

# Freedom and the State in Plato's *Politeia* (*Republic*): Reconsidering the concept of '*politeia*'

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## I. The title '*Politeia*'

The *Politeia* (*Republic*) is without doubt one of the greatest works of Plato. However, it is widely admitted that this English title is a hopeless translation of the Greek. First, the English word 'republic' does not mean the Greek '*politeia*'. Moreover, 'republic' conveys an image quite different from that which the dialogue presents.<sup>1</sup> Karl Popper, a formidable critic of Plato in the mid-twentieth century, explains how 'the idealization of the great idealist' emerges:

This tendency begins with the translation of the very title of Plato's so-called 'Republic'. What comes first to our mind when hearing this title is that the author must be a liberal, if not a revolutionary.... The traditional translation 'The Republic' has undoubtedly contributed to the general conviction that Plato could not have been a reactionary. (Chapter 6: Totalitarian Justice)<sup>2</sup>

Although I disagree with Popper's interpretation of Plato, I believe that this claim is essentially correct.

Based on the ancient testimonies, we are certain that Plato himself gave the title of '*Politeia*' to this dialogue (transmitted in ten books): Aristotle, in the *Politics* and *Rhetoric*, refers to this work by the name of '*Politeia*'.<sup>3</sup> While many of Plato's dialogues are named after the interlocutors (such as *Crito*, *Euthyphro* and *Phaedo*), some get their titles from the topics or situations (such as *Symposium*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Laws*); the *Politeia* is one of these.

On the other hand, there is uncertainty as to whether the original title was '*politeia*' (in the singular) or '*politeiai*' (in the plural). The oldest manuscript containing this dialogue, A (Parisinus graecus 1807, late 9 century), reports the title in the plural, 'Πολιτεῖαι'. Accordingly, the first printed edition of Aldus (1513) and the vulgar edition of Stephanus (1578) adopted the title in the plural. On the other

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<sup>1</sup> This is widely recognized: see, for example, Schofield (1999), 58–60.

<sup>2</sup> Popper (1966), 88. Notomi (2015) presents a reply to Popper.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.* II.1, 1261a6 explicitly mentions this form. For other references, see II.1, 1261a9, II.6, 1264b28, V.12, 1316a1, VIII.7, 1342a33, and *Rhet.* III.4, 1406b32.

hand, the other two major medieval manuscripts, D (Marcianus graecus 185, 12 century) and F (Vindobonensis suppl. gr. 39, 14 century), have the singular ‘Πολιτεία’. This suggests that the title had already been transmitted in the two different forms in antiquity.

However, Aristotle’s references in the *Politics* are regarded as a decisive piece of evidence in favour of the singular form, so that modern editors print the title ‘*Politeia*’ in modern editions. Although there are few commentators who take the issue of singular/plural seriously, I think that this is worth examination.

Here, we have to explain why major sources record the plural title *if* Plato himself put the title in the singular form, as Aristotle reports. For this question, Dominic O’Meara puts forward the following plausible explanation. The Platonists active in Alexandria in late antiquity used the works of Aristotle for an introduction to Platonic philosophy, and therefore paired major works of the two philosophers in their educational curriculum. They matched Aristotle’s political works, namely the *Politics* (Πολιτικά) and the *Constitutions* (Πολιτεῖαι, lost except for the famous *The Constitution of Athenians*, preserved in papyri) to the Platonic dialogues, the *Politicus* (Πολιτικός) and the *Politeia* respectively, so that the title of the last came to be (wrongly) called in the plural (Πολιτεῖαι), in accordance with the corresponding Aristotelian work.<sup>4</sup> Following O’Meara’s explanation, I suggest that the original title was singular.

In any case, it is wrong to treat Plato’s *Politeia* in the same way as Aristotle’s *Constitutions*, which are the achievements of collaborative research into various types of Greek *poleis* in the Lyceum. It is true that the *Politeia* discusses five types of constitutions, namely the best constitution (aristocracy), timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny, in a systematic way for the first time in the history of Western political thought. Nevertheless, the main aim of this dialogue does not lie in the examination of these (plural) constitutions. Rather, it is concerned with what ‘*politeia*’ is, which includes those different types of constitutions. Therefore, its title should be expressed in the singular.

