

## Entangling Plato: A Guide through the *Political Theory* Archive

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1. Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought: An Interpretation of Plato's *Symposium*," *Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (1984): 5–27.
2. J. Peter Euben, "The Battle of Salamis and the Origins of Political Theory," *Political Theory* 14, no. 3 (1986): 359–90.
3. S. Sara Monoson, "Remembering Pericles: The Political and Theoretical Import of Plato's *Menexenus*," *Political Theory* 26, no. 4 (1998): 489–513.
4. Christina Tarnopolsky, "Platonic Reflections on the Aesthetic Dimensions of Deliberative Democracy," *Political Theory* 35, no. 3 (2007): 288–312.
5. Jill Frank, "Wages of War: On Judgment in Plato's *Republic*," *Political Theory* 35, no. 4 (2007): 443–467.
6. Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "The Socratic Narrative: A Democratic Rereading of Plato's Dialogues," *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 728–53.
7. Carlos Fraenkel, "Theocracy and Autonomy in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy," *Political Theory* 38, no. 3 (2010): 340–66.

**Abstract:** Political theorists have increasingly sought to place Plato in active dialogue with democracy ancient and modern by examining what S. Sara Monoson calls "Plato's democratic entanglements." More precisely, Monoson, J. Peter Euben, Arlene Saxonhouse, Christina Tarnopolsky, and Jill Frank approach Plato as both an immanent critic of the Athenian democracy and a searching theorist of self-governance. In this Guide through the *Political*

*Theory* Archive, we explore “entanglement approaches” to the study of Plato, outlining their contribution to our understanding of Plato’s political thought and to the discipline of political theory.

**Keywords:** Plato; Socrates; entanglement; democracy; approaches.

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Already in the sixteenth century, it was possible to be dazzled by the variety and ingenuity of appropriations of Plato's political philosophy. In an evocative passage in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," Michel de Montaigne describes the redeployment of Plato as a duplicitous battle of wits:

See how Plato is moved and tossed about. Every man, glorying in applying him to himself, sets him on the side he wants. They trot him out and insert him into all the new opinions that the world accepts; and they make him differ from himself according to the different course of things. They make his meaning disavow customs that were licit in his century because they are illicit in ours. All this vigorously and powerfully, in so far as the mind of the interpreter is powerful and vigorous.<sup>1</sup>

Appeals to the authority of Plato are, Montaigne suggests, ubiquitous. Plato is invoked in order to sanction ideas and practices in the present, however alien they may be to Plato's times. Montaigne warns against the use and abuse of Platonic philosophy for political projects, and he longs for the recovery of Plato's ancient strangeness. Throughout the *Essays*, in fact, Montaigne inveighs against the artifice of his contemporaries, contrasting their deceptive sophistication with the natural simplicity of Plato's Socrates.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, as every reader knows of Montaigne knows, he himself was a prodigious and playful appropriator of the Platonic dialogues. For example, in his penultimate essay, "Of Physiognomy," Montaigne rewrites a climactic passage of Plato's *Apology*. He then comments on his free interpretation: "I give [such a passage] some particular application with my own hand, so that it may be less purely someone else's."<sup>3</sup> Montaigne uses Plato for his own philosophical purposes—to lay out his own practices of skepticism and Delphic self-scrutiny in

the spirit of, but also over and against, those of Plato's Socrates. For Montaigne, Plato is no authority; rather, as the writer of the *Essays*, Montaigne authors his own life.

Montaigne's approach to Plato is complex and generative. On the one hand, Montaigne defies the Procustean urge to cram Plato's thought into modern frameworks. Instead he preserves the strangeness of Plato, contrasting ancient and modern vocabularies and refusing anachronism. On the other hand, rather than adopt the role of an acolyte seeking an authoritative Platonic or Socratic teaching, Montaigne approaches the philosophy of Plato's dialogues and especially Plato's Socrates as textual and historical touchstones for his own project of self-examination and self-authorization. The dialogue he performs with Plato defines Montaigne's approach: it is this dialogue that allows Montaigne to engage Plato's writings without transforming Plato into a repository of timeless wisdom.

