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The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic by Leon Harold Craig
Plato's World: Man's Place in the Cosmos by Joseph Cropsey
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REVIEW ESSAY

IRONY AND ACCESSIBILITY

THE DEATH OF SOCRATES AND THE LIFE OF PHILOSOPHY: AN INTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S PHAEDO by Peter J. Ahrensdorf. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. 238 + x pp.

THE WAR LOVER: A STUDY OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC by Leon Harold Craig. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 439 + xxxviii pp.

PLATO'S WORLD: MAN'S PLACE IN THE COSMOS by Joseph Cropsey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. 227 + x pp.

During the fall semester of 1995, I taught Plato's *Republic* to a class of freshmen. The next spring, I worked through it with graduate students. These autobiographical details are worth noting because even if what they report is common, it is nonetheless startling: Plato's greatest dialogue can be successfully taught both to beginners and to sophisticated students. The *Republic*, whose philosophical richness and complexity are undeniable, is nonetheless uniquely accessible. Although befuddled by, say, the divided line, the beginning student can still read the dialogue with pleasure and profit. With the possible exception of sections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the same cannot be said for other philosophical masterworks. The severe difficulties of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology*, or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* lie forbiddingly on the surface. By contrast, the surface of the *Republic*, as is true of so many Platonic dialogues, is welcoming.[1]

Plato himself, through his character Socrates, may well address the source of this phenomenon. In his famous diatribe against writing in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says this:

> Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words (*logoi*); you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always

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> say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about alike among those who understand and those for whom it is not fitting and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak. (275d-e)[2]

As opposed to the "living, breathing" (276a) words of a speaking human being who stands before and hence can direct an appropriately crafted message to a particular audience, a written work indiscriminately puts forth the same words to every reader.

An inference is obvious: since this critique of writing is itself written, Platonic dialogues must have been conceived with an eye to overcoming this very deficiency. Plato strove, in other words, to make his writing able to discriminate among its readers (i.e., to know to whom to speak and to whom to be silent).[3] The dialogues are multilayered, and this is one reason why they are able to address, for example, both freshmen and graduate students.

But how exactly do they accomplish this? A widely accepted answer would be Socratic irony. Simply put, Socrates does not say exactly what he means. Instead, cognizant of what his interlocutor can comprehend, Socrates says different things to different people. If the interlocutor is not able to follow a complex line of thinking, then Socrates may address him in an appropriately comprehensible manner. To the grief-stricken and manifestly unphilosophical Crito, for example, Socrates may well withhold his complex thoughts about the relationship between positive law and justice itself and instead simply encourage his friend to obey the rulings of the Athenians. Socrates may argue thus even if such a straightforward statement does not adequately express his own far more subtle position. If this is the case, and if such ironic withholding is characteristic of the dialogues themselves, then a possible answer (or at least the beginning of one) would be supplied to the question of how a philosophical work as the *Republic* becomes uniquely accessible.

Probably no modern commentator has made irony and the multiple layers of Platonic writing more central to a reading of the dialogues than Leo Strauss. In *The City and Man*, he begins his well-known chapter, "On Plato's Republic," with an analysis of *Phaedrus* 275 and concludes, "The Platonic dialogue, if properly read, reveals itself to possess the flexibility or adaptability of oral communication." The dialogue, Strauss continues, "says different things to different people—not accidentally, as every writing does, but that it is so contrived as to say different things to different people, or that it is radically ironical." From this, Strauss infers that "the proper work of a writing is truly to talk, or to reveal the truth, to some while leading others to salutory opinions."[4]

The political corollary of such a hermeneutical position is readily forthcoming: "Irony is essentially related to the fact that there is a natural order of rank among men."[5] There are those few capable of understanding philosophical difficulties and those many who do better with less than the truth (i.e., with "salutory opinions"). Freshmen with no inclination to advance in philosophy may leave a reading of the *Crito* with the superficial impression that all forms of civil disobedience are simply bad. They are thereby encouraged to obey the law. By contrast, the advanced student should be urged to explore what appears to be a contradiction lying just beneath the surface of the dialogue. After all, at 46b Socrates says that he is a man who obeys nothing but reason. Why, then, does he also say one should always obey the law? Crito does not ask what the proper response is to a law that is not reasonable.

The elitism implicit in Strauss's hermeneutic presupposes a radical gulf between those capable of mining for the truth and those in need of superficial opinion. The true teaching of the dialogue is hidden from those who would neither understand nor benefit from it (and who, for reasons to be discussed shortly, would, if exposed to the philosophical teaching, bring harm to the philosophers).

The three books here under review follow Strauss's lead, for each distinguishes between a surface teaching and a hidden or buried, a more genuinely Platonic, depth. While each is in its own way helpful, all are finally deficient, and this is precisely because they misconstrue the meaning of the surface-depth relationship in a Platonic dialogue. These authors denigrate the surface by treating it as a philosophically insignificant façade. They disconnect surface from depth and thereby disrupt the structural continuity that, I propose, is the dialogues' most notable achievement.

