CHAPTER 6

# *Conclusion*
## *The Reach of Freedom*

A new conception of freedom in Athens developed over the fifth and fourth centuries, in tandem with its democratic government, that empowered its citizens. As an ideological value, freedom distinguished democracy from other polities, for better or worse. In practice, it affected the city at both the macro- and microlevel. On the one hand, freedom underpinned laws and procedures; on the other, it structured citizen identity and justified the exclusion of others. The political dimension of freedom emerged from its original statutory context but was never completely detached from it. The next layer of meaning incorporated the free man's sense of autonomy, or being able to act "however he wished." Democratic freedom was more than just freedom from restriction; it placed the impetus of action and power squarely on the individual. Rather than requiring a "true" self or limiting action to the public sphere through group identity, the notion of simple will achievement for citizens was at the core of this freedom. The one ultimately in charge is the "I": as a citizen *I* do whatever *I* wish. The central concern of positive freedom is "who is the source of control?" or, in other words, "who is in power?" Focusing on this core, a reconfigured "positive freedom" usefully describes the democratic conception. In Athens, the citizen was imagined as the locus of freedom and, so, power. Since a democratic citizen was free by definition, he was also empowered to do what he wished, and this was of equal importance. The citizen as his own master in public and private life fashioned the contours of democratic ideology and practice.

Each citizen recognized this shared identity in other citizens as well. As *kurios*, he was empowered to shape his public and private affairs. He participated in this power with the other citizen *kurioi* and their decisions manifested in laws, decrees, and court rulings. While ideally this shared power was expressed without conflict, in reality citizens did clash with other citizens and the law. Whether in the Assembly or law courts, speakers navigated these conflicts by acknowledging the place of citizen



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autonomy and freedom. These speeches also reveal how freedom was neither evenly applied to all inhabitants of Attica nor straightforwardly compatible with other democratic ideals. Power as the corollary of citizen positive freedom could be dangerous if the wrong person attempted to achieve their will. By the same token, this conception of freedom created and reinforced a status hierarchy that could be deployed to the detriment of non-citizens. Perhaps not so paradoxically, the expanded power of citizenship contributed to the rationalization of subjugation.

The view of freedom as will achievement had further consequences for the Athenian polity and how others perceived it. While I cannot fully explore all the consequences here, I would like to suggest how this conception of freedom might contribute to other conversations. I can only adumbrate how these interventions might be made; however, the scope of freedom's influence should emerge as touching many parts of Athenian democracy and our interpretation thereof.

While the subaltern in Athens was often victimized by democratic freedom, closer examination also reveals the ways in which power could be wielded by people legally classified as inferior. Expanding our view of power beyond power over others in order to allow multiple, simultaneous agents with the power to act uncovers often overlooked individuals with power. The principle of covert and interdependent operative power introduced in Chapter 4 shores up claims of the influence of female citizens suggested by scholars such as Hunter.[1] Metics also emerge as having spheres of power beyond the economic realm.[2] While not losing sight of the restrictions suffered by these groups, exploring their freedom and power moves the conversation away from competence or status in order to reveal their existence as agents.

The agency of the subaltern was a challenge for a citizen ideology that aimed to monopolize autonomy. The previous chapters mostly focused on the ways in which that ideology unfolded for the benefit of citizens. Recognizing the shortcomings of an exclusionary worldview is a useful corrective to valorizations of ancient Athens. At the same time, however, we must be wary of projecting our own presuppositions of the place of the Other onto antiquity. By uncovering ways in which residents who were not adult male citizens were empowered, we can uncover deeper complexities in Athenian society and challenge one-dimensional views of the

[1] Hunter explores how women had extralegal power in the *oikos*, even potentially *de facto* running households as widows (1989b and 1994: 29–33). Property is another avenue for finding female citizen power (see Cox 2003; Blok 2018; Campa 2019).

[2] Wijma has argued that metics' role in religion is indicative of their inclusion in the *polis* (2014).