A similar approach to the interpretation of Plato informs the work of contemporary political theorists. While scholars of philosophy often analyze Platonic arguments and ideas in the abstract, and while scholars of classics often focus on philological or historical aspects of Platonic texts, political theorists have increasingly sought to place Plato in active dialogue with democracy ancient and modern by examining what S. Sara Monoson calls "Plato's democratic entanglements."<sup>4</sup> More precisely, Monoson, J. Peter Euben, Arlene Saxonhouse, Christina Tarnopolsky, and Jill Frank approach Plato as both an immanent critic of the Athenian democracy and a searching theorist of self-governance.<sup>5</sup> In this Guide through the *Political Theory* Archive, we explore "entanglement approaches" to the study of Plato, outlining their contribution to our understanding of Plato's political thought and to the discipline of political theory.

Our exploration begins with an essay about the origins of both democracy and political theory in classical Athens. J. Peter Euben's "The Battle of Salamis and the Origins of Political Theory" (1986) demonstrates how Plato entangles his Socrates in mythic accounts of the Athenians' naval victory at Salamis.<sup>6</sup> At the heart of Euben's article lies an analogy between the "daring of mind and action" memorably displayed at Salamis and the philosophic and civic questioning that Plato ascribes to Socrates (380). For Euben, the political-theoretical activity of Plato's Socrates is distinctively democratic and Athenian because "Socrates calls on Athenians to live up to the principles of [Pericles'] Funeral Oration, while subjecting those principles to moral, political, and theoretical critique" (381). In Euben's hands, Plato's representations of Socrates in Athens engage Aeschylus, Herodotus, and Thucydides in an extended civic dialogue about the greatness, challenges, and the troubles of the Athenian democracy. Euben's origin story of political theory also moves Plato's Socrates back into Athens, unsettling narratives of Plato's truculent opposition to the city.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, Euben eschews both apologetics on behalf of democratic Athens and simple lessons about citizenship in the spirit of Socrates. Crucially, "Socrates appears as the supreme embodiment and the severest critic of the Athenian political and intellectual tradition as it was formed by and at Salamis" (361). Plato's Socrates criticizes Athens' new culture of decisiveness because that culture gave birth to imperialism. Paradoxically, it was the Athenians' excessive power, leading to a series of legal and imperial perversions, that made Socratic questioning both possible and necessary. As a critic who resists the corruption of Athens, Plato's Socrates is an extraordinary citizen: he is an educator, a philosophic Pericles.<sup>8</sup>

Was Socrates successful in Euben's view? It is no accident that Euben titled his first book *The Tragedy of Political Theory*. Euben reads Plato's dialogues against the background of Attic

tragedy—because, as a contextual matter, Plato’s dialogues inherit and reshape the conventions, devices, and pedagogy of tragedy, and because the substance of the Platonic corpus is centered on the tragic narrative of Socrates at Athens.<sup>9</sup> What makes this narrative tragic? According to Euben, the tragedy of Socrates consists in both the failure of the Athenians to accept Socrates’ project of democratic refounding and the failure of Socrates to reconcile his fellow citizens to the practice of philosophy.

However, for Euben, the fact that Socrates failed to reconstitute Athens’ democratic culture and to secure the place of philosophy as an accepted practice within the city neither indicts Socrates nor Athens, but rather illuminates the fraught and complex task of the political theorist. Just as Socrates “owes the fact and even the substance of his criticism to the city he is criticizing,” so it remains a central task of the political theorist today to examine—without elision—the clashing claims of democratic deliberation and philosophical critique, collective action and epic theory, “Socrates” and “Plato,” the *Apology* and the *Republic* (383). Euben concludes his “Battle of Salamis” article: “political theory is a tradition of activity whose empowering vision contains within it an immanent critique of its own possibility and prospects” (387). In this way, Euben leaves standing the tensions between “Socrates,” “Plato,” and “Athens,” presenting his non-reductive approach as appropriate to both the interpretation of Plato’s dialogues in their historical context and to the practice of political theory in a democracy.

