

AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

Plato's Caves: Diversity and
Dramatic Context

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Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity

By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276

The rise of populism, nativism, and postliberal authoritarianism in our politics today, bringing with it the attack on “woke” concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), coincides with promises of detention and mass deportations of immigrants. Given these political realities of our time, it is all the more imperative that we reflect on the impact of *Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity* by Rebecca LeMoine. In this wonderful book, LeMoine paints a picture of Platonic thought that pushes back against our illiberal tendencies today. Contrary to the popular and scholarly narrative, LeMoine argues that Plato was a friend of cultural diversity. LeMoine shows that far from exhibiting hostility toward foreigners, Plato believed foreigners play a role similar to that of Socrates: the role of gadfly.¹ Like encounters with Socrates, interactions with foreigners can expose contradictions in the authoritative opinions that undergird one's political community and thus encourage a more self-reflective citizenship.² Foreigners can do this because every citizen lives in a polity that shares the basic features of the cave, Plato's famous allegory in the *Republic*. This means that when we interact with someone raised in a different “cave,” we are faced with the possibility of another way of life and

hence with the occasion to reflect on our own conception of truth, beauty, and goodness.³ Foreigners, in other words, help us to see our cave as a cave, hence showing us that we live in a world of cave-like polities from which we can nonetheless be freed.

LeMoine argues that studying Plato's views on foreigners also gives deeper insight into his attitudes toward democracy, and she concludes with reflections on how Plato's portrayal of foreigners as gadflies can speak to our contemporary debate on cultural diversity. According to LeMoine, Plato shows how the "liberating sting" of cross-cultural engagement, although initially painful, can help citizens cultivate a Socratic knowledge of ignorance and hence the intellectual humility that is essential to the preservation of democracy.⁴ Plato, LeMoine argues, shows that democracy's downfall into tyranny happens when citizens develop intellectual hubris that rejects education and the exposure to cultural diversity that it brings.

LeMoine demonstrates that foreigners can play the role of Socratic gadfly by first "setting the stage," as it were, showing in chapter 2 that Plato believed that we lived in a "world of caves" and hence that interpolity relations and cultural diversity within the polis were key to philosophic liberation. Jacob Rodriguez of Baylor University discusses this chapter. In the next four chapters LeMoine provides a close reading of four Platonic dialogues to support her argument: the *Republic*, the *Menexenus*, the *Laws*, and the *Phaedrus*. Mary Townsend of St. John's University discusses LeMoine's reading of the *Republic*, Alexander Orwin of Louisiana State University discusses the analysis of the *Menexenus*, Robert Ballingal of the University of Maine discusses LeMoine's reading of the *Laws*, and I discuss her reading of the *Phaedrus*.

In her introduction, LeMoine answers two major objections to her argument that Platonic political thought is not xenophobic, which I will briefly address now. The first objection contends that contrary to the historical context in which Plato wrote, in arguing that Plato valued cultural diversity LeMoine has imposed our contemporary liberal biases back onto Plato's texts instead of letting them speak for themselves.⁵ LeMoine responds by arguing that the

historical context shows that Greeks and especially Athenians were not as hostile to foreigners as these scholars believe. According to LeMoine, two words were commonly used to denote a foreigner: *xenos*, usually denoting Greeks who were citizens of other Greek cities; and *barboros*, usually denoting non-Greeks.⁶ Moreover, for most Greeks, identity operated on two levels: that of their particular city and that of the Greek community as a whole (as the distinction Greek versus barbarian indicates). Thus, while citizens of other Greek cities were seen as foreigners (*xenoi*), those outside Greece were seen as more foreign (*barboroi*).⁷ Thus, LeMoine insightfully argues that the relationship between Greek cities is comparable to that between European countries and countries of European origin, such as the United States today. Although these nations are politically independent with different laws and customs and have often gone to war with each other, they have also formed leagues and alliances (e.g., NATO and the European Union) on the basis of a common European identity grounded in a shared religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage. So, just as an ancient Athenian would view Spartans as foreign but as less foreign than Persians, a modern American would view the people of France as foreign but as less foreign than the people of China.⁸

I have just one question concerning this very insightful argument. LeMoine argues that the common Greek identity was grounded in a shared religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage, as is the contemporary European identity today. Yet, when LeMoine argues that an Athenian would see a Spartan as foreign but as less foreign than a Persian, is there an assumption of a shared ethnic or racial origin as well? For instance, when it is argued that modern Americans view the people of France as foreign but not as foreign as the people of China, although this indeed may be true, are we supposed to see it this way? Although there are two types of citizens in the United States—native-born and naturalized—the Constitution makes no distinction between birth and naturalized citizens, and certainly no distinction between naturalized citizens of French origin and naturalized citizens of Chinese origin, or birth citizens of either background for that matter. Isn't this failure to

recognize an ethnic basis of citizenship one of the prime factors motivating the illiberal, populist hostility to the immigration system today? My larger question, therefore, concerns the relation between cultural diversity and racial diversity. Are they identical, or are there significant differences?

LeMoine argues that in 2010, approximately 12.9 percent of the US population was “foreign born,” including naturalized US citizens, permanent residents or green card holders, temporary migrants (e.g., foreign students), refugees and asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants.⁹ In Plato’s Athens, however, it is estimated that approximately 50 percent of Athens’s free population were foreign-born *metics*, or legal resident aliens, and that the *metic* population included both Greek *xenoi* and non-Greek *barbaroi*.¹⁰ This statistic alone is incredible, considering that 12.9 percent has caused such political turmoil in modern America, and is enough to convince me that Athenians valued cultural diversity. Moreover, the population of slaves in Athens, most of whom were non-Greek, likely equaled and even outnumbered the free, adult male population, and freed slaves likely made up a significant portion of the *metic* population. Classical Athens, at the height of its empire, attracting immigrants and incorporating slaves from across the known world, was, according to LeMoine, “a bustling, diverse city and home to a wide range of peoples, both those culturally similar to Athenians and those referred to as barbarians.”¹¹

The second major objection to the argument of the book is that Plato’s own words in the dialogues suggest that he was an opponent of cultural diversity. LeMoine persuasively answers this objection by arguing that for every passage in the dialogues that betrays a xenophobic attitude, one can find other passages that suggest Plato’s receptiveness to foreigners. The dramatic context of Plato’s dialogues is therefore crucial. According to LeMoine, one should read the dialogues as works of literature subject to literary analysis and thus should read them from beginning to end to consider the relation of the part to the whole.

Plato's Caves and Recognition

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By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276

Rebecca LeMoine's book *Plato's Caves* is an excellent example of how classical political thought, and serious scholarship that interrogates and understands its meaning, is relevant to our contemporary political discussions. As others have noted, in a political context that has seen the rise of a charged but very important discussion about diversity, multiculturalism, and national identity, considering how the ancients can help us to consider our own culture and its merits, as well as its drawbacks, is of great worth. My comments here focus on the core of the book's method, the exposition of the cave allegory in chapter 2, and explore that method in light of a contemporary account of the character of multiculturalism, that given by Charles Taylor in his essay "The Politics of Recognition."¹² Taylor's essay is perhaps the most substantive account of the origin of multiculturalism and such related political issues as affirmative action, DEI, and nationalism in the contemporary context. LeMoine's text provides a potential solution to the question Taylor poses at the end of the essay, that of how to ground "presumptions of worth" in other cultures in a manner that is not condescending or subjectivist. *Plato's Caves* also highlights an aspect of the Western philosophical tradition that makes our intercultural engagement unique with respect to other cultures and traditions: a recognition of the insufficiency of our own cultural knowledge and a desire to engage with other cultures in search of truer and more effective modes of living and governing ourselves.