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oppressed as lacking agency in their own right. The fact that these Others not only had "competencies," but could potentially share in high-value concepts, such as power, destabilizes the myth of complete citizen control.[3]

At the *polis* level, the connection between freedom and power opens up avenues for approaching long-disputed concepts of rule of law and sovereignty in Athens. I have suggested in Chapter 4 that power, understood through the qualities associated with the term *kurios*, could be shared in a non-zero-sum game between valid actors. The government, rather than a detachable oppressor actuated by a majoritarian tyranny or elite capture, was an extension of citizenship and citizens. Thus, citizens, severally and united, and the laws were imagined to function harmoniously and symbiotically.

Recognizing democratic freedom as autonomy calls for a reassessment of ancient critiques of that freedom. Approaching Plato's criticisms with an understanding of democratic freedom as ultimate autonomy opens new analyses of his own views on freedom. For instance, his critique in the *Republic* rests on democracy's misunderstanding and misapplication of freedom. Democratic freedom is extreme (560e–562a, 563e–564a) and anarchic (560e, 562e).[4] In Plato's view, democrats reject any kind of rule as equivalent to a slave master, even that of legitimate political rule or law (562d–e, 563d–e). The democratic desire for a maximum amount of negative freedom is expressed by these examples. Plato, however, also recognizes democracy's unique interpretation of freedom and so underscores what he sees as a misguided attempt at having ultimate positive freedom. He emphasizes the license (ἐξουσία) in democracy to do "whatever one wishes" (ὅτι τις βούλεται, 557b).[5] In the realm of the soul, this amounts to satisfying all desires equally and at random (561b). Haphazard desire fulfillment, however, does not qualify as being one's own master or truly being free in the *Republic* by virtue of the lack of reason.

For Plato, the devolution of democracy into tyranny emphasizes all the elements of slavery and lack of freedom already present in democracy. Democracy's extreme freedom leads to the extreme slavery of tyranny (563e–564a) precisely because of the democrat's obsession with freedom

[3] For the view that the category of "metic" simultaneously creates and destabilizes the category of "citizen," see Kasimis 2018.
[4] Discussed briefly on pp. 28–9.
[5] The *exousia* associated with democracy is returned to at various times, for example, 564d–e.

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(562b–d, 569b–c, 572d–e).[6] Slavery as *not* doing what one wishes is the opposite of freedom:

Σωκράτης: Πρῶτον μέν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὡς πόλιν εἰπεῖν, ἐλευθέραν ἢ δούλην τὴν τυραννουμένην ἐρεῖς;

Γλαύκων: Ὡς οἷόν τ', ἔφη, μάλιστα δούλην.

Σωκράτης: Καὶ μὴν ὁρᾷς γε ἐν αὐτῇ δεσπότας καὶ ἐλευθέρους.

Γλαύκων: Ὁρῶ, ἔφη, σμικρόν γέ τι τοῦτο· τὸ δὲ ὅλον, ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ τὸ ἐπιεικέστατον ἀτίμως τε καὶ ἀθλίως δοῦλον.

Σωκράτης: Εἰ οὖν, εἶπον, ὅμοιος ἀνὴρ τῇ πόλει, οὐ καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῳ ἀνάγκη τὴν αὐτὴν τάξιν ἐνεῖναι, καὶ πολλῆς μὲν δουλείας τε καὶ ἀνελευθερίας γέμειν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα αὐτῆς τὰ μέρη δουλεύειν, ἅπερ ἦν ἐπιεικέστατα, μικρὸν δὲ καὶ τὸ μοχθηρότατον καὶ μανικώτατον δεσπόζειν;

Γλαύκων: Ἀνάγκη, ἔφη.

Σωκράτης: Τί οὖν; δούλην ἢ ἐλευθέραν τὴν τοιαύτην φήσεις εἶναι ψυχήν;

Γλαύκων: Δούλην δήπου ἔγωγε.

Σωκράτης: Οὐκοῦν ἥ γε αὖ δούλη καὶ τυραννουμένη πόλις ἥκιστα ποιεῖ ἃ βούλεται;

Γλαύκων: Πολύ γε.

Σωκράτης: Καὶ ἡ τυραννουμένη ἄρα ψυχὴ ἥκιστα ποιήσει ἃ ἂν βουληθῇ, ὡς περὶ ὅλης εἰπεῖν ψυχῆς· (577c–e)[7]

Socrates: First, speaking of the city, would you say that a tyrannical city is free or enslaved?

