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WOMAN, EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN PLATO

In this paper we wish to look at the relationship between basic education and politics in the *Republic* and *Laws* of Plato with particular reference to the role and status of women in each account. We shall be passing over the highly specialized *higher* education given to prospective male and female Guardians described in book seven of the *Republic*, and concentrating on primary education. In the *Republic* this, too, as it happens, is also described in terms of the role it plays in the upbringing of prospective male and female Guardians; it is left to the reader to infer how much of this is supposed to apply to the general population. But before we get to that, it would probably be useful just to give a brief summary of the highlights of the primary education in question.

T. Robinson is the author of the parts of the article that address the problem of education of women-guardians, their “legal responsibility” and comparison of *Republic* and *Laws* in these questions. R. Svetlov prepared sections devoted to the problem of the differentiation of biological sex and gender qualities in the Platonic concept of the soul. Refs 2.

Keywords: Plato, philosophy of education, education and women’s political rights.

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ЖЕНЩИНЫ, ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ И ПОЛИТИКА У ПЛАТОНА

Статья рассматривает связи между образованием и политическими правами (и обязанностями), которые четко проговорены в платоновских диалогах «Государство» и «Законы». В Каллиполисе, проект которого создается Платоном в «Государстве», важнейшей цементирующей силой общества является сословие стражей. Показательно, что женщины в сословии стражей играют важную роль и получают воспитание, близкое к мужскому. В «Законах» женщины также получают практически полный спектр воспитания, в том числе военного. Подобный взгляд Платона резко контрастирует с представлениями о женской природе, которые были распространены в Античности. Платон полагал, что женское начало возникает из «сверхдуши», которая имеет мужскую природу («Тимей»), между женским и мужским нет абсолютного разрыва. В «Политике» Платон показывает, как феминное и маскулинное начала могут проявляться в социальных добродетелях граждан («уравновешенных» и «мужественных»).

Вместе с тем в «Законах» Платон отказывает женщинам в реальных политических правах. Причиной этого являются земные реалии: поскольку реальное государство (условная «Магнезия») составлено не из божественных людей и детей богов, именно в женщине проявляется низшее, материальное, начало, которое делает, по мнению Платона, вручение ей рычагов управления обществом слишком рискованным предприятием.

Т. Робинсон является автором тех разделов статьи, где поднимаются проблемы образования женщин-стражей, их правовой «вменяемости», соотнесения «гендерных» концепций «Государства» и «Законов». Р. Светлов подготовил страницы, посвященные проблеме дифференциации биологического пола и гендерных качеств в платоновской концепции души. Библиогр. 2 назв.

Ключевые слова: Платон, философия образования, образование и политические права женщин.

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In this paper we wish to look at the relationship between basic education and politics in the Republic and Laws of Plato with particular reference to the role and status of women in each account. We shall be passing over the highly specialized higher education given to prospective male and female Guardians described in book seven of the Republic, and concentrating on primary education. In the Republic this, too, as it happens, is also described in terms of the role it plays in the upbringing of prospective male and female Guardians; it is left to the reader to infer how much of this is supposed to apply to the general population. But before we get to that, it would probably be useful just to give a brief summary of the highlights of the primary education in question.

To produce the future rulers of his just society, says Socrates (376d ff.), a number of specific conditions must be fulfilled. The first is a sound educational system for soul and body, but particularly soul. This will involve the establishment of an educational environment based on the so-called "mimetic" theory of education, according to which we become what we become as persons through a process of osmosis from a particular educational environment. For the Greeks, most of them non-literate, educational environment meant in effect the artistic environment of dramatic festivals, rhapsodic recitations and the like, along with the physical presence at all times of their cities' civic structures, statues and temples, all in a context of the overwhelming natural beauty of the country in which they lived.

The appropriate artistic environment for the future rulers his good society, says Socrates, will, as far as drama, literature, music and the visual arts are concerned, involve truth in content and beauty in form, on the grounds that our objective is to produce rulers characterized by both beauty of soul and maximal rationality and knowledge. And how, he wonders aloud, can this be achieved if they are surrounded by ugliness in the visual and aural arts and are permanently deceived on vital matters by much that is conveyed in drama and other forms of literature? The result is a set of suggestions which we know astonished the Republic's first readers, and have drawn comment ever since.

