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ILLUSORY DEMOCRACY: A Platonic Examination of Perception, Opinion, and Neoliberalism

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ILLUSORY DEMOCRACY:
A PLATONIC EXAMINATION OF PERCEPTION, OPINION, AND NEOLIBERALISM

A thesis presented

by

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to

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CHAPTER 1

I. “Democracy” and America

The term “democracy” is a staple in the vocabulary of modern men and women around the world. In many countries, all around the globe, “democracy” is the defining feature of society. In many ways, it seems that “democracy” is representative of many features of government, while simultaneously embodying the character of modern society. For hundreds of millions of people around the world, “democracy” is a definite concept; eternal, strong, permanent, constant. “Democracy,” in modern society, is often just accepted simply as the ultimate political conception, never to be challenged for its supremacy. This dogmatic and steadfast loyalty to democracy, to which most modern citizens admit, is admirable; however it may ultimately lead to the transformation of democracy, as modern society now knows it.

The term “democracy” is not as straightforward as most individuals commonly believe or perceive. To the contrary, democracy is an incredibly ambiguous and far-reaching concept. The term democracy first appeared, thousands of years ago, in ancient Greek literature, philosophy and society. Democracy, first embodied in ancient Athens, has changed and evolved distinctly over time. Almost any modern political theorist or scholar would admit that democracy is among, if not the single, “most contested and promiscuous term(s) in our modern political vocabulary” (Brown 2015, 19). Democracy, in modern society, is representative of a wide range of differing political practices and institutions.

“In the popular imagery, ‘democracy’ stands for everything from free elections to free markets, from protests against dictators to law and order, from the centrality of rights to the stability of states, from the voice of the assembled multitude to the protection of individuality and the wrong of dicta imposed by crowds... Democracy comes in so many varieties – social, liberal, radical, republican, representative, authoritarian, participatory, deliberative, plebiscite” (Brown 2015, 19).

It is obvious that the problem of clearly or definitively defining the concept of democracy, within modern society, is incredibly difficult. The list of modern government practices and institutions that can be deemed to be “democratic” is exceedingly long, diverse and sometimes at odds. While the concept of “democracy” may seem somewhat ambiguous in modern society, there are several “democratic” examples around the world that are often understood to be universal models for “democracy”.

The United States of America is perhaps the first, and most, universally accepted “democracy” in modern society. The United States is one of the most powerful and influential countries in the world, and for most people, it remains a shining beacon that embodies and represents the “democratic” form of government. The forefathers of the United States aimed to create a society based on democratic ideals and principles, a society “where all men are created equal” (U.S. 1776). Since 1776, and the creation of the United States Constitution, America has existed as a functioning and thriving “democratic” society. Under this “democratic” government, America has risen to the level of world power. The American government and its leaders, over the last several decades, have used this presence on the world stage to protect and grow the concept of “democracy” globally. American leaders have used the concept of “democracy” as a

driving force, or an end goal, in their continual engagement in the global community and recurrent efforts to shape international politics.

“After all, the United States was the first modern democratic society, and has been a model for others ever since. And in many dimensions crucial for authentic democracy – protection of freedom of speech, for example – it has become a leader among the societies of the world” (Chomsky 2006, 205).

For American citizens, “democracy” is often understood to be inherently protected and present within American society. It is often believed to be intrinsic or fundamental to American society and success. Most Americans believe that “democratic” ideals continually drive American policy and work to protect American values and citizens. It is obvious that, at least, most Americans understand and maintain that the United States government is a functioning “democracy.” This would mean that, at its bare minimum, the government of the United States of America is, “a political form in which the whole of the people rule the polity and hence themselves... that the people authorize their own laws and major political decisions, whether directly or through elected representatives, and also that they share modestly in other, nonlegal powers governing their lives” (Brown 2015, 178). It seems, at face value, this assertion remains true for the American political system. Political representatives, media outlets, and some political theories continue to defend this assertion, in some cases vehemently, suggesting that democracy, most readily embodied by America, is “the crown jewel of the West” (Brown 2015, 19).

However, the nature of this thesis goes beyond the accepted understanding of American democracy. This thesis examines an intricate and threatening problem to the

concept of “democracy” as most Americans understand it, the problem of “Illusory Democracy.” This problem is fundamentally rooted in the difference between perception and reality, or opinion and knowledge, of a given “democratic” society of government.

In order to more accurately define the problem of Illusory Democracy, I turn to one of the most influential living authors, Noam Chomsky. Chomsky often discusses and acknowledges the distinction between the “dictionary” definitions and “real world” definitions of political, social, and economic terms or concepts. Chomsky’s “dictionary” definition of “democracy” mirrors, in many respects, the definition as presented by Brown and other modern theorists; he paraphrases it as,

“...having lots of different dimensions, but roughly speaking, a society is democratic to the extent that people in it have meaningful opportunities to take part in the formation of public policy. There are different ways in which that can be true, but insofar as it’s true, the society is democratic” (Chomsky 2011, 136).

However, Chomsky also presents his interpretation of the “real world” definition of “democracy.” “The US seeks to create a form of top-down democracy that leaves traditional power structures and their allies – in effective control... Any form that undermines their power is as intolerable as ever” (Chomsky 2011, 137). The fact that a difference exists between these two definitions is important; far too often the “dictionary” definition of democracy is perceived to be the equivalent to the “real world” definition. Chomsky sums up this problem, “A society can have the formal trappings of democracy and not be democratic at all. The Soviet Union, for example, had elections” (2011, 136). Unnervingly, Chomsky suggests this may be as true of modern America as it was for the Soviet Union. Most American citizens blindly accept the “reality” of a democratic

America. The American culture is often characterized by a steadfast, perhaps dogmatic, acceptance of the “reality” that the United States of America is, at his heart, a true, strong, and thriving “democracy.”

Understanding the concept of “democracy” in modern America is dependent upon an understanding of the distinction between “reality” and “perception.” An understanding that what one understands to be “true” is never completely “true.” For, even our American “truths,” like the acceptance of, personal liberty or majority rule, are fundamentally based in “opinion.”

The purpose of this thesis is to more accurately understand the problem of Illusory Democracy in modern America. This thesis shows how American society should understand Illusory Democracy, as well as, how American society should respond to this problem. To the surprise of most modern political theorists, I argue the answer to this problem exists within the writings of a seemingly vehement democratic enemy. Plato, often understood in modern society as an opponent of “democracy,” offers modern society a unique, yet, effective way of understanding and addressing the problem of Illusory Democracy. Plato’s understanding of philosophy, and in turn “opinion,” provides modern, “democratic”, American society with the necessary tools with which they can fix this incredibly dangerous problem.

II. Illusory Democracy: Perception v. Reality

Illusory Democracy, as stated last section, is founded in the acknowledgement of the differences between “perception” and “reality”. I understand that Chomsky’s “dictionary” definition of “democracy” is often misunderstood, by the general American public, as the “real world” definition of democracy. This translates to an understanding that the “perception,” within the general American public, is of a “democratic” American government. This implies that the American people “perceive” the existence of “meaningful opportunity” to significantly influence American government policy.

However, for Chomsky the “perception” of a “democratic” American government is greatly at odds with its “reality.” The American political system, from an objective view, is “democratic” only in appearance. In reality, the fundamental aspects of a truly “democratic” state are not present in modern America. The American general public does not have “meaningful opportunity” to affect change in American public policy. Chomsky explains this briefly, “Over long periods of time, the involvement of the public in planning or implementation of public policy has been quite marginal” (2011, 137). The American government and its institutions have, in recent years, increased, “the sharp divide between public opinion and public policy” (Chomsky 2006, 235). Chomsky uses the phrase, “democratic deficit,” to explain this phenomenon within a state.

The conclusion, that the American political system in reality exhibits a “democratic deficit,” is in direct opposition to popular opinion. It also seems, artificially, to be unsubstantiated. However, after understanding the reality, that American public

policy is markedly detached from public or popular opinion, this previous conclusion seems increasingly plausible. Recent political studies, like the 2014 study by Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, draw alarming conclusions. This study, and others like it, supports the various theoretical arguments claiming the “anti-democratic” nature of the American political system. Gilens and Page pessimistically conclude, “The preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy” (2014). Beneath the perception of a “democratic” American government is a harsh and chilling reality. While the vast majority of American citizens possess no political influence whatsoever, a very small percentage of American citizens possess a great deal of power and influence. Chomsky, Gilens and Page, and other scholars, point to a reality where the current political system favors the opinion of a “few,” and not the “many” or the general public, as is usually perceived.

As previously stated, a democracy is generally considered to be the rule of the “people” or the general public, implying that the general public has meaningful influence on public policy. However, recent statistical evidence has confirmed, in part, theoretical arguments that understand the American government to be representative of the views of only a small group of citizens. Generally, a government that represents the interests of a small group, instead of the general public, is considered an “oligarchy.” The “dictionary” definition of an “oligarchy” reads similarly, “a country, business, institution, etc., that is controlled by a small group of people” (Merriam-Webster).

The next logical question is, if the American political system resembles an “oligarchy,” then who are the few that run the government? Gilens and Page conclude ultimately that, “analysis indicated that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence” (2014). So it seems that the government and its policies are influenced disproportionately more by, “economic elites,” or groups that represent private business or commercial interests, than the “average” American citizen. Some theorists have long understood the influence of the economic elite and businesses, “This is a business run society. The political parties have reflected business interests for a long time... To participate in the political arena, you must have enough resources and private power” (Chomsky 2011, 137). It is now clear that the oligarchical nature of the American political system is based in monetary or financial influence, leading to the conclusion that America represents a “financial oligarchy (Gilens).” Wendy Brown, in her recent 2015 book, calls the American government a “Plutocracy,” defined simply as, the rule of the rich (17). Brown’s conclusion equates closely with this thesis’ definition of the modern American political system.

The illusion, appearance, or perception of “American democracy” helps to mask the reality that exists within the modern system. The degradation of democracy and democratic institutions within America has been a long and continual process; it is not something that has occurred overnight. This slow process, towards an American Financial Oligarchy, has been driven in large part by a concept called Neoliberalism.

Neoliberal theory has played a defining role in shaping the modern, global political and social atmospheres. I argue, with the help of Plato, that Neoliberalism has inherently worked to, over the last several decades, hollow out formal democratic institutions, ultimately leading to the problem of Illusory Democracy. In Chapter 3, I will examine the role that Neoliberalism has playing in creating illusory democratic tendencies; providing Plato's relevant arguments in accordance with specific modern examples of Neoliberal theory.

Ultimately, understanding Illusory Democracy is dependent on a great deal of previous conclusions. It is necessary to acknowledge the existence of, and understand the importance of, the distinction between reality and perception in American politics. It is also necessary to understand how modern concepts, like Neoliberalism, play defining roles in the creation of that distinction. However, obtaining meaningful conclusion on the problem of modern Illusory Democracy depends upon the nature of modern politics and philosophy. The last section in this chapter, presents the approach I took to reexamine modern political and philosophic theories and institutions.

III. Strauss to Plato: Addressing Illusory Democracy

If we are seeking to examine, address and solve the problem of Illusory Democracy, we must reevaluate the modern political institutions in place. For help with this inherently difficult task I turn to 20th century writer and theorist, Leo Strauss. Strauss is a well-known German American philosopher, widely recognized for his ability to understand and traverse the difference between classical and modern philosophy. Strauss

explains a unique understanding of reexamination in regard to modern philosophies and principles, “The method of reexamination is predetermined by the nature of the modern principles. They were evolved in opposition to, and by way of transformation of the principles of classical philosophy” (1946, 327). For Strauss, reexamining modern political philosophy, and its institutions, begins by understanding that modern political philosophy was founded, fundamentally, in response and opposition to many classical philosophic theories. Strauss asserts that an accurate reexamination of modern institutions and practices is based on an understanding of their intimate connection to classical philosophy. However, he also points to the requirement that, the examination of classical philosophy, by modern theorists, must also be impartial.

Strauss’ understanding of modern philosophy, as a free and impartial reexamination of classical philosophy, embodies the approach that Strauss suggests modern philosophy should be subject to, “Thus the only answer to the attack on modern principles which is legitimate on the basis of those principles themselves is their free and impartial reexamination” (Strauss 1946, 327). In this passage Strauss is pointing to the necessity, of a modern theorist, to remove oneself from their inherent connection and affinity to modern principles. This free and impartial examination, void of biased or partiality, is the necessary manner in which I approach all principles and concepts in this thesis, for this is the only way to accurately evaluate both classic and modern problems.