The central thesis of LeMoine's book is that the cave allegory, considered by Socrates in Book 7 of the *Republic*, can be (and is partly intended by Plato to be) read as an illustration of life in political community.¹³ The cave can represent the state of all political communities; every group of persons or every distinctive community finds itself in a state of confusion or deception about the nature of the world, and so we consequently live in a world of separate caves. But just as every political community is distinct in its traditions, culture, and intellectual attainments, so we can also think of each cave as possessing unique shadows, puppeteers, and relationships among its prisoners. LeMoine argues that just as the philosopher can shed light on those in the cave, so too can foreigners who have grown up in different caves give insight to those who remain shackled in their own. She draws three unique conclusions from this political interpretation of the cave allegory: (1) that Plato's view of the world is more egalitarian than is ordinarily thought, as he recognizes that all persons and communities reside in their own caves; (2) that Plato realizes that no culture is homogenous; and (3) that Plato sees the potential for intellectual liberation through the influence of foreigners within political communities.¹⁴

LeMoine spends much of the chapter expositing the various interpretations of the cave allegory, which take the thesis of the allegory to be an educational, a metaphysical and epistemic, or a political teaching.¹⁵ In many ways the allegory appears to be all three. The political element is difficult to deny, given that Socrates immediately likens the city to the cave after he explains the allegory. While the cave is an image for the state of our education and for our own individual knowledge of being and reality, it is also clearly a social and political state, wherein our knowledge is shared and shaped by those around us. A minor question to consider about this treatment of the interpretations is about which aspect of the allegory is primary, and what this implies about LeMoine's interpretation of the cave allegory. If the epistemic and metaphysical elements of the allegory are the primary concern for Socrates, and the political aspects of the allegory are a secondary consequence of

our individual ignorance of reality and of the Forms, are such scholars as Catherine Zuckert right to suggest that the cave is in fact a “subpolitical” state?¹⁶ Note that Socrates identifies us as being like the prisoners in the cave *before* he opens the possibility that the prisoners could discuss the shadows on the cave wall together (515a–b)—that is, before the social or political element of the allegory is introduced. This would mean not that LeMoine’s expanded use of the allegory is faulty or misplaced but that the foundational issue at work in the cave allegory is not a political issue regarding our collective knowledge; it is, rather, our individual inability to grasp reality fully, which has immediate political implications. While this interpretation would not eliminate the contributions that foreigners can make to our politics, it does suggest that we are still left in the cave without the aid of a philosopher who has seen outside it.

One of the great merits of LeMoine’s use of the cave allegory for describing political communities is that this framework resists any kind of moral or cultural relativism. Recognizing that each political community is a cave wherein the contributions of the foreigner can help in a similar manner to those of the philosopher leaves present the notion that one can ascend out of the cave into the light of truth. The contributions of the foreigner are not merely differing opinions but a perspective that may take us closer to reality. It is in this respect that I want to compare LeMoine’s approach to questions of diversity and multiculturalism with that of Charles Taylor.¹⁷ Taylor argues in his seminal essay that our current political climate is commanded by the thesis “that our identity is partly shaped by recognition . . . and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.”¹⁸ Recognition has become a vital need as a result of a new conception of the self that arises post-Enlightenment. Authenticity toward oneself becomes a moral end, and in Western culture this slowly transforms into a unique way of being that is peculiar to each individual. The problem with this inward turn in self-expression is that our self-formation occurs

dialogically with others: We are formed by our culture and community, not on our own. Suddenly Western culture finds itself in a state where there is a moral demand for unique self-expression, but this self-expression can really occur only if others acknowledge one's unique identity. From this politics of recognition first arises liberal universalism, which advocates in favor of equal dignity for all persons and their blanket possession of a battery of rights. Proponents of this style of liberalism are described by Taylor and others as advocating a kind of "procedural" liberalism. The politics of recognition also produces a "politics of difference" in competition with procedural liberalism, which demands the acknowledgment of unique groups uniquely. This politics justifies special treatment for a variety of groups on a universalistic basis; every minority group is owed special recognition as that group.

The politics of difference sees the work of procedural liberalism as the imposition of a hegemonic culture, one that would destroy its unique character through a blanket imposition of rights and cultural norms. In the multicultural space, the politics of difference demands that everyone judge the productions of a minority culture as necessarily equal to any other culture (and especially to the majority culture).¹⁹ But Taylor recognizes that such a demand is foolish; one cannot demand that someone value a culture any more than we can "find the earth round or flat" merely by deciding to.²⁰ That is, even insofar as recognition is a true human need, one cannot merely decide to value another's culture or self-expression. Peremptory judgments of worth are both condescending to minority cultures and homogenizing of those minority groups.

But this leaves us with a dilemma regarding our engagement with other cultures: How do we ground a presumption of another culture's worth? Taylor says that one ought to begin with a recognition of our limited knowledge, given our place in cultural history.²¹ In a similar way LeMoine's interpretation of Plato fits well as a framework for grounding earnest engagements with other cultures. Insofar as we all occupy a limited epistemic space, our own "caves," engagement with other cultures is expansive of one's own culture

and knowledge.²² Both LeMoine and Taylor acknowledge that while cultures are socially constructed, they are properly built according to natural and moral principles whose truth is external and independent of us. It is on such a basis that one can make value judgments regarding cultures or liberate oneself from the intellectual bondage of the cave, from the dictates of one's own cultural or political community. Such liberation implies an objective standard to which the perspectives of the foreigner can contribute. This objective standard is pursued through the Western canon, which Taylor highlights is a target of multiculturalism.²³ Yet the canon is defended by LeMoine's interpretation of Plato as not so hostile to the recognition of other cultures. In this respect LeMoine admirably illustrates a cherished aspect of Western culture that forms the background of liberal education. Truth-seeking, and the valuing of alternative positions or cultural perspectives in pursuit of truth, is at the very foundation of Western culture. LeMoine very usefully gives us a practical framework for the recognition and valuing of diverse cultures in *Plato's Caves*, which integrates that multicultural receptivity into the long tradition of truth-seeking in the West, a tradition inaugurated by Socrates.

A Gathering in Speech of Many Caves

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By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276

In *Plato's Caves*, Rebecca LeMoine is making a valuable and much-needed point: Plato as a philosopher is not xenophobic. Furthermore, the presence of foreigners in his dialogues often makes clear contributions to our coming to know, to being on the way toward a question. These points are undeniable, especially when, as LeMoine does, we take the dramatic, literary, and historical contexts into account. LeMoine offers good pedagogy for the reader who might be tempted to censure Plato for things said in the dialogues by an uncle, a brother, a man on the street: Each character in any dialogue is really different from the author who collects all these fragmented points of view; and it is possible to tame that reader's temptation into better things. As for me, I often look to this author, our Plato, for the pleasure of witnessing the manifestations of such otherness within his pages—of which foreignness is but one variety—right before we also witness the shock of the same. That Plato does not reduce what is truly beyond us to some pedestrian thing we already think we know is one of the fundamental goods of Plato as a thinker.

Yet, these are strange times, and other readers come to the text looking for other fights. As LeMoine notes in her opening, white

nationalists, for whom a genocide on ethnic or racial grounds would be but the beginning of their political advice, also look to the Greeks for support for a hyperconcentrated and, to my eye, cartoonish sort of sameness, and they look to Plato himself for the license to bring it about. For an example, one not foreign to many American readers, I spent a good part of last semester trying to convince three students that slavery was bad and bad for you, but I'm not sure I succeeded. And so, it is also this second sort of pedagogy, to likewise tame the uncanny power that otherness has to unsettle us and make us want to push it away, that was also on my mind as I read *Plato's Caves*. While it addressed the first pedagogy, it struck me as likely to have serious trouble with the second. To put it briefly, the democratic *panharmonia* that LeMoine is optimistic about still has to deal with the Pythagorean comma, the fundamental incommensurability of the different mathematical intervals that make up the dream of cosmic harmony, the fact that when added together the intervals do not make a mathematically perfect scale, and where even the best solutions remain dissonant—the thing that made the Pythagoreans weep. As LeMoine points out, though, her book represents one beginning toward work on this subject, and so in what follows, I offer a few hermeneutical, metaphysical, and pedagogical points in the hope of furthering this foundational project.

