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ARTIGOS

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Leo Strauss on the problem of Socrates in "The Clouds"

Leo Strauss sobre o Problema de Sócrates em "As Nuvens"

ABSTRACT:

The comedy *The Clouds* by Aristophanes is one of the main direct historical sources available on Socrates, alongside the Socratic dialogues of Plato and Xenophon. However, the portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds* differs substantially from the portrayals of Socrates in the texts of Plato and Xenophon. According to Leo Strauss, these portrayals were responses to Aristophanes and were constructed around the "problem of Socrates," that is, the problem of the place of rationality in human life and the tense relationship between philosophy and society, issues that appear intertwined with the conflict between philosophy and poetry. According to Strauss, there would be a great underlying agreement between Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon regarding Socrates' astonishing lack of prudence. For them, Socrates would be a purely theoretical and apolitical man who dangerously ignored the power of the *alogon* in social and political life. Plato and Xenophon would be more prudent than Socrates, more aware of the limits of reason in social and political life, and would have constructed a more prudent and respectable Socrates in the eyes of the city with the aim of saving philosophy from the city's repression and saving the city from the corrupting effects of philosophy. In this movement, philosophy becomes political philosophy and reconciles in a way with poetry, incorporating the tragic and the comic into a superior ironic unity.

Keywords: Socrates' problem; Rationality; Philosophy and poetry; Tragic and comic; Leo Strauss

RESUMO:

A comédia *As Nuvens*, de Aristófanes, é uma das principais fontes históricas diretas disponíveis sobre Sócrates, ao lado dos diálogos socráticos de Platão e Xenofonte. No entanto, a representação de Sócrates em *As Nuvens* difere substancialmente das representações de Sócrates nos textos de Platão e Xenofonte. Para Leo Strauss, essas representações foram respostas a Aristófanes e foram construídas em torno do "problema de Sócrates", ou seja, o problema do lugar da racionalidade na vida humana e a relação tensa entre filosofia e sociedade, questões que aparecem entrelaçadas com o conflito entre filosofia e poesia. Segundo Strauss, haveria um grande acordo subjacente entre Aristófanes, Platão e Xenofonte acerca da assombrosa falta de prudência de Sócrates. Para eles, Sócrates seria um puro homem teórico e apolítico que ignorava perigosamente a força do *alogon* na vida social e política. Platão e Xenofonte seriam mais prudentes que Sócrates, mais conscientes dos limites da razão na vida social e política, e teriam construído um Sócrates mais prudente e respeitável aos olhos da cidade com o objetivo de salvar a filosofia da repressão da cidade e salvar a cidade dos efeitos corruptores da filosofia. Nesse movimento, a filosofia se torna filosofia política e se reconcilia de certa maneira com a poesia, incorporando o trágico e o cômico em uma unidade superior irônica.

Palavras-chave: Problema de Sócrates; Racionalidade; Filosofia e poesia; Trágico e cômico; Leo Strauss

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, Leo Strauss's focus shifted away from modern thinkers to classical political philosophy and liberal education. This period saw the publication of notable books such as *The City and Man* (1964), *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966), and *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (1968). At this point, the book *Socrates and Aristophanes* takes on a prominent place. According to Meier, "*Socrates and Aristophanes* is the longest and most astonishing of his books" (2006, p. 27). In a letter addressed to Alexander Kojève, Leo Strauss remarked that he was about to publish his lectures on *City and Man* and that only after completing this could he begin his "real work, an interpretation of Aristophanes" (STRAUSS, 2000, p. 309). When Harvey Mansfield asked Leo Strauss which of his books was his favorite, Strauss reportedly responded, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, stating that it was because he "learned something new"[1]. It is also noteworthy that *Socrates and Aristophanes* is a book dedicated to analyzing the work of a poet rather than a philosopher, as was customary in Leo Strauss's work. Strauss's interest in Aristophanes had already been publicized in the lectures he delivered in Chicago in 1958 on "The Problem of Socrates", which would later be published posthumously in his book *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (1989), and in a more complete version in 1996 in the journal *Interpretation*, titled *The Origins of Political Science and the Problem of Socrates: Six Public Lectures by Leo Strauss*. Why did Leo Strauss attach so much importance to Aristophanes, and how does this work connect with Strauss's broader concerns about the relationship between philosophy and society and the revival of classical political rationalism? To begin investigating these questions, let's focus on the analysis of the comedy *The Clouds*.

Aristophanes' comedy *The Clouds* is one of the primary direct historical sources available about Socrates, alongside Plato's Socratic dialogues and those of Xenophon. Among these sources, it is the oldest. The comedy somewhat foreshadows the actual death of Socrates, as the accusations against Socrates in both the play and real life are similar: not believing in the city's gods and corrupting the youth. The play was first staged in 423 BC. At that time, Socrates was around 47 years old. Socrates was sentenced to death 23 years later, in 399 BC, at the age of 70. The political context of the play and the real death of Socrates is that of Athenian democracy in the tumultuous period following the death of Pericles (429 BC), with the city embroiled in the final stages of the Peloponnesian War and experiencing intense political events such as the rule of the Thirty Tyrants (404 BC) and the restoration of democracy (403 BC). In both the play and real life, Socrates is

ISSN 2357-7975

judged by the common people. At the end of the play, Strepsiades, a man of common sense, sets fire to Socrates' thinkery. In real life, Socrates was sentenced to death by the democratic council of 501 citizens chosen by lot. In Plato's dialogue *Apology of Socrates*, at the beginning of his own defense before the council, Socrates mentions Aristophanes' comedy as the first accusation made against him (PLATO, *Apology*, 19c)[2].

The comedy tells the story of Strepsiades, a man of humble origin who married a woman of higher class and sought out Socrates in his "thinkery"[3] to learn the art of speaking well, with the aim of deceiving his creditors and getting rid of the debts that his son, Pheidippides, incurred by spending his father's money on horses. The thinkery is described as a strange place with odd, thin, dirty, pale, melancholic people, conducting useless research such as measuring the size of a flea's jump or the sound of a mosquito's fart. Upon entering the thinkery, the first thing Socrates teaches is that the city's gods do not exist. He then introduces new deities, the Clouds. After some time trying to teach Strepsiades, Socrates gives up, considering him foolish. Strepsiades then calls his son Pheidippides to learn from Socrates. Pheidippides reluctantly agrees and witnesses the confrontation (*agon*) between two personified speeches (*logoi*): the Just Speech, representing traditional values, and the Unjust Speec[h], embodying the new values of the democratic era in which they lived. Pheidippides is intelligent and learns to argue very well. However, after this learning, he beats his father and justifies this aggression with logical arguments. He then threatens to beat his mother. Strepsiades reacts against his son, regrets having brought him to the thinkery, considers Socrates guilty of this inversion of values, returns to believing in Zeus, and sets fire to Socrates' thinkery.

