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CHAPTER ONE

Overview

WHY RULE AND OFFICE? WHY PLATO?

SIX CENTURIES AFTER PLATO, the polymathic Greek geographer Pausanias would recount a folk history of archaic Athens, contending that it was the stripping of the Athenian king of most of his unaccountable powers that had “transformed the kingship [*basileia*] into an accountable office [*archē hupeuthunos*].”¹ Spelling out kingship as unaccountable, office as accountable, Pausanias’s folk-historical claim both connects and contrasts them.² The implication is that kingship is absolutely, or relatively, free of the kinds of procedural limits and controls that could enforce accountability. Office, by contrast, is accountable, underscored here by the adjective *hupeuthunos*, which is one signal that the noun *archē*—translatable as either “rule” or “office,” depending on contextual clues—is being used by Pausanias in the sense of “office.”³

1. Pausanias, 4.5.10, trans. Jones and Ormerod, modified; the same phrase is cited in Caillemer’s “ARCHONTES” (383), where it is translated as “les Athéniens changèrent alors la royauté en une magistrature responsable” (the Athenians thus changed the kingship into a responsible magistracy [this being the French equivalent of “accountable office”]).

The reference is to the purported transformation of the archaic kingship into the figure of the so-called “king-archon” (*archon basileus*), also known as simply “the archon” in his unique function of giving his name to a calendar year. More broadly, Hall’s “Rise of State Action” (12), dates “a shift towards authority based on ascribed status, where emphasis is given to the office itself rather than the person who holds it as with the Homeric king,” back to the seventh century BCE. While Luraghi, in “Ruling Alone” (13, 15n17), calls this a “story-pattern” that lacks historical validity, he acknowledges that it “derives directly from Greek historiography.”

2. Whereas Pausanias contrasts kingship with (accountable) office, other ancient Greek authors (like many medieval European ones) would treat it instead as a nonstandard kind of office itself, an issue discussed further in chapter 2.

3. Sometimes (as here by inclusion of the adjective *hupeuthunos*), ancient Greek uses of *archē* and *archein* clearly signal which idea is meant. For example, the noun in the plural almost always signifies “offices” (or, by extension, their holders), especially when used with

The accountability of political officeholders was conventionally understood as central to what it was for them to hold office at all, just as much in Pausanias's time as in Plato's, and indeed as at the time of this writing.

Introducing an overarching category of rule helps to capture the connecting transformation of kingship into office of which Pausanias speaks. A king is one kind of ruler, described by Pausanias as an unaccountable kind; an officeholder is another kind of ruler—broadly speaking, the accountable kind, in the sense of one subject to limits and control by another agent or agents.⁴ To be sure, Pausanias does not use a separate word for rule as such a category. However, the noun *archē*, translated here as “office,” is exactly the same word that in both his Greek and that of Plato would in other contexts be translated as “rule”: namely, where it was not glossed or signaled to incorporate accountability (broadly conceived). The relationship between rule and office was understood by the Greeks not only in folk-historical terms but also in terms of a range of linguistic affordances of the noun *archē* and the cognate verb *archein*.⁵ The nuances of these intertwining significations are what originally sparked this inquiry into the ideas of rule and office in Plato in the context of ancient Greek thought in dialogue with modern political theorizing.⁶

Why start an account of rule and office in Plato with Pausanias's much later dictum? To start, it has Platonic antecedents. Plato had included a more iconoclastic version of the same folk history in his *Menexenus* (containing a long speech about Athenian history attributed by Socrates, who tells it, to a female

certain verbs and prepositions. Other uses are more ambiguous, depending on context, which may not offer decisive signals either way. For example, the noun in the singular can signify either “rule” or “office”; the verb in participial forms such as *archontes* can signify either “rulers” or “officeholders.” Further rules of thumb for interpreting the affordances of this vocabulary, which constituted common ground for Attic Greek authors who wrote mainly from the mid-fifth through the fourth centuries BCE (as well as some writing in other dialects of Greek and other time periods) are provided in chapter 2.

4. Office is on my analysis a kind of rule. When I speak of “rule and office,” I use “rule” in that expression to indicate other kinds of rule (or sometimes rule in general, treated abstractly) as contrasted with the kind of rule that is embodied in office.

5. I cite an infinitive form of this verb as it provides a clearer visual contrast with the noun, and follow suit by citing most other Greek verbs in an infinitive form as well (but generally refer to entries for verbs in the Greek lexicon LSJ according to the first-person conjugations by which such entries are listed).

6. The vocabulary (by which I mean to refer also to its syntactical deployment) of rule and office was common ground, part of the language in a more literal sense than what the historian of ideas J.G.A. Pocock calls the “languages” that offer various “idioms, rhetorics, ways of talking about politics, distinguishable language games,” each of which “may have its own vocabulary” (Pocock, “Concept of a Language,” 21). By contrast, Plato's development of ideas of rule and office is well characterized as such a Pocockian “language”; it builds on the same vocabulary and linguistic affordances common to other authors at the time, but develops distinctive idioms (such as the strict evaluative, versus loose descriptive, uses of these and related terms, explained below).

associate of Pericles named Aspasia). Rather than contrasting kings then and accountable officeholders now, Plato puts the accent on continuity between the archaic Athenian kings and the office of the “king-archon” that featured in the constitution of his own time.⁷ But more importantly, Pausanias’s claim about how an unaccountable ruler might be transformed into an accountable one bears as much on politics today as it did on the Roman-dominated Greece of his day or the classical landscape of the *polis* in that of Plato. Both the value and the vulnerabilities of accountable offices as a way of organizing political rule have posed recurrent challenges for political theory and practice.

The value of making rule accountable in the form of political office (or, rather, offices, since the very nature of offices in being constituted by limited powers makes them typically plural) lies in the aspiration to ensure that rule is carried out for the benefit of those ruled. This aspiration is evident in the structure and exercise of accountable offices in ancient Greek polities, as in constitutional polities of later times. Accountability was not a vague term in ancient Greek thought or practice. Used most specifically (call this a narrow use), it referred to a widespread family of procedures (generally termed *euthunai*) by which those subject to an officeholder’s powers were able to hold that officeholder to account. Those procedures consisted at a minimum in demanding the rendition of a set of accounts in the literal sense: a financial accounting of any public monies handled while in office. Sometimes (as in democratic Athens) they extended to demanding defense of a fuller account of one’s conduct in office.

Beyond that narrow understanding of accountability as a matter of procedural audit, the aspiration to political accountability came more broadly in ancient Greek contexts, as today, also to stand for an overall ideal of limited constitutional government. Accountability broadly understood encompassed not only the *euthunai* but also a wider family of limits and procedures that conventionally regulated the offices more generally, usually through law. I refer to these as a family of conventional parameters of office—including term limits, selection methods, and the like—which contributed to making officeholders accountable in a broader sense than their subjection to the *euthunai* alone.

If one asks what the purpose of making officeholders accountable might be, the implicit but indisputable answer must be that of ensuring the good of those for whose sake officeholders’ powers were meant to be exercised. Officeholders were expected not to exploit their powers for their own aggrandizement but rather to be accountable to fellow citizens (understood more widely in a democracy than in an oligarchy) for their proper use. That said,

7. Plato, *Menex.* 238d2–3: “We [Athenians] have always had kings; at one time they were hereditary, later elected” (trans. Ryan). All quotations of Plato are from the most recent edition of the relevant Oxford Classical Texts; all translations of Plato as well as other ancient and modern authors are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

conventional accountability procedures in ancient Greek constitutions (*politeiai*) were targeted at avoiding the most obvious bads (such as corruption) that would negate and undermine the good of the ruled.⁸

However, if the good of the ruled is the purpose (*telos*) of accountability measures broadly conceived, those measures—as part of an order (*taxis*) of accountable offices—were (and are) vulnerable to potential flaws. These put constitutional rule at risk. The most notorious expression of such vulnerability has long been associated with the name of the Roman poet Juvenal in the guise of the tag “Who shall guard the guardians?” The Juvenal conundrum, as I shall call it, one that Plato recognized in a particular context before him,⁹ is in fact an ensemble of related vulnerabilities that threaten not only accountable officeholding but also any kind of political rule. Each of these vulnerabilities targets one aspect of a constitutional order: the design of its roles (including the roles of its various officeholders), the relationship between the role and the natural person who holds it, and the safeguarding of the first two aspects (to ensure that they are correctly maintained).

The first vulnerability lies in the procedures and norms associated with a given role. What are the optimal parameters for a given office, for example? The second asks about the availability and selection of persons capable of meeting the demands of each role. Are there procedures and norms to ensure that such persons emerge through the societal system of education, are selected to fill appropriate roles, and remain oriented to the purposes for which they will be held accountable? This vulnerability spans the motivation and competence of such persons as well as the orientation they display in their official actions. Rulers must care about playing their roles properly, meaning both that their roles require them to be oriented to the good of the ruled and that those who serve as rulers must be motivated to maintain that caring orientation.

The third vulnerability, for its part, reiterates the Juvenal conundrum with respect to the prior two. However the political roles of officeholders and other

8. I generally use “constitution” to translate *politeia* (singular), in line with many scholars, though others would translate it as “regime,” and Arlene Saxonhouse has asked me in conversation to defend my choice in terms of its seeming to help itself to modern constitutional connotations. While I am aware of that risk, the articulation of *politeiai* (plural) in terms of offices and laws in much ancient Greek political thought from the sixth century through the fourth century BCE, as argued by Bordes (*Politeia*), offers support for my choice, and I discuss the similarities as well as differences from modern constitutions at points throughout this study. There were, however, also other significant ways of describing and categorizing constitutions, especially before the fourth century BCE. I return to the question of “constitutionalism” in ancient Greek politics in chapter 2.