First, there is less conceptual unity in the word *barbaros* than we are tempted to give it credit for. LeMoine acknowledges this in part, but nonetheless there are traces of a unity that create difficulties for addressing the *Republic* in particular. *Barbaros* is first of all an insult, not a concept; it is not a natural species or intelligible kind, or even a *genos* or family, but a claim that someone talks funny: a kind of splitting or division of the human on linguistic grounds, very difficult for us moderns to catch the sense of. I really don't think it means "barbaric" in the English sense, and this cross-current of sense makes reading in good faith more difficult. The *barbaroi* include the learned and poetic Persians, the alphabetically inventive Phoenicians, the opaque Scythians, the counter-clockwise Egyptians, the people who live quite beyond the Black

Sea and our ability to know them, the beautiful and divine Ethiopians—all these people, gathered together in an uncomfortable group, have civilization, have better civilization, and have it not, all to the discomforted Greek eye. As Jacques Derrida puts it in *Of Hospitality*, in the Greek barbarity there is absolute heterogeneity: No one place is like another, which is the very thing that makes foreignness so strange.²⁴

And so, on these grounds, I quarrel with LeMoine's use of our modern concept of stereotype. A stereotype is a bad Platonic Form if there ever was one, something that gathers together in comic unity things that do not quite fit: The relief of Greek barbarity is that it is either intelligent or not, civilized or not, all at once; its metaphysics are gracefully unlike our own concepts, such as to even threaten the nature of Form itself. Of course, it is worth recalling that our linguistic ear over the past four hundred years has been tuned toward an idea of racial differences made on the strongest conceptual, essential, and natural grounds possible, fake ones I think, and the political passions that have arisen in response to this metaphysical extremity are very odd, indeed because of the metaphysical oddity on which they are built. But because *barbaros* is already a kind of thing that is not a kind, the passions that arise in response to it will likewise be no more specific, and will be fundamentally different. To be clear, Plato is not xenophobic on either of these metaphysical grounds. But because Plato is giving thought to all these kinds of differences, a crucial question for readers is, What does each of his characters think happens, each in their own way, when the nonunity of *barbaros* works politically in Socratic, Eleatic, and Athenian *Xenos* regimes respectively? In all this, it will always be helpful to consider Plato's own metaphysical categories, such as difference or otherness from the *Sophist*, seen in the *Xenos*'s approach to determinate negation (255d, 257c), the better to avoid nineteenth- or twentieth-century interpolation.

These same hermeneutic difficulties are not operative when we turn to the narrower sort of otherness in the Greek language, to *xenos* or foreignness in the same tongue but a different key, and the claims the *xenia* makes across, through, and with the polity. Even

scholars' work on this more narrow foreignness in Plato has a tendency to make it "other" in the same respect, as though foreigners who spoke Greek, even the people from very far away, with very different customs, formed another sort of absolute natural kind. Again, both in the Greeks and in Plato, it is much more chaotic than that, and this chaos will be helpful. Therefore, I take issue with LeMoine's claim, for instance, that the Thracians were meant to be an "epitome" of barbarism (126). There is no epitome of this as such, and this changes how we view the introduction of Bendis's festival in the *Republic*. The Thracians have their own specific, determinate otherness, just as the Thessaly of the *Meno* does, and it is just that kind of specificity Plato makes use of in each dialogue: Thrace's warlike qualities, and the Thracians' desirability as female nurses to the young,²⁵ versus, say, Thessaly's terrible witches. And so I do recommend that everyone working on this see how each specific trope of otherness works its way into or against the grain of argument, one trope at a time. Thessalians are not barbaric in the English sense, nor are they not barbaric; they are uncanny, and dangerous. Thessalian witches do not necessarily stand for immediate civilizational collapse, but they can also steal your skin. So what is the difference between Socrates bewitching people, to Thessalian Meno's eyes (*Meno* 80a) and numbing people like a stingray, as Socrates wants to claim instead (*Meno* 80c)? This pattern is evident in *Plato's Caves*, that if Thracianness is doing something good, offering *aporia*, then foreignness as such is rehabilitated; but the problem is that there is no conceptual whole here to rehabilitate. Narratively speaking, the presence of a foreigner in Plato doesn't mean the foreign thing is bad, but it also doesn't mean it is good, either; each instance has to be assessed in how it specifically relates to the argument at hand.

Next, to pedagogy. I strongly agree with LeMoine that in Plato individual foreigners do lend their presence to moments of discrepancy that can act as catalysts for individuals coming to know. But the problem is again one of multiplicity: LeMoine often seems to argue as though foreignness represents a single, salutary pedagogy for us, but such a multiplicity could not operate in this way. At

the very least, it would not be predictable, and since not unified, not necessarily coherent, nor pedagogically safe. And so it is important to divide the “stinging” into action from foreigners’ arguments or presence into different kinds. Not all moments of *aporia* are the same or have the same effect. Likewise, in Plato we see several pedagogical patterns. *Republic* 6 speaks to the specific pedagogy of *periagoge*, of turning the soul around. And so, an important question would be, How is the stinging effect of Thrasymachus, for instance, related to *periagoge* specifically? It seems that it would be more than a generalized gadfly effect every time.

Not everyone can successfully be everyone’s teacher: That every person contributes equally well to the education of another is Protagoras’s argument (*Protagoras* 325b), and I do not think even he means that to be true. Some arguments sting us too far, especially when they come from an unfamiliar source, and they often push us past the point of learning into a rejection of argument itself, as Socrates describes in *Republic* 7 (539c). A foreigner telling the truth opens up quite deep possibilities for misology and prejudicial hatred (picture Alexis de Tocqueville in America, annoying every single person²⁶) that have to be taken into account and wrapped into a specific pedagogy. And yet, Socrates is perhaps the most annoying because he is from here: Despite his request to be treated no worse in dialect than a stranger (*Apology* 18a), it is his native status and its concomitant betrayal that provide his own peculiar sting.

Yet if even a native can spoil the civic harmony, what remains for the foreigner and the fully outré, and for justice not just as the harmony of the soul but as a larger harmony gathered together? What could or would be the harmony of the gatheredness of that which never quite fits? LeMoine ends her discussion of the *Republic* with a discussion of the Myth of Er and the way in which “Plato’s vision of cosmic music implies the ultimate compatibility of these diverse tunings” (129). What is leftover in this musical justice that seeks to resolve the awkward gatheredness of cities is the sense that among the Pythagorean hopes for ultimate harmony, even something so fundamental as a scale forms an insoluble

incommensurability; no scale, let alone chordal harmony built upon it, can ever provide a perfect mathematical solution to otherness. What remains is always a willingness to move forward with imperfection and, musically, a fundamental lack of essence, of perfect gatheredness, the sort that cities and music wish for ardently, without ultimate redress. It is this final incommensurability that I hope to see readers of Plato and LeMoine most of all address.

Diversity, Oratory, and Philosophy: Some Thoughts in Response to Rebecca LeMoine's Interpretation of the *Menexenus*

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Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity

By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276

It is both standard and appropriate to begin such symposia with praise of the book. In this case, such a task is straightforward, requiring none of the irony of the *Menexenus*. Rebecca LeMoine's effort is informed by deep and broad knowledge of both Plato and classical scholarship. Unlike many who write on Greek philosophy nowadays, she has learned Greek well enough to provide her own translations. The topic of the book—namely, the advantages of cultural diversity—is both clearly present in multiple Platonic dialogues and hotly debated today. Its style is clear and eloquent, mercifully devoid of academic dryness or scholarly jargon.

LeMoine's book aims to defend Plato from common accusations of racism, xenophobia, and the like.²⁷ It does so commendably by highlighting the dramatic character of the dialogues along with the various cultural exchanges they contain. To explain how and why Plato favors cultural diversity poses a greater challenge. While there is nothing wrong or misleading with adding Plato to the chorus of voices condemning Stephen Miller and his ilk, this in itself is not distinctive to Plato. Many other philosophers, including

Alfarabi, Locke, Montesquieu, and Nietzsche, also appear to have favored cultural diversity, each in his own peculiar way. In articulating a clear and distinctive Platonic defense of diversity, LeMoine is partially successful, but she often leaves some loose ends. Her account of the *Menexenus* is a case in point.