The Greek word ‘*politeia*’ is difficult to translate into any modern language, but from Cicero on it bears the Latin title ‘*Res publica*’. This leads to such modern titles as *The Republic*, *La République*, *La Repubblica* and *La República*. The Latin word ‘*res publica*’ means ‘public affairs’, and was a natural translation for Cicero. It should also be noted that Cicero himself wrote *De re publica* in response to Plato’s

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. O’Meara (2008), 44, and Westerink (1981).

work.<sup>5</sup> Yet, since the word later came to mean the political form of ‘republic’, this modern title often confuses or misleads readers. When Japan introduced Western philosophy in the mid-nineteenth century, the work was first introduced under the name of ‘*Kyowa-koku*’ (共和国, *republic*), but people soon realized that this was misleading, because the dialogue has nothing to do with the modern concept of the republic. Consequently, this Japanese title is no longer used.

Plato’s *Politeia* was first translated into the Japanese by Kimura Takataro from Benjamin Jowett’s English under the title of ‘*Riso-koku*’ (理想国, *Ideal State*) in 1906.<sup>6</sup> Kimura invented this title because he learned from Jowett’s ‘Introduction’ and other sources that the work is placed among Utopian literature, along with Cicero, *De re publica*, St. Augustin, *De civitate Dei* and Thomas More, *Utopia*.<sup>7</sup> Plato himself does not use a word for ‘ideal’, but his ‘*Kallipolis*’ (καλλίπολις) is usually taken for ‘Ideal State’.<sup>8</sup> Plato’s *Politeia* was widely read in the first half of the twentieth century under the title of ‘*Riso-koku*’, but this Japanese title went out of fashion soon after the Second World War, while it is still used in China.

In Japan, the title ‘*Kokka*’ (国家) has also been used since the nineteenth century. This is a translation of the German ‘*Der Staat*’, originally from the Latin ‘*Civitas*’. This shows that Japanese intellectuals (particularly in the field of law) read the *Politeia* under the strong influence of the German ‘*Staatslehre*’. ‘*Kokka*’ is now the standard title of the dialogue in Japan and Korea.

Why the once popular title ‘*Riso-koku*’ suddenly disappeared and was completely replaced by ‘*Kokka*’ in the latter half of the twentieth century is an interesting question, but it is probably related to the unfortunate fact that the dialogue was sometimes read and used for the totalitarian ideology in pre-war Japan, just as in Nazi Germany. ‘*Riso-koku*’ once was a catchword in constructing a new modern state, but this idealist attempt ended in disastrous failures: the imperial invasion and colonization of the other Asian countries and the suppression of freedom of the Japanese people. The reading of the *Politeia* as ‘*riso-koku*’ was abandoned, and this term is still avoided.<sup>9</sup>

## II. The meanings of ‘*politeia*’

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<sup>5</sup> For Cicero’s *De Re publica*, see Schofield (1999), ch.10, and Oshiba (2011).

<sup>6</sup> It is included in the second volume of Kimura (1903–1911).

<sup>7</sup> Jowett (1892), Vol. III, iii. In addition, Tommaso Campanella, *La città del Sole*, and Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, are often mentioned in this context.

<sup>8</sup> *Resp.* VII 537C.

<sup>9</sup> For the reception history of Plato’s *Politeia* in modern Japan, see Notomi (2012); cf. Moon (2014).

What does the Greek word ‘πολιτεία’ mean? It concerns ‘πόλις’ (*polis*), but it etymologically stems from ‘πολίτης’ (citizen). The *polītēs* is a free citizen who is a member of a *polis*, and the related verb ‘πολιτεύω’ means ‘to be a citizen or freeman, live in a free state/have a certain form of government, administer the state’ (LSJ). LSJ records the senses of ‘πολιτεία’ as follows:

- I. 1. condition and rights of a citizen, citizenship
2. the daily life of a citizen
3. body of citizens
4. = Lat. *civitas* in the geographical sense
- II. 1. government, administration
2. tenure of public office
- III. 1. civil polity, constitution of a state
2. republican government, free common-wealth

This word is relatively new, since it never appeared in Homer and Hesiod. The earliest examples came from Herodotus, *Histories*, and Aristophanes, *Knights*. This indicates that it came into use in the latter half of the fifth century BCE.

