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The University of Southern Mississippi

EXAMINING THE NATURE OF SOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: AN INQUIRY INTO  
THE VOEGELINIAN CONCEPTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by

Emma Christine Fontenot

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved:

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Dean of the Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

### EXAMINING THE NATURE OF SOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: AN INQUIRY INTO THE VOEGELINIAN CONCEPTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by Emma Christine Fontenot

May 2015

This thesis explores Socrates as the paradigmatic citizen through Eric Voegelin's theory of consciousness. While scholars tend to ground the source of Socrates' civic behavior in the self, I maintain that his *daimonion* is the very essence of his citizenship. Illustrating that spiritual openness endows him with the highest level of consciousness within the polis, I argue that Socrates' efforts to democratize truth are the direct result of his adherence to divine authority. In doing so, I assert that he is neither a self-interested civic actor nor an atheist. By examining Platonic philosophy through the lens of Voegelinian thought I offer a new perspective of Socrates that addresses spiritual openness as the crux of his citizenship. Most importantly, however, this project illustrates the public philosopher's contributive and participatory citizenship within the polis.

## DEDICATION

*...Were you born to resist or be abused?*

*I swear I'll never give in*

*I refuse...*

- Foo Fighters, Best of You

This thesis is dedicated to those who did what they had to do, because they didn't know what else to do. To every six year old that stood their ground and dared to tell their parents that: "Because I said so isn't a good enough answer. I want to know *why* you said so." But mostly, it's dedicated to every poor kid; every first grader who was ever put in the slow reading group; every second grader threatened to be left back because they were bored in class; to every kid who feels their self-worth wither away as each corporate created, state-sanctioned standardized test score erodes away their confidence; to every kid who thinks they're stupid; to that kid who tries to lose themselves in the illusory freedom of drugs; and to that very same kid who, some years later in a college classroom, will find themselves in the pages of a 2,000 year old book in which asking questions and being shamed for doing so are characteristic of the truly wise--only to realize that finding one's self is the one true sadness, because "the unexamined life isn't worth living."

*Tomorrow's just an excuse away*

*So I pull my collar up and face the cold, on my own...*

*... I know I'll make it...*

- The Smashing Pumpkins, Thirty Three

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Time is never time at all*

*You can never ever leave without leaving a piece of youth*

*And our lives are forever changed*

*We will never be the same...*

*...And you know you're never sure*

*But you're sure you could be right*

*If you held yourself up to the light*

*And the embers never fade in your city by the lake*

*The place where you were born...*

- The Smashing Pumpkins, Tonight Tonight

It would be impossible to mention everyone who helped make this thesis a reality. First, I would like to thank my committee for their time and assistance with this project. Shane, thank you for helping make this thesis a reality; if it were not for you I would not have made it through the writing process. You have helped with my project, given me strength, and been my rock throughout this entire process. To my Southern Miss family, thank you. Liz, Jake, Josh, Elisabeth, Candace, Sam, Drs. Gibson, Weinberg, Sayre, and McBride, and the rest of the department, thank you for your daily encouragement and guidance. Drs. Sirgo and Laehn, thank you for all of your help and dedication to my scholarly development.

Finally, Dr. Steedman, to say thank you is to do you a disservice. It oversimplifies, generalizes, and denies you and your pedagogy proper credit. But no other words can adequately express my gratitude. You saw beyond my test scores and

gave me a chance to pursue my dream. Somehow, you were able to make me question everything I thought I knew and transform my political ideology from week to week and semester to semester. *You* were able to make me Marxist, Rawlsian, Voegelinian feminist, interested in Platonic political theory.

Do not ever doubt your ability as a mentor or an educator. It is because of you and your 'adjustment' speech my first semester that I have gotten this far. Throughout my time at USM I have compared myself to my peers and questioned my abilities, intelligence, and self-worth. But your patience, understanding, and encouragement gave me the confidence to keep going. Despite my rough edges, self-doubt, and perpetually late papers (except for that one journal article review) you had faith in me even when I did not have faith in myself. I am the person I am today because of your guidance.

Thank you.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

*The duty of youth is to challenge corruption.*

- Kurt Cobain

Recently, President Obama commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1965 Selma, Alabama Civil Rights march. Because of the violence and bloodshed inflicted on the marchers by local law enforcement, the event has been dubbed Bloody Sunday. The following are excerpts from the president's speech:

...In one afternoon fifty years ago, so much of our turbulent history – the stain of slavery and anguish of civil war; the yoke of segregation and tyranny of Jim Crow; the death of four little girls in Birmingham, and the dream of a Baptist preacher – met on this bridge...

...As we commemorate their achievement, we are well-served to remember that at the time of the marches, many in power condemned rather than praised them. Back then, they were called Communists, half-breeds, outside agitators, sexual and moral degenerates, and worse – everything but the name their parents gave them. Their faith was questioned. Their lives were threatened. Their patriotism was challenged...

...And yet, what could be more American than what happened in this place...

...What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this; what greater form of patriotism is there; than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals...

...It's the idea held by generations of citizens who believed that America is a constant work in progress; who believed that loving this country requires more than singing its praises or avoiding uncomfortable truths. It requires the occasional disruption, the willingness to speak out for what's right and shake up the status quo...

...Because of campaigns like this...[p]olitical, economic, and social barriers came down, and the change these men and women wrought is visible here today in the presence of African-Americans who run boardrooms, who sit on the

bench, who serve in elected office from small towns to big cities; from the Congressional Black Caucus to the Oval Office...

...Fifty years from Bloody Sunday, our march is not yet finished. But we are getting closer. Two hundred and thirty-nine years after this nation's founding, our union is not yet perfect. But we are getting closer. Our job's easier because somebody already got us through that first mile. Somebody already got us over that bridge...<sup>1</sup>

As moving as President Obama's speech is, it goes beyond the historical event itself. His words celebrate individuals who, against all odds, fought for a more just society, which for them meant a more equal and inclusive society. In a country that conceptualizes justice as happiness, freedom, democracy, and equal opportunity, the Civil Rights Movement is evidence that many believed otherwise. African Americans and others felt that such ideals were reserved for an exclusive segment of society—namely the white segment.<sup>2</sup> To many, this contradicted the country's defining principles and its proclaimed conception of political justice. The country 'believed' in equal opportunity, but did not actually provide it. In many cases, regardless of level, governments did their best to maintain an unequal and exclusive sociopolitical landscape.

At this time, African American citizens were not afforded the same liberties as their white counterparts as a result of exclusionary sociopolitical laws and practices. This was so especially in the South where African Americans were more likely to be subjected to social segregation, political disenfranchisement, and severe educational and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Obama, Barak. "Remarks by the President at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches," The White House, accessed March 24, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/07/remarks-president-50th-anniversary-selma-montgomery-marches>.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am confining my comments to the country's sociopolitical divisions that existed between African Americans and Whites during the 1950s and 1960s. While I recognize there were many other suppressive societal fragmentations at this time with respect to economics, education, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual identification and orientation, among others, addressing each of these in equal detail is simply far too expansive for the project at hand. Though, to substantiate my claims later, I will briefly discuss gender in the ancient world to compare oppressive and discriminatory sociopolitical practices in antiquity to those of modernity. It is worth mentioning, however, that each of the aforementioned topics could be used to illustrate and support my claims, which will be outlined shortly.

inequality, among other things. Examples include subjection to separate and severely underfunded school systems that were inferior to those of their white counterparts as well as poll taxes and literacy tests as conditional requirements for voting. This effectively silenced an entire segment of the population's voice with respect to public discussions concerning laws and political practices which directly affected them. Finally, the indignation from suffering years of social oppression came to a head during the 1950s and 1960s and led to mass social movements which eventually helped create a more just society by bringing about greater sociopolitical inclusiveness and equality.

Campaigns like the Civil Rights Movement are an important aspect of any political community. They bring questions of political justice into the public sphere and compel a society to examine its accepted social norms, customs, and beliefs. More specifically, it sparks a philosophical debate among the members of a political community concerning notions of justice. In a democratic society this can be a force for social change. In a society in which power is vested in members of a political community, if a people discover injustice where justice was once thought to exist then they can compel a government and a society to alter its practices and beliefs. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, oppression and dissatisfaction manifested itself in the form of socially contentious behavior such as protests and boycotts. In turn, this caught society's attention and triggered a public conversation regarding the activists' reason(s) and purpose(s) for such political dissidence.

What is significant about President Obama's commemoration is that it praises the individuals responsible for sparking such political discourse. In this speech the president expresses our political community's now commonly held sentiments. He regards them as patriots and attributes social progress and the creation of a more just society to the actions

of those who stood in the face of political injustice and fought for a more equal and inclusive society. We now hold those Civil Rights activist in high regard and credit their unrelenting fight as the climactic moment in which generations of oppression, social inequality, and political exclusion brought about change in our sociopolitical landscape. Overwhelmingly, we think of these individuals as patriots who held true to the political principles which define our society, regard them as interpreters of a new, more accurate, and truer meaning of “We the People...”, and regard them possessors of truth and conquerors of injustice.<sup>3</sup> We recognize their efforts, defiance, and challenges to the status quo as events that ushered in transformative social change and led to the creation of a more equal and inclusive society.

President Obama’s speech and society’s changed sociopolitical practices and beliefs help us understand that political justice involves equality and inclusivity. As illustrated above, we recognize that valuing the opinions, voice, and needs of some over that of others is unjust. This is evident in society’s political progress. Comparatively speaking, the United States’ sociopolitical landscape now exhibits greater equality and inclusivity. Though still rife with exclusionary practices and inequality, these issues are less prominent than during the Civil Rights Era as made evident by the Civil Rights Acts and overall social practices and beliefs.

The president’s words and our changing perception of justice also highlight particular characteristics involved in the process of bringing about greater political justice. The first of which is self-criticism. To achieve political justice we must subject our sociopolitical ideologies to critical examination under the social microscope of the

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<sup>3</sup> United States, *The Constitution of the United States of America*, (Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, 1990).

public eye. It leads to an open discussion about truth and justice by compelling a people to evaluate their practices, beliefs, and themselves. Moreover, such a conversation allows for the transference of ideas, concerns, needs, and wants between the various social groups which comprise the political community. It also creates the opportunity for public consensus regarding matters of justice with respect to particular political concerns. It also leads to a more just society by creating a venue in which the voice of socio-politically excluded and oppressed minorities can be heard.<sup>4</sup> In general this aids in building a more just society insofar as open political dialogue leads to greater inclusivity and greater equality. John Rawls substantiates this claim noting that:

An essential feature of a well-ordered society is that its public conception of political justice establishes a shared basis for citizens to justify to one another their political judgments: each cooperates, politically and socially, with the rest on terms all can endorse as just.<sup>5</sup>

A second characteristic of political justice President Obama articulates in his speech is that progress towards a more just, equal, and inclusive society depends upon those willing to illuminate issues of injustice. In other words, social progress is reliant upon those willing to cast light upon issues of injustice and thrust them into the public sphere. These individuals are the catalysts of social change. Their actions compel a society to engage in a philosophical discussion in which its laws and customs are checked against its conception of truth and justice. Thus, the sociopolitical gadflies are a social

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<sup>4</sup> Ideally, citizens would have equal footing in the public political forum. Realistically, this is not the case. In a modern democratic society such as the United States, the degree to which one's voice is heard varies considerably with respect to age, race, gender, location, personal wealth, as well as with the issue at hand. While these problems distort inclusivity, at least some access to discourse is provided nonetheless. This is not to discredit, downplay, or ignore the inherent problems associated with such issues. Rather, it is to illustrate that questions of justice brought into the public sphere can and do bring about change for the better and create a more politically inclusive society.

<sup>5</sup> John Rawls and Erin Kelly, *Justice As Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 27.

necessity if a society seeks to align itself with justice.<sup>6</sup> To adopt the words of Howard Zinn who asserts that the:

agitators,...dissenters,...[and] the troublemakers [are] the people who have given [us] whatever liberty and democracy we have.<sup>7</sup>

The third feature of political justice is that it is progressive. Our history and the president's speech illustrates that we have advanced from a society in which social oppression and political exclusion of a large segment of our political community to one that now affords members of the very same group the opportunity to hold its highest public office. We have changed our beliefs and practices and adopted a truer definition of justice realizing in retrospect that our past actions and laws were actually unjust. This is evidence that political justice is not something we automatically achieve when a political society comes into being. It does not come about overnight. Rather, justice is a political state of being that comes about only after we have undergone critical self-evaluation and engaged in a public discussion in which we check dominant ideas about truth and justice against those of other comprising elements of society.

The president's speech and society's changed (and ever changing) ideas of justice have set the tempo for this project. In this thesis I use Socrates to illustrate the importance of those who challenge the status quo. Specifically, I examine his civic behavior to articulate the importance of those to take on the responsibility bringing discussions of political justice into the public sphere. Why examine the citizenship of someone who lived 2,500 years ago? Since Socrates we have wondered about the citizen's proper role within civic society. Much like the Civil Rights activists of the 1960s sought to bring issues of racial discrimination to light, Socrates too attempted to

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<sup>6</sup> To avoid the negative connotation associated with the term gadfly this project will refer to individuals described above and public-philosophers.

<sup>7</sup> *The People Speak*, directed by Howard Zinn, Chris Moore, and Anthony Arnove. (2009; 2009), Film.

illuminate injustice by questioning his fellow citizen about truth and justice. Because of him we ponder the concept of freedom within political communities, question the limitations of governmental authority, and contemplate the power of a people. His dedication to truth and justice provide us with the perfect example of the tensional existence between the polis and those who seek out true justice. That is, how members of a political community who recognize their regime's unjust political actions go about changing a people's mindset regarding such practices.

Just as Socrates pushed the envelope in his day, so too do those who continue to question despite the inherent risks involved with doing so. We continue to fight for social change, for a more equal and inclusive society, and for a more just regime all together. In the United States this is visible in a variety of major modern political issues. From marriage equality, to immigration, we see the ways in which Athenian questions and concerns remain relevant in modern politics. Regardless of public tumult and backlash, civil rights leaders continue to persevere in their fight against that which they believe is unjust. Perhaps the best modern example is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As a prominent figure in the Civil Rights Movement, he helped put the oppression of African Americans in the national spotlight. He, like Socrates, publically upset the status quo, questioned the nation's conception of justice and the legitimacy of laws premised upon traditional beliefs and commonly held sentiments. Without individuals willing to bring questions of justice and injustice into the public sphere, inspire individuals to reflect on these topics, and challenge social norms society would remain static. It is because of social figures like Dr. King and Socrates that political communities progress and create institutions of greater equality than before. As such, our focus is on the individual who

shed light upon social injustices and thrust them into the public sphere. In particular, we are concerned with Socrates.

Despite the drastic differences in social landscapes, the contemporary political interests of today nevertheless mirror those of ancient Athens. We too are concerned with issues such as: a citizen's rights and responsibilities, citizenship qualifications, what constitutes one as a citizen, what differentiates a good from a bad citizen, appropriate governmental boundaries, the proper role each should play within society along with a host of other topics. Thus, given the similarities between ancient Athens and contemporary political issues, if we are to properly answer our own questions and attempt to right the wrongs of the modern democratic societies we must return to ancient Athens. It is necessary to understand the original context in which questions of citizenship were asked if we are to continue striving toward greater political justice.

Socrates is often remembered as a morally incorruptible individual who sacrificed himself in the name of truth and the pursuit thereof. For the most part, history has been kind to him. Yet, there are those who view Socrates in a negative light. Many see him as a threat to the stability of Athenian society. This perception regards his philosophical quests as dangerous, self-centered, and irresponsible. However, this project argues otherwise maintaining that Socrates is in fact *the* paradigmatic citizen. I posit that his search for ultimate answers and his efforts are evidence of his conscious awareness of a greater truth beyond that of the state's. It is my contention that because of his willingness to shun social norms, challenge the status quo, and his refusal to cease his philosophical activities that he is a consciously elevated individual endowed with foresight which allows him to recognize social injustices before anyone else. Moreover, I hold that individuals with such qualities are necessary within the political community for the



progression of justice. Their presence, insight, and willingness to go up against the accepted social and political norms are vital for bringing issues to light within the public sphere. I posit that his transcendence into different social spheres, resulting from his willingness to philosophize with anyone, regardless of social class or gender, illustrates a conscious awareness of the gross misconceptions about political justices within the ancient Athenian state.

Regardless of one's opinion of Socrates' civic behavior, he serves as the best model for examining citizenship in democratic society. Because of Athens' political influence on the modern nation state, which will be discussed at greater length later on, his citizenship can be used to analyze our own. As will be shown, many of the political questions that we pose were first brought to light in in Athens by Socrates himself. For these reasons I employ Socrates when outlining my model for the best type of citizenship as well as the public philosopher's role as citizen. Jeremy Mhire further explains this importance writing that:

It is surely a noble effort to confront the dilemmas of modern political life with a view to resolving those dilemmas, and those looking for new models of citizenship are correct in looking to Socrates. [He] was the first true moral and political philosopher, the first person to raise the question of citizenship simply, and hence, theoretically. Socrates questions are inextricably linking with those of civic duty and responsibility, a characteristic that makes his legacy an appropriate starting point for theories on citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

Though, what distinguishes a good citizen from one who is bad has long been the topic of debate, particularly with respect to Socrates, this discussion differs in that it argues that he, as the public philosopher, is the paradigmatic citizen precisely because he challenges the status quo as a result of his adherence to divine authority. To make my

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<sup>8</sup>Jeremy Mhire, "Socrates As Citizen? The Implications of Socratic Eros for Contemporary Models of Citizenship," (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2006),7-8.

argument I build upon David Corey's assertion that current Socratic defenses fail to "acknowledg[e]" the divine source underlying Socrates' civic practices.<sup>9</sup> He argues that by negating Socrates' divine influence, scholars are attempting to "explain...away" the "*super-natural*" dimension of Socratic civic behavior and therefore deny an essential element that is "*intricately* related to his peculiar practice of citizenship."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he claims that rejecting Socrates' adherence to divine authority is to "fundamentally... misconstrue Socratic citizenship."<sup>11</sup> I maintain that the same idea applies to those who oppose the notion of Socrates as a model citizen.

Picking up where Corey leaves off, I adopt his methodology in undermining the idea that Socrates and his philosophy are politically threatening and atheistic in nature.<sup>12</sup> By illustrating that Socrates' openness to the divine endows him with the greatest foresight and highest level of consciousness within the polis, I argue that his efforts to democratize truth are the direct result of his adherence to divine authority. Specifically, I claim that his soul's openness to the divine provides him with the highest level of consciousness within the polis. Because of his desire for truth, Socrates' soul is oriented toward the good in life therefore I maintain that this affords him insight into the true nature of justice. In other words, through the process of questioning and answering, he is able to discern what is just and unjust whereas, those who are not a philosopher cannot. Thus, I maintain that progress toward a more just society is dependent upon the public-philosopher's citizenship.

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<sup>9</sup> David D. Corey, "Socratic Citizenship: Delphic Oracle and Divine Sign," *The Review of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 210.

<sup>10</sup> Corey, "Socratic Citizenship," 211.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Mhire. "Socrates As Citizen," 45.

Ultimately, by offering a defense of the public philosopher, I undermine the assertion that philosophy should remain the preserve of a privileged minority. In doing so, I outline Socrates's sociopolitical responsibilities and illustrate how his citizenship is socially participatory and politically contributive. Most importantly, I create a fundamental civic niche for the public philosopher. My goal is to bridge the gap between Voegelinian philosophy and Socratic citizenship by rekindling the debate concerning truth in the public sphere. To do this I explore Socrates as the paradigmatic citizen through Eric Voegelin's theory of consciousness and employ his theory of human historical symbolization as a means to support my claims.