In the course of discussing these books, I offer a proposal that aims to preserve the integrity of the dialogues' surface. Far from being superficial cant, and as opposed to being a screen or a disguise, the surface must be respected as a significant dimension of the philosophical content of the dialogue itself. I do not imply that the Platonic dialogues have no depths to be mined or that, ultimately, such depths are accessible only to a few. Instead, I hold that the surface of the dialogue is a phenomenon that must be philosophically preserved. Even if the surface is transfigured as the result of a philosophical interpretation of the dialogue as a whole, such transfiguration must be conceived as an *Aufhebung*, a dialectical sublation that does not only simply negate but also preserves what is being negated by elevating it.

My proposal also has a political correlate. The sensibility suggested by what I offer should perhaps be described as more "liberal" or "democratic"

than that implicit in the books here under review, for I insist that beginning readers, ordinary citizens, must be invited to read further and to enter the project of philosophy. In other words, the commentator must assume that the superficial reader can be taught, and such teaching should begin with a clear articulation of the surface. This surface depicts characters, deeds, places, and times, as well as arguments, jokes, and myths, and these depictions are, in the annals of Western philosophy at least, uniquely accessible. The surface is where all readers, and hence all thinking, begin. While Socrates's statement in the *Republic* that "the beginning (*archê*) is the most important part of every work" (377a)[6] itself requires interpretation, it nonetheless should remind us whence we, as readers, originated, and to where, ultimately, we must return.

The wide variety of surface phenomena of Plato's dialogues—everything from the explicit arguments to the myths—have a "face value," and while the face is but the exterior of a human being, it remains, even when the interior is probed, what we look at and what looks back at us. Even when we know someone exceptionally well, even if we are able to see through them, we cannot overlook, nor should we fail to be guided by, the face. The face, in other words, is not a mask, and so it cannot be discarded. To a greater or lesser degree, the three books here under review treat the surface of the dialogues precisely as a mask, and their doing so is the crux of my objections.[7]

I

Peter Ahrensdorf's book on the *Phaedo* is, almost paradoxically, straightforward in its explication of the irony in Plato's dialogues. "Socrates," Ahrensdorf announces, "was a supremely ironic man" (p. 4). Reiterating a theme familiar to readers of Leo Strauss, he says, "Socratic speech . . . is, in a very precise sense, double talk; it seeks to lead those who are able to benefit from the truth to grasp the truth, and it seeks to lead those who are not able to benefit from the truth to embrace opinions which, while perhaps not true, may nonetheless be beneficial to them" (p. 6). And what sort of untrue opinions benefit those unable to read carefully? Religious ones. Ahrensdorf's thesis is that average citizens need religion to secure meaning and a foundation for their moral and political worldview. Intelligent philosophers suffer no similar need. As a result, average citizens are threatened by philosophical atheism, and careful philosophers prudently hide their deepest views from the ignorant eyes of the vulgar.

Ahrensdorf begins with a short chapter that attempts to provide historical evidence that the situation just described obtained in classical Athens.

Unfortunately, as a historian, he is far from compelling. Consider, for example, the following: "The Greeks claimed to derive their moral codes and their laws from the Gods" (p. 11). What Greeks? The ones depicted in Homer's *Iliad*? The ones who listened to Solon? The audience of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*? And did all these Greeks really share the views of those in fourth-century Athens who read Plato?

Ahrensdorf continues: "The conviction that gods exist—and, specifically, that gods who reward the righteous and punish the wicked exist—was, in the Greeks' view, the foundation not only of their religious life, but of their political, moral and family life as well. Accordingly, they regarded any challenge to that fundamental conviction as an intolerable challenge to their whole way of life" (p. 15). Again, this broad statement is worrisome. For if it is correct, then surely the "Greeks" must have regarded the *Iliad*, whose gods rarely appear just and whose most righteous hero, Hektor, surely deserved better than he got, as positively blasphemous.

In any case, Ahrensdorf begins with the premise that "the religious persecution of the philosophers posed a grave threat to the very survival of philosophy in ancient Greece. The threat of imprisonment, exile, or even execution hung over their heads at all times" (p. 13). Without again worrying about whether Ahrensdorf is justified in asserting that "ancient" philosophers "at all times" were plagued by the threat of persecution, I simply note that this notion is basic to much of Strauss's own work. In his early book, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss, taking his bearings largely from the Jewish and Islamic medieval tradition, claims that "philosophy and the philosophers were in grave danger."[8] This is because philosophers necessarily challenge religious doctrine that, in stark contrast, the vulgar desperately need. If fully brought to light, the intellectual assault on traditional religion would redound to the profound detriment of the philosophers. Knowing this, when philosophers speak about, for example, the immortality of the soul, their writings "must be regarded as accommodations to the accepted view." In other words, "The exoteric"—or surface—"teaching was needed for protecting philosophy."[9]

