



Erōs, Philia and *Physis* in the *Republic*: A Review of

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Reviewed by R Gallagher
American University of Beirut
rg19@aub.edu.lb

Eros and its role in the character of the tyrant and of the philosopher are central themes of Plato's *Republic* and so it is not surprising that David Roochnik devotes a chapter of *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic* (Cornell, 2003) to *Eros* and its relation to *Republic's* synthetic city-state, Kallipolis. Difficulties abound, however, in Roochnik's treatment. He writes: 'without *Eros* there would be no philosophy. This should hardly be surprising... philosophy, as its etymology suggests, is an erotic activity... In Kallipolis, however, *Eros* is counted as a disruptive, subversive force, a potential tyrant, and therefore is systematically suppressed. *Eros* gives birth to Kallipolis, which in turn attempts to extinguish it' (55, 62) 'Kallipolis,' he adds, 'represses *Eros* at every turn' (69). *Inter alia*, Roochnik argues for these claims on the basis of 1) the elimination of the family and the government regulation of reproduction in Kallipolis, and 2) Socrates' requirement that philosophers go down again to the prisoners in the Cave and share in their labors and honors, rather than contemplate the forms outside the Cave (519d).

Roochnik's treatment displays a confusion of *eros* and *philia*. I am not only referring to his claim that *eros* ('sexual love or passion') is

connected with philosophy because *philosophia* is derived from *philia* ('friendly love, friendship'). That simply shows that he confuses the two fundamentally different concepts. No, I mean that, in general, he would be on firmer ground to claim that Kallipolis represses *philia*, rather than *eros*, for, as I will show, the city is designed to reward its heroes with fulfillment, not suppression, of erotic desire, whether they be warriors or philosophers. For the requirement that philosophers return to the Cave—to which Roochnik objects—would, I will show, enable them to deepen their contemplation of the forms in ways unavailable to them were they to refuse to return.

Under the eugenics policies of Kallipolis (459d), the young men who are 'good in war' are encouraged to have sexual relations with as many of the women in the guardian class as possible.¹ Socrates says that along with other rewards and prizes (*gera*), the license of intercourse with the women must be given more abundantly to those of the young who are good in war, so that under this pretext the most children will be sown by such men (460b). Furthermore, Socrates agrees with Glaucon when the latter proposes that for the man who is proved best in war on a military campaign, as long as that campaign lasts, no one whom he wants to kiss should be permitted to refuse, so that if a man happens to love (*erōn*) someone erotically, either male or female, he would be more eager to win the rewards of valor (468c). It is unlikely that such expressions of *eros* will stop at kissing. Some heroes, if their beloved is a woman, could seek an official marriage with her as a reward (*geras*) of service. The woman will have no choice in the matter. If the hero wants her, she is his. So, the Republic seems to legalize a form of rape, and call it marriage. This is hardly 'repression' of *eros*, but rather its redirection into forms independent of the relations of the private household (*oikos*).

By contrast, *philia* takes it on the chin. In *Republic iii*, Socrates says: 'People would care most for that which they happen to love (*philōn*)' (412d2). But *Republic v*, often inconsistent with *ii* and *iii*, bars fulfillment of *philia*. It would seem impossible to form strong individual bonds of *philia* in Kallipolis since no one is permitted to have their own husband, wife, son, daughter, father or mother to 'care most for,' or 'care for everything related or akin to,' as Socrates commends (412d2). If a man and a woman love each other and wish to 'care most for' each other and for everything related to each other, this may not be permitted them 1)

¹ Socrates and Glaucon clearly identify the gender of those who are proved best in war as male (*ton aristeusanta*, 468b2).

because their union may not be approved by the rulers (458d), 2) because the marriage laws, which require that they either move on to another sexual partner or refrain from sex, forbid it, or, 3) because of the privileges extended to those young men ‘best in war,’ one of whom may decide he wants the woman as a prize (*geras*) in the way that Agamemnon decided he wanted Briseis, the wife of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Only when the man and woman are old and infertile will they be able to choose to express their love for each other (461c). Furthermore, if a hero decides to claim a woman loved by a lesser guardian as a *geras*, it is hard to believe that the lesser man would remain a friend to the hero, if they ever were friends. Indeed, it is provided in the *Republic* that such conflicts lead to fights (464c). In addition, a guardian woman in love with a guardian man may resent being claimed as a prize by a superior warrior, but she will have no choice. In the city of the guardians, she must submit. These cases from the text of the *Republic* document the systematic suppression of *philia* in Kallipolis. Roochnik fails to notice that specific repression of *philia* because he confutes *philia* with *eros*.

Moreover, if one entertains Aristotle’s view that humans first and naturally experience and learn the virtue of friendship (*philia*) through the *oikos* (*EE* 1242a40, *EN* 1161b28-62a14), then Plato’s Socrates, in abolishing the *oikos*, eliminates the means by which individuals experience and practice friendship. As a result, friendship would be prevented from developing normally among the citizens in the city of the guardians, according to Aristotle, because no one can experience friendship with kindred. Instead, individual men are encouraged to compete for the reward of brief sexual liaisons with ‘the best women’ (459b), and those women are encouraged to view themselves as a fitting reward for such warriors. So, in the guardian state, the citizens know *eros*--as a passion which one fulfills or of which one is the object—but have scant familiarity with *philia*.

