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I-Kai Jeng
National Taiwan University
ikjeng@ntu.edu.tw
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2238-926X

Disclosure: Prof. Marren is a friend of mine and we share a common approach to interpreting Plato. I hope that our personal and intellectual friendship will be an advantage instead of a handicap for this review, insofar as my criticisms come from a place of understanding.

I begin with two ways of confronting Kallipolis in Plato's Republic. One is to say that it is totalitarian and therefore bad. Another is to agree that it is totalitarian or, to use Marren's preferred word, tyrannical, but to show, in addition, that Socrates (or Plato) did not seriously mean to realize it, or even really think that it was good. Marren's book is an instance of such an ironic reading. Naturally, the question arises as to why Socrates (or Plato) wrote ironically, and here commentators diverge. Marren's answer is that the tyrannical ways of Kallipolis are designed to stimulate the readers to more deeply examine themselves and their own potentially tyrannical inclinations. The tyrannical soul might be several removes away from the philosophical one, but their opposition does not exclude a hidden kinship. That Kallipolis is both tyrannical and not seriously meant is suggested to us, according to Marren, by Plato's careful reworking of the "literary devices in the plays of Aristophanes" in the Republic (26). Hence the title of Marren's book.

One can already guess at Marren's Straussian-inspired hermeneutic, according to which a dialogue's arguments can only be understood in light of its drama (or "action," to use Strauss's and Seth Benardete's preferred term). The latter often subverts or performatively contradicts the content of the conversation and forms a crucial part of Plato's message. Chapter One offers three illustrations of this interpretive commitment: the naked exercise requirement in R. V (18-20), Glaucon's excitement about pleasure while Socrates explains the

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Idea of the Good (21-22), and the way the need to have good food makes citizens themselves food-like in the luxurious city (24). On Marren's reading, one must recognize that these three passages, in terms of action, are jokes, and as jokes they inflect what is being said. In the first passage, for example, we are alerted to the infeasibility of naked exercise, while in the second, the character of the Good as "beyond being" probably reflects Glaucon's "too lively an interest in coming out on top" (22).

The main argument begins in Chapter Two. Marren's first choice is an obvious one, the Assembly Women. She helpfully notes that Blepyrus's objections to Praxagora's plan help us see more clearly the problematic character of Socrates's abolition of the family, something that Glaucon fails to notice (34-35). But she also boldly relates two other passages outside of R. V to the play. First, she argues that when Plato makes Socrates speak of needing "adequate light" (φῶς...ἱκανόν, 427d2) to discover justice and injustice in their best city, Plato is alluding to the opening of the comedy, where Praxagora also wields a lantern that promises to shine a light in the darkness. Socrates' remark can only be understood for the joke that it is once one sees that it appropriates the opening of the play. In fact, the definition of justice is no more illuminative than Praxagora's lantern in the play. Praxagora's lantern both lights the way to the just, new order and exposes the women's vices; similarly, what Socrates discovers is not justice alone, but something also mixed with injustice (32-33; cf. R. 371e12). The injustice is namely the soul's pursuit of equality gone awry. The Assembly Women is key because it reveals the kinship between communism and democracy, as the latter is described in R. VIII. Despite differences between the best city and democracy, "both are concerned with equality" (36; cf. Ar. Ec. 945)—in many cases, to excess. In Marren's reading, Kallipolis is not the anti-democratic regime it appears to be. If one reads the Republic alongside the Assembly Women, one realizes that Kallipolis is democratic to a fault insofar as it also pursues equality to excess. The significance of the Assembly Women, on this reading, is not restricted to the female drama in R. V, but governs the arc of a crucial part of the dialogue stretching from IV till VIII. Marren thus argues that Socrates's communism is just as fanatic and thus as wrongheaded as the pursuit of equality in the regime in the Assembly Women.

Chapter Three draws parallels between the Knights and Socrates' ship of state. They are based on the following analogy: the sausage-seller is to Demos in the Knights as true pilot is to the ship-owner in the Republic (47-48). The parallels are mostly sound, but given the popularity of the ship of state imagery in antiquity, perhaps unsurprising. There is a perceptive interpretation of the term ὑπερφυᾶ (monstrous, extraordinary) in Knights 141, used to describe the sausage-seller's art (52-53). Meanwhile, the interpretation of Republic 488c and 493b as counterparts to the oracle-mongering scene in the Knights is less convincing (51). The lesson Marren draws from this comparison is that both Aristophanes and Plato agree that "in a democracy the people must be held accountable for the conditions that allow corrupt individuals to rise to positions of political power" (46). But in the Republic one can actually argue that it is solely due to the philosophers' unwillingness to rule that power falls into the hands of the unworthy.[1] The question of who is more responsible for bad politics (the philosophers unwilling to rule, or the people choosing bad rulers over them) is clearly a theme in the ship of state

analogy, and relates to the question of whether it is the sophists or the people who corrupt philosophically talented youths (492a-493c, cf. 58-61 on the sausage-seller's aptitude for oratory and his possible decency). Marren concludes by suggesting that, because the people are responsible, they perhaps "must learn to think and to be philosophical," even as she admits that this is contrary to what Socrates claims (61).