Plato’s sustained interrogation of the politics and culture of classical Athens is no less emphasized in the work of Arlene Saxonhouse. A comparison of two of her important contributions to *Political Theory* reveals at once her alignment with Euben and her own unique approach. Two and a half decades separate “Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought: An Interpretation of Plato’s *Symposium*” (1984) from “The Socratic Narrative: A Democratic

Reading of Plato's Dialogues" (2009)—yet the two essays share important features. For one, they both seem to take as their point of departure Pericles's Funeral Oration in Thucydides' *History*. The former essay does so explicitly (6–9, 24), the latter implicitly in foregrounding the Athenian-democratic ideal of multitasking described by Pericles (745–6).<sup>10</sup> Like Euben, Saxonhouse interprets Plato's political thought against the backdrop of specific Athenian civic rituals and assumptions. And, also like Euben, Saxonhouse emphasizes the subtlety and shrewdness of Plato's intellectual response to Athenian culture, carefully tracing agreements as well as critical departures. But whereas Euben focuses on Plato's assessments of democratic Athens through Socrates' explorations of issues such as judgment, imperialism, and accountability, Saxonhouse shows that the dialogues' drama and "play of character" entangle Athens in their own right.<sup>11</sup> In particular, Saxonhouse argues that attending to the form of the Platonic dialogues can illuminate underappreciated democratic valences of Plato's thought, especially its inclusivity, plasticity, and polyphony.

In "Eros and the Female," Saxonhouse argues that a distinctive feature of Greek political thinkers such as Plato was that they—unlike the bellicose Athenian demos—"incorporated women into their political visions" (8–9). In ancient Greece, women were never citizens, and they enjoyed few legal protections or political privileges. Still, Saxonhouse shows that Plato displays "a subtle understanding of the feminine as a vitally important aspect of the human experience, and that a meaningful political life had to take account of the female and recognize her as an important qualification on the abstract public life of the city" (9). In Saxonhouse's view, Platonic philosophy offers a supple, dialogic, and critical vocabulary suited to diagnosing the problems of imperfect polities ancient and modern, including their "fear of diversity" and denigration of women.<sup>12</sup>

Her case-in-point is Plato's *Symposium*, which Saxonhouse reads, ingeniously, as an interrogation of Greek misogyny. True, the eponymous symposium excludes women—even the “flute girl” is sent away—and its attendees excoriate women as unworthy objects of eros for elite men (11). But on Saxonhouse's reading, the female remains central to the dialogue, and she comes to the fore in the speech of Socrates. Socrates' encomium of eros relies on the wisdom of Diotima of Mantinea, for whom eros refers to a longing to conceive and to give birth. “Thus eros is associated in Socrates' speech with creativity and the feminine” (22). Against the background of the prior speeches, which had praised homosexual eros as a spur to the “manly” activities of citizenship, war, and rule, Socrates' redefinition of eros as a kind of pregnancy has a critical bite. In Saxonhouse's words: “The female in the political thought of Plato (and Aristotle) is an open force of contradiction, clarifying to the male-males (*à la* Aristophanes) that their values, which have excluded the female and the feminine principles of creativity and birth, have led to a sterile political life that is unbalanced and self-destructive” (24). Not the warlike Pericles but the androgynous Socrates—student of Diotima, flautist, midwife, as well as citizen and soldier—is Plato's model of human flourishing.<sup>13</sup>