By examining Platonic philosophy through the lens of Voegelinian thought, I offer a new perspective of Socrates that addresses spiritual openness as the crux of his citizenship. While scholars tend to ground the source of Socrates' civic behavior in the self, I maintain that his *daimonion* is the very essence of his citizenship. Illustrating that spiritual openness endows him with the highest level of consciousness within the polis, I argue that Socrates' efforts to democratize truth are the direct result of his adherence to divine authority. In doing so, I assert that he is neither a self-interested civic actor nor an atheist. Furthermore, by outlining the process of Socratic democratization, I note that Socrates' conscious awareness leads him to recognize gross social injustices regarding class, equality, and gender.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY

If we are to offer a proper illustration of Socratic citizenship, we must first understand the way in which scholars perceive Socrates. In the next section I outline what has come to be known as the “The Problem of Socrates” or “The Socratic Problem.” This section will begin with an introduction of the inherent issues associated with investigating Socrates. Following this, research examples will be examined in order to illustrate the ways in which both fields have incorporated Socrates into their research. This will provide us with a clear picture of the two distinct Socratic figures which have emerged out of each field of study. An explanation of the bifurcated Socrates will allow us to see the important role history has played in influencing the two specific theories within the world of political philosophy regarding Socratic civic behavior. More importantly, however, the chapter will conclude with an explanation of the ways in which political philosophers employ the historical Socrates as a means of supporting their claims concern the nature of both his philosophy and civic character.

#### The Socratic Problem

Socrates is an inherently complex historical figure. He has played a significant role in Western thought over the past 2,000 years and yet we know almost nothing about him. The lack of historically sound evidence, coupled with his famous reputation, has caused two different Socratic characters to emerge within academia. First, there is the historical Socrates. This Socratic figure refers specifically to the historically accurate Socrates. This speaks to the actual man as he truly lived, moved, and acted within his ancient city-state of Athens. Next, there is the philosophical Socrates. This particular variation of Socrates is used to reference the reputation for which he is famously know-

the paradigmatic philosopher and virtuous man. In sum, for the historian there is the historical man about whom we know very little while for the philosopher there is the Socrates as he is depicted in the works of his students. While the division does exist, both Socratic figures serve an important role for scholars in each field who, in one way or another, often make use of both characters.

Because we have little evidence informing us about the actual man, much of what we know about Socrates has come from the work of his students, particularly that of Plato. The Platonic dialogues, however, pose a significant problem for scholars in both fields of study. In consideration of the fact that his famous teacher was executed for his philosophical pursuits as well as the fact that Plato remains silent in his dialogues, questions have arisen regarding the authenticity of the philosophy put forth in Plato's works.<sup>13</sup> In other words, did Plato leave us with an accurate depiction of his famous teacher? Or, perhaps, due to the reasons surrounding Socrates' death, Plato felt the need to use his mentor as a mouthpiece for putting forth his own philosophy.

Because the historical Socrates is something of a mystery, we have very little original evidence to confirm whether or not the real man was anything like the popular image so common to us today. Even the writings contemporary to Socrates are conflicting regarding the truth about the real man. Compare, for example, the Socratic character depicted in many of Plato's works to Aristophanes' Socrates of the *Clouds*. In each we are given two very different perceptions of the same man. The Platonic Socrates represents wisdom, prudence, and virtue while the Aristophanic Socrates makes a mockery out of the famous philosopher illustrating him as imprudent, irresponsible, and

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<sup>13</sup> Robin Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009), 26.

hubristic; literally, someone with his head in the clouds.<sup>14</sup> In light of the textual discrepancies, lack of original evidence, and given the fact that historians have employed perceptions of the philosophical Socrates into their work on the historical Socrates, how are we to know what is fact and what is fiction? From the historian's perspective there are very few things that we can be sure of when it comes to Socrates, and his philosophy simply is not one of them. According to the historian Robin Waterfield, while we have no way of discerning whether or not Plato was accurately portraying his mentor or using him as a mouthpiece in order to put forth his own philosophy:

[t]here is another way to recover a true impression of the historical Socrates, and test the truth of the Platonic picture, by paying attention to the historical record and historical plausibility.<sup>15</sup>

We can also glean factual information about the historical Socrates by sifting through the textual differences within all three authors' works. As a result, similarities will emerge which can be regarded as factual in nature.<sup>16</sup> There may also be "nuggets of historical truth" located within individual texts, but with regard to these we have no way of knowing for sure if they are true or not.<sup>17</sup> For example, in his article, Waterfield outlines what he refers to as:

a slightly revisionist view of Socrates, one that emerges from the historical record as well as from judicious use of the extant literary evidence.<sup>18</sup>

His first point listed is as follows: "We know that the elderly philosopher was put on trial, and we know the charges that were brought against him."<sup>19</sup> We know this

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<sup>14</sup> Mhire, *Socrates As Citizen*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. I have only listed one of the four points which Waterfield outlines as this particular is the most relevant for our study.

because it is a one of the consistencies present across the texts of Plato and Aristophanes.<sup>20</sup>

Further complicating the mystery of Socrates is his unwillingness, or according to some his inability, to write. He attributes the reason in large part to the possibility of misinterpretation.<sup>21</sup> As a result of his stance on the written word we are left with no primary resources from Socrates himself. What we are left with, however, are the Socratic depictions within the works of his students and his fellow Athenian citizen, the ancient comedian Aristophanes. Though these texts may offer us a contemporary view of the historical Socrates they nevertheless reveal themselves to be problematic when attempting to construct an accurate representation of the real Socrates. For example, Plato was a student of Socrates, a fact which creates the potential for a biased and therefore distorted perception of his former teacher.<sup>22</sup> As the historian Robin Waterfield points out, textual differences can be seen between the writings of Plato causing one to question the validity of Socrates' popular reputation as depicted by Plato.<sup>23</sup> And then there is the ancient comedian Aristophanes who is important for his distinct portrayal of Socrates. Unlike Plato, his play provides a Socratic image that paints the philosopher as an irresponsible absentminded idiot. Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates offers us a unique illustration in that he provides us with a Socratic depiction from the vantage point of a fellow citizen rather than that of a student.<sup>24</sup> This is important, because as we have mentioned, the Platonic Socratic character may offer a biased representation of the real Socrates.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 9

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 11-12

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 12-13

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 13

Despite the lack of solid evidence, however, there are still those who nevertheless adhere to the idea of Socrates as a wise and prudent philosopher. These individuals maintain that Socrates' trial and death illustrate his unwavering devotion to truth. In this chapter both of these views will be explored in greater detail below. We will explain how scholars in both history and political philosophy attempt to uphold or dispel Socrates' popular image. This is particularly important insofar as this study will defer to historical research in order to substantiate its claims. Incorporating history's perspective is necessary if we seek to ground our claims about Socratic civic behavior in truth. For as Jeremy Mhire puts it:

Only by understanding the historical Socrates can we understand what is meant by Socratic citizenship, be that in an actual, a philosophical, or a dramatic sense. [Furthermore] [w]ithout due attention to the problem of the historical Socrates, one is left without an interpretative ballast, something with which to secure a systematic inquiry and against which that study might be made honest.<sup>25</sup>

What is important to point out here is that we have highlighted what has come to be known as "The Problem of Socrates." Such a problem stems from the division between the lack of verifiable historical proof and the popularized philosophical image from which two Socratic figures have emerged within the world of academia: the historical Socrates and the philosophical Socrates. The historical Socrates refers specifically to the Socrates that can be verified through primary or original sources contemporary to the time in which the real man lived. Sources such as these are the only way in which we are able to determine fact from fiction. Conversely, the philosophical Socrates refers to the reputation that the philosopher has gained since the time of his

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<sup>25</sup> Mhire, Jeremy, *Socrates as Citizen? The Implications of Socratic Eros for Contemporary Models of Citizenship*. Dissertation: The Department of Political Science, Louisiana State University. 2006, 14, 16. Mhire's work gives us the clearest image of Socratic citizenship, regardless of philosophical stance, we will employ his definitions. He notes that: "By actual here Socrates' historical civic life is meant; by philosophical the historical intersection of his philosophizing with the city at large is meant; by dramatic the presentation of the previous two is meant."



death. Considering that contemporary literature stands divided regarding the truth about Socrates coupled, with the fact that we have almost no primary sources the “uncomfortable truth is that little or nothing of this picture [the popular image] of Socrates may be accurate.”<sup>26</sup>

The following paragraphs have provided us with a brief explanation regarding the complexities of Socratic research. Now that I have discussed the bifurcated Socrates, I will illustrate the ways in which historians incorporate contextual evidence into their research in order to substantiate their claims. This is particularly important in that each of our historians come to opposite conclusions about Socrates but nevertheless ground their work in historical evidence.

#### The Nature of Historical Scholarship

Given the diverse nature of academia there is no doubt that giving a simple description of research within a particular field of study does a disservice to much of its scholarship. Doing so renders the possibility of overgeneralizing the vast array of specified interests which comprise the entirety of a particular area of study. By confining research to the parameters of a definition, we run the risk of imposing limitations upon scholarship insofar as the investigation is confined to the specifics of the definitive phrase to which it was assigned. Furthermore, constraining an entire field of study to the boundaries of a single generality oversimplifies the complexity of the field at large. Thus, while I recognize the harm in generalizing the aims of historical research, since this is not nor is it intended to be a work of history; but, rather one of political philosophy, if we are to achieve our goal of restoring Socrates’ civic reputation, we must subject the

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<sup>26</sup> Waterfield, Robin. 2008 p. 27

studies of history to another brief and overly-general explanation regarding the nature of historical Socratic scholarship.

In order to begin we should note that the historian's first and foremost aim, is to understand change over time. Or, to speak more specifically, "historical study records advances in production of food, in technology, in the building of social groups and their habitations, and in general in the more efficient control of the environment."<sup>27</sup> In order to do this, however, one cannot simply look at the historical events themselves; rather, the study of history must concern itself with the study of the *causes* of those particular events which have spurred societal changes. "This means that historians [must] also study the ways human beings have viewed the world around them, that is, how people have understood its working through science, answered unfathomable questions through religion, and expressed their thoughts in art, literature, and philosophy."<sup>28</sup> However, this task proves particularly problematic for the Socratic historian.

As mentioned, for the historian, Socrates is an enigmatic figure. The Socratic narrative most of us are familiar with is one which speaks of a famous, wise, and prudent philosopher in constant pursuit of wisdom. Generally, he is recognized as a sort of sacrificial lamb insofar as his search for truth ultimately resulted in his death. Yet, this is not the Socrates known to historians, at least not in terms of factual evidence. As Bettany Huges puts it, "the primary-source, autobiographical historical Socrates is a lacuna..."<sup>29</sup> This is attributed to the fact that Socrates' legacy lives on almost exclusively through the works of his former student, Plato as well as in the plays of the ancient Athenian

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<sup>27</sup> Tosh, John and Sean Lang. *The Pursuit of History*, Ed. 4. Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2006. p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Huges, Bettany. *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. p. xv

comedian Aristophanes. And even here, in the texts of those who would have known him, insight into the historical man remains murky at best. Some scholars go so far as to suggest that we may have an image of Socrates that is completely unfounded.<sup>30</sup> Historian Robin Waterfield asserts that Plato used his former teacher as a mouthpiece to “...establish philosophy as he understood it...”<sup>31</sup> This view of Socrates is nothing new. And, perhaps, the notion of a Socratic medium can be most famously attributed to the political philosopher Leo Strauss who we will discuss at greater length below. Strauss saw Plato as something of a literary prestidigitator, if you will, maintaining that he simply used his former mentor as a character in his works for the purposes of conveying specific messages that were to remain out of public sight.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Waterfield claims that the Socrates with whom the world is familiar may never have existed.<sup>33</sup> If this is the case then the popular Socratic image may be attributed to philosophers aggrandizing the Platonic Socratic character based off of an inaccurate depiction of Socrates by his students. Regarding this historian Robin Waterfield writes in an article entitled “The Historical Socrates” stating that:

Unfortunately Socrates has for too long been in the hands of philosophers, and they are capable of overlooking the most stark pieces of historical evidence.<sup>34</sup>

Waterfield writes about the historical Socrates in his book, *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*. He shows how the historical Socrates may have been perceived as dangerous in such a way as to shed new light on the reasoning behind Socrates’ trial. Specifically, he uses the historical Socrates’ philosophical pursuits to show how the charges of corrupting the youth may have been perceived as politically threatening by

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Waterfield, Robin. “The Historical Socrates,” *History Today*. Vol. 59, Issue 18. 2008.,25.

<sup>32</sup> Strauss, *City and Man*, 52-60.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

prominent Athenians regarding familial social status and reputation. When discussing the accusation that Socrates was corrupting prominent young Athenians, we often think of political corruption in theological and philosophical terms. That is, we tend to regard the questions which Socrates posed to the young men as problematic insofar as he was teaching them his method of philosophizing. Yet, Waterfield suggests that: “Socrates used homosexual flirtatiousness to attract young men into his circle...”<sup>35</sup> While sexual relationships between older men and their younger students were not uncommon among Athens’ upper-class, he notes a distinct difference in the nature of Socrates’ homoeroticism than was standard at the time. First, by explaining that, based upon “available evidence,” there was never any sexual activity between Socrates and one of his young students Alcibiades stating that “[Socrates] refused to consummate his affair with Alcibiades.”<sup>36</sup> He then goes on to say further that:

Socrates was a non-ordinary homoerotic lover in another sense, too. In the normal course of Athenian events, the older partner pursued the younger. But Socrates flirted intellectually with young men, allowing them to glimpse what *he* had to offer, in order to make them attracted to him and want to spend time with him. He was trying to make them consummate a lifelong affair with philosophy, not with himself; he strongly emphasized the educational function of such relationships, to the exclusion, more or less, of the physical side. He exploited the homoerotic aspect of upper-class Athenian society for his own educational purposes.<sup>37</sup>

Waterfield uses Socrates’ relationship with his student, to suggest that the charge of corrupting the youth may have gone deeper than is traditionally thought. Although he is quick to note that we have no reason to believe that Socrates ever engaged in sexual intercourse with any of his students, his method of attracting young men may still have

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<sup>35</sup> Waterfield, Robin. *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009. p 55.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p. 57

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

been perceived as a danger.<sup>38</sup> In consideration of the fact that Socrates chose to forego work to devote his days to philosophizing and that he was therefore poor, coupled with the fact that Athenian pederasty was largely an “upper-class phenomenon” in which sexual gratification was exchanged for “patronage,” the fact that well-to-do young men were spending their days with the likes of Socrates may have been perceived as a social and therefore political danger to the youths.<sup>39</sup> As far as society is concerned, Socrates has nothing to offer these young men in return for their services.<sup>40</sup>

Because he was known to consort with the “lower sort,” Socrates may have been corrupting the reputation of not only the boys, but that of their families.<sup>41</sup> And insofar as pederasty was viewed as an “upper-class phenomenon” the fact that Socrates was enticing the young men in a flirtatious manner, via his philosophy, but not actually engaging in sexual activity was a way in which to keep the boys coming back for more, so to speak.<sup>42</sup> The fact that they did continue to associate and follow Socrates coupled with the fact that the upper-class viewed Socrates in a negative light may have been seen as a form of politically corrupting the youth. Waterfield’s approach to Socrates’ charge of corrupting the youth admittedly can in no way be a certainty.<sup>43</sup> Though, according to him, it still nevertheless appears to be a more historically accurate interpretation of the charges than generally thought.<sup>44</sup> Because of Athens’ highly stratified society associating with Socrates was threatening to their social status as well as that of their families. Again

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid 57

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 55,56,57,58

<sup>41</sup> Hughes, Bettany. *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Waterfield, Why Socrates Died, 56

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 57

<sup>44</sup> Ibid ,58

to a certain degree, everything about Socrates is speculative. However, what lends credence to Waterfield's claims is his use of historical context.

To avoid overgeneralizing Waterfield's position and approach to Socrates as *the* historical position, we should take the time to examine how the historian can make use of the philosophical Socrates in such a way that may lend credence to the philosopher's popular image. To do this we will turn to Bettany Hughes' book, *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life*. What is most interesting about Hughes' work is that she shows us what ancient Athenian life may have looked like from the perspective of Socrates the citizen-philosopher. Hughes does this by placing the philosopher within the historical context of fifth-century BCE Athens in such a way that we are able to see life in the city as Socrates the Athenian citizen may have seen it. She notes in her introduction that her "ambition is very simple: to re-enter the streets of Athens in real time."<sup>45</sup> In her book Hughes confronts the problems inherent to historical research by using ancient Athens as a backdrop in an attempt to give us a first person perspective of the real Socrates. While she is well aware of the problems regarding the lack of primary research, Hughes nevertheless tries to piece together an image of what the historical Socrates' may have experienced in everyday life. It is important to point out that although she makes use of the philosophical image of Socrates, she makes sure to state that she is an historian and therefore does not attempt to create a work which seeks to understand Socrates the philosopher or his philosophy. Rather, her goal was to create what she referred to as a "topographical map of the man."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hughes, Bettany. 2010, p. xxii

<sup>46</sup> Ibid xxii

Hughes is able to do this by alternating between the historically accurate setting of ancient Athens and the possible Socratic perspective. For example, when informing the reader of his military experience as a foot soldier in the Peloponnesian War, Hughes offers an illustration depicting how the real Socrates may have been during the battle's aftermath. In light of the fact that we know Socrates served in the Athenian military, she constructs a narrative about Socrates' possible thoughts as he took in the horrors of war in such a way that is in line with his popular image. Hughes is able to incorporate the popularized image of Socrates into the historic war by posing the same questions Socrates may have asked himself when taking in the horrors of war.

Perhaps an excerpt would do more justice here:

After seven days it is difficult to move decomposing bodies from one place to another, but at Delion the bodies had now lain, unburied, for two and a half weeks. As Socrates looks at the mold blooming on the skin of these once-humans, did he wonder whether this was all there was? Whether all that glittering chat, those beautifully crafted words and manufactured things back in Athens, whether it all came down to that gamey, dropping flesh?<sup>47</sup>

Although the narrative is purely speculative, this passage is nonetheless significant insofar as it places Socrates in the midst of what is no doubt a pivotal point in his life. This is important because we often do not think of Socrates the person going into the belly of war; rather, we simply associate a two-thousand-year-old name with a two-thousand-year-old fact. But what Hughes does in this particular passage is put into perspective how life experiences such as war can affect the way in which a person comes to know and view the world from that point forward. Thus, we are shown how the historical figure may have grown into the philosopher we so often think of today. More importantly, this also provides us with an historically plausible answer to our questions

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid p. 209

concerning the validity of Socrates the philosopher's reputation. As with any reputation there is always the element of exaggeration; Hughes' methodological approach to Socratic research nevertheless allows the philosophical Socrates to regain his humanity by providing an historically viable foundation to support his popular reputation rather than reducing him to nothing more than a mouthpiece for his former students. Though the answers to our questions have been lost to time, in this scenario Hughes' makes the philosophical Socrates an historical possibility by illustrating the ways in which his experiences in war may have compelled him to begin a life of questioning. As mentioned, unlike Waterfield, Hughes embraces the long-established 'popular' perception of the philosophical Socrates. In doing so she weaves together the two versions of Socrates that have for so long been divorced. She is able to do this by premising her book upon one very important yet often overlooked point: "Plato's memory matters."<sup>48</sup> Hughes writes that:

Socrates never wrote anything down, because as he went about his philosophical business on the streets of fifth-century Athens, he believed in the honesty of joint-witnessing. For Plato to give Socrates a living voice in dialogue was as close as he could get to the original 'Socratic' experience. The detail in Plato's work is conspicuous. We hear the species of trees that shade Socrates, the birds he hears sing, the discomfort of the wooden benches he lies upon, the shoemakers hiccups he cures. If this detail were utterly inappropriate, or fanciful, Plato would have been laughed out of the Academy he set up...and out of history.<sup>49</sup>

This brings us to the end of our introduction to the historian's approach to Socratic research. Thus far we have explained the academic rift between the philosophical and historical divide in Socratic scholarship known as the "The Problem of Socrates." Such a problem stems from the lack of original evidence available to support or refute the popular image of Socrates as a wise, upright, and prudent philosopher, an

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid p. xxiv

<sup>49</sup> Ibid



image that has, by and large, come to be taken as truth. We have also outlined two specific ways in which the historian approaches the problem of the historical Socrates. First, we noted how historian Robin Waterfield addressed the Socratic Problem. In an article Waterfield gives a harsh critique of Socrates' "acquired saintly aura" by divorcing fact from fiction.<sup>50</sup> He maintains that what survives of Socrates through the works of his student Plato is virtually useless as both "were not committed to factual reporting" attributing his statements to the inconsistencies that exist across the two authors' texts. Next, we examined Waterfield's book in which he tackles the conflicting versions of Socrates by chipping away at the myth of the famous philosopher. We said that the most significant thing about Waterfield's book is that he examines Socrates through his relationship with Alcibiades.