Always attuned to the dramatic setting of dialogues, LeMoine draws our attention to the multifaceted absurdity of the *Menexenus*, “one of the strangest dialogues in the Platonic corpus.”²⁸ Rather than interrogate Menexenus in his usual fashion, Socrates gives a mock funeral oration full of preposterous claims, including the pure autochthony of Athenian blood and the pro-Greek, anti-barbarian righteousness of every aspect of the city’s warlike foreign policy, carried out by entirely courageous and patriotic men.²⁹ To make matters still more confusing, Socrates introduces his speech by ridiculing funeral orations and then attributing his to Aspasia, a noncitizen woman of impure Milesian origin.³⁰ While the dramatic dates of many Platonic dialogues are controversial and unclear, that of the *Menexenus* is downright surreal, since the speech recounts historical events all the way down to 386 B.C., when both Socrates and Aspasia would have been long dead.³¹ The utterly fictitious setting of the dialogue mirrors the shameless mendacity of Socrates’s (or Aspasia’s) speech.

LeMoine raises the possibility, common in the secondary sources, that the dialogue is largely satirical, but she does not seem inclined to accept it.³² I agree with her basic intuition here. Plato does not value absurdity for its own sake. He employs satirical elements, to be sure, but for the sake of some kind of didactic or philosophical purpose. In the case of the *Menexenus*, that purpose is notoriously difficult to discern. LeMoine’s effort in this regard is both valiant and valuable. Her central insight concerns Aspasia’s unusual voice. By putting jingoistic arguments about pure Athenian origin and manhood in the mouth of a glamorous and influential Milesian woman, Plato effectively undermines them.³³ This fits nicely with the critique that Socrates gives of funeral orations in his own name: They are bewitching and flattering rather than edifying or reasonable.³⁴ Once Aspasia

has replaced respectable Athenian men as the purveyor of these flatteries, their folly becomes readily apparent.

LeMoine's conclusions seem sound, but they tend to be indecisive and somewhat short on specifics. She emphasizes the "element of discordance" in the work, which points to the need to "engage foreign voices" as well as "philosophers."³⁵ How would engaging foreigners correct the distortions and delusions of Aspasia's mock speech? To what alternative understanding of the history of Athens would such engagement point? To answer these questions, a more thorough investigation of the lengthy middle of the dialogue may be warranted. Its outrageously biased history of the Persian, Peloponnesian, and post-Peloponnesian wars is duly noted by LeMoine and summarized as containing the "myth that Athens is a benevolent defender of Greek freedom," but its details, including its account of Persian imperialism, are left largely unexplored.³⁶ Delving more deeply into them could help illustrate how completely the dialogue rewrites history and what its purpose in doing so could be.

The form of the *Menexenus*, complicated in so many respects, is simple in one respect: It consists of a conversation between Socrates and Menexenus. Any satisfactory interpretation would therefore have to explain Socrates's purpose with regard to his sole interlocutor. LeMoine argues that Menexenus is somehow a foreigner as well. Here she relies on his name, which could be construed to mean "remains a foreigner."³⁷ LeMoine concludes that Socrates is trying to prevent Menexenus "from becoming a citizen who harms both Athenians and foreigners."³⁸ This sounds plausible but requires further elaboration. Name aside, is Menexenus actually a foreigner? In a brief reference to him in the *Phaedo*, he is called a "local" (*epichorios*) in contrast to "foreigners" (*xenoi*) such as Simmias and Cebes.³⁹ In the dialogue named after him, Menexenus behaves like an Athenian, frequenting the council chamber and harboring some kind of political ambition.⁴⁰ These considerations suggest that Menexenus's foreignness cannot be taken too literally. Perhaps Plato means that Menexenus needs to remain a foreigner in a deeper, metaphorical sense. Is Socrates's

presentation of Athenian self-understanding, at once sinister and ridiculous, meant to dissuade Menexenus from participating in the wars and politics of Athens? This may be implied by LeMoine, but I am unsure if it is definitively stated.

I conclude by introducing one aspect of the dialogue that could help clarify these issues. Upon learning that Menexenus has been hanging around the Council Chamber, Socrates quips that he must have finished his philosophic studies and turned to the more serious matter of politics, with the intention of ruling others.⁴¹ Menexenus stays coy about his political ambitions and does not get provoked into discussing philosophy, about which nothing more is said by him, Socrates, or Aspasia. The absence of philosophy renders the presentation of politics in the *Menexenus* entirely different from that of the *Republic*, despite certain common themes. The myth of autochthony that pervades the account of Athens in the former is downgraded in the latter to a Phoenician lie.⁴² The hatred of barbarians meant to justify Athenian conduct in the former gives way in the latter to speculation that the city might come into being in some remote barbarian place, as if barbarians are not obviously inferior to Greeks.⁴³ In the political world contained within the oration of the *Menexenus*, based solely on birth, jingoism, and myth, philosophy has absolutely no place.

This status of philosophy within the city is highlighted by Alfarabi's brief summary of the dialogue: "After that, [Plato] investigated how the ranks of kings, philosophers, and the virtuous ought to be in the souls of the inhabitants of the city, and with what thing the inhabitants of the city ought to glorify them, and with what thing the virtuous and the kings ought to be exalted."⁴⁴ The presence of philosophers on the first list, followed by their absence from the second list, implies that Plato doubts whether they will ever be exalted by the city in the manner of virtuous people and kings. According to this interpretation, the *Menexenus* could be explained as an amazing concession to the shaky status of philosophy within the city. Perhaps Plato feels that in some situations following the trial and death of Socrates philosophy can no longer be espoused openly.⁴⁵ Aspasia's speech may be designed to espouse

it covertly by making political propaganda and speechmaking seem so ridiculous that Menexenus either turns back to philosophy or at the very least abandons conventional politics.

The conclusion, which consists of more banter about the dubious authenticity of the speech, provides no definitive answer to this question, but considering it further might help make sense of the dialogue and its place within the larger Platonic corpus. As LeMoine pointed out in our panel discussion, Menexenus's presence in the *Phaedo* during Socrates's last hours may point to his successful conversion to philosophy. As tempted as we are by this interpretation, we must note its utter anachronism, with the *Phaedo* "taking place" at least thirteen years before the current dialogue. But in the weird and wonderful world of Socratic dialogues, even time itself gives way to the requirements of philosophy and literature.

Civic Virtue and Its Contradictory Demands in Plato's *Laws*

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Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity

By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276

*P*lato's *Caves* is a remarkable book. Rebecca LeMoine argues that cultural diversity is a source of intellectual liberation in the Platonic dialogues and that it is consequently welcomed by their author as a spur, not only to philosophic reflection but to civic or political virtue as well. It is about this latter claim that I remain skeptical, for reasons that I will try to make clear. I am charged with responding to LeMoine's chapter dealing with Plato's *Laws*, a dialogue that examines civic virtue with unrivaled depth but that also proves sympathetic to xenophobia, or so I understand it. Before getting to the *Laws*, though, I do want to emphasize just how impressive LeMoine's book really is, taken as a whole. Extolling cultural diversity may be one of the reigning dogmas of our times, at least on the political left. But LeMoine provides a fresh account of how and why such diversity can be a public good. She moves past tired bromides to show how Plato of all people—perhaps the deadest white guy to stand athwart social justice—actually *defends* this core liberal value, perhaps better than liberals do themselves. Indeed, if openness to diversity is for us a dogma, for Plato it is an antidote to *dogmatism*, or so LeMoine argues. And in this I think she succeeds.

Another virtue of her book is the broadmindedness of its approach to interpretation. Plato scholars are notoriously sectarian,

but LeMoine engages judiciously and omnivorously with the whole range of the scholarly literature. While she certainly doesn't shy away from staking out a position in these debates, she does so while learning from and responding to readers who reject the interpretive paradigms on which she relies herself. LeMoine insists that we cannot fathom a Platonic dialogue unless we read it pursuant to Socrates's criterion for correct discourse: that every one of its details—not least its dramatic setting and action—is artfully deliberate (*Phaedrus* 275d–e, 276a). Until we understand why each such part is necessary to the whole, we cannot claim to have fully understood such a text. It is with Leo Strauss that LeMoine rightly associates the application of this criterion to the dialogues,⁴⁶ even if in other ways she departs from Strauss's interpretations. This, too, is to be commended. The study of ancient political thought suffers from a reluctance to learn from or even acknowledge the hermeneutical tradition associated with Strauss. LeMoine is contributing to an encouraging trend among political theorists to engage seriously with Straussian approaches.