Glaucon: It is as enslaved as possible.

Socrates: Yet you see in it people who are masters and free.

Glaucon: I do see a few like that, but the whole city, so to speak, and the most decent part of it are wretched, dishonored slaves.

Socrates: Then, if man and city are alike, mustn't the same structure be in him too? And mustn't his soul be full of slavery and unfreedom, with the most decent parts enslaved and with a small part, the maddest and most vicious, as their master?

Glaucon: It must.

Socrates: What will you say about such a soul them? Is it free or slave?

Glaucon: Slave, of course.

Socrates: And isn't the enslaved and tyrannical city least likely to do what it wants?

[6] Tyranny is a demotion from democracy because, while the democratic soul satisfies all desires at random, in the tyrannical soul all necessary or good desires have been exiled and only unnecessary vices remain (573a–b, 574d–575a).

[7] Speakers' names have been added for ease of reference and are not included in the original text.

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GLAUCON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then a tyrannical soul – I'm talking about the whole soul – will also be least likely to do what it wants.[8]

A soul ruled by the desires of the appetite is enslaved, and furthermore enslaved to slaves; it is not truly living as it wishes. Picking up on the language of doing "whatever one wishes," but redefining it as enslavement instead of autonomy, Plato reveals the democratic ideal on its own terms to be at odds with its practice.

Edge argues that Platonic freedom is a response to democratic freedom, but he interprets democratic freedom as negative freedom in contradistinction to views like Plato's that center on positive freedom.[9] Positive freedom for Edge is closely aligned with Berlin's traditional narrative as requiring a "higher" and "lower" self, exemplified by the *Republic*'s paternalistic system. In the modified definition of positive freedom used throughout this book, autonomy is disentangled from higher senses of self and instead finds expression in the simple achievement of will. In this light, Plato's criticism introduces the concepts of the higher self and second-order desires as a critique of democratic thought. Thus, in addition to censuring democracy's absurd underpinnings, Plato's criticisms reveal his psychic theory as a nascent concept of moral autonomy in response to democratic political freedom.

Stalley in fact finds similarities between Plato's rule of reason and modern theories of moral freedom.[10] Plato's political freedom, he argues, is inseparable from psychic freedom, in that when people are ruled by reason, they are free. For the city, this means obeying rational laws and rulers. Stalley does not, however, connect Plato's project to democratic freedom. Plato's freedom in a *polis* for Stalley mandates submission to laws that citizens may be persuaded to follow but cannot challenge. While

[8] Translations of the *Republic* are from Reeve 2004 with slight modifications.

[9] Edge 2009. See also discussion on p. 12. More recently, F. Miller has argued that Plato's conception of freedom is based on an aristocratic model of psychic freedom using MacCallum's triadic formula, where agent *x* is free *from* desire *y*, which allows him *to* be virtuous or happy (2016). Freedom in this model is contingent upon self-control, which is the key to having proper desires and the acceptance of the rule of reason in the soul, and is founded upon the statutory free-slave dichotomy. Miller further sees a political or civic aspect to freedom based on the attainment of aristocratic freedom later expanded in the *Laws* (2016: 8–10). This development is distinct from democratic freedom that springs from democratic history and institutions, which Miller takes to focus on negative freedom from impediments.

[10] For instance, Frankfurt's "decisive identification" with a desire and Taylor's "strong evaluations" (Stalley 1997/98: 151–2). Laks sees a similar "metaphysical" freedom expressed once in the *Laws* and hinted at in the *Republic*, but deems it insufficiently developed (2007).

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repugnant to modern views on freedom, Stalley suggests that Plato's view would be considered less radical in antiquity: "Evidently what mattered most for the Greeks was being a free man or woman rather than a slave and living in a free city rather than one controlled by a tyrant or a foreign power. So the fundamental distinction was that between rule willingly accepted and rule imposed by force."[11] While Stalley's emphasis on the rule of reason is associated with traditional interpretations of positive freedom by some theorists, this passage reveals that he takes negative freedom to be at the heart of Greek freedom, including at Athens.[12] Plato's version is then the psychic version of freedom, classifying desires as the tyrants of the would-be free soul. While this is part of the story of democratic freedom, it does not account for the positive aspect of Athenian freedom advanced in the previous chapters.

