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## *FROM LOGOS TO LOGO: PHILOSOPHICAL AND HUMANISTIC EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY*

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## The Logic of Plato's Feminism

by

Nicholas Smith

objects. It would be surprising if there were not some who will answer this call-- those who have lost the love of learning and the scholarly, scientific, artistic or pedagogical vision that first drew them into higher education, but not the ambition which always went with it. Only power in ever greater increments can begin to compensate for the loss of love. The stratagem of this response to unrequited love, whether it be love for a person or love of a field of endeavor, is to attempt to suppress the pain by attempting to destroy the object. The importation from the "scientifically" managed commercial world most destructive of every value essential to a scholarly and scientific community is game playing technique: the use of truth as if it were just another tool-- or weapon--of control: to be used when it's handy, and to be suppressed when it is not. More and more we can expect to find this. Even for honorable men in authority, there is a strong temptation to use such manipulative techniques (or to employ sheer fiat when they can do so) in order to control a vast and ever burdened institution.

The need for renewed attention and dedication to the humanities--to the languages, history, philosophy--is desperate. The university is caught directly in the greatest binds and dislocations of our culture. There may be no solutions. But we will never know if any are possible unless we try concertedly to bring our problems into focus before us.

When considering Plato's alleged feminism, one does well to bear in mind common Greek concepts concerning women. That they lack courage is manifest to the Greeks, for the concept of courage was considered applicable primarily in martial contexts,<sup>1</sup> a uniquely male province. Yet, Plato believes that women can be courageous too.<sup>2</sup> That they have no important capacity for politics is equally manifest. A Greek need point only to the woes of Sparta in this regard.<sup>3</sup> The very idea of granting them political power is laughable.<sup>4</sup> Yet in the Republic Plato allows that some women should wield political power over the vast majority of the men in an ideal state.<sup>5</sup> Women are treacherous,<sup>6</sup> devious,<sup>7</sup> unbeautiful creatures<sup>8</sup> that lack even the control rationality brings.<sup>9</sup> In short, they might well be compared to the spawn of pigs, dogs, weasels, monkeys, and other vile creatures: "the biggest single bad thing Zeus has made for us (men)."<sup>10</sup> Yet Plato allows that some of them will be the intellectual, moral, and political superiors to the vast majority of men in the kallipolis. What in the world would lead him to say such an outrageous thing?

In recent years, this topic has inspired much scholarly controversy. While some interpreters are inclined to be more generous than others, in at least one way there has been virtual unanimity concerning Plato's views on women, at least as they are presented in the Republic: The standard view of the matter is that Plato arrived at his position on women as an entailment from some other aspect of his moral or political theory. Of course, the exact entailment varies, according to which interpreter is consulted.

In this paper I will argue that Plato's position on women is, contrary to the standard view, independent not only of his other views on justice but of any other generalized moral position Plato holds. I will argue that his installation of women in the guardian classes in the Republic is entailed by his general theory of justice only when certain independent conditions (those specifically concerning such women) are assumed. I will do this first by showing that Plato's theory of justice does not, in and of itself or by any of its components, entail the inclusion of women in the guardian classes. I will then attempt to show that the independent conditions are extremely specific in

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### FOOTNOTES

1. Perhaps, however, we are on the verge of a swing back. I notice, for instance, an announcement from Basic Books of a work On Moral Fiction by John Gardner: "Why have mere nihilists, absurdists, game-players, and novelty hunters become so academically fashionable...? 'Moral' fiction, in the author's view, is fiction that attempts to test human values, not for the purpose of preaching or peddling a particular ideology, but in a truly honest and open-minded effort to find out what best promotes human fulfillment... Because so much present-day fiction fails to be moral in this sense, it undermines our experience of literature and our faith in ourselves." I hope the book lives up to its billing.

their application to women and are not in any important way derived from more general principles.