The most conventional interpretation of the play was that Aristophanes had created a false portrait of Socrates as an eccentric sophist who studied nature and promoted impiety and corruption. This false presentation was thought to aim at discrediting sophistry and philosophy in general, in defense of traditional Athenian values. In this reading, Aristophanes is seen as a naive reactionary, shocked by the disrespect of philosophers towards the gods and traditional values, while also warning of the corrosive effects that philosophy/sophistry could have on public morality[5]. However, this interpretation was not unanimous. Philosophers like Hegel[6], Kierkegaard[7], Nietzsche[8], and Leo Strauss, as well as more recent commentators like Martha Nussbaum (1980), Meier (2006), Menon (2017) and Ari Linden (2017), offered different readings that view Aristophanes as a profound thinker addressing important philosophical and political issues in his comedies. According to these commentators, we cannot conclude that the play

ISSN 2357-7975

The Clouds only presents a false portrait of Socrates[9].

Regarding the characterization of Socrates as a sophist, it is important to note that at the time of the staging of *The Clouds*, the distinction between sophists and philosophers was not fully established. According to Guthrie, "for a long time before it acquired its pejorative meaning, *sophos* and *sophistes* were once synonymous" (2007, p. 32). These terms were used to refer to wise individuals in general, including poets and thinkers. It is true that a certain distrust of intellectuals gradually developed in Athenian society in the 5th century BC, and the play *The Clouds* itself offers one of the earliest records of the pejorative sense of the term *sophistes*. However, popular distrust was directed towards intellectuals in general, and the rigid distinction between sophists and philosophers only solidified after the death of Socrates. Therefore, it would be anachronistic to expect the same understanding from Aristophanes.

It is also interesting to note, according to Kerferd, that the true reason behind Plato and Xenophon's effort to distance themselves from the sophists was the objection "against anyone being able to obtain what the sophists had to offer simply by paying for it" (KERFERD, 2003, p. 48). In other words, the objection was not to payment itself, nor to "relativism", but to the democratic attitude of the sophists who offered their teachings to anyone who paid, instead of carefully selecting their students. The concern with selection was justified by the power of speech in the *polis*, the political environment in which rhetoric could have a decisive influence, and this knowledge of the art of persuasion could be misused by unvirtuous individuals. According to Kerferd, "this was certainly the source of the powerful attraction exerted by the sophists in Athens, and also of the hatred that led to attacks by the authors of comedies, to trials, and ultimately to the death of Socrates himself, at the turn of the 5th to the 4th century" (*Ibid*.), and, for Kerferd, Socrates was part of the sophist movement (*Ibid.*, p. 62 and pp. 96-100). Regardless of whether the historical Socrates was ever a sophist, for Strauss, the problem of Socrates being presented as a sophist in *The Clouds* does not even exist, as Socrates was not portrayed that way in the comedy[10].

Regarding the criticism about the supposed falseness of portraying Socrates as a natural philosopher, Strauss points out that Socrates was indeed a "naturalist" philosopher in his youth, a fact mentioned in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates states, on the day of his death, that "in my youth I was passionately devoted to that kind of study which people call 'investigation of natural phenomena'" (PLATO, *Phaedo*, 96b, p. 108). This interest is also reported, Strauss continues, by "Xenophon in *Oeconomicus* (6.13-17 and 11.1-6) and in *Symposi-*

ISSN 2357-7975

um (6.6-8)" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 104). In the case of Xenophon's texts, Strauss asserts, Socrates was no longer young when he was still famous as a natural philosopher and had not yet fully turned his attention to human affairs. Thus, for Strauss, we cannot simply dismiss *The Clouds* as merely a false portrayal of Socrates.

According to Strauss, "the profoundest student of Aristophanes in modern times was Hegel" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 115). Strauss examines Hegel's interpretation of Aristophanes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, highlighting how it serves as a lens through which Hegel views the development of free subjectivity. This concept, crucial to modern thought, is traced by Hegel to its origins in ancient Greece, where it finds expression in the works of philosophers and playwrights like Aristophanes[11]. For Hegel, the same process that gave birth to subjectivity also led to corruption, as the relativization of communal values[12] that made subjectivity possible would also lead to "complete freedom from fear of anything transcending the individual" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 116), making eccentric and corrupt behaviors, based solely on individual interest, more likely. In antiquity, according to Hegel, the emergence of subjectivity is associated with corruption or decadence because there were no effective "external means" outside of consciousness to contain the negative effects of this development (external means such as the modern market and state). Socrates deconstructs without putting anything solid in place of the shared myths that form community life, "when Socrates wishes to induce his friends to reflection, the discourse has always a negative tone; he brings them to the consciousness that they do not know what the Right is" (HEGEL, 2001, p. 289). The city itself ceases to be Socrates' home, and "his true world becomes the world of thought" (Id). Thus, for both Hegel and Strauss, Aristophanes in *The Clouds* was not caricaturing a false problem because philosophy would indeed have a socially corrosive side by abruptly deconstructing the values and myths that form the pillars of ethical and communal life. In this sense, we agree with Linden when he states that Hegel and Strauss have brought relevance or modernity to the comedy *The Clouds* because they interpret it "as the most effective medium for displaying contradictions that arise when we have all fundamentally renounced our belief in absolutes (i.e., in gods, the state included) — this could be one way of understanding comedy's modernity" (LINDEN, 2017, p. 436).

