

THE STING OF THE *KEPHÈNES* ECONOMY AND VIOLENCE IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Resumen: Omnipresente en la descripción de la transformación de los regímenes políticos de la *República* platónica, la imagen de los *kephènes* ilustra un proceso de degradación del alma humana y de la constitución que conduce al predominio del principio apetitivo y a la ascensión del tirano al gobierno del Estado. En tanto metáfora de los agentes de una moral adquisitiva y de una serie de prácticas lucrativas que favorecen la tendencia a la *pleonexia*, los *kephènes* representan un elemento indispensable a la comprensión de la radicalidad de las medidas económicas que rigen la existencia de los guardianes de Calípolis. El objetivo de este artículo es poner de relieve el papel decisivo de los *kephènes* en un proceso de exacerbación de los deseos superfluos, cuya satisfacción implica la emancipación de la economía de la autoridad política. Libre de toda sujeción e incapaz de autorregulación, la economía conducirá la ciudad a la guerra intestina y propiciará el advenimiento de la tiranía.

Palabras clave: economía, apetitos, codicia, riqueza, *stasis*, sofistas, lobos, perros, *kephènes*, tiranía.

Abstract: The image of the *kephènes* is omnipresent in the description of the transformation of the political regimes of the *Republic*. As such, it illustrates a degradation process of the human soul and the constitution, which leads to the prevalence of the appetitive part of the soul and to the ascension of the tyrant to the State government. The *kephenès* are the metaphor of agents of an acquisitive morality and of a series of lucrative practices that favour the tendency to *pleonexia*. For this reason, they represent an indispensable element for understanding the

radical economic measures that govern the existence of the guardians of Kallipolis. The present article aims to highlight the determining role of the *kephènes* in a process of exacerbating superfluous desires the satisfaction of which implies the emancipation of the economy from political authority. Free from all subjection and incapable of self-regulation, the economy will lead the city to an internal war and will propitiate the advent of tyranny.

Keywords: Economy, appetites, greed, wealth, stasis, sophists, wolves, dogs, *kephènes*, tyranny

Introducción

Instead of defining our position in the contemporary scientific debate regarding the *kephènes* of the *Republic*, we will begin by drawing attention to the considerable scarcity of studies directly or indirectly related to this topic. In our opinion, this shortage is all the more surprising that the image of the *kephènes*, far from being a superfluous detail, represents an important element for understanding the political project outlined in the *Republic*. It is, first of all, decisive for the proper understanding of the introduction of the principle of specialisation and the prohibition on the possession of property and of any kind of profit-making activity for members of the political and military classes. Secondly, it is important for understanding the role of economy in the decline of the city.

It is in this sense that the absence of reference to the subject of *kephènes* in such outstanding studies as those of Allan Bloom or Julia Annas,¹ may provoke much perplexity. Many others studies tend to avoid the problems that arise in trying to establish the identity of the *kephènes* through the various stages of the process of degradation of the soul and the constitution which is described in Book VIII of the *Republic*. Among them

¹ A. Bloom: *The Republic of Plato* (1968), New York, Basic Books, 1991. J. Annas: *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981.

we can include Stanley Rosen's exhaustive interpretative work.² Despite being one of the few who recognise the importance of the *kephènes*, professor Rosen overlooks the difficulties relating to the identification of the various human types and various types of desires symbolised by this metaphor. The same observation applies to an article by Zena Hitz³, in which the absence of references to the difficulties mentioned above is even more evident than in the previous case, as her article deals exclusively with the decline of the political regimes.

A third category is made up of texts addressing the subject in a transversal manner. They provide us with elements of analysis and clues that contribute to the identification of the characters and trends personified by the *kephènes*. Among these texts we will limit ourselves to mentioning two, the reading of which has allowed us to develop some of the central hypotheses of the present investigation: *Ruse et violence dans le livre VIII de la République* by Marcel Meulder,⁴ and *La cité des mages* by Marcello Carastro.⁵

To conclude, we will mention a final group of studies, which, in addition to highlighting the fundamental role of the *kephènes* in the process of degradation of the political regimes, bring out the ambiguity and polyvalent nature of this image. Of this small group, it is worth mentioning the valuable study carried out by Jocelyne Peigney.⁶ Without avoiding the difficulties offered by this topic, the author manages to capture the various nuances of the *kephènes* and offers elements that facilitate the identification of the characters and desires symbolised by this image. André Pelletier's article⁷ is in the same vein and, in addition to showing the profound connection of the figure of the *kephènes* with the general project of the *Republic*,

² *Plato's Republic: A study*, Yale University Press, New Heaven- London, 2005.

³ "Degenerate regimes in Plato's *Republic*." In *Plato's Republic: A Critical Guide*, Chapter 6, (Cambridge Critical Guides), ed. M. McPherran, 103-130. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴ « Ruse et violence au livre VIII de la *Republic* de Platon » in : *Metis. Anthropologie des mondes anciens*, vol. 7, n° 1-2, 1992, pp. 231-258.

⁵ *La Cité des Mages. Penser la magie en Grèce ancienne*. Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2016.

⁶ "Platon et les faux bourdons (*Republic*, VIII, 552c-IX, 573b)." *Gaia: revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaïque* 19 (2016).

⁷ "L'image du 'frelon' dans la *Republic* de Platon." *Revue de philologie* 22 (1948): 113-146.

it reveals the subtle strategies that Plato uses in order to adapt it to the needs of his argumentation.

Based on the above considerations, this study will, on the one hand, attempt to address some of the shortcomings of the first two categories of studies mentioned at the beginning of our introduction. On the other hand, we aim to provide some elements of analysis to complement the work carried out by the authors who deal more seriously with the *kephènès*. In this perspective, we will propose a reading of the Books VIII, IX and X of the *Republic* directed by the following questions: who are these enigmatic characters that Socrates brings together in the same species under the name of *kephènès*? How do they intervene in the process of mutation of the oligarchic man and *polis* into tyrannical ones? In what sense can they be considered, at the same time, as victims and agents of a perverted economy and therefore as responsible for the civil war?