Much of Homer, for example, to this date the nearest the Greeks had to a sacred book, will in the Ideal Society ('Kallipolis', the 'Beautiful City') be drastically curtailed, on several grounds. First, the two poems tell untruths about the gods, who, says Socrates, are good and only good, cannot deceive, and are in no way anthropomorphic. The poems also portray a world characterized by violence, brutality, and a number of activities that do not fit into Socrates' canon of virtuous action: heroes, for example, occasionally break down in tears. Much of Greek tragedy and comedy will suffer the same fate as Homer, and on similar grounds. As far as music is concerned, too much of it is too soft in its rhythms for Socrates, too likely to produce emotions too effeminate and un-warrior-like to be suitable for his citizens; this also must be ruthlessly excised from the canon. The list of villainous features of contemporary art-forms goes on and on, and by the end (which takes a long time coming; few details are spared) one is left wondering how much of the Greek artistic environment will in fact remain, apart from one or two fables by Aesop, a few heroic odes by Pindar perhaps, and a lot of military marches.

This early education, in conjunction with two years of military training, an intense higher education in mathematics (ten years), dialectic (five years), and fifteen years of hands-on political training, will form the appropriate training for rule as Guardians of Kallipolis by a small group of males and females chosen from an appropriate genetic background of civic virtue, intelligence, and talent for rule.

What of the rest of the population of Kallipolis? From Plato's silence we can only assume that they will receive as much education as most people did in societies he knew, but this time subject to the pre-censorship of the arts that prevails in the early education of future Guardians. Which means, in effect, that the great majority would receive no formal education at all in terms that we ourselves would understand, but would live out their lives illiterate and innumerate, whatever learning they received coming from parental example at home and societal experience outside of it, along with the osmosis-effect of a magnificent sculptural and natural environment, and the morally uplifting effect of an artistic environment, as Plato saw it, of drama, music, dance, and poetry which would stress virtue as life's only acceptable end.

A small minority, born into families with wealth and reasonably enlightened values, but not deemed to be of genetically 'Guardian' material, would receive more formal instruction (in mathematics, music, dance, and the like) from paedagogoi employed for the purpose by their parents, but this instruction too would now be subject to the moral constraints laid down for all education in Kallipolis. Or so one must assume; it seems inconceivable that they would be allowed to attend plays, for example, which Plato deems morally unacceptable viewing for his future Guardians.

And, with a few exceptions, none even of this group could expect ever to join the Guardian class, and hence to have a share in the running of Kallipolis. (we say 'with a few exceptions,' because Socrates is careful to say that there will always be enough flexibility in the system for promotion to, and demotion from the Guardian class, if talent [or lack of talent] at any level in the system on occasion manifests itself).

When we turn to Plato's second-best society (his own term for Magnesia, the city he describes in the *Laws*), it is to a world of practical possibilities, as he sees it, rather than to the world of Kallipolis, which he now looks back on as something which could only be populated by 'gods and sons of gods', not normal humans, were it ever to come into being. And the adjustments he feels he needs to make are startling, not least in the realm of education.

In his new society, he says (we take it the 'Athenian' of the dialogue speaks for Plato), all will receive an education, males and females alike, and it will be the same education, including all the training in things like horsemanship and the use of weapons (including practicing fighting in armor, 813e) which had once been confined to boys. There will be six public schools for the purpose, three inside the city's confines and three outside, and they will have — another revolutionary notion — paid teachers (and paid by the state, no less), who will "offer a complete course of instruction in the arts of war and the fine arts alike" (804d).

It is hard to imagine how astonishing these ideas must have been to Plato's first readers, not least because the education will be for all, politically as well as socially. There is no mention of any 'special' education for children deemed appropriate material for the production of Guardians of the *Laws* (male and female), as in the *Republic*; and we are left to infer that those who finish up Guardians of the *Laws* will now do so, not on grounds of eugenic background and a special education dedicated simply to them, but on grounds of demonstrated merit and talent, after having passed through exactly the same compulsory educational system as everyone else.

This is heady material, which may well raise us aloft for a while, but our feet soon touch ground again once we see that it is based, not on any supposed equality of men and

women, but on a state's need for the maximal use of the material at its disposal. In Plato's own words: "I say the present practice in our own part of the world is the merest folly: it is pure folly that men and women do not unite to follow the same pursuits with all their energies. In fact, almost every one of our cities on our present system is, and finds itself to be, the half of what it might be at the same cost in expenditure and trouble" (805a). (Several have inferred from a later sentence in the dialogue (785b) that Plato gave citizenship to females in the Laws, and along with it access to all the higher civic posts that males had, but this seems to me very doubtful. To this degree his society finishes up using its women a good deal less efficiently than might have been expected from the heavy stress on equality of education).