In a similar vein, Ahrensdorf argues that the *Phaedo*, Plato's most overtly religious dialogue, is essentially two-layered. On the surface, Socrates attempts to demonstrate that the soul is immortal and that good people are rewarded in the next life. In its depths, however, the *Phaedo* actually teaches the radical finitude of human life and the irrationality of expecting divine reward after death. Ahrensdorf proceeds methodically, and often helpfully, through the entire dialogue to argue his thesis. A basic syntactical rhythm informs his writing throughout. After presenting an initial analysis of the surface of the text, Ahrensdorf frequently begins a sentence with a phrase

such as, "When we look more closely at what Simmias says, here, however . . ." (p. 84), or "Yet upon closer examination . . ." (p. 156). He regularly commutes between the superficially pious level of the dialogue and its deeply atheistic one.

Consider, for example, his treatment of what is frequently termed "the affinity argument." Socrates divides "beings" (*ta onta*) into two forms (*eidê*: 79a6): the visible and changeable multiplicity of sensible particulars and invisible, changeless entities such as "the equal itself, beauty itself and each thing itself which is" (78d3).[10] Since the soul through its ability to think apprehends the latter, it is more like the latter; since the body is responsible for sensation, it is more like the former (79e). Furthermore, "nature" has dictated that the soul rule the body. Since ruling is a divine activity, once again the soul must be counted like the divine and imperishable (80a). Therefore, Socrates concludes, "it is fitting for the body to dissolve quickly and for the soul to be entirely indissoluble or to be nearly so" (80b).

As Ahrensdorf nicely shows, there are problems in this argument that go beyond its obvious logical weakness. Specifically, "inasmuch as immortal beings are incorporeal, how could they affect, and hence rule over, mortal beings? And inasmuch as immortal being are always the same, how could they adapt their rule to the changing needs and circumstances of their moral subjects" (p. 97). In other words, in addition to moving illicitly from one degree of similarity to another, "the argument seems to suggest that, given the nature of the soul . . . it cannot be immortal, and that given the unchanging and incorporeal nature of the immortal gods, they cannot rule over us and hence cannot grant us . . . immortality" (p. 99). The proof, according to Ahrensdorf, suggests precisely the opposite of what it seems, on the surface, to show. As such, Ahrensdorf's Socrates deceives his friends, albeit with their benefit in mind. "By claiming to believe in the immortality of the individual soul, [Socrates] deliberately encourages them to embrace a belief and to cherish hopes which he himself regarded as false" (p. 200).

Socrates's friends, like "ancient philosophers" at "all times," fear both persecution as well as death. (Are they, and Socrates, thus cowards?) Convincing them that the soul is immortal assuages both fears. Similarly, and more significantly, Plato deceived his readers into thinking the philosopher to be a pious believer in divine justice and the afterlife. He practiced a pragmatic rhetoric designed to protect philosophy from the fury of the vulgar. And, according to Ahrensdorf, his strategy worked. Reviewing briefly a few historical sources (and never wondering how reliable they are or whether any might themselves be ironic), Ahrensdorf, after citing approvingly Plutarch's *Nicias* (chap. 23) states that "it was Plato . . . who brought about this remarkable improvement in the status of philosophy" (p. 203). Plato,

"through his portrayal of Socrates as a pious man . . . removed the charge of impiety against the philosophers as a whole" (p. 203).

Once again, this is a theme familiar to readers of Strauss. For example, Strauss also comments on Plutarch's *Nicias* (chap. 23):

> In what then does philosophic politics consist? In satisfying the city that the philosophers are not atheists, that they do not desecrate everything sacred to the city. . . . This defense of philosophy before the tribunal of the city was achieved by Plato with a resounding success.[11]

The strength of Ahrensdorf's commentary is that, in its straightforward explication, it regularly commutes between the surface and the depth, even if only to show the unphilosophical nature of the former and to delegate to it the pedestrian task of protecting the philosopher. Real philosophizing, for Ahrensdorf, takes place only in the hidden depths, far from the conventional concerns of ordinary men.