I. The *Kephènès*: agents and victims of a perverted economy

To the image of the guardian as a combative and loyal dog, docile to its masters, and protector of the flock,⁸ Socrates opposes the image of a wild wolf, devouring human entrails, and ready to savor the blood of the members of its own herd with its sacrilegious nose and tongue.⁹ While the first image illustrates the nature of the man born to command and protect Kallipolis, the second symbolizes the excessive and violent nature of the tyrant, into which the man raised to lead the State will convert himself. In this process of degradation of the human soul, the drones (*kephènès*) play a determining part. Their insidious sting unleashes violent passions that, in order to be satisfied, requires modes of action that vary depending on the political regime and the nature of individuals. The practices designed to satisfy the appetites of these perfidious and voracious beings and of those

⁸ About the opposition between the dog and the wolf and its correlation with the opposition between the educated thumos of the guardian and the wild thumos of the tyrant see C. Arruza, "Philosophical Dogs and Tyrannical Wolves in Plato's *Republic*," in *Philosophy and Political Power in Antiquity*, ed. Cinzia Arruza, Dimitri Nikulin (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 52.

⁹ *Republic*, VIII, 565e-566a. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6 translated by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969. All *Republic* quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from Paul Shorey's translation.

who have tried their honey or have been wounded by their sting, cannot but intensify the desires that are at the origin of this process.

The sophists, demagogues, sycophants, poets, moneylenders, businessmen, prevaricators, mercenaries and criminals of various kinds, either individuals or rulers, belong to the category of the *kephènes*. These various human types are full of specific desires that are born in their soul and proliferate, either naturally and spontaneously, or as a consequence of external circumstances. Despite the fact that the first direct allusion to *kephènes* appears at Book VIII of the *Republic*, it is necessary to refer to books II, III and IV to identify the origin of this epidemic. In those books, Socrates introduces a principle the compliance of which is the indispensable condition for protecting the State from the plague of the drones: the principle of self-function or the principle of specialization.¹⁰

The transgression of this principle, and the fusion of politics and economy it entails, leads to the first outbreaks of the plague of the *kephènes*. Consequently, a process of political and moral decline begins: men raised to lead the State and protect the members of the herd will succumb to the harassment of passions and desires, that will end up transforming them into tyrants. This process is accompanied by the entry of private property within the political and military class, and the appearance of lucrative practices that the old regime prohibited in order to preserve the city in speech from the risk of *pleonexia*. Such circumstances lead the economy of subsistence to convert itself into an essentially chrematistic economy, which engenders hitherto unknown forms of violence.

The aforementioned circumstances are an unavoidable consequence of the increase and intensification of superfluous desires. But they are also among the causes that are responsible for the emergence, proliferation and intensification of a new type of appetites that, by virtue of their idle, voracious and wasteful nature, are designated as the drones' appetites. With the support of politics, these appetites colonize the soul of the rulers and the

¹⁰For an in-depth approach on the role of the individual function principle in the construction of the definition of justice in the *Republic*, see Ada Neschke-Hentschke. *Platonisme politique et théorie du droit naturel. Le platonisme politique dans l'antiquité* (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1995), 100-105.

ruled, until they become mere instruments of an economy of excess that ends up subjecting them to its tyrannical dictates.

Following the reasoning of the dialogue, we will first analyse the reasons for the introduction of the principle of specialization. We will see that the efforts to guarantee respect for the borders between the functional groups, are the expression of the political will to neutralize the destructive power of economy. This objective is made explicit by the establishment of a system of norms aimed to prevent the emergence of the desire for possession and hoarding in the souls of rulers, for fear that, dominated by this type of desire, they would become *kephènes*.

II. Two prophylactic measures against covetousness

In Plato's *Republic*, the image of the drones (*kephènes*) symbolizes the germ of concupiscence spilling over the city like a plague, after having colonized the soul of the rulers and their auxiliaries. To avoid the emergence of these agents of such a political and moral disease, Socrates proposes what follows: the realization of justice implies the observance of a principle that orders everyone to occupy the place and carry out only the activity that corresponds to him in function of his natural faculties, since nature has not endowed all men with the same dispositions.¹¹

In accordance with this theory, the founders of Kallipolis will carry out a distribution of the population in three functional sectors. To ensure that each one carries out his own work and occupies his own place in the *polis*, they will try to persuade them that each one of the members of the State are brothers, but when it came to forming them, Mother Earth mixed a different material in the soul of each of her children.¹²

With this fiction, the founders of the city will try to warn the members of the community against the harmful consequences of the transgression of categorical borders, and against the contempt for the precept that orders each man to

¹¹ *Republic* II, 370b. For the correspondence between the functional groups and the parts of the human soul see Etienne Helmer, *La part du bronze, Platon et l'économie* (Paris: Vrin, 2010), 227.

¹² *Republic* III, 414d-415d.

refrain from usurping the others' functions, exchanging his tools or performing various tasks. Although the violation of this principle represents a risk for the quality of the product resulting from the activities corresponding to each class, the repercussions that arise from an eventual exchange of functions and tools between the producers, represents a lower risk compared with the fact that carrying the arms or the direction of the State pass into the hands of the producers. Given their inability to control their desires, they would be likely to commit all kinds of violence and excess against the other members of the State. But an even more serious situation would be that, by dedicating themselves to improper or diverse tasks, the men who are born for the administration and the defense of the city develop tendencies contrary to their nature and, from benefactor assistants, become wild masters.¹³

Consequently, and as further considerations will confirm, the main risk of infringement of the principle of specialization consists in the juxtaposition of two spheres: the economic sphere and the political one.¹⁴ By their strict delimitation, Socrates aims at avoiding the emergence of the desire for possession in the soul of those who are in charge of ruling and protecting the State.

As a conclusion of the first moment of this paper, we can say that the principle of specialization is the condition of possibility for limiting the risks of emergence of the drones. Those are a variety of men and desires who, as the agents and instruments of an economy of excess, foster the emergence of what Plato considers the most acute and pernicious form of violence that can be unleashed on cities: the stasis or internal war.