Herodotus uses this word only once in Book IX, Chapter 34: Tisamenus demands citizenship (πολιτηίην) from Sparta, by imitating Melampus’ request for kingship (βασιληίην). Here the word ‘*polītēiē*’ signifies the rights of being a free citizen.

Thucydides uses the word in 21 passages, out of which 4 are used in the sense of ‘citizenship’,<sup>10</sup> while the others mean ‘political form, constitution’.

In Plato, there are 10 examples in the dialogues supposedly written earlier than the *Politeia*. In the *Menexenus*, it signifies ‘constitutions’ such as democracy, oligarchy and tyranny (238B, C *thrice*, E *bis*). In the *Crito*, it means the being of a *polis* in general (53B). The *Gorgias* deals with the correspondence between the self and the constitution (510A, 513A, B), which anticipates the arguments in the *Politeia*.<sup>11</sup>

It is normally assumed that Plato does not use this term in the sense of ‘citizenship, or being a citizen’ in the *Corpus*, but I believe that, in order to understand Plato’s *Politeia*, it is crucial to see that the Greek word originally means ‘citizenship’, of which fact Plato must have been clearly aware.

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<sup>10</sup> Thuc. I 132.4, III 55.3, V 4.3, VI 104.2.

<sup>11</sup> See also *Alc. I*, 125D, E.

In the *Politeia*, one passage in Book VIII seems to imply that the word retains the original connotation of ‘citizenship’.

And presumably it turns into a democracy when the poor are victorious, when they kill some of their opponents and send others into exile, give an equal share in the *politeia* (ἐξ ἴσου μεταδῶσι πολιτείας) and public office to those who remain, and when public office in the city is allocated for the most part by lot.

(Pl. *Resp.* 557A, trans. T. Griffith, with slight changes)

Here, ‘giving a share in the constitution’ is virtually equal to ‘letting them rule as a full citizen’ in this political situation, and, therefore, it implies ‘having a citizenship’; for ‘to rule in a *polis*’ is ‘to play a political role by exercising a citizenship’.<sup>12</sup>

Paul Cartledge points out that *politeia* ‘came to denote both actively participatory citizenship... and the *polis*’s very life and soul’; it had ‘a wider frame of reference than either our “constitution” or “citizenship”’. This reflected the fact that the *polis* was imagined as a moral community of active participatory citizens, not as a mere political abstraction’.<sup>13</sup> Here a *polis* was ‘both a physical, geographical entity... and a metaphysical abstraction’.<sup>14</sup>

Plato’s *Politeia* uses this word as many as 94 times. The examples can be classified into the four groups that mean different things in particular contexts: (A) a condition of being a *polis*, or what it is to be a *polis*, (B) an ideal state, (C) different types of constitutions and (D) a metaphor for the inner state of the soul. Let us examine these four.

(A) The word ‘*politeia*’ (used for the title) appears for the first time in Book III 397E, in the sense of the being of a *polis*, in the course of constructing a *polis* in words (Books II–IV). In order to secure the *politeia*, the control over the education of music and literature is necessary (412B). Besides, the *politeia* naturally grows when it is well managed (IV 424A). Since this education is the most important, the *politeia* is eventually ruined when lawless music prevails in people’s mind (424E). The argument leads to the ‘*politeia*’, conceived of as the state of what a *polis* should be, i.e. an *ideal* state (B), in the next stage.

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle defines citizenship (being a full citizen) as the right to participate in judicial functions and in office, in *Pol.* III 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cartledge (2000), 20, (2009), 21, with reference to Bordes (1982).

<sup>14</sup> Cartledge (2009), 13, with reference to Hansen (2006), 58: ‘So a *polis* was part city, part state’.

(B) This sense of *'politeia'* as 'ideal state' appears in Book V in the discussion of the possibility of the best *polis*, which Socrates and his interlocutors have been constructing in discourse. After agreeing that their *polis* is the best, Glaucon raises the question as to 'whether it is possible—and just how it is possible—for political arrangements of this kind to be introduced' (471C); the *'politeia'* at issue is ideal. This best *polis*, later called *'Kallipolis'*, is the *ideal* state, or what a *polis* should be.

