PLATO'S *REPUBLIC* REVIS(IT)ED

D. ROOCHNIK: *Beautiful City. The Dialectical Character of Plato's* Republic. Pp. xii + 159. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003. Cased, US$35, £21.95. ISBN: 0-8014-4087-4.

The aim of this short book is to 'explain and describe in detail the philosophical character of Plato's *Republic*' as 'a thoroughly dialectical work' (p. 1). This means, Roochnik glosses, that the *Republic* should be read 'as a living conversation, as a massive instance of *dialegesthai*. As in many conversations, its topics change. Earlier proposals are reconsidered and revised. There is considerable interruption and sometimes improvement' (p. 7). R.'s emphasis on this character is surprising, not because of any novelty, but because he seems to be giving a most general, straightforward, and uncontroversial description of what Platonic dialogues, including the *Republic*, are. However, when coming to R.'s account of what specific proposals are revised in the dialogue, and how this happens, I suspect the reader will find plenty of room for disagreement.

In the first chapter R. reminds us that the tripartite model of the soul constructed in Book 4 on the basis of the city-soul analogy faces a deep contradiction: 'the tripartite psychology . . . postulates a totally irrational and hence seemingly inhuman part of the soul–namely, desire . . . But without any calculation at all, how could such a part receive, understand, and obey orders?' (p. 17). R.'s response is that Plato was fully aware of the difficulties springing from the very notion of a soul as a structured, static, arithmetical whole containing discrete and countable units, which will therefore be 'negated and revised' in later books, and that indeed he does call the city-soul analogy into question quite overtly in a number of places already in Books 3 and 4. R.'s reliance on passages in which the isomorphism between soul and city seems to be assumed only as a provisional hypothesis (e.g. 368d) is hardly decisive though, while his reference to passages in which the analogy is said to make the task of determining what justice is easier seems irrelevant. R. diagnoses that the limitation of the psychology of Books 2–4 lies in its being (and consciously being described by Plato as) 'excessively arithmetical' (p. 29), and that in the *Republic* 'the status or value of the arithmetical in general is consistently depicted as being intermediary' (p. 30): it is valuable, but only in a limited and instrumental sense, because it can help to effect the turning around of the soul from becoming to being. This arithmetical, and thus ultimately unsatisfactory, character of the tripartite soul would be revealed in the 'highly formal argument' (436b–439d) Socrates uses to demonstrate the distinction of its first two parts, based on the 'Principle of Non-Opposition' ('the same thing won't be willing at the same time to do or suffer opposites with respect to the same and in relation to the same'); the parallel character of Kallipolis would be embodied in its stability and unity, in its guiding principle 'one man, one art', and in the nature of its gods as 'self-identical units', 'dry as numbers' (p. 42). However, R.'s contention that 'implicit in all "truths" governed by the PNO is the notion of timelessness eternity', and thus 'what is governed by the PNO is similar to an *arithmos*', because the condition 'at the same time' 'freezes what it governs' as 'an atemporal or logical structure' (p. 22), but 'nothing in "real life" . . . actually exists at the "same time" ' (p. 27) is false, and almost nonsense: the PNO governs all truths, without implying, or presupposing, any 'notion of timelessness eternity'. As for unity, self-identity, and stability, they are no more distinctive of numbers than of Forms, so R.'s extreme emphasis on the alleged arithmetical character of the tripartite soul lacks real textual support.

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According to R., what is conspicuously absent from the psychology of Books 2–4 is Eros: 'in Kallipolis . . . Eros is counted as a disruptive, subversive force, a potential tyrant, and therefore is systematically suppressed' (p. 55). Only when Eros finally enters the stage, in Book 5, can philosophy make its appearance, because 'philosophy, as its etymology suggests, is an erotic activity' (p. 62). The tripartite psychology is thus implicitly revised and enriched, because 'here reason has expanded and has itself become animated by Eros', and is not 'reduced to calculation and radically separated from desire' (p. 63). These ideas are not new, but R. wants to reach much farther: since a regime different from Kallipolis is required to fully accommodate 'the tyrannical and polymorphous manifestations' (p. 69) of Eros, *including philosophy itself*, actually Kallipolis 'does not represent Plato's political or theoretical ideal' (p. 69). R. argues in detail that a conversation like the one depicted in the *Republic* could never take place in Kallipolis, nor could the *Republic* itself ever be written there (pp. 70–3). However, this does not prove, *pace* R., the bold claims that 'Kallipolis is not itself philosophical' (p. 76), or that philosophy 'would starve, wither, and die in Kallipolis' (p. 91), the city of philosopher-rulers, but only, at most, that a certain form of philosophical dialogue would be banned from it. Although this can be a good reason for us to be worried about Kallipolis, R. does very little to establish his grand thesis that 'Plato's *Republic*, far from being the condemnation of democracy it is typically thought to be, is in fact a qualified (and dialectical) supporter of it' (p. 77), because it is meant to show, without saying it, that the only context from which philosophy can emerge is democratic. Even granting that Kallipolis requires the philosophy of the *Republic* to come into being and that the *Republic* could not come into being in Kallipolis, it does not follow that 'the putatively just and beautiful city is . . . not possible' (p. 76) because it is self-undermining: nothing prevents a regime from being founded on certain bases and then denying them and surviving, and then flourishing on other, incompatible ones.