By looking at Alcibiades, Waterfield was able to piece together an argument which suggests that Socrates' unconventional homoeroticism may have played a larger part in his being charged on the grounds of corrupting the youth. In this way, Waterfield is able to contextualize Socrates' charges within the setting of Athenian Society. That is not for us to say, however, that the philosopher's traditional take on Socrates' charge of corruption is not political in nature, but rather to note that, according to Waterfield, we should be thinking about Socrates' charges in terms of Athens as opposed to the philosophical 'city' at large. In doing so, we are better able to root Socrates in historical reality.

Our delineation of the various methods in which historians have illustrated the difficulties associated with the Socratic. Learning to separate and differentiate between what is taken to be fact from that of speculation is of the utmost importance if we are to

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<sup>50</sup> Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died*, 29

understand true nature of the man. In the introduction of her book Bettany Hughes goes so far as to say that “we think the way we do because Socrates thought the way he did.”<sup>51</sup> Socrates serves as the main character in many of the works that are typically considered as foundational to Western thought, namely Plato’s *Republic*. And insofar as these texts are considered to be foundational in Western thought it is important that we make some sort of effort to know the truth about Socrates in an attempt to attain a greater understanding of these texts.

### Historical Athens

If ancient Greece is the genesis of western civilization, Athens was the epicenter of the cultural revolution. Typically, when speaking of ancient Greece’s impact on the modern world we are referencing Athenian influence. The city was mother to some of the greatest minds in history. Twenty-five hundred years ago it was their ideas which laid the very foundations that continue to shape our thinking. Their ideas serve as the intellectual benchmark for western civilization. Athenians gave birth to our concepts of education, philosophy, art, and politics. For example, our notion of the university originated in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens with Plato’s Academy. They were the first to systematically study mathematics using the logic of deduction and their theorems are still taught in classrooms today.<sup>52</sup> Because of them we get our modern movie industry, as they were also first to incorporate actors in storytelling thus inventing theater.<sup>53</sup> Most important, it is the Athenians who have shaped our ideas about the proper role of government, the power it should wield, who should hold said power, and how it should be used.

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<sup>51</sup>Hughes, Bettany. *The Hemlock Cup*, xvii

<sup>52</sup>Aristophanes, Alan H. Sommerstein, Aristophanes, Arisophanes, and Aristophanes. *Lysistrata and Other Plays*. London: Penguin, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Their system of government lives on today in modern democratic regimes, as do their political questions and concerns regarding topics like citizenship and justice. We still pose the very same political questions about the proper role of government, a citizen's appropriate role within the political community, and laws. Questions like: is it okay for one to rebel against their state when its laws or actions are seen as unjust? If so, when, how, and to what extent should this be done? How much should a government know about a private matters of its citizens? Conversely, how much should citizens know about the affairs of their government? Most importantly, if known, should a regime's information be made public? If so when, where, how, and why?

The most important of the Greek cities, Athens was at its height during the fifth century BCE under the rule of Pericles.<sup>54</sup> Coming to power in 461, he is responsible for helping to create the city remembered today.<sup>55</sup> This was known as Athens' Golden Age. It is the time in which art and philosophy flourished within the city's walls and this is the Athens of which we speak. To that end, there is very little need to extend our discussion beyond the scope of Socrates' Athens. Unless otherwise noted, when referencing the city, this project speaks to the period during the fifth-century BCE.

For the most part, the cities comprising ancient Greece remained independent of each other sharing only their language and religion.<sup>56</sup> Like all cities, Athens was economically independent, culturally distinct, and "self-governing."<sup>57</sup> At its height the city was the largest, wealthiest, and most "diverse" in all of ancient Greece.<sup>58</sup> At the heart of Athens was the Piraeus. This was a major port which played a significant role in

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<sup>54</sup> Hansen, Mogens Herman. *The Athenian Democracy in the age of Demosthenes: structure, principles, and ideology*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1991, 55.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid,57

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

differentiating Athens from the other Greek states with respect to its populace, culture, and economy.<sup>59</sup> Its economic success is attributed to its location near the Piraeus is its economic success.<sup>60</sup>

During its heyday Athens enjoyed the strongest economy in Greece.<sup>61</sup> Athenians relied heavily on the importation and exportation of goods as a major source of revenue.<sup>62</sup> Also, because of its location near a major port it was the only Greek city with an urban area.<sup>63</sup> During this time, the city boasted the largest population in Greece. While the vast majority of polies were comprised of about “1,000” citizens, at the city’s height its citizenry is estimated to have been “between 30,000- 60,000” inhabitants.<sup>64</sup> This aided in creating a culturally diverse environment which profoundly impacted ancient Athens by exposing its inhabitants to an assortment of people with a variety of different backgrounds and beliefs.<sup>65</sup> Like most port towns throughout history, as people came and went so too did their beliefs and customs. Naturally, this had an effect on the polity’s cultural atmosphere. Because of trade there was a constant influx of people from different parts of the world settling in the city. Out of this grew the rich and diverse public arena that came to define ancient Athens. Against the backdrop of diverse values, customs, and beliefs, Athenian culture grew out of a conglomeration of disparate backgrounds effectively making Athens the cultural hub of ancient Greece.<sup>66</sup>

Most importantly, the city stood alone in its system of government. Though most of the polies’ were oligarchical in nature, Athens invented and instituted a new form of

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<sup>59</sup> Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *The Ancient Greeks: History and Culture from Archaic Times to the Death of Alexander*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2013, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, pg 55.

<sup>65</sup> Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *The Ancient Greeks*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

government.<sup>67</sup> Coming from the word *demos*, the power to govern was placed directly in the hands of Athenian citizens.<sup>68</sup> This was the first time that the people had a say in the goings on of their government.<sup>69</sup> Historically, this set a new precedent in the way in which political communities were governed. Usually, people had no say in the governing process and were subject to some form of monarchical or dictatorial regime.<sup>70</sup> However, Athenian citizens were granted a variety of benefits not usually afforded to peoples of a political community. For example, an Athenian citizen had the right to hold office if they were over the age of 30 they were also able to voice their opinion by voting.<sup>71</sup> By casting a vote in favor or opposition to a proposed piece of legislation, a citizen also had a say in the law making process.

By and large these laws generally dealt with the public realm rather than the private.<sup>72</sup> Distinguishing between the public and private was typical in ancient Athens when it came to the law.<sup>73</sup> There is a sharp distinction between our contemporary definition of these terms and that of fifth-century Athens.<sup>74</sup> The Athenian conception of the public concerned affairs of the government and issues that dealt with the polis and the people as a whole.<sup>75</sup> This includes laws, taxes, electing officials, and more. There was also the private sphere. The Athenian private sphere had a very different meaning than it does today. It was not only concerned with one's home but individual relationships as well.<sup>76</sup> That is, the social sphere was considered the private sphere even if out in

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<sup>67</sup> Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, 57.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 69, 73.

<sup>69</sup> Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *The Ancient Greeks*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>71</sup> Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, 57

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid* 79.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid* 80.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid* 79.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* 80.

public.<sup>77</sup> However, there were a few instances in which the state govern private conduct. For example, “A citizen could...be punished...if he failed in he squandered his ancestral inheritance or failed in his duties towards his parents.”<sup>78</sup>

For all its glory and advancement, Athens was not without its problems. While praiseworthy in its achievements, like any other society it had its shortcomings. From the perspective of the contemporary liberal democratic state, Athens was oppressive in certain areas such as citizenship and its hierarchical social system. For example, inhabiting Athens did not necessarily mean one was a citizen of the city. In fact, the vast majority of Athenian residents were not citizens.<sup>79</sup> Athens was comprised of various collective groups which denoted one’s social status.<sup>80</sup> These included “citizens, metics, foreigners, slaves, juveniles, and women.”<sup>81</sup> To be a citizen of the Athenian state was to be of the “privileged order.”<sup>82</sup> Membership was reserved for a small minority of individuals. Unsurprisingly, this status was not easily attained. To gain citizenship one had to be a male, at least 18 years of age, and the title was almost always inherited.<sup>83</sup> If one were a member of the metic class or a foreigner this meant that they were free working individuals; however, they were not granted the same the privileges and legal protections as a citizen.<sup>84</sup> On the lowest rung of the male social ladder were the slaves. This group was only afforded the right of protection from being killed out of “malice.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Ibid 101.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid 94.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid 86.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

Though, in some rare instances citizenship could be acquired through a “naturalization” process, although this was “reserved for special circumstances and favored people.”<sup>86</sup>

While Athenian citizenship seems synonymous with wealth, this was not necessarily the case in ancient Athens. It is important to point out that the wealth of citizens “varied enormously, but no one...was poor.”<sup>87</sup> Though these groups were segregated along class lines, they worked “alongside” one another in everyday life.<sup>88</sup> Regardless of wealth, as legally recognized citizens, this meant that they were entitled to political rights. Suffice it to say, then, that the fact that citizens alone possessed political power “reduced the range of views represented” in government through disenfranchising a majority of those living in the city.<sup>89</sup>

Athenian citizenship requirements “systematically” and automatically excluded a significant portion of the population from the political process.<sup>90</sup> For example, women were inherently barred from ever acquiring citizenship and thus acquiring a political voice due to gender restrictions. When it came to the rights associated with citizenship, women were on equal footing with juveniles.<sup>91</sup> Among other things, they were prevented from holding public office and voting, advantages that went along with being an Athenian citizen. Although they called Athens home, they were not citizens in the eyes of the polis. Rather, they were simply inhabitants. They were legally recognized as

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid 94.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid 87; Cf Osborne, Robin. *Athens and Athenian Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 32.

<sup>88</sup> Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, 88.

<sup>89</sup> Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy*, 32

<sup>90</sup> Evans, Nancy. *Civic Rites Democracy and Religion in Ancient Athens*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, 108.

<sup>91</sup> Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy*, 33

members of the community only insofar as they could pass their Athenian lineage on to a son who could later become a citizen.<sup>92</sup>

It is no secret that women in ancient Athens were prevented from doing most things outside of the home. As one would expect, the public sphere was for the men and “the private (domestic) sphere” was for women.<sup>93</sup> Men enjoyed basic freedoms like moving about the city freely. Women, on the other hand, did not. Like many societies throughout history, a great deal of their life was spent inside the home. A women’s primary role was homemaker.<sup>94</sup> If one is to properly oversee her responsibilities she need not venture too far outside the confines of the space, especially “the good and responsible citizen wife.”<sup>95</sup> While men’s civic participation took place in the public political sphere, women’s came in the form of “making textiles.”<sup>96</sup>

Girls and women prepare the wool, spun it and toiled at the loom...[T]he good and responsible wife would also managed household slaves and servants, and oversaw the mundane tasks of housekeeping, childcare, shopping and food preparation. Women kept the household running smoothly, while the men met together and managed the public realm of the *polis*.<sup>97</sup>

However, women were not confined indoors entirely. While they did not have as much liberty as men, they were able to move about in the public sphere sometimes. A women’s movement outside the home was limited in that it was generally for task related purposes. These included going to the drinking fountain and getting goods from the market.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, each economic class appeared to have had social presence outside the home, though, how much appears to depend upon one’s social class. Most wealthy or

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<sup>92</sup> Evans, *Civic Rites*, 110.

<sup>93</sup> Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*,

<sup>94</sup> Evans, *Civic Rites*, 106.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 107

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>98</sup> Rotroff, Susan I., and Robert Lamberton. *Women in the Athenian Agora*. Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2006, 10.



“proper” Athenian women would not be seen in public and probably had their slave(s) attend to most their needs outside of the home.<sup>99</sup> At any rate, while they may typically have been of lower economic status, it is clear that to some degree women were present in the Athenian public.<sup>100</sup> Those who fell into this category made a living by:

Peddl[ing] salt, flour, honey, figs, fruits and vegetables, sesame, and clothing, and are particularly conspicuous as sellers of religious and luxury goods and items of personal adornment: incense, perfume, purple dye, wreaths, and ribbons.<sup>101</sup>

For all intents and purposes, women in ancient Athens were held in low regard. Inherently prevented from acquiring the citizenship, holding political office, and gaining political representation, women in Athenian society were subject completely to male control. For example, if a legal situation arose a women’s husband or closest male relative acted on her behalf.<sup>102</sup> Further highlighting her juvenile status and male subjugation was the fact that she could legally own property, but it was completely controlled financially either her husband or a close male relative.<sup>103</sup> Though, this privilege was granted via “inheritance laws.”<sup>104</sup> If she did acquire wealth or property through such means it was usually because a woman was the only familial beneficiary.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, this provided a way in which to keep wealth within a family.<sup>106</sup>

The lives of Athenian women differed greatly from those of their male counterparts as well as women in other Greek cities.<sup>107</sup> When compared, “[c]lassical Athens was more repressive in its dealings with women than other Greek cities...”<sup>108</sup> For

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Rotloff and Lamberton, *Women in the Athenian Agora*, 11

<sup>102</sup> Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *The Ancient Greeks*, 144

<sup>103</sup> Rotloff and Lamberton, *Women in the Athenian Agora*, 13

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy*, 35

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 254

example, Spartan women, were viewed as important citizens within their society.<sup>109</sup> Because all males were fully occupied with the military until the age of 30, Spartan women enjoy a great deal of freedom in comparison to women of Athens.<sup>110</sup> That is, “they were free from male domination” as well as permitted to “control property.”<sup>111</sup> This is certainly a far cry from the Athenian polity which is seen as politically advanced for its time.

Though, during the fifth-century BCE, under the rule of Pericles, the status of Athenian women was “slightly elevated around the year 450.”<sup>112</sup> Because Pericles’ new law tightened the requirements for citizen status, citizenship was now both patrilineal and matrilineal.<sup>113</sup> Although they did not gain citizenship which allotted them the same benefits as men, women, “when it came to civic rights celebrating fertility, motherhood, and the family, had a share in the common life of the *polis*.”<sup>114</sup> This gave women a certain element of “power” in that “the stability of Athenian society rested on the security of and trustworthiness of its female citizens.”<sup>115</sup> Still, though they were not ‘citizens’. Aside from this, a woman yielded virtually no power politically or otherwise. They were regarded as Athenian only insofar as their familial lineage was Athenian. Though, Josine Blok argues “that women did have citizen status in ancient Athens but not political rights.”<sup>116</sup> I challenge that assumption. Citizenship can be understood as a:

package of rights and duties that set citizens apart from noncitizens...[I]t is [a] notion that becomes relevant only when it conveys a benefit that some people receive and others do not.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *The Ancient Greeks*,

<sup>110</sup> Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *The Ancient Greeks*, 131.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

<sup>112</sup> Evans, *Civic Rites*, 108

<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy*, 266

<sup>117</sup> Frost, J. Frank, pg 45

Citizenship denotes the lawful recognition political privileges and protections. Besides from military protection and limited inheritance rights, women were granted no rights in ancient Athens. According to both of the above definitions, Athenian women were anything but citizens. They were neither granted rights nor allowed to partake in administering justice. As mentioned above, only men were afforded the political opportunities associated with citizenship. Women were completely excluded from the public (i.e. political) community. Men, not women, could hold office, have a say in the vote, or fully own property. Thus, Women did not hold citizenship so much as their reproductive organs.

These historical practices are a product of a deeply ingrained society outlook. The fact that Athens was extremely divided along gender and class lines helps put into perspective the city and its peoples' idea concerning the nature of political justice. For Athenians this included gender discrimination, slavery, a social caste system, and legal disenfranchisement. That these social divisions were legally sanctioned and socially accepted without challenge shows that Athenians embraced these social injustices—even if only through lawful compliance. To get a better understanding of the underlying thoughts regarding these social practices we turn to Aristotle. Aristotelian theory is helpful in two ways: 1) it gives insight into the ancient Athenian idea of who and what a citizen was and 2) it provides us with a theoretical perception from which we can begin to analyze Socrates' citizenship.

#### Theoretical Concept of Citizenship

The exact meaning of citizen is difficult to pinpoint. Because of its innumerable interpretations across time and civilizations, from the political theorist's perspective, it is

impossible to accurately contextualize. Nevertheless, in his *Politics*, Aristotle defines citizen as one “who shares in the administration of justice and in the holding of office.”<sup>118</sup> From this we can gather two things. First, his definition applies to those within a democratic regime. That is, those political societies in which a people have a say in the governing process either by voting or by sitting in public office. Second, only those who take part in the governing process are citizens. What can be concluded from this definition is that citizenship is associated with political independence.<sup>119</sup> In this case, Aristotle’s citizen is independent to rule himself.<sup>120</sup> From this we can gather that the notion of citizenship was exclusionary.<sup>121</sup> That is, there is an inherent ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality bound up within this concept. In a political community the ‘us’ is equivalent to those included in the governing process while the ‘them’ are those excluded from this process. Simply put, intrinsic to concept of citizenship is the practice of ‘political othering’. For various reasons, there is a sociopolitical identity differentiation between the politically included ‘us’ and the alienated ‘other.’

This may be fine in a single political community in which every member of the polity is regarded as a citizen. In this case each would have an opportunity to participate in the governing process and hold office. However, communities in which particular inhabitants do not retain the status of citizen there is a “heirarchi[cal]” system of “subordination and domination.”<sup>122</sup> In other words, there are the ruled and the rulers.

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<sup>118</sup> Page 93

<sup>119</sup> Rawls, 23

<sup>120</sup> I use the masculine form here from reasons that will be explained later.

<sup>121</sup> Osborne, Athens and Athenian Democracy, 33

<sup>122</sup> Steedman, Marek D. *Jim Crow Citizenship: Liberalism and the Southern Defense of Racial Hierarchy*. New York: Routledge, 2011 3. In his book Steedman speaks about the subordination and domination with respect to the exclusionary practices of racialized citizenship within the United States. Here, I apply his idea to inherent problems associated with Athenian citizenship, especially regarding women and slaves.

Within a democratic system those who rule are the citizens and those who are ruled are the alienated 'other.'<sup>123</sup>

Since a citizen cannot exist without a political community we must also take a look at Aristotle's idea of the city. He explains that these are naturally occurring entities insofar as they result from humanity's desire to live the good (or happy) life.<sup>124</sup> Aristotle writes that the attainment of such is predicated upon one having leisure time to so seek out that which makes them happy.<sup>125</sup> However, this requires one to be free from the demands of day to day life. Outside of the political society, fully caring for the needs that ensure one's survival like protection, making clothes, or cultivating, gathering, and preparing food make seeking out happiness is impossible in that it demands more time and attention than any one person can devote. Furthermore, since capabilities differ from person to person, the skills necessary for successfully attending to such obligations inherently prevent any individual from being able to provide fully for themselves. Thus, no one person can completely and adequately care for all of their needs all of the time.

Aristotle's explanation highlights a natural interdependency among humans. In doing so, it reveals that certain duties and responsibilities go along with being a citizen. To maintain the political community one must contribute their time and skills. Since one may lack the ability to make clothes or cultivate the land, others may be more qualified to complete those tasks successfully thereby appropriately attending to the needs of the other. It also frees the individual from such responsibilities allowing them to provide

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<sup>123</sup> Now, one could argue that this is not all that different from contemporary United States. Many people inhabit the country and do much of the same things as citizens such as work and pay taxes, but are nonetheless politically alienated from the governing process. While this is true, and certainly the subject of many current political debates it is not the concern of the present study. Rather, we are concerned here with the exclusionary practices of ancient Athenian citizenship.