9. Plato identifies this conundrum in the *Laws* (12.945b5–c2) with respect to the role envisaged there for the *euthunoi* (the officeholders who in that dialogue, as in some existing Greek constitutions at the time, carried out the *euthunai* procedures), as discussed further in chapter 3.

rulers are defined, however their incumbents are chosen, who can ensure that the defining limits of these roles are respected, that the accountability procedures are carried out properly, that the officeholders or other rulers act as they should? To what extent can any set of roles and procedures fully protect against a clever incumbent who is prepared to exploit them (or to make use of their loopholes) for their own benefit?

What do these concerns have to do with Plato? Beyond the folk history to which both he and later Pausanias refer, Plato's political thought in the high noon of his *Republic* is generally taken to be an effort to circumvent the theoretical force of the Juvenal conundrum. "Who shall guard the guardians?" is assumed to be a question that Plato's *Republic*—in prescribing that philosophers should rule—seeks not to answer but to reject as inapplicable, the assumption being that Plato's so-named "guardians" do not need any further oversight because they are wise.¹⁰ So construed, his political thought is taken not to have participated in any kind of realist vein in the projects of constitutionally limited officeholding and institutional design that preoccupied democrats (and others) of his day, but rather to have stood aloof from all such projects on the ground that wise rulers would make them unnecessary. (Even though Plato's *Laws*—the third in the trio of major works that constitute the focus of this study—canvasses a political constitution that is articulated in terms of offices and laws in great detail, this is usually understood to be a late turn in his theorizing that takes his politics in a very different direction from the central thrust of the other two dialogues in question, the *Republic* and *Statesman*.)¹¹

The thesis of this study is that Plato has much more to say about the Juvenal conundrum—including the nature of rule, the value and vulnerabilities of political office as a kind of rule, and the exploration of various ways in which both rule and office might be reconfigured so as to better address the conundrum—than has been previously recognized. The titles of his dialogues are clues to the different ways in which each tackles the conundrum in what I refer to broadly as their constitutional projects (meaning the constitutions that are laid out in detail in the *Republic* [composing much of books 2–7] and *Laws* [books 4–12], and the account of political rule that is laid out in detail in the *Statesman*).¹² The *Laws* does so in terms closest to ancient Greek

10. I consider Karl Popper's famous version of this line of interpretation later in this chapter.

11. In referring to these dialogues as constituting a trio, I speak of the way in which most studies of Platonic political thought treat them in tandem. They do not constitute a trio either in the dramatic framing of the dialogues or in ancient editorial groupings of them (the most influential of which is attributed to Thrasylus).

12. The specific books of each dialogue mentioned above also contain much other material (general reflections on politics, and so on); conversely, all three dialogues have much to say about constitutions and rule outside the scope of their constructive constitutional projects—for example, in the narrative of flawed constitutions in *Republic* 8, discussed below

constitutional practices, doubling down on the aspiration to make all offices and positions of political power accountable (and so notably eschewing any political positions called “kingship” in the laws that it canvasses as a model for a newly founded city in a post-heroic human era), while infusing the content of the laws with the wisdom that good rule requires. By contrast, while both the *Statesman* and the *Republic* do, as I shall demonstrate, include offices in their main constitutional projects, both dialogues address the Juvenal conundrum by also positing rulers described as “kings” to reign over, and so safeguard, those who hold offices under them.

When I say that both the *Republic* and the *Statesman* (as well as the *Laws*) include offices and officeholders in their constitutional projects, I mean that Plato sometimes in the contexts of those projects (as well as in other passages of those dialogues) deploys the vocabulary of *archē* and *archein* in ways that his Greek contemporaries would conventionally have recognized as signaling the specific sense of “office” rather than the more general one of “rule.” However, in neither the *Republic* nor the *Statesman* (in contrast to the *Laws*) does the institutional design of the offices so projected include mention of the *euthunai*, which were a conventional hallmark of accountable offices in his day. Whereas the *Statesman’s* mention of office in its constitutional project is so brief that it is hard to infer anything from this silence, the *Republic* envisages offices that have been radically reconfigured in various ways that seem deliberately to exclude this conventional parameter of accountability to those ruled. In chapters 6 and 7, I take up the challenge of explaining in what sense these remain “offices” and how the function of accountability (or a functional equivalent to accountability) is in this dialogue, as in different ways in the *Statesman* and the *Laws*, to be secured.

It is because I take seriously the questions of how political rule might be organized to secure the good of the ruled, the extent to which some kind of constitutional order of offices is the best way of doing so, and the Juvenal conundrum of who shall guard the guardians (understood figuratively as the rulers) in any such order, that I take seriously Plato’s varying explorations of these questions. It is because thinking about rule and office is so important that I seek in Plato a neglected guide in doing so, even though one might ultimately reject, as blueprints sufficient unto the modern day, any and all of the constitutional projects he explores. While Pausanias’s later dictum would emphasize a historical contrast between unaccountable rule (which he describes as archaic kingship) and accountable office, Plato’s dialogues suggest that one

in chapter 8; the discussion of constitutions and rule generally in *Laws* 1–2 and historically in *Laws* 3, considered in chapter 3; and the excursus on flawed constitutions and the role of law in the *Statesman*, considered in chapters 4 and 11. These references are not exhaustive; much can also be learned about the Platonic idea of rule from other aspects of each of these three dialogues (including their myths), as well as from other Platonic dialogues.

must think through the function that accountable office is meant to serve, reflect on the extent to which conventional accountability procedures succeed in achieving that function, and explore potential reconfigurations of both office and other kinds of rule as ways to do so. In so doing, it will turn out that although neither the *Republic* nor the *Statesman* makes use of *euthunai* procedures in characterizing the offices envisaged in their constitutional projects, they do explore other kinds of limits both for those offices and for other kinds of rule, in seeking to keep rulers (including officeholders) oriented toward the good of the ruled.

Notwithstanding these differences between Plato and Pausanias, another reason to take the latter's dictum as a useful starting point is that the language of kingship—the relationship between not just any kind of rule but specifically kingly rule and (accountable) officeholding—was itself central to Plato's political theorizing in certain dialogues.¹³ Think not only of the philosopher-kings and philosopher-queens of the *Republic*, but of the figure variously described as the “kingly ruler” and the “statesman” in the *Statesman*. Plato's interest in kingship, and in an idea of rule mediated through that image, is situated within a broader Greek discourse going back to the Homeric image of the king as the “shepherd of the people.”¹⁴ That figure epitomizes the expectation that a king should serve the good of the ruled, while wider discussions of kingship treated kings as orderers of their domains, caring for the ruled by establishing forms of order. A Homeric king could be described as *kosmētōr laōn*, “orderer of the people,”¹⁵ and while in context this described mainly the military role of ordering an army, the king's role in establishing a *kosmos* (a word for order) would have broader resonance also in later authors.

While Plato was interested in rule and the figure of the king, he was also, as this study contends, interested in officeholding as a distinctive kind of rule, one sharing overlapping vocabulary and developing a family of recognizable procedural limits in order to realize an aspiration of accountability broadly conceived. Office too had a long history in Greek thought and practices already by Plato's time, stretching back to seventh-century BCE Crete, from which survive the earliest known Greek laws regulating officeholders. Not only in the *Laws* but also in certain key passages of the *Republic* and *Statesman*, Plato discusses

13. I ascribe certain views to “Plato” despite the largely dialogical character of his writings. To introduce my approach to doing so, which is further developed in chapter 2: I identify “Plato” for the purposes of this study primarily with an overlapping set of repeated and broadly consistent positions, sometimes expressed through questions or converse denials, which certain protagonists—whom I characterize as “avatars” of Plato—adopt. Doing so is an interpretative choice that clearly comes at some costs, and has some limitations, as does any such choice.

14. Haubold, “Shepherds of the People.”

15. *Il.* 1.16, 1.375, 3.236; *Od.* 18.152. See Atask, *Discourse of Kingship*.

archē and *archein* in terms that sometimes unambiguously or arguably signal “offices” (usually found in the plural) by the conventions of the time, while at other times unambiguously or arguably signaling “rule” in a different or more abstract sense to be explored. In fact, Plato’s discussion of office, and his sensitivity to office as a kind of rule, must be identified as a textual fact hiding in plain sight.¹⁶

Putting together kingship as a figure of rule oriented to the good of the ruled and office as a kind of rule, it emerges that Plato was (like Pausanias after him) grappling with the question of whether office can suffice to realize the purpose of rule, or whether office and rule need to be reconfigured in order to better enable them to do so, whether by reconfiguring the offices themselves, supplementing them in some way with a further kind of rule or with a special kind of law, or both. This, of course, is to speak only of rule and office in the political domain. While that is the primary concern of this study, it cannot be discussed without attention also to the question of rule within the soul (and, indeed, also that of divine rule within the *kosmos*). Political rule is described by Plato as necessary wherever, and for those for whom, psychic self-rule cannot be sufficiently achieved. This makes Plato an opponent of *anarchia* (anarchy) in the political domain in virtually all circumstances; his occasional rumination on whether psychic self-rule might be achieved without, and so not require, political rule, is considered in the final chapter of this study.

While Plato is an opponent of anarchy, however, the dialogues show him to be equally an opponent of tyranny. One way to appreciate the profundity of that opposition is to consider the often-overlooked valorization of office and law (law being the standard way in which offices are limited and controlled) in the *Republic*, as well as in the *Laws* (alongside the critique, but also the deployment, of office and law in the *Statesman* as well). The ultimate refutation of the putative happiness of the tyrant in *Republic* 9 is made by appeal to what I call the garden-variety constitutionalism of office and law; while rule need not always take this form, there are distinctive values of civic freedom and friendship that office and law are particularly well suited to foster. To understand Plato on (political) rule, one must understand what he has to say

16. To illustrate: *archai* is used twice in *Resp.* 5.460b6–8, denoting first the officeholders and then the offices assigned a task of supervising early childhood education. (Hansen [*Athenian Democracy*, 226] notes that the noun *archē* was “used with just about equal frequency of the person holding the magistracy,” a point he made about Athens but which applies to other Greek constitutional polities as well.) As documented in chapters 2 and 7, translators of this passage into multiple languages correctly take the plural Greek noun to signal that “offices” and “officeholders” are meant, rather than abstract “rule,” which would not here make sense in the plural. Yet scarcely any scholars have discussed the political or theoretical significance of these and other references to offices in books 5–7 of the *Republic*, as I do in chapter 7.

about the variety of ways in which rule can be ordered, which include but are not limited to office.