For this reason, Plato's remark that 'it is probably necessary for the man who wishes to organize a city . . . to go to a city under democracy' (557d) does not need to be read as a defence of democracy. Despite his claim to the contrary, R.'s reading of the *Republic* must be deeply ironic: all the alleged dialectical negations of the possibility and desirability itself of Kallipolis, in favour of 'Republican' 'democracy, "multiculturalism", and erotic "diversity" ' (p. 91), would take place well beneath the surface of the dialogue, with most readers, both ancient and modern, remaining completely blind to them.

The book ends with a discussion of the significance of the final part of the *Republic*. R. argues that Books 8 and 9 represent a further valuable improvement of Plato's account of the soul by offering a narrative 'developmental psychology', with 'informal vignettes, little stories' and 'psycho-biographies' masterfully used to describe the various soul types and successions of regimes (p. 97). Agreeing that these books should not be overlooked and offer important supplements to the psychology drawn in Books 2–4 (and revised in Books 5–7), R. does not manage to show any real inconsistency or dialectical revision occurring.

In conclusion, despite the merit of reminding us of some overlooked aspects of Plato's *Republic* and being at times refreshingly thought-provoking, *Beautiful City* consistently fails to provide persuasive arguments in favour of its most original and provocative theses. Although it deserves some critical attention by specialists, then, I would not recommend it as an introductory reading for beginners.

One final comment is in order: while agreeing that 'the literature on the *Republic* is unmanageably vast and presents the grave risk to the commentator, of losing touch with the primary text', R.'s own resolution ('I *therefore* restrict my secondary sources

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chiefly to those written in English during the past forty years or so [p. 8]) represents a dangerous scholarly *non sequitur*, especially in the absence of any attempt to justify the rationale of the criterion adopted.

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PLATO BEYOND THE *REPUBLIC*

J.-F. PRADEAU: *Plato and the City. A New Introduction to Plato's Political Thought.* Translated by J. Lloyd with a foreword by C. Gill. Pp. xviii + 181. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002 (first published as *Platon et la cité*, 1997). Paper, £14.99 (Cased, £45). ISBN: 0-85989-654-4 (0-85989-653-6 hbk).

Pradeau's book is a brief and stimulating overview of Plato's political philosophy. For the most part, it covers the dialogues that one would expect of such a work: there is one chapter on *Republic*, one on *Statesman*, and one on *Laws*. But some aspects of this book might surprise readers. In particular, more attention is paid than is often the case (among American and British scholars, at any rate) to *Menexenus*, and to the political implications of *Timaeus* and *Critias* (a topic to which an entire chapter is devoted). There is less discussion than one would expect of *Gorgias*, and *Crito* is entirely neglected. P. covers the main territory, but he does not strive for comprehensiveness. Nor does he spoon-feed the reader; advanced students and even specialists have a lot to learn from him, but beginners who seek a bare summary of Plato's political ideas should look elsewhere.

P. conceives of Plato's political philosophy as a coherent whole. He finds in the dialogues a gradual evolution of a theory of politics, but no major reversals. One of Plato's organizing and unchanging ideas, according to P., is that since politics is a realm about which it is possible to acquire specialized knowledge, those who have such knowledge should play a leading rôle in the life of the city. That thesis, according to P., is present in Plato's earliest works, and continues to animate his thinking through the late period as well. He does not see any conflict between the Socrates of the early dialogues and the Socrates of *Republic*; nor any major break between the latter and *Laws*.

Furthermore, he holds that Plato's goal, throughout the dialogues, is to find a way in which the city can be unified. The city is an individual that has a life of its own; it is a living thing, with body and soul. Politics is the study of how to achieve the unification in which civic flourishing consists: 'the city is a collection, a unit created by a heterogeneous multiplicity, which exists simply in order to hold those multiple elements together and to allow them to live in a uniform way. The unity of the city, which is the constant purpose of the system, gives politics its function' (p. 88).

If I understand P. correctly, the excellence of a political system is not to be measured by asking how well off it makes all of the citizens who compose it, but by asking how well it unifies these citizens He says: 'Adopting the unity of the city as his hypothesis and point of departure, he [Plato] considers the individual citizen, whoever he may be, purely as *a function of the city*' (p. 60, his emphasis). The individual exists in order to fit well into the whole of which he is a part: a greater departure from the

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