

Ancient (and contemporary) accounts of the *Republic*

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Proposal in view of a 40 min. or a 20 min. panel

SHORTER ABSTRACT

1. Most of us are accustomed to presume that Plato himself could not be really satisfied with the outline of the *Republic* given in the *Timaeus*. However in *Ti.* 18c we read that the topics chosen for this particular summary are easy or easier to be remembered (*eumnemoneuton*) because of their strangeness (*dia ten aetheian*), much as if the summary would be ‘bad’ only because prepared in view of an uninformed and incompetent audience. Does this imply that for Plato himself a ‘good’ résumé (i.e. a much more penetrating one) ought to have been very different from the one given there?

However, in the opening pages of *R.* V Polemarchus explicitly requests from Socrates a detailed and well-argued account of the communality of women and related topics (449c-450a) and openly claims that the philosopher is addressing a competent and open-minded audience (450d). Moreover in 453d (and then repeatedly elsewhere) Socrates treats his ideas about the communality of women as a law to be established formally, while few other points have been treated as *nomoi* along this dialogue. By doing so, Plato is treating this particular theory as something important, well developed, to be taken seriously.

But along the same dialogue Plato’s Socrates has a lot to say about – or, rather, against – the efficacy of the *nomoi*, esp. when showing how easily illegality can permeate almost every kind of social order (VIII-IX). Does this refer to the communality of women too? If so, this particular *nomos*, not unlike many other, will possibly gain some efficaciousness at the beginnings, but only for a while, because in subsequent times illegality could probably reaffirm itself in the form of a resumption of family links.

2. Something should be added about Aristotle’s own account of the *Republic*, where the thesis of the communality of women and the related corollaries is discussed at length, much as if this were the sole relevant topic tackled in Plato’s dialogue. And also about Thesleff’s idea that the summary of the *Timaeus* could go back to a time when most of the *Republic* still had to be written.

But the crucial point is, rather, that our general approach to the dialogue is (and has been since some centuries) deeply affected by an unfavorable pre-comprehension of the political utopia as something of modest value other than impracticable. As a consequence, contemporary commentators tend to dismiss Plato’s utopia and prefer to concentrate on different features of the dialogue, different streams of thought, possibly more subterranean but, for just this reason, less ephemeral, i.e. more interesting, more stimulating and so on.

Whence the question I propose to address: could it be a mistake not to treat the communality of women and related topics as something actually believed to form the core of the *Republic*?

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