The principle of specialization represents the indispensable, not sufficient though, condition against *pleonexia*. To prevent it, it is not enough to free the guardians from any alternate occupation alien to their political and military responsibilities. It is also necessary to deprive them of everything that might arouse in them any kind of affection likely to rival their sense of belonging to the entire community:

¹³ *Republic* III, 416e.

¹⁴ On the two main meanings of the expression *ta hautou prattein* in the *Republic* see Etienne Helmer, *La part du bronze, Platon et l'économie* (Paris: Vrin, 2010), 225.

But whenever they shall acquire for themselves land of their own and houses and coin, they will be house-holders and farmers instead of guardians, and will be transformed from the helpers of their fellow citizens to their enemies and masters, and so in hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against they will pass their days fearing far more and rather the townsmen within than the foemen without—and then even then laying the course of near shipwreck for themselves and the state.¹⁵

Starting from the same principle that guides the legislative project of the *Laws*, namely, that what is common favors the cohesion of the cities, while what is individual brutally tears them up,¹⁶ Plato advocates the substitution of the traditional *oikos* for a community of goods, children and women in the *génos* formed by the rulers and their auxiliaries.¹⁷ The philosopher's conviction that the stability of the city rests fundamentally on the affective cohesion between the members of the ruling class, explains the fact that the community of goods is applied solely and exclusively to them and the auxiliaries. It is also a question of preventing the risk of the guards developing appetites that could lead them to use their strength against the people, because "the most monstrous and shameful thing in the world for shepherds to breed the dogs who are to help them with their flocks in such wise and of such a nature that from indiscipline or hunger or some other evil condition the dogs themselves shall attack the sheep and injure them and be likened to wolves instead of dogs."¹⁸

The abolition of private property is accompanied by the prohibition to use and possess currency, as well as to manipulate and be in contact with gold and silver.¹⁹ Socrates' arguments to justify these radical measures reveal his conviction that internal dissent or *stasis* is inherent to the existence of property.²⁰ The

¹⁵ *Republic* III, 417a-b.

¹⁶ *Lg.* IX, 875a.

¹⁷ *Republic* V, 464a. For the differences in the means envisaged to combat *pleonexia* in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*, see Christophe Rogue, *D'une cité à l'autre: essai sur la politique platonicienne, de la République aux Lois* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), 28-29.

¹⁸ *Republic*, 416a. On the idea that the possession of material goods may lead to a transformation of the city's sheepdogs into wild wolves see Clara Mainoldi, *L'image du loup et du chien dans la Grèce ancienne d'Homère à Platon* (Paris: Ophrys, 1984), 192.

¹⁹ *Republic* III, 416d-e.

²⁰ *Republic* V, 465c.

abolition of property is the cornerstone of a political project, the excellence of which rests on its ability to prevent the birth and proliferation of the appetites responsible for the advent of an economy that, by virtue of its lucrative vocation and its natural tendency to anomy, favors the emergence of *stasis* and violence.

The time will come, however, when men raised to lead the State will choose as their successors men of iron and bronze, who, given the inferiority of their dispositions with respect to those of their predecessors, will show themselves unworthy of their political and military responsibilities. Unable to identify the metal that predominates in the composition of the souls of their descendants, they will end up mixing the races, “things that always beget war and enmity wherever they arise [...].”²¹

The two groups were pulling against each other, the iron and bronze towards money-making and the acquisition of land and houses and gold and silver, and the other two, the golden and silver, not being poor, but by nature rich in their souls, were trying to draw them back to virtue and their original constitution, and thus, striving and contending against one another, they compromised on the plan of distributing and taking for themselves the land and the houses, enslaving and subjecting as perioeci and serfs their former friends and supporters, of whose freedom they had been the guardians.²²

This passage highlights the fallibility of the methods designed to preserve the souls of gold and silver from lust and rivalry. Thus, despite the radical measures aimed at preventing the awakening of the animal part of the soul, the drone will end up becoming the master of the movements of the soul of the flock’s protectors, causing the mutation (*metabolè*) of the aristocratic *politeia* into timocracy, since “that in every form of government revolution takes its start from the ruling class itself, when dissension arises in that.”²³

The first symptom of the decline of the aristocratic *politeia* and its transformation into timocracy is revealed when the members of the ruling class are allowed to use money, to

²¹ *Republic* VIII, 547a.

²² *Republic* VIII, 547b-c

²³ *Republic* VIII, 545c-d.

own land, to purchase and to sale property. It is revealed also when they start raising walls around their private residences where they secretly profess their love for wealth, and give free rein to their desires.²⁴

It is by virtue of the value-system and the personal relationships woven into the *oikos* that germs of violence and rivalry begin to sprout in the city, and to dissolve the community of feelings between the members of its political and military body.²⁵

The timocracy is but the first stage of this process of degradation of the human soul and of the constitution. Its progressive transformation into an oligarchy is initially marked by a state of oscillation between moderation and the ever-growing desire to become richer, which will eventually prevail. This desire is the decisive step in the transformation of the young timocratic man into an oligarch. His tendency to *pleonexia* will sharpen from the moment when, though still under the influence of his father, the young timocratic man ends up yielding to the bad influence of his circle. Freed from the weight of *aidôs* inherited from the timocratic regime, he will abandon himself without reservation to his passion for wealth.

Initially sponsored by the domestic economy, the tendency to *pleonexia* will find in each mutation of the soul and the constitution new modes of expression that will favor its intensification and deployment. The progressive decline of the *politeia* is thus accompanied by the exacerbation of the inclination to excess, and of the passion for riches, which being initially a secret passion, assumes ever more evident and violent forms.

²⁴ *Republic* VIII, 548a-b; 550d-e. Silvia Campese points out that the transformation of regimes implies a change in the space where the tendencies of each type of character are deployed: just as the battlefield is the space of action where the timocratic man displays his virile ardour, the *oikos* is the space where the oligarch displays his tendency to incontinence. See "Loikos e la decadenza delle città," in *Platone: La Repubblica*, vol. IV, libro VIII-IX, éd. Mario Vegetti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2000):199-200.