LeMoine's chapter on the *Laws* is one of two examining Plato's accounts of Athenians as foreigners. The protagonist of the *Laws* is of course a nameless stranger from Athens who has gone to Crete to intervene in and even assume control over the founding of a new city on the island. Although the city is to be a colony of the Knossians, the committee charged with its founding is authorized to adopt foreign laws if its members so choose (702c–d), a remarkable fact of which the Stranger takes full advantage. As LeMoine shows, the Stranger tactfully disarms his Dorian companions of their cultural chauvinism and persuades them to become much more open to his novel perspective.

But how chauvinistic, really, are the Dorian characters at the outset of the dialogue? After all, when asked whether the laws of his native city originate with a god or a human being, the Cretan, Kleinias, suggestively qualifies his traditionalist answer. To say that the Cretan laws originate with Zeus, he avers, is “to say what is at any rate the most just thing” (*hōs ge to dikaiotaton eipein*, 624a). But saying what is most just is not necessarily to speak the

truth. Might Kleinias already be skeptical of the traditionalism of his own regime, even *before* the Stranger gets to work? Might that partially explain *why* the Stranger has sought him out in the first place? The amazing account that Kleinias goes on to give seems to confirm some such interpretation. Kleinias thereafter speaks of the Cretan lawgiver as the human Minos, not as the divine Zeus.⁴⁷ Nor does he limit himself to claiming that the laws of Minos were laid down with a view to victory in war. Victory in war, he allows, is as necessary for a neighborhood, household, and even “for one man in relation to another” as it is for the city in relation to foreign powers. “All are enemies of all in public,” Kleinias claims (626d).⁴⁸ It is vital to see that these are *not* the traditionalist dogmas of the Dorian cities. Kleinias might have thought those dogmas through to their logical conclusions. But those conclusions would be considered scandalous from the traditionalist perspective.⁴⁹ No community as dependent on self-denying collectivism as a Sparta or a Crete could tolerate the widespread conviction that there exists by nature an undeclared war of all against all. It is not for nothing that the Stranger calls the Dorian law that forbids the young from inquiring into the laws’ integrity one of their finest (634d–e). He will counsel building on this law, warning as he does against the public questioning of the laws in general outside of carefully regulated institutions like the Nocturnal Council, whether by young or old.

What does all this mean for LeMoine’s argument? Her interpretation of the *Laws* seems to turn on two claims. First, that the Athenian Stranger of Plato’s *Laws* replaces the Dorian preoccupation with victory in war with a concern for virtue of the soul, for its own sake. In this she is no doubt correct. It is about her second claim that I have doubts. LeMoine argues that the new perspective toward which the Stranger leads his companions involves an openness to the new and the foreign. She adduces compelling evidence for accepting this claim as it pertains to the Stranger’s philosophic successors in the city, to whom he repeatedly alludes. But the kind of virtue suitable for men like Kleinias, and the sort of education that he holds out for *them*, seems to me quite different.

Kleinias's problem is not only or primarily that he is too traditional and closed minded—too imprisoned in his own cave. It is also and especially that he is too audacious in cynically questioning the official myths of his cave. For Kleinias, attracted as he admits to being to tyranny (661d–e), liberation from the thrall of his own laws leads not to philosophy. It leads to rebellion against the psychological restraints that reverence for law supplies, however imperfectly. The work that the Stranger accomplishes with Kleinias is less an opening of the latter's mind than a closing of that mind around a new authority—namely, that of the Stranger himself and the intelligence that he represents, an intelligence that remains beyond the Dorians' full understanding. It is true that the Stranger first opens Kleinias and Megillus to a radically new understanding of the human condition. But this openness proves a waystation. The Stranger preserves and intensifies the soul-shaping rectitude of the Dorian city, even as he transforms the end toward which it points. He in effect creates a new cave to replace the cave of Zeus to which Kleinias and Megillus had been walking but at which they never arrive. The cave of the *Laws* might be more hospitable to natural human needs. It is created with an eye to such needs by one who has left the world of caves and philanthropically returned. But a cave it remains.

LeMoine obviously reads the text differently, but I wonder if her overall interpretation can still fit with the alternative that I am proposing. LeMoine explains the persistence in the *Laws* of xenophobia as a concession to the resistance naturally felt at having one's core convictions called into question. That's no doubt correct as far as it goes. But I challenge her to consider that there is a deeper reason at play—that Plato understands the civic virtue of which men like Kleinias are capable as very different from the more comprehensive virtue of someone like the Athenian Stranger. Clearly, the Stranger and his philosophic activity have great need of the liberating sting of cultural diversity. For the city, too, this sting is needful, lest the reason for the city's laws be misunderstood or never improved on, as LeMoine deftly shows. What is less clear, what is in fact doubtful in my view, is that Plato conceives of the

virtue of ordinary citizens as reliant on this same provocation to self-criticism.

Isn't it rather that the Stranger of the *Laws* agrees with Aristotle in the *Politics* in his censure of Hippodamus? Hippodamus had proposed rewarding citizens for thinking up ways of improving on existing laws and conventions. But honoring legal innovation, Aristotle warns, "is not safe, though it sounds appealing" (1268b 24–25). Innovation is certainly advantageous with arts like medicine or urban planning, where the art is unambiguously improved by incorporating new discoveries and innovations. But change in an art, Aristotle warns, is not like change in law, "for law has no strength with respect to obedience apart from habit, and this is not created except over a period of time" (1269a 20–23). Here is in embryo the strongest argument *against* the popularization of critical thinking, whether by means of cultural diversity or any other spur. The calling into question of reigning moral dogmas presents a dangerous temptation. It opens the door to the rationalizing of injustice, to ignoring the moral limits that most people respect less out of firm understanding than from unreflective habit. But if that is true, then how might that change our reading of Plato's approach to cultural diversity? If it is not true, then what are LeMoine's reasons for thinking so? What evidence is there that Plato understands the virtue of nonphilosophic citizens as improved rather than threatened by critical thinking—not just in certain pedagogical moments but as a way of life?

Thumos, Shame, and Cross-Cultural Engagement

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Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity

By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276.

In chapter 6, “Socrates the Foreigner?: Self-Examination and Civic Identity in the *Phaedrus*,” Rebecca LeMoine explores Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Noting that it is the only dialogue between Socrates and his interlocutor to take place outside Athens’s city walls, LeMoine argues that the *Phaedrus* verifies the role of cross-cultural engagement in provoking philosophic reflection in two ways. First, *Phaedrus*’s engagement with the speech of the foreigner Lysias gives him an awareness of his soul as having been shaped by Athens’s imperial model of *eros* as domination of foreigners.⁵⁰ Second, in the setting to the dialogue and in his great speech, or his second discourse on love, Socrates reveals that philosophers are “foreigners,” as it were, to every city or cave because they are in a world of ideas or Forms, but that such philosophic foreigners are necessary to aid in the liberation of their fellow citizens.⁵¹

LeMoine provides an excellent analysis of cross-cultural engagement in the *Phaedrus*. Reading her account has given me a new understanding of how important the role of the foreign is in the dialogue. Although LeMoine’s analysis provokes many questions, I limit myself here to the most substantive ones. First, what is the role of *thumos*, or the spirited part of the soul, in cross-cultural engagement? This question arises if the assumed structure

of the soul in Lysias's speech and Socrates's first discourse is compared with the structure of the soul in Socrates's great speech or second discourse on love. I will consider the latter first.

In his second discourse, the image of the soul that Socrates crafts is that of a "team of winged horses and their charioteer."⁵² The "charioteer," famously denoting reason in the soul, drives the horses of passion. One horse is "beautiful and good," representing desire for honor or passion with a sense of shame.⁵³ This horse is governed by the charioteer through persuasion. The other horse is dark, shameless, and violent, representing the desire for sexual pleasure, which must be governed through force. The charioteer, therefore, must weave together in the soul two opposites: the passion for honor and the passion for sexual pleasure in the presence of a particular instantiation of beauty.

