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Not Athenian or a Stranger: The Veiled Critique of Aristotle in Plato's *Laws*

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Plato's last dialogue, the *Laws*, occupies an anomalous position within his larger body of work. An individual identified as the "Athenian stranger" replaces Socrates and reverses key Socratic teachings, most notably by endorsing tyranny. Scholars conclude that Plato abandoned his earlier political recommendations in favor of a more pragmatic vision. In that case, the *Laws* should be treated as Plato's definitive work, the ultimate statement of his thought, when in fact, much more attention is paid to earlier dialogues, particularly the *Republic*. The problem is resolved and the true significance of the *Laws* revealed when the text is read as Plato's ironic critique of his brilliant-but-rebellious student, Aristotle. Reasoning from Aristotelian premises, the Athenian stranger arrives at conclusions that Platonists and Aristotelians alike would find unpalatable or absurd. The alleged rupture between Plato's earlier and later work disappears. The esoteric writings that are thought to have been the product of Aristotle's later career are shown to have emerged from ideas that Plato himself was familiar with and rejected.

Keywords: Plato, Plato's *Laws*, Platonic irony, Aristotle, Aristotle's *Politics*, tyranny

An Unresolved Exegetical Problem

Who is the unnamed "Athenian stranger" who takes the leading role in the last of Plato's dialogues, the *Laws*, and how are we to reconcile his statements with those of the absent Socrates, since the two seem fundamentally to be at odds? Was Cicero correct in identifying the "Athenian stranger" as the voice of Plato (Cicero, 2017, p. 112) and did Plato perform an abrupt reversal late in life and abandon the lofty theoretical structure so carefully constructed in his previous works in favor of something more practical, as he often is said to have done?[1] (Strauss, 1975, p. 7; Cairns, 1987, p. 1225; Pangle, 1980, p. 379; Halverson, 1997, p. 99; Saunders, 1992, pp. 120-121; Morrow, 1993, pp. 17-18). If so, then why are earlier works, particularly the *Republic*, treated to this day as the definitive statements of Platonic philosophy? If even Aristotle thought that the Athenian stranger was merely a stand-in for Socrates after the latter had been tried and convicted in the *Apology*, imprisoned in the

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[1] According to Joseph Cropsey, the traditional approach treats the *Laws* as "a sweeping recantation that expresses Plato's senescent disenchantment with Perfection." "Plato is old" when he writes the *Laws*, says Huntington Cairns: "Death cannot be far away... He does not want to look farther and farther into "the beyond" but to come down to earth and realize some of the truth he has seen." "In the *Laws*," says Thomas Pangle, "we learn what Socrates *would* have said and done if his quest for self-knowledge, and his friendships, had ever allowed him the leisure to engage in giving advice to political reformers—and if he had ever found himself in the appropriate circumstances." "What he talks about [in the *Laws*] is a political system," says John Halverson, "reviving the legislative fantasy of the *Republic*, though now in a more practical mode." Plato in the *Laws* describes "a practical utopia, second-best to that in the *Republic*," says Trevor Saunders. "Unlike the *Republic*, the *Laws* does not describe a utopia but a Cretan city with a defined location in time and space," says Charles H. Kahn; "not an ideal state but as good an imitation as Plato thought possible in fourth-century Greece."

Crito, and put to death in the *Phaedo*, then the *Laws* should have counted as the ultimate statement of Platonic thought. Why, then, was it usually the *Republic* that Aristotle cited when discussing his teacher's ideas?[2] (Strauss, 1975, p. 2; Morrow, 1960, p. 146; Saunders, 1992, pp. 120-121; Zuckert, 2009, p. 51; Diogenes,1972, p. 323).

There is compelling evidence for identifying the "Athenian stranger" as Aristotle himself and good reason for reading the *Laws* as a catalogue of Plato's disappointments with a brilliant but recalcitrant student who was also a leading contender to take over leadership of the Academy once Plato was gone. When read as a thinly veiled critique of Aristotle, the final dialogue, the *Laws*, is consistent with the Platonic writings that predate it. By the time Aristotle responded in the *Politics*, Plato had died and the concerns that had motivated him were less relevant. Aristotle was free to respond with brevity, focus, and irony of his own.

Felix Grayeff claims that:

> there is no clear evidence from which to conclude that, already in his Academic period, Aristotle was beginning to go his own way as a philosopher ... or that he freed himself inwardly from Plato, starting his own independent philosophic development. (Grayeff, 1974, p. 21)

but Grayeff looks in the wrong place: in the early writings of Aristotle, when evidence is to be found instead in the last writings of his teacher. There are admittedly no explicit references to Aristotle in Plato's writings, though explicit references to Plato are found throughout the Aristotelian canon[3] (Organ, 1966, p. 126). The esoteric technical works written after he had left Plato's Academy (*Poetics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, etc.) are the only writings of Aristotle's that have survived substantially intact to the present day. Their purpose was narrowly instructional; they were not meant for publication. The works intended for publication—the earlier exoteric works, some written in dialogue form—were evidently more consistent with Plato's teachings. Only fragments of these survive (Grayeff, 1974, p. 19). Reading the *Laws* as an ironic critique of arguments and ideas gained firsthand from Aristotle in the two decades that both he and Plato were active at the Academy brings clarity to Plato's meaning in the complaint recorded by Diogenes Laertius: "Aristotle spurns me, as colts kick out at the mother who bore them."[4] While he was still Plato's student, Aristotle must have been formulating ideas that came to be associated with a later period of his life and he must have been formulating those ideas in something very close to their later, familiar form. Otherwise, the irony in the *Laws* would be inscrutable to the modern reader, when in fact, similarities between what the Athenian stranger *is made to say* (by Plato) and what Aristotle later *actually will say* (in the technical writings familiar to us today) are clear and compelling. Aristotle while still at the Academy embarks on an independent intellectual course which must either dissolve into incoherence or lead absurdly to the endorsement of tyranny: this is the warning delivered in the *Laws* by the Athenian stranger.

The Dramatic Context

Clues to Plato's underlying agenda in the *Laws*—as in other dialogues—are found in the dramatic setting. We have encountered the "Laws" before: personified in the *Crito*, where Socrates invokes them to explain

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[2] "A Socrates in fourth-century Crete would have been too gross an anachronism for Plato's dramatic taste," says Glenn Morrow, naming Aristotle (in the *Politics*) as the person who identified the stranger with Socrates. Aristotle's discussion of the *Laws* in the *Politics* would therefore have been continuous with his critique of the *Republic*. "The main speaker in the *Laws* is an elderly 'Athenian stranger,'" notes Trevor Saunders: "Aristotle, however, apparently thinks, though he does not quite say this, that it is 'Socrates,' a celebrated slip presumably induced by reading many other Platonic dialogues, in which Socrates is indeed usually the central character." Diogenes Laertius lists the Athenian Stranger as one of four persons in the dialogues who expound Plato's views.

[3] Troy Wilson Organ finds tacit references in Aristotle's writings to 17 of the Platonic dialogues.

[4] Diogenes Laertius, V.2, 445.

why it would be wrong for him to escape from jail. As proof that life in Athens has been satisfactory and that he has willingly accepted the conditions of Athenian citizenship, the "Laws" remind Socrates that he chose not to follow the pattern of his countrymen by traveling abroad. "You have never left the city to attend a festival or for any other purpose," they remind him, "except on some military expedition."[5] Yet in a striking anomaly, Socrates is seen in the first book of the *Republic* to be returning to Athens from Piraeus after doing the very thing that we were told he never has done: attending a festival, specifically a festival to welcome a foreign goddess, Bendis, as she is introduced to Athens from a place at the periphery of the Greek world, semi-barbaric Thrace.[6] Athens and Piraeus might seem to count as a single entity, the one "city" that Socrates is said rarely to have left, and indeed, a walk from Athens to Piraeus could have been accomplished without going outside the "Long Walls" that connected the two places until they were demolished by order of the Spartans once the Peloponnesian War had been lost. The action in the *Republic* predates those sad events, and so Socrates's walk from Athens to Piraeus might seem to be consistent with the claim that he never left Athens, even for a festival. However, we know from the orator Lysias who figures prominently in the *Phaedrus* that "never to have left the city"—in other words, "to have remained in the town" of Athens and not to have ventured to Piraeus—was an accusation that carried particular resonance for Athenians at the close of the fifth century. The charge was leveled against aristocrats who failed to leave their stronghold in the upper town to join the rebellion against the Thirty Tyrants as it was developing in the more cosmopolitan setting of the port (Lysias, 2000, p. 262). The "Laws" that forbid Socrates from escaping from prison thus give voice to a restored democratic constitution. Perhaps they also speak in the foreign accents that would have been common at Piraeus and conspicuous at the exotic festival for Bendis[7] (Nails, 2002, pp. 84-85, 251). Socrates pleads his innocence in the *Apology*, reminding the democratic jurors that his friend Chaerephon shared their expulsion and restoration, and that he, Socrates, refused at the risk of his life to participate in the prosecution of Leon of Salamis, though ordered to do so by the Thirty Tyrants.[8] Once he is convicted, his pleading ends. He is unwilling in the *Crito* to contradict the "Laws" of the restored democracy. It is evident in the *Apology* that he considers his conviction unjust; if he will undertake no further action to save himself, then Plato at least can send him on an uncanny walk—can put him through dramatic paces—that slyly undermines the Athenian pedigree of the "Laws" and calls into question the legitimacy of the imprisonment and execution to which Socrates passively submits.