Following Strauss’ lead, I examine, assess, and evaluate modern institutions through the lens of classical philosophy. However, this thesis now turns to an unlikely

ally of democracy for interpretation; a philosopher far removed from the American political system, who lived and wrote during one of history's most storied democracies... Plato is one of the most significant and influential thinkers in human history. The ancient Greek thinker and mathematician, who lived during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, is one of the defining and central figures of classical philosophy. Plato spent most of his life in the ancient Greek city of Athens during the Classical Period in Greek history. Athens was the capital of ancient Greece and represented history's first documented "democracy." In modern political discourse, Plato is often understood to be harshly critical of democracy. However, the range of interpretation regarding Plato's true intention and teaching is incredibly broad, leading to much philosophic debate.

By far, the most important Platonic text is his *Republic*. The *Republic* is one of the most widely recognized texts ever written, and even in modernity the *Republic* maintains itself as one of the most relevant texts in both political and philosophic theory. The *Republic*, at its core, is an examination of the question, "what is justice?" However, the *Republic* comments on far more than just the nature of justice. It addresses a wide array of political and philosophic topics, both explicitly and implicitly. The following chapter will be a close examination of the work of Plato and his *Republic*. Through a thorough and comprehensive "literary" approach to reading the *Republic*, as presented by Strauss, I gain a more clear understanding of Plato's classical conceptions of philosophy, politics, society, government, etc.

Led by Strauss, to Plato, I work with dedication and passion to show continuous effort in observing the classical “signposts” within the Republic that can guide the modern reader. I exhibit Strauss’ propensity to remove myself from modern principles, separating myself from the practices of most modern American citizens who cling to inflexible, institutionalized defenses of the American political system. Ultimately, after an exact examination and interpretation of Plato’s classical philosophy, I extrapolate a more accurate understanding of Plato’s teaching and apply it to the modern problem of Illusory Democracy in the United States of America.

CHAPTER 2

I. A Classical Approach to Modern Problems

Strauss understands that most of modern philosophy has been shaped by countless past philosophers and thinkers. Modern philosophers have, through the engagement with philosophic ideas from all time periods, created new and distinct philosophic theories and principles. For Strauss, a defining factor in the identification and classification of theories as part of “modern philosophy,” is a fundamental disagreement with classical philosophic theories. “A free examination of modern principles is necessarily based on their conscientious confrontation with those of classical philosophy” (Strauss 1946, 328). Strauss argues that people, who desire to examine modern political institutions, must necessarily examine the principles of their opposing position, most notably classical philosophy. Strauss even stresses the importance of the modern philosophers’ willingness to immerse him or herself completely in the classical context in which classical philosophy was created, “he must cease to take his bearings by the modern signposts with which he has grown familiar since his early childhood; he must learn to take his bearings by the signposts that guided the classical philosophers” (Strauss 1946, 331). Strauss clearly explains this conclusion,

“Adherents of the modern principles who lack the ability to take critical distance from the modern principles, to look at those principles not from their habitual point of view but from the point of view of their opponents, have already admitted defeat” (Strauss 1946, 327).

Strauss is pointing to the natural inclination of modern readers to inflexibly accept modern principles, and to the inherent misunderstanding and misinterpretation that can be

associated with this dogmatism. Any modern reader's tendency to defend or accept a modern position as "true," will inherently lead to an inaccurate or unbiased reexamination of opposing classical positions. Strauss argues that in any confrontation, debate, or examination, "the very resolution to defend a position" implicates inaccuracy (1946, 327). Strauss continues on to say, "Defensibility is not truth. The world abounds with defensible positions that are irreconcilable with one another" (1946, 327). Strauss rejects individuals who defend positions, it is clear that almost all political or philosophic arguments are defensible to some degree. Individuals that cling to the supremacy of modern opinions and concepts will never be able to accurately interpret classical philosophy.

"Only if the study of classical philosophy were accompanied by constant and relentless reflection on the modern principles, and hence by liberation from the naïve acceptance of those principles, could there be any prospect of an adequate understanding of classical philosophy by modern men" (1946, 328).

The unwillingness to question modern concepts or ideas, because of a dogmatic acceptance of the inherent supremacy of modern theory over classical, is fundamentally opposed to the goal of an accurate interpretation of classical texts like the *Republic*. This leads to inaccurate and unbiased interpretations of classical texts, ultimately failing to produce any meaningful conclusions in regard to the solution of modern problems.

Strauss is imploring modern philosophers and readers to be open minded in regard to the merit of classical principles. Strauss continues on to say, "But one cannot do this if one is prepared to consider the possibility that its teachings are simply not true, or that it is decisively superior to modern philosophy" (1946, 331). Unfortunately, in modern

society, suggesting a “reexamination” of the American political system, or questioning the nature and function of democracy itself, can be seen as Anti-American, “communist,” or even treasonous. This seemingly inherent connection in modern American thought, between the desire of reexamination or reform of the American government and the promotion of anti-American or Anti-democratic ideas, must eventually break down for progress to occur in America. With this in mind, I turn to Plato.

II. Plato and His *Republic*

Throughout the course of his life Plato wrote over 30 texts. These texts, mostly referred to as dialogues because of their unique literary style, are aptly dubbed the Platonic dialogues (sometimes Socratic dialogues). Plato is well known for this distinctly personal style, which he uses in almost all of his texts. The Platonic dialogues are written in the form of a dialogue between two or more characters. However, Plato, himself, never engages or participates in any of the dialogues that he authored. Instead, Plato uses his well-known friend and mentor, Socrates, as his primary character throughout the dialogues.

The principle consequence of Plato’s decision, to employ this dialogic style in his writings, is the inherent challenge that comes with analyzing and interpreting the text. Plato is removed from his writing since he never personally speaks, because of this, a degree of ambiguity begins to enter into the text. The reader never receives a first-hand account of Plato’s arguments; instead, the reader is forced to discern the arguments of Plato from the speech and discussion of Socrates and other characters. This style of

writing forces the reader to infer as to Plato's true opinion or intention, because Plato never explicitly asserts anything. The absence of Plato in his own writings, along with his unwillingness to declare obvious opinion or teaching, has led to much debate and contention among readers. The frustration of many readers is summed up by Strauss himself, "Let us admit that the Platonic dialogue is an enigma – something perplexing and to be wondered at. The Platonic dialogue is one big question mark" (1964, 55). The uncertainty and indistinctness that surrounds the Platonic dialogues is increased by Plato's propensity to accurately recreate, throughout his texts, the distinct philosophic method of Socrates.

Plato's main character, Socrates, is considered to be one of the founders of philosophic thought. Socrates was not just Plato's main character; he was Plato's teacher, mentor and friend. A classical Greek philosopher of immeasurable significance, much of modern philosophy can trace its history, in some way, to Socrates. However, while much of philosophy is indebted to Socrates, he never wrote or authored a single text. Any knowledge that modern philosophy has of Socrates is second-hand, provided in stories by Plato, Aristophanes, Aristotle, among others. As opposed to authoring philosophic texts, as has become accustomed in modern society, Socrates' main method of philosophic contribution was discussion and oral engagement with other members of his community in ancient Athens. Socrates relied heavily on the art of dialectic engagement to convey his philosophic teachings. This method of discussion and debate is now called the Socratic method in honor of the man, who originated and perfected it. The Socratic method is a form of philosophic dialogue and investigation. Socrates was notorious for

asking questions to others in an attempt to establish the true opinions and intellect of individuals. Socrates, in Plato's texts, shows an aptitude for proving contradictions and false logic in other's arguments, through a line of questioning. These questions, when answered by Socrates' companion, shed light on the true nature of the topic of discussion by the process of elimination of unsatisfactory responses.

In this way, we begin to understand why readers of the Platonic dialogue often characterize Socrates as ironic. Strauss summarizes the opinion of another Platonic character in regards to the nature of Socrates, "He is sure that Socrates is ironic, *i.e.*, a dissembler, a man who pretends to be ignorant while in fact he knows things very well; far from being ignorant and innocent he is clever and tricky" (1964, 77). This claim, of Socrates as "ignorant," speaks to the what modernity now calls "Socratic skepticism." In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates famously proclaims, "I know that I know nothing" (*Apology*). Defined more simply as, "knowledge of one's own ignorance" (Smith 2006, 101), this doctrine is less representative of Socrates' actual intelligence and more representative of his philosophic understanding. This philosophic understanding is based fundamentally on the concept that it is impossible to know anything beyond all certainty, and in this way, knowledge is incomplete. The Socratic method and skepticism, perfected by Socrates throughout Athens and incorporated in to the texts of Plato, offer a unique way of engaging in a problem or debate, something that will be returned to later in Chapter 4.

Combining the character of Socrates, who Strauss calls, "a master of irony" (1964, 50), with the artistic, literary, and philosophic talents of Plato, creates an

extremely ambiguous, imprecise, and often-contradictory text. This combination of two classical philosophic giants has created texts that are, seemingly loaded with meaning and intention, yet, are extremely difficult to interpret and analyze. One important fact to consider is the role that Socrates played in defining Plato's philosophy. The *Republic* is considered to be a "Middle" dialogue, the second of three widely-agreed upon groups of Platonic texts, characterized by Plato's nearly complete willingness to stray away from Socrates' explicit teachings, towards establishing a personal philosophic presence.

Although Socrates remains the main character in the *Republic*, this dialogue seems to be developed, planned, and structured, completely by Plato. However, this does not necessarily lessen Socrates' literary meaning; Socrates still remains an incredibly relevant part of understanding Plato and his *Republic*. In fact, Socrates is one of the defining aspects of the *Republic*, "Strauss' Plato shows us then, not only through words, but through the deeds of Socrates what philosophy is and what the obstacles are to its recovery" (Smith 2006, 103). Socrates does not simply tell the reader what justice is, what philosophy is, or the nature of the good life; instead, through his practices and actions, as created by Plato's literary intention, he teaches the reader how to answer these questions for themselves, *i.e.*, how to practice philosophy. In this way, it seems that Plato uses the methods of Socrates, in accordance with his personal writing style, to promote something beyond, "a doctrine or set of doctrines" (Smith 2006, 103). This teaching, beyond a set of guidelines, does not appear to be possible if presented in a one-sided dissertation, speech, or text. In this way, understanding Plato's literary style, and its

tendency to promote personal philosophic growth, becomes paramount in the journey towards ultimate Platonic understanding.

Leo Strauss wrote, in depth, on the topic of Plato's literary artistry, which he asserts is most dramatically exemplified in Plato's most meaningful and influential text, the *Republic*. Strauss understands the *Republic*, "in which Plato treated this subject [Plato's literary method] more comprehensively than anywhere," (1946, 361) as the exemplar of Plato's efforts at perfecting his literary method and style. The *Republic*, due in large part to Plato's literary style, is often considered to be an "aporetic" text, meaning that the main question or discussion is never entirely answered or completed. This style of text often leads to philosophic debate and contention. The extensive and "aporetic" natures of the *Republic* have allowed most significant modern philosophers and writers to respond or contest the *Republic* in one way or another.

Countless famous thinkers and writers, from all time periods, have expressed a myriad of differing interpretations of the *Republic*, putting Plato in the middle of much philosophic debate. These varying interpretations stretch across a broad spectrum and are contextually based around key aspects and passages of the *Republic*; from the friendly and enlightened interpretation of Plato offered by Strauss, to the interpretation and condemnation of Plato by Karl Popper. The more traditional and widely accepted interpretation of Plato and his *Republic*, in modern philosophy, aligns more closely with Popper. Authors like Myles Burnyeat, Hannah Arendt, and Machiavelli argue against Plato either explicitly or implicitly. These authors rely on a number of "tyrannical" and

“anti-democratic” anecdotes from the *Republic*; most frequently referencing Socrates’ explanation of the utopian-style “just” city, or his seemingly explicit critiques of democracy.

“His harsh proposals for a closed caste system and for the censorship of poetry and literature, his radical measures to eliminate the family and private property, and his investiture of political authority in an all-wise and all-powerful philosopher-king must strike even a sympathetic reader as radically opposed to liberal beliefs in freedom of thought and expression” (Smith 2006, 87).

