

The Women's Law (*tou gynaikeiou nomos*) in the *Kallipolis* of Plato's *Republic*

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Resumen: La Ley de la Mujer discutida en el libro V de la *República*, conocida como la primera ola, es un ejemplo notorio de la intención reformista de Sócrates de lograr justicia en la *pólis*. La legislación de la mujer, en general, históricamente ha sido relegada por los intérpretes de la *República*. El objeto del artículo es analizar este pasaje, del 449a al 457c, a través de los argumentos propuestos por Sócrates al considerarlos cruciales para concebir la igualdad entre los sexos (bajo el fundamento ontológico de la misma naturaleza humana) y favorecer el cambio institucional según su naturaleza, *katà phýsin*, dejando espacio para que las mujeres gobiernen la *pólis*. Antes de partir hacia el enfrentamiento externo, Sócrates considera urgente que sus interlocutores, Adimanto, Glaucón y Polemarco, estén de acuerdo entre ellos. Así, los insta a iniciar la discusión cuestionando la naturaleza humana de la mujer y su capacidad para las mismas funciones (*érga*) que desempeñan los hombres en la ciudad. El examen de lo inteligible permitió que el *lógos* sobre la capacidad intelectual de las mujeres respaldara una legislación adecuada. Este *nómos* puesto en práctica demuestra ser lo mejor para la ciudad y sus guardianes. En esa medida, Sócrates puede concluir dicha investigación con un consenso sobre qué hacer y la voluntad de confrontar urgentemente las opiniones opuestas en la ciudad.

Palabras clave: Platón; *República*; naturaleza humana; mujeres; *gynaikeioun nómos*

Abstract: The Women's Law discussed in book V of the *Republic*, known as the first wave, is a notorious example of Socrates' reformist intention to achieve justice in the *polis*. The legislation for women, in general, has historically been relegated by the *Republic* interpreters. This paper aims to analyze this passage, from 449a to 457c, through the arguments provided by Socrates seen as crucial to conceive equality between the sexes (under the ontological foundation of the same human nature) as well as to favor institutional change according to nature, *kata physin*, thus opening the possibility for women to govern the *polis*. Before leaving for the external confrontation, Socrates considers it urgent that his interlocutors, Adeimantus, Glaucon, and Polemarchus, agree with each other. Thus, he urges

them to start the argument by questioning the human nature of women and their capacity for the same functions (*erga*) performed by men in the city. The examination of the intelligible enabled the *logos* on women's intellectual capacity to support adequate legislation. Such *nomos* put into practice proves to be the best for the city and its guardians. To that extent, Socrates can conclude the investigation with a consensus on what to do and willingness to confront opposing opinions in the city urgently.

Keywords: Plato; *Republic*; human nature; women; *gynaikeiou nomos*

The discussion that unfolds at the beginning of the *Republic* book V between Socrates and his interlocutors, a passage known as the “first wave” (451b8-457d5)¹, ends with the conclusion that the common nature of men and women, that is, of the human beings, is crucial to ensure their own capacity in a corresponding and fair activity (*ergon*). Furthermore, it is crucial to guaranteeing equal education for women and men. As we shall see below, this revolutionary conclusion leads to the recognition that current institutions are affronting nature (*physis*) and, therefore, are susceptible to being altered to conform to what is natural. Agreeing to what is proper to human beings (human nature), regardless of the sex of the individuals, and what corresponds to the specific task of each one in the cooperative activities of the *polis*, civic institutions provide the best possible response to the preservation of justice in the new social organization and harmonize the relationships between people in the community. Therefore, the *Kallipolis* policy ensures that anyone gifted with *polis* government has their educational improvement extensively supported in the *politeia*. Natalie Bluestone² sums up the entire passage: “In Plato’s *Republic*... Socrates proposed an ideal society in which superior men and women would rule together equally. The Athenian philosopher thus became, more than twenty-four hundred years ago, the first advocate in human history of a measure of sexual equality. The guardians of his society were to be true philosophers, passionately committed to reason and trained in its rigorous application. Believing that some women possessed the necessary capacity for reason and philosophy, he introduced the then startling proposal that identical leadership roles required identical education for the most capable members of both sexes”.

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¹ Translations will be drawn from Cooper & Hutchinson (1997) unless otherwise indicated. See Cooper, J. & Hutchinson, D., *Plato, The Republic*, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

² Bluestone, N. H., “Why Women Cannot Rule: Sexism in Plato Scholarship”, in: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, v. XVIII, 1 (1988), p. 41.

Note that at the beginning of book V, as he is about to start explaining the vices that degenerate the *polis*³, Socrates is interrupted by Polemarchus, Adeimantus and Glaucon, who appeal to him to resume the discourse on the community of women and children and the children's education. This interruption, which directs him to face the known three waves (*trikymia*), has been widely highlighted by commentators on the dialogue. In general, it is possible to discern the following divergent positions:

i) who considers that this interruption is only rhetorical, and therefore the topics of the first two waves are peripheral or even inadequate and isolated from the theme and structure of the dialogue. And still those who consider such questions only preparatory to the introduction of the third wave: Jaeger⁴, Cornford⁵, Kochin⁶, Roochnik⁷;

ii) those who consider book V provocative, shocking or outrageous, although important for the structure, added to those who call it ridiculous, comical (in dispute with Aristophanes) and question the seriousness of its purposes: Strauss⁸, Annas⁹; Saxonhouse¹⁰, Smith¹¹, Canto¹², Bloom¹³;

iii) who sees the unity of the work and the importance of the discussion (and/or considers books V-VII as the central nucleus of the *Republic*): Adam¹⁴,

³ The unfolding of this question will be given in the *Republic*, book VIII.

⁴ Jaeger, W., *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

⁵ Cornford, F. M., *The Republic of Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

⁶ Kochin, M. S., *Gender and Rhetoric in Plato's Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁷ Roochnik, D., *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

⁸ Strauss, L., *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

⁹ Annas, J., "Plato's *Republic* and Feminism", in: *Philosophy*, v. LI, 197 (1976), pp. 307-321.