Like the *Republic*, the *Laws* opens with an anomalous walk, and again, issues are tacitly raised concerning the integrity of Athenian civilization and the threat of barbaric contamination. Three elderly men—a Cretan named Clinias, a Spartan named Megillus, and an unnamed Athenian stranger—agree to occupy themselves at the summer solstice by discussing political constitutions while walking from Cnossos to a shrine of Zeus. As in the *Republic*, things are not what they seem. As Debra Nails points out, "Clinias" is not a typical Cretan name,

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[5] Plato, *Crito* (52b). Translated by Hugh Tredennick in Hamilton and Cairns, 37.

[6] Plato, *Republic* (327a). Translated by Paul Shorey in Hamilton and Cairns, 576.

[7] The exotic nature of the festival, the strangeness, is apparent in the *Republic*. The event has never been held before. The familiar "procession of the [Athenian] citizens" is contrasted with the "show made by the marching of the Thracian contingent," while the torch relay on horseback is described by Socrates as a "new idea". Reinforcing the exoticism of the setting, the suggestion of foreign influence, is Plato's transfer of the conversation from the streets to the home of Polemarchus: a *metic* (foreign merchant with rights of long-term residence in Athens) who later was killed by the Thirty Tyrants and was both Lysias's brother and the son of Cephalus, a wealthy shield manufacturer and one of Socrates's first conversational partners in the dialogue. Plato, *Republic* (327a-328b); Plato, *Republic*. Translated by Paul Shorey in Hamilton and Cairns, 576-577.

[8] Plato, *Socrates' Defense (Apology)* (21a, 32c-e). Translated by Hugh Tredennick in Hamilton and Cairns, 7, 18.

though it was the name of the notorious younger brother of Alcibiades, described by J. K. Davies as a "psychotic delinquent" and described by Alcibiades himself as a madman.[9] The individual identified as "Megillus" claims to have visited Athens earlier on an embassy from Sparta, but the historical record gives that person's name as "Metellus", which, because it was unusual, was amended later to Megillus.[10] In retrospect, "Metellus" is easily recognizable as the name given to male members of the Caecilli Metelli, a noble plebian family destined to become one of the most illustrious families in Rome. Italians feature prominently in the *Republic*: Greek Italians in the person of Polemarchus, who hails from Thurii on the Italian mainland, as well as his father Cephalus and brother Lysias, who hail from Sicily.[11] The writing of the *Laws* predates any surviving record of Greek contact with the Romans, but just barely. Plutarch tells us that Aristotle himself took note of Rome's sack by the Gauls in 387 B.C. Rome's earlier gift of a fabulous golden bowl to the Delphic oracle in thanks for success in the war against Veii (396 B.C.) occurred within Plato's lifetime and would certainly have attracted wide attention in Greece (Plutarch, 1996, p. 157, 160, 168). Livy records a number of embassies that were sent from Rome to Greece from as early as the sixth century B.C., though as Jan Blits observes, these did little to cure Greeks of the "indifference" and "contempt" they felt for Rome until shifts in the balance of power forced an adjustment in attitude.[12] In one possible example of that contempt, "Corsairs of Italy" are cited by the Athenian stranger in Book VI of the *Laws* as an example of "the human animal" as "a kittle beast."[13] What we indubitably have in the character of Megillus/Metellus is a visitor from points west: from Sparta, if we take the text at face value, or from farther afield, maybe even from non-Hellenic Italy, if we probe a little farther into the textual anomalies. As for the unnamed individual, he is said to be an Athenian, but an honorary one only. "Ah, my Athenian friend! I would rather not say Attic," says Clinias, "for I think you deserve to take your appellation by preference from the goddess."[14] (Plato, 1988, p. 1228; Plato, 1937, p. 409; Aristotle, 1984, pp. 1986-1988; Thucydides, 1972, p. 36; Morford, Lenardon, & Sham, 2015, p. 589).

In short, these are individuals of questionable pedigree, marginal individuals from the margins of the Greek world. If the honorary Athenian, the stranger, is indeed a representation of Aristotle, then Plato has brought together three individuals who are semi barbarous: two by reason of culture and geography—Megillus/Metellus, who is allegedly Spartan but possibly non-Hellenic Italian, and the stranger, who is nominally Athenian but might

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[9] "Clinias IV of Scanbonidae" in Nails, 101. As befitting a brother of Alcibiades, Clinias in Book VII of the *Laws* (792b, 1364) will recommend "plenty of pleasures" as the remedy for the fussiness in infants that might lead in adulthood to peevishness and "melancholy temper": a course of treatment dismissed by the stranger as "the most mischievous we could possibly take".

[10] "Megillus of Sparta" in Nails, 197.

[11] "Cephalus II of Syracuse, son of Lysanias" in Nails, 84-85.

[12] Jan H. Blits, *Telling, Turning Moments in the Classical Political World*. Lanham, Maryland and New York: Lexington Books (2011), 149, 153.

[13] Plato, *Laws* (777b-d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1353. "Look here, Clinias," says the stranger in Trevor Saunders's translation: "the animal 'man' quite obviously has a touchy temper," and proof is found in "the various crimes and adventures of the robbers who plague Italy, the 'Rangers,' as they're called." According to Pangel, the text identifies these Italians as "Peridinoi", though who they might have been is a mystery. Plato, Laws (777b-c). Translated by Trevor J. Saunders in Cooper, 1450; Pangel, 165, 529.

[14] The passage is translated thus by B. Jowett: "O Athenian Stranger,—inhabitant of Attica I will not call you, for you seem to deserve rather to be named after the goddess herself, because you go back to first principles ..." Perhaps the Athenians "go back to first principles" in their claim to be autochthonous, or "sprung from the earth," while the Athenian Stranger—if indeed he is Aristotle—returns to first principles with the sketch of society's prehistorical origins that opens the *Politics* and the claim that "the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part" (1252^{a} 25-1253^{a} 35). On the Athenian claim to be autochthonous, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Rex Warner with an Introduction and Notes by M.I. Finley. London and New York: Penguin Books (1972), 36, and Mark P.O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (International Tenth Edition). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press (2015), 589.

actually be a familiar Macedonian—along with a third, Clinias, who, despite his identification as Cretan, might be squarely Athenian by birth but is barbarous by reason of moral depravity.[15]

Moral depravity on a grand scale is suggested by the landscape they cross, though in a further anomaly, the three speak reverently of the villains associated with the notorious surroundings and disparagingly of the heroes who challenged them. Cnossos was home to Minos, who refused to sacrifice a beautiful bull sent specifically for that purpose by the gods. In retaliation, the gods filled his wife Pasiphaë with a perverse sexual desire for the animal. She satisfied her desire by having Daedalus construct a hollow metallic cow into which she crawled, permitting the bull to mount her. The product of that depraved act was the Minotaur. Every nine years, Athens had to sacrifice seven of her best young men and seven of her best young women to the Minotaur until Theseus put an end to it by killing the monster. For this reason, Theseus counted as "the great national hero of Attica." (Morford et al., 2015, p. 597). The Athenian stranger notes that the "cruel tribute" could have been avoided if Athenians had possessed the naval power to defy Minos, but adds that "it would have been better for them to lose many times seven youths than to convert themselves from steady infantrymen into marines." Soldiers allegedly fight less courageously when a fleet stands ready to pluck them from danger, while sailors are always tempted to engage in piracy (Plato, 1988, p. 1298). What of the Battle of Salamis and the deliverance of Greece from the barbarians by action of the Athenian navy, asks Clinias? The stranger and Megillus agree that the land battles at Marathon and Plataea were more important, since "to become thoroughly good" and to avoid corruption is more important than "bare preservation in existence." (Plato, 1988, p. 1299). In other words, death at the hands of the Persians or the Minotaur would have been preferable to the corruption that accompanies the development of maritime power. Deeper insults to Athens and its "great national hero" cannot be imagined and far exceed anything said in the *Republic* by Socrates in his critique of the luxurious maritime city—never specifically identified as Athens—as "fevered" in its decadent pursuits.[16] These insults call into question the true allegiance and affiliation of the putative Athenian, this disparager of navies and admirer of land powers (like Sparta and Macedonia). Minos, the stranger tells us, was the author of "venerable legal institutions", but Greeks would recognize this as one of the so-called Cretan lies told by Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca when he disguised himself as a Cretan beggar[17] (Plato, 1988, p. 1226; Zuckert, 2009, p. 60). Rhadamanthus, Minos's brother, is said to have been "conspicuous for his justice," but every Greek knew that Rhadamanthus and Minos sat as dreaded judges in the underworld (Plato, 1988, p. 1226; Morford et al., 2015, p. 382).

The Problem of Justice

It is in the first four books of the *Laws*—the long "Preamble", accounting for approximately a third of the text—that the Athenian stranger develops a distinctive conception of justice to support the outrageous claims that victory at Salamis was regrettable and that it would have been preferable for the Athenians to continue sacrificing their youth to the Minotaur. Note that the stranger's expression of regret for the victory at Salamis is an exaggerated version of the claim Aristotle will make in the *Politics* that the boost given to Athenian democracy

[15] On the perception of Macedonians as barbarians, see Herodotus's discussion (V/22) of the exclusion of Macedonians from participation in the Olympic Games.