Saxonhouse's 2009 essay, “The Socratic Narrative,” extends this emphasis on Plato's subversive multiplicity even to the notoriously uniform *kallipolis* of the *Republic*. As Saxonhouse points out, the *Republic* is a “narrated dialogue,” which means that all characters are voiced by Socrates (730), who is therefore “imitating everything” (740–1). Saxonhouse contrasts Socrates's evident performative flexibility with the unimaginative literalism of *kallipolis*' censorship program (735–45). By forbidding poetic passages for their surface-level meaning, Socrates denies the ambiguity and open-endedness of Plato's literary work (736–7) and denounces himself (739–41). The upshot is that the mocking sting of Socrates's polyphony is



turned inward in the *Republic*: not democratic Athens (as in the *Symposium*) but *kallipolis* emerges as the target of Plato's critique of one-dimensionality. As Saxonhouse puts it: "With his proposals for censorship Socrates portrays in himself a blindness to interpretive richness; the censorship planned for Callipolis becomes a countermodel to the multiplicity of levels of interpretation to which the Platonic dialogues drive us" (738). Plato had presented Socrates as an antidote to Athenian male exclusivism in the *Symposium*. In the *Republic*, Socrates occupies the role of the versatile democratic citizen celebrated by Pericles (745–7), while he censors what would produce such a citizen.

Like Saxonhouse, S. Sara Monoson situates Plato against the background of democratic Athens in general and Pericles' Funeral Oration in particular—even as she presents Plato as a severe and self-conscious critic of Pericles. With Euben, moreover, she focuses on Plato's intervention in the political history and memory of democratic Athens. In her "Remembering Pericles: The Political and Theoretical Import of Plato's *Menexenus*" (1998), Monoson contends that Plato's reevaluation of Pericles was part of a "struggle to attach symbolic meaning to the memory of Pericles," in which "the stakes . . . must have been great" (490). The Peloponnesian War had ended in a disastrous loss for Athens; afterwards its citizens attempted to save face by constructing a counterfactual narrative in which Athens would not have lost had it followed Pericles's recommendations. Plato's main objective in the *Menexenus* is to unsettle his fellow citizens' complacency and to implicate Pericles in the catastrophe that had just occurred (490–1). Monoson suggests that the dialogue does so in two ways.

In the first place, it carefully mimics the funeral oration genre, placing superlative praise of Athens in the mouth of Socrates—only to ironically subvert this message through "some extraordinary falsifications of history" and "blatant anachronism" (493–4). Secondly, Socrates

cunningly critiques the Periclean ideal of citizens acting as the “lovers” (*erastes*) of the city. Monoson admits that “the *Menexenus* does not explicitly argue against the appropriateness of the *erastēs* metaphor proposed by Pericles” (495). However, Plato’s critical perspective shines through, she argues, in a series of associative moves that compromise the plausibility of the Periclean ideal. The character of Menexenus serves to remind the reader of Plato’s previous dialogue the *Lysis*, in which Socrates had argued at length against the form of reciprocity implied by the *erastēs/eromenos* relationship, while he had argued in favor of a teacher/student model of active participation on both sides (495–7). The dialogue also uses the sexually freighted language of “pleasing” and “gratitude” (cognates of *charis*), hinting at Socrates’ previous rejection of interpersonal erotic love (497–8). And finally, there is the figure of Aspasia, to whom Socrates says he owes his rhetorical powers: Aspasia, the same non-citizen, according to Pericles’s own citizenship law of 451 BC, with whom Pericles entered into a controversial sexual relationship (498–9). After rejecting Pericles’s recommendation of erotic attachment to the polis, Socrates goes on to suggest an alternative model of citizenship based on familial relations (499–502). By addressing citizens as “sons,” by invoking the language of nurturing, and by emphasizing the autochthony trope that characterized funeral speeches, Socrates gently guides the reader towards an understanding of citizenship rooted not in eros but in philia.

Monoson joins Euben and Saxonhouse in producing a critical Plato, whose writings are entangled in the civic discourse of the Athenian democracy. This Plato resists ideological appropriation, and some translation is necessary to make him speak to contemporary political themes. Other Plato scholars have begun this work of translation, entangling Plato in political-theoretical questions and moments that might seem, at first blush, to be uniquely modern. For example, Christina Tarnopolsky has brought Plato into conversation with contemporary

democratic theory, synthesizing a Platonic-Habermasian approach to deliberation, democratic decision-making, and identity formation. In a different vein, Carlos Fraenkel has studied Plato's reception in medieval Islamic and Jewish political thought, enabling him to speak to concepts such as "theocracy" and "autonomy." Why shouldn't scholars of Plato follow the example of his Socrates by bringing Plato into conversation with anyone at all—even interlocutors ostensibly alien to Plato's own time and thought?<sup>14</sup>