¹⁰ Saxonhouse, A. W., "The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato", in: *Political Theory*, v. IV, 2 (1976), pp. 195-212; Saxonhouse, A. W., "Callipolis: Socrates Escape from Tragedy", in: *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

¹¹ Smith, N. D., "The Logic of Plato's Feminism", in: *Journal of Social Philosophy*, v. XI, 3 (1980), pp. 5-11.

¹² Canto, M., "Le livre V de la République : les femmes et les platoniciens", in: *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, v. CXIV, 3 (1989), pp. 378-384.

¹³ Bloom, A., *The Republic of Plato*, New York: Basic Books, 1991.

¹⁴ Adam, J., *The Republic of Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, v. I & II, 1902.

Shorey¹⁵, Nettleship¹⁶, Voegelin¹⁷, Bluestone¹⁸, Vlastos¹⁹, Vegetti²⁰, Buchan²¹, Blair²²; Zoller²³;

iv) Finally, those who consider books V-VII as a late insertion: Jowett and Campbell's²⁴, Bosanquet²⁵, among others²⁶.

It should be noted that Socrates expresses his fear of continuing, given the disbelief that the topic arouses and his concern with delivering speeches among friends when he still has so many doubts. Faced with the exhortations to follow, Socrates began to prepare his interlocutors in order to understand the coherence of the legislation for *Kallipolis* and jointly prepare the discourse (*tois logois*) capable of refuting the criticisms of other questioners who would not be present in the discussion.

For Adam²⁷ the question of the best constitution of the city is addressed by Socrates in book V in three directives: in the first wave, which encompasses the “education community between guardian men and women” (451c- 457b); in the second, through the “communion of wives and children” (457b-466d); and in the third and biggest wave, which deals with “communism” and the possibility of realizing the “perfect city” in the world (471a sec.). The last wave would not be passed until the description of the philosopher and his city reaches an end in book VII. As a result, books V-VII form a coherent set in which the dominant principle is *physis* (nature), notably in the first two stages (451c-466d). For the author, it must be borne in mind that the conclusion reached, after the argumentation of the first wave about the government of women, is

¹⁵ Shorey, P., *Republic*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930.

¹⁶ Nettleship, R. L., *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, New York: MacMillan, 1937.

¹⁷ Voegelin, E., *Plato*, New York: Baton Rouge, 1966.

¹⁸ Bluestone, N. H., *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and the Modern of Gender Myths*, 1987.

¹⁹ Vlastos, G., “Was Plato a feminist?”, in: Tuana, N. (ed.), *Feminist interpretations of Plato*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, pp. 11-25.

²⁰ Vegetti, M., *Platone: La Repubblica*, v. IV, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2000.

²¹ Buchan, M., *Women in Plato's Political Theory*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1999.

²² Blair, E. D., *Plato's Dialectic of Woman: Equal, Therefore Inferior*, London: Routledge, 2012.

²³ Zoller, C., “Plato and Equality for Women across Social Class”, in: *Journal of Ancient Philosophy*, v. XV, 1 (2021), pp. 35-62.

²⁴ Jowett, B & Campbell, L. (eds.), *Plato's Republic*, v. II, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894.

²⁵ Bosanquet, B., *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1985.

²⁶ Cf. Blair, E. D., *Plato's Dialectic of Woman: Equal, Therefore Inferior*, 2012, pp. 88-93. For an analysis of the different views of commentators on the issue of women in Plato, up to the 1970s, in particular on the various forms of “hostility” to the proposal related to “Philosopher Queens”, see Bluestone, N. H., *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and the Modern of Gender Myths*, 1987, pp. 45-60.

²⁷ Adam, J., *The Republic of Plato*, 1902, p. 274.

that it is necessary to overcome the condition of the current city, which shows itself “against nature” (*para physin*).

Therefore, I consider that the debate circumscribed to this first wave places Socrates in front of the need for a sophisticated exposition on the internal coherence and logic of the discourse, which touches its support axis: “to *hautou prattein*” –to give each one according to nature and justice, differentiating argumentation from eristic itself– that is, from fighting with meaningless statements (450e3-451a2). Thus, according to Socrates, it is necessary to know how to discern and avoid eristics²⁸. Attempting to examine closely the oppositions between the two possible paths (452e4-6), Socrates urges Glaucon and Adimantus to start the argument by asking themselves about the nature of women (*dynatē physis*) and the capacity to exercise the same functions (*erga*) performed by men in the city. For this purpose, Socrates proceeds to the chain of each argument to delineate a norm for women (*tou gynaikeion peri nomon*). His concern, however, is not limited to the laughter it could provoke, “for that would be a child’s posture”²⁹, but to the fear of slipping into the truth (*alētheia*) and dragging his friends with him, limiting them to current opinions at the city. Socrates’ doubt (*apisteō*), which contrasts with the possession of a pre-established truth (*talēthe eidota*), must here be taken as genuine, given the conditional and hypothetical character with which all the argumentation starts to unfold in the construction of a model (*paradeigma*) agreed upon. Having problematized the role of men as guardians up to that moment of the discussion, Socrates finally brings into play the drama of women³⁰.

It should be noted that when starting to examine the women’s capacity with respect to guarding the *polis*, Socrates starts from the opinion of ordinary citizens (*kat’emēn doxan*). Furthermore, he considers that the treatment of men as “guardians of a herd” (451c8) must be consequential and, therefore, capable of attributing to women a “similar generation and upbringing” (*ten genesin kai trophēn paraplēsian*, 451d). Thus, he resorts to the analogy with dogs and finds that females watch, hunt and do everything in communion

²⁸ On eristics in this Plato’s dialogue, see Erler, M., *Platão*, São Paulo: Annablume Editora, 2012, p. 101 ff.

²⁹ The same expression “Γέλωτα ὀφλεῖν οὐ τι γέλωτα ὀφλεῖν - παιδικὸν γὰρ τοῦτο γε” (*Rep.* 451a) is found in Aristophanes Nu. v. 1035.