[16] Plato, *Republic* (372e-373a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 619.

[17] Clinias will later (680c-d) deflect the stranger's references to Homer by referring to him as this "poet of yours" and saying that "we Cretans are not much given to cultivating verse of alien origin." Megillus professes to hold Homer in high regard, though "the life he is always describing is decidedly Ionian rather than Laconian." What is suggested once more is the position of Clinias and Megillus at the margins of a civilization that venerated Homer.

by the accomplishment of the rowers (the *demos*) led first to Athenian command of the seas and later to political imbalance at home: "For the people, having been instrumental in gaining the empire of the sea in the Persian War, began to get a notion of itself, and followed worthless demagogues, whom the better class opposed."[18] This is far from wishing that Persia had won or that the Athenians had been spared the danger of corruption by being enslaved. As for justice itself, the stranger offers a definition that clearly is the antithesis of Plato's and just as clearly a version of Aristotle's, albeit a satiric, unfriendly version, crafted with little sympathy for Aristotle's original. Plato's definition, given in Book IV of the *Republic*, is universal and timeless: justice is "to do one's own business and not to be a busybody."[19] In contrast, Aristotle's definition in Book I of the *Politics* embodies relativism and flexibility. Justice "is the bond of men in states; for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society." (Aristotle, 1988). Justice administered is justice *tout court*; wherever there is political order, there automatically is a measure of justice. This definition allows for a variety of legitimate governmental forms, and not just the singular Platonic ideal of the philosopher king.[20] Government "must be in the hands of one, or of a few, or of the many," and Aristotle acknowledges three healthy governmental forms—kingship, aristocracy, and constitutional government—along with three corresponding perversions: tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy.[21]

As for the Athenian stranger, he says that the "best way to define real justice would be to say ... That it is in the interest of the sovereign."[22] This echoes Aristotle's position, since "the sovereign"—sovereignty, sovereign power—can assume a number of forms. The "sovereign to whom we must submit if we are ever to become men of worth" is identified by the stranger as "conscience", which is itself defined as "subjection to the existing laws" without specifying that the "existing laws" in question are those only of a single governmental form.[23] When asked what he had gained from philosophy, Aristotle famously answered: "That I do without being ordered what some are constrained to do by their fear of the law."[24] Conscience is developed through habituation. As he explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097^{b} 5-15; 1103^{a} 10-1103b 25), correct education inculcates virtuous habits and teaches one to find pleasure in virtuous conduct. The Socratic voice of conscience, on the other hand, is externalized and transcendent, appearing as a divine sign from the god in the *Apology* (31d), as a divine sign warning against the commission of sin or demanding atonement after the fact in the *Phaedrus* (242b-d) and as the stern, anthropomorphized "Laws" in the *Crito*. The just soul described by Socrates in Book IV of the *Republic* escapes condemnation for its wrongful appetites because reason prevails and the wrongful appetites are suppressed. For Aristotle, simply to have wrongful appetites is evidence of poor upbringing. People legitimately pursue happiness in innumerable ways, he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095^{b} 1-15), but we need to have been brought up in fine habits if we are to be adequate students of what is fine and just.

Conscience as described by the stranger can be habituated to law under any number of possible governmental/sovereign forms, and not just under the three virtuous forms of monarchy, aristocracy, or

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[18] Aristotle, *Politics* (1274^{a} 10-15; 1304^{a} 20-25), Translated by B. Jowett in Barnes, 2021, 2071.
[19] Plato, *Republic* (433a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 675.
[20] Plato, *Republic* (473c-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 712-713.
[21] Aristotle, *Politics* (1279^{a} 22-1279^{b} 10) in Barnes, 2030. The stranger in Book VIII of the *Laws* will say that democracy, oligarchy, and autocracy are not true constitutions at all but only "party ascendancies": "in all a willing sovereign is controlling reluctant subjects by violence of some sort." Herodotus credits Darius with the insight that governments, good or bad, take the form of rule by the people, by an elite or by a single individual. Plato, *Laws* (832c), 1988, 1398; Herodotus, 2013, 229).
[22] Plato, *Laws* (699b-d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1293.
[23] Plato, *Laws* (699b-d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1293.
[24] Diogenes Laertius, V.20, 463.

constitutional government. Even the perverted forms of government are politically organized and thus not entirely bereft of justice. Indeed, Megillus and Clinias note that the governments of Sparta and Crete fit into no single category, incorporating elements of tyranny, monarchy, democracy, and aristocracy.[25] This, too, anticipates an important point that Aristotle will make in the *Politics*: that "every state contains many elements."[26] Hybrids are best, says the stranger. Pure democracies of the Athenian type are as unbalanced as pure monarchies like Persia's. It is best to combine the two forms, the Athenian and the Persian, as has been done in Sparta and on Crete.[27]

The admixture of Greek and barbarian influence hinted at in the dramatic setting of the dialogue is now openly discussed, and not just discussed, but also endorsed.[28] What is more, the stranger acknowledges the similarity of his definition of justice to Pindar's definition of "natural justice" as "the high hand of violence."[29] It is the nature of law to mix persuasion with menace, echoing the demand made of Socrates by the "Laws" in the *Crito* that he either obey the law or persuade the city to change.[30] The state attends to its own survival; one can ask the state to change, but no one compels it to do so. "Whatever the existing constitution may be," says the stranger, "the law should look to its interest, its permanent security against dissolution ..."[31]. The prerogative of coercion is never surrendered, not even under virtuous governments and not even if the state temporarily restrains itself in order to grant a hearing to dissenters (like Socrates). Ultimately, it is the duty of law, says the stranger, to "ensure our society bliss and well-being, in part by persuasion, and in part by enforced and legal correction of characters not amenable to persuasion."[32]. When habituation proves to be insufficient, the state has recourse to coercion. We are not far from Thrasymachus's notorious definition of justice in Book I of the *Republic* as "nothing else than the advantage of the stronger."[33] (Plato, 1988, p. 100, pp. 1400-1401; Plato, 1937, p. 486). Thrasymachus says that each of three types of government—tyranny, democracy and aristocracy—will make laws that favor and perpetuate the status quo. Selfishness is no aberration. It is synonymous with self-preservation and is thus a natural and legitimate part of any government. If government seems to be solicitous to the needs of the governed, it is only the solicitousness of shepherds for the sheep who inevitably will be fleeced and slaughtered. Tyranny is best, since tyrants outdo everyone in selfishness and lead the happiest lives.[34]

Note the subtle but ominous reversal here, from the invitation issued to Socrates in the *Crito* to try his hand at persuading the "Laws" to the stranger's description of persuasion as merely a prelude to the state's application of coercive power against the recalcitrant individual. The original message—*try to persuade the state, and if you*

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[25] Plato, *Laws* (712d-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1304.
[26] Aristotle, *Politics* (1289^{b} 25-1290^{a}) in Barnes, 2046-2047.
[27] Plato, *Laws* (693d-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1288.
[28] It is highly unlikely that the stranger speaks here for Plato, since Plato in Book VIII of the *Republic* dismisses mixed constitutions as tragic producers of mixed people, citizens perpetually at war with themselves: "And this intermixture of the iron with the silver and the bronze with the gold will engender unlikeness and an unharmonious unevenness, things that always beget war and enmity wherever they arise." Plato, *Republic* (547a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 775.
[29] Plato, Laws (714c-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1305-1306.
[30] Plato, *Laws* (721e) and *Crito* (51e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1312 36: "Both in war and in the law courts and everywhere else you must do whatever your city and your country command, or else persuade them in accordance with universal justice ..."
[31] Plato, *Laws* (714c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1305.
[32] Plato, *Laws* (718b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1308.
[33] Plato, *Republic* (338c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 588. The similarity of the stranger's definition to Thrasymachus's is even more apparent in other translations. In Pangle's translation, the Athenian stranger says this of justice (714c): "That it is in the interest of the stronger." Likewise, in Jowett's translation (714): "Justice is said by them [i.e., men in general] to be the interest of the stronger." "You realize that some people maintain that there are as many different kinds of laws as there are of political systems," asks the stranger in Saunders's translation: "... the definition of justice that measures up the facts [according to these people] is best formulated like this ... 'Whatever serves the interest of the stronger'." Plato, *Laws*, 1988, 100; Plato, *Laws*, 1937, 486; Plato, *Laws*, 1997, 1400-1401.
[34] Plato, *Republic* (338d-e, 343b-344b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 588, 593-594.

fail, then obey—has shifted to something quite different: *Let us in the state persuade you to obey, since if we fail at that, we will use force*. The gravity of this shift is illustrated in Book VI of the *Laws*, where the stranger says that newly married couples must either conform willingly to regulations concerning procreation or be compelled to conform by "the menace of law."[35] In contrast, Plato in Books II and V of the *Republic* proposed to control procreation without recourse to coercion, relying instead on elaborate deceptions involving rigged lotteries and abstinence-inducing religious stories: the notorious "falsehood in words".[36] It is because selfishness, of individuals or states, is no aberration that severe measures might at any time be necessary. The stranger in Book IX of the *Laws* will concede that anyone would evade the legal consequences of his own misdeeds if he could. No one will "spend his life in the promotion of the public good of the state as the paramount object to which his own advantage must be secondary."[37] Until it has learned "subjection to the existing laws"—until the process of habituation is completed—conscience is a selfish sovereign. The unhabituated person would naturally fall prey to the temptations that Gyges succumbed to in Book II (359d) of the *Republic*. Everyone by nature craves tyrannical power—"irresponsible autocratic sovereignty"—and everyone would naturally abuse tyrannical power to his or her own advantage. Thrasymachus was right: people decry injustice only because they are afraid of suffering it themselves.[38]