²⁵ On the anti-political nature of the *oikos* according to Plato, see E. Helmer, "Le remodelage politique de l'*oikos* dans la *République* : de la famille au modèle familial, de l'économie domestique à l'économie politique." *The Internet Journal of the International Plato Society* 11 (2011): 5-8 <http://gramata.univparis1.fr/Plato/article08.html> (accessed March 2012); C. Natali, "L'éclatement de l'*oikos* dans la *République* de Platon," in *Études sur la République de Platon, I. La justice*, ed. Monique Dixsaut, Annie Larivée (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 216.

III. The *kephènes* in the oligarchy

The Genesis of Oligarchic Man

As calculating, industrious and thrifty as his timocratic father, the young oligarchic man has in his soul appetites that are typical of the nature of the drone. In this case, the drone is the metaphor of superfluous desires for ostentation and expense, which are repressed, however, for fear that wealth might be diminishing or lost. So, if most of the time, greed and calculation prevail over the desire of waste, when it comes to spending other people's goods, the drone that dozes in the soul of the oligarchic man awakens from his dream, and prompts him to venture into new activities that need less effort and allow him to considerably increase his income. Behind his appearance of respectability, this man will apply himself without hesitation to dispossess of their assets the widows and the orphans who fall under his tutelage and anything else similar that falls into his hands and gives him full freedom to commit crimes in all impunity.²⁶ Thus, disguised as philanthropy, rapacity surreptitiously enters the oligarchic city, causing a definitive division of the *politeia* in two cities at war with each other: the city of the poor, *kephènes* without darts, ambitious men, who are devoid of *métis*; and the city of the wealthy, *kephènes* with darts, named after their malicious and sly nature.

The birth of the drone in the oligarchy is closely linked to what Socrates considers one of the constitutive evils of this political regime: the *polupragmosune*. This one entails the possibility, for the members of the political group, to abandon themselves to lucrative activities, and for the economic agents to accede to political functions. The borders between the functional groups gradually fade, and their disappearance leads to the fusion between the political sphere and the economic sphere.

²⁶ *Republic* VIII, 554c.

The oligarchy

“Because the oligarchy is the regime based on the appraisal of fortune, in which the rich rule, and the poor do not participate in the government,”²⁷ men whose fortune comes from illicit or morally reprehensible activities will be among those who will be promoted to the highest political positions. To respond to the ever-increasing demands of the wealth-friendly part of the soul,²⁸ the rulers of the oligarchy do not only tolerate, but openly promote some lucrative activities that, benefiting a small minority, lead the others to poverty and begging. Since the rulers of the oligarchic “owe their offices to their wealth, they are not willing to prohibit by law the prodigals who arise among the youth from spending and wasting their substance. Their object is, by lending money on the property of such men, and buying it in, to become still richer and more esteemed.”²⁹ Thus, possessed by appetites akin to the *kephènes*, the rulers generate a new species of *kephènes*: men who, having lost their property and their social status, drowned by debt and deprived of political rights, wander in the city, conspiring against the other, like as criminals or beggars. Between these two classes, the businessmen wound with the sting of their money those to whom they lend it, and collect, multiplied, the interests that capital has generated, and thus causes the drone to abound in the State like the beggar.³⁰

According to Socrates the practice of usury gives birth to two kinds of people: the beggars, who are *kephènes* without a dart; and the criminals, who are *kephènes* endowed with a dart, like thieves, robbers, temple defilers, and other criminals.³¹ They form a mass of men ruined by unnecessary expenses. Attracted by the honey of the drone-traders, they contract debts that exceed their income, and have to sell their land, houses and other belongings to clear them. The birth and proliferation of this new species of impoverished men, inaugurates the advent of forms of violence that were absent from the previous regimes. An inevitable consequence of the transgression of the principle of

²⁷ *Republic* VIII, 550c.

²⁸ *Republic* IX, 580e.

²⁹ *Republic* VIII, 555c.

³⁰ *Republic* VIII, 555e-556c.

³¹ *Republic* VIII, 552c-d.

specialization, the *kephènes*-rulers of the oligarchy are the architects of an economy rooted in lucrative practices that generously favour a small minority. But the necessary counterpart of this process is the progressive pauperization of a large sector of the population. In giving birth to this plague, the rulers and the other beneficiaries of the usury and hoarding economy are unaware that they are insensitively plotting the ruin of the oligarchy.

In this portrait of the oligarchic regime, the image of the drone illustrates the desire for waste inhibited by greed and calculation. It illustrates also the result of an internal conflict (*stasis*), after which the unnecessary desires end up directing the movements of the oligarchic man's soul, and giving rise to the birth of the democratic man. Subsequently, the image is applied to men who, as they are dominated by unnecessary desires and are the victims of the rapacity of the rulers and the moneylenders, end up becoming criminals or as beggars. Finally, the members of the political class, as well as the merchants and the lenders, represent the most powerful and fearsome species inside the broader group of the *kephènes*. Under the rule of these greedy and powerful men, the city becomes a colony of drones, in which every one participates in the ruthless dynamics of an economy resulting from the submission of the wrathful part and the rational part of the soul to its wealth-friendly part. The *kephènes* endowed with darts, participate in it as agents and beneficiaries; as to the other *kephènes*, who are dominated by desires of the same nature but who are devoid of a dart, they are the instruments and victims of the economy of dispossession and robbery.

If the transition from timocracy to oligarchy appears as the consequence of a violent confrontation between the parts of the soul, the economic expressions of this moral conflict will soon trigger a conflict of a political nature: the *diastasis* or conflict between the poor and the rich,³² the two groups being driven by the same kind of appetites. Thus, the moral illness that gives life to the oligarchy soon destroys it to make way for the democratic regime.

³² On this subject see J.-M. Bertrand, "De la stasis dans les cités platoniciennes," *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 10 (1999): 214, <https://doi.org/10.3406/ccgg.1999.1502> (n.d.)