This contemporaneity of the play directly relates to the "problem of Socrates" as the central philosophical theme of *The Clouds*. Leo Strauss's interest in the problem of Socrates is not about interpreting the historical Socrates but the problem of Socrates as formulated by Nietzsche (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 6). That is, the perennial prob-

ISSN 2357-7975

lem of determining the place of reason in human life. Is reason capable of providing foundations for moral, social, and political life, replacing mythical, religious, and traditional foundations that had been arbitrarily and contingently constructed? Does reason have autonomy from the contingencies of the body, temperament, passions, and social milieu? Can philosophical life be universalized? How can philosophy be reconciled with society? Nietzsche viewed Socrates as a symbol of the rationalist, and thus optimistic, response to this problem. Nietzsche, on the other hand, represented the "tragic" response. For Nietzsche, Socrates was "the archetype of theoretical man" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 7; NIETZSCHE, BT, §15), promoting a "rationality at any cost" that aimed "to destroy myth" (NIETZSCHE, BT, §23), without, however, replacing the role of myth in providing meaning, communal ties, commitment, and motivation for action. Wanting to establish "reason as a tyrant," as Socrates purportedly did, would, for Nietzsche, be "radical means," expressing decadence and deepening it (NIETZSCHE, TI, The Problem of Socrates §9-10 and TI, Morality as Anti-Nature §2). In Nietzsche's terms, therefore, the problem of Socrates is the problem of the excess of the "theoretical man," or the hubris of rationalism. For Nietzsche, this hubris is mistaken in its premises and has negative effects on culture. Mistaken because it is "optimistic" or naive, as optimism is "the belief that the world can become the best of all imaginable worlds" and "thought can not only fully know Being but can correct it. Life can be guided by science" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 7). Therefore, myths could be replaced by science and put to the service of a "higher selfishness" (human needs). In short, "rationalism is optimism, for it is the belief that the power of reason is unlimited and essentially beneficial", and this optimism will only appear in its ultimate consequences "in contemporary West: in the belief in universal enlightenment and, with it, in the earthly happiness of all within a universal state" (Id). The hubris of rationalism would have negative effects on culture because if reason is unable to effectively replace the role of myths in culture, if science does not "create values", then the critical deconstruction of myths promoted by Socratic rationalism will have corrosive effects, dismantling the "protective atmosphere" of life formed by the myths and values of a specific culture, of a specific cave, without putting anything solid in its place, a situation that would lead to nihilism and ultimately be fatal:

> According to Nietzsche, the theoretical analysis of human life that realizes the relativity of all comprehensive views and thus depreciates them would make impossible human life itself, for it would destroy the protecting atmosphere within which life or culture or action is alone possible. Moreover, since the theoretical analysis has its basis outside of life, it will never be

ISSN 2357-7975

> able to understand life. The theoretical analysis of life is non-committal and fatal to commitment, but life means commitment (STRAUSS, 1950, p. 435).

Socrates as a "despotic logician"[13] would have a corrosive effect on the "protective atmosphere" of Greece and contributed to the loss of the "old Marathonian virtue of body and soul" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 103; NIETZSCHE, BT, §13) [14]. In the realm of tragic theater, "Socratism" is said to have been introduced by Euripides and led to the end of tragedy. The first attack on the negative effects of Socratism on culture and life was launched by Aristophanes in *The Clouds*. For Strauss, "Aristophanes's political posture seems to foreshadow Nietzsche's political posture" (1966, p. 8). However, Nietzsche is said to have taken Aristophanes's critique of young Socrates as if it applied to the Platonic Socrates (Id). Strauss seems to suggest that this was a mistake on Nietzsche's part. This suggestion depends on Strauss's hypothesis that the representations of Socrates in the texts of Plato and Xenophon were responses to Aristophanes's Socrates. To assess this hypothesis, let's focus on Strauss's interpretation of the comedy *The Clouds*[15].

STRAUSS'S INTERPRETATION OF *THE CLOUDS*

For Leo Strauss, Aristophanes was not an enemy of Socrates, and the play *The Clouds* should be understood more as a "friendly warning addressed to Socrates — a warning informed by a mixture of admiration and envy of Socrates" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 105). Furthermore, "the primary object of Aristophanes' envy is not Socrates' wisdom but Socrates' complete independence from that popular applause on which the comic poet necessarily depends, or Socrates' perfect freedom" (*Ibid.*). To support this hypothesis, Strauss points to the way Aristophanes is portrayed in Plato's dialogue *Symposium*, the plot of which is presented as taking place seven years after the presentation of *The Clouds*. In this dialogue, Aristophanes is one of Socrates' wise friends who participate in the wine banquet around philosophical conversations about the nature of love (PLATO, *Symposium*, 189c-193e). At the end of the conversation, only three men remain: Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Socrates. According to Strauss, "The three men were engaged in a friendly con-versation ending in agreement about a subject than which none was more important to Aristophanes, the subject of comedy. The agreement was an agreement of Aristophanes to a thesis propounded by Socrates" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 105).

ISSN 2357-7975

Furthermore, Strauss argues that it is necessary to analyze Aristophanes's other comedies to support this hypothesis, which he does in detail in his book "Socrates and Aristophanes," in chapters subsequent to the chapter in which he analyzes *The Clouds*. In these comments on the other comedies, Strauss points out various blasphemous moments against the city's traditional beliefs indicating that Aristophanes was much closer to Socrates and philosophy than we might imagine from reading only *The Clouds*. Finally, Strauss points out that in the play *The Clouds* itself, Aristophanes explicitly addresses, "in his own name and using the first person" (1966, p. 22), the wise men in the first section of the parabasis, the moment in comedies when the playwright addresses the audience directly. Aristophanes says:

> Spectators, I shall be frank and tell you the truth, I swear it by Dionysus who nurtured me to manhood [520]. So may I be victorious, so may I be thought a true artist, I took you for an intelligent audience and this for the most intellectual of my comedies, and therefore saw fit to give you the first taste of it, a play that cost me a great deal of labor (...) So now, like Electra of old, this comedy has come seeking and hoping somewhere to [535] find spectators as intelligent (...) but if you take pleasure in me and my poetic inventions, you will be thought by future ages to have been wise [560] (ARISTOPHANES, *Clouds*, 520-560)

Strauss comments that Aristophanes "never raises such a claim for any other of his comedies" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 23). Given this set of evidence, Strauss places Aristophanes in the same category of men as Socrates and Plato, that is, intellectuals and philosophers, seeking to distance the interpretation of Aristophanes as a naive reactionary of common sense. Therefore, Aristophanes' position could not simply be identified with that of the character Strepsiades in *The Clouds*, or be represented by the unfortunate end of the thinkery in the play. For Strauss, the play was written with two audiences in mind, the common citizens and the wise. For the common citizens, Aristophanes wants to provoke laughter and teach justice, exploiting the prejudices of common sense against philosophers. The ridicule of philosophers reaffirms traditional values and the city's gods, understood as important means of strengthening justice in the face of the majority of men. For the audience of the wise, however, Aristophanes would not intend to completely condemn philosophy, but to provoke reflection on the tension between philosophy and society, warning his philosopher friends about the risks of philosophy to society and society's reaction against philosophers. For Strauss, the theme of the encounter between philosophers and society is the natural theme of *The Clouds*:

ISSN 2357-7975

> Viewed in the perspective of the nonphilosophers the philosopher is necessarily ridiculous, and viewed in the perspec-tive of the philosopher the nonphilosophers are necessarily ridiculous; the meeting of philosophers and nonphilosophers is the natural theme of comedy. It is, as we shall see, the theme of the *Clouds*. It is then not altogether an accident that our oldest and hence most venerable source regarding Socrates is a comedy (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 106).