<sup>124</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 37.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 217

services for which they are more qualified and also meet the needs of another as well thus freeing them up to pursue their own interests. This ensures, at some level, that everyone is granted leisure time and therefore has an opportunity to live the good life. Thus, we can conclude that the end of the political community is happiness.

In light of this we can expand upon the aforementioned definition of citizen. This title not only applies to one who partakes in administering justice or holding public office via legally prescribed privileges (or rights) by virtue of being a lawfully recognized member of a political society. A citizen is also one who assists in maintaining the polity and helping it achieve its end. Someone who assists in helping every member of the political community live the good life.

Since we are concerned with what distinguishes one as a good or bad citizen, a basic working knowledge of these ideas is key to defending Socrates' civic character. Outlining Aristotle's political theory has given us insight into ancient Athenian ideas concerning what a citizen was and meant during Socrates' time. It has also helped us understand rights, duties, and responsibilities associated with citizenship. Using Aristotle's political philosophy to determine what was expected of a citizen during Socrates' life time this allows us to create an image of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian idea of a citizen and their idea regarding the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship. This will help later in our discussion when we analyze Socrates' civic behavior. We will be able to examine his actions within the context of the ancient Athenian idea of citizenship.

### Erotic Politics

In order to begin our examination of Socratic civic virtue we must first define some fundamental concepts in order to build the framework for our project. In the next

section we will look at the nature of human longing and how it relates to the political. Because philosophy is the love of wisdom, understanding the nature of this love is vital for the project. As the philosopher, having a working knowledge of Socrates' love will help us we examine his civic behavior. Second, we need to understand the ancient Athenian notion of citizenship. This political concept is necessary for examining the historical Socrates within the context of his city.

At the heart of philosophy lies human desire to know the unknown and attain that which is unattainable. This sense of longing originates as a result of incompleteness. The dissatisfaction with immediate reality compels us to extend our search for truth beyond the bounds of our reality into what Plato describes as a nonmaterial realm of perfection.<sup>126</sup> However, our limited existence confines our ability to know and understand within the bounds of our finite reality. That is, humanity experiences an anguish within its concrete existence which compels us to move beyond the self in an attempt to seek relief from one's present conscious state. This subsequently thrusts us into a vicious cycle constantly compelling us to pursue truth in spite of our inability to attain it. Because we see this illustrated across time, civilizations, cultures, languages, and religions, this suggests that existential discontentment is a fundamental feature sewed into the nature of humanity. Substantiating these claims are the thoughts of a myriad of philosophers, writers, and great thinkers spanning history.<sup>127</sup> As Boethius' Lady Philosophy surmises "Man's condition produces anxiety; it never proves wholly satisfactory..."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Laehn, "Eros," 1.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid

<sup>128</sup> Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Trans. Scott Goins and Barbara H. Wyman. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012. p. 42.

This stems from the desire to understand one's self and the nature of one's reality. Though, we are consciously aware of our concrete existence we nevertheless remain ignorant of our purpose or the origin of our being. As such, our conscious ignorance causes a spiritual anxiousness within the soul which arises out of the uncertainty of one's reality.<sup>129</sup> According to Eric Voegelin humans choose to embark upon a philosophical journey toward truth in order to calm this internal discontentment.<sup>130</sup> He explains that anxiousness begins to overwhelm the human psyche so much so that it becomes expressed in the form of questioning and answering.<sup>131</sup>

To begin, we must ask: What is the task of philosophy? The task of philosophy is to gain greater insight into higher, better, and true forms of truth. It seeks to inform the lover of wisdom about the truth concerning the true reality. Insofar as the soul longs for the truth of all things it must necessarily undertake the task of philosophy in order to gain the wisdom and quell the unrest within our soul. Philosophizing serves as something of a spiritual catharsis as it rids the spirit of anxiety and replaces opinions with truth. By embarking upon a philosophical journey we are attempting to discover truth that may provide us with a greater understanding of the reality in which we exist. Therefore the task of philosophy is to settle the soul's anxiety about that which it does not know. Thus, for Socrates as the philosopher, the lover of wisdom, it becomes his foremost aim to seek out truth pertaining to the structure of his reality to settle his soul's angst about his ignorance concerning the structure and the nature of his reality.

The type of desire of which this project speaks goes beyond its contemporary meaning. It refers to a particular type of yearning that comes from deep within the soul.

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<sup>129</sup> Voegelin, Eric, and Gerhart Niemeyer. *Anamnesis*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990, 97.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 94

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 97



It is illustrative of humanity's attempt to obtain personal "wholeness" and self "unification" as a result of conscious ignorance regarding the nature of their existence.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, in this project desire, longing, and love adhere to the ancient Greek understanding of such emotions. Considering the scope and aim of this investigation it is only logically that we examine Socrates' desire for truth within the context he and his fellow Athenians understood these emotions. Moreover, given that we are concerned with the Platonic Socrates having a firm grasp of the ancient Greek conception of desire also provides the proper context for understanding Plato'

Doing so requires that we discuss the various understandings and terms the ancient Greeks employed to distinguish between the different forms of desire which humans experience: (1) *agape* – brotherly love, the love of God for man and man for God; (2) *philia* - friendly love, affection, or friendship; (3) *eros* – love of thing; desire; or passionate joy.<sup>133</sup> Because Socrates' desire for truth is what brought him fame and lies at the core of his citizenship, the following discussion focuses on erotic love or *eros*.

Looking to the Platonic discussion about the soul helps clarify the philosopher's love in comparison to that of others. It also allows us to differentiate those with the best soul from those with the worst souls. For this we now turn to Plato's erotic dialogues the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.

In the *Symposium* Plato defines love, in general, as a desire to "possess" that which we lack.<sup>134</sup> He equates feeling with madness or *mania* in the *Phaedrus* Plato writing that erotic longing is an: "...irrational desire which overcomes the opinion that

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<sup>132</sup> Cooper, Laurence D. *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche The Politics of Infinity*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008 ,41.

<sup>133</sup> Liddell and Scotts. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*. 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>134</sup> Plato. *The Symposium*. Trans. M. C. Howatson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 201b.

prompts to right conduct and pursues the enjoyment of beauty, acquiring fresh strength from other desires akin to it for an assault on carnal beauty-that very strength provides its name, it is the power called love.”<sup>135</sup>

Perhaps acontemporary definitions will offer further clarification. According to Thomas Laehn:

*Eros* refers to the whole phenomenon of human longing, from its foundation in concrete, physiological desires to its most sublime expression in man’s longing to transcend the limits intrinsic to the human condition.<sup>136</sup>

The above definitions explain that, in a Platonic sense, our passions and desires to attain that which we lack transcend every facet of our lives; they are all-consuming; they can cloud our judgment; they have the ability to violently overtake us and place us in a state of madness; or they can make us weak in the knees as they thrust us into a state of absolute vulnerability. Thus, *eros* refers to the deepest and most powerful type of love one can experience, intimate love. It is that which shakes us at the very core of our being and engenders within our psyche a want so powerful that we long for nothing more than to satisfy this need. To understand just how powerful Platonic *eros* is, it may be helpful for us to think of the drug addict’s unrelenting gnawing desire to get their next fix: Scoring or the search become all-consuming and the attainment and physical indulgence brings on a state euphoria. Similarly, the philosopher’s insatiable appetite for truth is blinding. The need to know forces him into a state resembling that of the addict, which some argue can be just as detrimental is left unchecked.

Considering that *eros* refers to our most powerful urges and deepest desires, if left untutored, the erotic lust and the pursuit of self-satisfaction stands to threaten the ordered

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<sup>135</sup> Plato, W. C. Helmbold, and Wilson Gerson Rabinowitz. *Phaedrus*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1956. 17.

<sup>136</sup> Laehn, Thomas. (forthcoming) "Eros." In Michael T. Gibbons (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. ft. 48.

structure of the polis. Because, “[p]olitical philosophy [is] the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things [with] the knowledge of the nature of political things.”<sup>137</sup> Political philosophy, then, is the effort to discover and establish the most just regime by searching for answers to questions concerning the legitimacy of governing regimes; the proper extent of a governing regime’s authority; the bounds of individual liberty; the individual’s relationship to the state; morality and law; the essence of justice; and the basis for political order.<sup>138</sup> Consequently, this necessarily involves the questioning of the assumptions upon which institutions are built. Posing such questions within a public sphere is in effect politically subversive.

Forasmuch as it is the nature of the philosopher to pursue knowledge, and his quest leads to the discovery of certain truths, such truths may call into question the legitimacy of the regime’s authority. From this we can see how the public philosopher can be politically dangerous. The erotic desire of the philosopher “subverts political order by calling into question the texts upon which all regimes are based.”<sup>139</sup> That is, during his search for truth he questions and analyzes whether or not a regimes laws and practices are truly just. When the erotic desire of the philosopher is coupled the political there lay the potential to sway the citizenry and therefore renders a government vulnerable. It can be said that there is a tension which exists between philosophy and politics.

Having explored the philosophical and subversive aspects of human erotic longing we need to think of *eros*’ effect on the polity’s genesis. To help clarify the way in which *eros* spurs the create of political communities I have included a chart in which

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<sup>137</sup> Strauss, Leo. “What is Political Philosophy?” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3. August 1957. pp. 343-369. p. 344.

<sup>138</sup> Lawhead, 2000. p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Laehn, “Eros,” 21.

Laehn outlines what he refers to as the “five essential properties of *eros*.” This will be helpful when discussing the aim of the political community. It will also be helpful later when we examine Socrates’ civic behavior.

Table 1

*The Five Essential Properties of the Erotic Encounter*<sup>140</sup>

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Properties	Description
1. Transitive	Eros is always a desire for something...
2. Ironic	but eros is seldom a desire for its immediate object.
3. Unipolar	All eros is instead a yearning for that which is Beautiful in itself...
4. Anamnestic	a memory of which is triggered by the sight of a beautiful person or object within the world...
5. Metaxical	thereby locating the subject of the erotic experience in the intermediate position between the immanent and transcendent strata of reality.

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Let’s examine the erotic aspects of the political community by applying Laehn’s erotic properties to the genesis of the Aristotelian city. First, the transitivity of the city’s erotic aspect is its end, purpose, or ultimate objective. It is the thing which the city seeks to provide, a “political partnership” among the members of the political community which allows them to seek out the good in life.<sup>141</sup> Second, the irony of the Aristotelian city is that it seeks to provide a political partnership which only allows some of the city’s inhabitants to the opportunity to live the good life. Aristotle’s city is unequal and

<sup>140</sup> Thomas, Laehn R. "Politics and the Erotic: Socrates and the Subversiveness of Desire." Table 1.

<sup>141</sup> Aristotle, Carnes Lord. *The Politics*. Chicago [etc.]: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 35.

exclusionary. Despite helping the city achieve its end, he excludes women, slaves, and children from citizenship ultimately claiming that they are inferior beings.<sup>142</sup> He states that members of a political community must be able to participate in the deliberation process.<sup>143</sup> But Aristotle creates an unequal exclusionary city when he asserts that “The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority; the child has it but it’s incomplete.”<sup>144</sup>

Third, the unipolar nature of Aristotle’s city is that it ultimately seeks to achieve what Aristotle believes is the highest good or greatest virtue, living the happy life.<sup>145</sup> The fourth erotic property of the city is its anamnestic quality. Typically associated with a Platonic outlook on the beautiful, good, and true, it can also be applied to the polity’s attempt to seek out the leisurely life. The soul’s remembrance of true beauty, which will be discussed at greater length later, unconsciously evokes within one a spiritual need to recreate this experience within one’s concrete conscious reality.<sup>146</sup> Thus, the political community becomes the actualization of such an attempt and the good life becomes the substitute for true beauty. And finally, there is the city’s metaxical characteristic. That is to say that the polity’s conception of justice and thus the actualization of laws and sociopolitical practices reflecting such ideas are located somewhere between justice and injustice. Affirming this assertion is the progressive nature of justice with respect to a society’s changing customs, beliefs, and practices.

This shows that Athenian ideas about sociopolitical justice are flawed insofar as the fall short of exhibiting justice in its most complete form. Examining the historical

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 87

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 99

<sup>146</sup> Plato, M. C. Howatson, and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield. *Plato, the Symposium*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

practices and underlying theoretical perceptions of justice in ancient Athens—via Aristotle’s *Politics*—reveals an unequal and exclusionary sociopolitical landscape. The fact that women, slaves, and children were viewed as social inferior creatures and prohibited from political participation illustrates a scene not all that different from the Jim Crow atmosphere of the United States.

This is where Socrates’ civic practices come into play. Infamous for upsetting the status quo, he stood out from most other Athenian citizens in that he transcended all social spheres. Socrates indiscriminately conversed with everyone from slaves, prostitutes, and women to prominent young Athenian men—otherwise known as society’s “lower sorts” save for the last group.<sup>147</sup>

His actions show a blatant disregard for Athenian social customs of the time, bringing to light the issue of his citizenship. The open and indiscriminant manner in which Socrates conducted his search also challenges the polis’ conception of justice. In particular, he calls into questions the city’s beliefs regarding class, gender, and proper social roles. By ignoring the social standards of the day he undermines the values, customs, ideas, and laws incorporated into the polity’s perception of the ideal society.

But was Socrates a bad citizen for doing this? Generally we think of a bad citizen as someone who defies the state’s authority. However, when speaking of the public philosopher, these assumptions may be an oversimplification. This idea of a bad citizen needs to be examined more closely. This perception assumes that the state, its customs, beliefs, and traditions are always politically just. Though, as we all know from history, this is not the case. As I have illustrated at the outset of this project, one can look at the United States’ Civil Rights Movement and the Jim Crow South to see that the laws,

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<sup>147</sup> Hughes, *The Hemlock Cup*,

customs, and beliefs of a political community can be unjust and that those who challenge social norms and cause a country and its government to question itself can bring about change for the better. As such, I hold that Socrates' method of philosophizing seeks to undermine the discriminatory sociopolitical practices legally recognized within the Athenian regime.

## CHAPTER III

## LEO STRAUSS AND JEREMY MHIRE

In the previous section we examined the ways in which the historian deals with the Socratic problem. It was important to outline the historian's perspective regarding Socratic research because the political philosopher's view of Socrates is derived from the historical events surrounding his death. Therefore, in this section we will look at the political philosopher's approach to Socratic research. Unlike the historian, the political philosopher can and does make definitive claims about the nature of Socrates, his philosophy, and his civic behavior. As with our explanation of historical research, we will focus on two specific approaches to Socratic scholarship within political philosophy, specifically in regard to the public philosopher's civic nature. Just as in the field of history, there are simply too many angles from which the political philosopher is able to analyze Socratic civic behavior; therefore, in order to keep the discussion within the parameters of our study at large, we will outline the positions of those who stand in opposition to and in favor of using Socrates as the model of civic behavior, both as a citizen and philosopher. Much like the historians incorporated the popular philosophical reputation of the philosopher into their work in order to highlight historical truths about Socrates and ancient Athens, here we will illustrate the ways in which the two contrasting theoretical stances use history as a means of lending credence to their particular position regarding the nature of Socrates' political behavior.

As in history, the Socratic problem has created a divide among political philosophers. However, the split here deals in large part with Socrates' political relationship to his city as a citizen. Specifically, it is because of his philosophical pursuits that political philosophers stand divided over the historical Socrates' civic



nature. Again, the lack of historical evidence makes it hard to pin down the philosophical Socrates. The fact that Socrates' legacy lives on only through the works of his students is problematic for the Socratic philosopher as well in that there is no way in which to determine whether or not the author is putting forth his own philosophy or giving an accurate description of his former teacher's philosophy. The political theorist tackles this issue by placing the Socratic character(s), as depicted in the ancient texts mentioned above, against the backdrop of history in order to draw conclusions about the historical Socrates' civic character, philosophy, and the way in which he philosophized.

With very little evidence to inform us about the historical Socrates, turning to the work of his contemporaries for a glimpse of the real man is anything but avoidable. Obviously, no stranger to controversy, the mixed messages of those who knew him best has dragged out the debate concerning Socrates for over two millennia, leaving his reputation no better off in death than it was in life. Roughly 2500 years after his death, opinions remain divided over the nature of his civic behavior and his reputation as a philosopher.

Socratic advocates defend him as martyr while his adversaries regard him as a "political problem."<sup>148</sup> Those in the former camp see Socrates as the sacrificial lamb for justice and truth—someone who stood firm against the Athenian regime by refusing to abandon his quest for truth. Proponent Dana Villa credits Socratic conscientiousness as the most vital component in Socrates' fight against injustice. Others, like Dana Villa, attribute civil disobedience as the defining characteristic of Socratic citizenship.<sup>149</sup> Still, other proponents of Socrates assert that scholars like Villa fall short in their assessment of

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<sup>148</sup> Mhire, *Socrates As Citizen*, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Villa, Dana Richard. *Socratic Citizenship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Socratic citizenship by failing to “acknowledg[e]” the divine source underlying his conscientiousness as well as his civil disobedience.<sup>150</sup> David Corey argues that by negating Socrates’ divine influence, scholars like Villa are attempting to “explain...away” the “*super-natural*” dimension of Socratic civic behavior and therefore deny an essential element that is “*intricately* related to his peculiar practice of citizenship.”<sup>151</sup> While these scholars seem fragmented in their defenses of Socrates, they nevertheless converge upon one point: each Socratic advocate supports Socrates’ rebellion against the state. Whether a result of the secular self’s rational or a spiritual obligation, the aforementioned scholars choose to support Socrates insofar as their arguments seek to justify his stance against the Athenian regime. An action to which those in the latter camp stand strongly opposed.

Others contend that Socrates is a political danger, claiming that he can neither be a model philosopher nor a model citizen.<sup>152</sup> Insofar as Socratic philosophy requires a public dialogue about justice, which subsequently involves a discussion of injustice, it is predicated upon a critical analysis of the political. As such, an investigation into the nature of political justice and injustice necessarily calls into question the city itself. The view that Socratic philosophy is dangerous stems from its public nature. By publically philosophizing, Socrates compels the body politic to question the regime’s practices. Since calling the city into question has the potential to render the polis illegitimate in the mindset of the body-politic, Socratic philosophizing must be kept out of the public arena-

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<sup>150</sup> Corey, David D. "Socratic Citizenship: Delphic Oracle and Divine Sign." *The Review of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 201-228, 210.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>152</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 24.

-something Socrates refuses to do.<sup>153</sup> According to Jeremy Mhire, “The problem of Socrates, then, comes to light as the tension between philosophy and the community, with the implication that Socrates’ way of life is mortally dangerous to the community.”<sup>154</sup>

This position aligns with Leo Strauss’ view of Socrates.

Strauss maintained that Socrates’ method of philosophizing was personally and politically dangerous. Premising his argument on Socrates’ death, he held that philosophy is deemed politically dangerous as it poses a threat to the city’s traditions and customs. Because of the way in which Socrates chose to take his questions into the public sphere, Strauss asserts that Socrates threatened to unravel the tightly woven political society by exposing the true ignorance of those considered to be the wisest men in the city. For Strauss this is due to the inherent tension between philosophy and politics. He maintains “that opinion is the element of society” concluding that every society is held together by a collective of individuals sharing similar political opinions on topics such as the justice.<sup>155</sup>

Considering that philosophy is the search for truth, it “...attempt[s] to replace opinion” with truth.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, publically philosophizing necessarily calls into questions those opinions which serve as the binding element of a society. If those opinions which hold the fabric of society together are discovered to be untrue or fallacious, the political community will then cease to exist insofar as its foundational elements have been exposed as unfounded. Therefore, Socrates and his philosophy pose

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<sup>153</sup> Commings, Saxe, and Robert N. Linscott. "Apology Plato." In *Man and Man: The Social Philosophers*. New York: Random House, 1947.