³⁰ According to Vegetti (2000), Plato is alluding to the dramatization of everyday life in classical Athens, with separate performances by men and women, as happened in the works of authors such as Sophron (4th century BC Sicilian). Cf. Vegetti, M., *Platone: La Repubblica*, v. IV, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2000, p. 44. According to Diogenes Laertius III 18, Plato would have imported a copy of Sophron’s famous mimes, drawing inspiration from it for his representation of politics.

with males (and do not stay indoors, considering that giving birth and raising puppies make them incapable)³¹. Furthermore, canine females carry out all these activities, “despite being weaker”³². Socrates’ claim that females “are weaker” has divided interpreters over time. On the one hand, there are those who attribute gender differences to the body and, as a result, corroborate a certain dualist interpretation (body vs. soul). It is noteworthy that those who relate the differences to the body understand that the weakness of women concerns only the lower physical strength, empirically verified in animals. On the other hand, commentators warn that “Plato’s approach” is eminently ethical, understanding the inferiority of women under a moral determination that presents itself in the soul, but produces physical effects as well. Thus, a woman’s body would only reveal the status of her soul’s moral inferiority. I believe that the entire debate deviates from the point that is the most significant in Socrates’ proposal, namely: human nature is common and, in this sense, equally enables each individual to exercise the function that is related to his unique endowment, regardless of his sex. Note that so far there is only one statement of a supposed analogy: if this is the case between dogs, it should be the same between men and women³³.

The first mention of dogs is made in book II (375a-376b), in which passage the reference to women is directly related to guardians (*phylakes*) as guard dogs. The importance of this analogy for first-wave exegesis can be attested to by Aristotle’s comments. His criticism is a precursor of a strong rejection of the

³¹ The use of the canine metaphor to assign the same functions to men and women is considered inadequate and abrupt for many interpreters. Among those who criticize Plato’s analogy, we can highlight: Zeller (1876); Jowett, B & Campbell, L. (eds.), *Plato’s Republic*, 1894; Nettleship, R. L., *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, New York: MacMillan, 1937; Barker (1918). Among those who defend the relevance of the analogy for the deduction of conclusions, see: Adam, J., *The Republic of Plato*, 1902; Shorey, P., *Republic*, 1930; Annas, J., “Plato’s “*Republic*” and Feminism”, 1976; Bonsanquet, B., *A Companion to Plato’s Republic*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1985; Lerner, R. (trans.), *Averroes on Plato’s Republic*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005; Blair, E. D., *Plato’s Dialectic of Woman: Equal, Therefore Inferior*, London: Routledge, 2012. Taylor (2012) considers that Plato showed, with this reference to dogs, how absurd it would be to restrict the guard of the city to men only, giving up a large contingent of the population constituted by women. See: Taylor, C. C. W., “The Role of Women in Plato’s Republic”, in: Kamtekar, R. (ed.), *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honor of Julia Annas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 77-78.

³² κοινῆ, ἔφη, πάντα: πλὴν ὡς ἀσθενεστέρας χρώμεθα, τοῖς δὲ ὡς ἰσχυροτέροις (451d10-11).

³³ According to Blair (2012), the reference to dogs follows an argumentative Socrates’ strategy based on two objectives: first, to establish the common thread between the development of the current discussion and the previous discussion about education in the *polis* in book III (particularly, on the guardians’ life); second, to offer the imagination a photograph to stick with during the abstract argument that will follow in the more “philosophical” discussion of the third wave. I consider, however, that this interpretation simplifies and blunts the importance of the reasons given to Socrates’ speech and the complexity of the dialectical method that will unfold along the first wave. See Blair, E. D., *Plato’s Dialectic of Woman: Equal, Therefore Inferior*, p. 91.

statement based on the aforementioned analogy³⁴. Aristotle's objection (*Pol.* II 1261a14-1264b20) finds it absurd to use the metaphor of animals to extend masculine tasks to women on the grounds that these animal females have no duty in *oikonomia*. As he questions the validity of the comparison with guard dogs, regarding gender differences, and claims that animals do not have to deal with the housekeeping, Aristotle inaugurates an exegetical strand about the naturalization of the associated labor division to the supposed difference of natures between the sexes, which spans millennia, gathering followers and arrives with vigor in the 20th century in the well-known caustic analysis of Karl Popper³⁵. It should be noted that, considering that book V would foster a project of changes with practical application, Aristotle does not start from an appreciation of education and common functions in the *polis* for both sexes with a view to equality, but from the description of the harmful consequences of its implementation for the supposed disharmony of private life. In this context, the philosopher questions that, if Socrates makes women something of common possession and abolishes private property, men will take care of the fields, but "who will take care of the house (*oikos*)"?³⁶ In Aristotle's terms, since women's lack of responsibility for the household would disturb social relations and destroy this harmony, such ambiguous and impractical measures would not achieve the desired unity of the *polis*.

Back to the beginning of book V, it is necessary to consider that Socrates problematizes the current opinion that accepts the difference in nature between men and women in order to advance the idea of a common human nature³⁷. As a starting point, Socrates argues that if women are assigned the tasks defined to men in Athens, including the activities of war, they should be treated by the same rules. However, he recognizes that much of what has been agreed up to that moment, as it was not in accordance with custom, would seem "ridiculous" (*para to ēthos geloia an phainoito*, 452a) if put into practice as presented.

³⁴ On the Aristotelian reading of this issue in the *Republic*, see Calabi, F., "Aristotele discute la Repubblica", in: Vegetti, M. (ed.), *Platone. La Repubblica*, v. IV, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2000, pp. 421-438 and Rossetti, L. "Plato's and Aristotle's 'Bad' Summaries of the Republic", in: Notomi, N. & Brisson, L. (eds.), *Dialogues on Plato's Politeia (Republic)*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2013, pp. 355-360.

³⁵ Cf. Popper, K., *The Open Society and its Enemies. The Spell of Plato*. London: Routledge, 1966. According to Bluestone (1987), "This question of whether anatomy is destiny remains as alive today as it was twenty-four hundred years ago". See Bluestone, N. H., *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and the Modern of Gender Myths*, 1987, p. 186.

³⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 1264b4-7.

³⁷ Marques, M. P., "Paradoxo e Natureza no livro V da República", in: *Kriterion: Revista de Filosofia*, v. LI, 122 (2010), pp. 429-440.

Paradoxically, what should be considered good and acceptable for educating women would seem ridiculously “contrary to custom”³⁸. However, the experience itself would eventually lead to the recognition of what is true and good (451d7-9) and showing that only what is harmful can be laughable (452e)³⁹.

As far as the proposal is possible (*dynata*, 452e), the answer will only come a few pages later⁴⁰. As we shall see, “nature” (*physis*) is the central analysis category of the argument. For Monique Dixsaut⁴¹, Plato innovates by taking together the two terms, *physis* and *nomos*, received from tradition as a pair of opposites, which until then seemed “unbreakable”. According to Dixsaut, talking about “the name” of the very nature of a thing, Plato means by “nature” (*physis*) the form (*eidōs*). By identifying nature with form, nature is not necessarily defined as that which is “natural”, that is, as that which is not “by convention”, and is therefore removed from the pair *physis-nomos* where each of the two terms could only be defined as the opposite of the other. Looking at nature “of what is the name”, the *nomothetēs* (legislator) imposes the *nomos*, which in turn changes its meaning: *nomos* becomes the name of what all nature implies in terms of order and best arrangement. Thought out in this way, nature becomes the norm, making it possible to detect, depending on whether they benefit or not, the useful or harmful character of *nomoi*. In the commentator’s words: “Ce faisant, Platon travaille les deux termes d’une opposition sibien reçue qu’elle semblait indépassable. Car, en parlant à propos du nom de la nature propre d’une chose, il entend alors par “nature” (*physis*) la forme (*eidōs*) – celle vers laquelle regarde le fabricant de navettes, et qui n’est pas une navette particulière, ni une navette cassée, mais qui est bien la forme qu’elle doit avoir pour remplir sa tâche, sa fonction de navette, et le mieux possible (Pl. *Cra.* 389a-b). Or en identifiant la nature à la forme, on cesse nécessairement de définir la nature comme ce qui est “naturel” et comme ce qui n’est pas “par convention”: on la fait donc sortir du couple *physis-nomos*

³⁸ For Socrates, everything that is laughable is relative to the place and time specifically considered. Thus, he warns his companions that not so long ago the Hellenes seemed ugly and laughable, which now seems so to most barbarians, namely, that men were seen exercising naked in gymnasiums (*gymnous andras horasthai*; 452c8).

³⁹ According to Vegetti (2000), here it is difficult not to find a reference to Aristophanes, even though the term *kōmōdein* (which refers to satire, comedy) in 452d: δαιμόνιοι, ἔξῃν τοῖς τότε ἀστείοις παῦταν, μῶδ. Cf. Vegetti, M., Platone: La *Repubblica*, 2000, p. 46. See also Adam, J., *The Republic of Plato*, 1902, p. 345.

⁴⁰ In terms that this practice “is not contrary to nature” – *mē to physin*; 456b7.

⁴¹ Dixsaut, M., *Le Naturel Philosophe: essai sur les dialogues de Platon*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2001, p. 195.

où chacun des deux termes ne pouvait se définir que comme le contraire de l'autre. En regardant vers la nature de "ce qu'est le nom" (Pl. *Cra.* 389d), le nomothète impose le *nomos*, qui à son tour change de sens: *nomos* devient le nom de ce que toute nature comporte d'ordre et d'arrangement. L'opposition de la physis e du *nomos* avait fini par absorber, et par véhiculer, une quantité d'autres antinomies: du côté de la nature se retrouvait la brutalité du fait par opposition au mot qui n'est qu'un mot, la vérité de l'individu singulier par opposition à l'hypocrisie des opinions morales professées par la collectivité. Ainsi pensée la nature devient norme permettant de déceler, selon qu'elles lui profitent ou non, le caractère utile ou nuisible des *nomoi*⁴².

Indeed, whether the problem is that Socrates' proposals are contrary to nature or not, objections based on the belief that they are contrary to convention (or the law) can be dismissed out of court, that is, in a reflexive manner⁴³. It thus proves feasible to overcome the conservative objection that the measure will at first appear ridiculous "by today's standards" (*en to parestoti*; 452b). With this consensus established, Socrates sets out to defend that the notion of ridicule, concerning people (women and the elderly) exercising naked in the gym, refers only to a localized convention that can be changed as evaluative issues are established by new criteria. The example of gymnastics as a spectacle to be seen shows a phenomenal dimension that does not exclude the judgment of values and customs, expanding it dialogically. Therefore, the criterion for judging this practice is rationally placed, through thoughtful arguments. What appears to the polis, more than female nudity, is the common judgment about the actions and habits of women⁴⁴. Therefore, according to the general *doxa*, more than the nudity of bodies, the absence of the female body is inscribed in the space of public invisibility as an axiological dimension widely shared in today's city and that Socrates seeks to combat through a new approach to the problem⁴⁵.

Instead of, as in common sense, what is desirable is affirmed because it is easily deductible from the "natural" condition of the female sex, the investigation continues with the question about the possibility of normalizing

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ See Sanford, S., *Plato and Sex*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴ On the supposed women's inferiority condition, in the face of values that enhance male virility, see Blair, E. D., *Plato's Dialectic of Woman: Equal, Therefore Inferior*, 2012, p. 154 and Appendices A and B. On the criterion of excellence –*aretē*– applied to women being measured in relation to the silence that should surround them in Classical Athens, see Gastaldi, S., "Reputazione delle donne e corriere degli uomini in Atene. Opinione pubblica, legislazione politica e pratica giudiziaria", in: *Storia Delle Donne*, v. VI, 7 (2011), pp. 67; 87.