The word 'ideal' never appeared in Greek or Classical Latin. The Latin word *'idealis'* (since the fifth century AD, Martianus Capella)—the adjective of 'idea'—became our notion of 'ideal' (both adjective and noun) through medieval and modern philosophy. In Japanese, the latter is translated as *'risō'* (理想), while the 'idea' (both in modern philosophy and in ordinary usage) is usually rendered as *'kwan-nen'* (観念) or *'rinen'* (理念).

Their *politeia* becomes possible through the education of philosophers and their engagement in ruling. At the end of the proposals for realization, Socrates comments:

Don't you agree that this will be the quickest and simplest way for the *polis* and *politeia* we were talking about to come into being, making itself happy and bringing a large number of benefits to the nation in which it originates?

(Pl. *Resp.* VII 541A)

The *'politeia'* is presented in the central Books, V–VII, as 'the ideal state', i.e. the perfect and best state, or what a *polis* should be.

(C) Next, when this best and ideal *politeia* begins to be corrupted for some reasons, we meet various types of 'constitutions' (*politeiai*), which we are used to. In the transition from Book IV to Book V, Socrates first suggests that, just as virtue is unique but vices are diverse or limitless, many inferior constitutions emerge from the best constitution (445C–449B). They are mainly of four types, namely timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny, which will be discussed more fully in Books VIII–IX.<sup>15</sup> Here we see the ordinary sense of *'politeia'* as 'constitution'. In the

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<sup>15</sup> If my suggestion of the early summer of 412 BC (one year before the oligarchic revolution of the Four Hundred) for the dramatic date of the *Politeia* (cf. Notomi 2010) is correct, it was a high time for political controversy over which constitution should be adopted in Athens. On the other hand, while Menn (2006) examines this dialogue in the light of the literary tradition of 'on the constitution' (C), I understand that Plato's main focus is on (A), (B) and (D).

*Politics*, Aristotle defines ‘*politeia*’ in this sense, as ‘a certain ordering of positions of rule, particularly the one that is sovereign over all the others’.<sup>16</sup>

(D) Finally, the *politeia* is considered as realized inside one’s self (i.e. soul). This is called ‘*politeia* within us’, corresponding to the *politeia* of the state (A–C). We shall examine this concept in Section IV.

The basic meaning of ‘*politeia*’ lies in (A) the state of being a *polis*. The principle that Socrates proposes in constructing a *polis* in words is that each person engages in a single work suited to his or her own nature. These people are called ‘*politai*’ (citizens): the first citizens of the minimum *polis* are four, namely a farmer, a carpenter, a weaver and a shoemaker (II 370C).<sup>17</sup> In this way, citizens (members of the *polis*) form a single community like brothers and sisters (III 414E, IV 423D), and should not be at variance with each other (II 375B, 378C). Of those citizens, some are educated to be rulers, but it must be noted that not only the ruling class but also the ruled are *free citizens*, so that all of them make a *polis* as if they are a single body.<sup>18</sup> Each citizen is thus an essential part of the whole *polis*. The being of the *polis* that consists of these actively participatory free citizens (*politai*) is called ‘*politeia*’.<sup>19</sup>

### III. The Ideal State

The *polis* is a community where human beings can live together and realize a good life, as Plato tries to show in the *Politeia* and as Aristotle discusses in the *Politics* (especially in Book I).

The ideally just *politeia* is the one in which a community realizes *sōphrosynē*, i.e. the agreement of all about who should rule and who be ruled among the citizens. Here, *sōphrosynē* is shared by the ruling and the ruled, that is, by all the citizens (IV 431E–432A). In this just *polis*, each member is aware of his or her own position, and on this basis does his or her own work. In this way, the ideal *polis* is a community of the independent citizens (*polītai*), who enjoy freedom and justice.

This order produces self-awareness in each citizen in two ways. First, doing one’s own work is based on the awareness of what role one should play in the *polis*. This is social self-awareness. Second, in order to create this outer justice, a citizen has to be aware of his or her own nature (*physis*), i.e. what he or she is, and to find

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<sup>16</sup> Schofield (2006), 31: cf. *Pol.* III.6, 1278b8–10, IV.1, 1289a15–18.