<sup>154</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizens*, 49

<sup>155</sup> Strauss, Leo. “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing,” *Chicago Review*. Vol. 8, No. 1: 1954 pp. 64-75. p. 65.; Cf p. 64; Cf Mhire. 2006, p.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*

a threat to the city due to their likely undoing of the polity. Strauss explains his position writing that:

...[P]hilosophy or science is therefore the attempt to dissolve the element in which society breathes, and thus it endangers society. Hence philosophy or science must remain the preserve of a small minority, and philosophers or scientists must respect the opinions on which society rests.<sup>157</sup>

He maintains that the work of the philosopher must be done in a private setting, outside of the public eye, as to not upset the delicately constructed internal harmony of the polis. Therefore, in order to protect himself and the city the philosopher must practice his art in such a way that it is hidden from the plain view of the public at large. Since philosophy, insofar as it is the search for truth, necessarily involves the questioning of the foundational premises upon which institutions are built, it is often considered by many to be politically destabilizing. As such, the claim is made that the philosopher's "way of life is mortally dangerous to the community."<sup>158</sup> For each time he chooses to shed light upon the truths concerning the political, the philosopher places the structural order of the city in a state of vulnerability. Therefore, much like the tyrant, if the erotic longing of the philosopher is not tempered, his yearning to quell his questioning unrest will result in the downfall of the city.

According to Mhire, since the city "is...a community of citizens, linked together by a host of shared opinions..." it stands that the act of publically philosophizing within the walls of the city is politically destructive by virtue of philosophy's need to replace political opinions with political truths.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, illuminating the truths concerning the nature of the city's foundational premises has the capacity to undermine the internal harmony of the polis and thrust the city into a chaotic state of anarchy.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid

<sup>158</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 49.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 72.

One need only look to the example of Socrates as proof of the destructive outcome that arises when philosophy and the public mix. The Platonic dialogues appear to suggest an inherent tension between the philosopher and the “enthymematic foundations of political order.”<sup>160</sup> As Plato illustrates in the *Apology*, Socrates’ pursuit of truth turns the polis upside down as he is accused by the Athenian regime of denying the legitimacy of the city’s gods and corrupting its youth. Therefore, the political establishment comes into conflict with the very essences of what the philosopher *is*, in that his nature, and the nature of philosophy, are “fundamentally opposed to the nature” of the polis.<sup>161</sup> The Platonic Socrates substantiates this claim in the *Apology* stating:

For I am certain, O[h] men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. And do not be offended at my telling you the truth: for the truth is, that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one.<sup>162</sup>

In his defense to the Athenian judges, Socrates’ statement lends credence to the notion that the philosopher comes into direct conflict with the structural order of the polis. Firstly, Socrates acknowledges “the many laws and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state.” This leads one to presuppose that there is an element of corruption intrinsic to governing regimes. For example, the maintenance of a free and just society may require the governing body to act contrary to the very principles of freedom and justice upon which it claims to stand. This fundamentally challenges the premises and

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<sup>160</sup> Laehn, Thomas, 19; Voegelin, Eric. *Order and History*, 1978., 96. Strauss, *City and Man*, 1964. 111, 112.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, Strauss, 1964. 111, 112.

<sup>162</sup> Plato, *Man in Man: The Social Philosophers*. “Apology.” Ed. Saxe Commins and Robert Linscott. New York: Random House, 1947, 201.

framework of the democratic regime in that Socrates' attempt to move from ignorance to Truth causes him to undermine the authority of the city's cultural and political leaders.

If, for example, "every political order is built [up] on the ruins of the vanquished order that preceded it," the philosopher's quest for truth necessitates that he unmask the fallacious tales surrounding the genesis of the city.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, inasmuch as the city's origin may not actually rest upon divine providence, and instead may be founded upon principles which directly oppose true justice, delegitimizing the axiomatic elements that bind together the whole schematic structure of society in the mindset of the body-politic has the ultimate effect of delegitimizing the very existence of the city itself, and thus places the polis in a state of vulnerability, making it susceptible to those who believe, "the right of the stronger" may be the equivalent to the right to rule."<sup>164</sup> Above all, by questioning the very beliefs which weave together the fabric of society, the public-philosopher plants the seed of doubt within the mind of the public at large concerning the enthymematic foundations upon which the regime's authority rests. Since the state is dependent upon the people for its existence, if questions which challenge the legitimacy of the governing regime's authority are raised within the public sphere, the philosopher has the power to destroy the polis from the inside outward. For a well-ordered polity cannot exist without the people first legitimizing (in any fashion) its authority. Because of the philosopher's desire to satiate his questioning unrest it can be said, then, that he "...and the city tend away from one another," insofar as the philosopher's vocation comes into direct conflict with the state's need to maintain peace and stability within its

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<sup>163</sup> Laehn, Eros, 20. Those belonging to this school of thought contend that: "The good city [cannot exist] without a fundamental falsehood; it cannot exist in the element of truth, of nature." Strauss, *City and Man*, 1964, 102.

<sup>164</sup> Bloom, Allan, "Interpretive Essay." Plato, *The Republic of Plato, Second Edition*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1991. p. 366.

walls.<sup>165</sup> One may, therefore, conclude that because of the potential consequences associated with publically philosophizing, that philosophy, and thus the philosopher himself, pose the greatest threat to the polis.

Socrates' journey exposes the true ignorance of prominent Athenian men and, consequently, calls into question the city's laws and customs. By publically exposing the deficiencies of the polis it is said that Socrates is illustrating his political "imprudence," and, more particularly, the truth about his "civic character."<sup>166</sup> First, Socrates' failure to "kee[p] his philosophizing a secret" shows a complete lack of care for his own well-being by "expos[ing] himself and his wisdom to those who might use this wisdom for ill-gotten gains."<sup>167</sup> As mentioned above, calling into question the political and cultural ties which bind the city together may have the effect of eradicating the regime all together. By illuminating the ignorance of the city's political and cultural leaders, Socrates exposes the flaws in the societal foundation upon which the city is built. This has the subsequent effect, according to some, of placing the city in harm's way.

If, by exposing the truth behind the city's laws and customs, his philosophical pursuits cause the destruction of the polis, Socrates can no longer practice his art. This notion implies that the city is ontologically prior to philosophy in that neither philosophy nor the philosopher can exist without the city. Socrates' obligation as a citizen, therefore, should take precedence over his duty as a philosopher. Insofar as his philosophical quest revealed the truth about the knowledge possessed by the city's leaders, Socrates, whether intentionally or not, also calls into question the validity of the city's laws as well as the stories surrounding the origin of the polis; and in so doing, he not only places the city in

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<sup>165</sup> Strauss, 1964. p. 125; Cf 112.

<sup>166</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 42.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* 42, 50.

harm's way, but as made evident by his punishment, Socrates also places himself as well as his art in danger.<sup>168</sup> If we consider Socrates' physical state, a man weak and frail with age, it becomes clear that he is reliant upon the city's laws and military to protect him from those who may seek to cause him physical harm. Next, without the peace and stability provided by the city, Socrates cannot practice his art; he needs the safety, order, and above all, the students (e.g. citizens), which the city furnishes, in order to philosophize.<sup>169</sup> It can be said then that both Socrates and his art are necessarily dependent upon the protection offered by the city and by failing to care for the city Socrates fails to care for his own physical and spiritual well-being.

In accordance with this perception of Socrates, we can see from reasons adumbrated above that due to his civic imprudence Socrates cannot be the paradigmatic philosopher or citizen.<sup>170</sup> For the city ensures both the philosopher's existence as well as the existence of philosophy. And, as such, Socrates should place his duty as a good citizen above that of philosophy. Any 'good' philosopher would, therefore, understand the importance of the city and not bite the hand that feeds him, so to speak... Yet, Socrates fails to grasp this concept. He, like any other simple citizen, falls victim to his erotic desires. Socrates' need to satisfy his soul's yearning for truth causes him to act thoughtlessly and recklessly. "He fails to care for the city, the very thing providing him with the tools necessary to philosophize, first and foremost; thus proving that "a model of citizenship based on Socrates is at best a joke."<sup>171</sup>

Nowhere is this view of Socrates more solidified than in Aristophanes' play the *Clouds*. Aside from Socrates himself, no one else has given Socratic opponents

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<sup>168</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 338c.

<sup>169</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 42.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid 52

<sup>171</sup> Ibid



ammunition quite like the comic playwright Aristophanes. A well-known Athenian contemporary of Socrates, Aristophanes' play the *Clouds* gives us the only insight into the ways in which most Athenians viewed the historical man. For some scholars Aristophanes' play provides us with the best glimpse of the historical Socrates.<sup>172</sup> Although written to entertain, the comedy nevertheless plays off of commonly held sentiments about Socrates and from it we can gather information about the ways in which the real Socrates disregarded his city's needs in favor of satisfying his own desires.<sup>173</sup> What is more, unlike and Plato, Aristophanes is able to offer us a view of Socrates from the perception of an average Athenian citizen rather than that of a student.

In the *Clouds* Socrates serves as the butt of Aristophanes' jokes. The Aristophanic Socrates is more concerned with his the desire to learn than with every day Athenian life. More interested in the pursuit of knowledge than engaging in civic activities, Aristophanes' Socratic character would rather spend his days contemplating what most would regard as trivial or outright ridiculous. He depicts a Socrates that spends his days hidden away in his Thinkery confined to darkened rooms hypnotically staring "open-mouthed" at the ceiling while "research[ing]" the "moon" and examining insects.<sup>174</sup> Not only is this Aristophanes' not so subtle way of illustrating that Socrates spends his days ultimately doing 'nothing'; it is also a mockery of his intelligence. The assault on Socrates' character remains continuous throughout the play beginning with his introduction as Aristophanes has the brash and unwieldy Pheidippides refer to Socrates as a "quack" and ending with his desperate flee to safety."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid

<sup>173</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 55.

<sup>174</sup> Aristophanes, Alan H. Sommerstein. *Lysistrata and Other Plays*. London: Penguin, 2002, 170.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 100

While this seems innocent enough, such an illustration has strong political implications speaking to the nature of Socratic civic behavior. For example, by disconnecting from the outside world Socrates cuts himself off from society. In severing his societal ties he effectively absolves himself from responsibilities of everyday life thereby devoting all of his time to the pursuit of his own self interests.

If we adhere to Aristotle's assertion that the city grows out of the individual's desire to live the good life, we can understand just how important the citizen's civic participation is to the polity's health. According to Aristotle the city comes about everyone desires a life in which they are free to pursue happiness. He explains that the city is an organic entity which arises out of human desire for happiness. Because happiness and the pursuit thereof, are unique to the individual, the city is premised upon an interdependency of individuals. (Aristotle) However, since limitations are placed upon humans we are incapable of satisfying all of our needs upon which happiness is predicated. As a result, the city arises from a multitude of individuals, all differing in their skills, needs, and wants, in bringing about happiness by relying on others who may be able to satisfy their needs that we may not be able to satisfy on our own. (Aristotle)

Given the city's premise, then, it can be said that each inhabitant must participate in maintaining the city by donating both their time and knowledge if they are to benefit from citizenship. By virtue of one's natural desire to be happy and therefore inhabit the city, in an attempt to seek self-satisfaction, one is in turn obligated to participate in preserving the city by sacrificing leisure time and the pursuit of one's self-interests so that others may reap the benefits of living in the city as well. In exchange for contributing one's time the individual benefits not only from their contribution but that of other's as well. The existence of the city is thus dependent upon a reciprocity between its

citizens. By contributing leisure time and skills each person fulfills a particular, necessary, and equally vital role within society.

This has the effect of sustaining the polity by creating a balance that is mutually beneficial to all who wish to pursue the good life insofar as the contribution on behalf of each composite part constituting the whole provides everyone leisure time, at least some of the time. As a citizen, then, Athens rewards Socrates with the opportunity to pursue his own interests. And in exchange, Socrates is obligated to contribute to the good of the whole by assisting in caring for the polity. His civic responsibility comes as a result of his appetite for knowledge; because he chooses to live the life of a philosopher, Socrates obliges himself to the city.

If Socrates wants to satisfy his hunger for truth he must aid his fellow citizens in sustaining the very thing that allows him to practice his art. Without the city Socrates simply cannot pursue his desire for truth. It is the very thing enabling his ability to do so insofar as it provides him with the tools needed to engage in philosophical inquiry.<sup>176</sup> From its citizenry, the city provides him students with whom he can philosophize. Without the multitude of individuals Socrates cannot practice his art. The city's laws offer him protection so that he can safely engage in his quests for truth. Its structural organization creates internal stability which allows for a peaceful environment in which to satisfy his desire to know. Not only does the city grant Socrates protection from threats within its walls but external threats as well.<sup>177</sup> In turn, Socrates must assist in caring for the city by giving of himself as any good citizen would.

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<sup>176</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 55

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*

According to the *Clouds*, Socrates offers neither the city nor his fellow citizens anything in return for the privilege to philosophize. Instead, he chooses to spend all of his time and energy pursuing his own self-interests, interests of which he is the only beneficiary. In opting to boycott his civic responsibilities in favor of pursuing his own self-interests, Socrates illustrates that he neither cares for the well-being of his fellow citizens nor that of the city. He would rather spend his days satisfying his appetite for knowledge rather than contributing to the maintenance of the very thing allowing him to practice his art in the first place, the polis itself.<sup>178</sup>

Socrates disregards the importance of his civic participation by neglecting his public responsibilities and thereby places his needs before that of the polity. By cutting himself off from everyday life he is able to escape the burdensome aspects of being a citizen by seeking refuge in his Thinkery consequently failing to live up to his civic responsibilities. Because he spends his days contemplating seemingly trivial things such as the distance of a flea's jump and a gnat's "ass" rather than contributing to the good of the whole, he offers nothing to society.<sup>179</sup> He fails to uphold to his end of the bargain as a citizen.<sup>180</sup> As far as Aristophanes and the rest of Athens are concerned, Socrates is nothing more than a societal leech whose presence places a strain on the city. By failing to participate civically, Socrates renders himself irrelevant in the eyes of his fellow citizens.

Here lies the philosopher's predicament. In order to philosophize he needs the secured safety net provided by the city, but he also *needs* to satisfy his desire to know. This leads into what Strauss claims is Socrates' other major downfall. According to

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<sup>178</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 72.

<sup>179</sup> Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 2002.

<sup>180</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 71.

Strauss, this is Socrates' refusal to write choosing instead to engage in public discourse. For Strauss, it is not the misunderstanding of philosophical writing that leads to political persecution; rather, it is the public pursuit of truth and allowing the ignorant masses to hear your questions which threaten the validity of their tightly held beliefs. Accordingly, Strauss maintains that the philosopher should hide their philosophy within their writing citing that:

the proper work of writing is truly to talk, or to reveal the truth, to some while leading others to salutary opinions; the proper work of a writing is to arouse to thinking those who are by nature fit for it; the good writing achieves its ends if the reader considers carefully the 'logographic necessity' of every part, however small or seemingly insignificant, of the writing.<sup>181</sup>

As the search for truth, philosophy necessarily involves the questioning of the assumptions upon which institutions are built and, in consequence, is often considered to be politically destabilizing. Therefore, the proper work of a philosophic writing is "to say different things to different people," and "to speak to some readers and to be silent to others."<sup>182</sup> Allan Bloom contends that "Plato intended his works essentially for the intelligent and industrious few, a natural aristocracy determined neither by birth or wealth."<sup>183</sup> Those who defend this position posit that the philosopher is forced to engage in a manner of writing in which he must purposefully conceal the truth of his text to all but a "small minority" of the public who are able to discern the truth without the assistance of others, all the while being cautious not to jeopardize the opinion of the masses. In a word, political "philosophy," insofar as it is truth and truth has a subversive nature, "must remain the preserve of a small minority."<sup>184</sup> Bloom refers to this

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<sup>181</sup> Strauss, 1964. p. 53

<sup>182</sup> Ibid

<sup>183</sup> Bloom, 1991b. p. xviii; Cf. Strauss, 1964. pp. 53-54.

<sup>184</sup> Strauss, Leo. "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing." *Chicago Review*. Vol. 8. No. 1. Winter-Spring, 1954. pp. 64-75. p. 64.

perception as a “radical statement about the relationship between truth and justice,” citing the paradoxical notion that “wisdom can only rule in an element dominated by falsehood.”<sup>185</sup> The esoteric (or hidden) meaning, then, is the true meaning of the text while, the exoteric (easily recognizable) meaning is the meaning of the text regarded as “socially acceptable” to a large majority of the public body.<sup>186</sup>

No matter how they are read, the ambiguous meaning of the doctrine and the formulas in which it is expressed protects the nonphilosophic reader by confusing him. Consequently, the author, too, is protected from what animosity the concealed teaching might have raised in a nonphilosophic audience.<sup>187</sup>

Socrates’ death serves as the reason for which Strauss believes that Socratic philosophy is personally dangerous. The public aspect of questioning political authority is the ultimate reason behind Socrates’ death. By taking his pursuits public, Socrates allowed his questions to fall on the ears of the city’s unwise masses. If he would have kept out of the public’s eye, Socrates would never have been brought to trial and therefore would have never have been sentenced to death. It is for this reason that Strauss upholds the notion that Socrates was merely a mouthpiece for Plato. According to Strauss, Plato realized exactly why it was that his teacher was executed and he was therefore compelled him to mask his philosophy as the words of his former teacher. In an attempt to avoid the same fate, Plato put forth his own philosophy via his Socratic characters while simultaneously remaining out of the public’s eye and thus out of harm’s way.

It is for this reason that Strauss and his contemporaries concede that Plato’s *Republic* was written in an esoteric manner. They contend that the *Republic* was written

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<sup>185</sup> Bloom, 1991b. p. xix. Cf. Strauss, 1964. p. 102.

<sup>186</sup> Strauss, 1954. pp. 64-65, 69.

<sup>187</sup> Kayser, John. “Noble Lies & Justice: On Reading Plato.” *Polity*. Vol. 5, No. 4. Summer 1973. pp. 489-515. p. 505.

as an instructional guide for the intellectual few to construct a city in which this few, i.e., the philosophers, can safely philosophize and rule. Rooted at the core of a perfect city, then, is a sort of “noble lie” fashioned by the philosophers in an attempt to instill a sense of loyalty toward the governing regime and unity among the citizens of the city.<sup>188</sup>

According to this view, Plato simply masks his instructions within the confusion of his dialogues so that only the intelligent few are able to discover it. Simply put, Plato wants to keep the masses docile by feeding them tales about their own origin and the origin of the city. Since the philosopher does not allow himself to become corrupted by the truth, he takes on the role of the city’s guardian in which he protects the citizens from certain harmful truths in order to maintain the city’s stable existence.

For example, in Book III the Platonic Socrates leads his interlocutors through a dialogue in which they contrive an archetype for the perfect city. Plato has Socrates assume the role of a mythmaker as he provides his interlocutors with a fictitious narrative for the origin of the ideal regime.<sup>189</sup> He begins by referencing the so-called Phoenician tales that are customarily propagated by poets, noting that in the past these poets “have caused others to believe” in the validity of their tales.<sup>190</sup> The creation of such a myth, Socrates posits, will produce civility and justice within the polis by curbing the insatiable desires of men, thus rendering it stable.<sup>191</sup>

To the extent that the nature of man is implicated in an investigation into the best political order, this investigation compels Socrates to recognize the natural differences in men and, therefore, in their abilities to succeed within various occupations.<sup>192</sup> As a result

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<sup>188</sup> Plato, 1991. 414c.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 414a-415c.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 414c.

<sup>191</sup> Bloom, 1991a. p 367. Cf. Strauss 1964. p. 102.