Consider Tarnopolsky's 2007 article, "Platonic Reflections on the Aesthetic Dimensions of Deliberative Democracy."<sup>15</sup> Tarnopolsky argues that the structure and drama of Plato's *Gorgias* evoke the deliberative practices of democratic Athens—however harshly anti-democratic the substance of the dialogue may appear (292). Moreover, for Tarnopolsky, Socrates' biting criticisms of Athens in the *Gorgias* are often better understood as criticisms of the Athenians' failures to measure up to their own democratic self-image—for example, the image of Athens as a city that encourages frank speech within and outside the assembly and the law courts (293–94). How, then, does Plato's *Gorgias* illuminate issues of deliberation, frank speech, and aesthetic judgment in a democratic context?

To answer this question, Tarnopolsky focuses on the idea of shame. Platonic shame, on Tarnopolsky's reading of the *Gorgias*, is a complex "psychic [mechanism] by which we come to have certain virtues or vices and thus become certain types of people" (301). When Socrates shames his interlocutors through elenctic questioning, he produces moments of perplexity that are highly indeterminate, precisely because the experience of occurrent shame "opens up a number of different possible reactions: hiding from, contesting, or transforming either oneself or the 'other' responsible for this perplexity. . ." (294). Since beliefs are constitutive of identities rather than merely self-chosen, deliberation that aims to change minds must involve carefully

tuned rhetoric and imagery that plays upon the shame of its intended audience in the right way (307).

Tarnopolsky presents these “Platonic reflections” on shame as both Plato’s immanent critique of deliberation in democratic Athens and her own intervention in the scholarly literature on deliberative democracy. In particular, she suggests that her reading of the *Gorgias* enriches an important Habermasian point—that communicative interaction and aesthetic judgment implicate and reshape identities. “For Plato and Habermas, truthfulness or sincerity involves far more than the willingness to utter one’s pre-deliberative preferences, rather it also involves the much more difficult willingness to acknowledge new selves and others that may come to light through the processes of dialectical engagement or democratic deliberation” (308). Making Plato and Habermas allies across time, Tarnopolsky shows that shame can explain the indeterminacy of deliberation, the potency of imagistic rhetoric, and the weight of identity on public speech. Because these dynamics of persuasion preoccupy deliberative-democratic theorists today, Tarnopolsky reveals how Plato may speak to them.

Carlos Fraenkel’s “Theocracy and Autonomy in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy” (2010) serves as a foil to Tarnopolsky’s article. In this piece, Fraenkel wants to show that the ostensibly modern concept of “autonomy” has roots in both medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy and in Plato’s political thought, especially his *Laws*. While Fraenkel’s intervention resembles Tarnopolsky’s in the sense that he too brings Plato into dialogue with later philosophers and political theorists, his story of the transmission of a fixed Platonic teaching diverges from the project of thinking with Plato as an entangled critic of democracy.

In “Theocracy and Autonomy,” Fraenkel argues that canonical theorists of theocracy, such as Maimonides, Alfarabi, and Averroes, saw themselves as the intellectual descendants of

Plato (344). He also submits that the point of theocracy, in their view, was not the suppression of autonomous and rational thinking, but rather its cultivation.<sup>16</sup> Scriptural authority and philosophizing converged in their objective to produce a society of reason-governed individuals. Scriptural commandments could be uncritically accepted as statements of reason precisely because they conveyed God's Word, which was necessarily rational. But these thinkers also maintained that obeying Scripture stopped short of the full exercise of individual reason. Only by arriving at the same truths through our own philosophical reflection could we be counted "autonomous" (351–54). In sum, Judeo-Islamic "theocrats" believed that reading Scripture should be to philosophizing what riding a tricycle is to cycling: a propaedeutic. Religious observance did not preclude rational exertion; the latter demanded the former.