According to Strauss, Aristophanes' play is the first reflection on "the problem of Socrates" in its various facets, one of which is the inevitable tension between philosophy and society. This tension is revealed in the naturally comic encounter between philosophers and society, which can turn into a tragic encounter, as it effectively does 23 years after the play, with the real death of Socrates. One of the points of greatest tension between philosophy and society concerns belief in the city's gods. Strauss highlights that in Strepsiades' first encounter with Socrates in the thinking-house, Socrates is suspended in a basket and responds to Strepsiades' call by saying, "Why dost thou call me, thou creature of a day" (*Clouds*, 223). Strepsiades asks what he's doing hanging in the basket, and Socrates responds, "I walk the air and descry the sun" (*Clouds*, 225). Strepsiades responds amazed that Socrates is looking down from the basket to see the gods up there, not from the earth. With this, Aristophanes would be indicating that Socrates looks down to see the gods, sees himself as superior, has no reverence for them, is aloof and above the gods and ephemeral human things, while engaging in celestial and perennial matters, such as the study of nature (Ares and the sun). Next, Strepsiades recounts his problem and swears by the gods that he will pay whatever Socrates wants to get rid of the debts. To which Socrates responds, "What do you mean, swear by the gods? Apart from anything else, we don't credit gods here" (*Clouds*, 245). Shortly after, Socrates says that the Clouds "are the only gods; all the rest is codswallop" (*Clouds*, 365), to which Strepsiades disputes, "don't you consider Olympian Zeus a god?" and Socrates replies, "What do you mean, Zeus? Will you stop talking nonsense? Zeus doesn't even exist" (*Clouds*, 367). Strauss emphasizes that in this first encounter, Socrates immediately and imprudently teaches Strepsiades that the city's gods do not exist, not even Zeus, the greatest among them, and states that the "only divinities" are a natural element, the Clouds. For Strauss, "The Aristophanean Soc-rates is characterized by an amazing lack of *phronesis*, of practical wisdom or prudence" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 121).

But what are the Clouds? According to Strauss, they are a metaphor for what Socrates teaches, the study of nature and rhetoric (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 21). The Clouds are not personal deities like the Olympian gods and constantly

ISSN 2357-7975

change shape. They "They take any form they like", says Socrates (*Clouds*, 350), just as rhetoric adapts to any circumstance[16]. Strauss also emphasizes that Aristophanes in the first parabasis seems "a member of the Clouds chorus" and that he "is himself a cloud" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 46), but unlike Socrates, he acknowledges the city's gods, tracing his lineage back to Dionysus (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 22 -23). After asserting that the only divinities are the Clouds, Socrates says that there would be something higher than them, the ethereal Vortex (*Clouds*, 380), and shortly afterwards tells Strepsiades: "Is it correct, then, that you will now recognize no god but those we recognize, the Void around us, the Clouds, and the Tongue, these three?" (*Clouds*, 423). This sequence reveals a certain improvisation by Socrates, as if he were inventing these gods during the dialogue, for he had previously said that "the only" divinities were the Clouds, now he also presents Void and Tongue. A little before that, Strepsiades asks if Vortex rules and not Zeus, how do thunderstorms arise, to which Socrates responds with a naturalistic explanation, "Didn't you hear me? I say that the clouds, when they are full of water and collide with one another, make a noise owing to their density" (*Clouds*, 383), however, Strepsiades retorts "Come on, who do you expect to believe that?". So Socrates offers an example, comparing the thunder of the Clouds to a fart and states that the words "thunder" and "fart" are similar (*Clouds*, 385 -398). Strauss comments that

> He does not say that thunder is the same as the sounds accompanying diarrhea, but (cf. also 165) that it is like them. Still, the similarity is great; it deprives things aloft of all their awesome *glamour*. Socrates debunks the things aloft (rumor has it that he held heaven to be a stove), perhaps in order to debunk justice (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 19).

Thus, Strauss points out that none of these divinities is personal, they are natural elements, and "there is no divine punishment for perjury or any other crime. Socrates calls Strepsiades old-fashioned: The debunking of things aloft is inseparable from the debunking of antiquity, which clothes them with awe-inspiring splendor" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 19). After these explanations by Socrates, Strepsiades believes in the new gods presented because, as Strauss states, his "credulity is very great because of his nature, his upbringing, and his desperate situation" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 17).

Further in the play, Socrates becomes irritated with Strepsiades' stupidity and gives up teaching him. Strepsiades becomes desperate and convinces his son, Pheidippides, to go to the thinkery to learn from Socrates how to speak well and get rid of debts. However, Strauss emphasizes that the first lesson received is not given by Socrates

ISSN 2357-7975

personally because he exits the scene when the "Just Speech" and the "Unjust Speech" appear fighting each other. The *agon* between the two arguments seeking to persuade young Pheidippides begins. Strauss comments that Pheidippides seems to watch the *agon* without having undergone any test or initiation and that "the Clouds preside over the debate of the two Arguments, and thus reveal themselves more responsible for the debate or more akin to it than Socrates" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 29.), who had withdrawn. However, "they call both Arguments their 'friends.' As they imitate everything, they enjoy everything; they both praise the other gods with pleasure and listen with pleasure to Socrates' rejection of the other gods. They are as irresponsible, as insubstantial, as the clouds" (Id). In the agon between the two arguments, the Just Speech represents traditional customs, rigor, discipline, modesty, and virtue. The Unjust Speech represents the new liberal, relativistic, hedonistic education of democratic Athens of the new times. Strauss comments that in this clash between the two arguments about ancient and new education (*Clouds*, 960-1000), the Just Speech makes a long defense of the "ancient education", emphasizing that in ancient times "moderation was respected. Boys were seen and not heard; they were well behaved and bred to continence and endurance; they learned traditional music and poetry; deviations were severely punished. Love of men for boys was part of the custom, but that love was free from all frivolity and incontinence" and "boys were well trained in gymnastics" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 30). Strauss points out, with some ironic humor, that when "speaking of the chastity both demanded and practiced in ancient times, the Just Speech goes into such details as to make one fear that his abhorrence of unchastity is not altogether chaste" (Id). The Unjust Speech challenges this presentation of ancient education, saying that they are old-fashioned. The Just Speech retorts saying that "But what matters is that these are the ways in which my education bred the men who fought at Marathon" (*Clouds*, 986). Strauss discusses this and other passages of the agon and comments that:

> The Just Speech is old-fashioned; the Unjust Speech is bold. (Their relation resembles that of Sparta and Athens in Thucydides.) The Just Speech pronounces just things (as Aristophanes claims to do); accordingly, he is indifferent to popular applause (like Socrates and unlike Aristophanes): he insults the audience. The Unjust Speech is popular and appeals to the audience as wise (as Aristophanes did to some extent in his own name in the parabasis); when called shameless, ribald, a pederast, and parricide by the Just Speech, he accepts these epithets as terms of praise. While the Just Speech is now reduced to beggary in Athens, the Unjust Speech, who was formerly a beggar pretending to be a king in disguise, now thrives in Athens (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 29).