<sup>17</sup> For the citizens of this *polis*, see also II 375B, 378C.

<sup>18</sup> In particular, see III 416B–417B. For the analogy of body, see V 462C–E.

<sup>19</sup> For the freedom of the Ideal State, see Takahashi (2010), esp. 108–16.

that the true self is rationality. A person who possesses true self-awareness is a *free* citizen and becomes a proper member of the whole *polis* (cf. IX 590E–591A).

If this is correct, the ideal state of Plato is opposite to the ‘totalitarian’ state, as some claim, in which the rulers enslave the others under the dictatorship called ‘philosopher-king’ and ignore people’s rights and freedom for the purpose of securing totality. This view is wrong because the just *polis* is possible only when all the citizens rationally and willingly follow the rule of the rulers who exercise reason, so that the whole state is under the rule of reason. In participating in the politics of this *polis*, citizens are neither forced nor deceived, but are ready to take care of the best order.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the ideal state realizes freedom, independence and human rights fully for the first time.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Plato criticizes ‘democracy’, in which citizenship is usually thought to prevail most widely. As quoted above (557A), democracy distributes the political rights of ‘*politeia*’ to people generously. However, the *politeia* (citizenship) in democracy is what everyone arbitrarily exercises as the ruling class. This kind of liberty is nothing but licentiousness. Democracy is far from the true *politeia* where each person plays his or her proper role as a free citizen.

In the democracy, which is compared to a trade fair of colourful constitutions (IX 557D), people live diverse and capricious lives. The people in this constitution lack self-awareness as citizens (*politai*) of their own duties. Accordingly, although democracy is counted among ‘*politeiai*’ (constitutions) as a political form of government, it is by no means a true *politeia*, i.e. truly constituting a *polis*.

It is for this reason that democracy, characteristic of extreme freedom, can easily turn into tyranny, which features extreme slavery (VIII 564A). In tyranny, the unity of a *polis* disappears, since all the people except one tyrant are given the status of slaves. This regime barely has the name ‘*politeia*’ (constitution), but is no longer a *politeia* at all, since it never constitutes a single community.

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<sup>20</sup> Ursula Coope raised an important question as to whether, and how, the producers are really free and rational. To answer this question, I’d like to emphasize two points. First, ‘persuasion’, which the rulers use in order to realize the Ideal State (cf. VI 502D, 519E), is the good kind, as distinct from the bad criticized elsewhere, e.g. in the *Gorgias*. Second, the educational program of the rulers may imply the enlightenment of the intellect of *every person*. In Book VII, number and calculation is said to be ‘among the first things that *everybody* is obliged to learn’. (522C) Therefore, I propose that all the members of the Ideal State, citizens, are rational in the basic meaning, i.e. self-awareness (in both social and individual ways), but among them, the rulers are more rational than the producers. The difference is only a matter of degree in realization of one’s intellectual ability.

<sup>21</sup> Takahashi (2010) demonstrates that Plato proposed freedom in a positive sense in this dialogue.



This is why Plato primarily means the ideal and just state (B) by ‘*politeia*’. It is probably this understanding that Aristotle has in mind when calling his best middle constitution ‘*politeia*’ (‘polity’ in English) in the *Politics* (III ch. 7, IV chs. 2, 7, 8).<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. *Politeia* within us and in the universe

In Plato’s *Politeia*, there are four references of (D) ‘*politeia* within us’, at the end of Book IX (590E–591A, E) and in Book X (605B, 608B). Let us examine this expression.

In Book IX, the final answer to the question of whether an unjust person is happy is given. From the consideration of the life of a tyrant, it is concluded that unjust people are the unhappiest. Instead, Socrates suggests that we should constitute an ideal *politeia* in our-selves, and nurture a just soul (590E–591A). We should look into this inner *politeia* to live a just and happy life (591E).

Then, in Book X, the imitative poets are criticized as nourishing the inferior and bad parts of the soul and weakening the reasoning part, so that a bad *politeia* is established within us (605B). This is contrasted with the good state of the soul, positively presented at the end of Book IX. For this reason, we should not be serious about poetry, and even if we listen to poetry, we should be on our guard against it and should take care of the *politeia* within us (608B). If we realize the just *politeia* within the soul and organize our own self with reference to this just *politeia* as the ideal, we live a just and happy life in the *polis*.