Importantly, Fraenkel shows that a chief source from which the Islamic (and Jewish) *falasifa* drew their ideas was Plato's *Laws*. The *falasifa* were naturally drawn to the late Plato, Fraenkel argues, because he was "the first to introduce God as reason (*nous*) in the sense relevant for my purpose" (345). In the *Laws*, we find political institutions and a legal code explicitly meant to embody divine reason. What makes Magnesia's *nomoi* divine is their virtue-inducing effect (345–6).<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the preludes or preambles attached to these injunctions bring the citizens to an understanding of why they are to follow the law to the letter (34–51).<sup>18</sup> In this way, simple commands are instrumental to a broader pedagogical mission: they habituate the citizenry to perform what they also—and more importantly—need to understand. According to Fraenkel, the *falasifa* merely substituted the *shari'a* and the Mosaic Law for Plato's detailed ordinances (346). The core idea, however, remained essentially the same.

Approaching Plato through his historical afterlife carries benefits and risks. By constructing a conversation about faith and freedom that implicates Plato, Alfarabi, and Kant,

Fraenkel reminds us that skeptical attention to the reception of Platonic ideas is not merely a defensive interpretative posture. However, Fraenkel's genealogy risks distorting Plato's writings by viewing them through Josephan and Enlightenment prisms. "Theocracy" did not become a legitimate constitutional model until Josephus, who presented it in contradistinction to the elitism of the *Republic* and *Laws*, and to whose judgment medieval thinkers were critically responding.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, "autonomy" invokes a specifically Enlightenment idiom of emancipation from superstition and unaccountable authority.<sup>20</sup> Finally, while Fraenkel assumes that the words of Plato's Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* articulate the thought of Plato himself, practitioners of entanglement approaches tend to resist such a simple identification of Plato with his characters—a move, as we will see, that has implications for how we read Plato's texts and how we understand his political thought. In sum, the payoff of putting Plato in dialogue with historical moments and concepts that are not usually associated with him must be measured against the diminution of Plato's strangeness and distinctiveness.

By way of conclusion, we turn to the work of Jill Frank, who raises a fundamental question of Platonic exegesis: if Plato is concerned with practices of self-government, at once philosophical and political, as all our authors suppose, then how do his dialogues work to educate the reader in and toward these practices? Or, to modify the words of Danielle Allen, *how did Plato write?*<sup>21</sup> Frank examines this question in her 2007 article, "Wages of War: On Judgment in Plato's *Republic*."<sup>22</sup> For Frank, reading Plato requires distinguishing him from Socrates and all other characters of the dialogues—who are, after all, Platonic creations. By eliciting this work of "disidentification," as Frank puts it, which involves questioning the authority of Socrates, his interlocutors, and the text itself, Plato educates the reader to good judgment or self-governance required for the exercise of democracy.<sup>23</sup> The *how* of Plato's

dialogues therefore cannot be divorced from the *what*: only by seeing how Plato addresses his audience can we assess what he has to say about politics, philosophy, and their relationship.<sup>24</sup>

Through her reading of the *Republic* in “Wages of War,” Frank argues that Plato intervenes in Athenian-democratic discourse on war, especially the discourse on the Peloponnesian War and its aftermath. War, she shows, is everywhere in the *Republic*. It is implicated in Polemarchus’ name, the violence threatened in the opening scene, and the shifting alliances among the dialogue’s interlocutors, whose extra-textual biographies indicate their proximity to war (446–49). It is explicit in the founding of *kallipolis*: the auxiliaries and guardians are educated for war; in Book V, moreover, Socrates reflects on practices of warfare that *kallipolis* will employ (449–54). According to Frank, “it is not unreasonable to conclude that Plato, in setting the dialogue during the Peloponnesian War, is participating in an argument beyond the dialogue regarding the goals and strategies of that war” (454), an argument he stages before his readers—the increasingly literate citizen-body of fourth century Athens.