The differences in interpretation are most commonly based on fundamental differences in the readers’ method and approach to reading the *Republic*. The previously outlined, predominant, interpretation of Plato is usually dependent upon the premise that, the words of the dialogue within the *Republic* represent accurately, completely, and definitively, the personal opinions and philosophies of Plato. This means that these thinkers are interpreting the *Republic* and its text in a “literal” sense, proceeding under the assumption that the words and passages, alone, represent the full breadth of Plato’s teachings. Strauss, is perhaps the foremost opponent of this concrete or “literal” approach to Platonic interpretation, but a great deal of philosophers acknowledge the seemingly undeniable existence of underlying intention and meaning within the lines of the *Republic*. Strauss believes that, in order to accurately understand Platonic dialogues, one must look past the artificial surface and text. Strauss points to the necessity for interpreting “literary” clues, provided by Plato, in accurately understanding Plato’s elusive teaching. The *Republic*, which Strauss claims is the Platonic dialogue in which Plato most strongly employs his “literary” genius, offers Strauss the opportunity to construct and perfect his own “literary” method, a method for reading Plato, as Plato, himself, intended.

III. Strauss' "Literary" Approach

Strauss was perhaps one of the most knowledgeable men in history in regards to the Platonic dialogues. His unique and innovative interpretation of the *Republic* and other Platonic dialogues relies heavily on the quotation, "One cannot understand Plato's teaching as he meant it if one does not know what the Platonic dialogue is" (Strauss 1964, 52). For Strauss, the necessity to understand the Platonic dialogue before attempting to understand the teachings is due to Plato's authorial anonymity, "the fact that Plato is the author of everything we read but is nowhere present in any of his dialogues. Until we figure out the proper relationship between author and text, every other question must be put on hold" (Smith 2006, 90). This is vital to understanding Strauss' argument for his "literary" interpretation of the *Republic*. Strauss suggests that in order to accurately understand the relationship between author and text, the reader must, "understand the thought, say, of Plato exactly as Plato understood it himself, or to interpret Plato's statements with a view to the center of reference not of modern thought but of his own thought" (1946, 330). Examining the text through the same classical lens as Plato wrote is the basic theoretical underpinning for Strauss' "literary" approach to reading the Platonic dialogues.

Strauss' "literary" approach to reading and interpreting the *Republic* depends upon the reader's ability to understand the text in the same context as Plato thought of it. This, ultimately, is achieved by a careful and thorough reading. This process, perfected by Strauss, is named "Straussian hermeneutics" by Steven Smith, in his book *Reading Leo Strauss*. This unique method of textual research is intensive and demanding. It

requires an acceptance that, before the reader can attempt to accurately read and interpret the text of the *Republic*, and well before the reader comes close to discovering Plato's true teachings, the reader must understand the nature of the text. Strauss admits to the unpopular conclusion that, "One must postpone one's concern with the most serious questions (the philosophic questions) in order to become engrossed in the study of a merely literary question" (1964, 52). The "literary" question, for Strauss, is answered by gaining a greater understanding of contextual clues and signs that point towards a truer interpretation of the latent meanings of Plato.

The common and simplified "literal" approach to reading can lead to interpretations of the text within *Republic* that are incomplete, inaccurate, and in contrast to Plato's true teaching, "For presenting his teaching Plato uses not merely the 'content' of his works but also their 'form'" (Strauss 1946, 352). Strauss believes strongly in the necessity of interpreting and analyzing the *Republic* as a "whole".

"One cannot separate the understanding of Plato's teaching from the understanding of the form in which it is presented. One must pay as much attention to the How as to the What. At any rate to begin with one must even pay greater attention to the 'form' than the 'substance' since the meaning of the 'substance' depends on the 'form'"
(Strauss 1964, 52).

The nature of the text in the *Republic* is determined by its style, and the literary style presented by Plato significantly influences the text. For Strauss, the "speech" or text in the *Republic* is only half of the entire message; he goes on to assert that the reader must understand the "speeches" in light of the "deeds" (1964, 60). Strauss identifies what Plato's "form" is and what "deeds" are, "the dialogic form in general, the particular form of each dialogue and of each section of it, the action, characters, names, places, times,

situations an the like” (1946, 352). These “deeds” are the facts and details of the interactions that the reader cannot immediately see; this includes the age, appearance, abilities, and position in society of the men Socrates encounters, as well as the time, location and nature of the interaction (Strauss, 1964 59).

However, Strauss reminds us that we must remember the impact of authorial anonymity. These “facts” or “deeds” are not simply random, as in reality, but instead are created by and known to the author Plato. Smith asserts that, “Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs. Everything which would be accidental outside of the dialogue becomes meaningful within the dialogue” (1964, 60). Strauss even argues that Plato admits to the veracity of this previous conclusion, “...what is implied by Plato’s comparison of written or unwritten speeches with living beings (*Phaedrus* 264) – the principle that in a good writing every part, however small, is necessary and nothing is superfluous” (1946, 353). It seems increasingly obvious that the teaching of the *Republic* is not just what is said in the text, but how it is said, where it is said, to whom, etc. Strauss acknowledges that the reader obviously cannot see or witness these details, but he argues that the reader is, “guided to those ‘facts’ partly by the unthematic details and partly by seemingly casual remarks” (1964, 60). In the eyes of Strauss, an accurate interpretation of Plato’s text would encompass far more than just an interpretation of the written text; it would require a comprehensive and methodical examination of both the written text and the contextual facts provided by Plato, in relation with one another and in relation to the *Republic* as a whole.

Strauss' "literary" approach to reading and interpreting the *Republic*, what Smith calls "Straussian hermeneutics," is best summarized by a complete dedication to understanding the form, style, and detail of the Platonic dialogues. Strauss himself summarizes it simply, "In other words, a much more careful consideration of the narrower and wider context of each statement is required for the understanding of Plato's books than for the understanding of most books" (1946, 352). After thoroughly gathering contextual evidence, making sense of it, and then placing the dialogue in the context created with this evidence, the reader of a Platonic dialogue can come closer to a more precise evaluation of Platonic philosophy. This is in distinct opposition to the "literal" approach of reading Plato, which plagues the interpretations of many modern thinkers. This approach may be characterized by hasty and hurried examinations of Platonic texts, ultimately leading to interpretations that fall embarrassingly short of ascertaining Plato's true meaning. This "literal" approach ignores or underestimates the impact of contextual evidence, and can lead to a two-dimensional analysis of Plato that is limited to the words on the paper. Strauss offers one very clear example of the interpretive failure that is generally associated with a "literal" approach. This example discusses a modern philosopher's response to a Platonic dialogue.

"Very rarely if ever does he take the trouble of exhibiting to the reader the 'ascent' from the popular views from which the discussion frequently states to the less provisional views at which it arrives, and thus he is led to ascribe the same importance to statements which are of very different specific weights" (1946, 353).

Although, it seems like an unimportant distinction, this modern philosopher has, according to Strauss, grossly misinterpreted both the intention and teaching of Plato

within that section. In this way, the seemingly meaningless difference between the “literal” and “literary” approaches of reading Platonic dialogues becomes increasingly important.

As previously stated, Strauss argues that the “literary” question is the first question that needs to be answered. However, Strauss contends that a strong connection exists between the literary questions and the philosophic ones; from an understanding of the literary questions the reader can understand in greater depth the philosophic implications of the text. Smith mirrors this point, “the dialogue may present puzzles of the literary kind, but which are intrinsically connected to the philosophic problems proper” (2006, 92). The last section of this chapter examines simple textual examples to help further exhibit the importance and necessity of employing Strauss’ “literary” approach when reading the *Republic*.

IV. “I went down yesterday to Piraeus...”

The most immediate example that displays Plato’s affinity for inserting latent meaning into his texts is presented in the very first line of the *Republic*. Socrates begins telling a story of something that had happened just the previous day, “I went down yesterday to Piraeus” (Plato, 327a). From the very first line of the book, Strauss wants us to look at the contextual clues that are presented. Plato begins by taking Socrates and his readers on a journey downwards, physically making Socrates travel south, from Athens to Piraeus. This literary representation of Socrates and his readers moving, physically, downwards signifies the descent of the characters (and readers) away from the real world,

down into another realm, ultimately representing their willingness to reexamine previously accepted conclusions. Throughout the length of the book, a philosophic discussion takes place and while this is occurring, the characters slowly make their way back to upwards (geographically). The geographical movement of the characters within the *Republic*, the descent down to Piraeus and ascent upwards towards Athens, is symbolic of the nature of philosophy as understood by Plato. Philosophy, the engagement in discussion and debate, is a descent or admittance that you know nothing, in a similar way as Socrates. It is followed by an ascent, upwards, through an acceptance of one's own ignorance, towards truth.

The fact that Socrates retells the story one day after it has happened may also be representative of something more than it seems. Plato ultimately points to the cyclical nature of philosophic understanding. Plato may be trying to teach the reader, through Socrates' speech and actions, that the pursuit of philosophy is never ending. Socrates has this wonderfully philosophic discussion one day, and the next day he feels compelled to share the entire story with another companion. In this same way, once the reader reads the *Republic* he may have achieved higher philosophic understanding, and then may feel compelled to start the book and assume his own ignorance, once again, in the continued pursuit of knowledge and philosophic growth. The one example, "I went down yesterday to Piraeus," the first 6 words of the *Republic*, provides a very powerful example of the contextual clues provided by Plato. In particular, this one line offers contextual clues that shed light on Plato's understanding of the nature of philosophy, and the nature of the *Republic* as a whole. Without taking the time or care to properly investigate each turn of

phrase, detail, or seemingly “casual remark” a reader may miss a well-concealed teaching or message. Here in lies the fundamental problem that exists in applying the “literal” approach of textual analysis.

Aside from Strauss’ understanding of the importance of literary clues and facts, is his understanding of the importance of Plato’s choice of dialogue as his literary medium. For Platonic readers like Strauss and Smith the dialogue, itself, plays a vital role in the development of Plato’s philosophic teachings. Strauss argues that writing and written text are, “defective because they are equally accessible to all who can read or because they do not know whom to talk to and to whom to be silent or because they say the same things to everyone” (1964, 52). However, Platonic dialogues seem to circumvent the issues associated with written text. Strauss claims that the Platonic dialogues say different things to different people, this is because, “if read properly, [the Platonic dialogue] reveals itself to possess the flexibility and adaptability of oral communication” (1964, 53). As previously noted, oral communication and engagement is the preferred method of Socrates. Plato’s decision to, in a literary sense, adhere to Socrates’ dialogic method, forces the reader to more thoroughly examine each of Socrates’ companions and understand how that character might impact the tone or message of the dialogue. Strauss acknowledges that each character, coming from a different background or having a unique character, will necessarily offer an individual interpretation of the general questions being asked, “these and those human beings converse there and then about the universal subject (*e.g.* with justice); to understand the speeches in the light if the deeds

means to see how the philosophic treatment of the philosophic theme is modified by the particular individual” (1964, 60).

There are numerous instances in the *Republic* that exhibit the previous conclusion. One example that Strauss discusses is the change in tone that occurs when Socrates moves from his discussion with Thrasymachus to his discussion with Glaucon and Adeimantus,

“With Glaucon’s entry, which is immediately followed by the entry of his brother Adeimantus, the discussion changes its character profoundly. It becomes altogether Athenian. In contradistinction to the three non-Athenians with whom Socrates conversed in the first book... they belong by nature to a nobler polity than the characters of the first book, who belong respectively to oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny” (1964, 85).

This example, from the beginning of Book II in the *Republic*, shows how the background and personality of different characters can influence the direction, intensity, subject, or effectiveness of the philosophic debate and the coinciding text. Thrasymachus, described as the most ferocious and beast-like challenger to Socrates, has been “tamed” at the end of the first book (Strauss 1964, 85). His impassioned, yet, unconvincing argument against Socrates ultimately gives way to a reluctant submission to of the Socratic method. However, two new characters enter the setting, and Socrates is forced to engage in discussion again. Strauss argues that this second discussion, because of Socrates’ interlocutors’ background and their willingness to listen and question, becomes more philosophically satisfying than the previous.

“Thus while Socrates is responsible for the fact that justice is the theme of the conversation, Glaucon is responsible for the manner in which it is treated. In order to head a solid praise of justice itself, he presents a solid blame of it, a blame which could serve as the model for the praise” (Strauss 1964, 85).