II

It is from these depths that Joseph Cropsey seems to speak. Unlike Ahrensdorf's patient and methodical attempt to demonstrate the philosophical vacuity of the surface, Cropsey's writing is economical to the extreme, and while at times eloquent and provocative, it is also laced with contempt. For example, in explaining why he does not cite a single commentator, Cropsey says, "I have been unable to benefit from scholarship on the precise subject of this volume" (p. x). Presumably, all other commentators have been far too superficial for Cropsey. But what exactly is Cropsey's "precise subject"? He describes it as the "unbroken dramatic sequence" of dialogues depicting the last days of Socrates's life: *Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. These dialogues offer "an evident unity and thus a true hermeneutic object" (p. ix).[12]

There are problems. First, immediately after announcing this unbroken unity, Cropsey violates it. His first chapter consists of a previously published article on the *Protagoras*, a dialogue with no dramatic link to the others. His justification is "the heavy involvement of a number of the dialogues with the teaching of Protagoras" (p. x). In other words, Cropsey's justification relies on thematic connections. This is puzzling because if thematic connection between dialogues is the proper basis for establishing a "hermeneutic object," then why would the *Republic* be excluded from any discussion of Socrates? Note also why Cropsey does not treat the *Cratylus*: "Because the reference

of the nature of speech to the existence of the things in themselves [i.e., the subject of the *Cratylus*] raises questions that are sufficiently attended to in the other texts" (p. x). Does this imply that the *Cratylus* is a merely redundant work with no contribution of its own to make? Furthermore, the theme Cropsey attributes to the *Cratylus*—namely, the relationship between the nature of speech and things in themselves—is crucial to an understanding of Protagoras. In other words, Cropsey's reasons for including the *Protagoras* and excluding the *Cratylus* are, strangely, the same.

In any case, far from having a "precise subject," Cropsey, in his 225 pages, treats an appended version of the dramatic account of the last days of Socrates. And, remarkably, Cropsey has found not a single commentator whose work could aid his own "search for the meaning" (p. x) of these dialogues.

Cropsey says this: "In making this inquiry I resolved to begin from the beginning and to take account, almost without exception, only of what appears in the texts" (p. 2). But to what beginning does he refer? Again, the *Protagoras*, the subject of chapter 1, is an appendage and not a true beginning. As I show below, when he comes to the *Phaedo*, Cropsey also fails to begin at the beginning. Finally, it is far from clear what text Cropsey accounts for. As is inevitable in a short book with a large agenda, huge swaths of text go unmentioned. At times, Cropsey seems to be paraphrasing, but of course in doing so he invariably leaves much out. Cropsey never explains why. Perhaps this is because he wishes to place the burden on the reader to discover his principle of exclusion.

Another example of Cropsey's apparent contempt for the "superficial" issues is his lack of comment on philological questions. For example, in discussing *Phaedo* 75d2 (on his page 191) he cites what, according to Burnet, is Iamblichus's emendation of the manuscript. Perhaps he is right to do so, but surely some justification is warranted. Unfortunately, Cropsey provides none.

If Ahrensdorf's characteristic linguistic turn is a phrase such as "yet upon closer examination," in Cropsey it is his use of "we." For example: "We who read are sensitive to Socrates' proviso . . ." (p. 201), or "We who read are left to suppose . . ." (p. 204). A striking example is found during Cropsey's treatment of "recollection" in the *Phaedo*. The context is this: how did human beings attain knowledge of items such as "the equal itself" (74a11)? Sense perception only provides access to the many equal things, such as sticks or stones, and these appear sometimes equal and sometimes not (74b8).[13] By contrast, equality never appears to be inequality (74c4). Throughout one's life, one is made aware of sensible equals, as well as the fact that not only do these equals "fall short of" (*endei*: 74d6) the equal itself but that (amazingly) they "wish" (*bouletai*: 74b10) and "strive" (*oregetai*: 74a2, 75b1) to be like

the equal itself. In other words, ordinary experience discloses that the standards by which sensible things are measured are not themselves resident in the sensible world. Measuring two sticks of (approximately) equal length, the measurer calls on "the equal itself." However, sensation is not itself capable of supplying us with knowledge of the equal itself.

> Therefore, before we began to see and hear and to sense in other ways, we had to have gotten knowledge of the equal itself, what it is, if we were going to refer the sensible equals to that and realize that all such [sensible] things are eager to be such as that [the equal itself] and that they are inferior to it. (75b4-8)

Since human life as such is characterized by sensation (75b10), knowledge of the equal itself must have been gotten before birth (75c). This conclusion applies not only to knowledge of the equal itself but to

> the beautiful itself and the good itself and the just and the holy and, just as I was saying, about everything on which we stamp the seal the "very thing which is" (*to "auto ho esti"*) in the questions we ask and the answers we offer" (75c11-d3).

This passage is difficult both philosophically and philologically. The phrase *to "auto ho esti,"* which I translate as "the 'very thing which is,' " is Burnet's emendation of what appears in the manuscripts as *touto ho esti* ("this thing which is"). Iamblichus has simply *to ho esti* ("the what it is"). This textual debate is covered in Burnet's notes, and the details of the Greek are not relevant here. The interesting question is, What does "stamp with the seal of being" mean? Cropsey formulates two options: "what Socrates means . . . is certifying or confirming by discourse that the things themselves do exist. The alternative meaning is that we, in philosophizing, impress or impose their being on such things as the beautiful and the just in their abstraction from perceived things" (p. 191). Here Cropsey slips in his "we": "Regrettably, no one in the company questions Socrates about the meaning of the arresting locution, and we are thus left in doubt" (p. 191).