Plato thus makes the Athenian stranger accede to a definition of justice to which he, Plato, cannot subscribe without ceasing to be Plato. Socrates's defeat of the sophist Thrasymachus is the centerpiece of the *Republic*'s Book I and the touchstone for all that follows in that text. If there is one thing that Plato can never make Socrates do, and can never do himself, it is to be converted to Thrasymachus's definition of justice and the concomitant endorsement of tyranny. It follows that the Athenian stranger cannot be the voice of Socrates or Plato[39] (Zuckert, 2009, pp. 51-52). Yet Aristotle in the *Politics* also labels tyranny "the worst form of governments".[40] To have the Athenian stranger proceed from distinctly Aristotelian premises and through distinctly Aristotelian arguments to a definition of justice that Aristotle emphatically rejected is to reveal the stranger's identity and the author's—Plato's—target. They are one and the same: Aristotle. Aristotelian relativism and pragmatism are made to lead to conclusions that Platonists and Aristotelians alike would find unpalatable or absurd.

Reductio ad Absurdum

Of course, it is no more evident that justice conceived as "the advantage of the stronger" (Thrasymachus/Pindar) must necessarily equate to justice conceived as "the bond of men in states" (Aristotle) than to justice conceived as "doing one's own work and not being a busybody" (Plato). The stranger's equation of tyranny and justice is remarkable and seemingly inescapable, but for all of that, it is at this point no more than implicit. To borrow from Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, one might say that it is enthymematic. It is left for the reader to complete the syllogism,

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[35] Plato, *Laws* (783c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1359.

[36] Plato, *Republic* (382b-d; 459d-460b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 629, 698-699; in Trevor Saunders's translation of the *Laws*, it is unclear whether the stranger in Book VI is recommending deception or coercion: "Similarly, when we've won control of certain institutions that have never yet been controlled by law, we'll use them as 'cover,' just as other people do, with the result I indicated just now: thanks to a more detailed inspection of these institutions, we may be able to lay down laws that take account of them better." Plato, *Laws* (783b-c) in Cooper, 1455.

[37] Plato, *Laws* (875b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1434.

[38] Plato, *Republic* (344c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 594.

[39] Zuckert provides a useful overview of the several interpreters of the *Laws* who have identified the stranger as Plato.

[40] Aristotle, *Politics* (1289^b 1-5) in Barnes, 2046.

to connect the dots.[41] One might also object that it is only the unhabituated person, the person of uninhibited natural appetites, whose desires are tyrannical. Justice in that case would align with Thrasymachus's definition only in the life of the person who is too young to have been habituated or for whom the effort of habituation has failed. Eventually the stranger is made to offer an explicit endorsement of tyranny, and his reasons, then, are instrumental. Tyranny is a means to an end and not (like justice) an end in itself. This instrumentalism is itself characteristic of Aristotle. What counts in life is action, Aristotle tells us in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Actions "that occur in life" are the topics of political science, and political science is the "most authoritative art", "truly the master art", since all other human activities fall within its purview. Since:

> politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to *what we are to do and what we are to abstain from* [emphasis mine], the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good of man.[42]

The focus on action is reiterated in the *Poetics*, where tragedy is described as the "imitation of an action that is serious." "All human happiness or misery takes the form of action," says Aristotle: "the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality."[43] It is in facilitating the work of one who legislates—in other words, it is in the realm of political action—that tyrants are said by the stranger to become appealing. Tyrants are useful because they present a legislator with "the normal occasion and opportunity for facile and speedy revolution."[44] Power is diffused under aristocracy and democracy but concentrated under tyranny. The legislator who wants to accomplish great things for "the good of man" with a minimum of resistance should therefore attach himself or herself to a tyrant.

Perhaps this is meant to cast aspersion on Aristotle's interest in the ruling house of his native Macedonia. The qualities we are told by the stranger to look for in a suitable tyrant mirror—one might almost say, parody—those later recommended by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*. Law, Aristotle tells Alexander, is "the final appeal on all matters" in a democracy, but "under kingly rule, the appeal is to reason." Alexander is urged to appeal to men's reason by setting a good example, by practicing virtuous pursuits, "using the elements of

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[41] On enthymeme as "the substance of rhetorical persuasion" and as an incomplete syllogism to be completed by the hearer him- or herself, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (1354^{a} 10-20; 1357^{a} 10-25), Translated by W. Rhys Roberts in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: the Revised Oxford Translation*. Ed., Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press (1984), 2152, 2157.

[42] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094^{a} 18-1094^{b} 12; 1095^{a} 1-5), Translated by W.D. Ross, Revised by J. O. Urmson in Barnes, 1729-1730. Terence Irwin translates the passage to read that politics "uses the other sciences concerned with action, and moreover legislates what must be done and what avoided." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094^{b}), Translated by Terence Irwin in *Classics of Moral and Political Thought*. Edited by Michael L. Morgan, Second Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company (1996), 250. Noting that the word "philosophy" appears just twice in the *Laws*, Kevin M. Cherry concludes nevertheless that the practical education designed for members of the Nocturnal Council by the Athenian stranger is indeed philosophical and that philosophy (not political science) "comes to rule" in the stranger's Cretan city, as also in the *Republic*'s Kallipolis. This interpretation is possible because Cherry assumes that Aristotle in the *Politics* "alludes" to Plato's *Laws*, rejecting the possibility that the *Laws* might have been written as a response to Aristotelian arguments with which Plato was already familiar. In other words, Cherry assumes that Aristotle reacted to Plato but not Plato to Aristotle. "Aristotle is quite clear that neither the *Republic* nor the *Laws* offers proper guidance for political life," Cherry argues: "yet his *Politics* has far more in common with the institutions prescribed by the Athenian Stranger." The list of similarities between what Aristotle will say in the *Politics* and what the stranger recommends in the *Laws* is significant. Both recommend that lawgivers travel extensively and benefit from the study of existing constitutions. Both are critical of the Spartan constitution and endorse mixed regimes instead, since "the conflict between the various kinds of rule is ultimately irreconcilable." Both say that "all things are in motion, all things are at rest, or some things are in motion and some at rest." Cherry, Kevin M. "Politics and Philosophy in Aristotle's Critique of Plato's Laws" in Ann Ward and Lee Ward, Editors. *Natural Right and Political Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame (2013), 51-53, 59, 63.

[43] Aristotle, *Poetics* (1449^{b} 20-1450^{a} 25), Translated by I. Bywater in Barnes, 2319-2321.

[44] Plato, *Laws* (710e-711a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1302. Taylor translates as autocrat/autocracy what Saunders (1397) translates as dictatorship and Pangle (96-97) and Jowett (481-482) translate as tyrant/tyranny.

excellence in them to produce a beauteous copy of the model thus set before [most men]."[45] "Let the autocrat be young," says the Athenian stranger in comments that closely parallel Aristotle's. Let him be "of retentive memory, quick to learn, and temperamentally bold and high-souled." Only then will society "achieve the constitution which will bring felicity into its life with maximum speed and success."[46] What is efficacious, what is instrumental, is what matters. Two millennia later, Hobbes will say that "tyranny" is nothing more than an insult hurled against monarchy by malcontents (Hobbes, 1991, pp. 129-130). The Athenian stranger treats tyranny with similar detachment, as an unobjectionable manifestation of power in its most concentrated—and thus useful—form.

Plato in Book IX of the *Republic* calls the tyrant "the most evil type of man," and miserable, too. Forever friendless, unable to sleep, "he will refrain from no atrocity or murder nor from any food or deed ..."[47] In Xenophon's *Hiero*, it is the weary and disillusioned tyrant himself who corrects the popular misimpression that tyrants live delightful lives, using their power to maximize their pleasures and minimize their pains (Xenophon, 2013, p. 4, 8). The Athenian stranger admits that tyrants are probably miserable but adds that we would have to call them miserable, even if they were not. The reason once again is instrumental: such judgments are "a useful fiction."[48] The stranger operates from an understanding of human nature that is unmistakably Aristotelian. It is because people will not choose a painful course of action over a pleasurable one that they must be made to believe that the tyrant gains nothing from his selfishness: no one "if he can help it, will let himself be persuaded into following a course not attended by a surplus of pleasure over pain."[49] The irrelevance of sensual pleasure to the philosophical life (or, worse than irrelevance, the antipathy between philosophy and the pursuit of sensual pleasure) is a recurring theme in Plato's writings. Many examples could be cited from the dialogues; typical is the statement in Book VI of the *Republic* that the philosophically inclined person "will be concerned ... with the pleasures of the soul in itself, and will be indifferent to those of which the body is the instrument ..."[50] Similarly, in Book X, Socrates warns that if we admit poetry, "the honeyed Muse," into the city, "pleasure and pain will be lords ... instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best."[51] The superiority of the philosophical life to the life of sensual gratification is the central theme of the *Philebus*. It is Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* who restores the link between virtue and pleasure: "Again, if the excellences are concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, for this reason also excellence will be concerned with pleasures and pains."[52] It is also in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle famously identifies happiness as the greatest good, since happiness is "complete and self-sufficient, and is the end of action."[53] According to the stranger, a correctly educated person,