For Frank, the ascendancy of Athenian imperialism, *pleonexia*, and militarism was bound with a decline in the capacities of citizen judgment. As she reads it, the *Republic* offers an education to judgment that responds directly to this predicament—a predicament at once political and philosophical. Political, because only judgment can navigate conflictual political terrains in which authority is in flux and rules are changing. Philosophical, because “judging well and philosophizing both call for grasping what is, on the basis of imagination and experience, and offering an account of what has been grasped by giving reasons” (460). Frank argues that the education to judgment offered by the *Republic* works on readers when they question claims made with political and philosophical authority where Socrates’ interlocutors do not. And, in particular, she sees the martial education of the guardians—presented by Socrates as preparation

for their practice of politics and philosophy (455, 459–60)—as rather conspicuously thwarting the capacity to judge and thereby destroying the key condition of both politics and philosophy (450–53).

Frank explains the philosophical and political stakes of her entanglement approach as follows:

Reading the *Republic* as, among other things, a pedagogy in the practice of judgment both philosophical and political implies a mutual embeddedness of philosophy and politics that goes against the grain of much of the scholarship on that dialogue and on Plato’s political philosophy more generally, challenging, in particular, the conventional assumption that Plato sought to insulate philosophy from politics. (461)

Frank’s approach gives the lie to representations of Plato as a naive idealist, a mystic, a metaphysician, an authoritarian personality, an aristocrat, a withdrawn questioner, or an anti-political curmudgeon.<sup>25</sup> It also goes far beyond the observation—made by Dana Villa and other theorists of “Socratic citizenship”—that Socrates philosophizes inside the cave and that his practices of conversation and reflection model practices of deliberation and civic friendship among citizens.<sup>26</sup> Rather, at the deepest level, Frank’s entanglement approach suggests Plato is both *theoretikos* and *politikos*; indeed, he is one because he is the other.<sup>27</sup>

In different ways, then, entanglement interpreters of Plato evoke Montaigne insofar as they too seek to strike a balance between genealogical inquiry and practical orientation, skepticism and imagination, historical accuracy and self-authorizing judgment. For all of these authors, Plato speaks to political problems recognizable to modern readers, but in an idiom strange enough to warrant scholarly translation and mediation. In this sense, entanglement



approaches converge on the task of philology—less as it may be practiced by contemporary classicists, however, than as described by Nietzsche in his *We Philologists*:

If we set the philologist the task of better understanding his own age by means of antiquity, then his task is eternal. This is the antinomy of philology. The ancient world has in fact always been understood only in terms of the present—and should the present now be understood in terms of the ancient world?<sup>28</sup>

Nietzsche recommends a thoroughly dialogical orientation toward classical antiquity. We interpreters have to begin somewhere. Since historical inquiry is heavily inflected by present concerns, why not start there? Yet, we return to ancient texts to recover something “rich and strange,” if not to “suffer a sea-change” ourselves.<sup>29</sup> Entanglement approaches leave historical difference standing and therefore make this dialectical exchange, and the wonder and resistance it may produce, possible. Equally important, by refusing to incorporate into their hermeneutics prescriptive answers to the most difficult questions of Platonic political philosophy, including the relation of philosophy to politics, entanglement approaches preserve the openness of Platonic texts as sites of self-knowledge and self-discovery. What Montaigne saw in Plato remains possible, in a new way, in our own time.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1943), 443. Citations of Montaigne refer to this volume.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Montaigne, “That to Philosophize Is to Learn to Die,” 64.