Socrates furthers the image of the soul when he poeticizes that four types of souls attempt to grasp the immaterial ideas beyond the heavens. The highest type of soul is that of the gods. These divine souls are drawn by their charioteer to the outer rim of the heavens, and from there they look beyond the heavens, receiving a deathless intellectual vision of ideas. Next, the most godlike soul "raises the head of its charioteer up to the place outside and is carried around in the circular motion with the others. Although distracted by the horses, this soul does have a view of Reality, just barely."⁵⁴ Thus, this charioteer of the soul keeps the horses of passion under control and allows the soul, just barely, to gain rational access to and hence knowledge of the ideas. The third best soul has a charioteer who can raise his head sometimes and thus see some of the ideas, but being pulled violently by the horses of passion in different directions, the charioteer sinks back down again and so misses other ideas; this soul has some rational knowledge of some things. According to Socrates, "The remaining souls are all eagerly straining to keep up, but are unable to rise; they are carried around below the surface, trampling and striking one another as each tries to get ahead of the others. . . . Many souls are crippled by the incompetence of the drivers."⁵⁵ Except for the divine souls who remain in heaven, the other three types of

souls, after intellectualizing or attempting to intellectualize the ideas but failing, fall to earth and enter a body upon being born. According to Socrates, "A soul that has seen the most will be planted in the seed of a man who will become a lover of wisdom or of beauty, or who will be cultivated in the arts and prone to erotic love."⁵⁶ The soul of the philosopher, therefore, like that of the gods, has intellectualized the ideas and is a lover of beauty.

To further understand the structure of the soul in the second discourse, it is worthwhile to quote at length precisely what happens when a philosophic soul encounters a particular example of beauty in this world. According to Socrates:

Now when the charioteer looks in the eye of love, his entire soul is suffused with a sense of warmth and starts to fill with tingles and the goading of desire. As for the horses, the one who is obedient to the charioteer is still controlled . . . by its sense of shame, and so prevents itself from jumping on the boy. The other one, however, no longer responds to the whip or the goad of the charioteer; it leaps violently forward and does everything to aggravate its yokemate and its charioteer, trying to make them go up to the boy and suggest to him the pleasures of sex. At first the other two resist. . . . At last, however, . . . they are led forward. . . . So they are close to him now, and they are struck by the boy's face as if by a bolt of lightning. When the charioteer sees that face, his memory is carried back to the real nature of Beauty, and he sees it again where it stands on the sacred pedestal next to Self-control. At the sight he is frightened, falls over backwards awestruck, and at the same time has to pull the reins back so fiercely that both horses are set on their haunches, one falling back voluntarily with no resistance, but the other insolent and quite unwilling.⁵⁷

In this passage, the horse beautiful and good, wishing to be honored by the beloved and so having a sense of shame before them, is ruled voluntarily by the commands of reason. The dark

horse, wishing to be sexually gratified by the beloved, is ruled by force, just barely. Yet, the insolence of the dark horse has some benefit, as it brings the charioteer closer to the beloved's beautiful face, which then causes it to recall and desire to ascend to the eternal idea or truth of Beauty itself. Also, this passage demonstrates that in the second discourse the structure of the soul is similar to the tripartite structure outlined in Book 4 of Plato's *Republic*. Here the soul has three parts—reason, spirit, and desire—which in a properly structured soul are hierarchically ordered, such that reason rules spirit voluntarily, and with the help of spirit reason rules the desires. Reason, spirit, and desire correspond to the charioteer, the horse beautiful and good, and the dark horse respectively. It is with the voluntary help of the horse beautiful and good (spirit) that the charioteer can gain control of the insolent and unruly dark horse (desire).

The tripartite structure of the soul in the second discourse can be compared with what I will call the bipartite structure assumed in Lysias's speech and Socrates's first discourse. In Lysias's speech, the nonlover has sexual desire for the beloved but acts, as it were, "under the cold eye of reason," or a rational assessment of his sexual urges. Socrates begins his first discourse by defining love as the irrational and forceful drive to take pleasure in a beautiful human body, and so as sexual desire, what Lysias characterized as nonlove.⁵⁸ Moreover, Socrates argues that sexual desire "drags us without reasoning toward pleasure," and thus it causes us to go against "our acquired judgment" of what is best.⁵⁹ Therefore, although the soul has reason, it cannot speak to or control sexual desire. Why? In both Lysias's speech and Socrates's first discourse, the soul has reason (the charioteer) and sexual desire (the dark horse). What it seems to lack is the horse beautiful and good, or what I have argued is an image of the spirited or *thumotic* part of the soul. Without the help of spirit, reason simply becomes instrumental to sexual desire, helping it to gratification through clever speech. Thus, it seems that liberation from the Athenian model of *eros* as domination of foreigners to the second discourse's model of *eros* as engagement with foreigners, and seeing the self in the

other, requires the addition or recognition of *thumos* in the soul, the horse beautiful and good.

Since *thumos* in the second discourse is what appears to allow reason in the soul to control sexual desire and thereby ascend to the ideas or Forms, I will conclude by asking, What is the relation of cross-cultural engagement to the Platonic Forms? Moreover, since discerning the forms allows one to give definitions of the things one speaks about, what is the relation of cultural diversity to dialectical as opposed to rhetorical speech that Socrates references later in the dialogue?

Revisiting *Plato's Caves*: An Opportunity for Self-Examination in Turbulent Times

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Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity

By Rebecca LeMoine. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 276.

When *Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity* was published in 2020, little had been written on the role of foreigners and cultural diversity in Plato's political thought, in large part because of the widespread perception that Platonic thought is hostile toward cultural diversity and thus has nothing of value to contribute to modern multicultural societies. My book was the first monograph devoted to challenging this dominant view. Through close readings of four Platonic dialogues, it sought to demonstrate that foreigners play a role similar to that of Socrates: revealing discordance in the beliefs and practices that citizens within a polity tend to share, thereby "stinging" citizens into consciousness. The painfulness of this experience explains why encounters with foreigners often give rise to tension and conflict. Yet it also reveals why cultural diversity is an essential good. Simply put, exposure to cultural diversity helps us develop the intellectual humility we need to be good citizens and global neighbors. The proper object of our aversion is therefore not diversity but rather the fear of education that prevents us from appreciating the epistemological value of exposure to cultural diversity.

As a scholar of Plato, I like to practice what I “preach” (admittedly, to varying degrees of success). In this case, that means welcoming the opportunity to learn from others and to continue developing my own intellectual humility. I am therefore grateful to the symposiasts for participating in this symposium and provoking so much wonder in me through their phenomenal questions and critiques, which generally relate to one of three aspects of the book: (1) its interpretation of Plato’s dialogues; (2) the Platonic argument for cultural diversity; and (3) the contemporary political implications of this argument. In what follows, I hope to be able to clarify and defend the book while also acknowledging its limitations and where future work might improve or expand on it.

Interpretation of Plato’s Dialogues

First, regarding the book’s interpretations of Plato’s dialogues, both Mary Townsend and Robert Ballingall push me to attend more closely to the differences among Plato’s foreign characters. Townsend rightfully emphasizes the muddiness of the concept of *barbaros* and the difficulties of translating this term, given the baggage accompanying the modern word “barbarian.” Whereas to modern ears “barbarian” or “barbarism” connotes backwardness, an absence of the elements of civilization, for the Greeks *barbaros*, originally at least, conveyed more of a linguistic difference and was often applied to highly developed societies. Not all non-Greeks were regarded as “other” in the same respect, moreover. Townsend thus takes issue with referring to Thracians as the epitome of barbarism. To understand Plato’s presentation of foreigners, she argues, we must “see how each specific trope of otherness works its way into or against the grain of argument, one trope at a time.” I fully agree that there is much less conceptual unity in the term *barbaros* than scholars working in the structuralist tradition would have us believe. As discussed in the book’s introduction, the term *barbaros* was neither clearcut nor consistently applied. There existed no singular view of non-Greeks generally and thus no single conception of what it means to be *barbaros*, nor even a singular view of any specific group of non-Greeks, especially given that

these categorizations often shifted over time. I agree that scholars would do well to attend to the specificities of the various foreign characters represented in Plato's dialogues or ancient literature more generally, rather than assuming they all embody a single barbarian archetype, and that future scholarship might aspire to go farther down this road than I did in *Plato's Caves*.