In the text Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus provide Socrates with the help he needs to ultimately convey his message to both the brothers and the reader. This is one clear example of how Plato can use character, setting, or occurrence, as a way of setting up and inserting philosophic meaning in his texts. Ultimately, this level of interpretation and analysis is not possible without the “literary” approach of Strauss, which relies on an in-depth understanding of each distinct fact and detail, character and role, each passage and phrase within the *Republic*.

The rest of this text continues to employ Strauss’ “literary” approach in an effort to reach a more complete and comprehensive interpretation of the *Republic*. The “literal” method of interpreting Plato is perhaps more “literally” accurate, but it fails to account for the underlying signs, within the Platonic dialogues, that lead towards discovering Plato’s true intention. This “literal” approach provides the reader with an understanding of a small sliver of Plato’s argument and intent.

Following Strauss, “starting from the correct principle that we must interpret Plato’s myths in terms of his philosophy” (Strauss 1946, 353), I descend into the *Republic*, examining relevant passages in accordance with Strauss’ “Literary” approach. I keep in mind the “deeds” of the text, and through this process I come closer to understanding, in part, Plato’s intention behind the *Republic*, as well as Plato’s philosophic and political teachings. This more developed and complete understanding, of Plato’s classical conceptions of politics and philosophy, can help to contextualize the modern problem of Illusory Democracy. However, it seems, that even when employing

Strauss' "literary" method, the modern reader must be determined to let go of any preconceived acceptance of the superiority of modern concepts. This must be the focus of concern in the next chapters. I examine the modern concept of Neoliberalism, and demonstrate that an accurate and objective reexamination of presupposes one's ability to remove oneself from their inherent modern predisposition to the concept.

CHAPTER 3

I. Introduction to Plato's Philosophy

With a more complete understanding of how to extrapolate and interpret Plato's meaning, both overt and latent, I move forward, drawing some conclusions from Plato's teachings. I move forward with a greater awareness of modern society's natural propensity to be dogmatic in our acceptance of the supremacy and "truth" of modern concepts and principles. Hopefully, the reader will also be more willing to consider and investigate, completely and fairly, the nature of classical theory, in an attempt to impartially reexamine modern institutions. If society can return to and evaluate the true intention and meaning of Plato's arguments, society will be more equipped with an ability to understand and solve the modern problem of Illusory Democracy.

In this chapter, I argue that Plato would interpret, the modern concept of Neoliberalism, to be a defining factor in the problem of Illusory Democracy in America. I argue that Neoliberal theory has worked, in many ways, to hollow out or weaken American democratic institutions. I call on two of Plato's relevant, political and philosophic, arguments within the Republic, and attempt to place them in a modern context. Using modern authors, and real world examples, I will show that Plato, centuries ago, understood and wrote on the dangers of many features and characteristics that now define the modern concept of Neoliberalism.

The second section of this chapter elaborates on the definition, nature, and effect of the modern concept widely called Neoliberalism. After gaining a more complete understanding of Neoliberalism, I turn to Plato, to understand how this concept may inherently jeopardize modern democracy. The third section of this chapter examines and discusses Plato's "city and soul" theory. Plato's understanding of the relationship between the human "soul" and the "city" is necessary to understand how Neoliberalism has changed the nature of the modern individual and society. The fourth section of this chapter will investigate Plato's critique of economic inequality within a society. The fifth section of this chapter places these two Platonic arguments together, to prove that Neoliberal theory, policy, and culture can be harmful to a democratic society. This section also shows that Neoliberalism, not only breaks down democratic structures, but also creates and perpetuates a modern financial oligarchy within the American government.

II. Neoliberalism and its Influence

Since the 1950's, the world has seen swift and seemingly constant change. Globalization has led to drastic changes in worldwide technology, communication, trade, science, etc., creating a unique historical period of social, political, and economic transition. The last several decades have been marked by considerable transformation in the nature and purpose of various political and economic institutions. One of these defining transformations is the growth in support for, and implementation of, the economic ideology called Neoliberalism. An analysis of

American economic and political policy, since the 1980's, reveals the strong influence of Neoliberalism.

Previously, I argued that the concept of Neoliberalism has worked, over the past several decades, to hollow out formal democratic institutions. This economic ideology promotes limited government regulation of the private sector and the protection of free markets. This concept has been, and remains to be, the driving force in a significant majority of global economic and political policy. At the urging of some "economic experts" countries like the United States, and other world powers, have systematically liberalized political and economic policy. This liberalized economic approach is most specifically characterized by the lessening of government involvement and regulation. Economist, Ha-Joon Chang, explains how Neoliberalism liberalizes government policy around the world,

"most countries have introduced free-market policies over the last three decades – privatization of state owned industrial and financial firms, deregulation of finance and industry, liberalization of international trade and investment, and reduction in income taxes and welfare payments" (2012, xii).

Supporters of Neoliberalism argue that allowing for the maximum freedom of individuals companies will produce the most efficient and advantageous results; this is fundamentally founded on the premise that those individuals and companies participating in each individual market are the most knowledgeable on their particular market (Chang 2012, xii). Supporters of Neoliberalism also argue that heightening competition within a free market, through weakened government restriction and action, will create a successful and highly profitable private sector.

Although, even Neoliberal supporters admit that heightening competition, and the institutions that allow for increasing competition, may, “temporarily create some problems, such as rising inequality” (Chang 2012, xii.). Despite these “temporary” problems, supporters contend that increasing competition and the freedom of markets will boost the overall wealth and strength of an economy, as a whole. This argument is based on a principle known as “trickle-down economics,” which can be simplified to the common metaphoric phrase, “a rising tide lifts all boats together” (Chang 2012 xiii.). Fundamental Neoliberal principles often sit in direct opposition action. Key principles such as, limited government regulation of industry and capital flow, increased privatization of public goods, and the end of wealth redistribution as political policy, all inherently guard against government involvement” (Brown 2015, 28). Neoliberal supporters often criticize government action and involvement, claiming governments often act solely for self-serving and egalitarian motives (Chang 2012, xiii.), while nonetheless relying on government institutions to economize all spheres of human life.

Decades have passed since the rise and domination of Neoliberal economic policy, allowing scholars to adequately study and evaluate the effect and impact of these policies. Contrary to the expected boom promised by Neoliberal supporters, many countries around the world are still failing to see any positive economic benefit from these policies. Decades later, most of these countries are failing to see any type of substantial economic growth; instead, countries are seeing contradictory results to the ones promised by Neoliberal supporters. Even the United States, an

economic super-power and a leader in the modern Neoliberal push, has seen recent increases in social unrest, political contention, and economic instability. One glaring example of increasing economic instability, since the implementation of Neoliberal policies, is the 2008 American financial collapse, the largest financial failure since the Great Depression. “Prior to that (2008 crisis), and unbeknown to most people, free-market policies had resulted in slower growth, rising inequality, and heightened instability in most countries” (Chang 2012, xvi). There are substantial statistical and theoretical bases for the criticisms of Neoliberal policies. Chang argues, “Investment as a share of US national output has fallen, rather than risen from 20.5 per cent in the 1980’s to 18.7 per cent since then (1999–2009)” (2012, 19). Chang also points to one of the most clear indicators of national economic strength, “the growth rate of per capita income in the US fell from around 2.6 per cent per year in the 1960’s and 1970’s to 1.6 per cent during 1999-2009, the heyday of shareholder capitalism [free-market policies]” (2012, 19).

It seems obvious that Neoliberalism has failed to produce the economic results its supporters provided. However, Neoliberalism has done far more than just fail as an economic theory of national growth; it has fundamentally changed the nature and function of government institutions. Brown describes it this way, “Neoliberal reason, ubiquitous today in statecraft and the workplace, in jurisprudence, education, culture, and a vast range of quotidian activity, is converting the distinctly *political* characters, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into *economic* ones” (2015, 17). Brown is describing the

economization of the political life in modern society, the remaking of government and the state by neoliberal rationality (Brown 2015, 39). Neoliberalism has permeated into all aspects of social and political life, it can be represented in many ways, “Neoliberalism as economic policy, a modality of governance, and an order of reason is at once a global phenomenon” (Brown 2015, 20). One quote from Brown effectively summarizes the influence of Neoliberalism on modern society and the consequential economization of the political sphere. Brown says this of President Barack Obama’s 2013 inauguration speech, which was intended to express his desire to amend the growing social and political problems in America,

“While Obama called for protecting Medicare; progressive tax reform; clean energy; home ownership, and education; immigration reform; fighting sex discrimination and domestic violence; and raising the minimum wage, each of these issues was framed in terms of its contribution to economic growth or American competitiveness”
(Brown 2015, 25).

Even President Barack Obama, and his left-based administration, cannot hide the reality that, “democratic state commitments to equality, liberty, inclusion, and constitutionalism are now subordinate to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning, and capital enhancement” (Brown, 26). A sitting President, who works to support and protect fundamental democratic institutions, cannot escape the reality that these democratic practices have been forced to the background by the domination of Neoliberal theory. This inauguration speech, for Brown, embodies the conclusion that, “economic growth has become both the end and legitimation of government” (Brown, 26).

Neoliberalism has created government institutions that possess the same aims and functions of private firms and companies. Government success and political power are seen and measured in financial or economic terms, fundamentally removing the political nature from state and government institutions. However, Neoliberalism does not solely influence government and political states, it also influences the individuals and souls of individuals that live in Neoliberal dominated states. To more completely understand this phenomenon, we turn back to Plato. In this next section, I examine Plato's argument for the resemblance between the natures of the human soul and the city. I then prove how Neoliberalism has, not only, fundamentally changed political institutions, but also the nature of the modern human individual and soul.

III. The "Neoliberal City and Soul"

In order to examine how Neoliberalism affects the soul in a similar manner as it does modern government, the modern reader must understand Plato's fundamental argument for the connection between the natures of the city and the human soul. Plato's argument suggests that the nature of the human "soul" corresponds very closely to the nature of the "city." This argument is based on the fundamental basis of the city; the necessity of human being to engage in a "city" is their inability to remain completely self-sufficient (Plato, 369c). Because humans create, populate and shape cities, a city's nature will necessarily reflect the nature of its citizens. Plato's desire, to relate the nature of the city and soul, becomes apparent

early on in the *Republic*. Socrates, while attempting to explain to his companions the nature of justice within the human soul, turns to a larger example, a city, which has a mirroring representation of justice.

"...it would be easier to catch sight of what sort of thing justice is in one human being if we tried to see it first in some bigger thing that has justice in it. And it seemed to us that a city is just that... So let's carry over what came to light for us there to one person, and if they're in accord, it will turn out beautifully; but if something different shows up in the single person, we'll go back to the city again and test it" (434d).

This passage follows the first several books of the *Republic*, in which Socrates and his companions outline their conception of a "just" city. Although, later in this work, I contend that Plato does not, necessarily, support the possibility of this "just" city, this understanding of the "just" city remains incredibly relevant to Plato's city and soul argument. Earlier in the *Republic*, Socrates points out that the "just" city was "just" because all parts of the city were in harmony. In this next passage, Socrates implies that, in the same manner as the city, the parts of the human soul must also be in unity and harmony for justice to be exhibited.

"Therefore a just man will not differ at all from a just city with respect to the form of justice, but he'll be like it."

'He'll be like it,' he said.

'But the city seemed to be just because each of the three classes of natures present in it did what properly belonged to it... Therefore, my friend, we'll regard a single person in this way too, as having these same forms in his soul'" (435b).

This passage shows Plato's three-part understanding of the nature of the city and the soul. However, this is not the lone section in which Socrates points to the importance of the harmony within a city or soul. Throughout the *Republic*, Socrates details this argument, more completely explaining the three distinct parts of the

soul, their intended role, and the necessity for unity among them. This next passage outlines, in part, the purpose of two parts, of the three, within the human soul and city.

“So since, as it seems, there is a pair of things in the soul... two arts, musical and gymnastic, for the spirited and philosophic parts, not for a soul and a body except as a side effect, but for that pair, so that they might be harmonized with each other by being tightened and loosened to the appropriate degree” (412a).