But why must "we" be left in doubt? Why don't "we" instead pursue the question, What is the ontological status of entities like the equal or beauty itself? Is their reality subjective and derivative from some human activity—that is, is it like a seal that is produced by the stamp (itself a human artifact)—or is it objective and independent—that is, is the equal itself an already existent reality that merely needs to be discovered and articulated? Cropsey is right that Socrates does not provide the answer on the surface of the dialogue. But surely Plato offers readers some tracks to follow, and Socrates's silence is meant to invite philosophical reflection. Unfortunately, this is an invitation Cropsey never accepts.

Phrases like "the equal itself," which employ the intensive pronoun (*itself*), are far more common in the *Phaedo* than the familiar Platonic words *form* or *idea*. Indeed, Plato foreshadows the importance of the intensive pronoun in the opening line of the dialogue. Echechrates asks Phaedo, "Were you *yourself* with Socrates on that day when he drank the poison in prison, or did you hear it from someone else?" (57a). In fact, the first word of the dialogue is the intensive pronoun itself: *Autos*. In asking, Were you *yourself* there?, Echecrates asks, Were you really, actually, there? Do you really know what you are talking about, or is your description of Socrates's death mediated by someone else's report? Echecrates wants firsthand knowledge; he wants the real thing. His wanting this prefigures precisely what it is philosophers want. Having realized that two sticks are not exactly equal in length, the philosopher is impelled to strive for direct access to what really is equal. The philosopher too wants the real thing, that which cannot be sensed but nonetheless somehow structures what can be sensed; that which does not change, but in which changeable things somehow participate. These entities that are coupled with the intensive pronoun—the equal itself, beauty itself—thus offer us some intimation, however fleeting and even metaphorical, of the immortality of the soul, which Socrates talks about at such length in the body of this dialogue.

Again, however, the ontological status of what is named by phrases like "the equal itself" is not obvious, and the reader should ask whether such entities have an objective existence independent of human cognition or whether human beings somehow impose or even construct them through the use of abstract nouns coupled with intensive pronouns. In this context, consider Socrates's use of the verb *oregetai*, "strive, reach for, grasp at, yearn for." He tells us that imperfectly equal things like sticks and stones "yearn to be like the equal, but fall short" (75a). But how can sticks and stones yearn for anything? Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates used the same verb to describe the philosopher as one who "yearns for being" (65c).[14] In other words, at 75a the verb associated (at 65c) with the subjective disposition of the philosopher is applied to objects. Does Socrates anthropomorphize? Does he project his subjective state onto putatively nonhuman objects? The reader is invited to wonder about the status of these "itselfs" that inform our experience.

The dialogue, on its surface, invites the reader to ask questions. But Cropsey's response is, "we are left in doubt." In fact, however, not all of "us" are left in doubt, at least not by Plato. Instead, we are left in wonder, the sure provocation for philosophical reflection. Cropsey seems not to find the dialogues wonderful, for he neither pursues philosophical questions nor invites his readers to do the same. Perhaps this is because he ultimately believes that philosophy is pointless.[15] Referring to (but not explaining)

Phaedo 60d-61a, where Socrates tells Cebes that he has been composing poetry in prison, Cropsey says, "[Socrates] dies as a poet because a philosopher must be a poet" (p. 2). Why "must" this be? Perhaps Cropsey believes that the arguments and clues and provocations found on the surface of the dialogue are simply too superficial to pursue. Perhaps he believes that the depths can only be satisfactorily expressed through some version of elegiac poetry. If so, then he is, as I believe, either simply wrong or, if he is right, then Plato is not worth studying in the first place.

III

Leon Craig also seems to believe that the depths of a Platonic dialogue can only be reached through poetry. He signals rather than states this view. Four examples: first, his title, *The War Lover*, is based on a phrase that "for some strange reason . . . is never uttered in this dialogue" (p. 58). Second, his epigraph, a few lines from Alexandre Kojève (reiterating a now familiar theme), is arranged typographically to look like a poem:

> But here is the difficulty:
> the number of people who read Plato is limited;
> and the number who understand him is still more limited.

Third, after a twenty-five-page prologue on how to read a Platonic dialogue, Craig begins chapter 1 with an eleven-page summary of the *Republic* in which he uses the literal meaning of Greek proper names. As a result, we find phrases like "Bold Fighter [Thrasymachus] presents his own laconic definition . . ." and "Gleaming [Glaucon] . . . challenges Sure Strength [Socrates]" (p. 5). With no justification of its interpretive value, this philological maneuver is difficult to take seriously. Craig begins with a surface phenomenon, the etymology of names, and seems to suggest that they contain a deeper meaning. He does not, however, solidify this suggestion with argument. In this instance at least, his conception of the depths is far too superficial.