His inquiry does, however, encourage us to see the emergence of a moral or metaphysical sense of autonomy in antiquity. In Plato's scheme, an individual is only truly acting upon their authentic desires if their souls are in proper order and if they live in a city that reflects proper virtues. The latter requirement bears a resemblance to the modern relational notion of autonomy.[13] Recently, while Lane has repudiated the notion of self-mastery as related to Platonic freedom, her interpretation may still support the nascent idea of relational autonomy.[14] She analyses Plato's comparison of the tyrant's danger at the hands of his enslaved population to the slaveholder's danger who is relocated outside of society (*Rep.* 578d4–579d10–11) as revealing the need of civic friendship buttressed by a functional constitution. Without the crucial political

[11] Stalley 1997/98: 158. For Lane 2018, which treats willing acceptance of rule in Plato, see pp. 171–3. Additionally, there is a vast literature on the idea of "willing obedience" in the works of Xenophon, which, while I cannot treat here, may be another fruitful response to democratic positive freedom. The classic treatment is by V. Gray, which also coins the term "willing obedience" (2011: 15–18). For an overview of the role of cultivating willing obedience for effective leadership throughout Xenophon's corpus, see Buxton 2016. Mitchell argues that willing obedience, as a rejection of democratic equality, still falls short as a successful model of leadership at least in the *Cyropaedia* (2009). Interestingly, she finds the origin of willing obedience in the hierarchical relationships of the *oikos*, and its application in ruling an attempt at "de-politicising political relationships" (15).

[12] For example, Lane 2018: 702 n. 1 regards Stalley's view of Platonic self-mastery as positive freedom.

[13] Feminists have challenged traditional views of autonomy and offered instead a relational sense of autonomy recognizing the embeddedness of individuals in relationships. Some philosophers have argued that these relationships are constitutive of autonomy, and that oppressive external conditions can render an agent nonautonomous, regardless of any psychological state (e.g., Oshana 2006). The question remains whether Plato sees his societies as constitutive of everyone's autonomy or whether a paternalistic view prevails in which autonomy is limited to the intellectual elites who oppress the rest of the city's constituents.

[14] Lane 2018.

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structure and the participation of others, there is no free action.[15] This may be construed alternatively as indicating how autonomy is relational. No one can act as befits a free person without the support of the other free persons in a society. While Plato's scenario takes for granted the domination of others, of interest is the potential congruence with an idea of relational autonomy. Rather than drawing a straight line from antiquity to the Kantian self, Plato's incipient conception of autonomy predates the liberal tradition and contains elements of a relational interpretation.

Lane rejects the view that Plato in the *Republic* is advocating for positive freedom, like I do, but she connects positive freedom, like Edge, to moral autonomy or "self-mastery." She argues that the portrait of the tyrant is built upon traditional models of slavery and its inherent badness, and therefore does not need a new conception of self-mastery to underpin it.[16] Lane claims that the Platonic Socrates' conclusion (579d10–11) that "'a real tyrant is really a slave' is argumentatively rooted in the text not in the ideal of virtuous self-mastery, but rather in a set of theses about the tyrant's inability to act freely as would befit a putatively free person, especially one of his superlatively masterful status."[17] I absolutely agree that his actions are limited and therefore slavish, but I see this construed specifically as a response to democratic freedom, the extreme of which the dialogue has shown leads to tyranny. Lane takes the tyrant's self-imposed limits, such as restricted freedom of motion, as an example of how he acts as if he lacks negative freedom.[18] My view of democratic liberty as positive freedom, however, shows that he instead does not have positive freedom, although he has no external constraints (i.e., a lack of negative freedom). The extreme "freedom" to act as one wishes engendered by democracy and fully realized in the tyrant is revealed by Plato to be quite the opposite: as earlier, the tyrant is actually "least likely to do what [he] wants" (577e). Lane's other claims that take Plato to advocate for a freedom compatible with willing obedience to the laws and magistrates are also consistent with a reading of Plato's freedom as response to democratic notions of autonomy.[19] The idea of willing obedience may be another instance of tempering specifically democratic values. Looking at both the *Republic* and the *Laws*, she explains that "one can think of this reshaping [of freedom] as a limiting of the set of free actions that befit a person who has free status within a given constitutional order, so as to be compatible with the maintenance of rule of law and of rulers as specified by that order."[20]

[15] Lane 2018: 707–10. [16] Lane 2018: 704–7. [17] Lane 2018: 704. [18] Lane 2018: 708.
[19] Lane 2018: 708–16. [20] Lane 2018: 713 n. 48.