ISSN 2357-7975

The Unjust Speech is popular and democratic because it is hedonistic[17], allowing for the immediate satisfaction of pleasures and permitting everyone to "live as they like", a conception of freedom (*eleutheria*) that, according to Aristotle, would be typical of democracies, and according to Thucydidean Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, was a characteristic of Athenian democracy in contrast to Spartan rigor[18]. At the same time, the Unjust Speech also appeals to the wise, as it seems to be more in line with nature (*physis*) and does not rely on ancient myths, which would be difficult for the wise to believe. The Unjust Speech proceeds to "to make mincemeat of all this by counter-arguments" (*Clouds*, 1037) and mobilizes examples from tradition against tradition. For example, the Unjust Speech denies the existence of justice with the argument that justice is not "with the gods" (Clouds, 903-5), because Zeus committed violence against his father, Cronos, and was not punished for it, to which Strauss comments that "the Just Speech is unable to reply to this point", which exposes the fragility of the *nomos* (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 121-122). Another example of mobilizing tradition against tradition occurs when the Unjust Speech challenges the Just Speech's recommendation to take cold baths to strengthen character by saying that Hercules took hot baths. Or when the Unjust Speech questions the defense of temperate living made by the Just Speech, saying that not even Zeus was temperate:

> Look, my lad, at all that virtue entails, and all the pleasures you'll be deprived of: boys, women, cottabus, good food, drink, laughter. How can life be worth living for you if you're deprived of these? (...) But if you become my pupil you can indulge your nature, leap and laugh, think nothing shameful. If by chance you are taken in adultery, this is what you will reply to the husband: that you have done nothing wrong. Then transfer the responsibility to Zeus, saying that even he is a slave to love and women, and how can you, a mortal, be stronger than a god? (ARISTOPHANES, *Clouds*, 1071-1083)

Strauss comments that Aristophanes exposes the fragility of the Just Speech, the fragility of the traditional *nomos*, but does not identify Socrates with the Unjust Speech. As mentioned earlier, Strauss highlights that Socrates was not even on stage during the agon between the two arguments. Socrates cannot be identified with the hedonistic Unjust Speech because he is presented in *The Clouds* as a person of "inhuman asceticism" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 15), he is a "needy fellow who makes his com-panions needy as well and yet is insensitive to his and his compan-ions' neediness" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 120). In other words, Socrates was not a reckless and voluptuous hedonist like the Unjust Speech. The Socrates of Aristophanes, according to Strauss, is also not unjust.

ISSN 2357-7975

He is "indifferent to Justice" and his vice is "his lack of practical wisdom or prudence" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 124). Socrates did not morally criticize Strepsiades when he sought to deceive his creditors, but he also did not defend Fidippides' aggression against his father. Strauss comments that "it is not Socrates' fault if the common view of justice, based as it is on mythology, is intellectually inferior to the open plea for injustice" (Id).

PHYSIS AND *NOMOS* / FAMILY AND CITY

For Strauss, Aristophanes' comedy is philosophical because its basis "is the knowledge of nature, and that means, for the ancients, philosophy. But philosophy is a problem; philosophy does not have a political or civic existence. Here is where the problem of the *Clouds* comes in" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 118). Aristophanes exposes a classic theme of philosophy, the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*. The philosophical quest for what would be natural as opposed to what is merely the result of conventions. The polarity between *physis* and *nomos* appears linked to the polarity of family and *polis*, which would be central to Aristophanes' work. For Strauss,

> The phenomenon in the light of which Aristophanes looks critically at the city as such is the family or the household. His comedies can be said to be one commentary on the sentence from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1162 a17-19) which reads: 'Man is by nature a pairing animal rather than a political one, for the family is earlier and more necessary than the city, and the begetting and bearing of children is more common to all animals' (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 112).

Thus, Strauss differentiates Aristophanes' message from the message of the Just Speech, as the defense of the family view is not identical to the virile and heroic view of ancient Homeric ethics. The "bond of the family is love" between husband and wife and from parents to children. This love "appears most characteristically in the case of the mother, who suffers most when her sons are sent into wars by the city. No such natural feelings bind mothers to the city" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 111). Strauss comments that in Aristophanes' *Assembly of Women*, the women take power and try to rebuild the city based on the model of the family. This leads Strauss to conclude that Aristophanes' critique "is not only directed against the decayed city of his time, but extends also to the healthy city or ancestral polity" (1989, p. 111). In this regard, for Strauss, Aristophanes was a sort of reformer, rather than a reactionary or a revolutionary (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 47). For Strauss, Aristophanes was not ascetic like Socrates nor heroic like the ancient ethics of the Just Speech; he was more

ISSN 2357-7975

erotic and sought a "life of joy, peace, and enjoyment", something more "natural" than the *polis* and that could be found in the family.