A fourth example: Craig's footnotes, which account for 133 of his nearly 500 pages, function as a voluminous subtext. These massive notes (one, note 17 to the Prologue, is itself sixteen pages long) travel far indeed from the *Republic* and touch on a wide variety of subjects in political philosophy as well as literature. How exactly these extraordinary digressions contribute to an understanding of the *Republic* is not obvious. Perhaps they are meant to constitute a teaching accessible only to those readers with the wherewithal

to trouble themselves with a text strategically buried below the body of the book itself. As he states in one of these footnotes (p. 306), Craig takes Plato to practice a numerological esotericism in which the number seven is crucial. On any list of seven, for example, the fourth or central item holds pride of place. Sure enough, the fourth of Craig's seven chapters—each of which is named after a famous novel (another unexplained literary gesture)—is ominously titled "Heart of Darkness" and contains the book's central thesis. Its topic is what Craig takes to be the animating, albeit hidden, issue of the *Republic*, namely "spirit" (*thumos*). This word, Craig tells us, is found only thirteen times in the dialogue, but Plato uses its cognate, *thumoeidês*, "exactly twenty-eight (i.e., 4×7) times" (p. 96). (By contrast, *thumos* occurs "49, or 7×7, times" in the Laws.)[16]

Craig's thesis is that spirit is "the most crucial part" (p. 109) of the human soul, which in turn is described as "this perplexing, perplexable thing each of us is, and hence intimately familiar with, while understanding it hardly at all" (p. 85). Spirit is the source of anger, of righteous indignation, and of the desire for victory; it is what characterizes Socrates's primary interlocutor, Glaucon (548d). In the "tripartite psychology" offered in Book IV, it is treated, along with desire and reason, as one of three distinct parts of the soul.

The argument that secures spirit as a distinct part of the soul is, however, problematic. Its first step is taken during the famous analogy between city and soul. When "Glaucon and the others begged" Socrates "to seek out what each [justice and injustice] is," Socrates, acting from his own sense of piety, agrees. To find out what justice is, a just city must be created for, Socrates says, it would be too difficult to see justice in the individual. To explain, he offers an analogy with seeing letters. If someone ordered us to read small letters from afar, they would be too hard to see. It would thus be a godsend if they could be "bigger and in a bigger place," for then they could be read (368b-d).

This analogy makes two assumptions: (1) the city and soul are both like the alphabet (i.e., are wholes composed of discrete elements or parts), and (2) the city and soul are isomorphic. Socrates invites us to question (2) when he adds, "if they do happen to be the same" (368d). This possibility should trigger questions about (1) as well: even if the city is like "letters" (by, for example, having a tripartite class system), it is at least questionable whether the soul—which, after all, is not a material or extended thing—is a whole with parts (i.e., is isomorphically letterlike). Socrates suggests as much when he poses the question, Do we act with three separate parts of the soul or with the soul as whole (436a)?

One clue favoring the latter is the manner in which Socrates justifies the two assumptions cited above: they make, he says, the task at hand "easier"

(368e7, 369a9, 370a6, 370c4). The tripartite psychology is invoked to further the city-soul-letter analogy, which itself is invoked to facilitate the task of finding justice and demonstrating to Glaucon its comprehensive superiority to injustice.

The artificiality of the tripartite psychology is apparent in the account of desire found in Book IV. Socrates exemplifies desire with thirst. He insists that for the purpose of his argument, thirst should be considered as having a single object only, namely, drink (rather than a good drink: 438a). For this reason, and because it is manifestly possible for a person both to want a drink and to resist drinking (on the grounds that it is not good to do so), and because the principle of noncontradiction is said to hold (436b), there must be a second part of the soul that is responsible for the agent's resisting the drink. This is "calculation" (439d).

For all its problems, this passage at least takes the form of an argument. But when commencing his discussion of "spirit," Socrates abruptly shifts strategy: instead of arguing, he tells a story—"I once heard something that I trust" (439e), he says. He tell the tale of Leontius. One day, this man was (like Socrates) "going up from the Piraeus . . . when he noticed corpses lying by the public executioner. He desired to look, but at the same time he was disgusted" (439e). Leontius could not restrain his desire, he did look, but then he railed at his eyes, "Look, you damned wretches" (440a). His anger has its origin in spirit, which when functioning properly is the ally of reason in the war against desire.

What makes this story so strange (in addition to the simple fact of its being a story) is the kind of desire Socrates uses to illustrate spirit: Leontius desires to see (*idein epithumoi*: 439e9). But why did Leontius want to see corpses? Curiosity? Morbid fascination? A desire for perverse titillation? Whatever the answer, the desire to see is akin to the desire to know. To see a corpse is to stare at death, witness its motionless domain, and to learn its look. Recall that the philosopher is later described by Socrates through the metaphor of seeing; he is "a lover of the sight of truth" (475e; compare 533a5). Implicitly, then, the Leontius story suggests the collapse, rather than the separation, of the parts of the psyche. The tripartite scheme is undermined even as it is broached.