At the same time, I hesitate to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Surely there is *some* conceptual unity in the term *barbaros*. Whatever particular foibles Greeks attributed to distinct groups of non-Greeks, we can point to myriad instances in Plato's dialogues and other sources where multiple peoples are grouped together as sharing certain characteristics that apparently classify them as *barbaroi*, a stereotype that generally took on a negative cast in Plato's time. Hence, while Townsend is correct that we should be careful not to imply that all non-Greeks manifest otherness in the same respect and that we should pay careful attention to how those specificities arise in Plato's depictions of individual foreigners, that does not mean we need to avoid the concept of *barbaros* altogether. We can attend to these nuances while still observing how widespread portrayals of non-Greeks helped to define and crystallize in the ancient Greek imagination what it meant to be *barbaros*, albeit imperfectly.

That said, Ballingall's response to the chapter on the *Laws* provides a concrete example of how greater attentiveness to individual differences between the dialogues' foreign characters could in fact augment the book's argument. Specifically, Ballingall pushes back against the claim that the Cretan Kleinias and the Spartan Megillus are both depicted as embodiments of Dorian chauvinism. Ballingall contends that Kleinias exhibits skepticism toward the traditional Dorian dogmas, the expression of which would have been considered scandalous. He views the Athenian Stranger as trying to rein in Kleinias's overly audacious tendency to question the laws and myths of his society. To be sure, I am not fully persuaded by this account of Kleinias. While Kleinias acknowledges that Minos was the Cretan's lawgiver, Minos was the son of Zeus and thus still a demigod (though I will grant that he does

qualify his answer by suggesting this is what people in his society say, not necessarily what he himself believes). Ballingall's point about Kleinias's easy willingness to admit that there exists a war of individual against individual gives me more pause. Perhaps there is an argument to be made here that the progression of the conversation requires at least one interlocutor of a more untraditional bent. Yet to paint Kleinias's questioning as dangerously audacious seems to me a step too far. After all, when the Stranger suggests a divine lawgiver would have instituted laws that give citizens training in resisting pleasures through exposure to them, Kleinias responds that this argument seems right on the face of it, but that it would be rash and thoughtless to adopt it too quickly (635a). He hardly seems willing, here or at other points, to simply jump ship. Nonetheless, if Ballingall is right and I am wrong about Kleinias (which may well be the case), I still think my interpretation holds. One of the major points I make in this chapter is that for all its apparent unity, the "armed camp" of the Dorian city is actually internally divided. If Kleinias is irreverent or semi-irreverent toward his country's laws, that only serves as a case in point. Attending more closely to the individuality of Plato's foreign characters might therefore provide deeper insight into how the liberating sting of cultural diversity works in varying contexts.

Platonic Argument for Cultural Diversity

This brings me to the symposiasts' second set of concerns, which challenge in different ways the claim that the liberating sting of cultural diversity is good for us. I begin first with Townsend's and Ballingall's articulations of this challenge. Building on her first critique, Townsend observes that there may be different ways in which a foreign *logos* stings us and that not all these encounters will be successful in provoking contemplation; in fact, some might push us too far, into misology or hatred of argument.

The book acknowledges the varying outcomes to which Townsend refers. The sting of the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* is, I show, necessarily slow and drawn out owing to the fragile nature of the situation. The sting of Aspasia's speech in the

Menexenus, delivered as it is through the voice of Socrates, a male citizen, is different in kind from that of the bold Thrasymachus in the *Republic* (and, to address one of Alexander Orwin's queries here, it is important to remember that Aspasia's voice is presented through Socrates because this in itself illuminates something about the status of women—even *hetairai*—in Athenian society, just as the way Socrates engages with Aspasia's voice tells us something about him). In sum, different foreigners sting their interlocutors differently throughout the dialogues, as the book shows.

The book also acknowledges that reactions to the sting of cultural diversity will vary as well, with many of those reactions being negative. The final pages of the book consider that because many are averse to the provocation of cross-cultural engagement, statesmen may find it necessary in some cases to limit exposure to foreigners. That state of affairs should be regarded, however, as regrettable—not a course of action to be championed and permanently adopted. For if cross-cultural engagement can be beneficial in stinging us into wakefulness, then it would be best to find a way to open our society to it. Given the aversion to education at the heart of the rejection of foreigners, Plato's dialogues push us to think of ways to inculcate in citizens a friendlier disposition toward learning and a greater appreciation for intellectual humility. In essence, cultural diversity is not absolutely good, just as *symposia* are not absolutely good, but both, conducted in the right way, can be great sources of good.

In a related vein, Ballingall questions whether exposure to foreign ideas might be dangerous, not for philosophers but for ordinary citizens, who may be more prone to throw out good traditions on a whim. In response, I would point out that Plato's cave allegory implies that the opposite problem is more prevalent: Humans are more likely to cling to the tradition they have always known and to resist change. The *Republic* also shows us, however, that there are individuals and even polities that are more susceptible to unexamined reception of new ideas. It is therefore a serious question.

I would like to go a little further with it. If exposure to foreign ideas is bad for the majority of people, then surely exposure to philosophy is equally bad. After all, Socrates was known for questioning the reigning dogmas of his day. Ballingall's question sounds to me like the sort of thing we would hear from Socrates's detractors. Philosophy is dangerous to the many because they do not know how to handle it responsibly. Should we therefore shelter citizens from philosophy? Socrates at least did not; as we learn in the *Apology*, he questioned anyone he met. Yet one of the most admirable features of Platonic political philosophy is a willingness to take seriously the ideas of others, including those critical of philosophy. Plato does not dismiss offhand the concern of Aristophanes and others that philosophers, and anyone else who might provoke citizens to think differently, might be a source of corruption, teaching the youth—whether intentionally or not—that all traditions are bad and can be discarded. In the *Laws*, for instance, Plato takes a highly sympathetic approach to this concern. Ultimately, I think he wants to defend philosophy and cross-cultural engagement, but he also wants to push us to think about how a city can engage with philosophy and cultural diversity without destroying itself. What safeguards might need to be in place to better ensure that ordinary citizens have neither a knee-jerk negative reaction to foreign provocations nor a knee-jerk positive reaction?

For their part, Alexander Orwin, Ann Ward, and Jacob Rodriguez interrogate the extent to which cross-cultural engagement is doing the work I say it is doing, and what exactly that work is. In his comments on the *Menexenus* chapter, Orwin wonders what, specifically, comes of engaging with Aspasia's speech, particularly as regards Socrates's interlocutor Menexenus. What the chapter gestures to, albeit perhaps not explicitly enough, is that by exposing Menexenus to Aspasia's speech, Socrates provokes him to think about both Periclean and Socratic political rhetoric from the perspective of a foreign woman and thereby to see how political rhetoric as such depends on strict dichotomies and unquestionable principles, promoting the kind of unreflective citizenship that

transforms democracy into tyranny. Only by bringing in a different voice, transforming the monologic language of rhetoric into the dialogic language of philosophy, can we break this pattern. In agreement with Orwin's suggestion, I interpret Socrates as trying to push Menexenus away from a budding interest in politics and political propaganda and instead toward philosophy and dialectic. Assuming we do not take the surrealness of the *Menexenus* too literally and instead treat it as an imagined conversation between a living Socrates and his young adult friend Menexenus, the latter's presence at Socrates's deathbed in the *Phaedo* implies that he ultimately chose the path of philosophy and, in this sense, remained a foreigner (metaphorically) to the unreflective, closed-off understandings Athenian oratory propagated.

Ward's and Rodriguez's comments, as I interpret them, imply that something other than cross-cultural engagement may ultimately be needed to help us become better people and citizens. For Ward, it is the introduction of *thumos*. For Rodriguez, it is an encounter with a philosopher. Responding to Ward's point first, I ask, Is *thumos* missing in Lysias's and Socrates's first speeches in the *Phaedrus*, or has it merely aligned with *eros*? Consider that Phaedrus is so desirous of delivering speeches that Socrates says he would "force" someone to listen. Socrates later refers to him as the son of Pythocles ("Eager for Fame") and, after delivering his own first speech, worries that he was too concerned about seeking honor in the eyes of men and thus acted impiously. To me, this all suggests the presence of *thumos*, and that *thumos* can be problematic if not tamed or controlled by the charioteer—that it can lead to the pursuit of honor instead of wisdom and result in excess violence, arrogance, and injustice. By helping Phaedrus see his own engagement with a foreigner's text through a foreign lens, Socrates provokes him to align his *thumos* with *logos* rather than *eros*. If we can tame *thumos* in the direction of reason and wisdom-seeking when interacting with foreigners, then cross-cultural engagement can assist us in ascending to the ideas or Forms; otherwise, we will spend our time "trampling and striking one another as each tries to get ahead of the others" (*Phaedrus* 246d). Perhaps here we see

some indication of how we might better prepare citizens for the liberating sting of cultural diversity.