This project is insufficiently pursued in the discussions of “rule” in Plato offered by scholars such as Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière, each of whom is primarily interested instead in drawing a broad binary opposition between rule and democracy.¹⁷ When, for example, Arendt glosses the Greek “concept of rule” as “the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey,”¹⁸ her insistence that rule entails its subjects being “forced to obey” fails to recognize the role played by office in Plato’s writings as a kind of rule distinguished by its limited and accountable parameters and associated thereby with willing obedience. Indeed, for Plato in *Republic* 8, the democratic constitution features rulers who are officeholders within a constitutional framework of law, though their unwillingness (and that of those whom they rule) to act according to the constitutionally specified limits turns their roles into a kind of shadow play.

Arendt’s effort to drive a wedge between democratic ideas and practices of politics (drawing especially on Athens) and Plato’s idea of rule—followed by Rancière in accusing Plato of failing to grasp what is properly political at all—must be reconsidered once one recognizes Plato’s subtle and varied grappling with office as well as rule, and with the relationship between them.¹⁹ On my

17. Rule is a relatively neglected idea not only in Plato but in democratic theory more generally, as observed by Markell (“Rule of the People,” 1), who writes: “In mainstream democratic theory, the term ‘rule’ has received relatively little attention, not because it has been thought to be unimportant, but because its meaning has seemed comparatively straightforward. . . . [T]he thought that politics is at bottom a matter of ruling, and that ruling consists in the exercise of authoritative control, remains part of the taken-for-granted background.”

18. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 222. See also pages 8–9 and passim for her development of a connection between “beginning” and a notion of “natality” as part of the human condition and as arguably the “central category of political . . . thought” (9); at 224, she mentions a passage in the *Laws* (without giving a precise citation) holding “that only the beginning (*archē*) is entitled to rule (*archein*),” perhaps thinking of 6.775e3, a passage she cites in both *On Revolution* and “What Is Authority?” I have argued in *Eco-Republic* for a related opposition between “initiative” and “inertia” as a neglected but fundamental axis of political life.

19. While influenced by Arendt, Sheldon Wolin’s recognition of the importance of the language of rule for the Greeks and in Plato differed from her in valorizing its institutional realization in the form of constitutionalism. Wolin (*Fugitive Democracy*, 81) writes: “Ancient Greek theorists were the first to conceive the idea of codifying both the practices of ruling and the competing claims to rule while, at the same time, enclosing the dynamics of politics within a determinate structure and designated political space,” one which he calls (as I do here) a project of “constitutionalism.” Unlike Arendt, Wolin also recognizes and discusses, briefly but illuminatingly, what I call the characteristic limiting parameters of office, specifically in the context of Athens.

view, Plato's choices of language show him to have been keenly attuned to the variations of officeholding in existing Greek constitutions, democratic as well as oligarchic. His political theorizing involves working out the extent to which existing models of office could succeed in realizing their implicit purpose. And it involves reconfiguring those models in varied roles of office and (other kinds of) rule, designed to better grasp and realize that same purpose.

Having said that, Arendt's further diagnosis of Platonic politics as resting on mastery in the household, "where nothing would ever be done if the master did not know what to do and did not give orders to the slaves who executed them without knowing,"²⁰ raises an issue that must be confronted in Plato's willingness to use the language of slavery in describing rule—I take this up in chapter 10. The fact that virtually all ancient Greek accounts of rule, and of freedom, presupposed a society in which some were and would remain enslaved casts a profound shadow on them with which this work, like other studies of Plato, must contend. Setting aside Aristotle's theory of "natural slaves," virtually all such accounts likewise presupposed that actually existing Greek slavery was the domination and exploitation of those enslaved for the benefit of their enslavers. In using the language of slavery to describe certain relationships of rule among people not legally enslaved, Plato harnessed only the epitactic dimension that masters of slaves shared with political rulers;²¹ he yoked this to an inversion of the *telos* of legal slavery, insisting that political rulers must qua rulers seek to serve the good of the ruled. This abstraction of a dimension of slavery to characterize rule keeps his theorizing within the ambit of the slave society within which it arose, but does not pretend that such legal enslavement was anything other than exploitation (a point which I find to be recognized in a passage of *Republic* 9, as argued below in chapter 10).

In following Arendt, Rancière, and others in speaking of "rule" in Plato, but understanding it as encompassing not only the register of *Herrschaft* (rule in the sense of mastery or domination) as it were, but also that of *Regierung* (rule in the sense of government or administration),²² I owe the reader also a brief word as to why I have chosen the English word "office" as its complement in my title (and as one of the kinds of rule). The word "office" is derived from the Latin *officium*, glossed as "service, duty," and related to *opificium*, "the performance of constructive work";²³ *officium* connotes the "duty and

20. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 222–23.

21. This is complicated by the emphasis in Ismard's *Démocratie contre les experts* (74–79) on the fact that the actual powers of physical coercion were wielded in the Athenian democracy by enslaved people (such as the Scythian archers who served as a police force).

22. I draw this contrast from the observation in Markell's "Politics against Rule" that when Arendt writes of "rule" in German, she translates it with the vocabulary of *Herrschaft* rather than *Regierung*.

23. De Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*, 431 (both quotations).

service attached to a role.”²⁴ These Latin terms were not limited to politics—Cicero’s *De officiis* is an account of the virtues and duties attached to the role of a good man, albeit that for him the good man would also be the citizen;²⁵ likewise, the Greek *archē* was not limited to the sense of office or rule (it could also mean more generally a “beginning,” as Arendt emphasized, though in so doing she neglected the sense of “office”).²⁶ More challenging for my choice of “office” to capture an ancient Greek (and Platonic) idea is the fact that even when focusing on political offices, there have been significant historical shifts in various epochs. For example, historians of English law trace a shift from an eighteenth-century regime of offices understood as individually embodying distinct assignments of public trust to “a model of salaried employment and managerial control.”²⁷ Nevertheless, contemporary administrative law in common-law systems includes reference to “offices” often treated broadly as positions of public powers delineated by legal limits and controls, which comport reasonably well with the “offices” that characterized the *archai* (and the roles held by *archontes*) in Greek constitutions of Plato’s day.

24. J. Allen, “Office of the Crown,” 307. Schofield (*Cicero*, 185) observes, “*Officium* is in fact a Roman moralizing transformation of the Greek *to kathēkon*, ‘what it belongs to us to do,’ or ‘what accords with our nature,’” noting further that “the transformation accordingly makes behaving virtuously also a matter of performing those actions that are *required* of us . . . a matter of doing our duty (as a requirement conceived in that way)” (emphasis original). Neither *officium* nor *to kathēkon* in its central role in Stoic thought was limited to political offices alone.

25. For Cicero on magistrates (to use another Latinate term in its sense of “office”), see *De officiis* 1.124 (on the magistrate bearing the *persona* [literally, a mask, in the sense of a particular role or character] of the people); see also *De officiis* 1.97–115.

26. Arendt (*Human Condition*, 222–23) emphasizes the related verb *archein* in its sense of “beginning” in discussing the *Statesman*:

The problem, as Plato saw it, was to make sure that the beginner [the ruler] would remain the complete master of what he had begun, not needing the help of others to carry it through. In the realm of action, this isolated mastership can be achieved only if the others are no longer needed to join the enterprise of their own accord, with their own motives and aims, but are used to execute orders, and if, on the other hand, the beginner who took the initiative does not permit himself to get involved in the action itself.

There were also other senses of *archē*, including to designate empire or imperial domination, a sense related to that of “rule.”

27. J. Allen, “Office of the Crown,” 308. See also McLean’s “Authority of the Administration” and Manners and Menand’s “Three Permissions” for different aspects of the legal history of office, as well as Condren’s *Argument and Authority* for a broader historical and conceptual account. In accounts of what is called a great shift “from office to contract,” office is contrasted with a model in which bureaucrats are subsumed in a hierarchical chain of command, with only those at the top typically being publicly accountable. But while this restricted usage can be historically illuminating when so delineated, it does not negate the survival of the broader and more flexible concept of office as I use it.

To focus in particular on ancient Greek officeholders: they were rulers who exercised epitactic and other powers, but whose roles in so doing were limited and constrained by a family (or a subset thereof) of conventional parameters. Each of these parameters (which have to be reconstructed from a variety of texts and material evidence) can contribute to controlling the officeholders and so making them accountable in the broad sense. As I noted earlier, accountability in a narrow sense revolved around the end-of-term audits (*euthunai*), which counted as limits on performance and could also be invoked as symbols of the whole of accountability (with Pausanias's adjective *hupeuthunos* already a key way of characterizing accountability in the classical period, being cognate to the word *euthunai*).²⁸ In the broader sense of accountability as meaning limited constitutional government, the parameters can be grouped into three further sets: limits on the powers of each office (often as a collegial member of a board), limits on the eligibility to serve (including term limits; specified selection procedures usually by means of lottery, election, or some combination thereof; and, mainly in Athens, scrutiny of those chosen before they were allowed to take up an office), and other potential parameters, sometimes including (of special interest in chapter 6) the payment of wages.

While procedural and institutional details differ, each of these parameters has parallels in many constitutions outside ancient Greece as well. Conversely, the parameters could in practice be filled out and combined in a wide variety of ways, and with some latitude, meaning that whether a role counts as a political office will ultimately be a matter of family resemblances requiring judgment and interpretation. Plato invites such interpretation by continuing to use the recognized vocabulary of office while pushing the bounds of these family resemblances to the extreme, exploring alternative ways in which offices might be limited and configured that diverge significantly, and some will think decisively, from those that could count as "offices" according to the standards of his time or ours.