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[45] Aristotle, *Rhetoric to Alexander* (1420[a] 15-25), Translated by E.S. Forster in Barnes, 2270.
[46] Plato, *Laws* (709e, 710 b-c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1301-1302.
[47] Plato, *Republic* (574d, 576b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 801, 803.
[48] Plato, *Laws* (663d-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1260.
[49] Plato, *Laws* (663b-c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1259-1260. "A child's first infant consciousness is that of pleasure and pain," says the stranger: "this is the domain wherein the soul first acquires virtue or vice" (653a, 1250). The rehabilitation of criminals is said in Book IX (862d-863a) to be accomplished through the appropriate application of pleasure and pain, and laws are said to be necessary because men will, in general, put their own pain and pleasure "before the claims of the right and the good ..." (875b-c, 1434).
[50] Plato, *Republic* (485d-e), in Hamilton and Cairns, 722.
[51] Plato, *Republic* (607a-b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 832.
[52] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1104[b] 10-15) in Barnes, 1744.
[53] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097[b] 15-25) in Barnes, 1734-1735.

a person habituated to virtue, "will abhor what he should abhor and relish what he should relish ..."[54] Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* says that correct education teaches us to find pleasure in virtuous conduct and to develop virtuous habits. Humans will behave virtuously only if doing so makes them happy, and happiness is achievable only in association with others because we are "sociable by nature", or, as others have translated the passage, because we are "political animals."[55]

Could anything be riper for irony than the claim that people are animals? At this point, the discussion in the *Laws* arguably transitions from something approximating the Socratic elenchus to something unabashedly parodic. Aristotle in the *Movement of Animals* will compare animals to automatic puppets. Sensations and ideas cause body parts to grow hotter or colder and thus to expand or contract, generating movement.[56] Since Aristotle also calls man a political animal, Plato slyly places the strings of the human puppet in the hands of the state. In the "moral fable of the human puppets", the stranger says that human beings are puppets created by the gods. Our inner strings are pulled one way by the allure of vice but are pulled toward virtue by the "public law of the city."[57]

Being political animals, as Aristotle in the *Politics* says we are, the relevant faculty that makes political life possible for us—the faculty that allows us to deliberate on matters of expediency and inexpediency, justice and injustice—is speech: "Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who has the gift of speech."[58] To say that discursive ability belongs to man alone is very nearly the same as saying that man alone possesses reason, and Aristotle says precisely this in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*.[59] But we are also mimetic animals, as Aristotle explains in the *Poetics*. Imitation, he says, "is natural to man from childhood, one of the advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation."[60] These claims are by no means inconsistent. Man alone of animals is political; it is the faculty of speech that makes political life possible, because speech allows us to deliberate on the core political topics of expediency and justice; and speech is readily acquired in childhood through the human gift for imitation. When a mechanical explanation is wanted for the psychological processes underlying political behavior, Aristotle provides the puppet analogy in the *Movement of Animals*. Yet when the Athenian stranger is made to synthesize these claims, the result is a being—man—whose sociability is manifested musically, not politically, in choric performance, and whose ability to discern between good and bad is tested in the theater, instead of in the political arena. We are animals, says the stranger, but only musical or choric animals. What had been a matter of moral import in political life is reduced in the theater merely to a question of taste. Individual taste, like individual conscience, is shaped by style and convention, suggesting a unanimity and a conformity that is the antithesis of the individual's rational and autonomous participation in the contentious, deliberative life of the polis.[61] The stranger might be oblivious to the discomfiting position into which Plato is maneuvering him, but the reader need

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[54] Plato, *Laws* (653b-c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1250.

[55] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097^b 5-15; 1103a 10-1103^b 25) in Barnes, 1734; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097^b 5-15), Translated by Terence Irwin in Morgan, 255.

[56] Aristotle, *Movement of Animals* (701^a 10-20), Translated by A.S.L. Farquharson in Barnes, 1092.

[57] Plato, *Laws* (645a-d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1244-1245.

[58] Aristotle, *Politics* (1253^a 5-10) in Barnes, 1988.

[59] Aristotle, *Rhetoric to Alexander* (1421^a 5-25) in Barnes, 2271.

[60] Aristotle, *Poetics* (1448^b 5-25) in Barnes, 2318. Plato in Book X of the *Republic* (602b 10-603b 5) derides imitation as an activity that is essential for tragedians but far removed from truth.

[61] The "sovereignty of the best" as arbiter of taste gave way to the "sovereignty of the audience," complains the stranger, when innovations in music "created a universal confusion of forms." Taste is presented in either case as a cultural sovereign to which individual conscience submits, just as individual conscience was earlier seen to submit to the political sovereign. In effect, the stranger traces a decline from an aristocracy of taste to a democracy of taste. Plato, *Laws* (700d-701b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1294.

not be. Human beings can be essentially political or essentially mimetic, but not both; to say otherwise leads to absurdity. "Now animals at large have no perception of the order or disorder in these motions [of dancing and frolicking]," says the stranger, "no sense of what we call rhythm or melody:"

> But in our own case, the gods of whom we spoke as given us for companions in our revels have likewise given us the power to perceive and enjoy rhythm and melody. Through this sense they stir us to movements and become our choir leaders. They string us together on a thread of song and dance, and have named our choirs so after the delight ... they naturally afford.[62]

As we will see, the metaphor of gods as chorus leaders reappears in Aristotle's work *On the Universe*. The capacity for speech which, according to Aristotle, makes possible our lives as rational, political animals makes possible nothing more, says the stranger, than our lives as dancing, frolicking animals: "But to speak generally, no man who is using his vocal organs, whether for song or for speech, can keep his body perfectly still."[63] After first listing the established genres of song and dance, the stranger warns against innovation: "No, our citizens and their city must preserve their identity by a uniform life of unvarying pleasures, where all are as utterly alike as may be in all happiness and bliss."[64] For the herd of rhythmic animals, synchrony must be the goal. Politics is choreography. In this way, Aristotle is made to face, as the consequence of his own reasoning, a criticism similar to one he will level against Plato's city in the *Politics* (1261^{a} 10-30): that it would be so unified—and so simplified—as to count as a family or an individual but not as a city at all.

It was a hallmark of Athenian democracy that the interface between communal politics and individual morality was explored critically in the theater through dramatic performances attached to the worship of Dionysius. Song and dance, "dancing and frolicking", as the stranger condescendingly labels them, were part and parcel of the politico-religious experience. Public subsidies supported dramatic performances, notably tragedies, whose potential for criticism and political subversion would not have been tolerated under oligarchy or tyranny (Beer, 2004, p. xii). The dramatic imitation of an action accomplishing catharsis through arousal of pity and fear is the technical definition of tragedy famously given by Aristotle in the *Poetics*.[65] Less technically, Plato complains in Book IX of the *Republic* that tragic depictions of parricides arouse sympathy for tyrants. They cloak tyrants in a "tragic costume" (577b), which is what we might expect him to say, since he also tells us in Book VIII (569a 5-569e 5) that it is not just tragedy that evolves from democracy, but tyranny, too. A crowning irony in the *Laws* is that tragic poets are barred from the city, not because they might be innovative or disruptive or lend credibility to tyrants, but because they are redundant. The Aristotelian community is already dramatic and tragic to its core. We "are ourselves authors of a tragedy," the stranger says: "In fact, our whole polity has been constructed as a dramatization of a noble and perfect life; that is what *we* hold to be in truth the most real of tragedies."[66]

Here again is an utterance that cannot be placed in the mouths of Socrates or Plato. It is unthinkable that Plato would label Kallipolis tragic by virtue of its perfection. There is no aesthetic satisfaction, no *ruth*, to be found in the *Republic* in the expectation of futility and failure. What we have in the person of the Athenian stranger is someone who takes Aristotelian premises and arguments to conclusions that are as embarrassing as they are seemingly unavoidable.

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62 Plato, *Laws* (653e-654b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1251.
63 Plato, *Laws* (816a-b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1386.
64 Plato, *Laws* (816d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1386.
65 Aristotle, *Poetics* (1449^{b} 20-35) in Barnes, 2320.
66 Plato, *Laws* (817b-c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1387.