IV. The *kephènes* take the reins of the city

The internal war and the birth of democracy

Gathered together in a military expedition, the poor see that the rich, full of superfluous meat and breathless, barely manage to defend themselves. The poor will belittle them and consider that they do not deserve the wealth they possess. This conviction encourages them to conduct an internal war that ends with the victory of the poor, marking the birth of the democratic regime.³³

After a violent struggle against the oligarchic party, the members of the *demos* gain the right to access political functions, but this right is still conditioned on the possession of wealth, as in the oligarchy. However, unlike to what happens in the oligarchy, wealth no longer represents an end in itself. Its value lies in the fact that it represents the means to realize the democratic dream of freedom: freedom to express oneself, freedom to act, but above all, freedom to abandon oneself to chrematistic practices in order to satisfy unnecessary desires, more and more varied, more and more intense. Two more differences between democracy and oligarchy must be mentioned. The first has to do with the use that each State makes of wealth. While in the oligarchic regime the passion for wealth is expressed in the form of hoarding and accumulation, in the democratic regime, it is expressed in the form of ostentation and waste. The second difference has to do with the nature of its beneficiaries: being the exclusive monopoly of a small minority, the lucrative activities that were previously reserved for the rulers and other practitioners of usury and fraud, will be distributed in a much wider sector of the population, like rulers, small and big merchants, moneylenders and sycophants, to which a new species of *kephènes* is added: the lotus-eaters, a metaphor, that, judging by the rhetorical ability and the powerful seduction they exert on the souls of young people, would seem to apply to the sophists.

³³ *Republic* VIII, 557a.

According to the Socratic principle that political constitutions are born from the character of individuals,³⁴ it is logical to suppose that the mutation of the oligarchy in democracy is the necessary consequence of an alteration of the order of the oligarch's soul. In the following lines we will see which causes are involved in this process.

Thanks to his natural tendency to greed and austerity, the son of the timocratic man initially manages to escape from the constant siege of the drone that nests in his soul.³⁵ But the moment comes when the *kephènes* free him from the weight of the *aidôs* that he has inherited from his timocratic father. And as he has been a laborious and moderate man in his expenses, he abandons himself to his wasteful and superfluous desires. This mutation is explained by the same scheme that illustrates the transformation of the political regimes: the intervention of an external ally who, by virtue of his affinity with one of the parties vying for authority, comes to help them. Just as it happens in the State, the mutation of the oligarchic man is the result of the convergence of an internal tendency to incontinence, and an external circumstance that reinforces it: the company of the *kephènes*. "When a youth, bred in the illiberal and niggardly fashion that we were describing, gets a taste of the honey of the drones and associates with fierce and cunning creatures who know how to purvey pleasures of every kind and variety and condition, there you must doubtless conceive is the beginning of the transformation of the oligarchy in his soul into democracy."³⁶

Once again the *kephènes* attack, but this time, instead of using their dart against the young man, they make him taste their honey. While in 555d-556a the meaning of the allusion to the dart of the drones and its relation to the practice of the loan with interests is quite clear, the sense of the image of the honey shared by the *kephènes* is not so easy to understand. Judging by the recurrence of the allusions to the ambitious, voracious and wasteful nature of the drones, it would be possible to deduce that in this case, as it happens later, the honey symbolizes money

³⁴ On Plato's idea that political constitutions reflect the character of individuals see Nicole Loraux. *La cité divisée* (Paris: Payot, 1997). 79

³⁵ *Republic* VIII, 554c-d.

³⁶ *Republic* VIII, 559d-e

and the other delights of an opulent and voluptuous life.³⁷ However, the entrance of the lotus-eaters leads us to think that, in this specific case, the honey refers fundamentally to a certain kind of discourse that favours the emergence of appetites hitherto repressed in the soul of the oligarch. From this perspective, honey would be, not so much the desired result of a series of actions oriented towards a life of leisure and excess, as the catalyst of a process: the substance that, once tested by the oligarch, causes the relaxation of the part of the soul in charge of containing the unnecessary appetites. To demonstrate the relevance of this interpretation, it is necessary to analyze the reference to honey in the light of Socrates' considerations about what appears to be a new species of *kephènes*: the Lotus-eaters.

In 560c, Socrates uses for the first time the term Lotus-eaters. This appellation is applied to the men towards whom the young oligarch is dragged because of the increase and intensification of the desire to spend. They are the drones of 559d, those ferocious and terrible beasts that give a taste of their honey to the young man whose soul is empty of knowledge and upright concern and true speech.³⁸ Using their powerful rhetoric, they strip his soul of the last vestiges of modesty and moderation that it still had, and instead introduce anarchy, prodigality and impudence.³⁹ This causes the definitive transition from a man educated in the satisfaction of necessary desires to a man governed by unnecessary desires. Unlike the other varieties of *kephènes*, of which Socrates offers a characterization accompanied by a description of the genus of life corresponding to each species, the Lotus-eaters disappear as characters endowed with corporeality to be incarnated in their *technè*. Behind this art appears the figure of the sophist as an agent of a process of conversion of the soul of his auditor. Although Socrates does not formulate this idea explicitly, the subversive power of the logos of the lotus-eaters and their skilful handling of the art of pleasing and flattery coincide with the arts that Plato attributes to the sophists in other dialogues such as *Gorgias* (502b-503c), *Menexenus* (235ab) and *Sophist* (223a).

³⁷ J. Peiney, "Platon et les faux bourdons (République, VIII, 552c-IX, 573b)," *Gaia: revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaique* 19, (2016): 283. <https://doi.org/10.3406/gaia.2016.1709>. (n.d)

³⁸ *Republic* VIII, 560b.

³⁹ *Republic* VIII, 560e.

However, among the many authors consulted on this subject, Marcel Meulder is the only one to offer concrete elements in favour of this hypothesis. In his article “*Ruse et Violence dans le Livre VIII de la République*”, the author uses the term “*sophistes-Lotophages*” (“Lotus-eaters sophists”) to designate those responsible for the transit of the democratic man into a tyrannical one.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that this term does not appear in the *Republic*, Meulder’s analysis of the nature of the discursive mechanisms involved in the process of converting the souls of the young people subjected to the influence of this art, demonstrates, in our opinion, the plausibility of the identity of the *kephènes* Lotus-eaters and the sophists.