⁴⁵ See Marques, M. P., "Paradoxo e Natureza no livro V da *República*", 2010, p. 432.

this issue: “–However, mustn’t we first agree about whether our proposals are possible or not? And mustn’t we give to anyone who wishes the opportunity to question us –whether in jest or in earnest– about whether female human nature *can* share all the tasks of that of the male, or none of them, or some but not others, and to ask in which class the waging of war belongs? Wouldn’t this, as the best beginning, also be likely to result in the best conclusion? –Of course” (452e4-453a6; translator’s italics).

Socrates, reaffirms that each one must exercise a single function (*ta erga* 453a2), which is her by nature, which is the definition of justice established in book IV⁴⁶. Once they came to an agreement, the result of what was said above would have to be that men and women should do the same things, even though they have completely different natures (453b7-c6). Therefore, the first wave is formulated not only as a paradox concerning customs, but also as an internal contradiction in the argument. Socrates admits the self-contradiction that results from the following argumentative chain: the interlocutors agreed that a different nature (*physis*) has a different function (*ergon*) and that the nature of women is different from that of men; but in attributing the same occupations to men and women, they attribute the same occupations to different natures, which contradicts the first statement. Socrates acknowledges that he unwittingly got tangled up in a path that doesn’t lead to where he wanted to go: “–Ah! Glaucon, great is the power of the craft of disputation. –Why is that? –Because many fall into it against their wills. They think they are having not a quarrel but a conversation, because they are unable to examine what has been said by dividing it up according to forms. Hence, they pursue mere verbal contradictions of what has been said and have a quarrel rather than a conversation” (454a1-10).

So, Socrates admits that, even unintentionally, they threw themselves into antilogy, believing they were making dialectics. Eristic antilogy implies the permanent risk of being stuck with words and not following the investigative path opened by dialogue, which aims, on the contrary, to examine what is said and distinguish according to forms (*kat’eidē diairoumenoi to legomenon episkopein*; 454a6). Socrates notes with annoyance that contradiction is not a deliberate choice but an event in the process of thinking. Although he concedes that there is a certain nobility in recognizing the contradictions themselves (454a), he

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⁴⁶ “Then, it turns out that this doing one’s own work –provided that it comes to be in a certain way– is justice”, και μὴν ὅτι γε τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν καὶ μὴ πολυπραγμαίνειν δικαιοσύνη ἐστὶ (433b1).

warns of the danger of falling back into argumentation for contradiction, which can be imposed even against their will, making debaters victims of contestation and prisoners of the literality of the that is said⁴⁷. The combative eagerness in the discussion could prevent them from noticing relevant differences and adequately formulating the problem. This would cause, instead of developing a shared investigation, the interlocutors would come into conflict with each other in a struggle for victory in the argument. Thus, Socrates highlights the opposite meaning between arguing (*erizein*), taken with a pejorative sense, and, on the other hand, conversing and maintaining a philosophical dialogue (*dialegesthai*) in order to arrive at the truth⁴⁸.

It becomes necessary, therefore, to undo the contradiction they reached. By attributing different occupations to different natures and the same occupations to equal natures, they did not examine what difference and what identity was in question. That is to say, they did not discuss or establish the way in which it should be defined, whether the species of nature (*to tēn autēn physin*) which, in this case, is different, or the species of nature which, in turn, is the same. *Thus, they suppressed the analysis of the kind of nature that each case refers to.* The attribution of functions (*erga*) in the polis took place from the establishment of a supposed identity (and differences not yet duly examined); off differences thought only in terms of *doxa*. Let's see: "–We're bravely, but in a quarrelsome and merely verbal fashion, pursuing the principle that natures that aren't the same must follow different ways of life. But when we assigned different ways of life to different natures and the same ones to the same, we didn't at all examine the form of natural difference and sameness we had in mind or in what regard we were distinguishing them" (454b4-10)⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ On the antilogical technique "erizein and dialegesthai" in the first wave, see De Luise, F. & Farinetti, G., "La *techne antilogike* tra erizein e dialegesthai", in: Vegetti, M. (ed.), *Platone. La Repubblica*, v. IV, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2000, pp. 211-231. According to the authors, the first wave places Socrates to review the internal discourse logic regarding its main argument: "to *hautou prattein*".

⁴⁸ According to Dixsaut (2001), *dialegesthai* goes beyond the false logos antinomies, making it possible to think philosophically: "Le pouvoir du logos est dialectique, le *dialegesthai* est une manière de penser. Dans l'activité dialectique se réintroduit la passivité, mais une passivité différente de celle de l'opinion: celle du logos par rapport aux étants réels, intelligibles. Le *dialegesthai* dépasse les fausses antinomies concernant le logos: celle de l'actif et du passif, du prendre et du recevoir, du positif (persuader) et du négatif (réfuter)". See Dixsaut, M., *Le Naturel Philosophe: essai sur les dialogues de Platon*, 2001, p. 91.

⁴⁹ For Vegetti (2000), Burnet accepted the insertion of μὴ (that different natures do not have to engage...). For the author, by refusing it, Slings makes the interpretation of the passage more difficult, but less banal. The cristic consists in considering masculine and feminine nature as different (cf. 453e) and not identical (due to the lack of conceptual analysis) and, therefore, in

For Socrates, it would therefore be appropriate to examine how to establish what is the same and what is different and realize that there are different types of differences. That is, that there are distinct differences (*on different planes*) according to what is being discussed, in this case: which role in the *polis* to assign to each citizen, according to their capacity. In fact, what matters for the characterization of the personality of each individual, at the end of the discussion conducted, is linked to their own (and unique) capacity to carry out each particular activity in the *polis*. In the words of Bluestone⁵⁰: “Plato considered character only in connection with capacity regardless of the opinion of the multitude. That is, one human being learns quickly, the other less so; one female has the capacity for medicine, another does not. This is the only sense of character relevant in Book V. And it is on the basis of such judgements of individual character that Plato believes the opinions of mankind *ought* to be formed”.