Craig elaborates several of these points, at times insightfully (see pp. 18, 97, 101). What he does not offer is an explication of this story as an element in what I would term the dialectical ascent of the *Republic*. For example, as its implicit undermining suggests, the tripartite psychology of Book IV may well be provisional and be later revised and superseded by what is offered in Book IX. Here (581a-b), the sharp distinction between the three parts of the soul—now renamed as the honor loving, the money loving, and the wisdom

loving—is mitigated by the description of all three as "loving." Love, and not spirit, operates as the unifying thread holding the human psyche together.

Craig understands the major role love plays in the *Republic*, which he signals by affiliating it with spirit. (See chapter 3, titled "Sons and Lovers.") But, again, what he does not do is methodically explicate the dialogue's treatment of eros. This is a major weakness in his commentary, for eros, in my view,[17] can best guide the reader through the immense complexities of the dialectical ascent that is the *Republic*. To mention only a few points: a major concern of the city in speech is control of eros. Specifically, all facets of sexual intercourse—partners, frequency, the time of life during which it is allowed—would be strictly monitored (461a). This theme of the control, or repression of eros, is foreshadowed as early as 329c, when Cephalus quotes Sophocles's expression of delight in old age as an escape from the "frenzied and savage master" that is eros. The notion of eros as master or tyrant reappears much later during the discussion of tyranny, where it is reported that "love has from old been called a tyrant" (573b). The implicit problem, of course, is that philosophy, as its etymology immediately suggests, is itself an erotic activity. Socrates makes this clear when he takes up the following challenge presented to him by Glaucon.

After hearing the particulars of the "third wave" (and recall that the Greek for "wave" is *kuma*, which comes from the verb "to swell" and also means "fetus")—that is, the proposal that philosophers must be kings—Glaucon is aghast and demands that Socrates offer a defense. To do so, Socrates explains who the philosopher is. And to do this, he turns to eros. "Do you remember," he asks Glaucon, "that when we say a man loves something, it is rightly said of him, he must . . . cherish all of it?" (474c). A philosopher, Socrates continues, is a "desirer of wisdom," (475b), a "lover of the sight of truth" (475e), and philosophical natures "are always in love with that learning which discloses to them something of the being that is always and does not wander about, driven by generation and decay" (485b). The philosopher "goes forward and does not lose the keenness of his passionate love . . . before he grasps the nature itself of each thing which is" (490b).

In short, a reading of the *Republic* that takes its bearings from the surface generates a problem. The city in speech, the apparently perfectly just city, requires the severe repression of eros. But philosophy itself, as is repeatedly stated on the surface of the text, is an erotic activity.[18] (Erotic too is the Idea of the Good: after all, it gives birth to the sun "in a proportion with itself" [508b]). Careful attention to the surface thus generates a question: Why are these two strands or themes (i.e., the positive and negative evaluations of eros) in apparent tension throughout the dialogue as a whole? This question, I believe, is the key to the entire dialogue, for the *Republic* is not a systematic

deduction but a dialogue. As a result, its essential dynamic is that of dialectical revision and development. To return to my earlier example, what is proposed as a psychology in Book IV, the radical disjunction of the three parts of the soul, may well serve a dialectical purpose at that stage of the dialogue. On further reflection, however, it requires revision, and this it receives by Book IX, where, as mentioned above, the severity of the distinction is mitigated by the unifying thread of each part loving something. So while it is indeed true that the tripartite psychology of Book IV, one of the most famous surface teachings of the *Republic*, is negated in the course of the dialogue, its negation is akin to a Hegelian Aufhebung. The surface teaching is not junked; even if it is revised, and in this sense elevated, it is nonetheless still preserved as a moment in the dialectic.

The surface of a Platonic dialogue is a dimension of the whole work and so must be taken into serious account by a philosophical reader. In an important sense, the *Phaedo*, for example, is in fact about what it seems to be about—namely, the immortality of the soul. Although Socrates fails to prove personal immortality, he may nonetheless have demonstrated, in his account of "recollection," that human beings have some cognitive access to that which is beyond the changeable flux of sensible life. Entities (or are they merely words or concepts?) like "the equal itself" somehow inform our experience, and a life devoted to their study (and to an examination of whether they are entities or mere words or concepts) is a "preparation for death." This is to say that the philosophical life aims beyond itself for that which, unlike life itself, is formal and stable.