These two parts, the philosophic and spirited parts, are only two of the three parts that make up the soul. Only a short while later, Socrates and his companions describe the third part of the soul as, the “Desiring” part of the soul. The desiring part of the soul, as mentioned by Socrates, is the largest and most dangerous to justice; it is characterized by the bodily desires and impulses that all humans are inherently prone to. However, these three parts of the soul, the Philosophic part (ruled by reason), the Spiritedness part, and the Desiring part, are not equal and do not play the same role within the “just” soul. Socrates explicitly discusses the roles for each part, he presents a pairing of the Philosophic and Spirited parts.

“...isn't it appropriate for the reasoning part to rule, since it's wise and has forethought on behalf of the whole soul, and for the spirited part to be obedient to it and allied with it?”

‘...So once this pair have been nurtured in this way, and have learned and been educated in the things that truly belong to them, they need to be put in charge of the desiring part, which is certainly the largest part of the soul and by nature the most insatiable for money. This part needs to be watched over so that it doesn't get filled with the so-called pleasures of the body and, when it becomes too big and strong, not do the things that properly belong to it, but try to enslave and rule over things that are not of a kind suited to it, so that it turns the whole life of all the parts upside-down.’” (441e).

For Plato, it seems that the Philosophic part of the city or soul should be the governing part and the Spirited part must work together with it, in governance over the ever-present Desiring part. If this harmony or unity is disrupted, the result is injustice in differing forms. It becomes increasingly clearer that Plato, through Socrates, is attempting to show that a “just” person and city are aware, not only of the three-part nature of the soul/city, but also how those parts should interact. The harmony of the soul within an individual is necessary for justice; this is because Plato understands philosophy as the only way through which justice can be reached. Only a human being, who attends to the harmony of his or her soul (that is to say that the philosophic part rules, in accordance with the spirited part, over the desiring part) can understand justice, and in that way can bring it forth into the city.

Plato submits that harmony of the soul is fundamental to the presence of justice; this implies that injustice is a breakdown of this natural harmony. Socrates speaks to the cause of injustice, in both the soul and city, in this next passage, “Doesn’t it in turn have to be some sort of faction among these three things, a meddling or butting in and an uprising of a certain part of the soul against the whole, in order to rule in it when that’s not appropriate” (Plato, 444b). From this, I can deduce that, for Plato, any efforts by the spirited or desiring parts of the soul to rule will, upset the natural hierarchal structure within the soul. An unbalance of the philosophic, spirited, and desiring parts of the soul will lead to differing types of injustice, depending on the make up and hierarchy of those parts. For Plato, the most unjust souls will be ruled by the Desiring part of the soul. However, this

Desiring part is even more dangerous when it is driven by the desire for money, as Socrates mentions before, “the desiring part... by nature the most insatiable for money” (Plato, 441e). It seems from this passage and the interpretation of others, that Plato would fear most a soul driven by the desire for money.

For Plato, the love of money leads to the love of few other things. Socrates claims that money and its pursuit can be blinding or all-encompassing. Money, as previously stated, is inherently more dangerous because the Desiring part of the soul is the strongest when its desire is money. Plato would argue that money, as it exists, corrupts the soul and, in turn, the city. Money, in all aspects, inherently leads to injustice. This is because money inherently places value on material or worldly things and actions, decreasing the soul’s value of the spirited and philosophic pursuits. Plato and Socrates work together to argue that money, as it exists, is a vice. The increase in the valuation of money inherently sacrifices justice or the “good.” Socrates presents this problem through the following dialogue,

“Does it seem to you that a pottery maker who’s gotten rich will still be willing to attend to his art?”

‘Not at all,’ he said

‘And will he himself become more lazy and careless than he was?’

‘Very much’

‘So he becomes a worse pottery maker?’

‘That too,’ he said, ‘much worse’” (421d).

However, Plato understands that an excess of money is not the only way in which money corrupts the nature of humans. Plato argues that a lack of money, in a financially driven society, corrupts individuals. "And then too, if from poverty he (pottery maker) cant provide himself with tools or any of the things that go into his art, he'll produce substandard work and he'll train his sons, or any others he trains, to be inferior craftsman" (Plato, 421e). For Plato, money, whether too much or too little corrupts or impedes the true nature of humans,

"Riches,' I said, 'and poverty, since the one brings in luxury, laziness, and upheaval, and the other brings in stinginess and bad workmanship, in addition to upheaval... From both poverty and riches, then, the works of the art are worse, and the people themselves are worse'" (422a).

As previously stated, Plato abhors the ruling of the soul or city by any part that is not meant to rule. For Plato, the introduction or increase of valuation of money in a soul or city will lead to changes in the hierarchy of that soul. Value of money places an inherent superiority of the desiring part of the soul over the two others, forcing individuals to become less driven by reason, spirit, or justice. Individuals will inherently strive less for the beauty and perfection of their craft, skill, art, or purpose, because the human is driven by, instead of the end goal of each craft, the accumulation of money. For Plato, when money, wealth, and financial worth are the highest values in the human soul and the city, then the city will increasingly devalue justice,

"...as they move from there to an advanced stage of money-making,' I said, 'to the extent they hold it in higher regard, to the same extent they hold virtue in lower regard. Or doesn't virtue stand divided

against riches that way, as though each of the two were lying in a scale of a balance, always inclining opposite ways?’

‘Very much so,’ he said.

‘So when riches and the rich are honored in a city, virtue and good are honored less.’” (551a)

It seems clear that money, as a conception, corrupts the nature of humans. It also creates a society that, while promoting economic gain, devalues justice. A society filled with individuals who are driven by money is dangerous, for it creates more competition and naturally leads to the degradation of the “common” good. Instead of individuals pursuing actions directed towards the “common” good for the city, the intention behind their actions would inherently become, almost exclusively, the accumulation of money or increase of personal worth. This disregard for the “common” good is brought about by, Neoliberalism; which fundamentally creates a slow transition, in the nature of both the individual and the city, away from political motives towards financial motives, “Most striking about the new homology between the city and the soul is that its coordinates are economic, not political” (Brown 2015, 22).

Brown helps to simplify this city and soul argument, as well as apply it directly to Neoliberalism,

“In the Republic, Plato famously offers a strict homology between the city and the soul. Each has the same constituent parts – reason (philosophers), spirit (warriors), and appetite [desire] (workers) – and each is properly or improperly ordered in the same way. If appetite [desire] or spirit, rather than reason, governs either the individual or political life, the cost is justice or virtue” (2015, 22).

From Plato, we understand that the nature of the human soul mirrors the nature of the city or state. Brown, relying on Plato's philosophic principle, argues that Neoliberalism changes both the nature of the human soul and the nature of modern government, "...both individual and state become projects of management, rather than rule, as an economic framing and economic means replace political ones" (Brown 2015, 22). In the previous section, I offered examples exhibiting how Neoliberalism can change the nature of the modern polity. Neoliberalism has worked towards complete economization of government and political institutions, but it also exists beyond the political realm, and changes the individuals within a society. Brown understands this to be the product of Neoliberalism's adaptability. She sees this concept as more than an economic theory but, instead, "an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as governing rationality, extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices and metrics to every dimension of human life" (Brown 2015, 30). Brown is not suggesting that Neoliberalism is literally marketizing all aspects of human life. Instead, Brown suggests that,

"Neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities – even when money is not an issue – and configures the human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only and everywhere as 'homo oeconomicus'" (2015, 31).

Essentially, this creation of the *homo oeconomicus* is a representation of the internal economization within individuals, which mirrors the economization of social and political institutions. In this way, it seems that Neoliberalism molds individual into a money driven being motivated, by monetary or financial success, to act in a manner similar to the modern business firm.

“...both persons and states are construed on the model of the contemporary firm, both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value... through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors” (Brown 2015, 22).

For Brown, modern society, in everyday life, places inherently high levels of value on the increase in personal monetary worth. Brown understands the incredibly profound and disturbing impact that Neoliberalism can have, on the individual soul and city, by increasing the value or honor of money, “Neoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity – not only through its machinery or compulsory commodification and profit-driven expansion, but by its form of valuation” (Brown 2015, 44). This “form of valuation” becomes all encompassing in modern society.

“Whether through social media ‘followers,’ ‘likes,’ and ‘retweets,’ through rankings and ratings for every activity and domain, or through more directly monetized practices, the pursuit of education, training, leisure, reproduction, consumption, and more are increasingly configured as strategic decisions and practices related to enhancing the self’s future worth” (Brown 2015, 34).

For Brown, Neoliberal theory, inherently places increased valuation on financial worth through almost all every day actions. In this way, it becomes increasingly clearer that Neoliberalism, has, and continues to work towards creating a soul and city that is driven by the Desiring part. Not only is this Neoliberal society driven by the Desiring part of the soul, it is driven by the desire for money, which inherently, leads to injustice and corruption within society due to the characteristics of the human soul in regard to money. However, this is not the only way in which Neoliberalism works to break down democracy. The next section explains

Neoliberalism's involvement in the growing problem of global economic inequality, and creation of an American financial oligarchy.

IV. Two Cities: Economic Inequality

Since the 1970's Neoliberal practices and policies have redistributed wealth upwardly. Inherently, Neoliberalism has worked to direct resources and power, both economic and political, to the financial elite, transnational corporations, and foreign investors and markets (Chomsky 2011, 77). These policies have helped create an increasingly oligarchical government structure within America by increasing economic inequality.

Neoliberal policies have impacted economic inequality in a number of ways. One important consequence of Neoliberal policy was the creation of a new global economy. The deregulation of currencies and trade led to a rapid globalization of many national economies; international trade skyrocketed and corporations (free of labor regulations and rich with free-flowing capital became increasingly international (Chomsky 2011, 76). Neoliberal policy often attacks national autonomy, the deterioration of national economic autonomy leads to domestic job instability, lower worker wages, and increased corporate profits. This neoliberal system creates countless desirable incentives for entrepreneurs, promoting the entrepreneurial spirit throughout individuals as Brown mentioned. However, "with entrepreneurs richly rewarded and workers having to adapt quickly, the system

does create high inequality” (Chang 2012, 104). So it seems inherent that neoliberal policies cause, or at least increase the likelihood of, growing economic inequality.

Chomsky also sees a connection between the globalization of capital, industry, and labor and rising inequality. He dubs this cause and effect relationship, “Third Worldization.” Chomsky says, that when Neoliberal, “free-market,” policies direct resources and wealth to the wealthy or attack welfare institutions, “it extends the Third World model to industrial countries... Its (Third World model) a two tiered society – a sector of extreme wealth and privilege, and a sector of huge misery and despair among useless, superfluous people” (Chomsky 2011, 76). Chomsky compares two simple statistics to make a resonating argument,

“When neoliberal-style programs began to take shape in the 1970’s real wages in the United States were the highest in the industrial world... From 1983 to 1998, average wealth of the top 1 percent rose ‘a whopping 42%’ while the poorest 40 percent ‘lost 76%’ of their (very modest) wealth” (Chomsky 2006, 211).

It seems clear, just from these two statistics, that Neoliberal policies are creating an increasingly wide gap in economic level between classes in America. This “Third Worldization” of industrial countries, like America, has led to significant increases in income inequality. Chang says that because of, “Increased trade liberalization and increased foreign investment... income inequality has increased in most rich countries” (Chang 2012, 143). Chang cites the ILO (international Labor Organization) report, “The World of Work 2008”, when saying, “between 1990 and 2000... income inequality in the US, already by far the highest in the rich world, rose

to a level comparable to that of some Latin American countries such as Uruguay and Venezuela,” (144).

However, the idea that Neoliberal policies or concepts would lead to heightened economic inequality is not, in any sense, new. Plato, centuries ago, very clearly pointed out the consequences of policy or government action being driven by financial or economic desires. I outlined in the previous section, that Plato believes that money in society inherently corrupts or creates injustice within the soul or the city. The fact that money corrupts, along with Neoliberal efforts to promote, within humans, increased valuation of money, seems to connect very closely with the modern increases in income inequality.