The philosophical quest for *physis* was the search for something truer, firmer, and more secure than convention (*nomos*). According to Strauss, Aristophanes points out the fragility of both convention and *physis*, as the family is described as more natural but dependent on *nomos*, because the natural origin of the family would be the sexual impulse, which can also stimulate adultery. To have stability, the family needs the complement of *nomos*, which is essentially precarious, and therefore, the family itself is precarious. The theme appears in *The Clouds* when Pheidippides learns from Socrates to speak well and use logic to question anything he wants. Pheidippides questions his own father, hits him, and argues that hitting his father is just, because if before the father justified hitting the son for being wiser and knowing what would be best for the son, now the son, being wiser than the father, can also hit him. Strepsiades tries to object but fails. During the discussion, Strepsiades tells the chorus why he was beaten by Pheidippides and reveals that the reason was a disagreement about favorite poets. Strepsiades preferred Aeschylus. Pheidippides, a supporter of the innovative "Just Speech," mocked Aeschylus. Strepsiades comments:

> All right, you recite something from these modern poets, that clever stuff, whatever it is." And he immediately loosed off a speech of Euripides, about how a brother, heaven forfend, was having it off with his sister by the same mother. Well, I could take it no longer, and I immediately piled into him with many hard and foul words; and after that, as you might expect, we attacked each other insult for insult. Then he jumps up; and he knocked me and banged me and choked me and pulverized me (*Clouds*, 1370-1377)

The son, justifying himself, comments to the chorus: "So wasn't I right to do so to one who won't praise Euripides, a man of genius?" (*Clouds*, 1378). Strauss comments that what made Pheidippides beat his father was not necessarily an enthusiasm for incest. Strepsiades was beaten by his son for not admiring Euripides. Euripides was seen in Athens as innovative and philosophical, quite distinct from the older and more religious Aeschylus. The new Pheidippides, a fan of Euripides, sees no problem in incest and beats his father. Strauss comments:

> As Pheidippides takes for granted and Strepsiades does not contest, all law is of human origin; it is the work of a man like you and me, who succeeded in persuading the ancients by speech, i.e., who did not impose, for instance, the law forbidding father-beating by virtue of a preceding law or authority. Hence nothing prevents Pheidippides, by persuading his contem-

ISSN 2357-7975

> poraries, from establishing a new law permitting father-beating. This could be understood to mean that both the old law and the new have the same status, that both are laws merely by virtue of persuasion, agreement, or convention. This, however, is by no means the case: Father-beating is a common practice of cocks and all other beasts, i.e., it is according to nature; for beasts do not have any conventions (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 41-42)[19]

Strepsiades accepts his son's arguments, they reconcile for a while, but it doesn't last long. Pheidippides goes further in subverting *nomos* and argues that it is just to beat one's own mother, which is the last straw for Strepsiades, he rebels, doesn't accept the arguments, but also can't counter-argue, and regrets ever taking his son to the thinkery, blaming it on the Unjust Speech and Socrates. However, the chorus of the Clouds retorts to Strepsiades that "you are responsible for bringing it on yourself, because you turned yourself towards evil actions" (*Clouds*, 1455), absolving Socrates of blame, a point emphasized by Strauss when he argued that Aristophanes, himself a cloud, does not directly condemn Socrates or philosophy itself, but Socrates's lack of practical wisdom and political irresponsibility. Strepsiades asks the chorus why they didn't warn him of this before, to which the chorus replies: "This is what we always do on every occasion, whenever we find a man to be a lover of what is evil, until we cast him into misery, that he may learn to fear the gods" (*Clouds*, 1460). Then, Strepsiades invokes Zeus the father; his son calls him old-fashioned, to which he emphatically exclaims that Zeus exists. He then calls his son to go with him to set fire to Socrates' thinkery. The son refuses because he doesn't want to act against Socrates, who freed him from so many things. But he also does nothing to help Socrates; he doesn't go to warn him of the imminent danger he faces, recalls Strauss. Pheidippides remains neutral and feels contempt for his father, who has returned to believing in Zeus. In contrast, Pheidippides maintains unwavering "his belief in the nonexistence of Zeus and the other gods (he never believed in the divinity of the Clouds)" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 45), as the teaching Pheidippides received inside the thinkery was different from the teaching Socrates gave to his father. Strauss comments on Pheidippides' neutrality by saying that,

> He is captivated by the possibilities that Socrates has opened up for him (...) he is not a follower of Socrates; he has not been converted by Socrates to the Socratic ways of extreme continence and endurance. He has learned from Socrates that what he believed to achieve by horsemanship can be achieved much better by the art of speaking: He has not learned to replace his end by the Socratic end. He has been converted by Socrates' charms only to the way of life recommended by the Unjust Speech (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 52).

ISSN 2357-7975

Neither Socrates nor Pheidippides believe in the city gods or in any personal and punitive deity and express contempt for these beliefs. The Clouds, in contrast, "never deny that the other gods exist; in other important respects, they avoid Socrates' extremism" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 47). For Strauss, the Clouds chorus expresses Aristophanes' prudent position. Just like Socrates, Aristophanes is also dissatisfied with established divine worship, but instead of eliminating it, he thinks that "the traditional pantheon must be enlarged" (Id). Aristophanes is as detached from literal belief in the city gods as Socrates, but, unlike Socrates, he recognizes the importance of divine sanctions to reinforce social norms. According to Strauss, "nothing is sacred" for Socrates, "because nothing can withstand his *logos*; but he forgets the power of that *alogon* which is the basis of the family and hence of the city; he forgets the fact that he is at the mercy of force, of superior force, or that force is the *ultima ratio*, the last *logos* of the city" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 49). Aristophanes cares about the city, "Socrates, on the other hand, is wholly unconcerned with the city or the family; in this respect, he agrees with the Unjust Speech. He is concerned above all with the knowledge of the things aloft and, secondarily, with the art of speaking" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 48). Therefore, Aristophanes' Socrates "does not show the slightest sign of civic responsibility" and is not aware of "his dependence on the city", thus, "he has the defect of the pure theoretician; he lacks *phronesis*; he has not reflected on the conditions or context of his own doing: he lacks self-knowledge" (1966, p. 49).

For Strauss, in his conduct of events with Strepsiades and Pheidippides, Socrates, a student of nature, "does not properly consider nature in its practically most important respect: the natural differences among men" (Id). This mention of the natural differences, in the passage above, is important because in other texts, Strauss had already highlighted that this was a central aspect in Classical Political Philosophy: the view that men are different by nature or temperament, that people of philosophical nature or temperament will always be a minority, and that this could not be changed "by any progress of popular education" (STRAUSS, 1952, p. 34). For Strauss, by not recognizing the natural differences between men and the power of the *alogon* in social life, Socrates fails to perceive the political consequences of his actions. He appears "wholly unaware of the devastating effect which his indifference to practical matters must have on the city if non-theoretical men should become influenced by Socrates' sentiments" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 125), which would be revealed in the events following his encounter with Strepsiades and Pheidippides. According to Strauss, Socrates liberates Pheidippides from the city's beliefs, but he doesn't truly convert him to

ISSN 2357-7975

the philosophical life. This is because, despite Pheidippides being intelligent, he had an immoderate nature, and, we can add, *thymotic*. Pheidippides was immoderate before and remained so after receiving Socrates' teachings. His temperament didn't change. In contrast, Socrates, besides being intelligent, had a moderate nature, he possessed *enkrateia*, as he possessed self-control and led an ascetic life. Socrates detached from the city's beliefs didn't harm anyone, as his nature didn't predispose him to that. Socrates only wanted to satisfy his *Eros* for knowledge, without any utilitarian motivation. Pheidippides, on the other hand, when liberated from the moral coercion derived from fear of the city's gods, beats his father and attempts to beat his mother; he lost any reverence for the city's values, which don't stand through *logos* alone.