It is a pragmatic voice we are hearing. If Plato has the 'virtue' of the state before his mind as he speaks, it is now very much the virtue that is efficiency (the basic meaning of the word usually translated as 'virtue', arete). And efficiency underlies the basic content of the educational practices of his new society, many of which will be familiar to readers of the Republic. First of all, education will be, not just the same for all, but unchanging in its content. So "the same children," he says, "will always play the same games in one and the same way, and get their pleasure from the same playthings" (797b), on the principle that "change — except when it is change from what is bad — is always...highly perilous" (797d). The canons of music and dance will also be fixed, as each of us lives out as his life as one "who has been fashioned as a toy (paignion) of God" (ibid.). War is not the most serious thing in life, says Plato, as Spartans and Cretans seem to think. Play is the most serious thing, and that play is comprised of our conducting of sacrifices and singing of songs and dancing of dances all of which follow an eternally unchanging script, with the objective of winning heaven's favour and vanquishing the enemy within (803c–804b).

Plato is in full flight again. But he is aware of it, and he finishes up by saying that, while humans are 'puppets in the main', they do have 'some touch of reality about them too' (804b). But the concession does not satisfy the Cretan Megillus, who accuses him of having a "poor estimate" of humanity (ibid.). All Plato has by way of reply is that he had had God before his mind as he was speaking, and that he had 'felt' the things he had just said (ibid.). Whether Megillus was satisfied with this answer is not indicated.

Plato's answer to another question is undoubtedly intriguing. As part of a discussion of the rote-learning of appropriate poetry which will form part of young people's education, the Spartan Clinias asks the Athenian how we would "advise our Guardian of the Law ... on the choice of a standard (paradeigma) by reference to which he will permit the young folk to learn one piece and forbid their learning another" (811b). Plato has no hesitation in replying that their present discourse has been "just like a kind of poem"! (811c). "The fact is", he says, "that of all the many compositions I have met with or listened to, in verse or in plain prose, I find it the most satisfactory and the most suitable for the ears of the young. So I really think I could not direct our Guardian of the Law or Minister of Education to a better standard, or bid him do better than instruct his schoolmasters to teach it to their pupils" (811d) — along with any "connected or similar matter" a teacher might find among poets and prose writers, or in unwritten discourses like the present one, which, he says, they should "get put into writing" (811e).

A question many people must have asked him — "What do you hope will be the place of your own writings in a city such as Magnesia were it ever to come into existence?" — Plato has now finally answered, at least partially. His dialogue the Laws, he says, will be the

standard for all prose and poetry which the young in his good society will, as part of their education in virtue, have to learn by rote. In the midst of so many other features of the educational system in the Laws which simply repeat what was said in the Republic, here is an item which is dramatically new, and strikingly personal. It also contains — in one of those en passant phrases which have the ring of truth to them — a statement that offers us a hint why he is so happy to call his laws a ‘paradigm’ or standard: the conversation, he says, which they have been engaged in since daybreak “seems to me at any rate <to have been> not without divine inspiration (epipnoia) of some sort” (811c). His own book, in a word, is a great prose-poem, and, like all great poetry, is, as Greeks believed, infused with the breath of God. Unlike that ‘paradigm in the heavens’, however, which is the perfect society described in the Republic, and likely to remain forever un-instantiated, his dialogue the Laws will be the paradigm of all instruction — and that means instruction in what he has in ringing tones just characterized as the only goal of a society with any claim to be called ‘just’, that is, “true excellence in the virtues of soul proper to human character” — in a society which, second-best as an instantiation though it might be to a putative first instantiation of the paradigm, one where a number of the citizens are ‘in a way gods and sons of gods’, has a real chance of actually seeing the light of day.

Still on the topic of citizen virtue, we notice how firmly committed Plato continues to be to the ideals of the Republic. On the age-old principle of like associating with like and like influencing like, he says that, in the matter of drama, comedy will “receive no serious consideration whatsoever” (316e), and tragedy will be tolerated to the degree that what it offers is, as he puts it, “fit to be uttered, and edifying to be heard by the public” (817d).