Thus, Socrates asks if there is a common nature (essence) between men and women that is prior to certain differences: this natural “community” would then justify common education, as well as the attribution of the same functions in city government. He considers that they had initially taken particular differences and identities without recognizing when they are *absolutely* established what the same nature and the different nature is (*hoti tote ou pantōs tēn autēn kai heteran physin etithēmetha*, 454c8-10; my italics). Thus, they were eristically attached to the names, without examining the differences between their own natures. That is, what is characteristic of human nature, the nature of women, the nature of the person who performs the role of shoemaker, doctor, etc.

attributing different functions to natures that are, in reality, the same. Still on this passage and its translation Adam (1902) adds that: “(τὸ μὴ τὴν αὐτὴν κτλ. See cr. n.). The omission of μὴ was perhaps due to the erroneous idea that διώκομεν below meant ‘to attack.’ In reality, it means ‘we are pursuing’ (the proposition that), i.e. ‘we are insisting that.’ The way for this somewhat strained use is prepared by διώκειν τὴν ἐναντίωσιν just above. Plato is in fact applying the expression τοῦ λεχθέντος τὴν ἐναντίωσιν to the special case before us. τὸ λεχθέν would in this case be that ‘different natures are to follow the same pursuits’ (453e τὰς ἄλλας φύσεις τὰ αὐτὰ φαμεν νῦν δεῖν ἐπιτηδεύσαι). Its ἐναντίωσις is that ‘different natures are not to have the same pursuits.’ For τὴν αὐτὴν we must therefore read either <μὴ> τὴν αὐτὴν or else τὴν ἄλλην (with Baiter). I prefer the former, both because it has some MSS authority, and also because, if Plato had chosen to use ἄλλος, he would probably have written τὰς ἄλλας φύσεις as in 453e. It is also true, as J. and C. observe, that ‘the opposition of μὴ τὴν αὐτὴν, οὐ τῶν αὐτῶν is more like Plato than the conjectural reading τὴν ἄλλην’. Translate ‘we cling to the verbal point and insist that what is not the same nature ought not to have the same pursuits’. See Vegetti, M., *Platone: La Repubblica*, v. IV, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2000, n. 15, p. 647, and Adam, J., *The Republic of Plato*, 1902.

⁵⁰ Bluestone, N. H., “Why Women Cannot Rule: Sexism in Plato Scholarship”, in: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, v. XVIII, 1 (1988), p. 51.

Ironically, Socrates returns the question: he compares the difference to be examined when considering the undisputed difference, or dissimilarity, between bald and hairy. Although attesting to this notorious difference between these people, such specificity would not prevent the exercise of the activity of shoemaker or any other *technē*. By continuing without establishing in an absolute way what the same nature and the different nature is, they are faced with ridicule (*geloion*) and are not aware of the particular differences in the light of the difference itself. They persist, therefore, in the error of paying attention only to that kind of difference and similarity that concerns their occupations. Let's see the passage in full: “–And aren't we in this ridiculous position because at that time we did not introduce every form of difference and sameness in nature, but focused on the one form of sameness and difference that was relevant to the particular ways of life themselves? We meant, for example, that a male and female doctor have souls of the same nature. Or don't you think so?” (454c8-d4).

The restlessness arises when comparing the doctor and the builder, the female who gives birth and the male who fertilizes, among other examples. In fact, if they are different in relation to anything, should we attribute them to the same arts? It can be seen that the interlocutors have not yet considered the identical nature and the different nature (in the absolute sense), but only the type of otherness and similarity, both relating to the specified occupations. The same can be said about identity: there are different kinds or types of similarity or identity, more or less partial, more or less comprehensive, and misunderstandings arise when taking a partial difference for another or a partial identity for an absolute identity. Identity or difference in themselves (which is characteristic of them) has not yet been analyzed, *but insignificant or partial differences and similarities*. At this point in the investigation, it is considered that the entities do not always differ in the same way, so each case must be examined.

Only the vision of the form itself illuminates the examination of particular cases, allowing different planes or modalities of differences to be perceived, that is, the multiple manifestations and the unity of the being of things⁵¹. According to Marques⁵², it is in this sense that the first wave prepares the understanding of the third, in which the philosopher becomes ruler, deepening the discussion on *doxa* and *epistēmē* and the insight into the nature of the philosopher and his capacity to glimpse the form, taken up in books VI and VII.

⁵¹ It is an ontological difference from the reality of appearance.

⁵² Marques, M. P., “Paradoxo e Natureza no livro V da *República*”, 2010, p. 430.

From that moment Socrates starts to compare other types of differences with the difference in question to show how they are “different differences”, that is, to demonstrate that there are different planes of differences, whose importance is revealed in the way you investigate. Thus, Socrates contrasts a physician with another physician, saying that both are of the same nature; and compares a doctor and a carpenter, claiming that they have different natures. The example highlights the senses in which the term “nature” is used (*physis*) and illustrates “appearing to differ” (*diapheron phainetai*). The two doctors are of the same nature with regard to functions in the *polis*—a case of *homoiōsis*, but a doctor and a carpenter have different natures, also with regard to functions—a case of *alloiōsis*⁵³. To define any plane of similarity or identity that matters to the research, it is necessary to “cross” the multiple planes of alterity (*heteran*): “dialectical identity is only constituted in this network of dialogically constructed differences”⁵⁴, that is, with method. Therefore, Socrates challenges a supposed contradictor in this dialogical process (454e8): he must say in relation to which occupation of the city administration the nature of woman and man is not the same, but different. The challenge is for Glaucon to follow the discussion to see if critics would be able to demonstrate that no occupation is women’s, in the sense that it is exclusive to women because of their essential nature (her humanity). Thus, three criteria are presented to establish what is a natural good disposition (endowment): being easy to learn; to be able to make many discoveries despite having had a poor apprenticeship; and so that the functions of the body are put to the service of thought in a satisfactory way, the body not being an obstacle to learning (455b6–c4).