The notion of ‘*politeia* within us’ comes from the framework of the dialogue, that is, the analogy between *polis* and soul. In order to consider ‘justice’ in the soul, the inquiry introduces a *polis* in words, so that we can observe ‘justice’ in the *polis* (II 368C–369B). The good/bad state of the soul is investigated in the analogy with *polis*. The concept of ‘*politeia*’ is to be applied to the soul, since the order and harmony of constituents makes a soul good and just, in the same way as a *polis*.

In this analogy, the *polis* and the soul are investigated to catch sight of the ‘justice itself’ (IV 434E–435A). The notion of ‘*politeia*’ turns out to illustrate what justice is. However, it is seen not solely in these two. The ideal *polis*, once presented in words, is said to be ‘laid up in the heavens’ as a model to observe. The ‘*polis* in the heavens’ signifies the celestial order of the universe, to be discussed in the *Timaeus* (47B–C).<sup>23</sup> By observing and contemplating it in the heavens, we should both organize our own soul and construct a good *polis*, so that we make a good

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<sup>22</sup> For ‘polity’, see Rowe (2000), 384–89.

<sup>23</sup> I follow Cornford (1941), 319–20, and Burnyeat (2001), 9; for this interpretation of the passage of 592A–B, see Notomi (2011).

being of our own life in the appropriate *politeia* (*Resp.* IX 592B, cf. VI 497A). These three phases of *politeia*—the soul, the *polis* and the universe—represent the ontological principles, namely the Forms of Justice and Good. The ‘*politeia*’, presented in the dialogue, is a model of the Justice itself made visible in words.

I think Plato entitles the dialogue ‘*Politeia*’ because this notion illuminates the analogy and relations between the soul, the *polis* and the universe, in relation to the Form of Justice.

## V. Conclusion

The title *Politeia* primarily signifies the good and ideal being of the state (human community), and, in this sense, this dialogue discusses politics. However, Plato’s main aim is not to examine various forms of government (and to examine political science in this ordinary sense), but to make a philosophical inquiry into the nature of the *polis* and the soul and to investigate how the best states of an individual and of a community are realized.

I think that here Plato was not unaware of the basic meaning of ‘*politeia*’, but used this implication in discussing the *politeia*, for the word originally means ‘citizenship’, i.e. the being a citizen (*polites*); each member of a *polis*, whether ruling or ruled, contributes to *politeia* as a *polites*, i.e. independent citizen. The true *politeia* is never made possible without each citizen’s free and active participation with self-awareness.

To be a good citizen (member of the *polis*), each individual has to play a social role suitable for him or her, and also has to make himself or herself an independent, free, rational human being, for the good of his or her own soul. For this, one has to keep desires and spirit under the control of the rational part of the soul and to harmonize all the parts of the soul in this way. Freedom (realized in order) must be distinguished from licentiousness (release of unnecessary desires and greed). Each person is *just* when he or she establishes a good *politeia* in the soul. Our inner *politeia*, i.e. our own self, is Plato’s focus in the dialogue.

The members of the ideal *politeia* alone can be called ‘citizens’ in the right sense of the word. To be rational, we have to seek to know the whole truth of the universe as well as the right order of the society and the true nature of our soul. These three phases of *politeia* are understood in analogy. Plato’s philosophy is thus characterized as the interaction and relation between psychology, politics and cosmology. In this way, the dialogue presents the idealism of, and trust in, human beings as rational.

The *politeia* within us should be established in order to avoid the disorder of the soul and to reject the evil control of desire: the control of reason makes us free and just, inside our-selves, in the community and in the universe.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The earlier version of this paper was read at the international conference "Freedom and the State: Plato and the Classical Tradition" (organized by Corpus Christi College Centre for the Study of Greek and Roman Antiquity, and the JSPS Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research Project), at the Classics Centre, Oxford University, on 6 August 2012, and at the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy (organized by FISP), in Athens, on 5 August 2013. I thank the commentator, Ursula Coope, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and the participants of both conferences for valuable comments. I also thank anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

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