

CINZIA ARRUZZA, *A Wolf in the City: Tyranny and the Tyrant in Plato's Republic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, p. 304

Plato's *Republic* has been object of a lively debate amongst commentators and philosophers who have proposed several, often controversial interpretations of this work. From a political point of view, the *Republic* was mainly criticised by Popper for being proto-totalitarian and distant from liberal principles. As a consequence of these accusations, many interpreters have tried to rehabilitate the *Republic* by softening Plato's anti-democratic view, stressing, by contrast, the liberal spirit of its dialogues. With this dense and insightful book, Arruzza responds to this current debate, arguing that, although Plato's work is not proto-totalitarian, it is also far from being democratic. She argues that defenders of Plato's proto-totalitarian accusation had erroneously merged the concepts of liberalism and democracy which the author clearly distinguishes and separates, claiming that Plato's was in fact a straightforward critique of democracy in spite of its liberal spirit.

Arruzza presents a clear and well-defined picture of both tyranny (in its relation to democracy) and of the tyrant's character seen from both psychological and moral perspectives underlining that these themes constitute one of the main threads of Plato's dialogue and are both crucial to gaining a holistic understanding of his overall political and moral argument. As explained in the introduction, according to Proclus, one of the main challenges with the *Republic* was to identify the main subject matter of the work. The two most convincing yet opposite interpretative themes are focused respectively on a) the political aspect of the *Republic* and b) its moral reflection referred to as "the justice of the soul". In agreement with Proclus, Arruzza believes that these two themes should not be seen as exclusive but rather as complementary. In the light of this perspective Arruzza has divided her book into two distinctive sections respectively entitled "Tyranny and Democracy" and "The Tyrant's Soul" pointing out the interrelation of the two being manifestations of the same truth and underlining the absence of any form of hierarchical importance.

In the first section of the book Arruzza argues that the literary and historical tropes emerging from the *Republic*, of both tyranny and the tyrant should not be seen exclusively as an attack against tyranny itself but first and foremost as a means to understanding Plato's critique of Democracy. Moreover, the latter should not be perceived as the opposite of tyranny but as its natural derivation.

Chapter I provides a thorough analysis of the Athenian historical and literary tropes of the tyrant of the V and the IV century BC. Here the author argues that the Athenian anti-tyrannical literature mainly served the purpose of providing a description and conceptualization of democracy by opposition. As Arruzza writes, "*Tyranny played a crucial role in the self-understanding of Athenian democracy as it embodied everything that was opposed to it*" (p.13). Chapter II supports the idea that the aim of Plato's work was not that of adding an additional critique to the already solidly established negative view of tyranny, rather, his aim was to criticise democracy showing that tyranny is its offspring. Here Arruzza ably rules out both the ideas that Plato's Tyrant was a portrait and critique of a historical figure, and that his was a critique of tyranny per se to praise democracy. Her idea that Plato's is a critique of democracy will be reinforced by a more detailed analysis of the tyrant and of how he "naturally" derives from democracy in chapter III, where she interestingly highlights the botanic imagery employed by Plato to stress the idea that such a derivation is produced naturally. Tyranny is linked to the nature of democracy, characterized by corruption and trends which allow certain individuals to gain advantage. The institutional deficiencies of democracy, Arruzza explains, "*specifically generate tyrants because of the moral*

continuity between the appetitive nature of the demos and that of the tyrant” (p.118).

The second section of the book is dedicated to the exploration of the Tyrant’s psychology and more specifically to the understanding of the different roles played by the different parts of the soul. According to Socrates, there is a conflictual relationship between them (appetites, spirit and reason) and through a thorough analysis of Plato’s dialogues, completed by logical extensions and deductions, Arruzza delineates such an interrelation with particular focus on the tyrant’s case.

Chapter IV includes another historical excursus highlighting the eroticised and greedy behaviour of tyrants of Plato’s time and explores the role of appetites and eros within the soul. The tyrant’s appetitive part, thanks to the enhancing role of eros, triumphs over the other two parts (spirit and reason), making them pursue its own desires. Chapter V defines the nature of spirit as a drive to self-assertion and underlines its interestingly active role within the tyrant, whose soul is already dominated by appetites. Spirit’s drive to self-assertion, which would naturally ally with reason, through the intervention of madness, becomes enslaved by the appetitive desires. Here Arruzza utilises Plato’s powerful animal metaphors to represent the possible states of spirit. The wolf, as suggested by the title of the book, is the symbol of the tyrant’s greedy and mad nature. The dog, symbol of normativity, without the guidance of education, and with the intervention of madness and eros, would take the shape of a savage and ferocious wolf, known for being dominated by its instinct and for eating its own lambs. Finally, chapter VI is dedicated to the exploration of the role of reason and of its domination by the appetites. The author importantly distinguishes between reason as a cognitive and motivational faculty and as a theoretical and practical activity. The latter needs a philosophical education in order to know what is Good. Here, Arruzza overcomes a potential contradiction by explaining how reason continues to be strong in the tyrant in spite of being dormant. The dormant part is the one cherishing the understanding of Good, while the strong one, which continues working enslaved by the appetites, is the cognitive side.