## I

One way in which a logical tie has been argued to obtain between Plato's view on women in the Republic and his overarching theory of justice is via Plato's prohibitions concerning private property. Thus, in the most recently published paper on this topic, Susan Moller Okin<sup>11</sup> (like Marcel Pierart before her<sup>12</sup>) argues that Plato's use of women as guardians is entailed by that aspect of Plato's theory of justice which disallows the ownership of private property by the rulers. Since women were typically considered male properties, the abolition of property for the rulers, according to Okin, requires Plato to allow their women to be active participants in the guarding (as guardians) of the state. Accordingly, concerning Plato's apparently independent arguments concerning the political capacities of women, Okin thinks that Plato was forced into giving these because of the emancipation of women that must result in their being given political power:

...every person in the ideal city is defined by his or her function; the education and working life of each citizen are to be dedicated to the optimal performance of a single craft. If the female guardians were no longer to be defined in relation to particular men, children, and households, it seems that Plato had no alternative but to consider them persons in their own right. If they were to take their place as members of the guardian class, each must share in the functions of that class. Thus, Plato had to convince his skeptical audience that women were able to perform tasks very different from those customarily assigned to them.<sup>13</sup>

Does this follow? Why should it be that because women were no longer to be the private property of men, they must now become "citizens?" How does it follow that because male guardians will not have private wives, there must now be "female guardians" "taking their place as members of the guardian class?"

Let us consider other cases concerning

the guardians and things they will need. For example, although they have no private property, they will live in barracks (416d), presumably barracks designed and maintained for their unique use. These barracks will be common<sup>14</sup> to the guardians. It is not clear exactly what this entails: Will they be allowed the same bed each night, or will they have to rotate around to insure that they will not be inclined to feel that a given bed is their own? In any case, we can presume that for any given night, the bed a guardian sleeps in will be his or hers for the night.<sup>15</sup> We might even assume that the assignment of beds will be made according to the specific needs of the guardian in his or her role within the state. Thus, it would be in the state's interest to supply an unusually long bed to an unusually tall guardian, so that he or she could rule more efficiently, having slept well each night. Similarly, active guardians might be kept in separate barracks from those not currently engaged in the affairs of the state.<sup>16</sup> Of course, such distributions of beds, barracks, and other objects would be made according to the requirement that the state be served by such distribution. Moreover, such distributions might very well be temporary, subject to change as the needs of the state change.

This elimination of private property does not, however, in any meaningful sense "emancipate" the guardians' beds and barracks. Though male guardians are not allowed privately owned beds, we do not see the emergence of bed-citizens or bed-guardians, taking their place in the guardian class, despite the fact that guardians must sleep, and will no doubt sleep in beds. Surely the fact that they also ought to breed, yet cannot own breeding partners, is no different in principle. Why should their breeding partners be afforded rights and responsibilities when their beds are not? Why is Plato not forced to consider the guardians' beds as persons in their own right?

What else could Plato have done with women, given both that they could not be the private property of the guardians, and that it was in the interest of the state that the guardians breed? Notice that if this latter condition did not obtain, there would be no problem; the guardians would simply live in lifelong celibacy. If Okin is right, there are only two alternatives: either the guardians own women, or there be women-guardians. Okin never considers any other possible solutions Plato might have offered to this problem.

But other solutions exist. Plato might consistently have maintained his stricture that guardians should have no private property with the belief that women should not participate in statecraft by supplying the guardians with a special class of women to breed with them.<sup>17</sup> Okin seems to discount this alternative when she says:

Since planned breeding and communal childbearing minimize the unpredictability of pregnancy and the time demanded of mothers, maternity is no longer anything approaching a full-time occupation. Thus, women can no longer be defined in their traditional roles.<sup>18</sup>

Again, Okin believes that this entails the equality of women. I do not. The mere fact that childbearing will be communal and breeding planned, does not get Plato out of the need for women to breed children, nurse them, and care for them. One cannot have one wet nurse for twenty children and expect the children to live. The women mated by guardians need not have custody of their own offspring, but all of the children will need some lactating female to feed them. Unless we independently believe that women ought to be involved in statecraft, why not make their job the production and care of guardian-bred infants? If this is not enough, surely they could serve the state by washing and cleaning for the guardians themselves; someone is going to have to do all that. Yet nothing in this alternative implies that guardians will have private wives. Such women will be selected for the specific use of individual guardians only for breeding. This might be quite temporary, however. (Indeed, the same guardian might reproduce through a number of "breeding-women," and the same "breeding-woman" might reproduce through a number of guardians, according to the rigged lottery system described from 459c to 460a.) In all other respects this would be a true community of women -- women as servants to the needs of the guardians and their progeny. Such women would no more violate Plato's strictures on private property than do the guardians' beds and barracks. Their status would be the same as these other "goods," and they would be used, like beds and barracks, for the good of the state. Again, nothing in Plato's theory of private property excludes such an arrangement.