Yet the laws and procedures of offices are not guaranteed to protect the good of the ruled. Accountability mechanisms sanction officeholders for corruption; term limits, rotation, collegiality, eligibility requirements, and so on, seek to prevent the abuse of power. Such procedures are likely to do better in warding off the worst abuses than in ensuring officeholders who fully grasp, reliably care for, and can effectively realize the good of the ruled. Moreover, the procedures themselves can break down or be abused by the persons who get into office, or by others able to manipulate them from the outside. These

²⁸ The significance of being *hupeuthunos* or its opposite (*aneuthunos* or *anupeuthunos*) was drawn to my attention as relevant for this study by Kinch Hoekstra ("Athenian Democracy").

roles are not immune to the qualities and aspirations and habits—in short, the virtues—of the individuals who operate in and by them.²⁹

How then might one address the Juvenal conundrum for constitutions predicated on offices? Fourth-century BCE Athenian appeals to an idealized “ancestral constitution” (*patrios politeia*) idealize the Areopagus Council, composed of selected former holders of offices, in playing a safeguarding role for current officeholders and for the constitution and city as a whole.³⁰ Indeed, an Athenian decree of 403 BCE, in the wake of the ousting of the Thirty, charged the Areopagus Council to “take caring charge of (*epimeleisthai*) the laws, so that the officeholders (*archai*) may employ the laws that have been passed.”³¹ Such a two-level model, in which officeholders are safeguarded by a higher body that does not itself hold or constitute an office, is comparable to the explorations that Plato would make in the *Republic* and the *Statesman* of ways in which superordinate rulers could safeguard the officeholders proper. Indeed, the language of ruling, caring, and safeguarding, which Plato develops, resonates more broadly with the *patrios politeia* debate and other interventions into ways of thinking about rule and office in his time and beyond, especially in the contributions of Isocrates.³²

29. I adapt this sentence from my *Eco-Republic* (30).

30. In Plato’s wake, for example, the late fourth-century *Constitution of the Athenians* (transmitted in Aristotle’s corpus, though whether its authorship should be ascribed to Aristotle himself or others in his circle is a matter of scholarly debate) described the Draconian-era Areopagus Council as “guardian (*phulax*) of the laws,” who “watched over the officeholders (*tas archas*) to see that they ruled (*archōsin*) in accordance with the laws” (4.4; see also 3.6 on the Areopagus’s pre-Draconian *taxis* of “watching over (*diaterein*) the laws”); my translation, drawing on discussion in Wallace’s *Areopagus Council* (esp. 39–47).

31. Wallace, “Councils in Greek Oligarchies,” 200, so translating Teisamenos’s decree as reported in Andocides, 1.83–84; [*Ath. Pol.*] 8.4. Wallace there also notes a presumably short-lived (if not entirely invented) institution, mentioned by Philochorus, who “reports that, probably after 462/461, the Athenians instituted a board of *nomophylakes* [*nomophylakes* in my preferred transliteration] to ‘force the *archai* to abide by the laws,’” citing Jacoby (*Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 328 F 64).

32. Isocrates in the *Areopagiticus*, in particular, stresses the epitactic role of the ancestral Areopagus Council (composed of selected and tested ex-officeholders) as a supervisor (*epistatousēs*; Isoc., 7.51), and conjoins this with the function of the *epimeleia* (care) which that Council exercised over adults and not only youths (Isoc., 7.37), in its overall role of caring for the good order of the city (*tēs eutaxias epimeleisthai*) (Isoc., 7.39). As has long been noticed in different currents of scholarship, Plato and Isocrates use mutually resonant language in this regard (setting aside the vexed debate over priority and influence, which goes back to Werner Jaeger and others). Socrates in the *Republic* describes the role of a philosopher-king or philosopher-queen as that of being a “supervisor” (*epistatēs*) whose role is necessary if the “constitution is to be safeguarded” (*ei mellei hē politeia sōizesthai*) (3.412b1), using language which recurs at crucial moments in the *Statesman* and the *Laws*; likewise, he refers to the need for philosophers to be compelled by chance to “care for” (*epimelēthēnai*) a city, using the same verb as Isocrates in 7.39, one which will play an

To be sure, in speaking of ancient Greek offices, it is significant that Greek polities did not distinguish between political offices (such as elected members of the legislative or executive) and administrative offices (appointed through a civil service) as many modern polities have variously come to do. Neither did a sharp distinction between executive, judicial, and legislative powers apply. In fourth-century BCE Athens, for example, every officeholder had the power to preside in certain kinds of court proceedings (a kinship of executive and judicial roles that Plato echoes in the *Laws*); as to legislative powers, these were transferred from the plenary Assembly to a judicial-like board of *nomothetai* who heard and judged motions to make any change to any of the codified laws. With these caveats, however, one may loosely treat ancient Greek *archai* as more or less comparable to modern executive offices, being more like political offices in their modes of accountability but administrative offices in their typical sets of duties.³³

To compare ancient Greek offices to modern executive offices is to confront a new set of challenges, however, since, as Joseph Heath has remarked of modern states, “given that the state is constituted largely by the executive, it is surprising how undertheorized this branch of government is.”³⁴ It has been

important role in all three Platonic dialogues considered in this study. Helmer (*Oikonomia*, 143) observes that *sōzein* and *phulattein/phulassein* (the verb corresponding to the role of “guardian (*phulax*)” in the *Republic*) are verbs widely used in Greek discussions of political economy, describing their relevant sense as “conserver, c’est ranger et calculer” (to preserve is to arrange and to calculate).

33. There was also an important group of administrators in ancient Greek cities who were so-called public slaves—enslaved persons owned by the city itself and deployed in civic tasks, many of them requiring considerable expertise—as has been emphasized by Ismard in *Démocratie contre les experts*. As he points out, this violates the very nexus between expertise and rule on which Plato would insist, and which modern societies have in some circumstances come to expect (though in fact that intuition is more fraught today than he admits). Notably, Ismard opens his second chapter (63–64) with a scene from Plato’s *Statesman* in which “the group of slaves and servants” appear as rivals claiming the mantle (and title) of statecraft, a scene to which I shall return in chapter 4. However, his broader argument (30) that the role of public slaves challenges the sense in which the Greek state (say, the Athenian democracy) was in fact a state, to my mind goes too far in downplaying the role of the citizen officeholders (who could be designated by the term, *archai*, that could also designate their offices).

34. Heath, *Machinery of Government*, 19–20. One instructive exception, which appeared in the same year as Heath’s study, is Cordelli’s *Privatized State*, though the latter’s discussion of “officeholders” (esp. 85–86, 102–13), focuses on administrative bureaucrats without theorizing the broader role of the executive per se. An earlier exception is Tuck’s *Sleeping Sovereign*, although this is focused on the theoretical contrast between sovereignty and government (which includes constitutional officeholding) rather than on the nature of the latter. Several historians of early modern England have emphasized the role of office as a fundamental organizing political vision in that period, while noting its later retreat; here I have learned from Dauber’s *State and Commonwealth*, Goldie’s “Unacknowledged Republic,” and Withington’s *Politics of Commonwealth*, among others.

regarded by many political theorists and ancient historians alike as involving “mere administration,” as it were, being overshadowed by interest in the powers of legislative and judicial bodies—in the case of scholars of democratic Athens, in the Assembly and the popular law courts. Officeholders have been of interest to many students of ancient Greece largely insofar as many of them were chosen by lottery, neglecting consideration of the significance of their powers once chosen (not to mention the fact that some were always, even in democratic Athens, chosen by election). Meanwhile, office has been regarded by some political historians and scientists to be a remnant of scholarly focus on the wrong kind of institutionalism, one that is too static and legalistic to illuminate political life in the ways that studies of ideologies and game-theoretic approaches can do.³⁵

Thus office as a form of rule, and the idea of rule more broadly, is ripe for reconsideration from the perspective of the present work. Even those persuaded of the interest of office and rule as topics may be surprised to find Plato taken as a guide to development of what Heath calls “a philosophy of the executive,”³⁶ again using that modern vocabulary as a gloss on the roles of the officeholders and rulers who figure in classical Greek texts, and pointing to certain overlapping institutional formations then and now, such as the role of law in limiting and controlling officeholders so as to make them accountable. Yet Plato has a great deal to say about the proper role of rulers, the extent to which officeholders (who constitute one kind of ruler) can adequately fulfil the purpose of that role, and how both rule and office might be reconfigured so as to better realize that purpose. Or so it is the burden of this study to show.

To do so, I put some terms of art on the table, while noting that this overview makes many claims for which evidence can be given only in subsequent chapters. These terms of art are designed to capture Plato’s ideas of rule and office, while also situating those ideas in a broader family of such ideas. Rule is a relationship between a ruler and one or more persons ruled, which can

35. See the discussion in Beck’s introduction to the *Companion to Ancient Greek Government* (1–2), noting that recognition of the “anachronistic” presupposition of “a normative state law” in ancient Greek cities led scholars to turn away from what he calls “an overtly constitutionalist approach,” and toward cultural and social scientific studies instead. The latter are well represented by the immense contribution made by the multifaceted works of Josiah Ober, including both his early work on the performative and ideological role of rhetoric in Athenian democracy and his more recent role in the turn to a game-theoretic “new institutionalism.” I have learned much from these approaches as pursued by Ober and others, including his many students (among them Federica Carugati, Matthew Simonton, David Teegarden, and others). Yet the study of the constitutional structure of Greek offices, together with the practices associated with them, still has something important to teach us about the ideas and normative expectations implicit within them—not least because of the ways in which these came to animate (and be criticized and renovated) in the work of Greek philosophers, as I show in this study for the case of Plato.