This book is an exceptionally rich and well researched piece of work supported by a crisp argumentative style, in spite of rare incongruences and structural difficulties. It adds to scholar research by persuasively responding to a current ongoing debate concerning the tormented interpretation of Plato’s Republic. By rehabilitating his attack against democracy rather than tyranny, it also becomes pertinent to our modern times playing the role of an additional stimulus for the reader, who is thus driven to reflect on and make parallelisms with the demagogical nature of our own current democracy.

The structural difficulties of the book may well derive from its very nature of being so dense and resourceful. Due to their strong analytical nature some sections have the potential of dragging the reader away from the main focus of the argument. It would have benefitted from a more direct and explicit connection to the main focus facilitating the reader to appreciate their value even more in the light of a broader view of their function. For instance, Arruzza’s outline of greed in Athenian Leadership, which draws upon the figures of Alcibiades and Nicias, in spite of allowing the reader to understand the reasons behind Plato’s choice of depicting the tyrant as an appetitive man, does not directly support the main argument which feels distant and abstract.

As for the rare argumentative incongruencies, (rare in that what primarily emerges is a masterful argumentative ability to provide valid and sound syllogisms) I wish to point out the contradiction I believe to be the most blatant; the labelling of the tyrant’s eros as “*of a sexual kind*” (p.180). Having argued against the idea of a pluralism of eros, Arruzza stresses, that the multiple manifestations of eros should be better interpreted as something that could intensify and

drive towards a specific object. Eros' role of intensifying specific parts of the soul, which in the tyrant translates into the enhancement of the appetitive desire pushed beyond law, is consistent with the idea that, thanks to eros, appetites win over the other two parts of the soul. However, Arruzza's conclusive definition of eros as of a "sexual kind" is contradictory and such a nature seems to persist in spite of her further clarification aimed at distinguishing the *sexual eros* from mere appetite. Despite her elucidation, the tyrant's eros labelled as "erotic", continues to imply the existence of other types of eros which contradicts the idea of a neutral, intensifying eros. This section would therefore have benefitted from further clarification.

Another incongruity lies within her belief that there is no hierarchical importance between the political side of the Republic and the justice of the soul. Although the analogy between the city and the soul, evident from Socrates's arguments from books 2 and 4, would reinforce the idea of a deep interrelation between the two subjects, the absence of a hierarchy between them is arguable. It would seem from Socrates Arguments in book 4 that the function of the city would be to provide a visible and macroscopic tool to analyse what cannot be seen; the soul. However, the incongruity lies within the idea that in her book it is the soul that would seem to serve the understanding of the political aspect of the Republic defeating her idea of the absence of a hierarchy. However, this does not diminish the impact of her main argument, as the importance of the correspondence of the two central subjects is still valid and would justify her need to develop them and refer to their interconnection.

A very interesting aspect of this book concerns Arruzza's original suggestion that Plato's appropriation of the tyrannical tropes served as an indirect critique against Democracy. This revolutionary argument plays a fundamental role in the current debate concerning the Republic's interpretation shedding light on a work eclipsed by the attempts of freeing Plato from his proto-totalitarian label. Arruzza's thesis is supported not only by her sound arguments backed by detailed portraits of Plato's political background, which may already seem sufficient, but also by her reference to the analysis of the tyrant's soul. Here she interestingly stresses that the tyrant is not an ordinary individual but an exceptionally capable and intelligent man who uses his intellectual capabilities to serve his own appetites. The tyrant is the philosopher's "alter ego", "a philosopher gone astray" (p.247), someone whose perception of the Good has been distorted but continues to use its calculative part of the soul to his own benefits. This, together with the tyrant's ability to manipulate crowds also reminds the reader of the extreme modernity of Plato's Philosophy and pertinence of Arruzza's book to our present day. Thanks to the thorough analysis and explanation of the Republic, the reader can strongly relate to Plato in spite of the immense time lapse which only apparently separates him from our time.

In conclusion, this is an extremely well researched, and persuasive book which should be consulted not merely by scholars for its insightful contribution to the current debate on Plato's Republic and for its meticulous attention to details and historical sources. It can also be appreciated for addressing an extremely modern theme; that of populism and demagoguery characterizing our own modern times which Le Bon defined as *the era of crowds*.

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