<sup>192</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato, Second Edition*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1991. 370b.

of this recognition, Socrates unambiguously asserts that in consequence of the fact that the endowments of men differ so greatly across humanity, men are inherently unequal. Paradoxically, however, insofar as men vary in their natural capacities and no one is completely “self-sufficient,” there exists a certain equality among men evident in the reciprocity which inevitably exists between them.<sup>193</sup> It is in virtue of man’s reciprocity that it may be said that the city comes into being out of “a natural necessity.”<sup>194</sup> As one man benefits from another in satisfying his needs so does another man in order to fulfill his particular wants, and since the wishes of men vary greatly “and many things are needed, many men gather in one settlement as partners and helpers.”<sup>195</sup> As a result, promoting the good life becomes the foremost aim of the city, which is a harmonious relationship between each part that composes the whole of society. This can only transpire within a system in which labor is divided in order to provide for the needs and wants of all men, a system in which there exists an interdependency among the people.<sup>196</sup>

While fashioning their conceptual blueprint for the city, the participants in the dialogue engage in a deliberation in an attempt to define the true nature of justice. Socrates and his interlocutors arrive at the conclusion that true justice is nothing more than minding one’s own business.<sup>197</sup> Rather than interfering in the business of others, “if each does properly what is his to do, he also does good to others.”<sup>198</sup> This supposition is paramount since the city’s stability is dependent upon “enduring sentiments of

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<sup>193</sup> Hallowell, John. “Plato and His Critics.” *The Journal of Politics*. Vol. 27, No. 2. May 1965. pp. 277, 279. Cf. Plato, 1991. 370b-371a.; Bloom, Allan. “Interpretive Essay.” *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books, 1991a. p. 344; Strauss, Leo. “On Plato’s Republic.” *The City and Man*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964. pp. 93-94.; Voegelin, Eric. “The Republic.” *Plato and Aristotle*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957. pp. 98, 105.

<sup>194</sup> Plato, 369b-c.; Hallowell, 1965. p. 279; Voegelin, 1957. p. 98.

<sup>195</sup> Plato. 369b; Hallowell, 1965. p. 279

<sup>196</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*. Trans. C.D.C Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 1998. pp. 36-37. Cf. Voegelin, 1957. p. 315; Hallowell, 1965. p. 279.

<sup>197</sup> Plato, 1991. 433a.

<sup>198</sup> Bloom, 1991a. p. 374.



friendships between good men.”<sup>199</sup> As such, Socrates aims to “persuade” the citizens of the polis into believing that they ought not harm one another.<sup>200</sup> This myth is composed of two parts.<sup>201</sup> First, all the members of the founding generation of the ideal regime are to be told that they were “fashioned and reared” underground and that their childhood memories were implanted in their minds upon their emergence from their earthly womb. Second, the citizens of the incipient political order are to be taught that their souls were fashioned with different types of metals, with the specific type of metal in each person’s soul signifying his or her proper position within society.<sup>202</sup> Socrates recites his myth as if he were giving directions to members of a founding order:

All of you in the city are certainly brothers ... but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; and iron and bronze in the farmers and the other craftsmen. So, because you’re all related, although for the most part you’ll produce offspring like yourselves, it sometimes happens that a silver child will be born from a golden parent, a golden child from a silver parent, and similarly all the others from each other. Hence the god commands the rulers first and foremost to be of nothing such good guardians and to keep over nothing so careful a watch as the children, seeing which of these metals is mixed in their souls. And, if a child of theirs should be born with an admixture of bronze or iron, by no manner of means are they to take pity on it, but shall assign the proper value to its nature and thrust it out among the craftsmen or the farmers; and again, if from these men one should naturally grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary, believing that there is an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian.<sup>203</sup>

According to Allan Bloom, who adopts Strauss’ philosophical outlook, this tale does not actually demonstrate a blueprint for a city of justice. Rather, it explains the way in which a city should be constructed in order to ensure the safety of the philosopher as

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<sup>199</sup> Voegelin, 1957. p. 321.

<sup>200</sup> Plato, 1991. 414a, 414c.

<sup>201</sup> Bloom, 1991a. p. 365.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Plato, 1991. 415a-c.

he embarks on his search for truth and knowledge.<sup>204</sup> Those who side with Bloom contend that Socrates' "noble lie" has two objectives, both of which are aimed at creating an ideal setting in which philosophy and the philosopher can exist safely without fear of the harmful repercussions which may stem from public knowledge of potentially subversive truths discerned by the philosopher: 1) "to create a fraternal order among the citizens in which they all share the same earthly mother identified as the land belonging to the particular city in which they live;" and 2) "to evoke a god in order to give divine sanction to the natural inequalities that exist among men so that each man is able to hold himself to the same standard of worth as his neighbor."<sup>205</sup>

According to Bloom, Socrates' myth seeks to give divine sanction to the natural hierarchy of human talents and virtues.<sup>206</sup> There is a fundamental inequality which exists among men insofar as their intellectual capabilities differ. Since the "highest form of superiority is the superiority of wisdom," the perfectly just city must be constructed in such a way that allows the wisest to rule.<sup>207</sup> However, every member of society must also be compelled to feel a sense of worth within society. Socrates' "noble lie," then, allows each member of society to believe the axiom that every person has a specific function and role within society and each is an important part of the whole, no less important than anyone else's role. That is to say, the function of the carpenter is no more or less important than the function of the lawmaker. Plato's Socrates provides a way in which the citizens can view themselves in the same light in which they view their neighbors, regardless of their function within society.<sup>208</sup> The noble lie creates a fraternal order

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<sup>204</sup> Bloom, Allan. "Preface." *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books, 1991b. p. xxi.

<sup>205</sup> Bloom. 1991a, p. 365. Cf. Strauss. 1964. p. 102.

<sup>206</sup> Bloom, 1991a. p. 366.

<sup>207</sup> Strauss. 1964 p. 51.

<sup>208</sup> Bloom, 1991a. p. 367.

amongst the citizens to distinguish themselves as brothers from the same mother.<sup>209</sup> This notion is set forth by conveying to the citizens that human inequalities are of divine origin. “If the god is the cause of all good things ... the inequality would seem to be a good thing.”<sup>210</sup> Thus, a poleogonic myth “is the only way to insure that men who love the truth will exist and rule in a society.”<sup>211</sup>

The necessity of the origin story lies in the fact that many men would be harmed or corrupted if they were to know the truth it hides.<sup>212</sup> Insofar as there may be no rational basis for political legitimacy, as the state was founded upon conquered lands, the myth provides a just account of a civil society, legitimizing the state’s existence.<sup>213</sup> Forasmuch as it is the nature of the philosopher to pursue knowledge and his quest leads to the discovery of certain truths which could potentially thrust the city into a state of chaos, he must perpetuate this poleogonic myth in order to prevent the city from falling into a state of anarchy.<sup>214</sup> This position is justified in part because Socrates explicitly calls his myth a “lie.” A lie has the intention of purposefully deceiving the listener. Therefore, Plato has his Socratic character *choose* for the citizens to believe an “untrue story to be true.”<sup>215</sup>

Conversely, however, John Hallowell dismisses outright the notion that the purpose of Socrates’ founding myth is to conceal the ideal city’s origin. He writes:

Plato makes a great deal of use throughout many of his dialogues of myths and if one approaches them as attempts to deceive one misses the point of them completely. While a myth is never literally true, it is intended to point to a truth that defies expression in any other way. A myth is a simplified version of the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

<sup>210</sup> Strauss, 1964. p. 102.

<sup>211</sup> Bloom, 1991a. p. 369.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. p. 497.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. p. 367.

<sup>214</sup> Bloom 1991a. p. 364.

<sup>215</sup> Bloom, 1991b. p. xvii. However, Eric Voegelin challenges this notion, citing that the Greek form of the word “lie” is *pseudos*, which has multiple meanings. Voegelin, 1957. p. 106

truth or a likely story. It is an appeal to our imagination, but that is not to say that it is false ... There is nothing, I suggest, particularly sinister in this myth.<sup>216</sup>

In his article, "Plato and His Critics," Hallowell lays out three lessons contained in Socrates' poleogonic myth: "1) that all men share a common humanity by virtue of their common origin from mother earth; their common origin makes them brothers, 2) men differ in their natural endowments, some men are born with greater capacities and potentialities than others, and 3) there should be equality of opportunity, merit alone should determines one's place in society."<sup>217</sup>

Hallowell seems to reiterate the opinion of Eric Voegelin, who contends that the Myth of Metals is in reality the semblance of a "Great Truth" in relation to man's existence which is "communicable only through the truth of myth."<sup>218</sup> They maintain that the purpose of the myth is to "introduce ... the point where the sense of a common humanity, overriding the differences of gifts and social positions, had to be evoked."<sup>219</sup> A myth is an intramundane story which explains the inexplicable; it is a mechanism through which a mystery, such as the origin of a city or the truth about human existence, can be transformed into a *thing* which may be explored on all sides.<sup>220</sup> Hallowell and Voegelin posit that Socrates' myth acts as a medium through which Plato conveys "the simple truth that all men are brothers," equal by virtue of their common humanity, despite differences in their natural endowments.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, the Myth of Metals is a

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Hallowell, 1965. p. 277.

<sup>218</sup> Voegelin, 1957. p. 107.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Rolheiser, Ronald. *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2011. p. 224.

<sup>221</sup> Voegelin, 1957. p. 105.

symbolic representation of the “inexplicable mystery of human existence in community.”<sup>222</sup>

In the next section I examine Eric Voegelin’s theory of symbols. Incorporating the philosophical perspective helps when examining Socrates civic behavior. Later, it will illustrate that Socrates’ action fit in the context of the pattern of human existential longing. More importantly, understanding Voegelin’s take on the Platonic Symbol proves useful in upholding my claims about the philosopher’s citizenship.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

CHAPTER IV  
ERIC VOEGELIN'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND SOCRATES IN THE  
*APOLOGY*

Voegelin posits that from the beginning of our conscious history humanity has engaged in a sort of transcendental pilgrimage in search of cosmological truth and order.<sup>223</sup> He notes that throughout history humanity has been plagued by an innate desire to elucidate the mysteries surrounding his existence. For Voegelin, this desire for truth is intrinsically sown into the very essence of our being insofar as this deep-seated yearning to know transcends all historical, geographical, political, societal, cultural, and ethnic bounds, thus highlighting a transcendental commonality across humanity. He posits that these shared experiences and their symbols “designate fundamental *tensions* of human reality” that transcend time.<sup>224</sup> The historical prevalence of our ontological pursuits reveals a sort of “metaphysical pathos” which denotes an ever present longing to yield rational explanations about the inexplicable cosmological whole in order to “penetrate the veneer of human existence and to address the actual meaning of life itself.”<sup>225</sup> To support his claims he points out a consistent pattern of human existential discontentment which he claims stretches across time and civilizations.<sup>226</sup>

Evidence of this can be found in the mythical symbols through which humanity has attempted to explain its existence. Voegelin iterates that humanity has created symbolic expressions to give insights into the experiences resulting from this search.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 116-117.

<sup>224</sup> Sandoz, Ellis. *A Government of Laws Political Theory, Religion, and the Founding*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 6.

<sup>225</sup> Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960, pg. 10

<sup>226</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 89.

<sup>227</sup> Voegelin, Eric. *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Published Essays 1966-1985*. Vol. 12. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 115.

As evidence, he turns to the rich and complex allegorical origin tales and mythical symbolizations illustrating humanity's historical quest. The symbolic form affords humans the opportunity to express the transcendental experiences and insight resulting from this search. Since we are finite beings existing within an infinite reality our finitude renders us unable to properly and fully communicate the transcendental truths governing the physical reality. He is therefore compelled to actualize to the best of his ability the truth his soul has experienced and does so via symbolic expression as these symbols are able to "brin[g] together a range of considerations touching upon philosophical anthropology, philosophy, existence, the comprehending reality of the whole, experience, mind, faith, and reason," all of which have been constants in the history of mankind.<sup>228</sup> Because there are "certain realities" that "are beyond what we can neatly nail down in our understanding" the symbol then is a mode by which to explain realities that ultimately defy "language itself."<sup>229</sup>

Symbolization then is an illustration of the human soul which transcends time. Whereas the soul, and that for which the soul longs, cannot be expressed in literal terms, for "we have no models in physics, metaphysics, or psychology by which to explain this adequately," the metaphors, tales and symbols humanity adopts in trying to hypostatize that for which we longs is the best, if not the only, way we can elucidate the source and aim of our longing.<sup>230</sup> Voegelin believes that the truth about such concepts can only be found in the constants which exist within the symbols man has used throughout history in his search for order and his place within the universe.<sup>231</sup> While the symbolic expressions

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<sup>228</sup> Sandoz, Ellis. *The Voegelinian Revolution A Biographical Introduction Second Edition*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000. xvi-xvii.

<sup>229</sup> Rolheiser, Ronald. *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2011. p. 29.

<sup>230</sup> Rolheiser, 2011. p. 58.

<sup>231</sup> Voegelin, Eric. *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Published Essays 1966-1985*. Vol,

created by humanity throughout History may vary in the exactness of their message, they all nevertheless point to a single truth concerning the nature of humanity: the symbols all illustrate humanity within its tensional existence longing for a perfectly ordered realm beyond the bounds of space and time. If we compare symbolic expressions across history we begin to notice that the symbols are not the constants themselves. Rather, the constant is the “sameness” of the experiences which beget such symbols, a sameness which gives use to a “language of equivalences.”<sup>232</sup>

[Since] there is no adequate language that would impose itself with the authority of an established theory, we use such a language in the practice of our work on symbols. When we engage in comparative studies concerning ancestor cults, ceremonies, coronation rituals, the myths of life eternal or the judgment of the dead in various societies, we do not talk about “values” but speak of “equivalent” cults, ceremonies, rites and myths. Moreover, in doing so we are aware of the differences between the symbols and we know that the sameness which justifies the language of “equivalences,” thus, implies the theoretical insight that it is not the symbols themselves but the constants of the engendering experience are the true subject matter of our studies.<sup>233</sup>

Since our intellectual capacities are finite and we cannot know the totality of our reality, we must rely upon collective knowledge for insight into the truth regarding our existence. It “requires a community of people exercising their intelligence and it requires a continuity and communication of that intelligence from one generation to the next.”<sup>234</sup> Through such knowledge, a commonality in human experiences begins to emerge revealing a sort of transcendental sameness in the nature of humanity.<sup>235</sup> For bound up within the lineage of humanity are “shared experiences” which fashion together the image of man. These experiences are constituted by historical patterns of thought

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12. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p.

<sup>232</sup> Sandoz, 2000. p. xvii.

<sup>233</sup> Voegelin, “Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History.” *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*. Vol. 12. 1991, 115.

<sup>234</sup> Marsilius of Padua. *The Defender of Peace*. Trans. Annabel Brett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. xvii.

<sup>235</sup> Voegelin, “Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History,” 115.



common throughout the history of mankind.”<sup>236</sup> We can only begin our ontological quest for Truth when we look to the historical “whole.”<sup>237</sup> For “there is no wholly natural or immediate knowledge, no cognitive grasp that requires no community of understanding;” knowledge is “cumulative” and historical in nature. The symbol expresses a transcendental truth which is a truth that is confirmed through each individual’s explanation of his experience of reality and through the collective testimony of humanity as a whole. The symbol therefore represents the highest form of human language insofar as it “is multivalent, carrying different layers of meaning” by transcending the boundaries to which humanity is confined.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, in order for the truth to be archetypal it must transcend time, and resist the ebb and flow of opinion and societal flux.<sup>239</sup>

Eric Voegelin contends that the soul has made us aware of an infinite reality existing beyond space and time; a reality in which perfect truth exists, but nevertheless transcends the bounds of human finitude. He believes that it is the arousal of *nous* within the psyche urges us to pose questions about our place and purpose within the universe. And it is out of this self-reflective journey that the truth of our reality becomes luminous; thereby causing him to become conscious of his participatory existence within concrete physical reality. The soul’s awareness of a perfectly ordered reality beyond the one currently known gives rise to questioning unrest about the disordered temporal reality. Humanity’s quest for truth is therefore evoked by a feeling of anxiousness from deep within his psyche which in turn compels us to embark upon an introspective journey in an attempt to gain knowledge concerning the truth of our existence.

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<sup>236</sup> Voegelin, Eric. “Immortality: Experience and Symbol.” *Harvard Theological Review*. Vol. 60, No. 3. July 1967. p. 235.

<sup>237</sup> Voegelin, 1978. p. 81.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>239</sup> Sandoz, Ellis. *A Government of Laws*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.

For Voegelin this represents the emergence of humanity's conscious existence within the world.<sup>240</sup> We have come upon what Eric Voegelin calls the "horizon of consciousness."<sup>241</sup> Here we become aware of ourselves "in the personal, social, and historical existence of man[kind]..."<sup>242</sup> Voegelin writes:

Within this rich field of reality-consciousness...there occur the processes of wondering questing, and seeking, of being moved and drawn into the search by a consciousness of ignorance, which, in order to be sensed as ignorance, requires an apprehension of something worth to be known; of an appeal to which man can lovingly respond or not so lovingly deny himself; of the joy of finding and the despair of having lost the direction; of the advance of truth from the compact to differentiated experiences and symbols; and of the great breakthroughs of insight through visions of the prophetic [and] the philosophic...<sup>243</sup>

Moreover, since all humans endure the problem of a disordered chaotic corporeal existence, it is through the expansion of consciousness that we attempt to bring ordered knowledge to our confused state.<sup>244</sup>

This newly discovered self-awareness engenders a feeling of inexplicable angst within our soul (*psyche*) highlighting the complex duality of human nature. This is the "paradox of Man's consciousness," the constant internal struggle of Humanity and the individual-of one's self in the abstract pitted against one's self in the concrete.<sup>245</sup> We become aware of our ignorance growing dissatisfied and anxious because of our inability to fully comprehend the truth of our existence; yet, simultaneously, the soul is aroused in that we now have a need to fill this newly discovered internal void.<sup>246</sup> This is to say, that the conscious mind, an abstract infinite entity, is in constant battle with the body, a

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<sup>240</sup>Voegelin, Eric. *Anamnesis*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978, 4.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 32

<sup>246</sup> Voegelin, Eric. *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin What is History and Other Late Unpublished Writings*. Vol. 28. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.

concrete tangible entity. For through our attempt to attain truth we become fully conscious of our finite physical existence within an infinite reality as our anthropic condition becomes luminous to us through an awakening of our consciousness. Thus, we can conclude that consciousness also exists in modes, or two realms: the spiritual and the physical. And it is “[t]he concrete consciousness of concrete man that is the only consciousness given in our experience.”<sup>247</sup> In other words, consciousness is the experience of one’s being within concrete reality.

According to Voegelin, human existence lies within what Plato refers to as the *metaxy*, or the in-between. He believes humanity’s universal position is situated halfway between the spiritual and temporal. Voegelin contends that humans reside between two poles of reality—the spiritual and the temporal, the finite and the infinite, the concrete and the abstract.<sup>248</sup> More accurately, the *metaxy*, is the “nonexistent reality” in which “transactions are conducted within consciousness itself and not externally in time and space...”<sup>249</sup> It “symbolizes” the moveable field of conscious reality between the two poles in which Man, and his soul, embark on a noetic quest in an attempt to understand and actualize the beautiful, the good, and the true.<sup>250</sup> To describe humanity as existing in an in-between state is to say that humans exist above the animals but below the gods.<sup>251</sup>

For Voegelin the conscious individual comes to recognize this tensional struggle between the poles of reality. He maintains that the awakening of the *nous* and the subsequent historical quest of truth and order are evidence that humanity’s universal position is a tensional existence between his concrete physical reality and the divinely

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid pg. 201.

<sup>248</sup> Voegelin, 1978. p. 107.

<sup>249</sup> Sandoz, Ellis. *The Voegelinian Revolution A Biographical Introduction Second Edition*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000. xx.

<sup>250</sup> Voegelin, 1978. pp. 103-104.

<sup>251</sup> Corey, Divine Sign, 61

ordered beyond. The awakening of the *nous* within the soul is evidence that the human is a creature that desires what it does not possess—perfect truth about the self. Through the experience of a questioning unrest and subsequent search for truth we are able to move between these two spheres of existence and symbolically actualize the truth of our existence. One may think of the abstract infinite as a divinely ordered reality outside of the bounds of human comprehension, or the immortal. While that which is concrete may be thought of as the finite tangible reality in which we are aware of his corporeal existence within the world. It is the fixed, restricted reality in which he consciously participates. Accordingly, concrete humanity is humanity existing within the finite physical realm and his soul is Man in the infinite and abstract. Since he is subjugated to animal like desires he is rendered a prisoner unto himself in that his psyche is in constant battle with his body. Therefore, he is eternally at war with himself insofar as the two things, which embody him both in the abstract and in the concrete, desire two very different things—the former, wisdom, truth, goodness, and justice—the latter, impure satisfaction.