Poetry and music likewise will be strictly controlled. “No poet shall compose anything in contravention of the public standards of law and right, honor and good, nor shall he be at liberty to display any composition to any private citizen whatever until he has first submitted it to the appointed censors of such things and the Guardians of the Laws, and obtained their approval” (801d). Such poets must also have reached the age of fifty, and have performed at least one “noble and illustrious deed” in their lives (829c8–d1). In the final analysis, admits Plato disarmingly, the compositions of poets who are men of moral worth should be performed “even if they have no artistic content” (829d)! It is a passing remark, but one rich in significance: as far as education’s unique goal of the production and reinforcement of virtue is concerned, the high moral stature of a poet outweighs the low artistic value of his creations.

Education, he continues, will also have a strong military-training component, [1, 9–21] for the protection of the state from outside danger (830c ff.). There will be military drills — daily if possible — and monthly exercises in the various aspects of warfare, in which citizens will compete with one another in simulations of combat, “with real fighting with gloves and missiles closely modelled on the genuine articles” (830e). The weapons, he continues, “should be comparatively dangerous, in order that the sport may not be wholly without its perils, but give occasion for alarms, and thus serve, in its way, to discriminate a man of courage from a coward” (ibid.). If a life is occasionally lost in these exercises, the homicide will be regarded as involuntary (831a). The legislator’s view, he says, “will be that if a few men die, others as good will be born to take their place” (ibid.) — and this, he adds, is a far better situation than if we allow fear to die (ibid.).

These views carry over into his view of athletics in general. Boys’ and men’s running events (though not the women’s and girls’ events) will now take place with the competitors

in full armor (833a). Sports such as wrestling will be done away with, and in their place there will be single combats, or combats between pairs, again in full armor (833d6–e1). The boxing element in the pancration (a type of no-holds-barred wrestling, resulting on occasion in death) will also be eliminated, and a contest involving bows and arrows and slings put in its place. In sum: athletic contests, he says, which do not provide a training for war “should be bidden farewell” (832e2).

A fair inference from all this, we think, is that in Magnesia it will be young men who are trained specifically for combat, though young women will be engage in vigorous exercise. As far as the rest of their education is concerned, however, it will be the same for both groups. But how will this work out in the political arena? Plato has already said how foolish a society is which does not use the talent which lies in the one half of its population which is female. How does Magnesia plan to use that half, now that we know they are just as well educated as the other half?

Its commitment to education for all females as well as males would appear to be enough to ensure that there would be a plentiful supply of females as well as males for potential election to all the various offices of state. But in practice, women in Magnesia will be eligible to ‘enter office’ (archas) only at age forty (785b), i. e., when their child-bearing duties are over, (men, by contrast, can first compete for office at the age of thirty, *ibid.*), and the offices in question do not appear to include any of the major offices of the state. The Minister of Education, for example, a post which Plato describes as ‘the most important of the highest offices of the state’ (765e), is by statute a ‘father of a family’. The Guardians of the Laws Plato refers to unequivocally as ‘men’ (andras, 755b5; ‘aner’ is the standard Greek word for ‘[adult] male’). The all-important Auditors of those finishing their term of office are all ‘men’ (andras, 946a1). And the members of the Nocturnal Council are clearly men too, being comprised of ten Guardians of the Laws (all male), a Minister and an unspecified number of ex-Ministers of Education (all male), an unspecified number of (male) priests of distinction, and a number of junior members, who, being by statute aged between 30 and 40, are also clearly each one of them men, women being forbidden access to office before the age of forty. Note that at *Meno* (81a10) Plato clearly distinguishes priests and priestesses; the word ‘priest’ is not a generic term covering both. See also *Laws* (800b1, 828b4, 909d9), *Phdr.* (244b1), *Rep.* (461a7). As far as Magnesia is concerned, priests and priestesses are chosen by lot (759c), must be over sixty years of age, and hold office for one year.

The only other major public office left to which citizens are elected is the Advisory Council. We cannot be certain whether Plato intended women to form part of it, but the fact that those who, in final conjunction with a use of the lot-system, elect its members are once again ‘men’ (andra, 756e4) offers little reason for thinking it likely. If we add to this the fact that only males in Magnesia are entitled to hold property, and that women continue to have their marriages arranged by male relatives, [2, 388] it looks highly unlikely that, by contrast with contemporary Athens, females have been granted citizenship (814c4) in Magnesia, as some understand Plato to be saying. But we see that in distinguishing ‘politides’ and ‘citizens’ Plato is distinguishing between ‘free females dwelling in the polis’ and ‘citizens’ — who are free, male, and have all the rights of full citizenship. See *Soph. Electr.* 1227, *Eurip. Electr.* 1335, where no one would ever infer from the use of the word *politides* that the women in question enjoy the privileges of citizenship, even if, out of camaraderie, they address one another warmly as ‘*politides*’.