Another example: the *Phaedo*, just as it seems to, does indeed present a kind of body-soul dualism. This dualism is not, however, of the radical or metaphysical sort that divides the two as entirely distinct kinds of substances. Instead (or so I would argue), the dualism latent in the *Phaedo* is a far more "phenomenological" one. In the course of ordinary human consciousness—when, for example, someone turns in on himself to concentrate hard on a question (as Socrates seems [*phainetai*: 84c3] to do)—the soul experiences, albeit fleetingly, a kind of independence. The thinker turns away from sensory input, collects his thoughts, directs them hard toward the question, and thereby "uses pure thinking (*dianoia*) itself in relation to itself" (66a1-2).

This "itself" talk animates Socrates's description of philosophy as "purification" and as the practice for death and dying. Such language may well generate the impression of a soul destined to spend a disembodied eternity in Hades. While such an impression does no justice to the fullness of Plato's thinking, it is not simply wrong. As Ahrensdorf rightly shows, the arguments of the *Phaedo* fail to prove personal immortality. But this does not mean they are to be philosophically junked as mere disguise or political protection for

the philosopher. The *Phaedo* does demonstrate that the soul is immortal: not literally immortal, to be sure, but immortal in the sense that the soul, when it itself turns to itself (i.e., when it thinks hard) can make contact with those entities (the "itselfs") that are beyond the flux of mortal existence. This, I would argue, is the true nature of Platonic dualism.

My account of the surface of a Platonic dialogue has, like the interpretations here under review, a political correlate. Beginning readers, like the surface itself, are to be taken seriously and treated with respect. My proposal is thus more "democratic," more "liberal," than that entailed by the radically ironic reading of Ahrensdorf or the poetic excess of Cropsey and Craig. Beginning readers, ordinary citizens, are to be invited to read and, more important, to reread the dialogues. Responsible commentators must make this invitation clear. In doing so, they will mimic Socrates himself: after all, he haunted the agora and was willing to talk with "both young and old . . . foreigner and citizen" (*Apology*, 30a). (And, as we know from the *Symposium* and the *Menexenus*, with both men and women.)

Of course, Socrates not only invites but also exhorts and rebukes his interlocutors for not thinking carefully enough. So too must the commentator urge readers to rethink their superficial impressions and integrate them within a comprehensive analysis of the dialogue as a whole. But superficial impressions, like the surfaces that generate them, are the beginning. To use one of Plato's own metaphors, they are the tracks to be followed in the hunt for being and truth. Perhaps most readers will not have the stamina to pursue the quarry far enough. Still, the nature of the dialogues' construction makes it unmistakable that Plato wanted them to try.

If the political correlate of the hermeneutic stance I propose is democratic or liberal, then its stylistic correlate is clarity. This is not to imply that a final interpretation of a Platonic dialogue gleams with mathematical precision. Instead, it is to insist that a set of questions generated through the "wonderful" provocations located on the surface of the text be methodically tracked. Questions are not the same as (Cropseyian) doubts, nor need they reflect an abject confusion that requires poetry for solace. Even if their answers are terribly elusive, the structure and genesis of even the most complicated questions can be articulated clearly. Showing that this is so is, I believe, the primary task of the teacher. Insofar as one might hope to learn from a commentary, so too does this task belong to the philosophical commentator.

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NOTES

1. It is of course true that several of Plato's dialogues (the *Parmenides*, for example) are as forbidding as any other great philosophical work. Such dialogues present interpretive problems of their own that I cannot consider here.

2. The translation is that of H. Fowler in the Loeb edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

3. The most comprehensive treatment of these themes raised by the *Phaedrus* can be found in Charles Griswold's *Self-Knowledge in Plato's* Phaedrus (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

4. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 53-54.

5. Ibid., 51.

6. I follow the translation of Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

7. The notion of the mask plays a significant role in Nietzsche's thinking. His god, Dionysus, was after all the god of the mask. In a sense, therefore, my criticism of Strauss and his followers is precisely, and surprisingly, that they are too Nietzschean. This is a point noted by Stanley Rosen, in his *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 124.

8. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 17.

9. Ibid., 15, 18.

10. Translations are my own. The Greek text is that of J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

11. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 220.

12. Cropsey offers no argument why he includes the *Cratylus* here. Presumably he bases his inclusion on 396d, which would be plausible but not conclusive.

13. Actually, in the Greek this is difficult to translate since *toi* can be construed as either masculine or neuter.

14. Recall the first line of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "All human beings by nature yearn (*oregontai*) for knowledge."

15. Again, see Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 107-23, for an elaboration of this criticism of Strauss.

16. It is not clear how Craig documents this textual datum. He cites Brandwood's concordance in his bibliography, and so I assume that this (rather than, say, the superior *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*) is his source.

17. And here I follow Stanley Rosen, "The Role of Eros in Plato's *Republic*," in *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1988), 102-9.

18. Also on the surface of the text is the repeated description of Glaucon as an erotic man: see 474d, 368a, 402e.