The above example shows that in prohibiting the possession of private property by the guardians, Plato is not in any way placed in the position of "having no

alternative but to consider (women) persons in their own right." Something more is needed before Plato must allow women the status he affords them. Thus, contra Okin, it seems that although Plato does try to "convince his skeptical audience that women were able to perform tasks very different from those customarily assigned to them," this endeavor was not necessitated by his abolition of rights to property for the guardians. It seems, rather, that Plato had independent interests in taking the argument in this direction.

Even with this additional argument attached to the theory of property, Plato is not compelled to admit women into the guardian classes. If Plato wished to allow the standards of justice to apply in one way to men, and in another way to women, there is nothing in the observation that women are capable that implies that women must join men in the practice of statecraft. A special class of female slaves might be created, whose role it would be to not only breed with the rulers, but to provide them with advice as well. The guardians would still be men. Such women would have no authority, but would be employed as tools in statecraft (as we employ computers), according to the abilities women need not be privately attached to any given guardian, but might rather be viewed as public property to be shared by the men, as the needs of the state require.<sup>19</sup>

The only way to avoid such a system is to make the prior restriction that the standards of justice apply to women in exactly the same way that they apply to men. And this restriction, together with the observation that women are suited to participate in the affairs of state, is all that is required for Plato to include women among the guardians. Prohibitions of private property now, it seems, have nothing to do with it. For even without such prohibitions, this principle, together with the observation of capacity, would require Plato to include women among the upper classes; only now female guardians, like their male counterparts, would be allowed private property. Unless, however, this sexually indifferent application of the principles of justice applies, Plato has not supplied us with sufficient grounds for his employment of women, rather than the one conceived in the above alternative.<sup>20</sup>

If this correct, then Okin's view must be entirely abandoned. According to her, Plato is required to emancipate women by his prohibition of private property among the ruling class. The first alternative I suggested shows that the abolition

of private property is in no way a sufficient condition of such emancipation. The second alternative shows that the abolition of private property is not even a necessary condition of such emancipation, according to the principles which must be assumed in order for Plato to employ women as he does. The question remains, then: If not Plato's provisions concerning property is there anything else which entails the principle that women be given equal consideration, or is this, like the observation of their capacities, an utterly unique and independent point?

## II

According to Gregory Vlastos,<sup>21</sup> the principle that women must be considered equally is inherited from Socrates, who believed that virtue is the same in men as it is in women. Vlastos also believes that this stand is logically independent of the general theory of justice but required for Plato's position on women. Thus, according to Vlastos, if Plato had shared Aristotle's premise that female excellence could be no better than male mediocrity

...he could not have written Book V of the Republic, even if he had written every word before it in that dialogue. He did not share it because he derived from Socrates the conviction that human excellence, intellectual and moral, was unisex, so that when he designed a state where the possession of that kind of excellence would be its possessor's title to share in dictatorial power, he had to make the tenure of political authority in that state also unisex.<sup>22</sup>

Although I do not believe that the Socratic connection is irrelevant to the issue, I find Plato's actual position much more restrictive than the Socratic inheritance should allow it to be. For the Socratic position is not just that human excellence is "unisex," but rather that it is common in nature to all: male and female, old and young, slave and master.<sup>23</sup> For the Socratic inheritance on the nature of virtue to complete the conditions required to entail the equal treatment of women-guardians in the Republic, it must be that those conditions are applied consistently to every qualified member of society, and that there can be no ad hoc exclusions made. For otherwise, the fact that the treatment of women

is consistent with these conditions, the fact that they are not excluded in an ad hoc way, remains puzzling in the face of evidence that Plato was willing to be inconsistent and exclusive, and that Plato's general impression of the value of women was not particularly favorable. Indeed, one would think that if Plato were to provide for the exclusion of any class from the application of his theory, it would be women, given the negative ways in which he often refers to them.<sup>24</sup> Of course, this is not a problem if Plato does not allow such exclusions, but I think that he does, and that, moreover, he does without even explicitly providing ad hoc reasons for doing so. The cases that come to mind in this regard are those of slaves and the women of the artisan class.