If there is any political break-through for women in the second-best society, it is at a level well below that enjoyed by male citizens. While it is possible that the several references to 'andres' are just slips on Plato's part, this seems very unlikely, given the various other instances of high office where males and only males seem to be involved. A more likely explanation, it seems to me, is that women's 'entering office' (785b5) simply means their 'entering public service,' without specification of what the range of such service might be. An example of it would be membership, if elected, of the board of 'female overseers' of Magnesia's marriages, something mentioned in the immediately antecedent paragraph, at 784a1-2. But this does not compare with the major offices open exclusively — apparently — to men.

Why this apparent disconnect in the Laws between equal education for women and equal access to political office for women? We can begin by going back to the Guardians of the Republic, where, after an education equal to that which male prospects for Guardianship undergo, female Guardians — by a natural progression — rule Kallipolis on an absolutely equal footing with male Guardians. So why does Plato not follow this same progression in Magnesia?

The first thing to notice is that Plato seems to have come to believe over time that, were his perfect society ever to come into being, it would have as a number of its inhabitants people who are 'in a way, gods and children of gods' (the philosopher-rulers, presumably) (739d). But such godlike creatures are the product of rigorous genetic selection and a second-order education denied to all others. In the Laws, by contrast, where there is one education for all, and no genetic selection of anyone for anything, all who achieve power will do so by a standard political process of elections and the lot-system. And in this more recognizable world women — educated or not — will have a role to play which makes them unfit for all political office other than, as we saw (see n. 6), the one involving supervision of marriages, and even here, where they are unable to adjudicate a particular problem they encounter, they must defer to the final decision of a group of ten (male) Guardians of the Laws (784bc).

This could of course be put down to the standard belief that a woman's place is in the home, and that the chief objective of even an education identical to what all the men have received will still be primarily the production of citizen-children. But Plato's earlier comment on a good society's using all the talent available to it, including that of the fifty percent of that society who are women, suggests that Plato had in mind something more broad-ranging than that. For example, his introduction of public eating tables for women, Spartan-style, to go with the public eating-tables for men, suggests that he wants at least a social (if not a political) life for women in Magnesia that is far broader than anything hitherto tried in his own city of Athens.

Even here, however, the move seems to have nothing to do with what would seem on the face of it a reasonable possibility, and that it is women's equal education to men which has now empowered them to a social life — if only one of eating with one another in public — equal to that enjoyed by men. Unfortunately, Plato himself suggests a reason much less agreeable, and much more in line with contemporary beliefs about women. The reason, he says, is one of security. Just as common tables for men served as a security device in controlled societies like Crete and Sparta (780c), so too common tables for women as well as men will serve as a security device in his own society, Magnesia. As he puts it with distressing bluntness: "The very half of the race which is generally predisposed by its

weakness to undue secrecy and craft — the female sex — has been left to its disorders by the mistaken concession of the legislator [in societies such as Athens]... Women — left without any chastening restraint — is not, as you might fancy, merely half the problem; nay, she is a twofold and more than a twofold problem, as her native disposition is inferior to a man's." He goes on to talk about how women need to be forced out of the shady corners in which they like to hide "into the daylight" (781c), where they can be kept under observation.

This is very uncomfortable reading. It does not suggest, of course, that Plato's views on women are worse than those of any other Greek of the day; but it does not suggest that they are any better either. And to be sure we fully understand them, we need to spend a moment looking at the precise import for him of the word 'inferior'. A hint of it comes in the Republic (469d7), when he talks of the 'womanish, petty minds' of those who wait till the battle is over and then rush onto the battle field to rob the dead of their armour and accoutrements. The clear suggestion is that women have a tendency towards cowardice (perhaps unsurprisingly, the word on Greek for 'brave' is 'manly', *andrios*), and this is re-reinforced by a strong passage in the Timaeus (90e ff.), where he talks about how reincarnation in a woman's body is the punishment for a man who in a previous life was characterized by 'cowardice and injustice' (90e7).