The Aristotelian Path to Tyranny

The "Preamble" ends at noon, at the close of Book IV, when Megillus, Clinias, and the Athenian stranger sit to rest (722d). "Yet I fancy that we are only beginning to talk laws," says the stranger: "all we have said hitherto has been but preambles to laws."[67] We are a third of the way through the text, having already covered material that exceeds in length any of Plato's other dialogues with the exception of the *Republic* and the remaining two thirds of the *Laws* itself. The difficult foundational work on justice is complete, and yet the interrupted walk is never resumed. The journey's sacred goal—the shrine of Zeus—quietly has been abandoned, signaling that Aristotle in his relativism and pragmatism abandons philosophy's loftiest goals.[68]

Tyranny must again be the consequence. Like Socrates, who offers devastating critiques of Homer and Hesiod in Books II, III, VIII, and X of the *Republic* (377d-378e, 379d-380c, 383a, 386c-387c, 545d-e, 598e, 605c-e), the stranger in Book X of the *Laws* rejects traditional stories of the gods: "we may dismiss the primitive stories without more ado ..." At the same time, pre-Socratic philosophers, "our modern men of enlightenment," whose theories have undermined faith in the traditional stories and spread atheism "must be held to account for the mischief they cause."[69] "How dare you undermine faith in our stories about the gods, plainly ridiculous though they are:" this, in effect, is the absurd question posed by the stranger to scientific "men of enlightenment". The solution is not, as in Book II of the *Republic* (382a-c), to compose new sacred stories, "lies in words", which would be untrue but whose effects would be socially beneficial. Nor is there any admission, as there is in the *Republic* (382d), that we can never know the truth about ancient stories involving the gods. The stranger says instead that skepticism must be countered with persuasion. "And 'tis of the first importance," says the stranger, "to give our plea for the existence of gods, and good gods with a superhuman reverence for right, such persuasiveness as we can ..."[70] Members of the "nocturnal council of magistrates" who in Book XI are assigned responsibility for enforcing the laws are therefore required in Book XII to know "with all the certainty permitted to man" that gods indeed exist:

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[67] It is in Book V that the task of outlining laws begins: "Here our discourse by way of prelude to our legislation may come to its end. After the prelude, of course, must come the composition itself, or, as it would be truer to say, an outline of a civic code." Plato, *Laws* (722d, 734e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1312.

[68] Clinton DeBevoise Corcoran builds on Thomas Szlezák's description of platonic dialectic as a "double movement of thought" by which the soul ascends through increasing abstraction to the "Realm of Being" and true knowledge of the Forms and then descends back into the world of sensual phenomena, the "Realm of Becoming," in order to apply the knowledge gained. According to Corcoran, this dialectical progression organizes a number of the "spatialized structures," physical and intellectual, that are described in the Platonic dialogues: from the *Republic*, the Allegory of the Cave, the Myth of Er, the line exercise in Book VI and the simile of the sun as the "good;" from the *Symposium*, the "Ladder of Love," from the *Phaedrus*, the myth of the charioteer. The description in Plato's last dialogue, the *Laws*, of an abandoned journey (to the shrine of Zeus) counts as a remarkable anomaly, yet Corcoran treats it merely as Plato posing the question of whether or not Socrates will win the battle for the souls of his interlocutors. This question, of course, is implicitly posed in all the previous dialogues; the abandoned journey to the shrine of Zeus is unprecedented. The nearest corollary might be the interruption of Socrates's walk back to Athens after attending the festival of Bendis which opens the *Republic*, but that walk was detoured, not abandoned, for reasons explicitly stated, and the detour itself provided the occasion for the dialectic that subsequently unfolded. In the *Laws*, the walk is voluntarily interrupted and never resumed. The stated goal is never attained. The dialectic is never completed. The abandoned walk joins Socrates's absence—for the first time, he is not present to battle for his interlocutors' souls—as one of several anomalies signaling the need for a different interpretative approach to the *Laws*. Corcoran, 2016, 2, 171.

[69] Plato, *Laws* (886d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1442. The "modern men of Enlightenment" explicitly cited or tacitly alluded to in the *Laws* and treated explicitly in Aristotle's works *On the Soul* include Empedocles and the theory of the four elements (889b, 891c; *On the Soul*, 404^b 5-10, 408^a 15-29); Democritus, Leucippus and the atomistic theory of matter (893d-e, *On the Soul*, 403^b 25-404^a 10); and Thales and the doctrine that "all things are full of gods" (899b; *On the Soul*, 405^a 15-20).

[70] Plato, *Laws* (887b) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1442-1443.

> In the great mass of our citizens we may tolerate mere conformity to the tradition embodied in our laws, but we shall do well to deny all access to the body of our guardians to any man who has not made it his serious business to master every proof there is of the being of gods.[71]

To borrow a distinction from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094[b] 25), the "degree of certainty permitted to man" in this case rises only to the level of persuasion, not demonstration. A discussion is adequate, says Aristotle, "if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of."[72] Aristotle in his writing *On the Universe* will urge Alexander to study "the Universe and the greatest things of the Universe" and, "*as far as possible* [emphasis mine], inquire into their divine nature ..."[73] It is not correct, as R. F. Stalley has claimed, that Plato in the *Laws* provides "an elaborate proof for the existence of god or gods." (Stalley, 1983, p. 1). The magistrate is not required to succeed in proving that gods exist or even to believe that gods exist, but only to master the components of a persuasive case: to master "every proof there is of the being of gods".

The "proof" in question is drawn from observations of the sort that Aristotle will present in the works on cosmology and physical sciences, as well as from a distinctly Aristotelian understanding of the soul. Two "motives" are acknowledged by the stranger for reasonable belief in the gods:

> One of them is our theory of the soul, our doctrine that it is more ancient and more divine than anything that draws perennial being from a motion that once had a beginning, the other our doctrine of the orderliness in the movements of the planets and other bodies swayed by a mind that has set this whole frame of things in comely array.[74]

God's existence is inferred in the *Physics* from the logical necessity of there being some "first mover" which imparts original motion without itself being moved. The tracing of motions back to their causes, Aristotle reasons, "cannot go on to infinity ..."[75] The absolute source of all motion in the universe is identified in the *Metaphysics* as the "prime mover."[76] Aristotle likewise says in the *Movement of Animals* that there must be something apart from, but connected to, "the whole of nature", the source of all motion in nature but "no part of that which is moved". Yet he also concedes that "whether or not there is some higher and prime mover is not clear ..."[77] As suggested in his writings *On the Universe*, belief in God ultimately depends less on logical arguments pertaining to the origins of motion and more on the rapturous, transporting experience that accompanies the contemplation of universal order and beauty:

> The single harmony produced by all the heavenly bodies singing and dancing together springs from one source and ends by achieving one purpose, and has rightly bestowed the name not of 'disordered' but of 'ordered universe' upon the whole... Thus, too, must we think of God, who in might is most powerful, in beauty most fair, in life immortal, in virtue supreme; for, though he is invisible to all mortal nature, yet is he seen in his works. For all that happens in the air, on the earth, and in the water, may truly be said to be the work of God, who possesses the universe...[78]

Here again, God is compared to a chorus-leader: the same metaphor appropriated by Plato in the *Laws* to ridicule Aristotle's claim that man is both a political and a mimetic animal.[79] The Dionysian allusion might be

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71 Plato, *Laws* (966c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1511.
72 Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (1094[b]) in Barnes, 1730.
73 Aristotle, *On the Universe* (391[a] 20-391[b] 5), Translated by E.S. Forster in Barnes, 626.
74 Plato, *Laws* (966d-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1511.
75 Aristotle, *Physics* (242[a] 50-55), Translated by R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye in Barnes, 408.
76 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (1018[b] 15-25), Translated by W.D. Ross in Barnes, 1608.
77 Aristotle, *Movement of Animals* (669[a] 10-30; 700[a] 15-25) in Barnes, 1088, 1090.
78 Aristotle, *On the Universe* (399[a] 1-399[b] 25) in Barnes, 636-637.
79 Aristotle, *On the Universe* (400[b] 8) in Barnes, 639. "To sum up the matter, as is the steersman in the ship, the charioteer in the chariot, the leader in the chorus, the lawgiver in the city, the general in the army, even so is the God in the Universe; ..."

more revealing than Aristotle realized or acknowledged. Plato in his description of the soul's ascent to heaven in the *Phaedrus* showed that he, too, could reach flights of rapture in contemplation of the highest mysteries, but rapture is not argument and intoxication is not conviction. Inevitably there will be citizens for whom the intoxicating, rapturous experience is elusive or insufficient. Remember that "mere conformity to the tradition embodied in our laws," and not conviction, is what the stranger requires from "the great mass of our citizens." Remember, too, that society's "bliss and well-being" is attained "in part by persuasion and in part by enforced and legal correction of characters not amenable to persuasion." Behind every attempt at persuasion lurks the possibility of failure and a recourse to coercion, or "legal correction". Plato undoubtedly found it kinder and more effective to provide the majority of people with a solid foundation for faith in the form of plausible and salubrious religious stories, the "lies in words", than to test them intellectually by asking them to erect an edifice of faith on a foundation of science and logic.