Plato argues that the pursuit, envy, or desire of money by a city or individuals will always lead to fraction within that society. He understands that one city, drive by money is, “a whole bunch of cities, not a city” (Plato, 423a). This understanding stems from Plato’s conclusion that men will become more and more driven to accumulate money, ultimately creating competition and fraction among individuals within society. This ultimately, falls back on Brown’s understanding of the *homo oeconomicus*, which rejects the common good of the city, in lieu of more personal, private, usually economic drives. A city, full of men and women driven by money, will not be united because none of these citizens are able to understand the “good” in terms of the “common” good, instead they only often only understand “personal”

good. Plato suggests that increased value or worth of money, within a society, inherently creates fraction, breaking down the unity of a city or state,

“Whatever they (money driven cities) are, each of them is two things at war with each other, one made up of the poor, the other of the rich, and in each of these there are a great many parts; if you treat them as one thing, you’d miss the whole point.” (423a)

Plato is arguing, in this passage, that a city cannot be united, or whole, if money is the driving goal or value. A money driven city is not one city moving towards one goal, but instead a number of individual actors working at odds with one another to further increase their personal worth. Socrates says explicitly that the pursuit of money leads to differences in class, which also creates fraction and dissention within society. This fraction is most easily seen in the growing problem of economic inequality throughout the world. Plato not only claims that income inequality create fraction within a city, but claims that it can create resentment, even perhaps conflict, “That such a city isn’t one but two, one consisting of the poor, the other of the rich, living in the same place and always plotting against one another” (551d). This fraction stems from each individual’s ultimate valuation of money, as the highest aim. Because men identify money or wealth as the primary indicator of the soul, the inequality of money turns into an inequality of individuals and human souls. This unequal evaluation of money, leads to economic and social inequality within a city, almost always leading to social unrest and revolt, as Plato alludes to (557a).

It seems, in order to preserve the unity of the soul and the city Plato would vehemently disagree with any political policy and theory that helps to heighten economic inequality in a society. Plato understands that a financially driven society

is never able to avoid the inherent desire of money that develops within its citizens. This “money-loving” moves individuals away from political drives, the inherent nature of the city, towards solely economic motives. This creation of, what Brown calls the, *homo oeconomicus* ultimately washes away any political drives that individuals may possess. This process eliminates, within a society, an idea of the common good, and then sets forth an economic competition, in which there are naturally always winners and losers. This natural financial inequality, associated with money-driven societies, creates social unrest and eventually, at least for Plato, revolt of the poor. After understanding several Platonic passages, it seems Neoliberalism has played a role in setting forth this dangerous chain of events. The next section will examine several modern examples, in which, Neoliberalism works to hollow out democratic practices in America.

V. Neoliberalism and Democracy

Chomsky argues that the political institutions supporting today’s “financial oligarchy” were created by, and can be traced back to, “Neoliberal measures instituted in the 1970’s, enforced more rigidly in the later years, with economic as well as political consequences” (2006, 216). By increasing and deepening economic inequality within American, and by fundamentally changing the nature and harmony of the human soul and city, Neoliberalism has broken down traditional democratic practices. Modern American society has seen drastic increases in

economic inequality in the last decades, and this society is plagued, or often characterized, by materialist values and monetary virtues.

For Plato, a society that values money inherently creates a government run by, or for, the economic elite. Plato, living in classical Athens, essentially understood the nature of the problem of a modern financial oligarchical government. When discussing a society of individuals who honor or value money, Plato says,

*“...they end up becoming lovers of money-making and money, and they give praise and admiration to the rich person and bring him into the ruling offices but treat the poor person with dishonor.’
‘So then don’t they set down the definitive law of an oligarchic polity, fixing an amount of money...proclaiming that there’s to be no share in ruling for someone without wealth up to the prescribed assessment?’
‘That’s just how it is,’ He said” (551b).*

It seems that Plato, centuries before Neoliberalism, understood that a society with economic fraction and a high value of money would inherently move itself towards an oligarchic nature. Plato asserts that an oligarchical society will equivocate one’s ability to accumulate money as equal to one’s ability to rule or lead. In this way, any oligarchical society will usually be dominated by economic elites. However, Plato knows that one’s ability to accumulate money has no bearing at all on an ability to lead. In fact, Plato warns of inherent problems in the selection and judgment of leadership based on financial success. Socrates questions this in a passage,

“Consider a case in which someone made people helmsmen of ships that way, from property qualifications, and wouldn’t entrust one to a poor person even if he was better at helmsmanship.’

‘They’d have lousy sailing on their voyage,’ he said” (Plato, 551c).

In this passage, both Socrates and his companion agree that evaluation leadership within a society, based on economic or financial qualifications, is inherently flawed. For Plato, the best leaders have little concern for money; his argument regarding the proper nature of leaders is found in what could be called the “Ship Metaphor” (Plato, 488b). Plato might argue that we are inaccurately evaluating our modern political leaders, valuing their ability to increase their financial worth over their ability to effectively or successfully lead. While, Neoliberalism does not directly impact how we elect or choose American politicians, it offers many opportunities for the economic elites to assert their economic dominance, effectively eliminating democratic practices.

Neoliberalism has, very clearly, increased economic inequality within society and continually redistributed wealth upwards. As this occurs, from Plato’s understanding, the individual and the city come to value or honor money above all else. When this happens, the economic elites are often inclined to enjoy increased political power, which then allows for their disproportionate influence of government policy (Gilens, 2014). As a result of increased political power, the economic elites are able to, through influence over government policy, continually perpetuate and increase both their financial dominance and political influence. Chang cites the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) to effectively represent the massive financial and political benefits that the economic elites see as a result of Neoliberal policies,

“between 1979 and 2006, the top 1 percent of earners in the US more than doubled their share of national income, from 10 per cent to 22.9

per cent. The top 0.1 per cent did even better, increasing their share by more than three times, from 3.5 per cent in 1979 to 11.6 per cent in 2006” (2012, 144).

It seems safe to conclude that the driving principle in Neoliberal thought, as Chang recalls it, is inaccurate, “When you give the rich a bigger slice of the pie, the slices of the others may become smaller in the short run, but the poor will enjoy bigger slices in absolute terms on the long run, because the pie will get bigger” (Chang 2012, 137). Chang instead argues, “The rich got the bigger slice of the pie all right, but they have actually reduced the pace at which the pie is growing” (2012, 145). After thoroughly examining the impact of Neoliberal theory on income inequality, and understanding Plato’s fundamental arguments regarding the love of money and its pursuit, it is easy to see Neoliberal principles for what they are... Self-serving economic policies that, in Plato’s conception, create an “unjust” state, which in modern society means the creation and perpetuation of a financial and political hegemony of the economic elite.

This recent financial and political hegemony is inherently built into modern everyday institutions. One glaring example of an institutional perpetuation of this financial hegemony is the Supreme Court Case, *Citizens United v. FEC*. This 2010 Supreme Court ruling is an incredibly important example because it shows the economization of the political sphere, not only through the marketization of all aspects of life, but through the transition of political principles to economic ones (Brown 2015, 158). The ruling in *Citizens United* is, famously, known for its rendering of speech as capital. Brown argues that, “the classical associations of

speech with freedom, conscience, deliberation, and persuasion are nowhere in sight,” (2015, 158) when referring to a particular Supreme Court Justice’s opinion. Ultimately, this decision links the rights of an individual, having the right to free speech (through campaign fundraising), to large corporations and other big businesses. Because of this decision, corporations enjoy the same privileges as all individuals in the right to free speech within the political realm. This ruling has cemented, for now, a hierarchal structure that disproportionately favors the owners of large corporations, who now possess the capacity to invoke their right to free-speech, which is now equivalent to capital, in the political sphere with no regulation. The ability of a small group of people to assert a disproportionate amount of political influence is fundamentally anti-democratic. Brown draws a scary conclusion,

“While large corporations will obviously wield their financial might in the political sphere in pursuit of their own ends... this does not qualify as bending the public interest because, on the one hand, neoliberalism eliminates the very idea of the public interest and, on the other, corporations now have standing as personas whose speech is public” (Brown 2015, 169).

Ultimately, *Citizens United v. FEC* embodies the economization of the political sphere. Neoliberalism has fundamentally changed the nature and purpose of the individual, the government, and its institutions.

Another significant consequence of Neoliberal policy is the increasing of societal reformation that aims at restricting the public arena and shifting the decision making structure into executive positions, that are often unaccountable domestically and hardly accountable to “trade agreements” or multinational banks

(Chomsky 2011, 77). Chomsky says, “that’s a real success in the long-term task of depriving democratic structures of any substance” (2011, 78).

Neoliberal policies have further decreased the general public’s democratic right to policy influence, through the privatization of many “services,” specifically “services” that are of public concern (water, education, health) (Chomsky 2006, 218). The privatization of public services gives power, over public needs and institutions, to corporations and individuals with private interests. Chomsky makes a chilling conclusion about this increase in privatization, “Once these (services) are removed from the public arena by ‘trade in services,’ formal democratic practices are largely reduced to a device for periodic mobilization of the public in the services of elite interests” (2006, 219). This dark conclusion shows us, yet, another way that Neoliberal policies have hollowed out democratic institutions, However, this quote also shows us a way in which these policies have helped create a distinction between the perception and reality of democratic institutions in America.

The last example, which may present the most dangerous to democracy, returns to Brown’s term, *homo oeconomicus* and its corollary, *homo politicus*. Brown says,

“When the construction of the human beings and human conduct as homo oeconomicus spreads to every sphere, including that of political life itself, it radically transforms not merely the organization, but the purpose and character of each sphere, as well as relations among them” (2015, 35).

The understanding of modern beings as, *homo oeconomicus*, implies that this political transformation is already beginning. However, this transformation is moving towards the elimination of the political sphere, and in turn, democratic government.

“Thus, one important effect of neoliberalization is the vanquishing of liberal democracy’s already anemic homo politicus, a vanquishing with enormous consequences for democratic institutions, cultures, and imaginaries” (Brown 2015, 35).

Neoliberalism is working to eliminate the political sphere through the economization of both the individual and state. The slow and continual reduction of the political sphere inherently reduces individuals’ ability to act and participate politically. As individuals move towards a determinate *homo oeconomicus*, the conception of the “city” and the “common” good begin to dilute. Instead, each individual is nothing more than that, an individual, not part of a society or city. Brown draws a worrying conclusion, “The replacement of citizenship defined as concern with the public good by citizenship reduced to the citizen as *homo oeconomicus* also eliminates the very idea of a people, a *demos* asserting its collective political sovereignty” (2015, 39). The comparison of modern American citizens as *homo oeconomicus* is frightening, for it implies that the modern American population has no true understanding of what it means to be politically involved or directed. This is an incredibly threatening problem to modern American democracy, if the entire American public lacks the desire and ability to enter the political sphere, then the future of democracy in American looks increasingly dim.

Neoliberal theory has become commonplace in the modern world, permeating throughout economic, political, and social aspects of life. Its policies have helped to create institutions that, perpetuate and deepen income inequality, create grossly large benefits for a minuscule percentage of the population, and promote and protect the rule of the economic elite. It has worked to hollow out democratic institutions, that favor the rule of the people, and has replaced them with oligarchic institutions. In this way, it seems increasingly obvious that Neoliberalism and its corresponding policies are inherently threatening to the concept of democracy. Through Plato's philosophy, we understand that Neoliberalism has worked, in distinct ways, to degrade and hollow out democratic principles, practices and institutions, creating a severe "democratic deficit" in America. We also understand, through Plato, that Neoliberalism has promoted and perpetuated a financially driven oligarchy. In this way, Neoliberalism has worked to build a broad perception of American democracy, while also creating a very different reality. This chapter, ultimately, proved that Plato would see Neoliberalism as the main cause of the problem of Illusory Democracy in America. It is clear that, Plato might not have considered modern capitalist, neoliberal, "democratic", American society to be the "Crown jewel of the West", as perception may claim. However, it is not because Plato is as "anti-democratic" as most modern authors assert. The next chapter will examine Plato's "critique" of Democracy, why Plato might return in the future as a guardian of democracy, and ultimately how Plato would respond to the problem of Illusory Democracy.

CHAPTER 4

I. Modern Platonic Interpretations

In Chapter 3, I show how Neoliberalism; by altering the modern human soul and “city”, increasing the inherent value of money, widening and deepening the effects of economic inequality, among other things; has hollowed out formal democratic institutions, creating a severe “democratic deficit” in America. I showed how Neoliberalism has been promoting and implementing government institutions that are, by definition, oligarchic in nature. These two factors have helped form and perpetuate a stark distinction between the general perception of the American government and its true reality. It seems obvious that obvious that Plato would first argue that, if you want to lessen the problem of Illusory Democracy, you must seriously reduce or completely eliminate the influence of Neoliberalism on the political world.