Voegelin claims that Plato's erotic dialogues illustrate the soul's tensional struggle by depicting humanity's fall with various myths or stories of how the human soul once knew perfection, but now only remembers it.<sup>252</sup> It is due to this remembrance that one experiences desire. And the object of one's desire determines the nature of one's soul. For Voegelin this symbolization is meant to illustrate the nature of one's soul. The spiritual represents the soul's longing for true order which is located beyond the realm of experienced concrete reality while the temporal is representative of one's imperfect human state. The individual's concerted effort to attend to the spirit's needs will

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<sup>252</sup> See Myth of the Charioteer in Plato's Phaedrus.

determine whether or not the soul will become more conscious of the true order of existence or if it will remain removed from truth by choosing to focus on satisfying the unremitting desires of the body. And what determines the nature of one's soul then is the ability to suppress his animalistic desires in favor of allowing the soul to transcend into the infinite and thus move closer toward attaining perfect knowledge and truth. That is to say that the metaxical existence of the soul between the heavenly and the earthly causes the soul to be pulled either upward or downward. If the individual is able to suppress his earthly desires then his soul will ascend upward toward the realm of perfection, but still nevertheless falls short. For:

The soul, as the repository of intelligence, provides the link between the eternal and immutable forms and the body of the cosmos; it is alive and intelligent and in this sense is akin to change. The soul, in both the world and the individual, forms a realm of everlastingness that is halfway between the eternity of the forms and, for example, the everlastingness of a species or the constituents of the cosmos which persists through all time but lack individual immortality.<sup>253</sup>

#### Platonic Symbolism: Eros and the Soul

We see this depicted throughout the Platonic corpus. Here I will explain Plato's usage of symbols by illustrating the various ways he speaks of the soul. Because we are speaking of the Platonic Socrates, understanding Plato's conception the philosopher's soul is paramount to this project in helping to undermine the notion that Socrates is a political threat. To do this we must first understand the nature of human desire as Plato described it. For this we will employ three Platonic texts: two of his early works, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, and one of his later dialogues, the *Laws*. Choosing both early and late texts shows the consistency in his thoughts regarding the nature of the soul and more importantly the nature of the philosopher's soul. First, I illustrate Platonic love

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<sup>253</sup> Gunnell, John. *Political Philosophy and Time: Plato and the Origins of Political Vision*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968. p. 202.

using the *Symposium*. Next, I explain Plato's conception of the philosopher's soul. And last, I incorporate the *Laws* into the discussion to illustrate that the *metaxical* character of the soul remains consistent through the Platonic corpus.

First "acquir[ing] the status of a philosophical concept in Plato's middle dialogues," erotic longing [appears] to be an essential feature of the human condition, intrinsic to man's intermediate location between the beast and gods within the hierarchy of being."<sup>254</sup> That is our conscious reason universally positions us above the unconscious but because we love humanity and therefore lack a divine state of perfection we are situated below the gods. When discussing the concept of the erotic Plato writes that the soul is aware of the perfectly ordered realm that exists beyond the confines of the material. He goes on to explain that human longing arises out of the remembrance the true beauty the soul once beheld as it followed the train of gods in "outermost region of the heavens."<sup>255</sup> In the *Phaedrus* Plato asserts "that every human soul beheld the highest realities before falling to earth and acquiring a body..."<sup>256</sup> It is, therefore, because of his fallen state that man is "naturally drawn toward" the beautiful, the good, and the true through a "typically unconscious recollection of the hyperuranium Beauty glimpsed while traveling in the train of the gods, unencumbered by the bod[y], at the outermost reaches of the heavens."<sup>257</sup> Thus, the immortal soul remembers true Beauty while the mortal body knows nothing of it insofar as it has fallen to earth.

"For to be a man one must understand the content of a general term, leaving the field of manifold sense-perceptions, and entering that in which the object of knowledge is

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<sup>254</sup> Laehn, Thomas. *Subversiveness*, page 1.

<sup>255</sup> Laehn, *Politics and the Erotic*, page 1

<sup>256</sup> Laehn, Thomas. (forthcoming) "Eros." In Michael T. Gibbons (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pg. 1.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

unique and grasped only by reasoning. This process is a remembering of what our soul once saw as it made its journey with a god, looking down upon what we now assert to be real and gazing *upwards* at what is Reality itself.”<sup>258</sup> This is clearly the reason why it is right for only the philosopher’s mind to have wings; for he remains always so far as he can, through memory in the field of precisely those entities whose presence, as though he were a god, he himself is divine.<sup>259</sup>

He is quick to point out that madness is not necessarily “an evil,” but rather one of the greatest gifts “bestowed on us” by the “gods.”<sup>260</sup> He notes that there are two types of madness: “one brought on by mortal maladies, the other arising from a supernatural release from the conventions of life.”<sup>261</sup> Insofar as one type of madness is brought about by the mortal or finite and the other is supernatural in nature, this tells us that one love desires the tangible while the other longs for supernatural or divine. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates explains that the philosophers have the best souls.<sup>262</sup> They are the souls that have glimpsed the most Reality and remember the most about divine reality.<sup>263</sup> Those souls which best remember true beauty will have greater wisdom and therefore have a greater understanding of Truth. Here Socrates is explaining that the soul which has glimpsed to most reality has not been held back by untamed desires of the body. That is to say that the best souls, i.e. the soul of the philosopher, have a better memory of perfect truth. The philosopher allows his desire for the beautiful and good to lead him toward the highest realities. As a result of not allowing one’s soul to fall victim to those desires that

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<sup>258</sup> Plato, W. C. Helmbold, and Wilson Gerson Rabinowitz. *Phaedrus*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1956.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 32

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 25

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 30-31

<sup>263</sup> Ibid; Cf, 7

are less than godly and therefore be pulled down further and further away from the divine, the philosopher's soul has a better understanding of perfect truth than anyone else.

Plato uses the myth of the charioteer as a means of explaining how it is that humans and more particularly why the souls of some are good while others are bad. The characters in the myth are symbols of humans and their desires. The charioteer represents the human and their ability or inability to control their appetites. With the charioteer as their guide the horses serve as the symbol for the soul's desires. The first horse is tame, well-bred, and represents the good desires. While the second is unruly, poorly-bred, and illustrates the bad desires. The charioteer serves as the souls guide keeping the unruly horse on track and letting the tame horse lead the way. The nature of the soul is therefore determined by which horse the charioteer allows to lead, the tamed or the untamed. If it ascends toward the heavens then the soul is good; conversely, if the soul descends and falls away from the divine it is consider bad. More simply put, one can allow their soul to be led by the desires that yearn for the divine or are they can succumb to their base appetites and fall further and further away from the divine. Thus, For Plato, our desires place us in an endless battle against ourselves and it is this "Great struggle" that determines "whether a man will become good or bad."<sup>264</sup>

This idea is even prevalent in Plato's late dialogues. In Book I of the *Laws* Kleinias states that there is an internal conflict which exists in each of us to which the Athenian Stranger replies each person is either "superior to himself or inferior to himself..."<sup>265</sup> The Stanger is alluding to Man's ceaseless internal struggle between his

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<sup>264</sup> Voegelin, Eric. "The Republic." *Order and History: Plato and Aristotle*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. 129.

<sup>265</sup> Plato. 1980. 626e.



reason (*logos*) and his passions (*eros*).<sup>266</sup> Plato tells us that “there are two kinds of [desires]: one brought on by mortal maladies, the other arising from a supernatural release from the conventions of life.”<sup>267</sup> He refers to those driven by the former as “bad lovers,” they are men of a “common sort.”<sup>268</sup> In contrast to the former, he calls the good lovers, those driven by the latter type of madness, “philosopher[s].”<sup>269</sup> The bad lover falls victim to his bestial passions as he allows himself to be driven by the need to satisfy his carnal desires. He finds comfort in things such as glory, fame, and honor. However, the philosopher, the lover of wisdom, longs for true beauty. He is a “man whose soul is attuned to the divine measure” of things.<sup>270</sup> The philosopher is not someone who is concerned with temporal or finite goods. Rather, he has an innate desire to seek out the highest truths.<sup>271</sup> Moreover, in order to distinguish between the different types of lovers one must look to the aim or end (*telos*) of the lover’s desire.<sup>272</sup> That is, when one chooses to satisfy their erotic desires with the finite and fall victim to beastly passions, they are thus rendered inferior to the self. Conversely, in order to become superior to one’s self they must learn how to suppress erotic desire for temporal or corporeal goods in order to move closer toward the divine. The philosopher, the one who “cares for the soul,” seeks out “[t]he heavenly or divine things; [the] things to which man looks up or which are higher than the human things...”<sup>273</sup> In sum, as man consciously moves through reality his soul will experience a constant tensional pull between the poles of

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<sup>266</sup> Voegelin. 1978. 106.

<sup>267</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. Trans. W.C. Helmbold and W.G. Rabinowitz. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1956. p. 54.

<sup>268</sup> Plato. *The Symposium*. Trans. M. C. Howatson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 183e, 204b.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> McKnight, Steven. John Hallowell *Eric Voegelin’s Search for Order and History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978. P. 110.

<sup>271</sup> Plato. 2008. 183e, 204a.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. 200e.

<sup>273</sup> Strauss, 1964. p. 13.

“good and evil;” “wisdom and ignorance;” “immortality and mortality;” “life and death;” “truth and untruth;” and *he*, existing, and moving between these two poles, can either allow truth and reason to illuminate his soul and ascend upward toward the light; or fall victim to his erotic appetites and allow his soul to be pulled down further into the darkened depths of the cave.<sup>274</sup>

Plato uses the symbol man-the individual-to elucidate our conscious participation in reality and the ascension of the soul to illustrate our transcendent journey from a chaotic reality toward an ordered truth.<sup>275</sup> humanity, for Plato, as for Voegelin, exists in a state half way between the inanimate and the animate, and through his search for truth, which Voegelin calls “the unfolding of noetic consciousness in the psyche,” he draws himself nearer toward the animate.<sup>276</sup> When speaking of “the philosopher,” the lover of wisdom, then, it can be said that he “is in a middle state between a wise man and an ignorant one.”<sup>277</sup> He is a “man whose soul is attuned to the divine measure” and “[p]hilosophy, the love of wisdom, becomes a tension of [his] existence in search of truth.”<sup>278</sup> His anxiousness stems from his existence between the known and the unknown and “[d]istrust in himself engenders fear; and anxiety, in turn giving rise to a drive for certainty.”<sup>279</sup> That is to say that the philosopher’s state of unrest causes his soul to long for that which is beautiful, good, and true and through the process of philosophizing he embarks on an upward journey toward that which is divine or most beautiful.<sup>280</sup> His soul

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<sup>274</sup> Voegelin, “Eric. Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History.” *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*. Vol. 12. 1991.

<sup>275</sup> Sandoz, 2000. p. xvi-xvii.

<sup>276</sup> Voegelin, 1978. p. 111.

<sup>277</sup> Plato, 2008. 204b.

<sup>278</sup> McKnight, Steven. John Hallowell. 1978. p. 50; McKnight Steven. 1978. p. 111.

<sup>279</sup> Voegelin, 1978. p. 92.; McKnight, Steven. *Aufright. Eric Voegelin’s Search for Order and History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978. p. 55.

<sup>280</sup> Plato, 2008. 204b

is a “link” between the human and the divine and through the unfolding consciousness of his psyche man- the philosopher- is able to transcend from the finite into the infinite.<sup>281</sup>

Thus, the philosopher is someone who has undergone a spiritual awakening which has been engendered by a questioning unrest that compels him to seek out the truth of all things. And insofar as the philosopher seeks out the truth concerning the nature of all things, resisting the partial truths, or un-truths, of his temporal reality in order to obtain whole truth or perfect truth, his awareness of the existence of true order places his consciousness above that of all other men. In so doing he comes to suppress the need to satisfy the bestial passions of the body in order to fulfill the soul’s desire for truth. The suppression of his bodily desires draws the philosopher away from the chaotic disorder of the temporal toward the ordered truth of the beyond. Furthermore, since all men experience the problem of a disordered chaotic corporeal existence, the philosopher’s “[r]evelation and response are not a man’s private affair; for the revelation comes to one man for all men, and in his response he is the representative of mankind. And since the response is representative it endows the recipient of revelation in the relation to his fellow men with the authority of the prophet.”<sup>282</sup> For:

[i]t is the calling of the philosopher to utter...judgment and to claim the authority of public order when necessary, for example, under conditions of social schism and disintegration when political and other institutional power and truth of spirit separate.<sup>283</sup>

In short, through the expansion of his consciousness the philosopher attempts to bring ordered knowledge to a disordered existence necessitating his responsibility to bring the rest of the polity into the light of truth. We see this illustrated with Socrates in

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<sup>281</sup> McKnight, *Aufright*. 1978. p. 51.

<sup>282</sup> Voegelin, Eric. *Order and History* Vol. II. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. p. 6.

<sup>283</sup> Sandoz, Ellis. “The Philosopher’s Vocation: The Voegelinian Paradigm.” *The Review of Politics*. Vol. 71, No. 1. Winter 2009. p. 61.

the *Apology* when he confesses his true ignorance by admitting that he knows nothing. By doing this Socrates is illustrating himself to be the wisest person in the city over than the politician who had a “reputation” among “the many” for being wise and thought of himself as wiser than even the people.<sup>284</sup> That is, Socrates’ wisdom surpasses those considered to be the wisest because he was able to admit his ignorance whereas they were not.

By recognizing and admitting that he does not know Socrates is able to open his soul up to the divine and lets it ascend toward perfect truth as he persists in his philosophical journey. Because the politician was thought to be wise by the many and thought that he knew that which he did not know and Socrates concluded that he neither knew nor thought that he knew anything he becomes the wisest person in the city. In this way he serves as the polity’s teacher insofar as he is teaching them about their true ignorance. Socrates was trying to inform the polity that only a god can possess wisdom and to think that one’s human self as wise is to think of one’s self as a god. In doing so a person is no longer able to open themselves up to the truth of justice; they are preventing themselves, the polis, and the people of the city from being able to live in a more just state. And it is the philosopher’s duty to inform the people of their ignorance so that the polity can become more in line with truth.

If we take a second look at the *Apology* we discover that Socrates’ actions did not undermine the existence of Zeus. Although Socrates went through the motions of questioning the Oracle’s message, he ultimately fails to undermine its truth, subsequently affirming the god’s divine authority. As such, Socrates’ “inquiries” were not “robbing the traditional myths of their dignity and power” or “the city of one of its most precious

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<sup>284</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 189

foundations: the notion that there is cosmic support for justice.”<sup>285</sup> In fact, he was doing quite the opposite: Socrates’ failure to disprove the god resulted in him upholding the truth of the city’s “traditional myths” concerning divine knowledge. Socrates’ “assertion that the gods [were] wrong” may have initially been an attempt to illustrate what he thought was the superiority of his knowledge over that of the gods. And if he would have been successful in his initial efforts the outcome would have then had the effect of rendering the city godless. But, this is not the outcome of the *Apology*. Socrates begins his journey egocentrically in an attempt to undermine the knowledge, and thus the authority, of the god; however, he ultimately discovers the god to be correct therefore lending credence to the notion of a divine existence.

Whether the Socrates of the *Apology* is meant to be “a symbolic form created by Plato as the means for communicating and expanding the order of wisdom by its hero,” or not, one thing is certain: the reader witnesses a transformation, or turning around (*periagoge*) of Socrates’ soul. That is, we see Socrates transcend from an egocentric state of being into a philosopher. His quest for truth becomes something of a humbling experience in that his failure to find a man possessing more wisdom than him forces Socrates to recognize the limits of his own knowledge. While he may be the wisest man in Athens, Socrates discovers that his wisdom is still, nevertheless, inferior to that of the god’s; thus, compelling him to admit that the only thing he truly knows is that he knows nothing at all.<sup>286</sup> In other words, because of his lack of success in undermining the Oracle’s claims, Socrates learns that he is simply “a lover of wisdom, [not] its possessor,

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid 63, 45.

<sup>286</sup> Plato, *Man and Man: The Social Philosophers*. Ed. Saxe Commins and Robert Linscott. New York: Random House, 1947. p. 201. “Apology.” 187.

for...knowledge of the whole” can only belong to a divine being.<sup>287</sup> This is in consideration of the fact that insofar as love is a desire to “possess” that which we lack, and “there [exists] no desire if there is no lack,” it necessarily follows that Socrates, because he is a ‘philosopher’, i.e. the *lover* of wisdom, cannot possess knowledge, and therefore, must be ignorant of Truth.<sup>288</sup>

Thus, the *Apology* is not simply an account of what happens when the philosopher and philosophy enter the public realm; it is, rather, an illustration of Socrates’ transformation into a true lover of wisdom, or a true philosopher. His admission of ignorance signifies that he is someone who is ready to shed his preconceived notions about the world in which he exists. In this particular case: that his wisdom is superior to even that of the gods. For it is only at the point at which one recognizes his ignorance that one can begin to learn the whole truth concerning the nature of his existence and that of the world in which he exists. Moreover, we witness the turning-around of Socrates’ soul away from the finite knowledge contained within the physical world toward the infinite knowledge of the cosmos; “from the opinion of uncertainly wavering things to knowledge of being;” from temporal knowledge toward the divinely ordered truth of the beyond.<sup>289</sup> Or, to put it in Platonic terms, Socrates experiences “the turning of [his] soul around from a day that is like night to the true day; it is that ascent to what *is* which we shall truly affirm to be philosophy.”<sup>290</sup> Thus, we see the ascension of Socrates’ soul as he becomes conscious of his universal position, via the spiritual arousal of his *nous*, which leads him to recognize the true order of nature.

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<sup>287</sup> Sandoz, 2009. p. 56.

<sup>288</sup> Plato. *The Symposium*. Trans. M.C. Howstan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 201b; 200b.

<sup>289</sup> Voegelin, Eric. *Plato*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957. p. 68.

<sup>290</sup> Plato, 1991. 521c.

By publically stating that “[n]either” he nor the wise men of the city “knows anything really beautiful and good...” Socrates is asserting that there is no “one who understands human and political virtue.”<sup>291</sup> Specifically, there is no ‘human’ in the city capable of *fully* understanding either human or political virtue. For if Socrates himself is the wisest man in Athens, as proclaimed by the god, and yet keenly aware of his ignorance concerning truth, then there, in fact, is no human within the city capable of creating truly just laws. Nevertheless, while this may be true of humans, it is not true of the gods. Insofar as the god’s message was proven to be true, and it referred both to wisdom-which serves as the backbone of a well ordered regime-and Socrates’ failure to discredit the divine message, this illustrates that only a divine being, someone with perfect knowledge, is capable of fully understanding both human and political virtue.<sup>292</sup> Therefore, a person’s soul must be open to the divine truth of the cosmos in order to formulate laws which act in accordance with true justice. As mentioned earlier, this can only begin to take place when one recognizes the limits placed upon one’s own knowledge by virtue of their position as humans within the universe.

Keeping in mind that “every polis writes large the type of man that is socially dominant” within its walls, insofar as the philosopher’s soul “is attuned to the divine measure of things,” I maintain that his soul is ordered in such a way that it provides a model for the best type of citizenship.<sup>293</sup> This is in consideration of the fact that it is only “the philosopher’s noesis (rational inquiry)” that is “oriented” toward transcending the temporal bounds of his finite existence with the aim of obtaining knowledge of the

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<sup>291</sup> Plato, 1947. p. 189, 187.

<sup>292</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 2008. 204b.

<sup>293</sup> McKnight, Steven. *Eric Voegelin’s Search for Order and History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978, 110.

whole.<sup>294</sup> Because his soul is more attuned to divinely ordered truth, Socrates is more aligned with the city's gods than anyone else. As a result he "...become[s] the source of a new authority."<sup>295</sup> In other words, his openness allows him to become the source and the conveyor of the god's truth. Since, he has recognized and publically proclaimed his ignorance, it becomes his responsibility to order the souls of the city's inhabitants with divine truth. For it is only when the citizens of the city shed their egocentric state of being and recognize their finitude can the polis move closer toward perfect justice.