The coercive skull emerges from beneath the persuasive skin when the stranger is made to address the question of incorrigible atheism. Laws must be explicit and thorough, says Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*: "it is of great moment that well-drawn laws should themselves define all the points they possibly can and leave as few as may be to the decision of the judges ..."[80] The stranger obliges with a flood of tedious regulation. And not only are the regulations tedious; they are also draconian. A "law against *impiety*" will require that anyone demonstrating unbelief "by word or act" be denounced by those who witness it. Otherwise they, too, will face the same charge.[81] This could only be repugnant to any Athenian whose view of the city still aligned with the Periclean ideal of mutual tolerance and respect for privacy.[82] More shockingly still, the stranger says that slaves can gain their freedom by denouncing masters who neglect their elderly parents. The offenders may be put to death.[83] Genuine concern for the elderly is not the motive. On the pretext that elderly citizens approaching death must necessarily be bewildered by their situation, a confiscatory state will seize their property (922d-923c). Oaths will no longer be required of the parties in legal proceedings, for the patently exaggerated reason that it is unseemly for people to intermingle in public festivals and meals in a city where "half or nearly half of the inhabitants are forsworn [in legal processes against one another]." Here the satire anticipates Mandeville's "grumbling hive". Oaths at any rate are meaningless in a city of unbelievers: "Men's beliefs about gods have changed," says the stranger, "and so the law must be changed too."[84] This flies in the face of the "innate love of justice" attributed to Athenians by Lysias in the "Funeral Oration" delivered at the start of the Corinthian War, almost 40 years after Pericles in his own funeral oration had offered the Athenians similar praise (Lysias, 1966, p. 13). The irreverent comedies which were a unique feature of Athenian democracy will vanish: "No composer of comedy, iambic or lyric verse shall be permitted to hold any citizen up to laughter, by word or gesture, with passion or otherwise ..."[85] There will be no more private shrines or private worship in the home (909d-910d). Death will be the penalty for anyone who even comes under suspicion of poisoning (933a-e). Death will be the penalty after three convictions for perjury (937c), for filing frivolous lawsuits in an expectation of financial gain (938a-c), for stealing public property (941b-d), for harboring exiles (955b), for receipt of stolen goods (955b). Life as Athenians know will

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[80] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (1354[a] 30) in Barnes2152.
[81] Plato, *Laws* (907d-908a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1463.
[82] Thucydides, 1972, 145. Just "as our political life is free and open," said Pericles in the "Funeral Oration," "so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other."
[83] Plato, *Laws* (932a-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1482-1483.
[84] Plato, *Laws* (948d) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1494.
[85] Plato, *Laws* (935e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1484.

be upended by the stranger's program of draconian reform. The message is clear. In a regime like Plato's, built on covert indoctrination, coercion is unnecessary. In a regime like Aristotle's, built on persuasion but backed by coercion, tyranny is inevitable.

What the stranger presents is not "Plato's utopia", as Chris Bobonich and Katherine Meadows have said; it is not the utopian vision from Plato's earlier works "recast". To characterize his program of reform as a set of "extremely high ethical demands" is an understatement (Bobonich & Meadows, 2018; Bobonich, 2002). Fourth-century Athenians would have found the proposals to be radical and shocking. By all indications, they are meant to be read as bitingly satirical, and not as "feasible", as Catherine Zuckert suggests. "What the dialogue presents (whenever it was written)," says Zuckert, "is a hypothetical history, a 'could have been'" if only a philosopher like Socrates had succeeded in influencing the city's laws (Zuckert, 2009, p. 57). The *Laws* seem more plausibly read as Plato's satirical warning against *what might yet come*.

When the focus shifts from the extensive discussion of justice to less critical matters, the irony is less subtle. Consider just a few examples:

- Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (242c) is warned by the mantic voice that speaks to him of such things that he blasphemed when he made a cynical speech imitating one by Lysias to the effect that a boy with two suitors should not succumb to the one who loves him but instead to the one who does not love him but can offer material rewards. The stranger in Book VI of the *Laws* is made to offer similar advice to a young man contemplating marriage, who is told to ignore his erotic yearnings and instead make a match that is beneficial to the city. The logic is lifted from Aristotle's discussion of the four humors. The person who is "hasty tempered" must be encouraged to "seek partners in matrimony among the phlegmatic and the placid among the hasty."[86] In addition to their shared status as foreigners, it is suggested that Lysias and Aristotle share a clinical, calculating pragmatism.
- Aristotle in the *Politics* says that a good man possesses the virtues that qualify a ruler to lead, as well as the virtues that qualify a citizen to obey. The same person possesses both, but the virtues are distinct, just as the virtues of men and women are distinct. After all, a woman would be "thought loquacious" if she possessed the courage of a man.[87] The stranger in Book VII of the *Laws* decides that a city full of courageous, martial women would be a fine thing, noting that "untold thousands" of (barbarian) Samarian women "living round the Black Sea" are trained in horsemanship and weaponry. The stranger faults the Greeks for not following suit: "what an amazing oversight for a legislator!" If nothing else, an invader would be struck with alarm "by their appearance in martial formation," making broad Aristotelian suffrage and armies of loquacious women the twin targets of Plato's satire.[88]
- After explaining in the *Politics* that man "is the only animal who has the gift of speech," Aristotle says that other animals have "mere voice". The former allows for discerning between the "expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust," while the latter is "but an indication of pleasure or pain."[89] Plato in the *Laws* lampoons Aristotle's observation by making the stranger add a third category: the "screaming" of newborn creatures, "especially newborn human beings", which must be attended to in that period of early development when the child must not be given so much pleasure as to spoil him or be subjected to so much

[86] Plato, *Laws* (773a-e) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1350.
[87] Aristotle, *Politics* (1277^{b} 5-30) in Barnes, 2027.
[88] Plato, *Laws* (804e-805c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1376.
[89] Aristotle, *Politics* (1253^{a} 5-20) in Barnes, 1988.

pain—so much "unqualified tyranny"—that he becomes "spiritless, servile, and sullen ..."[90] The reduction of lofty argument to banality and silliness is comic, recalling the treatment meted out to Socrates by Aristophanes in the "Clouds".

- Aristotle in the *Politics* complained that Plato condemned male homosexuality "for no other reason than the violence of the pleasure" when a more practical problem was that both homosexual incest and parricide were bound to occur in Plato's ideal city, where "golden" children would not know the identity of their parents or siblings. Unaware that they had committed parricide or incest, they could perform none of the customary expiations.[91] In order to suggest that radical and oppressive consequences follow from Aristotle's pragmatism, Plato in Book VIII of the *Laws* makes the stranger approach the question from the standpoint of what people can be persuaded to do, and not what they ought to do. The "faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" is Aristotle's definition of rhetoric.[92] The stranger observes that the available means of persuasion regarding homosexuality are limited by cultural inertia, or the "dead weight of incredulity". People are unlikely to be persuaded to change their minds or established practices where sexual gratification is concerned. Knowing that incest is described everywhere as an abomination—knowing, in other words, that the universal prohibition against incest is available as a means of persuasion—the stranger suggests that homosexuality should be presented in the same terms. People should also be told that homosexuality is unnatural, since it is not practiced by animals. "Surely you, we will say, ought to be better than the beasts." The persuasive goal will be achieved when any non-procreative sexual activity is accompanied by such a sense of shame that the legislator succeeds in suppressing homosexuality "utterly."[93] Utterly suppressed—not redirected into philosophical pursuit of the beautiful and the good, not brought under rational self-control—is the erotic love for Socrates that drew Alcibiades toward the philosophical life in the *Symposium* or was the cause in the *Phaedrus* of the soul sprouting feathers and growing the wings that carried it aloft to the heavenly vision. Aristotelian thought is made to lead to tyranny in the emotional life of the individual, just as it was earlier made to lead to tyranny in the political life of the city.
- Aristotle in the *Politics* rejected Plato's call for the sharing of property among people of the golden class. "It is clearly better," he said, "that property should be private, but the use of it common."[94] He also said in the *Physics* that if something is moving but not the source of its own motion, then something else has moved it.[95] Plato in Book VIII of the *Laws* mischievously combines the two unrelated claims to make the stranger say that property should be protected by landmark boundary stones, with prohibitions against "moving of the not-to-be-moved", reducing Aristotelian practicality to banality.[96]

Aristotle's Response

Of course, even these few samples, briefly summarized, warrant further study. Full treatment of the ironic critique of Aristotle in the *Laws* is the undertaking for a full-length monograph, though none need be written if we accept Leo Strauss's assertion that Aristotle himself "saw no difference between the Athenian stranger and

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90 Plato, *Laws* (791d-792c) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1364.
91 Aristotle, *Politics* (1262^{a} 25-1262^{b} 1) in Barnes, 2003.
92 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (1355^{b} 25-30) in Barnes, 2155.
93 Plato, *Laws* (839a-842a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1404-1406.
94 Aristotle, *Politics* (1263^{a} 35-1263^{b} 1) in Barnes, 2004-2005.
95 Aristotle, *Physics* (241^{b} 20-35) in Barnes, 407.
96 Plato, *Laws* (843a) in Hamilton and Cairns, 1407.

Socrates." (Strauss, 1975, p. 2). After all, it is unlikely that Aristotle was Plato's target in the *Laws* if he did not recognize himself to be so. It is true that Aristotle never explicitly acknowledges the *Laws* as a personal attack, but neither does he identify the Athenian stranger as Socrates or as Plato speaking through Socrates. Greek is a highly inflected language; writers can dispense with subject nouns and pronouns and rely on the verb to indicate the active agent. Consequently, the identification of active subject in key passages is often an editorial task left to the translator. In B. Jowett's translation of the *Politics*, Aristotle is made to identify Socrates as the person in the *Laws* who says that people need only as much property as will permit them to live temperately.[97] In H. Rackham's translation, it is the "writer"—namely Plato—who makes the point about property and temperate living.[98] A. Sinclair translates the passage in yet a third way so that the point about property and temperate living is made by an unspecified "he." [99] The noun antecedents to which subject pronouns in the chapter might refer are only two: Plato, who is mentioned in the first line of the chapter as the author of the *Laws*, and Socrates, who at the same point in the text is named as the individual in the *Republic* (not the *Laws*) who resolves a small number of issues concerning the community of women and children, property and the structure of the constitution (1264b 25-35). In other words, authorship of the *Laws* is attributed to Plato; Socrates is acknowledged as an active agent *within* a work but not as an agent outside the work who creates the work, and furthermore, the work in which he is active is the *Republic* and not the *Laws*. Jowett later in the chapter again makes "Socrates" the active subject who omits to explain in the *Laws* how rulers differ from those who are ruled.[100] Rackham once more translates the passage so as to have Aristotle blame the omission on "the writer"—namely, Plato—while Sinclair is again scrupulous in rendering the active subject as a general "he."[101] As before, the verb (*φημί*, "to say") is conjugated in the third person singular present indicative active (*φησί*, "he says"); otherwise, no subject noun or pronoun is specified.[102] Also as before, the antecedent subject noun must be he who has been named as author of the *Laws*, Plato, and not Socrates, who never appears in that text.