36. Heath, *Machinery of Government*, 19.

be characterized in terms of two dimensions: a *telos* (purpose) and a *taxis* (order).³⁷ A *taxis* is an ordered set of roles and relationships (including institutions and procedures) through which a *telos* might be achieved.

A constraint on the *taxis* of any kind of rule is that the ruler have in principle the epitactic power of issuing orders (*epitaxis*, singular) to the ruled;³⁸ Aristotle would observe that “issuing orders is most characteristic of office.”³⁹ What is essential to this epitactic power is, at least in principle, the form of a directive order: not the particular means of persuasion or coercion that a ruler may use to enforce it, nor the basis on which someone ruled may or may not be actually bound to obey the directive. Whether all those issued such an order are bound to obey, as well as whether they do or do not actually obey, does not affect the standing of a ruler as a ruler on this account. Plato is no Weberian in this respect. He does not treat coercion as fundamental to rule, a point discussed in chapter 11.

Within a significant tradition of thinking about ancient Greek rule, which can be traced from Homer to Plato, there is likewise a constraint on the *telos* of rule: that this should be the good of the ruled. Plato is no Weberian in this respect either, in not treating rule as an evaluatively neutral idea. That will undoubtedly seem tendentious. Why not take rule to describe a relationship in which a ruler may adopt any *telos* that they choose, including one that exploits

37. While Plato does not spell out these ideas in the way that I schematize them here, he uses both *telos* and *taxis* in the relevant senses of “purpose” and “order,” though sometimes also using other words as well. Consider an illustration of each such use: on the one hand, his reference to “the *telos* (purpose) toward which . . . a man’s appetites are directed” (*Resp.* 9.575e1, though this is not a reference to a political *telos*); on the other hand, his reference to “order [*taxis*] and law [*nomos*]” as virtues of a second-best form of rule that is contrasted with the case of someone engaged in “unaccountable and autocratic rule in a city (*anupeuthunos te kai autokratōr arxēi poleōs*)” (*Leg.* 9.875d4 and b3–4 respectively, parts of a difficult passage that is discussed further in chapter 3).

38. An order in the sense of a command is in Greek an *epitaxis*, which is part of an overall ordered arrangement (*taxis*), and thus contributes to realizing a state of *kosmos* (a fine arrangement); both *taxis* and *kosmos* can signify order in general. Rulers may also exercise other powers of ordering, through speech acts of persuasion, creation, and so on, as is noted by Landauer in “Drinking Parties Correctly Ordered,” who criticizes my emphasis on ordering or commanding as essential to rule (expressed in an earlier publication of mine, “*Antianarchia*”) by arguing that there are multiple “modalities of rule,” such as negotiating and agenda setting. While this is true, my point remains that the capacity to issue orders remains central in principle to a relationship of rule. This is also the case with Raz’s definition of practical authority, which hinges on the issuing of authoritative directives.

39. *Arist., Pol.* 4.1299a27–28, emphasizing this as most characteristic among a trio of powers of officeholders [*archai*], namely: “to deliberate and to judge and to issue orders.” This passage is cited in Hansen (*Athenian Democracy*, 229), who also remarks of the fourth-century Athenian democracy in which Plato wrote: “the ephebic oath [taken by young men upon successfully attaining the status of adult citizen] included a promise to obey the magistrates [in my parlance, officeholders],” on pain of being fined.

the ruled rather than seeking to serve their good? Rule as inherently oriented to serving the good of the ruled might seem to be merely stipulative, not only to Weberians but also to Marxists, and indeed to many political scientists and some political theorists of various stripes. In fact, some of Plato's own contemporaries used the very vocabulary of rule that I have introduced (as well as other linguistic terms and idioms) to describe rulers who aimed at their own good instead. Plato too shows himself to be well aware of the existence of such cases, showcasing characters who describe or endorse self-serving rulers in several dialogues.

Nevertheless, Plato's adoption of this approach in context should not be taken as a novel philosophical intervention. Rather, he was working within a deeply ingrained evaluative nimbus of long-standing Greek approaches to the figuration of rulers, especially of kings. The Homeric trope of the king as shepherd, expected (if often failing) to care for the good of his flock, opened a source of imagery to which Plato would explicitly respond. Language of caring for the good of ruled, as would a caretaker put in charge of them, and of serving their good, as would a servant, can be found in idealizing depictions of the Athenian Areopagus in fourth-century BCE orators, and more generally in certain portrayals of politics in fifth-century BCE playwrights and tragedians (some of which will be quoted at later points in this study). Plato was in step with many of his predecessors and contemporaries in portraying rulers as expected to care for the good of the ruled, just as he was in emphasizing the epitactic dimension of rule (which clearly characterized, for example, portrayals of kingship).

Of course, some authors in ancient Greece (like many today) dissented from the assumption that kings and other rulers should serve the good of the ruled. Plato explicitly responds to such challenges as well, presenting them as voiced by the likes of Thrasymachus and Calicles in his dialogues. Moreover, many figures in power then (as now) dramatically flouted this expectation, yet their power was sometimes still described as "rule" (using *archē* or *archein*) in a looser use of language, showing that the evaluative nimbus of rule was a matter of clustered expectations rather than strict definition. My claim here is not that tyrants (say) were not sometimes described by Plato's contemporaries or predecessors as ruling in the vocabulary of *archein* and its cognates; indeed they were—for example, by Xenophon in presenting his version of Socrates.⁴⁰ "Rule" could sometimes be used to describe bad rule as well as good rule (though there was little effort made by Greek authors to develop an evaluatively neutral category). Notwithstanding all these caveats, Plato was far from isolated in taking the *telos* of rule to be the good of the ruled. He did

40. To illustrate: Xenophon (*Mem.* 4.6.12) ascribed the view to Socrates that "kingship and tyranny . . . were both kinds of rule (*archas*)" (an unusual instance in which a plural form of the noun *archē* should in context be translated as "rule" rather than "office").

so within a broadly shared social horizon of evaluative expectations, not as an isolated flourish or fetish of his own philosophical idealism.

The *telos* of rule as the good of the ruled, which for the Greeks was captured in the image of the king or ruler as shepherd, can also be picked up in modern philosophical vocabulary. Call this a service conception of rule, an expression that I adapt from the philosopher Joseph Raz's service conception of authority (focusing on his account of practical authority). A service conception is explicitly evaluative: it is oriented to the good of those persons whom it is the role of the party in question to direct (issue directives, for Raz, or orders, for Plato). Accordingly, both delineate a role—the role of ruler (Plato), the role of being a (practical) authority (Raz)—in terms of what it would be to perform the role rightly and well. It is consistent with this approach that any given natural person seeking to perform such a role might do so badly; that the persons whom they seek to direct should reject their direction, or that they should fail in some other way; and indeed that such a role might never be properly filled or recognized at all.⁴¹ Both also independently take there to be objective grounds for those parties to accept directives or orders that are genuinely oriented to serving their good. Conversely, neither Plato nor Raz defines rule or authority in terms of its potential use of coercion.

With regard to the service conception and the *telos* of rule in particular, this was in context far less controversial (which is not to say not at all controversial) as a stance for Plato than it is for Raz. That politics should serve the good of the ruled appears to have been a view shared by a far greater number of Plato's predecessors than those relatively few iconoclasts who may have challenged it. That said, of course Plato would develop a profoundly original and counterintuitive account of the true nature of the good of the ruled, rooted in the Good as such—that is, the Form of the Good. A study of Platonic political thought without an account of his theory of goodness risks being *Hamlet* without the prince. Yet providing such an account, integrating the metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics of even just the three dialogues on which I focus in this study, is beyond the scope of what this work can do. Fortunately, it

41. Plato does not discuss as explicitly as does Raz whether a measure of de facto power is needed for someone to count as a practical authority (which Raz says [*Morality of Freedom*, 56] there is “a strong case” for answering in the affirmative). The *Statesman* insists that someone with the requisite expertise is a statesman even if they are serving as an advisor to a ruler rather than ruling themselves, but invokes the closely related role of king to indicate someone with the same expertise who is actually engaged in ruling. As to the questions of feasibility and possibility: while Raz says little about these in *Morality of Freedom*, Plato addresses them explicitly in the *Republic* in books 5–7. I see Plato as similar to Raz in emphasizing the success conditions for a service conception, while separating this from the question of whether and how a constitution realizing such a conception could come into existence. In my “States of Nature,” I discussed Raz's relative silence on the related question of the marks by which a genuine practical authority might be recognized.

is possible to draw on some basic presuppositions of Platonic ethics to explain the *telos* of rule, while also appreciating that the ways in which he presents the Good as operationalized in making political arguments do not always require a full account of the nature and content of that Good.

Among the basic presuppositions of Platonic ethics is that virtue is good for each individual, and that living virtuously is necessary for happiness (and probably also sufficient, though I leave that problem aside). Virtue consists in a proper ordering of the soul, and so of a person's life, toward that good. Thus rule within the soul is the ultimate aim of any kind of rule. Political rule aims at fostering rule within the souls of those who are unable to ensure such rule for and within themselves. Those who are sufficiently similar in having rule within their souls, whether achieved through self-rule or through political rule, are capable of participating in and so enjoying further relational goods: civic freedom and friendship. These are depicted in the dialogues especially as fostered by rule through office and law.

That said, the logics of self-rule and political rule are necessarily different. Self-rule aims to secure the good of the whole person; the only part that is capable of doing this—namely, the rational part of the soul—is part of that whole, and so seeks to realize its own good as part of the good of the whole. Political rule, however, requires someone to take up the role of ruler over another person. A natural person who plays the role of ruler has a different good from the good of the ruled in principle, in that each of them has their own virtue to pursue and realize, without which their individual life cannot be happy. A natural person who plays the role of ruler also has a different good from the good of the ruled in practice, in that their separateness as natural persons means that there is always a risk of the former using the powers of rule to pursue what they take to be their private good at the expense of the good of the latter.