Note that several occupations are mentioned and analyzed to demonstrate that, on the whole, one sex is better than the other (455d2), although many women, in many areas, are better than many men (455d3). Examples from medicine, music, gymnastics, and war, as well as philosophy (“isn’t one woman philosophical or a lover of wisdom, while another hates wisdom?”, 456a4) are

⁵³ According to Marques (2010): “the two doctors have the same nature regarding occupations (a case of *homoiōsis*); but a doctor and a carpenter have different natures, also with regard to occupations (a case of *alloiōsis*); it is a further determination of human nature, specified with regard to occupations, but not to be confused with similarities or differences, on other planes, or relating to different aspects of the same natures... Differences in one plane, or according to one aspect, can lead to supposing that there are differences in other planes or according to other aspects; to establish any plane of similarity or identity, it is inevitable that one crosses the multiple planes of alterity” (my translation). See Marques, M. P., “Paradoxo e Natureza no livro V da *República*”, 2010, p. 436.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

illustrative of the deduction: “–Then there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she’s a woman or to a man because he’s a man, but the various natures are distributed in the same way in both creatures. Women share by nature in every way of life just as men do, but in all of them women are weaker than men. –Certainly” (455d4-e2).

Note that in this passage the term “according to nature” (*kata physin*) reveals a strong normative value, which is confirmed by the indicative “participates” (*metexei*)⁵⁵. The concept of nature is clearly related to a “normative” value as what is natural corresponds to the essential quality and property of the “object itself” and reflects the best possible order of the entity⁵⁶. Here it is important to realize that we can speak of “nature” only on the condition that what we so call includes an order and a regulated distribution. That is, according to Dixsaut⁵⁷, on the condition that “*physis* implies *nomos*”. Nature considers the differentiation and multiplicity inherent in the various ways that different realities (intelligible and sensible) have to “be one, to be intelligible, to act and to be acted upon”. This difference is not empirical and there is nothing arbitrary in this multiplicity: the intelligibility proper to order, to govern, supposes that the differences between natures are real differences and that the natures constitute an intelligible multiplicity –*nomos* involves *physis*. As a result, the intelligibility of the different types of order and structure implies the essential, first and proper intelligibility in each nature and, therefore, the possibility of knowing the structure of the real. For, for Dixsaut, if all nature is not intelligent –only the nature of the soul is– “all ‘nature’ according to Plato only deserves this name if it is at least intelligible”. It should be noted that “nature” is not a term that is used in Platonic dialogues to talk about “Nature”. Because, according to her, under this identification (it is worth saying: under this “illegitimate substantiation”) we think of a reality so real that any other type of reality seems to us to have to derive from it, that is, a unit all the more coherent as it excludes any multiplicity of meanings. To that extent, the notion

⁵⁵ ἀληθῆ, ἔφη, λέγεις, ὅτι πολὺ κρατεῖται ἐν ἅπασιν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν τὸ γένος τοῦ γένους. γυναῖκες μέντοι πολλαὶ πολλῶν ἀνδρῶν βελτίους εἰς πολλὰ: τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἔχει ὡς σὺ λέγεις. οὐδὲν ἄρα ἐστίν, ὡ φίλε, ἐπιτηδεύμα τῶν πόλιν διοικούντων γυναικὸς διότι γυνή, οὐδ’ ἀνδρὸς διότι ἀνήρ, ἀλλ’ ὁμοίως διεσπαρμέναι αἱ φύσεις ἐν ἀμφοῖν τοῖν ζώοις, καὶ πάντων μὲν μετέχει γυνὴ ἐπιτηδευμάτων κατὰ φύσιν, πάντων δὲ ἀνήρ, ἐπὶ πάσι δὲ ἀσθενέστερον γυνὴ ἀνδρός. πάνυ γε (my emphasis).

⁵⁶ Vegetti, M., *Platone: La Repubblica*, 2000, p. 653.

⁵⁷ Dixsaut, M., *Le Naturel Philosophe: essai sur les dialogues de Platon*, 2001, p. 199.

of nature would be reduced to being “uniquely” the principle of every singular nature and every natural being⁵⁸.

Thus, nature is the guarantee of what is possible to achieve and a consistent criterion for evaluating existing institutions (which are generally not in accordance with the natural order, being in fact contrary to nature – *para physin*; 456c). According to Vegetti⁵⁹, as is characteristic of a radical thought, this normative scope is opposed to the prevailing customs in the *polis*, which in the current way are shown to be unnatural. It must be considered that Socrates speaks of nature on at least two different planes (forms and particulars). The natures –*hai physeis*– multiple, are equally distributed. In other words, nature in relation to particular dimensions is gauged in the unique endowments of each individual, such as in any occupation: guarding the city (*phylaken poleōs*).

On the other hand, nature thought of as one (unique) –*kata physin*⁶⁰ supports the equal distribution of men and women in all occupations. In this case, any particularizing dimensions would be justified and overcome. In other words, when the human essence is admitted, each one would be able to do any activity, that function that their unique endowment justifies and that would be improved by education, regardless of their gender. The argument points to the “intelligible human nature”, characteristic of humanity, according to which the differences between men and women are not such as to prevent both sexes from exercising equal functions in running the city.

Socrates highlights the situation in present-day Athena as something against nature (*para physis* – 456c1-2). Through dialectics, you can conclude that the same training is appropriate for both men and women: “–We’ve come round, then, to what we said before and have agreed that it isn’t against nature to assign an education in music, poetry, and physical training to the wives of the guardians. –Absolutely. –Then we’re not legislating impossibilities (*adynata*),

⁵⁸ My translation. Let’s see in Dixsaut’s words: “Or “nature” n’est pas un terme qui serve, dans les Dialogues, à penser la Nature. Car sous cette illégitime substantification, identification, nous pensons une réalité si réelle que toute autre espèce de réalité nous semble devoir en dériver; une unité d’autant plus cohérente qu’elle exclut toute multiplicité de sens: la Nature nous paraît devoir être univoquement principe de toute nature singulière et de tout être naturel. On ne peut, selon Platon, parler de “nature” qu’à la condition que ce que nous nommons ainsi comporte un ordre et une distribution réglée. *Physis* implique *nomos*”. See Dixsaut, M., *Le Naturel Philosophie: essai sur les dialogues de Platon*, 2001, p. 199.