In the remainder of that short chapter, when Aristotle speaks of something that is accomplished in the *Laws* without specifying the active agent, the reference must logically be to the one acknowledged as the author, Plato, and not to the absent Socrates. Jowett's translation seems to support the traditional identification of the stranger with Socrates, but it was almost certainly the traditional identification that guided the translation, since the name "Socrates" appears in the original only in reference to action in the *Republic*. Rackham and Sinclair's translations are consistent with my claim that Aristotle treats the stranger as a mouthpiece for Plato—a mouthpiece operating in parodic mode—and not as a resurrected Socrates, though it must be admitted that subject nouns or pronouns rarely appear in the Greek original. Instead, verbs are consistently conjugated in the third person singular present indicative active, making Sinclair's general assignment of the active role to an unspecified "he" the least audacious choice for a translator. This is not the same as saying that it is the most defensible choice, since again, the antecedent subject noun in discussions of the *Laws* would logically be the name of the text's author, who of course is Plato.

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97 Aristotle, *Politics* (1265[a] 25-30) in Barnes, 2007.
98 Aristotle, *Politics: with an English Translation by H. Rackham* (1265[a] 25-30), Translated by H. Rackham in Rackham, 103.
99 Aristotle, *The Politics* (1265[a] 25-30), Translated by T.A. Sinclair in Saunders, 123.
100 Aristotle, *Politics* (1265[b] 15-20) in Barnes, 2008.
101 Aristotle, *Politics* (1265[b] 15-20) in Rackham, 105; Aristotle, *The Politics* (1265[b] 16) in Sinclair, 124.
102 I gratefully acknowledge the expert assistance of Andrea Eis, who advised me on points of Greek grammar and offered analyses of specific passages from the *Politics* in the original Greek.

One passage in particular is often cited as evidence that Aristotle equated the stranger with Socrates. Here is Jowett's rendition of that passage: "The discourses of Socrates are never commonplace; they always exhibit grace and originality and thought; but perfection in everything can hardly be expected."[103]

Here is the same passage as translated by Sinclair: "Now all the Socratic dialogues are marked by a certain exaggeration and brilliance, by originality, and by an urge to investigate; but they can hardly be expected to be always right."[104]

Finally, the same passage as translated by Rackham: "Now, it is true that all the discourses of Socrates possess brilliance, cleverness, originality and keenness of inquiry, but it is no doubt difficult to be right about everything..."[105]

On a casual reading, it might seem that all three translators make Aristotle classify the *Laws* among the "discourses of Socrates", which are usually but not always excellent, when in fact two of the three translators, Jowett and Rackham, agree that Aristotle distinguishes between the Socratic works ("discourses" or "dialogues"), which are excellent, and something inferior which exists apart from the Socratic works. The discourses of Socrates "are never commonplace"; "all the Socratic dialogues" are brilliant; "all the discourses of Socrates" possess brilliance and keenness of inquiry. The inferior thing which exists apart from this brilliant legacy—the thing which proves that "perfection in everything can hardly be expected" (Jowett) or that "it is no doubt difficult to be right about everything" (Rackham)—is the final, anomalous dialogue, the *Laws*. Sinclair, too, might understand Aristotle to be making this distinction, if the *Laws*—the one dialogue in which Socrates never appears—is understood to exist apart from the "Socratic dialogues" that are "marked by a certain exaggeration and brilliance" or if Sinclair thinks that Aristotle at this point in the text has casually used the names "Plato" and "Socrates" interchangeably when speaking of action that takes place (or things that are said) in the dialogues, as people today still are wont to do. In that case, the *Laws* might be included in a single oeuvre labeled the "Socratic dialogues" with no implication that Socrates appears in the final text.

If indeed Plato in the *Laws* delivered a sustained, ironic critique of Aristotelian thought, then Aristotle might have elicited knowing chuckles from a sympathetic audience with the distinction he draws between the brilliant Socratic dialogues and this later text, which was anomalous and inferior. After all, this was the man who later, after the death of Alexander, would drolly characterize his flight from Athens as a reluctance to have the Athenians sin twice against philosophy. Irony was a game he could play as well as his teacher. Trevor Saunders, for one, thinks that "an ironic joke" might have been intended in the contrast Aristotle draws between the "ponderous lecturing of the Stranger" and "the scintillating conversation of Socrates". Also wry, according to Saunders, is Aristotle's apparently tautological remark (1265^{a} 1) that the greater part of the *Laws* consists of laws (Saunders, 1992, p. 120). To the suggestion in the *Laws* that the city should contain five thousand warriors "free from servile occupations"—a fivefold increase over the number recommended in the *Republic*—Aristotle responds with evident sarcasm that such a number "supported in idleness" will "require a territory as large as Babylon, or some other huge site ...", evoking Herodotus's description of the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, due to its decadence and great size.[106] The satire is thereby flipped; the suggestion is impugned morally, as well as

[103] Aristotle, *Politics* (1265^{a} 10-15) in Barnes, 2007.
[104] Aristotle, The *Politics* (1265^{a} 10) in Sinclair, 122.
[105] Aristotle, *Politics: with an English Translation by H. Rackham* (1265^{a} 11-15) in Rackham, 101.
[106] Aristotle, *Politics* (1265^{a} 1-20) in Barnes, 2007; Herodotus, I/191, 94-95: "Indeed, according to local tradition, such was the size of the city that those who lived in the centre of Babylon had no idea that the suburbs had fallen, for it was a time of festival, and all were dancing, and indulging themselves in pleasures; so that when they did finally get the news, it was very much the hard way."

logistically. The very brevity of Aristotle's commentary on the *Laws* is suggestive of conspicuous restraint and ironic understatement. The art of the succinct response is something he tried unsuccessfully to teach his kinsman Callisthenes of Olynthus. "Short-lived, I ween, wilt thou be, my child, by what thou sayest" was Aristotle's accurate prediction (Diogenes, 1972, p. 449). If later commentators failed to recognize Aristotle as the target of an extended and withering satire, it was in part because he took care not to behave like one.

The *Laws* and the *Republic* are of comparable ambition and length, but Aristotle clearly did not think that the later text supplanted the earlier one. Far more attention is paid in his writings to the *Republic* than to the *Laws*. In any serious critique of Platonism, the text that had to be treated in detail was still the *Republic*. So it was that when comparison had to be made between the constitutions proposed by Aristotle and Plato, it was to the *Republic* that Aristotle directed his attention, and not the *Laws* (Aristotle, 1944, p. 2001). This again is evidence that an elderly Plato had not abandoned his theoretical program in favor of something new.

We cannot know what was said in the groves of the Academy regarding the conflict between teacher and brilliant student, except that it was Speusippus, not Aristotle, who was handed the reins of leadership when Plato died, while Aristotle returned to Macedonia. The *Laws* were unavailable until after Plato's death. By the time Aristotle responded in the *Politics* to his teacher's criticisms, he was back in Athens at the head of his own school, the Lyceum. He was no longer a student compelled to answer a teacher's rebuke. The stakes had changed[107] (Zuckert, 2009, p. 53). The dissatisfied teacher was dead. The conflict between Platonism and Aristotelianism was no longer intramural. Aristotle kept his commentary on the *Laws* short and focused. He did not make the mistake of reading the *Laws* as the definitive statement of Platonic philosophy or of identifying the Athenian stranger with Socrates. Neither should we.

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[107] The stakes had not only changed for Aristotle, but for Athens, too, and indeed for all of Greece. Zuckert considers it unlikely that Plato used his final text, the *Laws*, to deliver "his own, final political understanding or practical proposals for constitutional reform," since he makes no mention there of Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian War or the domestic political instability that followed. Yet by that time, Athenians had the experience of more recent traumas to shape their political thinking. Plato and his countrymen had seen their city first align with the hereditary enemy, Persia, against their fellow Greeks, the Spartans, in the Corinthian War (395-387 B.C.), only to have their barbarian ally double-cross them and join their enemies, dooming Athens to defeat. They had also had their first bitter taste of warfare against Philip's Macedonia and, by the time of Plato's death, had been warned against the rising power of Macedonia in the first of Demosthenes's "Philippics". Barbarians or quasi-barbarians had thrust themselves to the center of Athenian political consciousness and anxiety. This is the broader historical context for a dialogue between three marginal and nearly barbarian individuals, two foreign and one domestic, in the *Laws*, and the broader historical context, too, for Aristotle's response in the *Politics*.

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