Socrates describes the stages of this process in the manner of an initiatory ritual: the *logoi* of the Lotus-eaters empty and purify the soul of the young man possessed by them, whom they thus initiate into the great mysteries.⁴¹ This purification represents the first stage of a process at the end of which words such as modesty, virility, moderation, greatness of spirit and liberality lose their former significance, giving way to an inversion of the values inherited by the young.⁴² By giving young people a taste of their honey, the *kephènes* are spreading throughout the city the seeds of a political and moral disease that the excess of freedom that reign in the democratic city will exacerbate.⁴³ Similar to phlegm and bile, which beginning with a member, ends up colonising the whole body, the honey of the sophists triggers a process of corruption which, beginning with the individual soul, soon affects the city. They validate with their *logos* the tendency to *pleonexia* that the *aristé politeia* contained by means of a strict regulation of the economy and the rigorous observation of the principle of the own function (*ta hautou prattein*). Nourishing this drive to unlimited hoarding and spending, this new class of drones is associated with the causes that trigger the collapse of the democratic regime and the advent of the tyrant.

⁴⁰ « Ruse et violence au livre VIII de la *République* de Platon » in : *Metis. Anthropologie des mondes anciens*, vol. 7, n°1-2, 1992, p. 249.

⁴¹ *Republic* VIII, 560d. The Lotus-eaters remove from the soul of the young man the knowledge and the opinions inherited from his timocratic father and introduce into it the oblivion, closing the way to return to his old condition. As well as those Lotus-eaters that make Ulysses’ sailors forget their home.

⁴² *Republic* VIII, 560d.

⁴³ *Republic* VIII, 564a.

The democratic man

Thus, the young man formed by the Lotus-eaters and fed with their honey will soon become a *kephèn* himself. Thanks to the fortune acquired by means of the trickery and other lucrative activities described above, the young man will gain the “respectability” necessary to enter the political life of the democratic city. Drunk with the honey of the Lotus-eaters and imbued with the freedom that reigns in the city, the young man will give himself up to the intense and varied pleasures that his regime offers him. In order to satisfy the demands of the ostentatious and licentious life of this type of individual, the city will open its doors to an economy of expropriation and violence, which, having begun to make its way into the oligarchy, finds in demagogues its privileged agents and beneficiaries, and in the democratic regime the most favourable of the lands for its development.

Once installed at the head of the state, the demagogues, or *kephènes* with dart,⁴⁴ form with their followers and with the *autourgoi* and *appragmones* a coalition against the rich.⁴⁵ Influenced by their leaders and hoping to get some honey from them,⁴⁶ the poor associate with the *kephènes* in a fierce procedural battle against the rich. Accused of conspiring against the democratic regime, those are dragged to court and stripped of their assets.⁴⁷ Most of the confiscated goods pass into the hands of the drones with dart who, in order to gain support and respectability, distribute the little that remains of those goods among the hungry people.⁴⁸ A deleterious climate settles over the city: the litigations swarm and, with them, grows hatred and resentment between the demagogues and the rich dispossessed. The practice of defamation is professionalized by giving life to

⁴⁴ Note that, in the case of the oligarchy, the image of the *Kephènes* with a dart applies to thugs or bandits, and that of the *Kephènes* without a dart to beggars, whereas in democracy the former applies to demagogues and the latter to their followers.

⁴⁵ These are men who work for themselves and are not interested in business. On this subject see Alain Fouchard, “L'éloge de l'agriculture et des agriculteurs au IV^e siècle avant Jésus-Christ,” in *Mélanges Pierre Lévêque* vol.3, ed. Marie-Madeleine Mactoux, Évelyne Génie (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989): 140. See *Republic* VIII, 564e, where the rich are called by Socrates “grass of the drones” because they are the victims of the rapacity of the demagogues.

⁴⁶ In this case the honey alludes to money.

⁴⁷ *Republic* VIII, 565b-c.

⁴⁸ *Republic* VIII, 565a.

one of the most perfidious characters of democracy: the sycophants. The city is transformed into a great court where the drones and the tainted rich face off in a ruthless procedural battle whose inevitable outcome is the ascension of the tyrant to government. Before describing how the transition from democratic to tyrannical regime takes place, we will explain the main lines of the process of converting the democratic man into a tyrannical one, highlighting the role of the *képhènes* in it.

V. The city prey to wolves

The genesis of tyrannical man

Having reached maturity, the democratic man will have a son to whom something similar to his father will happen. His natural inclination to leisure and prodigality will drag him, like the former, to frequent the drones, now designated as “terrible wizards and tyrant-makers.”⁴⁹ Without specifying the nature of the technique they employ, Socrates explains that these magicians engender in the young man a love that, like a great winged drone, takes command of the idle and wasteful desires that flutter in his soul.⁵⁰

Considering the essential role of these mysterious characters in the production of tyrannical man and his rise to government, it is strange that most interpreters simply name them without mentioning the problem of identifying them.⁵¹ Leaving this question temporarily aside we will approach this passage by starting with the identification of the effects of this Eros on the soul of the victim.

Socrates explains that this winged drone infuriates and dislodges from himself any desire or opinion that is opposed to it,⁵² inducing the host “to dare anything and everything in order

⁴⁹ *Republic*. IX, 572e.

⁵⁰ *Republic* IX, 572e-573a.

⁵¹ Regarding the difficulty in identifying these characters and the lack of clarity regarding the type of *eros* Plato refers to, see M. Meyer, “Peisetarios of Aristophanes’ Birds and Erotic Tyrant of Republic IX,” in *The political theory of Aristophanes: explorations in poetic wisdom*, ed. Jeremy Mhire, Bryan-Paul Frost (Binghamton, NY: Suny Press, 2014): 279.