Of course, it has been a matter of lively debate whether or not slaves will form part of the population of Plato's kallipolis. I share Vlastos' view in believing that they will.<sup>25</sup> Vlastos argues very convincingly that a proper reading of 469c, 470b-471b, and 433d require us to conclude that certain inhabitants of Plato's state will be slaves. But slaves will not be members of the polis insofar as they will not be members of any of the three classes of citizens. Their talents, such as they might be,<sup>26</sup> will not be considered when in the state, although they might be considered in assigning them, as tools, to various artisans. At 433d, Plato does assert that slaves (like all others) will perform their one task and not attempt others, but this is only to say that slaves in the perfect state will behave as slaves. Plato nowhere attempts to explain why slaves must be given slavery as their "civic duty" according to the principle that each shall do their own. We must not think that slavery, like any other job in the state, will be a role assigned by the rulers to those best suited to be slaves, for Plato does not allow that certain citizens could be made slaves in the performance of their natural duty, nor that certain slaves (or their children) would be freed to advance in class according to their abilities. For one thing, no Greek citizen or his children could be enslaved, for this would defy the rules Plato sets up at 469b ff. To say, then, that slaves will do their own qua slaves is not to provide them the same consideration provided the citizenry. But the Socratic position on the general application of virtue terms applies equally to slaves. As long as slaves are excluded from equal consideration according to the dictates of justice, as they are in Plato's state, why should women not be

similarly excluded? Why should "Women doing their own," unlike "slaves doing their own," not mean that injustice would be done when they are afforded the same consideration as men? Why is it not an egregious attempt at versatility for a woman, qua woman, to attempt the same job as is done by a man?

There is, moreover, another group which merits consideration in this regard; namely, the women of the artisan class. Plato advocates special practices with regard to the women of the guardian classes, but nowhere suggests that the women of the lowest class will be treated any differently than they are in contemporary Athens. But if the Socratic principle is to be consistently applied, they must be. Thus, while it looks very much like men of the artisan class will have wives (in the traditional sense implying an asymmetric relationship between the spouses), Vlastos' Socratic inheritance would seem to require that even lower-class women be viewed as functioning co-equally with lower-class men, according to their abilities. But this is nowhere suggested, despite the fact that Plato goes to great pains to explain his emancipation of the other women of the state. His silence on this issue cannot be viewed as anything other than evidence that he will allow the status quo to obtain in the lower class.

If the above arguments are correct, there are thus at least two separate classes of individuals<sup>27</sup> who will not be included within the scope of the equal application of Plato's theory of justice, one of which is excluded on grounds (we must assume) which are none other than that they are of a certain sex, ceteris paribus<sup>28</sup>. Even if only one of these cases obtains, it is sufficient to raise the question about women once again, only now in a slightly different way: If slaves or lower-class women can be excluded, despite their abilities, from equal participation, what motivated Plato to not exclude women from the ranks of the guardians for similar reasons? If Socrates' open-minded analysis of virtue can be defied in the case of slaves (male and female), or artisans (female), why not defy it as well in the case of potential female guardians?

Of course, one might argue that such cases are irrelevant to the issue at hand, simply because the fact remains that female guardians are not exceptions to the theory (as Vlastos construes it), despite the fact that the theory has exceptions. But we can conclude, at least, that Plato's position is, at best, imperfectly Socratic

in this regard. It seems equally (or more) likely that Plato's position on women guardians is a unique and independent position generated from specific beliefs about the capacities and worth of certain sorts of women. This at least suggests that Plato was not at the outset sufficiently disinclined to allow women such a role,<sup>29</sup> for in other cases he seems quite willing to abandon this inheritance from Socrates without explicit argument or justification for doing so. In the case of women, he instead elects to undertake an argument showing them worthy of the consideration this principle requires. It might have been easier, had Plato been so inclined, to invent reasons for excluding women from consideration.<sup>30</sup>

### III

I have argued that Plato's views on women in the Republic are generated on grounds independent of his general views on the nature of virtue or justice. Accordingly, I have considered other ways in which women could have been treated in the kallipolis of the Republic than the way Plato actually treats them, ways which are at least as consistent with his views on the nature of justice as many of the other practices he allows in his state.