On the one hand, this gap between the person(s) whose good constitutes the *telos* of political rule and the person(s) whose role is that of ruler is what makes a service conception of rule necessary. The role of the ruler is to serve the good of the ruled. On the other hand, this gap also makes it possible to discuss that service conception without invoking a full account of the content of the Good. For the Good can be operationalized in politics as “the good of the ruled,” in the sense that the role of ruler be taken to be oriented to serving the good of the ruled as opposed to exploiting the ruled for the sake of the good of the ruler. This operationalization provides a helpful test, insofar as exploitation can often be assessed in mundane terms—personal financial enrichment, for example—without requiring a full grasp of the Form of the Good to determine.⁴²

42. An even more literal test has long been applied by the town of High Wycombe in England, which annually weighs its officeholders to determine whether they have fattened

Of course, Plato also has in his repertoire the more fundamental ethical point that a ruler who seeks to exploit the ruled is making a mistake about their own good. Such a ruler is getting their own good wrong: the goods that exploitative political rulers take themselves to be pursuing will turn out not to be genuine goods at all (or, at least, not insofar as they are pursued by unjust means, and not insofar as they are to be used without knowledge of the true Good). But the account of rule offered in the *Republic*, as in the *Statesman* and *Laws*, does not hinge on that point. The point is that qua ruler, one must serve the good of the ruled, whatever that turns out to be (even though in fact its content will be Platonically determinate).

Considered as a natural person, one may derive some individual benefit from taking up the role of ruler. Those who rule so as to avoid being ruled by others less knowledgeable and virtuous than themselves do thereby derive a benefit.⁴³ But while that benefit may be their motivation as natural persons for taking up the role of ruler, it cannot constitute the *telos* that orients their actions in that role.⁴⁴ That *telos*, Plato argues explicitly in *Republic* 1 and in the *Statesman*, is the good of the ruled. In other words, the aim of one's actions as a ruler must be the good of the ruled, even if the aim for which one takes up the role of ruler may be different.⁴⁵ Qua ruler, one must pursue a service conception of rule all the way down.

To be concerned with a role that is directed toward a *telos*, one must be concerned with who will fill that role. Institutional design involves at least three interlocking issues (corresponding to the cluster of vulnerabilities associated with the Juvenal conundrum): design of the role; design of the selection procedure for identifying and assigning someone capable of meeting the demands of the role; and design of safeguards to ensure that, once installed in the role, the role holder will indeed pursue its proper purposes. Plato, on my view, is equally interested in each of these issues, not only in choosing the natural persons to serve as rulers, an issue that is too often taken to have exhausted his political thought. Each of the trio of Platonic dialogues considered in this study explores one or more of these issues (the *Republic* and *Laws* addressing each of them, the *Statesman* focusing especially on the first) and explores possible reconfigurations of the roles of rule and office to address them. Each such reconfiguration can be understood as exploring a way to keep the *taxis* of rule

themselves while in office (as an indication that further inquiry into private gain, in both senses, is needed): Freytas-Tamura, "British Town."

43. This distinction is drawn in a related context by Viehoff in "Authority and Expertise."

44. I seek to respond here to comments made by Josiah Ober on another part of this study in draft.

45. The point is analogous to a point often made about rule utilitarianism: one may have a utilitarian aim in designing an overall system of punishment, say, but insist that liability to punishment within the system be based on desert, even if that fails to maximize overall utility in any given case.

(which may include office) properly oriented toward its *telos*, in terms of both the shape of the roles and the orientation of the persons playing those roles. This is what I mean by “safeguarding”: to arrange for the maintaining, so far as possible, of the orientation of those playing roles within a given political *taxis* toward the *telos* of the good of the ruled.

Republic 1 draws attention to a potential tension between the role of ruler, as there described, and any natural person who might take it up. Qua ruler, one must seek to serve the ruled. Yet the only natural person who can be trusted to take up that role is someone who does not want to rule but will take it up so as to avoid being ruled over by someone worse than themselves. The same underlying psychology that can make someone a suitable candidate to rule—subject to development by the right kind of education and experience—is what makes them naturally disposed to avoid becoming corrupted while doing so. This psychology marks out those who are philosophers by nature (as described in *Republic* 6), rooted in a hydraulic flow of their psychic energies away from physical appetites and toward the love of learning. The moral and intellectual virtues of these philosophers arise from this same root.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Plato does not appeal to these natural virtues, as I call them, as a basis for untrammelled rule. To the contrary, these very candidate philosophers, and moreover the fully cultivated philosophers who are to rule as kings, are still to be subject to various kinds of legal and procedural safeguards (imposed by the reigning philosophers on others, and by their predecessors on themselves), some of them very drastic, as explained in chapters 6 and 7.

Putting together the role and its proper incumbent leads me to a final set of terms of art, building on ones used by Plato himself. For Plato sometimes speaks of true rulers, officeholders, constitutions, cities, and citizens as the only ones worthy of their respective names, speaking thus in a strict sense (*sensu stricto* is a useful Latin tag) that is inherently evaluative. A true ruler, citizen, and so on, is one who pursues the purpose proper to that role or entity.⁴⁷ This strict

46. Lane, “Virtue.”

47. E.g., for constitutions, referring to the single *orthē politeia*, *Plt.* 293c5–6 (cf. 302b5–303c2), calling those in political power in all others “not statesmen, but experts in faction”; for constitutions and citizens, *Leg.* 4.715b5–6, arguing that certain kinds of putative constitutional regimes are not *politeiai* at all but rather *stasiōteiai* (factional regimes) (though here the contrasting reference to laws not being *orthous nomous* may mean only that these laws are not correct but not that they are not laws at all, as Jiseob Yoon has suggested to me), and *Leg.* 8.832c1–2, again renaming putative *politeiai* as *stasiōteiai* and claiming that none of them (*oudemia*) is a constitution at all; for a similar point about rulers and ruled, *Resp.* 8.552b9–11. These passages have been catalogued as making a discrete gesture of this kind by a number of scholars of Plato’s works, as by Schöpsdau (“*Nomoi*” (*Gesetze*) *Buch IV–VII* and *Buch VIII–X*, respectively, ad loc. to the *Laws* passages cited in this note). But it has not been linked by these scholars, as I link it here, to Plato’s following of existing patterns of usage distinguishing between rule and office; to his systematic analysis of office, rule, and the related idea of a constitution that could be articulated in terms of

sense contrasts with an alternative loose sense (*sensu lato*), which is merely descriptive. A ruler or citizen may be described as such in loose everyday terms even though they fail to be oriented to their proper *telos*. In the strict sense of “ruler,” the everyday political figures with whom Plato or any of his contemporaries would have been familiar—imagine a statue gallery of kings, tyrants, officeholders, and so on, an image that is explored in chapter 2—reduces to just one genuine ruler, who may in fact have never yet existed, with the existing crew being largely or entirely imitations not worthy of the name.

While I am supplying “strict” and “loose,” as well as “evaluative” and “descriptive,” as terms of art for this distinction, I also follow Plato in making use of the vocabulary of “*alēthōs*” (“truly”) or *ontōs* (“really”) or *orthos* (“correct”) or *dikaiōs* (in one of its senses, “really and truly”)⁴⁸ to mark the strict evaluative side of the distinction. This vocabulary can be used when one wishes to deny that someone or something who may descriptively seem to count as an X is in reality an X at all, because they are not capable of fulfilling the proper evaluatively laden function of their role.⁴⁹ This kind of move is not made by Plato alone. On the contrary, modern linguists refer to the “dual character”⁵⁰ of certain concepts, which can be deployed either descriptively or evaluatively, with the latter use capable of invalidating the former in certain contexts. For example, one might describe someone with a PhD in biology working in a lab as a scientist, but also say (depending on whether they were flouting norms of research) that they are not a true scientist—that is, not truly a scientist at all. Similarly, just

archai (offices) and *nomoi* (laws); or to the inventive variations on roles of rule and office that feature in different configurations in the *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*.

48. LSJ, s.v.

49. For the Platonic concept of proper function, see the *ergon* discussion of *Republic* 1 (352d9–353e6). For all the scorn often heaped by modern political theorists on Platonic naturalism, many philosophers today make ready use of the concept of a goodness-fixing kind, one such that “merely by understanding what the kind is, we can order things of that kind from best to worst,” and so are capable of “knowing a standard merely by knowing a kind.” Examples of such kinds are typically drawn from the same sets as those of Plato—namely, artifacts on the one hand and biological kinds on the other. The notion of a goodness-fixing kind was introduced by Thomson in *Normativity* (21) and called to my attention by Michael Smith.

50. On such concepts, I follow Knobe, Prasada, and Newman’s “Dual Character Concepts,” an earlier version of which was drawn to my attention by Stout in “Religion since Cicero,” with thanks to Emily Foster-Hanson for further advice. Leslie (“Hillary Clinton,” 116) also invokes this formulation of dual-character concepts in discussing those social kinds that are also labeled “normative generics” in possessing a normative sense in which they are an “exemplifier of the ideals associated with being a [member of that kind].” In earlier versions of this study, I used the label “dual character concepts” more liberally in what follows, but I have been persuaded by Ian Walling that this could be misleading insofar as Plato is not making a point about concepts as distinct from reality, and have been further helped to think about these matters by Shapiro’s “Essentialism” and by conversations with Gabriel Shapiro more generally.

as some of Plato's contemporaries could use "rule" to describe tyrants (even though Plato and others emphasized the positive evaluative nimbus of "rule"), so Plato could himself sometimes deploy the language of office and rule descriptively (referring to oligarchic officeholders, corrupt rulers, and so on).⁵¹

For Plato, however, the two alternative uses (strict and loose) are not on a par, nor is the character of a concept all that is at stake. He employs the strict sense when averring that only the evaluative use of certain ideas—such as ruler and constitution—correspond fully to the contours of reality. And while he sometimes in other contexts employs the loose sense, the implication of his work (so I argue) is that even seemingly everyday descriptive uses are ultimately illuminated by the underpinning evaluative expectations with which they cannot break altogether (as I show in part III, in chapters on *Republic* books 8 and 9).