⁵⁹ Vegetti, M., “*Beltista eiper dynata*. The status of utopia in the *Republic*”, in: Vegetti, M., Ferrari, F., Lynch, T. (eds.), *The Painter of Constitutions. Selected essays on Plato’s Republic*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2013b, p. 114.

⁶⁰ οὐκ ἄρα ἀδύνατά γε οὐδὲ εὐχαις ὅμοια ἐνομοθετοῦμεν ἐπεὶ περὶ κατὰ φύσιν ἐτίθεμεν τὸν νόμον: ἀλλὰ τὰ νῦν παρὰ ταῦτα γιγνόμενα παρὰ φύσιν μᾶλλον, ὡς ἔοικε, γίγνεται. (456c14d3).

or indulging in mere wishful thinking (*euxais*), since the law we established is in accord with nature. It's rather the way things are at present that seems to be against nature. – So it seems” (456b8-c5) ... “–Should we have one kind of education to produce women guardians, then, and another to produce men, especially as they have the same natures to begin with? – No” (456c14-d3).

The proposed legislation for women is neither impossible nor a mere wish, as it is in accordance with nature (*kata physin*)⁶¹. What has been normalized is not unrealizable (*adynata*), nor is it just a dream (*euxais*). Unlike the new measure that was established dialogically, it is the current institutions that are against nature. Once it is established that human nature is the same, because of the education they will receive, both men and women guardians will be the best (*beltista*). Therefore, the city will be inhabited and guarded by the best men and women, and as a result it will become better itself. Thus, the improvement of this nature endowed for the government will be carried out by education, considering the differences of each individual regardless of their sex (457a6-7). There would be nothing better or more powerful for a city than being inhabited by the best people: “– Is there anything better for a city than having the best possible men and women as its citizens? – There isn't...” (456e6-7).

At the end of this discussion, Socrates and his interlocutors consider that they crossed the first wave unscathed, paraphrasing Pindar and returning the criticism to comedy: whoever laughs at seeing women exercising naked reaps the fruit before it is mature (457b3). Apparently, these people neither know what they laugh at nor understand what they are doing. The humor of the comedy provokes an immediate and unfounded laugh. However, what is truly ridiculous is not knowing how to determine what is good for the city and not being able to distinguish the useful and beautiful from the harmful and ugly (457b6).

In short, there are at least two fundamental planes on which the concept of nature can be thought of in book V. On the one hand, nature thought of as essence, which unifies humankind and justifies common education for women and men (452e6-453a4). This is the unifying and constitutive nature of each individual. On the other hand, the particularizing and distinct natures of groups taken in their particularities, such as men and women, superficially justify their recognizably different activities in the current city. Socrates problematizes the

⁶¹ According to Adam (1902) “Plato’s proposals – so he asserts – are ‘natural’, because in harmony with the natural endowments of gifted women; and it is because they are natural that he calls them possible”. See Adam, J., *The Republic of Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, v. I & II, 1902, p. 449.

current opinion that accepts the difference in sensitive nature between men and women in order to speculate about a common human nature. Starting from a paradox, it builds the necessary argumentative environment to counteract judgments accepted without reflection or discernment. For Marques, this *démarche* brings together the investigations and the method established in the first and third waves of book V. In his words: “Therefore, effectively, it seems that the initial configuration of book V, thought of as paradoxical, prepares or builds the necessary argumentative environment for the position of the decisive difference between *doxa* and *epistēmē*, in the end. The confrontation of the first wave already prepares the political proposal that the philosopher must govern the city, for having knowledge that is different from the judgments accepted without reflection or discernment by the citizens. Countering and questioning what is seen ‘in the eyes’ with what is thought ‘in the arguments’ is a way of opposing the *doxa* and developing the *epistēmē*, without this meaning the reduction of opinion to its phenomenal (or empirical) aspect or take the conception of science dogmatically (absolutely) or determined by a univocal identity (being confused with ‘being the same as’). Thinking through paradigms requires critical examination of judgments accepted as good and true, including those that structure the city in its most fundamental aspects (its warrior protection). As to their natures, there are differences between men and women, but there are also similarities; there are different differences and different similarities; *being able to discriminate these differences is decisive to better understand the natures (of each one) and the nature that is common to them, their intelligible identity*”⁶².

Socrates therefore considers that thinking through paradigms requires critical examination of judgments accepted as good, advantageous and true, notably for the *polis*’ government and security functions. Regarding their natures (in the plural!) not so important and significant, there are differences between men and women, but there are also similarities –there are different differences and different similarities. Being able to discriminate these differences is decisive for better understanding the natures of each individual person and the nature that is common to them: their intelligible identity. The bottom line, therefore, is that people with government endowments rule the city. This legislation for women to work on equal terms in the *Kallipolis* is not impossible and it is not a dream, since there is a natural justification for it. In turn, the current

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⁶² Marques, M. P., “Paradoxo e Natureza no livro V da *República*”, 2010, p. 439; my translation and italics.

community and existing institutions are not natural, since the city's *de facto* situation is contrary to nature. “–Can we say, then, that we’ve escaped one wave of criticism in our discussion of the law about women⁶³, that we haven’t been altogether swept away by laying it down that male and female guardians must share their entire way of life, and that our argument is consistent when it states that this is both possible and beneficial? – And it’s certainly no small wave that you’ve escaped” (457b8-c3).

At the end of the discussion of the women’s law (*tou gynaikeiou nomos*), what is good for the *polis* has been defended with arguments and shown to be following what is “good in itself”. This rule put into practice proves to be useful and beautiful for the community and all guardians. Besides being achievable, it is the best. The examination of the intelligible enabled the *logos* on women’s intellectual capacity to support adequate legislation. To that extent, Socrates can conclude such an investigation with a consensus on what to do and willingness to confront opposing opinions in the city.

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⁶³ τοῦ γυναικείου πέρι νόμου.

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