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Her view is strengthened by considering Plato's rejection of the democratic notion of autonomy as a free range of action.

In modernity, ancient freedom is not associated with democratic freedom as will achievement. Since Skinner's landmark *Liberty before Liberalism*, a republican response to liberal notions of freedom, the entrée of antiquity into modernity has revolved around a neo-Roman conception of freedom.[21] Democratic freedom provides an alternative form of liberty before liberalism that still protects a multiplicity of individual values. As explored in Chapter 1, neo-Roman freedom is based on the concept of non-domination. No matter how robustly that domination is imagined, it remains a type of negative freedom focused on another's power. Athenians differed in valuing citizen empowerment, expressed by will achievement in the private and public spheres, in addition to freedom from external and internal arbitrary rule. This type of positive freedom is not just a semantic difference but reveals the engine that powers democracy. The direct democracy of antiquity is not a corollary or means to freedom but is an essential expression of freedom itself.[22] Power over the political machine, however, is not the end of Athenian freedom. Ancient democracy valued both public and private forms of positive freedom, protecting the individual without necessarily making recourse to the liberal self.

As I write this text, critiques from the left and the right have made the case for the shortcomings of liberalism. While my current aim is neither to offer solutions to these challenges nor to promote nor discredit liberalism, I have presented a reconceived classical Athenian model that is not rooted in liberalism but is also not based on republicanism. Since Athenians considered their government an essential part of preserving and enacting their *eleutheria*, a reimagined positive freedom provides both an anchor for participatory democracy and a vision of freedom neither automatically linked with liberal values nor opposed to them. It serves as a more robust conception of freedom than neoclassical interpretations and continues to maintain the importance of individuals. Unlike liberal freedom, the Athenian conception of doing "whatever one wishes" was embedded partly in group identities, as the individual could express his will in all aspects of public policy and as *kurios* was subject to the needs of his household. At the same time, it avoids Berlin's fear about versions of positive freedom that

[21] Skinner 1998.

[22] As Edge 2009 has argued, in the Athenian view freedom was available only in a democracy. For the distinction between my view and Edge's, who interprets Athenian freedom as a form of neo-Roman or republican freedom, see page 12.

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depend on a "truer self" and consequently subject the individual to a majoritarian tyranny or fascism. The balancing act resulted in neither a priority of the individual before society nor society above individual: in ideal terms they were seen as reinforcing each other without erasing either.

The newly developed sense of a citizen's autonomy as key to political structures reverberated throughout the *polis* in ways that both empowered and oppressed individuals within a democratic hierarchy. Self-representation in the courts, explored in Chapter 3, shows that citizen self-identity was fashioned in part by protecting the ability of all citizens to act at both the individual and community levels. In this way, self-rule began at the individual level and spread to include self-rule at the *polis* level. The Athenians looked to their freedom to answer, "why democracy?"[23] Freedom as autonomy for Athenians was not opposed to government since it was their own freedom that underpinned their government and their government that underpinned their freedom. This symbiosis offers another approach to our own questioning of "why democracy?" without a traditionally liberal basis. While we cannot simply lift the definition out of antiquity and straightforwardly employ it for our own needs, as a lens it magnifies where our own "freedom" is successful and where it fails.

[23] In a bid to save democracy from critiques aimed at liberalism, Ober's *Demopolis* (2017) has recently demonstrated democracy's value as a good without grounding it on liberal values, as most democratic theorists have. He uses Athens as a historical example of the possibility of such an arrangement. My interpretation of freedom may show a way freedom of the individual might still contribute to democracy before liberalism.

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