Another part of Roochnik’s claim regarding the repression of *eros* involves Socrates’ requirement that philosophers return to the Cave to lead and govern. This, in the opinion of Roochnik (and Glaucon), constitutes repression of the philosopher’s *eros* for knowledge of ‘what is’ (cf. 485abd, 490b, 501d), presumably achievable only through contemplation of the forms outside the Cave. He writes that ‘despite requiring philosophy in order to come into being, Kallipolis is not itself philosophical, for its essential thrust is to constrain and repress the erotic impulse from which philosophy necessarily originates’ (76). Yet Socrates resolves the problem with which Roochnik is concerned directly after

Glaucon objects to this return (519). He says: ‘each of you must...grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. When you are used to it, you’ll see vastly better than the people there. And because you’ve seen the truth about the fine, just and good things, you’ll know each image for what it is. And also that of which it is the image,’ i.e., the form (520c-d). This passage reiterates (in abbreviated form), and points back to, the discussion of contemplation of the forms in everyday life that is presented in *Rep. 3*, where Socrates says that from education in music ‘we know the different forms of moderation, courage, frankness, high-mindedness, and all their kindred, and their opposites too...and see them in the things in which they are, both themselves and their images’ (402c, Grube-Reeve translation, underscore added). Socrates resolves the very problem about which Roochnik worries: the guardians redeployed into the cave will contemplate the forms as they are instantiated in the world around them. They will take pleasure in taking actions that bring about the instantiation of the forms of moderation, courage, and justice, etc., in the institutions and people of Kallipolis. So, in Kallipolis, then, the eros of both youthful warrior and learned philosopher are satisfied. But Roochnik concludes from an argument that we have shown to be flawed that ‘Kallipolis must fall apart because it represses *eros* so thoroughly’ (77). He would be more faithful to the text if he considered attributing the decline described in *Republic viii* to an *inconsistency* in the constitution of Kallipolis in regards to *eros*. For obviously the law that no one loved by a hero can refuse his advances admits *eros* into the city and legitimizes it for the guardians, but *eros* is a passion to possess another, and so, with this law, Socrates and Glaucon re-introduce private cares into the city—in violation of its constitution. Another, related possible explanation might lay in its repression of *philia*.

Roochnik makes his flawed argument—that Kallipolis represses *eros* completely—the perilous foundation of his claim that *Republic* endorses Athenian democracy over aristocracy. ‘[W]hat is needed,’ he asserts, ‘is a regime that allows the flourishing of Eros’ (77). I will not deal with every aspect of Roochnik’s peculiar claim, e.g., how he accepts, without explanation, S. Monoson’s utterance that the democracy that murdered Socrates sustained ‘an environment conducive to philosophy’ (80). I focus on Roochnik’s interest in diversity, as a component of Socrates’ description of democracy (83-86). It would be better for Roochnik’s argument if he abandoned the unjustifiable claim that for the *Republic*, ‘One’s nature—a word repeated several times in this section [453a-c]—is determined only by what one learns (455b)’

(59). The notion that our natures are determined by what we pick up in life is hardly supportive of the idea that human beings are meaningfully different. The cited passage (455b) doesn't even support this notion that is so damaging to one of Roochnik's central concepts. The text emphasizes that some people by nature learn quickly, while others never pick something up, no matter how much attention their instructor gives them. A more useful passage for Roochnik's interest in diversity is Socrates' claim that 'each of us is naturally not quite like anyone else, but rather differs in nature' (*physis*) (370a8). From this, Socrates concludes that different people are fit for different tasks because each possesses a unique skill (*techne*). That nature and skill becomes the eternal essence of the individual in the Myth of Er (619e-620d), where the only characteristic of an individual that survives multiple incarnations is that peculiar skill and nature, e.g., Orpheus' and Thamyris' musicality, Atalanta's running, Ajax's courage, Epeius' craftship (all in the Myth), and last but not least there is the uniqueness of the philosopher. As Roochnik writes: 'Philosophers are peculiarly disposed to long for being and so turn away from the particulars. By contrast, lovers of sight are delighted by particularity as such and experience a strong resistance to thinking the world to be otherwise' (66). Yes, Professor Roochnik, but, contrary to your claims (66), Socrates *is* engaging in metaphysics when he distinguishes the natures of philosophers and of 'the lovers of sights and sounds,' for he is trying to explain to Glaucon that his soul is uniquely different from that of theirs, so much so that he should abandon his interest in the objects of their desires, and turn to philosophy.² It is doubtful that such a Platonic notion of diversity would recommend democracy over aristocracy.

² For more on this aspect of the *Republic*, cf. R. Gallagher, "Protreptic aims of Plato's *Republic*," *Ancient Philosophy* 24.2 (2004) 293-319.