Socrates and Pheidippides are "beyond good and evil," beyond the city's *nomos*, but the nature of the former keeps him in the philosophical life without causing great harm to others, while Pheidippides, of an immoderate nature, becomes a sort of young tyrant. Therefore, Socrates did not corrupt Strepsiades, as he sought him out for a corrupt motive, but he did corrupt Pheidippides in a way. Not because he corrupted his nature, which was always immoderate and *thymotic*, but because he removed the moral restraint that coerced this nature, unleashing the tyrant within him. In real life, a few years after the presentation of *The Clouds*, the two disciples of Socrates who ventured into political life were an aspiring tyrant, Alcibiades, and a member of the tyranny of the Thirty, Critias. Both were widely known by the Athenians of the time, facts that will also be remembered by Socrates' accusers at his trial. For Strauss, and according to him for Aristophanes as well, Socrates did not teach tyrants to be tyrants, but indirectly undermined the things that coerced certain natures, such as Pheidippides', to stay within certain limits. According to Strauss, "Aristophanes has no doubt that nature, human nature, is in need of *nomos*. Aristophanes does not reject *nomos*, but he attempts to bring to light its problematic and precarious status, its status in between the needs of the body and the needs of the mind; for if one does not understand the precarious status of *nomos*, one is bound to have unreasonable expectations from *nomos*" (1989, p. 115). Unreasonable expectations, such as the project of a society guided by a purely rational *nomos*, as if common morality could be the object of theory, the object of science. This, however, does not seem to be Strauss's position, as he writes:

> Perfect gentlemanship is not a science, nor is it based on a science, but it is guided by opinions alone, by things which you understand fully by listening. In other words, no intellectual effort is required for grasping the principles of ordi-

ISSN 2357-7975

> nary morality. Ordinary morality consists not in knowing, but in doing (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 148-9).[20]

For Strauss, there is a significant problem in the relationship between theory and practice. The beliefs that form common morality are part of the "fundamental requirements of the city" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 312) and are a matter of opinion. They do not survive a rigorous rational examination, and theoretical reason would not be able to offer substitutes that fulfill the same role. Socrates would have demonstrated a lack of *phronesis* by failing to realize this. Aristophanes, on the other hand, "complies with the fundamental requirements of the city without looking at them altogether as the city looks at them" (Id). Strauss appears to follow Plato here, who, according to him, distances himself from "Socrates' extremism" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 47) — an "intellectualist" extremism — and also aligns with Aristotle, who criticized Socratic intellectualism.[21]

THE RECONCILIATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY AT THE DAWN OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The comic and tragic encounters of Socrates with the city cannot be underestimated. For Strauss, after the exposition of Socrates' problem in the play *The Clouds* and Socrates' condemnation by the democratic council in Athens 23 years later, Plato and Xenophon would have agreed with Aristophanes[22] that the *alogon* is the basis of family and city, thus distancing themselves from the extreme rationalism of the "pure theoretical man" Socrates. They concluded that if philosophy wanted to have political existence, it would have to possess *phronesis* and resort to poetry and rhetoric. Thus, political philosophy was born. In this sense, Strauss understands that the Socrates of Plato and Xenophon were responses to the Socrates of Aristophanes[23] because "both the Xenophontic and Platonic Socrates have understood the essential limitation of reason and of speech generally, and therewith the nature of political things" (1989, p. 159). Understanding this, especially after Socrates' death, Plato and Xenophon "beautified" the character Socrates in their dialogues, presenting him as endowed with prudence and practical wisdom. As pointed out by Menon, the lesson of Aristophanes may be summarized by this, "'Don't separate wisdom from moderation', where moderation is not a virtue of thought, but of speech. In a sense, Aristophanes shows that the philosopher should conceive an exoteric teaching, or a better one" (MENON, 2017, p. 10)[24]. Thus, for Strauss, the Platonic Socrates, "as distinguished from the Aristophanean Socrates, is characterized by *phronesis*, by practical wisdom. He is so far

ISSN 2357-7975

from being blind to political things that he has realized their essential character, and he acts consistently in accordance with this realization" (1989, p. 162). Plato and Xenophon would have "beautified" Socrates with the aim of saving philosophy from the repression of the *polis*, showing philosophers as citizens, who respect the gods of the city and who can be politically useful to the *polis*. They concluded that "there are absolute limits to persuasion" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 160), and thus, the necessity of poetry arises from the limitations of reason and speech in social life. The poet is better equipped than the philosopher to confront these limits to persuasion (which cannot be entirely overcome), because the poet has a deeper understanding of the crowd and a greater ability to employ alternative means of persuasion, such as *ethos* (character) and *pathos* (the emotions of the audience). In contrast, the philosopher's capacity is more concentrated in persuasion through *logos*, which is crucial and inherent to argumentation, yet often weaker than *ethos* and *pathos* in the realm of political persuasion.

Leo Strauss reminds us that, at the end of Book IX of the *Republic* (592a-b), Plato's ideal city is deemed impossible; it "exists only in words" and depends on a "divine chance". This is because it is improbable that wise and virtuous philosophers will govern, as they lack the interest in ruling and are unable to persuade the masses, much like Socrates failed to do during his own trial (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 160). The ideal city would be possible only "if all men could become philosophers, that is to say, if human nature were miraculously transformed" (*Ibid*.). While, for Strauss, the *Republic* was a kind of satire of political idealism, *The Laws* (*Nomoi*) represents "the political work of Plato", his "most extensive work" and presents "the best possible city for beings who are not gods or sons of gods" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 162). In *The Laws*, the best possible government, though distinct from the ideal, is a mixed government grounded in the rule of law. Interestingly, in this, which is Plato's most extensive work, the main character is not Socrates, but the "Athenian Stranger", which could indicate the difference between "the way of Socrates" and "the way of Plato", defended by Strauss[25]. Furthermore, in *The Laws*, the reconciliation of philosophy with poetry appears in a more direct and positive way than in "The *Republic*", which on the surface treats poetry in a more negative way. This is evident, for example, when the Athenian Stranger admits that they, who are creating the best possible regime, are also tragic poets (PLATO, *Laws*, 817 a-d).