⁵² Zena Hitz explains that this final purge of shame and moderation in the soul of the son of the democratic man is the individual analogue of the political tyrant’s purgation of any

to find support for himself and the hubbub of his henchmen, in part introduced from outside by evil associations, and in part released and liberated within by the same habits of life as his."⁵³

Freed from the last shreds of moderation that he still retained, the young man will no longer find any obstacle to doing at vigil what was previously allowed only in his dreams: he will not hesitate to appropriate his father's goods, and after having squandered them in the company of his corrupters, friends and courtesans, he will steal, desecrate the temples, accept bribes to give false testimony in court, sell free men into slavery, and act as a public informer.⁵⁴

As the above passage shows, the mutation of the democratic man into a tyrannical one is partly brought about by his own habits, partly by the wizards and tyrant-makers. The question arises of who are these evil beings, endowed with quasi-supernatural powers, and what does their art consist of.

J. Peigney offers an interpretation according to which these epithets would apply to the desires of the young man⁵⁵. However, several elements lead us to think that the *màgoi turannopoi* designate a certain type of men who inoculate in the young man a passion that activates and reinforces idle and wasteful desires.

Among these elements, the main one is the reference to the circumstances that lead to the conversion of the father.⁵⁶ In establishing the parallel with the father, Socrates indicates that the same scheme applies to the son: a natural tendency to incontinence reinforced by bad companies. According to Marcello Carastro, these bad companies are the sophists. The presence of the verb *katékhein*, which suggests dominance or control, and the verb *mekhanân*: to engineer, often used to

good or virtuous characters remaining in the city. "Degenerate regimes in Plato's *Republic*," in *Plato's Republic: A Critical Guide*, ed. M. McPherran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120. Kindle ed. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511763090>

⁵³ *Republic* IX, 575a. As Annie Larivée explains, this eros is a sort of unifying principle that gives the desires of the young a certain direction, a certain coherence and a power to act. "Malaise dans la cité," in *Études sur la République de Platon*, Vol. 1, ed. Monique Dixsaut, Annie Larivée (Paris: Vrin, 2005), p.181

⁵⁴ *Republic* VIII, 575b.

⁵⁵ J. Peigney, "Platon et les faux bourdons (République, VIII, 552c-IX, 573b)." *Gaia* 19 (2016): 281, <https://doi.org/10.3406/gaia.2016.1709> (n.d.)

⁵⁶ *Republic* IX, 572d-e.

indicate the sophist's slyness, would be a first clue.⁵⁷ But even more eloquent than these verbs, is the very figure of the tyrant: his rhetorical skill and the perverse use he makes of it would represent the unequivocal sign of his trade with sophists.⁵⁸

Once the tyrant-making magicians have been identified, the question arises as to the nature of the link between an individual subjected to his own appetites and the exercise of that individual's tyrannical power over the State. The passage that follows the enumeration of crimes of the tyrannical man gives an initial indication of this question: "when men of this sort and their followers become numerous in a state and realize their numbers, then it is they who, in conjunction with the folly of the people, create a tyrant out of that one of them who has the greatest and mightiest tyrant in his own soul."⁵⁹

Before quoting the passage about the mutation of tyrannical man into a tyrant, it is important to insist on the fact that his rise to power is conditioned on popular support.⁶⁰ It is necessary that the *demos* be possessed by the same kind of appetites that the man he will choose in the hope of preserving his freedoms threatened by the oligarchs. But more than fearing the return of the oligarchy, the *demos'* main motivation for allying with demagogues against the alleged enemies of the regime seems to be honey, which could be considered a metaphor for the *misthos* or remuneration offered to the people to motivate them to attend the assembly and give their vote to those who claim to represent them.⁶¹

But soon the *demos* will witness with horror the spectacle of the transformation into a tyrant of the man appointed to protect him. To illustrate this transformation Socrates resorts to

⁵⁷ Marcello Carastro, *La Cité des Mages* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2016), 191.

⁵⁸ On the deceitful speech of the tyrant and his rhetorical ability to seduce the naive *demos* see C. Panos, "Le tyran dans le rôle du roi. À propos du chapitre XI du livre V de la Politique d'Aristote," in *Le philosophe, le roi, le tyran*, ed. Jean-François Pradeau, Silvia Gastaldi (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2009), 166-167.

⁵⁹ *Republic* VIII, 575c-d.

⁶⁰ With regard to the fact that the support of the *demos* appears in the *Republic* as an indispensable condition for the rise of the tyrant to government É. Helmer, *La part du bronze* (Paris: Vrin, 2010), 134-135.

⁶¹ On the *misthos* according to Plato see François Vannier, *Finances publiques et richesses privées dans le discours athénien aux Vème et IVème siècles* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1988), 235.

the legend of Lycaon, king of Arcadia, turned into a wolf,⁶² after having offered a human sacrifice in the sanctuary of Zeus Lycaios:

[...] A leader of the people who, getting control of a docile mob, does not withhold his hand from the shedding of tribal blood, but by the customary unjust accusations brings a citizen into court and assassinates him, blotting out a human life, and with unhallowed tongue and lips that have tasted kindred blood, [66a] banishes and slays and hints at the abolition of debts and the partition of lands is it not the inevitable consequence and a decree of fate that such a one be either slain by his enemies or become a tyrant and be transformed from a man into a wolf?⁶³

With the allusion to human sacrifice and the passage of humanity to the bestiality that such an act implies, Socrates illustrates the result of the transgression of the principle of specialization and of measures prohibiting possessions for guardians: to allow the guardians to possess something privately is to expose them to the risk of being transformed into savage masters. The question remains how does the mutation occur from what was originally a moral illness to a political illness. In other words, how do we explain the rise of this moral monster to the government of the city?

The birth of tyranny

Trying to put an end to the hostilities in the city the *demos* chooses a protector.⁶⁴ Initially honouring his position, he is kind and accommodating to those who have made his rise to power possible. Son of the city and drone among the drones, the tyrant is not a being endowed with qualities that make him stand out from his supporters. Far from being a contingent or isolated

⁶² On this subject C. Arruzza, "Philosophical Dogs and Tyrannical Wolves in Plato's *Republic*," in *Philosophy and Political Power in Antiquity*, ed. Cinzia Arruzza, Dimitri Nikulin (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 43.