<sup>3</sup> Montaigne, “Of Physiognomy,” 809. On “Of Physiognomy,” see Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 116–25.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, among philosophers, see David Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); among classicists, Mark Schiefsky, "Galen and the Tripartite Soul," in *Plato and the Divided Self*, ed. Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 331–49. See also S. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. 153.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the *Political Theory* articles (and related books) by J. Peter Euben, Arlene Saxonhouse, S. Sara Monoson, Christina Tarnopolsky, Carlos Fraenkel, and Jill Frank that we treat below, other important contributions to entanglement approaches include: Danielle Allen, *Why Plato Wrote* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Gerald Mara, *Socrates' Discursive Democracy: Logos and Ergon in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); Joel Alden Schlosser, *What Would Socrates Do? Self-Examination, Civic Engagement, and the Politics of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); John Wallach, *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2001). Cf. the adjacent Straussian and Skinnerian approaches of, respectively, Mary Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Melissa Lane, *Plato's Progeny: How Plato and Socrates Still Captivate the Modern Mind* (London: Duckworth, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Euben arguably originated entanglement approaches. See J. Peter Euben, "Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Crito*," *Political Theory* 6, no. 2 (1978): 166; Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 221; Arendt, “What Is Authority?,” in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 93; Dana R. Villa, “The Philosopher Versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates,” *Political Theory* 26, No. 2 (1998): 153–54. At the same time, Euben follows Arendt—while improving on her rather flat-footed reading of Plato—by juxtaposing Socratic “political theory” to Platonic “philosophy” and championing the former. For Euben’s reflections on his debt to Arendt, see J. Peter Euben, *Platonic Noise* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 40–63.

<sup>8</sup> See Plato, *Gorgias* 521d and J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 208–9.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Peter Euben, “Introduction,” in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2–3, 7–13.

<sup>10</sup> Thucydides, *History* 2.37–41.

<sup>11</sup> See especially Euben, *Corrupting Youth*, the volume in which “Battle of Salamis” appears (among other essays on Plato). The phrase “play of character” derives from Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> See also Arlene W. Saxonhouse, “The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato,” *Political Theory* 4, no. 2 (1976): 195–212; Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Wendy Brown, “‘Supposing Truth Were a Woman...’: Plato’s Subversion of Masculine Discourse,” *Political Theory* 16, no. 4 (1988): 594–616; and Mary Nichols, “Socrates’ Contest with the Poets in Plato’s *Symposium*,” *Political Theory* 32, no. 2 (2004): 186–206.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. J.R. Lucas, “Because You Are a Woman,” *Philosophy* 48, no. 184 (1973): 161–71; Julia Annas, “Plato’s *Republic* and Feminism,” *Philosophy* 51, no. 197 (1976): 307–21.

<sup>14</sup> See Schlosser, *What Would Socrates Do?*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> See also Christina Tarnopolsky, “Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame,” *Political Theory* 32, no. 4 (2004): 468–94; Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato’s Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Jeffrey E. Green, “The Shame of Being a Philosopher: Critical Response to Tarnopolsky,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005): 266–72.

<sup>16</sup> See also Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion and Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Laws* 713a–714a, 631b–d.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 719e–720d. Cf. Christopher Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ryan Balot, “An Odd Episode in Platonic Interpretation: Changing the Law in Plato’s *Laws*,” in *Ethics in Ancient Greek Literature: Aspects of Ethical Reasoning from Homer to Aristotle and Beyond*, ed. Maria Liatsi (Berlin: De Gruyter), 61–80.

<sup>19</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.164–9.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, ch. 2. For Plato and his contemporaries, by contrast, *autonomia* usually signifies a polity’s freedom from foreign rule.

<sup>21</sup> Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*.

<sup>22</sup> See also Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Frank, *Poetic Justice*, 15–16.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 52: “One must pay as much attention to the How as to the What. At any rate to begin with one must pay greater attention to the ‘form’ than to the ‘substance,’ since the meaning of the ‘substance’ depends on the ‘form.’” While Frank’s Plato diverges radically from Strauss’s, she takes up this challenge.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Susan Bickford, “‘This Way of Life, This Contest’: Rethinking Socratic Citizenship,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought*, ed. Stephen Salkever (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126–27; Schlosser, *What Would Socrates Do?*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> See Frank, *Poetic Justice*, 209; Nina Valiquette Moreau, “Musical Mimesis and Political Ethos in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Political Theory* 45, no. 2 (2017): 192–215.

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Notes for *We Philologists*,” trans. William Arrowsmith, *Arion 1*, no. 2 (1973–74): 296.

<sup>29</sup> See Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 1.2; Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940,” in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace), 193; Euben, *Corrupting Youth*, epigraph.

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