What we must conclude, then, is that in the Republic, at least<sup>31</sup> Plato really had a prior belief that at least some women were entirely capable of participation in the state, and that it would be desirable to include them. Herein lies Plato's most important contribution to the ethics of sexual stereotyping in societal roles. And that contribution stands on its own, for it is not an entailment of some more general moral principle.

### Notes

\*I am indebted to Gregory Vlastos for arousing my interest in this subject, and to William Jacobs, Harlan Miller, and Bill Williams for their help in clarifying my thoughts on this issue. All errors are, of course, my own. I am also grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for helping to fund the initial stage of my research on this issue.

1. Cf. Laches 190d-191a; also Timaeus 90e.
2. Laws 814b, Meno 73a ff.
3. Laws 637c, 780e, 806a ff.
4. Cf. Aristophanes, Ecclesiazousae.

5. This is entailed by the fact that the ruling class will be the smallest class ( in numbers) in Plato's state. Thus, women rulers will indeed rule over the majority of the men in the state.
6. Laws 781a.
7. Cf. Republic 619e ff., where it is pitiful but appropriate that that most devious of men, Epeus ( the maker of the Trojan horse) is reincarnated as a crafts woman.
8. In this regard it is noteworthy that until the 4th century almost all of the statues of women were clothed, while those of men were almost always nude.
9. Cf. Aristotle, Politics 1260a9 ff.
10. The quote and the comparisons are from the lyric poet, Semonides, An Essay on Women (Lattimore's translation).
11. Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol.6, no. 4 (Summer, 1977), 345 ff.
12. Marcel Pierart, Platon et la Cite Grecque, Brussels, 1974, 75.
13. Op. cit., 356-7.
14. A number of commentators have noted that Plato describes the relations between the sexes of the guardian-classes in much the same way as he describes the relation of guardians to the material goods they use. Thus, Plato describes the situation as if the females are, like the barracks, common to the men (449d, 450c, 451b, 453d). Such language certainly suggests that this relationship is asymmetrical ( we would not say that the guardians are common to the barracks, for example). Cf. for example, Sarah Pomeroy, "Feminism in Book V of Plato's Republic," Apeiron (1974), 33 ff. Pomeroy concludes that these expressions show that the female guardians will not really participate in government, but will exist as a class only to serve the males. This view has, I think, been successfully critiqued in a number of subsequent papers on the subject. Cf. for examples: W. W. Fortenbaugh, "On Plato's Feminism in Republic V," Apeiron 9 (1975), 1 ff.; Brain Calvert, "Plato and the Equality of Women," Phoenix 29 (1975), 231 ff. ; Gregory Vlastos, "The Status of Persons in Platonic Justice: Women," (unpublished).
15. It may well be that the rulers are allowed private beds. It is noteworthy that Plato is not necessarily committed to the elimination of all private property for the guardians. For Plato allows that they might own indispensables (Republic 416d). Might a woman not have been conceived as indispensable, given the guardians' need to breed?
16. Thus, rulers will retire from the duties of statecraft at fifty (Republic 540a).
17. This is basically what Pomeroy ( op. cit.) believes Plato actually to be advocating. Vlastos also suggests this alternative ( op. cit. p. 21). Cf. in addition, Julia Annas, "Plato, Republic V and Feminism," Philosophy 51 no. 197 (1976), 307-321.
18. Op. cit. 356.
19. Bill Williams suggested this example to me.
20. Even this principle is too general, however, for it would imply equality not only for the women of the guardians, but for those of the artisans as well. But Plato nowhere argues for this. Cf. my argument concerning this below.
21. Op. cit.
22. Op. cit. 18
23. Cf. Meno 73a ff.
24. Cf. Dorothea Wender, "Plato: Misogynist, Paedophile, and Feminist," Arethusa 6 (1973), 75 ff. for a discussion of Plato's often slanderous references to women.
25. Gregory Vlastos, "Does Slavery Exist in Plato's Republic?" Classical Philology 63 (1968), 291-95. See also: John Wild, Plato's Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law (Chicago, 1953), 50-51; Karl Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 1 (Princeton, 1963); Ronald B. Levinson, In Defense of Plato (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 170 n. 76; Glen R. Morrow, Plato's Law of Slaves (Urbana, Ill., 1939) and "Plato and Greek Slavery," Mind XLVIII (1939).
26. Such talents and / or human worth might be considerable. Cf. Meno 85c, where