Most modern political theorists might claim that Plato would support the degradation of democratic institutions within America. It seems that America is moving in the reverse order of societal degradation, as seen on Plato’s hierarchal scale (544a), from democracy to oligarchy. Most modern theorists might even draw the conclusion that Plato may have welcomed a transition away from democracy towards an oligarchy. However, this interpretation is most certainly dependent upon a “literal” interpretation of the text in the *Republic*. With the help of Strauss, I argue that Plato is more supportive of democracy than he explicitly states in the text of the *Republic*. In that respect, I would

argue that Plato would understand the problem of Illusory Democracy to be inherently threatening to justice and to philosophy.

In this last chapter, I explain how Plato can be interpreted as a democratic ally, instead of an enemy, with a vested interest in protecting democratic society. I reconcile Socrates' explicit democratic criticisms in the text of the *Republic* with Plato's fundamental and most significant themes. With an understanding of Plato as a democratic ally, I move forward and explain how Plato would respond to the modern problem of Illusory Democracy. I examine several Platonic conclusions and I argue that Plato's understanding of philosophy, as a pursuit away from opinion towards knowledge, is vital in working to fix the problem of Illusory Democracy within America.

II. Totalitarian or Liberal Democrat?

In Chapter 2, I argued that the very nature of the *Republic*, more specifically its dialogic style and prevalent use of illusion, irony, and contradiction, has created an extremely distinct fragmentation in its philosophic understanding. I also argue that the fundamental differences, in these varying interpretations of Platonic philosophy, are due to dissimilar understandings of the manner and style in which to read the text. I outlined Strauss' "literary" approach to reading the Platonic dialogues and explained that an accurate interpretation of Plato is dependent upon a dedicated application of this "literary" approach. Ultimately, applying Strauss' literary method to reading the *Republic* easily debunks the common misconception of a tyrannical Plato, and shows that

Socrates' explicit critique of democracy can be seen as part of the overall argument, as laid out by Plato.

Once the reader understands the differences between the “literal” and “literary” approaches to reading the *Republic*, it becomes easy to understand how modern philosophy has come to, as a majority, grossly misinterpret Plato's teaching. These philosophers, citing the literal text of the *Republic*, widely accept Plato to be an enemy of democracy. These philosophers believe Plato to be an anti-liberal political reformist, who promoted radical ideas such as; a closed caste system, the elimination of family and private property, government promotion of fundamental falsehoods, and the censorship of literature and poetry (Smith 2006, 87). Anti-democratic statements and proposals, within the *Republic*, often misguide those who read the text in a “literal” form. A literal reading of the *Republic* might provide the readers with the understanding of Plato as a philosopher-tyrant, wishing to rule over a utopian-esque city-state. Literal readers also might suggest that Plato is elitist, citing Socrates' comments on the nature of the philosopher, and the “good” within the philosopher (Strauss 1964, 127). Modern author Sara Monoson comments on these explicit critiques of democracy and democratic ideals, “Plato's dialogues are consistently and unequivocally opposed to the institution of majority rule” (2000, 122). However, I argue that Strauss' “literary” approach reveals Plato to be a friend of democracy, instead of an enemy.

Smith asserts in his book, *Reading Leo Strauss*, “In part, due to the influence of Strauss, we are coming to appreciate a new Plato, less monolithic, less absolutist, and less

dogmatic than the totalitarian virtuecrat he has been made out to be” (2006, 89). Smith argues that both, Plato and Strauss, are far more democratic or liberal than most modern theorists would consider (2006, 90), Strauss’ “literary” method is the fundamental basis for this assertion. Monoson also agrees, to an extent, that Plato is more democratic than previous dominant philosophic theory has concluded. Monoson’s book, *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements*, “is an exploration of how intimately connected are two things usually viewed as thoroughly opposed – Plato’s thoughts and Athenian democratic ideals and practices” (2000, 18). Monoson argues through research and analysis of ancient Athenian democratic culture and institutions (2000, 6) that Plato and Socrates embodied, to some degree, a number of characteristics found in Athenian democratic culture (2000, 233). She offers examples like Plato’s use of “frank speech”, desire for unity, and continued practice of philosophy, to argue that Plato and Socrates exhibited patterns of interest in democracy alongside their well-documented literal criticisms of certain democratic practices (Monoson 2000, 237). The next section more clearly outlines the way in which I interpret Plato, as a protector of democracy.

III. “Democratic” Plato

Ultimately, it is Strauss that provides the defining evidence in our conclusion of a “democratic” Plato. The reconciliation, of Socrates’ explicit critique of democracy with Plato’s underlying democratic interest, is intricate. I draw heavily on Strauss and his “literary” approach to the Platonic dialogues when forming this argument. Smith offers us with a good place to start this argument, “By emphasizing the always partial and

incomplete nature of philosophy, Strauss returned to Plato and classical philosophy as a possible resource for, rather than an enemy of, political liberalism” (Smith 2006, 89).

Interpreting Plato to be an ally of democracy depends, first, on understanding his conception philosophy and, in turn, knowledge. Strauss contends that the true nature of philosophy and knowledge is, inherently, incomplete. Plato considers “philosophy” to be incomplete. Comparable in nature to that of Socratic Skepticism, philosophy, for Plato, is the questioning and examination of accepted or presented idea. Ultimately, Plato sees philosophy as something that is never completed, characterized by willingness to question, assess, reexamine, and doubt all concepts, principles, or beliefs. Plato seems to be calling, through his literary style, for the necessity of continual reexamination. Plato never explicitly presents a definitive answer, forcing a continual examination and reexamination of principles and assertions throughout the *Republic*.

The next understanding that is crucial for our interpretation of a “democratic” Plato, is Strauss’ assertion that Platonic philosophy places “philosophy” as the highest good (1964, 127). It seems that, through Plato’s continual effort to promote philosophic growth within the *Republic*, he aims to protect and promote philosophy within society. Authorial anonymity eliminates any explicit teaching from Plato; instead, Plato’s communicates his “philosophy” through both the text and the form in which that text is presented, “even the Platonic manner of writing dialogues as a way of stimulating discussion rather than stipulating answers (Smith 2006, 102). In this way, Plato does not simply present philosophic questions and his corresponding answers, Strauss says, “An

adequate understanding of the dialogues would enable the reader to discover the decisive indications of Plato's serious teaching. It would not supply him with ready made answers to Plato's ultimate and most important questions" (1946, 352). Plato's main teachings in the *Republic* will not be found in the text alone, but only when the reader engages in the philosophic journey himself. In Plato's mind, each Socratic assertion is not simply a doctrine or teaching, but should be seen by the reader, "as a set of permanent questions or problems that each person must think through for themselves" (Smith 2006, 105). Plato seems to be creating a process of personal philosophic growth through independent questioning and rationalization of proposed statements within the *Republic*. Smith says, in this way, Plato can teach us the importance and necessity of philosophy within a society, "what we can learn from Plato, then, is not a doctrine or set of doctrines, but the permanent solution of philosophy vis-à-vis society" (2006, 103). In light of this understanding, it seems that Plato creates, in the *Republic*, a unique teaching mechanism for individuals, through which he can promote and protect the practice and process of philosophy.

Plato does not explicitly state many of his meaningful arguments; instead he conveys them through the insertion of clues in his reading for the reader to follow. Strauss understands that not everything said within the *Republic* can be taken at face value, "As Cicero has observed, 'The *Republic* does not bring to light the best possible regimes but rather the nature of political things – the nature of the city'" (Strauss 1964, 138). It seems obvious now that accepting the textual critiques of democracy, to be entirely representative of Plato's intentional teaching, is fundamentally inaccurate. This

understanding is the basis for the devaluation of Socrates' explicit critique of democracy within the *Republic*. It seems that Plato's critiques of the four distinct "bad" nature of the soul/city are not, necessarily, as conclusive as they seem. Strauss says conclusions that draw concrete connections of Socrates' descriptions to corresponding modern regimes, are, "a dim and crude reflection of Socrates' distinction" (1964, 130). Strauss continues on to say,

"in describing the regimes Socrates does not speak of the 'ideologies' belonging to them; he is concerned with the character of each kind of regime and with the end which it manifestly and knowingly pursues as well as with the political justification of the end in question" (1964, 130).

This passage shows that Socrates' explicit "critique" of democracy is simply a literary adherence to the Platonic philosophy of stimulating personal philosophic growth. Socrates is presenting each form of "bad" polity/soul, even the democratic, to his companions for critique. The Platonic characters investigate each polity and corresponding soul, with its fractioned "parts," each exhibiting fundamental faults and injustices. Plato, remaining true to his ultimate goal of creating a teaching mechanism for readers, treats democracy in the same way as all other forms of "bad" polity and forces the characters, and reader, to analyze each of the 4 equally. In this way, it seems that Socrates' critique of democracy, while accurately representing the inherent dangers of a city of this nature, is not an explicit critique of the "democratic" form of government. Instead, this "critique" of democracy is one part of a larger Platonic theme that forces the reader to individually question the legitimacy of each regime and the philosophical basis that Socrates presents for them. Plato never truly sets out to directly assert which of these polities is "best." Instead, Plato presents an unbiased and fair argument for all, offering

the “facts” as he knows them, but ultimately allowing the reader to interpret those “facts” and Socratic assertions individually. The reader must understand Socrates’ assertions in light of Plato’s true intention. Plato is aiming to, through the presentation of contradictory, radical, mild, and even unimportant assertions, intentionally invoke philosophic thought. His hope may have been to show how, philosophy, the continual willingness to question and reexamine, can be practiced, by forcing readers to question and reexamine any and all assertions.

Although I argue that Plato is not explicitly criticizing democracy above, there is no evidence to support a claim that Plato is explicitly “calling” for democracy. This passage then becomes only a part of a larger argument; in this way, it seems that Socrates’ critique of democracy is significantly less relevant than previously believed. However, through a literary interpretation of the entire *Republic* it becomes clear that this passage still remains vital for understanding the idea of a democratic Plato, “We shall consider here only his account of Democracy because of its crucial importance for the argument of the *Republic*” (Strauss 1964, 130).

Plato can only be seen as a protector of democracy through a literary analysis of the “just” city. Through an intricate argument, Strauss understands that the “just” city, brought into reality by the presence of philosopher-kings, is not natural and could not exist. Simplified here, Strauss says, “even the ‘just’ city as a pattern is not capable of coming into being as it has been blueprinted; only approximations to it can be expected in cities which are in deed and not merely in speech” (1964, 121). Major complications to

the “just” city arise throughout the *Republic*, from the likelihood of the possibility of philosopher-kings; to the deviations away from nature that Socrates takes to create it (Strauss 1964, 127). Since Plato’s “best” city is understood to be fundamentally impossible, and therefore not the best city in “deed,” I turn back to the evaluation of the four “bad” polities in order to establish the “best” city in reality.

It is the inherent problem of a democratic society that ultimately leads to the conclusion of a “democratic” Plato. Socrates says of the “democratic” polity,

“Well, first of all aren’t they free, and doesn’t the city get filled with freedom and free speech, and isn’t it permissible in it to do whatever anyone wants?”

‘So it’s said,’ he said.

‘And in a place where it’s permissible, it’s obvious that each person would manage the arrangement of his own life in private however it pleased him’” (Plato, 557b).

Democracy, as understood by Plato, was characterized by freedom, the freedom to pursue any style of life, including the life of the philosopher. This inherent problem, which ultimately in Plato’s societal degradation, leads to the breakdown of democracy into a tyranny, is also the fundamental democratic support for Plato.

“Hence democracy is the regime which fosters the greatest variety; every way of life, every regime can be found in it. Hence, we must understand, democracy is the only regime other than the best in which the philosopher can lead his peculiar way of life without being disturbed” (Strauss 1964, 131).

It seems the support for a democratic Plato is not fully presented. Plato is not necessarily a protector of democracy because he understands it to be the best society, but because he understands it to be the only plausibly polity, in “reality,” in which philosophy can exist.

The Republic says explicitly that only a democratic society would have allowed for Plato's life of philosophic pursuit and his authoring of the *Republic* (517a). Strauss furthers this point, "Since democracy, in contradiction to the other three bad regimes, is both bad and permissive, it is that regime in which the frank quest for the best regime is at home: the action of the *Republic* takes place under a democracy" (1964, 131). Essentially, Plato can be seen as more friendly towards democracy because of this understanding that, although it is not the "best" polity for its citizens (Strauss 1964, 132), it is the sole realistic polity that allows for the pursuit and practice of philosophic growth. In this way, it seems that Plato views democracy as the least "bad" or "evil" of all "possible" forms of government.