Therefore, philosopher must illuminate societal injustices to allow the city to progress toward truer forms of political justice. Socrates uses his craft to expose injustices within the city. By going to the public he attempts to guide the city away from injustice through an open discussion about sociopolitical concepts of truth and justice. Socrates employed his particular method because he wanted the people to discover the truth on their own. In order for them to come to and understanding on their own it was necessary for Socrates to employ his specific method of philosophizing. By instilling within his fellow citizens questions of justice and truth he provided them with the tools necessary to progress toward a more just society that has greater equality and inclusivity rather than remaining static in an unjust, exclusionary, and oppressive state.

From this we can conclude that the philosopher's social task is to spread and democratize the truth regarding a polity's sociopolitical injustices. This illustrates that philosophy necessarily has a place within the public political sphere. We also see that Socrates (the public philosopher) has a fundamental, contributive, and participatory citizenship role within the political community.

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<sup>294</sup> Sandoz, Ellis. "The Philosopher's Vocation: The Voegelinian Paradigm." *The Review of Politics*. Vol. 71, No. 1. Winter 2009, 57.

<sup>295</sup> Voegelin, Eric. *Order and History, Volume III*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957,



It is the philosopher who protects the city from injustice. He has the ability to recognize unjust political practices because his soul desires wisdom. Resulting from the philosopher's longing for truth, his conscious awareness grows which allows his soul ascends toward truth. As a result his soul becomes attuned to the beautiful, good, and true rendering it the best in the polis. From this we can conclude that the philosopher has the highest level of consciousness of anyone within the polis. Because his level of consciousness affords him greater insight into truth, he above anyone else, is able to determine and understand the difference between just and unjust laws. Therefore, we can see that the public philosopher is a vital and necessary element within any polity.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

## Shortcomings of Strauss and Voegelin

We see stark differences in these two Socratic perceptions. Both incorporate history into the theoretical positions in order to lend credence to their claims about Socrates and we see *eros* in their assertion. However, each scholar comes to very different conclusions about the ancient philosopher. Strauss and his contemporaries focus on the potentially threatening aspects of Socratic philosophy. Citing Socrates' fate, their diatribes outline philosophy's inherent dangers. Voegelin and his contemporaries, on the other hand, defend Socrates by placing him in the context of human history. Through the use of metanarrative, they employ Voegelin's theory of symbols and consciousness to defend Socrates' actions.

Those who view Socrates as a political threat turn to his trial and death to support their claims. Because he chose to continually challenge the cities laws, customs, and beliefs within the public sphere, he is seen neither as a good philosopher or a good citizen. Instead, scholars like Leo Strauss, Jeremy Mhire, and Allan Bloom hold that Plato is in fact the "model citizen" and best philosopher because he opted to remain hidden from plain view and wrote rather than openly and publically philosophize with the masses.<sup>296</sup>

Because he chose to write dialogically, Plato adopted a method of writing which speaks to two different audiences simultaneously. For fear of meeting Socrates' fate, Plato wrote esoterically burying the true meaning of his philosophy between the lines of

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<sup>296</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 295

his writing or in textual “silences and contradictions.”<sup>297</sup> In other words, the ink on the page speaks to non-philosophers while textual silences then whisper truth to true philosophers.<sup>298</sup> Strauss and those adopting his philosophical outlook claim that vagueness and ambiguity prevents against textual perversion. This allows the writing to take on different meanings for different people and therefore protects the author and the polis from the dangers associated with philosophy. Thus, the importance of Plato’s philosophy lies not in what was written but what which was purposefully left out. Further lending credence to their argument is Plato’s choice to exclude Socrates from his *Laws*. Unlike his other texts, his teacher no longer fulfills the role of educator and is replaced by a character simply dubbed Statesman.

While Plato did go against the teachings of Socrates by writing and left his teacher out of the *Laws*, one can hardly claim to know his reasons for doing so. As historian Josiah Ober concludes the “absence of any reliable evidence” renders this theory anemic.<sup>299</sup> There is no data to suggest that Plato acted out of fear or left Socrates out of his final work because he needed a true philosopher to lay a politically just foundation. Though, one cannot ignore his choice to disregard the teachings of his mentor by making use of the written word. It is the only piece of solid evidence we have suggesting that Plato deviated from the teachings of Socrates. Is it possible that his choice to write and remain silent in his texts resulted from a fear of persecution? Maybe, we simply cannot and do not *know* Plato’s motives for doing so. But so what? This

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<sup>297</sup> A. W. Saxonhouse, "The Socratic Narrative: A Democratic Reading of Plato's Dialogues." *Political Theory*, 2009, 733.

<sup>298</sup> Walsh, Sean Noah. *Perversion and the Art of Persecution: Esotericism and Fear in the Political Philosophy of Leo Strauss*. Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2012, 64.

<sup>299</sup> Ober, Josiah. *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 157.

speaks has nothing to do with Socrates' citizenship or the civic duty of the public philosopher. It does, however, have everything to do with Straussian scholarship.

We can see that the foundation of Strauss' opinion regarding the proper role of the philosopher and the proper method of philosophizing suffers a draw back when laying claims to the historical Socrates. Failure to look beyond the Platonic texts and place Socrates into a larger historical picture leaves his political philosophy lacking a solid foundation. In a 1988 article, Gordon Wood critiques Strauss' scholarship noting that first and second generation Straussians:

...[A]re not really concerned with the way historians understand the past; they are usually interested in, for example, only a few documents... They have no conception of the process of history. They do not study [history] to see how it flows out of previous events and into subsequent events...<sup>300</sup>

Historical context is necessary for substantiating theoretical arguments. It provides us with a standard against which to measure the adequacy of our concepts and allows us to justify explanations of human political behavior. Unlike his predecessors, Mhire sees the importance of an historical "ballast"<sup>301</sup> as made evident by his attempt to validate Strauss' claims by using Aristophanes' *Clouds* as a means for examining the historical Socrates and framing the symbolic Socrates. He writes at the outset of his project that: "Only by understanding the historical Socrates and we understand what is meant by Socratic citizenship, be that in an actual, philosophical or dramatic sense. Mhire is not all together wrong in his assertion. And analyzing the historical Socrates from the perception on his contemporaries is of the utmost importance. Understanding the ancient philosopher in the way that his fellow citizens did gives us of a firsthand view

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<sup>300</sup> Wood, Gordon S. "The Fundamentalists and the Constitution." *The New York Review of Books*, February 18, 1988.

<sup>301</sup> Mhire, *Socrates as Citizen*, 16.

of the man within his political society. However, he does fall short in his usage of Aristophanes.

Keeping the playwrights public role in mind shows us that he may not be the most reliable source when examining Socratic citizenship. To begin, the success of Aristophanes and his plays rest upon public opinion. For his own benefit and for the sake of his reputation, Aristophanes is beholden to people. He must satisfy the people if his plays are to be successful. Thus, in order to do well he must please the people by giving them what they want.

For the sake of comedy, Aristophanes' Socratic character is a grossly over-exaggerated representation of the historical Socrates. This, of course, means that the *Clouds* offers us a distorted version of the truth as made evident by Aristophanes' hyperbolic illustration describing Socrates' philosophic inquiries. He degrades Socratic philosophy by illustrating Socrates and his students as uninvolved imbeciles that fill their time investigating trifling matters such as the distance of a flea's jump. Aristophanes offers us a Socratic caricature--a burlesqued version of the actual man.

The problem with relying on Aristophanes is that he offers a citizens point of view, is the view point of citizen who was content with the Athenian status quo. Simply, by virtue of catering to the public's view of Socrates, Aristophanes does not offer any insight into the public-philosopher's citizenship other than what we already know—that Socrates upset the Athenian status quo. The issue at hand when relying upon the *Clouds* is that neither the play nor its author provides us with anything that we do not already know. While the *Clouds* offers us a perception of the historical Socrates as perceived by some in Athenian society, it does not offer any insight into Socrates the public-philosopher.

Understanding the nature of ancient Athenian theater also shows us that the *Clouds* is a poor Socratic measure. All plays are meant for public entertainment and those of ancient Athens were of no exception. Productions were composed with the intent of having them premiere at “major civic festivals” in front of large audiences which could draw as many as “17,000 persons.”<sup>302</sup> They were also almost “always competitive” and judges were picked from “Councils.”<sup>303</sup> Also, given the nature of the events at which the plays were presented, they are typically financially backed by the city itself.<sup>304</sup> Perhaps to his disappointment, but nonetheless true, Aristophanes cannot offer us a ‘proper’ perception of Socrates because he caters to both the public and regimes’ opinions. Thus, we can rule out the *Clouds* as a reliable source for a true glimpse into the nature of Socrates’ citizenship.

In terms of Voegelin’s take on Socrates and Socratic philosophy he determined that Socrates’ decision to turn his soul to the divine truth of the spiritual beyond provided him with greater insight into the truth of universal existence and thus a deeper level of consciousness. According to Voegelinian political thought Socrates was attempting to spread the gospel of his newly discovered truth to his city. Athens’ negative response illustrated the city’s spiritual sickness insofar as they were concerned with their own desires. This is symbolized in the anger of Socrates’ accusers insofar as he exposed their ignorance. Thus, Voegelin’s Socrates’ represents humanity’s next great leap in being.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Ober, Josiah. *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989, 122.

<sup>303</sup> Aristophanes, Alan H. Sommerstein. *Lysistrata and Other Plays*. Introduction, London: Penguin, 2002, xxvii. Sommerstein goes on to say that “...the only exception that we know of, in Aristophanes’ time, was the restaging of *The Frogs*...”

<sup>304</sup> Ober, *Mass and Elite*, 122-123.

<sup>305</sup> Haven’t spoken about the great leap in being before this mention.

As the person with the best soul he possessed insight into truths that could bring the city closer in line with divinely perfect justice.

But Voegelin does not offer us a comprehensive piece of literature outlining Socrates' citizenship. He too falls short in the way of Socratic scholarship. While we have a good working knowledge of his views on Socrates, the philosopher, and the philosopher's civic duties the two are never merged into a piece strictly regarding citizenship. Not until David Corey has there been a piece of scholarship which examines Socratic citizenship under the light of Voegelinian political philosophy. As mentioned earlier, Corey successfully undermines scholars Hannah Arendt and Dana Villas' views of Socrates civic behavior. He acknowledges their defense of Socratic citizenship, but cites their misconstrued ideas regarding its driving force. Each scholar roots the driving force of Socrates' civic behavior in the self thereby failing to recognize its divine aspect. Yet, the scope of Corey's article does not move beyond these two scholars to discredit those who view Socrates as an atheistic, desire drive, political threat. However, I have.

Using Voegelinian political philosophy and the Platonic Socrates I have undermined the Straussian perception of Socratic citizenship. My argument illustrates that Socrates' civic behavior neither disregarded the polity nor was atheistic. Instead, he sought out progression toward true justice through publically philosophizing as being "obedient to the god."<sup>306</sup> He is a "gadfly, given to the state by God..."<sup>307</sup> In other words, insofar as the gods have granted him the wisdom and foresight necessary to move the polis closer to a truer form of justice, Socrates is a divine gift to the city. Because his soul is open to divine wisdom, he serves as a medium for truth between the divine and the

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<sup>306</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 190

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, 200

temporal. That is to say that because of his heightened conscious awareness, he is able to recognize and communicate truths of which he becomes consciously aware through his pursuit of knowledge to the public through an open discussion about truth and justice. Thus, Socrates is beneficial to his city in that he and his craft are a force for social change insofar as they bring to light sociopolitical injustices which are discovered through the philosophical process.

Earlier we explored Aristotle's definition of a citizen and his reasoning for the political community's existence. In doing so we showed that those who participate in maintaining the polis can be considered a citizen by virtue of helping to make the good life possible for others. But according to Aristotle only those who are able to aid in administering justice within the city and the holding of office can hold the status of citizenship within a democratic society.<sup>308</sup> This highlights a shortcoming in Athenian society with respect to metics, slaves, and women. Each of these social groups assist in one way or another in the maintaining the city and helping it to achieve its end, yet they are denied the rights and privileges which are granted to legal citizens.

Turning our attention back to members of political communities like Socrates and Dr. King who seek to create just societies, we can see how this conception of justice would be problematic for a public-philosopher like Socrates. For the Socratic public-philosopher sociopolitical justice includes an equal and inclusive society. We see this with respect to Socrates in his disregard for and refusal to adhere to accepted sociopolitical norms. For example, despite the ancient Athenian perception of women, Socrates converses with them and includes them in discussions regarding truth and justice. We can view his noncompliance with such standards of behavior along with his

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<sup>308</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 53.



refusal to stop his public pursuit of truth as his means of standing against social injustice. Thus, rather than viewing Socrates as a political problem, we can think of him as something of a civil rights leader who viewed the Athenian sociopolitical atmosphere as corrupt and unjust. Similar to Dr. King during the Civil Rights Movement, insofar as he challenged the status quo and called into question notions of political justice with those who were political excluded, Socrates brought to light issues of injustice.

Though this was seen as civil disobedience, as mentioned earlier, sometimes this behavior is necessary to highlight injustices and progress toward true political Justice. That is to say that the status quo must be challenged in order to bring about a true, better form of justice than is currently known. In Socrates' case this meant that he could not stop his philosophizing. He had an obligation to the gods to continue his journey toward truth and thus an obligation to disobey the governing regime. As such, the philosopher's civil disobedience can be seen as a political obligation. Since he is the only one in the city who is able to recognize a better form of justice than currently known in the city, it becomes his duty as a citizen to break the laws that are unjust in order to show their injustice.

However, it is important to point out that for the philosopher's civil disobedience to shed light upon issues of sociopolitical injustice properly it must be nonviolent in practice. As Dr. King explains in his Letter from Birmingham Jail:

Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored...[T]here is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for

nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of [injustice].<sup>309</sup>

It is also worth reiterating that the philosopher does not state what is just outright, but instead illustrates what is injustice in order to foster a public discussion about a society's political practices and beliefs. This is because, like anyone else, the public-philosopher is bound by the limits of his human condition and therefore cannot know what is just; however, because his consciousness and pursuit of knowledge give him greater insight into the nature of true justice, more so than anyone else. Consequently, he is able to recognize injustice before the rest of the polity and thus bring it to light within the public realm-much like Socrates did when he was philosophizing with society's 'lower-sorts'.

Furthermore, since human finitude renders us incapable of knowing what justice truly is, the laws within the city necessarily fall short of exhibiting true justice. In consequence of this we must remember that by virtue of our finitude no city will ever exhibit true justice. The polity is constructed by humans as are its laws. As such, is inherently imperfect because it is created and maintained by imperfect beings.

However, through the philosophical process we can gain wisdom, become more conscious and progress toward justice. It allows us to illuminate sociopolitical injustices within the public sphere, engage in discussion about our sociopolitical practices and notions of justice. This helps to create a more just society by attempting to bring about greater equality and inclusivity. Furthermore, the city must recognize and address perceived social injustice and attempt to adapt. Otherwise, failing to do so will eventually threaten the stability of the city and possibly its existence. That is to say that

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<sup>309</sup>King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968, author. *Letter from Birmingham Jail: Martin Luther King Jr's Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle That Changed a Nation*. 2013.

the regime can choose either to ignore its shortcomings or recognize them. Thus, the city must be flexible and recognize its wrong doing(s) and take care to fix them in order to appease those within its walls if it seeks to maintain its existence. If the city has the aim of sustaining itself then it must, at some point, in some form or fashion, allow its laws to evolve in such a way that they now meet the new standard of justice discovered and brought to light by the philosopher, especially if the city prides itself of being just as Athens did.

If the city chooses to maintain its unjust oppressive practices it will inevitably fall by the hands of the group that is victim of such practices. A particular segment of the population will eventually resist oppression.<sup>310</sup> If a social group(s) feels as if they are being treated unequal by the state, then the state must address the problem and attempt to fix it. If it fails to do this history has shown repeatedly that an oppressed people eventually may cause the downfall of a regime through revolution. To put it in the words of Dr. King: “Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself...”<sup>311</sup>

We must keep in mind that a people will eventually yearn to be free from oppression. Therefore, in order to ease the level of political disruption, the philosopher must expose political injustices to protect the city from mass political discontent. This stems from the fact that small that the polity can withstand small spurts of political disruption about particular topics as opposed to mass violent outbursts. The city can withstand the small-scale disruptive blow by addressing the issue or particular set of issues more attentively than a large scale mass political disruption as a result of an

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<sup>310</sup> Dr. King, *Letter From Birmingham Jail*.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid

injustice that is propagated by the state as just but is considered to be oppression by a large segment of society. Thus, public philosophy is need in order to preserve the city.

As we mentioned earlier, political disruption is unavoidable within any type of political society, therefore, introducing newly discovered truth and forms of justice progressively has the effect of tempering social unrest insofar as unrest is confined to a small area of interest. This is not to say, however, that the matter at hand is insignificant. Rather, it is to say that the perceived injustice causing political unrest is particular rather than broad.

Not shedding light upon issues of political injustices fosters discontentment and, as history has shown, more often than not, will result in large and multiple segments of the body-politic being dissatisfied. As such, this places the state at greater risk than when a small segment of the population is dissatisfied. The regime is better able to focus on the particular issue at hand, address it, and create justice where injustice exists.

Furthermore, public philosophy also creates an environment in which the people are eased into political changes incrementally rather than thrusting them into an entirely new political setting. Open discussions about perceived sociopolitical wrongs allow a polity to deal with issues singularly rather than all at once. The ability to ease into a new and more just political environment, then, protects the polity and the people from each other. That is to say that the polity is protected from mass political discontentment. Ultimately, accepting new truth(s) progressively keeps the polity balanced due to the constant tug of war between the regime, and the citizens and if one side gains too much power, the other side will fall as a result of the other's force.

Accordingly, public political discourse is needed to serve as a sort of litmus test for justice. Openly discursive societies stand to weather the storms of deep social

division, injustice, and political schism as they pose less of threat to truth and justice. Simply, public reason takes the place of persuasion and allows for the transference of ideas and opinions between members of a political community. Inclusivity is also an important factor in public discourse. Open dialogue amongst an exclusive segment(s) of society in a democratic system of government is oxymoronic. The discussion is not open and therefore does not include the *demos*. Rather, it is selective. Moreover, exclusive public discourse creates the potential for social and political domination. It suppresses the voice of particular groups by denying them the opportunity to make their needs and wants heard. It is oppressive in that it subjects the voiceless to the political domination of those who are able to engage in public political dialogue. Thus, to have a democratic discussion of justice there must be equal participation from each group comprising the political community.

Furthermore, with respect to Socrates and his civic behavior, we can view him as a model for citizenship. As mentioned at the outset of this project, Socrates was the first to bring questions of political justice and injustice into the public-sphere. He was the first to publically change the status quo in a philosophical manner, defy social norms for the pursuit of a greater good, and bring the political philosopher into the public sphere. It is for these reasons that I assert Socrates is the paradigmatic citizen.

This thesis has sought bridge the gap between Eric Voegelin's political philosophy and Socratic citizenship. Though this was done in part by Dr. David Corey, his article only addresses Dana Villa and Hannah Arendt's shortcomings by illustrating their failure to acknowledge Socrates' adherence to divine authority. Until now there has been no text which gives a comprehensive defense of Socrates as the paradigmatic citizen that uses Voegelinian political thought. Here, I have done both. In my defense of the

public philosopher I have illustrated that those who have challenged the political and social status quo were first viewed as miscreants only to be regarded later as heroes and fighters for justice. This speaks to society's need for challengers of injustices. For as President Obama stated in his speech about the civil rights leaders and activists who paved the way for a more just society in Selma, Alabama 50 years ago:

[O]ur work is never done...[A]ction requires that we shed our cynicism. For when it comes to the pursuit of justice, we can afford neither complacency nor despair.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> "Remarks by the President at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches."

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