If Marren wishes to argue that, rather than problematically ceding control to philosophers the demos—which she suggests is educable—is capable of distinguishing between good and bad rulers, then Socrates' exhortation to Adeimantus to "not despise the many so much" (R. 499d10-e1) is, I believe, very relevant to Marren's project. On the one hand, it reveals that Adeimantus's excessive seriousness (evinced in his inability to laugh) and his contempt for the people are two sides of the same coin. The proper evaluation of the many requires a comic stance that Adeimantus lacks. On the other hand, the context of that remark seems to qualify Socrates' earlier denial of the potential of the many to be enlightened. Some consideration of that remark, in short, would have strengthened the book's overall thesis.

It is unfortunate that Marren does not clarify her use of the terms 'tyranny' and 'tyrannical,' which is crucial for her argument that there is a kinship between the tyrannical and philosophical rule. If tyranny means "lawless rule," then the rule of philosopher-kings is tyrannical. But tyranny, as Socrates speaks of it in the Republic, seems to be ignorant or disorderly rule, when what by nature ought to be ruled rules what by nature ought to rule. In this sense, the knowledgeable and absolute rule of philosophers is not tyranny.

Chapter Four continues the exploration of Kallipolis as tyranny. Parallels are documented between it and Cloudcuckooland in the Birds (77-79). Some brilliant observations showcase Marren's sharp eye for critical moments. For example, she argues that the honors and prizes of Kallipolis belie its ostensible claim to virtue, and appeal to Glaucon's erotic nature instead (73-74, 77). Also, her comment on how Peisetairos's eventual bird-eating echoes the myth of Tereus (75) is eye-opening and rich (even though on the same page she misses the opportunity to cite Birds 1167 in connection with R. 382a, as both passages speak of "true falsehoods"). These pieces of evidence allow Marren to claim that the Kallipolis' tyrannical aspects are established according to the temperament of Glaucon and Adeimantus, who are typical in their eagerness for a political order that, among other things, avoids the messiness of everyday political life. Like the Birds, the Republic appropriates the trope of the idyllic as the desirable but impossible dream (81). One longs for it at one's own peril, because if we strive for "a life unburdened by the demands of politics," "we expose ourselves to the worst kind of political manipulation" (80). One is naturally reminded of the philosopher's reluctance to engage in politics (R. 347c3-d2; Lg. 803b3-5).

According to Marren, part of the reason why philosopher-kings are tyrannical is that the Good "cannot be known in any discursive manner that would enable one to understand its content and its meaning, and then explain it to someone else" (79). But this is to argue on the basis of R. 509b9-10 (and also 505a5-6, 533a3) without considering 534b3-d1 (and the implication of ὑπογραφήν, "sketch," at 504d6). 534b3-d1 suggests that, unlike real tyrants, who actively avoid being questioned and examined, the guardians of Kallipolis welcome questioning precisely because they can use dialectic to defend against objec-

tions to their account of the Good. While that passage doesn't refute her claim about the tyrannical nature of Kallipolis, it does weaken it somewhat.

The final chapter argues that the critical distance comedy presupposes is indispensable for self-knowledge. But, she asks, should we make fun of the philosophic life if we want to be philosophers? Absolutely. Step one of her argument: tyrants weaponize seriousness, and mockery must be employed to destablize the values that tyrants wish to establish beyond questioning (94). Step two: the mythical degeneration of regimes in R. VIII-IX does not fit with historical reality. Not only democracy, but all other regimes, can transform into tyranny quite quickly (91-93). Final step: since Kallipolis is as close to tyranny as democracy is (and given the arguments in previous chapters, perhaps even closer than other regimes are), and since Socrates himself associated with people who became tyrants or problematic political figures, the mockery of tyranny should be applied to those close to tyrants, i.e. to philosophers. I wish Marren had compared the modern diagnoses of tyrannies with Socrates'. At one point, "passionate idealism and nationalism" are identified as what modern tyrannies appeal to garner support (87); Socrates, by contrast, suggests that the tyrants appeal to freedom understood as lawless hedonism (R. 562b12-563b9; 571c3-d4, 572d8-e4). But are "passionate idealism and nationalism" and "lawless hedonism" identical in the final analysis, or are there important differences?

With the main text running at just under 100 pages, Marren's multi-layered discussion leaves me wanting more. A longer book would have assuaged the worries voiced here. Nevertheless, her book generally succeeds in its stated goal and is a good place to begin exploring Plato's relation to Aristophanes. It is obviously motivated by contemporary political concerns. Indeed, since it is a work that argues that we neglect politics at our own peril, and that we, as a people, are as responsible as those in power for our political future, it is only proper that she approaches the Republic from the angle of comedy. After all, comedy, all at once, diagnoses, deflates, and fights tyranny, and brings our self-knowledge to bear upon our confrontation with it.

ENDNOTES

1 Compare Strauss's comment in The City and Man, University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 124.