a slave is thought to have the potential for knowledge of geometry "as good as anybody's," and Laws 776d, where slaves are said to be often better than brothers or sons.

27. Similar arguments might be considered concerning metics, but it appears unlikely that Plato will include them, having arranged for all needed skills in the state to come from within the ranks of citizens. This is an odd point dramatically, however, given that the Republic takes place in the house of a metic, Cephalus.
28. As I said above ( n. 20), Plato offers no independent argument to the effect that the women of the lower class are not qualified for equal treatment. This either means that such women will be treated equally (which seems altogether unlikely at least because of the fact that Plato does not include them in his arguments for treating women equally), or that they will be excluded from equal treatment simply on the grounds of sex.
29. This not only suggests that Plato was more of a feminist than many have believed, but perhaps less of a misogynist as well (cf. Dorothea Wender, op. cit.).
30. For example, it would certainly be easy enough for Plato to simply argue that although women must be given consideration, they would never, due to their inherent inferiority, meet the high standards required for one to be selected for the guardian classes. Thus, cf. Allan Bloom, The Republic of Plato, New York (1968), p. 383, where he says that it would be "highly improbable that any woman would be considered for membership in the higher classes." All we would need from Plato would be a slightly stronger claim to the effect that women are inferior to men than the one he makes (455d), and we could be assured that the guardian classes would be free of women, despite the fact that they would be considered equally. Certainly Socrates' audience would have been better prepared for such a position than the one he actually takes. As it stands, however, I think Bloom's position is

not justified by the text. Cf. Christine Pierce, "Equality: Republic V," Monist 57 (1973), 1 ff., and Brian Calvert (op. cit.), for specific arguments contrary to Bloom's position.

31. It is true, of course, that Plato somewhat changes his views of women in the Laws. This issue lies beyond the scope of this paper, however, as I have sought only to consider the logical role of Plato's views on women in the Republic.

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### The Computer as Instrument

by

Martin Bertman

The computer is an instrument. An instrument is a means for achieving some purpose. Non-living things, like computers and hammers, and living things, like human beings and dray horses, can be instruments. No matter what aesthetic or ethical appreciations one has of oneself or of other human beings as "ends-in-themselves," it is obvious human beings use one another instrumentally: one may have a conversation with a taxi driver (less often with an airplane pilot) but this is aside from his instrumental function of transporting us. The taxi or the plane is chosen not in terms of conversation but as a means to an end and, from this point of view, the human driver might well be replaced by a nonhuman instrument. Again, it is proper to consider our limbs instruments for our purposes; a hand, in good condition, is useful and so is a "right-hand" man. The instrumental quality of the person is neutral to any other relationship or feeling one has to an individual so designated.

Each instrument, in principle, has specifically storable capacities. We can designate instrumental function; when an instrument's efficiency is considered function is implied. Though it is part of the meaning of the word "instrument" that its designatum be a means, artefactual instruments, like hammers and computers, have been designed to be means. They are useful, within the intent of the design, for a specifically conceived range of functions fulfilling human purposes. The design of the hammer, for instance, is for battering and a particular sort of hammer, i.e. a sledge hammer, is designed to batter certain objects in certain way; however, if the hammer has an iron head it may also function as a magnet, another kind of instrument, though it might not have been artefactual for that