As for Rodríguez's insightful question about whether the deepest source of our imprisonment in ignorance stems not from our political conditioning but from our entrapment in human bodies, we can grant that Plato sees natural obstacles to the attainment of knowledge yet still maintain that there is value in investigating the nonnatural or human-made obstacles. After all, those are the only ones over which we can exert human agency, the only ones we can change rather than merely be aware of, which is perhaps why Socrates became more interested in studying political phenomena rather than natural philosophy. Moreover, our upbringing in a particular cave conditions us to make sense of sensory inputs in certain ways and to rely on certain senses more than others. In one cave people might view the earth as flat, and in another they might think it is round; encountering such contradictions can awaken reflection on the use of our senses to interpret the world around us.

A bigger question Rodríguez poses, however, is whether we ultimately still need a philosopher to help us ascend from the cave. My question in response is, If we need a philosopher to ascend out of the cave, would that negate the value of whatever released us from our chains in the first place? The philosopher cannot drag us out until we are able to be moved, and in Book 7 of Plato's *Republic* we learn that encountering contradiction is what sets us in motion. Wisdom begins in wonder. Even if encounters with foreigners only help to awaken thought and nothing more, that effect alone is arguably of great worth. As the book's conclusion argues, the development of intellectual humility is vital to the safeguarding of democracy.

Contemporary Political Implications

I must confess, the last category of questions raised, pertaining to the contemporary political implications, is the most difficult for me to address. Regarding Ward's question about the perhaps greater salience of racial and ethnic differences in the contemporary American context, admittedly, there is much more my book could,

and probably should, have said about race and ethnicity in Greek antiquity. To address the subject all too briefly, it is a matter of intense scholarly debate whether the concept of race existed in the ancient Greek world and thus whether it is even possible to speak of racism. Various scholars, however, including Benjamin Isaac, Denise McCoskey, and Sarah Derbew, have powerfully challenged this traditional view, pushing scholars to look beyond modern associations of race with skin color and instead to consider how references to pure lineage and the inheritability of politically salient traits might justly constitute an ancient conception of race. Their work suggests such differences were just as politically salient for the Greeks as for us.

The decision to focus on what I call “cultural” diversity resulted from my reading of the cave allegory. I wanted a word that would capture the different constellations of beliefs, practices, and power dynamics present in each political community’s instantiation of the cave. The best word I could come up with in ancient Greek was *nomos*, which can refer both to formal laws and to informal customs or habits. In the works of Herodotus and others, we frequently hear of the *nomoi* of the Greeks as distinguished from the *nomoi* of non-Greeks, or of the *nomoi* of a specific city whether Greek or non-Greek. Thus, it made sense to me to speak of differences in *nomoi* and to make the argument that the closest equivalent in modern English is the equally difficult-to-define word “culture.”

What I might have said had I ventured to address the issue of race and ethnicity more fully is that at least on the basis of what we find in the cave allegory, a Platonic account of race and ethnicity would be subsumed, in a way, under the umbrella of “culture,” which is in no way to deny its significance. What I mean is that whether we have a concept of race, what the parameters of that concept are, and to what extent it gets politicized would be a matter of our particular cave’s social construction of reality. Simply put, race would constitute another potential shadow on the cave wall.

As I hope is evident from my engagement with their wonderfully thought-provoking questions and critiques, I am extraordinarily

grateful to all my critics, and especially to Ann Ward for organizing the panel that begat this conversation. I could not have asked for better interlocutors. Their brilliant insights, delivered in a spirit of friendship, will long stay with me and no doubt inform my thinking as I work on the book's sequel about music and foreign influence in Plato's political thought. There is still much to wonder about when it comes to Plato and cultural diversity, and the subject could hardly be more relevant.

Notes

1. Rebecca LeMoine, *Plato's Caves: The Liberating Sting of Cultural Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 4.
2. *Plato's Caves*, 5.
3. *Plato's Caves*, 5.
4. *Plato's Caves*, 41.
5. *Plato's Caves*, 8.
6. *Plato's Caves*, 10.
7. *Plato's Caves*, 10.
8. *Plato's Caves*, 11.
9. *Plato's Caves*, 21.
10. *Plato's Caves*, 21.
11. *Plato's Caves*, 22.
12. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton University Press, 1994).
13. *Plato's Caves*, 56–57.
14. *Plato's Caves*, 56–57.
15. *Plato's Caves*, 58–68.
16. *Plato's Caves*, 63.
17. *Plato's Caves*, 237–38. LeMoine engages with the communitarian argument and with Taylor specifically in her conclusion.
18. Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 25.
19. *Multiculturalism*, 68.
20. *Multiculturalism*, 69.
21. *Multiculturalism*, 72–73.
22. *Plato's Caves*, 241–44. LeMoine considers the intellectual benefits of cultural diversity in a different context here.
23. Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 65–69.
24. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford University Press, 2000), 21.

25. Lesley Beaumont, *Childhood in Ancient Athens: Iconography and Social History* (Routledge, 2012), 57.
26. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Deborah Winthrop (Vintage, 1954), 227. First published 1835–1839.
27. *Plato's Caves*, 1ff.
28. *Plato's Caves*, 135.
29. Plato, *Menexenus*, ed. David Sansone (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 236d3ff.
30. *Plato's Caves*, 145ff.; *Menexenus* 235e8.
31. *Plato's Caves*, 140; *Menexenus* 245d6ff.
32. *Plato's Caves*, 140–44.
33. *Plato's Caves*, 145ff.
34. *Plato's Caves*, 142; *Menexenus* 234c1–235c4.
35. *Plato's Caves*, 156–57.
36. *Plato's Caves*, 149–50; *Menexenus* 239d1ff.
37. *Plato's Caves*, 141.
38. *Plato's Caves*, 142.
39. Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. C. J. Rowe (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 59b6–c1.
40. *Menexenus* 234a1–b10.
41. *Menexenus* 342a–b.
42. *Plato's Caves*, 146; Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 2016), 414c.
In Greek: *Platonis Opera*, vol. 4, ed. Joannes Burnet (Oxford University Press, 1982).
43. *Plato's Caves*, 79–80; *Republic* 499c6–d1.
44. Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Cornell University Press, 2001), 67. In Arabic: *Philosophy of Plato (Falsafat Aflātūn)*, ed. Franz Rosenthal and Richard Walzer (Warburg Institute, 1943), 22.9–12.
45. I owe this suggestion to Dr. Allen Ray, who is currently working on the *Menexenus*.
46. See, e.g., Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1964), 60.
47. Of course, Zeus is believed to have originated the laws of Crete through the medium of Minos (*Laws* 624a7–b3; *Minos*, 319c1–20d7). But the way in which Kleinias responds to the Athenian's opening question must change the significance of his ceasing to mention Zeus. If Kleinias implies that the Cretan laws did not truly originate with the god, then

he likewise hints that Minos merely claimed to have conversed with Zeus. And seeing as Kleinias would emulate Minos in becoming a Cretan lawgiver in his own right and in making the pilgrimage to Zeus's cave, he must similarly intend to be his own authority, his own god.

48. For an interpretation of the opening passages of the *Laws* that stresses the antinomian and subversive character of Kleinias's account, see my "The Rule of Law and the Imitation of God in Plato's *Laws*," *Perspectives on Political Science* 51, no. 4 (2022): 190–200.
49. Consider Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, chaps. 8, 10; Paul Anthony Rahe, *The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy* (Yale University Press, 2016), chap. 1.
50. *Plato's Caves*, 210–16.
51. *Plato's Caves*, 200–201, 217–19.
52. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Hackett, 1995), 246a–b.
53. *Phaedrus* 246b.
54. *Phaedrus* 248a.
55. *Phaedrus* 248a–b.
56. *Phaedrus* 248d.
57. *Phaedrus* 253e–254c.
58. *Phaedrus* 238c.
59. *Phaedrus* 237d.