Plato's drawing out, in this way, of the implicit evaluative presuppositions of existing models of rule and office,⁵² and his philosophical renovations of them in the shape of reconfigured roles, are not radically distinct activities (contrary to what modern-day "practice positivists" would posit).⁵³ Instead, as I reconstruct his line of thought, Plato starts from the kind of investigation

51. Cf. Aristotle in *Pol.* 1276a2–3; I owe this reference to Josiah Ober.

52. While I use the word "implicit," I find Amanda Greene's approach to reconstructing the notion of the "implicit claim" made by an institution to be less helpful, remaining as it does ambiguous between the actual claim and the philosophically reasonable claim to be made. (Compare her account of a single [and implied normatively adequate] "implicit claim" made by the institution of a library ["When Are Markets Illegitimate?," 214–15] with Applbaum's reflections [*Ethics for Adversaries*, 57] on an old-fashioned librarian whose view of the institution rejects the transition from print to electronic collections.) Instead, I follow the political theorist Michael Rosen, who has observed (in "Liberalism" [2], while explicating the thought of Michael Sandel) that "philosophies carry within themselves assumptions that are expressions of particular forms of life while institutions are animated by practices within which political theory is already implicit," adverting to Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent* (4), which defines the "public philosophy implicit in our practices and institutions." In a similar spirit, I seek in this study to put text and context on a par: treating texts as contributions to a context, even as the vocabulary involved in articulating those practices serves also to structure a given text.

53. Defending "practice positivism," Arthur Applbaum (*Ethics for Adversaries*, 51 and 48–58 more generally), argues that "the rules of a practice are simply what they are, not what they ought to be or what we want them to be"; on which view, "we cannot criticize the schmocker [a doctor who views themselves as free of some of what a philosopher might consider the best case for the 'reasonable' moral duties associated with the role of doctor] on grounds that are internal to the concept of a professional practice or role." Applbaum insists that his own view does not reduce to the laxity of allowing that "a role is . . . simply whatever role occupants happen to do"—a position that he dubs "role realism"—because he takes it that a role can indeed be betrayed, traduced, and so on by a particular occupant (58). But he asserts that the evaluative criteria for determining whether an occupant is betraying or traducing their role are to be drawn from the social facts of how any such betrayal, and the role itself, are understood, not from the philosophical reconstruction (as

that another scholar has recommended in seeking to reconstruct the social norms, including the implicit evaluative criteria that they include, obtaining at any given time.⁵⁴ In particular, Plato identifies the *telos* of the good of the ruled as being implicit in the institutions and practices defining such offices, especially in the accountability mechanisms attached to them, which could potentially fail, however, to adequately protect the realization of that good. Accountability is a particularly sore spot, since this was part of the *taxis* of office meant to orient it toward a proper *telos*, but could fail in practice (as I take the dialogues to suggest) to do so with sufficient robustness. It is the recognition of such failures that leads Plato, in his *sensu stricto* moods, to claim that existing constitutions fail to count as genuine constitutions at all.

In each of the major dialogues that are the focus of this study—*Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*—I show that Plato included variously reconfigured offices in constitutional and civic models of well-ruled cities. At the same time, he also reflected in various ways on their limits (pun intended) and vulnerabilities. Moreover, in so doing, he went a further step beyond existing models of how such Achilles' heels might be safeguarded against by considering how safeguarding might be achieved all the way down, or rather, up: not just how some further group of rulers might safeguard some subordinate officeholders, but also the further iterative question of how those superordinate rulers can be safeguarded themselves. The *Republic* in particular will contend that ruling at any level cannot be entirely unbounded or unlimited, entirely disordered, on pain of being unable to play its part in ordering others. The lack of any limits does not render rule pure; it negates rule altogether, yielding anarchy (literally, the privation of *archē*). At the same time, tyranny, which may seem to be an excrescence of epitactic power rather than its absence, turns out to count as a kind of anarchy as well. Tyrants undermine the order that is constitutive of any kind of rule.

So construed, Platonic political thought is exhausted neither by stating that the *telos* of rule must be the good of the ruled nor by identifying the knowers of that good or of the Good in itself. It is no simple epistocratic program of handing over absolute powers to such knowers.⁵⁵ On the contrary. The rule of knowledge in Plato is the *rule* of knowledge. Plato has as much to say about the nature of rule, including the value and limits of office, as he does about the nature of knowledge. And he is as interested in ways in which offices can be reconfigured as in the reconfiguration of other kinds of rule.

he terms it) of what the most “reasonable” boundaries of the role should be. In my view, Plato does exactly the opposite.

54. Rehfeld, “On Representing”: a reference I owe to Darius Weil. The specific aim of Rehfeld’s discussion is to formulate criteria for determining when someone is to be counted as “representing” someone else in a political sense.

55. I am grateful to Lisa Disch for suggesting the epistocratic framing in comments on a version of this chapter (Disch, “Comments on ‘Rule’”).

The trio of dialogues on which I focus each models such reconfiguration in different ways. Plato's *Laws* focuses on the limits (pun intended) of a *taxis* of offices; the *Statesman*, on the *taxis* of rule, with a subordinate role therein for offices—an inquiry matched by that of *Republic 1* into the *telos* of rule as the good of the ruled; and the *Republic* as a whole, on constructing an elaborate mosaic in which two kinds of rule are reconfigured and related so that the philosophers reign as kings by safeguarding those in roles junior to them, including a cohort who are unambiguously linguistically signaled to be holding offices. To be sure, whether what are linguistically signaled to be “offices” in each of these reconfigurations should count as offices against the conventional standards of his time, or ours, is a matter for each reader of Plato to judge. Some will deny that they should count, taking their divergences from narrow mechanisms of accountability to be too profound for them to do so. My point is that Plato's deployment of the vocabulary of office and rule in all three dialogues implies that readers must at least ask themselves that question, and recognize it to be a genuinely Platonic one.

It may help to place the stakes of my reading of Plato in context by situating this between two poles, a Scylla in the shape of Karl Popper and a Charybdis in the shape of Adrian Vermeule. For his part, Popper famously proposed that political theorizing must “replace the question: *Who should rule?*”—a question that he ascribed to Plato—“by the new question: *How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?*”⁵⁶ On my reading of the *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*, by contrast, Plato was far from limiting himself only to the question “*Who should rule?*” Neither did he rely upon what Popper ascribes to him as “the . . . general assumption that political power is practically unchecked, or . . . the demand that it ought to be so; together with the implication that the main question left is to get this power into the best hands.”⁵⁷ Rather, he explored various models of offices and their relationship to other kinds of rule, so as to test how their *taxis* could prevent bad or incompetent rulers from coming into positions of rule at all. To illustrate with the *Republic*: the constitutional project thereof imposes limits of various kinds (including deprivation of any accumulation of wealth and dependence on wages, both limits that are said to be imposed by law) on the powers of the rulers, including those who are to hold various offices. Even the supreme philosopher-kings and philosopher-queens, who are described as reigning within the constitution (in a verb cognate with kingship), are shown to be subject to certain limits necessary to safeguard them in their very role of guarding others (the officeholders and others subordinate to them) and so of the city as a whole.

56. Popper, *Open Society*, 1:120–21.

57. Popper, 1:121.

Whereas Popper criticized Plato for (in effect) failing to attend to a project of liberal procedural limitation of power, the legal scholar Adrian Vermeule has recently advanced a theory of what he calls “common good constitutionalism,” which puts a *telos* of the good of the ruled at the heart of a constitutional project. Vermeule’s project may seem in keeping with that of Plato, in that it is fair to say that the latter shares the view that (as Vermeule puts it), “the end of the community is ultimately to promote the good of individuals.”⁵⁸ As Vermeule attributes his own view to a broad classical tradition (drawing especially on Aristotle, Cicero, Roman law, and their later reception, while not in his book mentioning Plato), it is worth assessing the extent to which Plato’s ideas of rule and office might be similar to or different from those of Vermeule, both for its own sake and as a way of clarifying the Platonic view.

Take first the content of the *telos* of the good. Vermeule argues that a “common good” must be “unitary and indivisible,”⁵⁹ and further, that “common goods are themselves the highest good for individuals.”⁶⁰ On my reading in part IV of this study, Plato does identify certain common goods, such as the relational goods of civic freedom and friendship. These are fruits of certain kinds of *taxis* of rule, when those ruled obey the rulers willingly and more generally exhibit a cooperative disposition. And he speaks generally sometimes of the good of the city as a whole, as at the beginning of *Republic 4*, a passage discussed in chapter 6. But the primary *telos* of political rule is fostering the virtue (requiring ordered rule within the soul) of each of those who is ruled, virtue which for each of them is necessary to their individually enjoying a happy and flourishing life (a life of *eudaimonia*). Because the virtue of each embodied individual is, while not rivalrous, countably distinct from the virtue of another, the good as the *telos* of political rule must include the summation or aggregation of individual virtue.⁶¹ Yet for Vermeule, any kind of aggregative approach counts as an antonym of the true “common good.” Thus Plato’s approach would fail Vermeule’s test; conversely, Vermeule’s approach fails to be in keeping with the Platonic source of any later classical tradition.

It is also worth noting that Vermeule’s conservative approach to the content of common goods over time is very different from Plato’s willingness to countenance breaking with long-standing social and political traditions where

58. Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism*, 29.

59. Vermeule, 7. This is an introductory characterization, which is explained more fully as part of “the classical theory” as follows: “A genuinely *common* good is a good that is unitary . . . and capable of being shared without being diminished. Thus it is inherently non-aggregative” (28).