⁶³ *Republic* VIII, 565d-566a. On the different ancient versions of the myth of Lycaon see M. Jost, "Deux mythes des métamorphoses en animal et leurs interprétations," *Kernos* 18 (2001): 347-370. <https://doi.org/10.4000/kernos.1909>

⁶⁴ *Republic* VIII, 565c.

phenomenon, its rise to political power is the result of a series of defined political, social and economic conditions.⁶⁵

The devotion of people to their protector is all the greater inasmuch as he promises them the abolition of debts and the redistribution of land. Under this pretext he promotes a bloody revolution against the oligarchs, who, accused of conspiring against democracy, are forced to leave the city or die at the hands of their adversaries. The goods of the murdered rich pass into the hands of the tyrant, who will divide them between his entourage and the *demos*.⁶⁶ To increase his income he will promote some wars that will also allow him to minimize the risks of an uprising of the impoverished people by the payment of war taxes.⁶⁷

Initially directed at the rich, the tyrant's violence will soon be deployed against those who, having allowed him to conquer political power, now represent a danger to him, whether by their wealth, their greatness of spirit or their intelligence. Having exterminated the men of value, the tyrant will surround himself with the most abject men in the city.

It is in this context that Socrates undertakes his diatribe against poetry, accused of affirming absurdities such as that tyrants are wise for the company of wise men.⁶⁸ Generously rewarded by their beneficiaries, the tragic poets not only praise the tyrants, but also, traveling from state to state "collecting crowds and hiring fine, loud, persuasive voices, they draw the politics towards tyrannies or democracies."⁶⁹ This assertion is an extension of the analyses on music education at Book III and the need to adapt poetic texts to the ethical objective that guides the *paideia* of the guardians.⁷⁰ This implies the suppression of

⁶⁵ Sylvain Roux observes that, unlike Gyges, the tyrant of the *Republic*, he managed to become the head of the city thanks to social, economic and political conditions. "Entre mythe et tragédie: l'origine de la tyrannie selon Platon," *Revue des Études Grecques* 114 (2001), 151

⁶⁶ *Republic* VIII, 566e.

⁶⁷ *Republic* IX, 567a. About the taxations imposed by tyrants in the classical period see L. Kallet, "Demos Tyrannos: wealth, power, and economic patronage" in *Popular Tyranny: sovereignty and its discontents in Ancient Greece*, ed. Morgan (Austin: university of Texas press, 2003), 123-126.

⁶⁸ *Republic* VIII, 568b.

⁶⁹ *Republic* VIII, 568c.

⁷⁰ J.-M. Bertrand explains that the censorship of speech in the *Republic* does not only concern tragic poetic speech, but that it also applies to the recipients of ungodly speeches. Indeed, for Plato the listeners are as guilty as the composers of such speeches, simply by

passages describing heroes or greedy gods,⁷¹ in a state of dementia, drunkenness or lust, practicing deception or perpetrating violent acts against their parents or other divinities.⁷²

Analysed in the light of Book III, the considerations of Book IX highlight the relationship between poetry and the birth of tyranny. By indicating the participation of the tragic poets in the production of the tyrant and in his ascension to the government of the State, Socrates reveals us that, in addition to the Lotus-eaters, the adjective of *mágoi turannopoioí* covers the tragic poets.⁷³ The art of flattery and the rhetorical skill of the sophists combine with the *mageía* of the poets to generate a powerful potion: the honey of the *kephènes*, nourishment and delight of the animal part of the human soul that loves wealth and sensual pleasures.

Continuing the destructive work initiated by the other species of *kephènes*, the sophists and tragic poets participate in the construction of appetites, practices and values that lead the city, scarred by the violence gangrened by *pleonexia*, towards tyranny.

VI. Conclusions

Although the decline of Kallipolis begins with the transgression of the principle of specialization, the drones make their first appearance within the oligarchy. Their passion for wealth generates a set of lucrative practices which, favouring a small minority, leads to the impoverishment of the *demos*. Their desire to put a stop to the greed of the rich ends up in an internal war, which culminates in the dissolution of the oligarchy and the

listening to things they should not be listened to. J.-M. Bertrand, "Langage juridique et discours politique dans les cités grecques de l'Antiquité. Réflexions sur *les Lois* de Platon," *Langage et société* 77 (1996): 71-75.

⁷¹ *Republic* III, 390d-e, 390e-391a.

⁷² *Republic* III, 387a-d. Let us remember that in IX, 573c the tyrannical man is described as a drunkard, erotic and lunatic.

⁷³ It should be pointed out that Plato's criticism is particularly directed not at de poets but at tragic poets. On this subject see L. Mouze, "Le conflit entre le poète tragique et le philosophe dans la *République* de Platon," *Rationalité tragique, Zetesis, Actes des Colloques de l'association N°1, 2010: 8* <https://zetesis.hypotheses.org/files/2014/04/1Mouze.pdf>

birth of the democratic regime. The powerful, but still discreet influence of the *kephènes* on the organisation of the oligarchic city will gain in democracy the strength to set itself up as a mentor for political activity and prepare the conditions for the advent of tyranny.

Between the transgression of the principle of specialization and the birth of the tyrant, there is a story of political and moral decadence led by the *kephènes*. Without ignoring their specificity or the diversity of the causes that lead these individuals to develop the trends that define their nature, they share one constant feature: their exacerbated passion for wealth.

While it is true that the decline of the *politeia* begins with the corruption of the elements in power, confirming the importance of education of the guardians and the need for economic measures to prevent the awakening of the animal that sleeps in its soul, the continuity of this process is not only related to the decline of the leaders. The ascent to government of men dominated by appetites of the drone's kind, and ultimately the advent of the tyrant, are the result of the sum of the particular wills of a city eaten up by *pleonexia*. The participation of the demos in this process highlights the harmful consequences of an education system that is exclusively focused on the training of leaders. The absence of an educational programme aimed at educating the appetites of economic agents exposes the city to the risk of seeing the proliferation of a race of greedy and licentious men who choose as their ruler a member of their species, imagining that the fact of being possessed by the same type of appetites will provide them with the conditions to freely exercise their tendency to incontinence, anarchy and prodigality.

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