One might perhaps object that the passage we have just quoted, suggesting so strongly as it does that Plato considers women to be characterized by moral fault, particularly but not exclusively cowardice, and hence appropriate punishment-receptacles for males who have shown moral faults, is 'only a myth'. But unfortunately this argument will not work, since later on, in the Laws (944d), in a context of open discussion, where no-one would ever claim that myth is involved, Plato has the following to say:

"Now what shall we call a fitting punishment for the coward who throws away [his] weapons...? A human judge cannot, indeed, invert the transformation which is said to have been wrought on Caeneus of Thessaly; he, we are told, had been a woman, but a god changed him into a man. Were the reverse process, transformation from man to woman, that, in a way, would be of all penalties the properest for the man who has flung his shield away".

Thus a woman is a converted man, fashioned as a result of a gender reassignment operation, which took place at the beginning of time. If so, women can be educated in the same way as men. No wonder Plato also argues in the Timaeus that women of the Guardian class should be educated by the same techniques as those used for men. "Moreover, we went on to say about women that their natures must be attuned into accord with the men, and that the occupations assigned to them, both in war and in all other activities of life, should in every case be the same for all alike" (Timaeus 18c; tr. W. R. M. Lamb).

So, some women are inherently masculine. It is especially pronounced in the best of them — those who, according to the verdict of the sages of Kallipolis, are included among the Guardians. However, Plato goes further, revealing the presence in some men, too, of a kind of femininity. The clearest instance of his thinking on this subject we see in the Statesman, in the passage dealing with citizens of 'good character' who differ from others not by their fervent courage, but by their modesty (*cosmiotetos*). When citizens of this sort constitute a majority in the polis, the following process takes place: "Those who are especially decorous are ready to live always a quiet and retired life and to mind their own business; this is the manner of their intercourse with everyone at home, and they

are equally ready at all times to keep peace in some way or other with foreign states. And because of this desire of theirs, which is often inopportune and excessive, when they have their own way they quite unconsciously become unwarlike, and they make the young men unwarlike also; they are at the mercy of aggressors; and thus in a few years they and their children and the whole state often pass by imperceptible degrees from freedom to slavery” (Statesman 307e–308a, tr. H. N. Fowler). Recall that the stranger from Elea, the leading character of the dialogue, offers to weave the web of state with a basis of hard masculine natures as its warp, and with lush and modest natures as its woof. Modest natures here play the role of the feminine, ‘manly’ natures the role of the masculine.

Thus, in Plato’s picture of “gender” reality, the separation of male and female from each other was not as fundamental as it is often made out to be. Woman has her origin in man, but femininity may also be represented in the ‘masculine’ areas of the polity.

In his views on gender, Plato was less committed to a fundamental opposition between masculine and feminine than was Aristotle in the *Politics*, and in this he is far more archaic. His ideas about the origin of the feminine principle in the “oversoul” (male soul that existed before the first female soul), and about concealing the presence of male and female principles in the political habitus of the city, are close to the gender realities which we often see in antiquity. Male Athenians at the time of Dionysius often represented female characters from mythology. So Apollonius of Tyana “heard them dancing lascivious jigs to the ronds of a pipe, and in the midst of the sacred epic of Orpheus striking attitudes as the Hours, or as nymphs, or as bacchantes” (Flav. Philostr. *Vita Apollonii*, IV. 21, transl. by F. C. Conybeare). By contrast, Spartan brides dress up and cut their hair men’s style: “After the woman was thus carried off, the bridesmaid, so called, took her in charge, cut her hair off close to the head, put a man’s cloak and sandals on her, and laid her down on a pallet, on the floor, alone, in the dark” (Plut. *Lycurg.* 15.3, transl. by B. Perrin, 1914). But the anthropogenic proximity of masculine and feminine principles does not mean an absence of differences between them. This fact is especially important, according to Plato, in the context of the political reality of the “century of Zeus».

With that, we are now finally in a position to make our argument. The reason, it seems to us, why Plato is unwilling, in the *Laws*, to make a causal connexion between equality in education and equality in access to public office is because, in a real world rather than a paradigmatic world, a world where rulers will be of recognizable, flesh and blood human beings, not ‘in way, gods and children of gods’, women have a tendency to moral fault — like cowardice and, more broadly, ‘injustice’ — such that they cannot be trusted with such power. It is a conclusion which cannot help but distress, but it seems to us the one which makes the most sense of the evidence available.

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