So it seems that Plato's propensity to perhaps defend democracy is rooted in his understanding that it remains the only possible regime in which the philosopher can exist. While it seems like Plato would enjoy the philosophic freedoms granted by modern democratic society, I argue that Plato never successfully unites the conceptions of philosophy and politics within a democratic society. Plato's understanding of this dichotomy is based on his concepts of philosophy, knowledge, and opinion. These three concepts lead towards the next section and towards Plato's final call for defense against Illusory Democracy.

IV. Opinion and Knowledge

It seems, from the last section, that Plato has successfully identified a polity where the philosopher could live freely and where philosophy and politics might

intermingle. However, I argue in this section that Plato never successfully theorizes a harmony between philosophy and politics in democratic society. In fact, it seems that Plato and Strauss both understand philosophy and society to be fundamentally at odds. At the root of this division, between philosophy and politics, is Plato's understanding of philosophy and Opinion.

Plato never "defines" philosophy in the text of the *Republic*, as stated earlier, he uses the *Republic* to exemplify philosophy. However, one famous Platonic passage in Book XII of the *Republic* characterizes the nature of philosophy more specifically, the Cave Metaphor. In a unique manner, Plato likens the process of philosophy to the ascent out of a cave (517a); in the cave, a fire only allows the cave-dwellers (society) to see shadows or images, "the cave is in turn decorated with a variety of 'images,' that is, opinions" (Smith 2006, 94). However, philosophy represents the upward journey or movement (away from those images and shadows) towards the "intelligible realm" which is characterized by the sun, light, truth, and knowledge. So it seems that opinion, based on the perception of images, stands fundamentally opposed to philosophy, "which is the attempt to go beyond opinion towards knowledge" (Strauss 1964, 125).

Plato's notion of philosophy, as a movement away from images and perception towards truth, is mirrored in his literary style. "The Socratic elenchus, the method of question and answer, the experience of aporia where beliefs once held dogmatically or unreflectively are shown to be less than satisfactory" (Smith 2006, 102) all promote the readers ascent, away from "opinion," towards knowledge. Plato seems to reject opinion,

which he considers to be dogmatic in nature, essentially ignorant of understanding the necessity of questioning and reexamination. For Plato, opinion presupposes the presence and acceptance of a solution to a problem, “Therefore a philosopher ceases to be a philosopher at the moment at which the ‘subjective certainty’ of a solution becomes stronger than his awareness of the problematic character of that solution” (Smith 2006, 102). For Plato, dogmatically accepting an opinion or perception, without personally considering and deliberating the problems that it generates, is directly opposed to philosophy and knowledge. This understanding of philosophy is readily embodied and represented in the previously mentioned concept of Socratic Skepticism. Socrates’ desire to question every single solution or conclusion, and the nature of the proposal, all while asserting his own personal ignorance, is the highest exemplification of Plato’s apprehension to opinion. The willingness to question and dispel previously accepted conclusions, most easily seen in Socrates’ actions, “provides a third way out of the sterile alternatives of dogmatism and relativism” (Smith 2006, 101). Smith simplifies this philosophic approach, almost to a fault, “All that is required in facing these problems is an open mind and a willingness to listen and weigh the alternatives” (2006, 106).

Ultimately, through Plato’s representation of Socratic skepticism in his texts, along with his conclusions regarding philosophy, and opinion, the reader can finally begin to see Plato’s true philosophic meaning. The nature of philosophy seems to be incomplete, for it must be a constant reexamination. Philosophy, for Plato is not one, singular, ascent away from opinion, but a constant ascension and a continual willingness to reexamine. This continual, or cyclical, nature of philosophy implies that knowledge

may not ever be complete. Plato seems to believe that society will always be forced to face difficult or insurmountable problems; society's willingness to create, examine, and then reexamine the potential solutions to these eternal problems is the difference between societies based on opinion or knowledge. However, as I mention earlier, Plato may not have completely understood the possibility of a unity between philosophy and politics in a democratic society; this is based on Strauss' understanding that, opinion, is "the element of society" (Smith 2006, 94). Two quotes from Strauss illustrate the conclusion of Plato's inability to reconcile philosophy and politics;

"they [philosophers] know that the life not dedicated to philosophy and therefore even the political life as its best is like life in a cave, so much so that the city can be identified with the Cave. The cave-dwellers i.e. the non-philosophers, see only the shadows of artifacts (515b-515c). That is to say, whatever they perceive they understand in the light of opinions sanctified by the fiat of legislators, regarding the just and noble things, i.e. of fabricated or conventional opinions, and they do not know that these their most cherished convictions possess no higher states than that of opinions" (1964, 125).

Strauss seems to point to society's acceptance of the "truths," as provided by government officials, media outlets, or institutions themselves, to be of the highest knowledge. This seems to suggest society's tendency to be fooled or misled by the "opinions" of those who hold political power. Strauss also mentions how these "truths" can often become society's "most cherished convictions." Modern citizens seem to almost welcome dogmatic acceptance of principles, something Plato and Strauss would consider to be foolish,

"Precisely the best of these non-philosophers, the good citizens, are passionately attached to these opinions and therefore passionately opposed to philosophy (517a)... This is the true reason why the coincidence of philosophy and political power is extremely improbable: philosophy and the city tend away from one another in opposite directions" (Strauss 1964, 125).

Strauss understands that in modern society one's willingness to show dogmatic acceptance of a principle like, democracy, and exhibit steadfast defense of that principle often is understood to be "truth." In many cases, as in America, an individual's dogmatic acceptance of a position or opinion can be valued by society. However, the inflexible defenses of the superiority of modern principles like capitalism, democracy, and neoliberalism, are, for Plato and Strauss, as far from "truth" as one could get. This gross misinterpretations of "truth," "opinion," and "philosophy" inherently help to create the rigid defenses, within modern society, of modern principles. In this way, it seems Plato's understanding of philosophy, as an ascent upwards, away from opinion towards truth, is directly opposed to modern societal practices.

The last section of this text draws conclusions as to Plato's true intention and meaning within the *Republic*. I also show how Plato's philosophy, if understood correctly, can help amend the modern problem of Illusory Democracy in America.

V. A Platonic Response to Illusory Democracy

Ultimately, I believe that Plato would respond in two parts to the problem of Illusory Democracy. As outlined in Chapter 3, Neoliberalism has played a very blatant role in the degradation of democracy, and the construction of an oligarchic structure. Plato would view Neoliberalism as influencing and changing the natural order of the soul, and in turn the city. Neoliberalism is also responsible for increases in economic inequality around the world. In many fashions, Neoliberalism is working to rearrange the

natural order of the soul, creating a financially driven human being. Plato would argue vehemently against an economic concept that promotes the valuation of money and its pursuit, for the consequence is injustice. It is very obvious that Plato would implore modern society to reject modern Neoliberal principles. For if Illusory Democracy in American will ever be solved, it will surely be after Neoliberalism is removed from the political and social spheres.

However, Plato would most likely not believe in modern society's ability to rid itself of Neoliberal theory. In fact, I argue that Plato would understand modern society to be too dogmatic even to listen to his advice because of the propensity modern society has shown to dogmatically interpret Plato's own text. Plato, who believes in the supremacy of philosophy over opinion, understands philosophy as an ascent away from opinion. Through a "literary" approach I have found a number of passages that point to Plato's desire to show the movement down and then up, in the text of the *Republic*. I have already mentioned the clearest example, The Cave Metaphor, which explicitly calls for a philosophic ascent out of the cave. However, many other passages exhibit the literary representation of an up and down motion, such as; the first line of the book, "I went down yesterday to Piraeus..." the Myth of Er in Book X, and even Socrates' physical movement throughout the *Republic*. What we can learn from Plato's continual to portray this up and down movement is the nature of philosophy. This up and down movement is representative of an individual's journey when engaging in philosophy.

The first step, as exhibited first by Socrates, moving downwards at the start of the book, represents Socrates' willingness to reject or separate oneself from what the believe to be true. The second step, moving upwards, as exhibited by Socrates throughout the rest of the *Republic*, represents the act of discussing, debating, questioning and philosophizing. However, this second part can only be achieved if an individual can submit to releasing any dogmatic adherence to an accepted position. This theme of movement up and down, for Plato, is never ending. We must again examine the deeds of the *Republic* to ascertain how Plato emphasizes the cyclical and continual nature of philosophy. This is most easily seen in the very foundation of the text; The *Republic* is a story, of Socrates, who engages in a day long philosophic discussion with a number of individuals, however this story, is told exclusively through the mouth of Socrates as he addresses another character only one day after. Socrates' willingness to retell the entirety of the story, or to submit to his ignorance and to once again attempt to gain a deeper philosophic understanding, is representative of the necessity to continually reexamine and question.

It seems that we have narrowed Plato's main assertions into two distinct messages. The first, that, in order to engage in philosophy, one must refrain from dogmatic acceptance of positions. And the second, that philosophy, is a continual and repetitive ascent upwards away from opinion. Ultimately, we must remember that Plato never directly asserts these teachings, instead he lays out literary details that the reader may follow.

These two main assertions are incredibly relevant to the modern problem of Illusory Democracy in America. Illusory Democracy, as understood by Plato, is most likely created and perpetuated by Neoliberal rationality, however Plato might contend that its' due to dogmatism within modern society that has allowed the detrimental affects of Neoliberalism to flourish. Because the American public leans towards dogmatically accepting and maintaining the veracity of common "truths," modern society will never accurately understand or evaluate modern institutions. Plato would most likely contend that Americans' refusal to challenge and question modern principles like capitalism, democracy, and modern government policies, from an impartial perspective, inherently leads to a distinction between the perception and reality. Plato would assert that modern American society must be less dogmatic and more philosophic.

Plato might first argue that modern society is far too dogmatic in regards to the truth surrounding the American political system. The continual acceptance and validation of the American democratic system does not give society a more definitive answer or understanding of it. In fact, Plato would argue the opposite, only by evaluating and critiquing all forms of government, policy, life, action, etc. does any one individual or person come closer to the truth. The collective American support of the American "democratic" dream does little to maintain its existence. Instead, Plato might argue that it is the duty or obligation of democratic citizens to engage and discuss the nature of the polity in which they live. Plato and Socrates both embodied this principle; as two ancient Greeks, living in democratic Athens, they promoted, through discussion and questioning, a greater philosophic understanding of the nature of democracy. However, one critique or

questioning of the American democratic system does not suffice for Platonic philosophy. Plato implores the necessity of constant and perpetual reexamination, for only through this continual pursuit of philosophy will an individual begin to move further away from opinions.

Ultimately, reading and interpreting Plato's *Republic* is dependent, always, upon the Platonic dialogue, in which Plato creates an incredibly effective teaching tool to promote philosophic practice. The Platonic dialogues offer no true explicit meaning through which to conclusively conclude Plato's arguments, "For the crucial part of his interpretation the interpreter has to fall back on his own resources; Plato does not relieve him of the responsibility for discovering the decisive part of the argument by himself" (Strauss 1946, 351). Plato is creating, through the *Republic*, the model on which philosophic discussion and debate should be based. Instead of indoctrinating his teaching, he remains ambiguous, and in this manner Plato teaches us to remain free from dogmatic acceptance and adherence to a principle.

I would argue that Plato would implore modern society to remove themselves from the positions that they dogmatically maintain; such as the success of Neoliberalism as an economic policy and guiding rationality, the protection of democratic institutions by the American government, the true nature of the society in which we live, etc., Through the *Republic*, I argue that Plato would attempt to promote philosophic growth within society and work to eliminate dogmatic principles that have seemingly become engrained in some facets of American culture. Plato, in his *Republic*, has not supplied me

with any explicit argument for the protection of democracy or a solution for the problem of illusory democracy. However, he has provided me with a teaching tool and the material through which I can practice philosophy and ultimately conclude for myself, the solutions which I turned to Plato for in the first place. I encourage the majority of modern American society, in an effort to amend the decreasingly democratic structure within America, to be more willing to question, debate, and discuss the problems, issues, and principles that exist in American society. For only through a willingness to reject opinion and perception in modern society, and an impartial examination of that opinion or perception, will society begin to identify and amend the growing problems of Illusory Democracy within America.

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