60. Vermeule, 29.

61. Vermeule, 26. It must be noted, however, that while Platonic virtues can be both separated and summed up across individuals, they are not to be reduced to “the sum of separate private utilities,” which is specifically what Vermeule decries under the heading of “aggregation.”

philosophical insight can justify doing so. Consider, for example, the arguments in the *Republic* for qualified women to serve as rulers, and likewise Socrates's remark therein about a change in Greek male customs of exercising (from clothed to unclothed): "what reason had proved best lost its absurdity to the eye."⁶² This is Plato summing up the process of bootstrapping changes in the political imagination, a process that Plato deploys in ways that were far more challenging to many practices of his own time than Vermeule's approach for its part generally countenances.

What of the *taxis* of the Platonic idea of rule, as compared with the *taxis* of Vermeule's common good constitutionalism? Again, there is an important shared starting point: both reject what Vermeule calls "ruling for private benefit."⁶³ But whereas Vermeule seeks to combat this by asserting a strong substantive account of the common good, I have argued that Plato does not simply fall back on his own metaphysics to make this point, but rather reconfigures the role of the ruler as being to serve the good of the ruled. For Plato, it is the role of ruling itself that puts constraints on the commonness of the good that ruling is to serve in its direct aims.

Moreover, Plato takes the risk of abuse of power far more seriously than Vermeule (and likewise more seriously than Popper allowed him to have done). Acknowledging that allegations of "abuse of power" are "a stock concern about political rule, under robust authority directed to the common good," Vermeule sketches two brief lines of response. He observes, first, that "the bad is privative and thus defined by the good"; second, that "the risks of abuse of power created by state organs" can overlook "the risks of abuse of power that public authorities prevent through vigorous government."⁶⁴ Neither of these responses, nor indeed Vermeule's downplaying of the concern altogether, is especially Platonic.

Plato's response to the risk of abuse of power explicitly attends to the nature, education, and selection of the persons who will hold constitutional roles of rule, simultaneously with applying safeguards of multiple kinds (including legal ones) to the ruling done by such persons.⁶⁵ To be sure, as Vermeule says of what he calls the classical tradition, the Platonic idea of rule too must finally rest "on the overarching principle of *bona fides* [good faith]," such that "where such good faith is systematically absent, the law may misfire."⁶⁶

62. *Resp.* 5.452d5–7, trans. Lee, as quoted in my *Eco-Republic* (185), from which I adapt part of this paragraph.

63. Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism*, 26, in context of 26–27.

64. Vermeule, 49 (first pair of quotations), 50 (second pair).

65. It is true that Plato does not concern himself with seeking to prevent risks of abuse of power by those who are not political rulers, even when those risks are obvious to modern eyes—as in the risks of abuse of power by slaveholders over their slaves. I confront this issue again in chapter 10.

66. Vermeule, 70.

Yet this is true of any form of rule, including liberal institutions as well. Moreover, Plato is far more concerned to find ways in which good faith can be both cultivated and safeguarded in those filling the roles of different kinds of rulers than Vermeule shows himself to be. Systematic explorations of the relationship between those roles and the natural persons who serve them, and also among those roles as one can be deployed to safeguard another, shows Plato to have put prevention of corruption of the rulers and exploitation of the ruled at the very heart of his politics (as opposed to relegating it to a briefly rehearsed objection, as does Vermeule).

Pace Popper and Vermeule alike, a fundamental concern of Platonic political thought is how to prevent the abuse of power by political rulers, including explorations of various models of the kind of *taxis* of rule and office that could successfully prevent this: partly by precluding bad rulers from coming into those roles at all, but also by safeguarding the orientation to the good as the *telos* of those who hold them. At a deeper level, Plato recognizes that any procedurally delineated political role risks being corrupted, if the person installed in that role (be it office or another kind of rule) is either by nature incapable or unwilling to carry it out for the good of the ruled, or is allowed owing to lack of limits and safeguards to exploit the ruled rather than serve them. This recognition has as much to say to radical critiques of legalism and proceduralism (call it liberalism if you wish) as it does to conservative ones. Plato has no greater elective affinity with conservative than with radical politics; there are elements in his thought that can speak to both.⁶⁷

Time to confront some objections. First, the tone and approach of this study will be rebarbative in several ways to a number of scholars whose rival approaches I very much respect. I unabashedly attribute views to “Plato” despite the fact that he is not writing assertorically in his own voice, but rather writing different dialogues with different characters. I have adopted the method of treating some of these characters (in particular, in the three dialogues on which I focus, Socrates, the Eleatic Visitor, and the Athenian Visitor) as avatars of Plato, and in taking these three dialogues to be broadly complementary in the architecture of their treatment of the topics that interest me here (rule and office), even though they develop diverse models of how those roles might be organized (so taking up what one may call a complementarist position on the relationship among these dialogues, in between the traditional alternatives of unitarianism and developmentalism).⁶⁸ And I take the cities founded “in speech” in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, together with the city sketched briefly at the end of the *Statesman*, to be in their different ways propounded as models of

67. The reception history of Platonic political thought bears this out, as I argued in a selective survey in *Plato's Progeny*.

68. These interpretative stances involving avatars and complementarity are elaborated in chapter 2.

good cities (with the city of the *Laws* avowedly “second-best”), rather than as antitypes or critiques.⁶⁹ All these views will be controversial, and are undoubtedly in certain respects flat-footed. My defense is that it is impossible to do justice to the vast subtleties of these three Platonic dialogues (let alone all others) in a single study. By tracing the guiding thread of rule and office among them, I hope to derive insights that are relevant even to those starting from different assumptions, using different methods, or concerned with different questions.

Finally, committed democrats of many stripes will be normatively unsatisfied, indeed profoundly disturbed, by the picture of rule and office that emerges in Plato, and most intensively in the *Republic*, with its functional separation of roles between rulers and ruled that the rulers at any given time maintain by supervising the selection of their own successors. Democrats will object that it is impossible for a *taxis* of rule to achieve the postulated *telos* of the good of the ruled so long as that *taxis* does not include the participation of the ruled themselves. Such participation by the ruled is necessary, on this objection, both to determine the precise content of their own good and to contribute to constituting it in and through their own active engagement in politics. That might include potentially serving as rulers themselves, but in any case it must include being able to hold rulers accountable. For, on this line of objection, in dispensing with accountability mechanisms that are controlled by the ruled themselves, the very function of accountability is rendered moot.⁷⁰ The function of accountability simply cannot (they would contend) be achieved through any of the reconfigured institutional models that I take Plato to be exploring (at least, not through those of the *Republic* and *Statesman*; scholars are more divided on how to assess the democratic credentials of the *Laws*).⁷¹

In response, let me clarify that my aim in this study is not to endorse the value of the constitutional project outlined by Plato in the *Republic* or in any other dialogue, nor to defend its adequacy in seeking to address the challenge of how to keep a political order oriented toward the good of the ruled. It is, however, to insist that Plato recognized that challenge as one inhering in any kind of political constitution, including the proceduralist and institutionalist organization of rule through offices, which is broadly common to liberal democratic constitutions today. Those challenges are, for any kind of political constitution, ones to which Plato was not oblivious, any more than democrats today can afford to be. Consider the predicament of liberal democratic constitutions when those at the apex of the judicial order refuse to recuse themselves in

69. Here I am especially conscious of diverging from the erudite and challenging reading of the *Republic* offered by Frank in *Poetic Justice*.

70. This challenge has been pressed on me by a number of colleagues, among whom I am especially grateful to Jill Frank (“Comments on ‘Rule’”) for framing it in ways that I seek to capture here.

71. For a defense of the democratic nature of the constitutional project of the *Laws*, see Bobonich’s *Plato’s Utopia Recast*.

cases of conflict of interest, which Plato would consider a sign of rule oriented to the good of those in judicial office rather than the good of the ruled; when those at the apex of the executive branch refuse to uphold the fundamental constitutional duties of their office, including taking care that the laws be faithfully executed; when those at the apex of the legislative branch support the violation of the prescribed electoral procedures on which the constitution depends. It is far from clear that the existing remedies of accountability in liberal democratic constitutions today are capable of resolving that predicament.

Indeed, Plato recognizes the ways in which the procedures of office can be corrupted from within, if and when those seeking and holding them do so in a spirit of zero-sum rivalry rather than being animated for the good of those whom they rule. As I have asserted much about Plato in this overview while leaving its substantiation to subsequent chapters, let me introduce here a remarkable passage in book 4 of the *Laws* in order to give the flavor of the Platonic concern with such institutional corruption caused by the breakdown of the orientation of officeholders toward the *telos* of the good of the ruled. In that passage, the Athenian Visitor demonstrates that offices cannot fulfill the constitutional purpose that they are institutionally designed to achieve if their denizens themselves flout that very purpose. Moreover, he connects such potential abuse of office by its holders to their mistaken and dangerous views of the nature and role of law, and in so doing clarifies the interweaving of rule, office, and law in Plato's ideas of the political.

The Athenian Visitor makes his point by imagining a group (whom I shall call the "disputants") who object to the account of the purpose of office and the broader genus of rule that he has been laying out. In disputing the claim that one could aim at good laws simpliciter, as opposed to good laws relative to the interest of a certain party, these imagined figures bring a veiled confrontation with the position defended by Thrasymachus in the *Republic* into the heart of the *Laws*. This moment in the latter dialogue is accordingly important for the complementary reading of these two dialogues (together with the *Statesman*) that the present work undertakes.

The Athenian describes the position of the disputants by attributing to them use of several words that significantly mark Thrasymachus's position in the *Republic* as well.⁷² The disputants (it is claimed) hold that laws are relative to a given kind of *politeia* (4.714b3–5). Accordingly, they reject any assumption that the purpose of law should be "attaining complete virtue" (the *telos* of legislation that had been proposed by the Athenian himself in book 1). Instead, the disputants insist that the laws should be entirely relativized to the advantage of the *politeia*, a view that in context turns out to be operationalized in terms

72. Compare Thrasymachus's language in *Republic* 1.338d9–e3 and passim in book 1 of that dialogue.

(continued...)

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