If philosophy cannot persuade the multitude[26], it cannot teach just things. Poetry, in contrast, can. If philosophy wants to have political existence, it will have to use poetry and rhetoric and be prudent, meaning, among other things, that it

ISSN 2357-7975

will have to write esoterically, offering in the same text two teachings, one for the initiated and another, of an edifying nature, for the citizens (STRAUSS, 1952). In this art of writing, the political philosopher incorporates the tragic and the comic into a superior ironic unity, in which the comic appears above the tragic. Thus, Strauss challenges the traditional view that places tragedy in a higher status than comedy (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 106). In this view, later theorized by Aristotle, tragedy imitates "superior people" and addresses serious and grave themes such as gods, the fate of heroes, and virtues. For this reason, it should inspire reverence in good citizens, not laughter. In contrast, comedy was considered inferior for being irreverent and imitating "inferior people", allowing spectators to laugh at the characters' flaws due to their sense of distance and superiority. In contrast to this traditional view, Strauss follows Plato, who "silently opposes the popular preference for tragedy. He suggests that the same man must be both tragic and comic poet" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 106). Strauss goes so far as to say that 'Comedy rises higher than tragedy' (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 108). He asserts that 'Socrates was only comic, he was not tragic, but human life is both tragic and comic' (Ibid., pp. 105-106). Therefore, the path of Socrates, despite being more elevated, would be partial. But what does Strauss mean by this?

Strauss's understanding of comedy and tragedy is deeply influenced by Nietzsche, particularly by aphorism 1, I, of "The Gay Science"[27], where Nietzsche discusses the "The teachers of the purpose of existence", who are the "founders of moralities and religions, these instigators of fights over moral valuations, these teachers of remorse and religious wars". These masters promote "faith in life" and deal with serious matters, not allowing laughter at existence, at themselves, or at us. They, like the tragedians, believe that social and political life requires belief in serious things. However, Nietzsche observes that, "in the long run", these masters of meaning are eventually overcome by laughter, reason, and nature. "The waves of uncountable laughter", in the words of Aeschylus, always return, transforming the brief tragedy into the eternal comedy of existence. After all, according to Nietzsche, no religion, moral, hero, or empire has survived the incessant and purposeless becoming.

The philosopher, when examining society's beliefs, distances himself from them, becoming a stranger in his own city[28]. This detachment makes him comical in the eyes of the citizens and also allows him to laugh at serious things, public dogmas, and himself. While the tragedians do not laugh at serious things, the philosopher can. Strauss suggests that a life guided solely by the tragic tends to result in religious and moral wars or ossified social stability. On the other hand, a life guided solely by

ISSN 2357-7975

the comic would lack stability, seriousness, or commitment, making social existence impossible. In this regard, Nietzsche concluded that, "Not only laughter and gay wisdom, but the tragic, too, with all its sublime unreason, belongs among the means and necessities of the preservation of the species!" (NIETZSCHE, GS, I, §1, p. 75-6). Strauss shares this understanding and affirms that comedy and tragedy "show man in his totality" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 107).

For Leo Strauss, Nietzsche may have inadvertently provided a "perfect interpretation of what Plato conveys" (1989, p. 177) and quotes Nietzsche's passage "The poets were always the valets of some morality" (NIETZSCHE, GS, I, §1). According to Strauss, Nietzsche knew that "for a valet there is no hero. If the poets are the valets of a morality, they are in the best position to know the defects which their master conceals in public and in daytime" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 177). Thus, poets "come indeed to sight as valets of the morality to which they are subject. In truth, however, they are the severest critics of any established morality or any established order" (Ibid.). Strauss observes that both Aristophanes and the classical political philosophers, Plato and Xenophon, are valets of a morality to which they maintain a critical distance and argues that Aristophanic comedy presupposes tragedy and is superior to it, because

> It conjures up for us, within the limits of that possibility which it must respect, a simply pleasant falsehood: a life : a life without war, law courts, terrors caused by gods and death, poverty, and coercion or restraint or *nomos*. The falsehood points to the truth; the truth is the inevitable suffering, coeval with man, that is caused by both *physis* and *nomos* (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 312)

For Strauss, political philosophy also constructs a pleasant falsehood, which may be comical in the eyes of the philosopher but is tragic or grave in the eyes of the citizens, and thus useful to them insofar as it constitutes a protective atmosphere that shields them from nihilism, providing edifying teachings that can elevate them or at least help to avoid the worst, even though they cannot realize the city with perfect justice, as this would be impossible, being "incompatible with nature" (STRAUSS, 1964, p. 127). For Leo Strauss, in Plato's *Republic*, the harmony of the city reflects the harmony of the soul, with justice defined as the proper order of both the soul and the city. However, the dialogue does not fully elucidate the nature of the soul, as it abstracts from the body and *eros*, and in doing so, the *Republic* also abstracts from nature. Thus, the *Republic* concludes by demonstrating that justice is "salutary", yet without fully revealing the nature of justice itself (STRAUSS, 1964, p. 138). Describing something as 'salutary' is distinct from calling it 'true,' which

ISSN 2357-7975

leaves room for the implication that it may be a pleasant and useful falsehood. For Strauss, this suggests that Plato views perfect justice as impossible, as it is incompatible with nature. In doing so, Plato would be pointing to the inherent limits and nature of the city. The greatest happiness, from this perspective, lies beyond the city, in the contemplative life of the philosophers.

The "pleasant falsehood", however, "points to the truth", which only the best readers will understand. Thus, the political philosopher incorporates the comic and the tragic within an ironic unity, for, according to Strauss, irony consists in "speaking differently to different kinds of people" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 152). According to Strauss, in some passages of the *Republic*, the impossible (total communism, which abstracts the body) is presented as possible, which would be comical to the best readers, and, "the core of every Aristophanic comedy is something impossible of the kind indicated" (STRAUSS, 1964, p. 62). In this sense, according to Strauss, "Platonic dialogue is slightly more akin to comedy than to tragedy" and this affinity "is noticeable also in Plato's *Republic* which is manifestly akin to Aristophanes' *Assembly of Women*" (*Ibid*., 1964, p. 61). For Strauss, "the Platonic dialogue brings to its completion what could be thought to have been completed by Aristophanes" (*Ibid*., p. 62). According to Strauss, Platonic dialogue is "the greatest of all works of art" (1989, p. 134). Platonic metaphysics itself would be an exoteric artistic creation. Strauss even goes so far as to say that "The doctrine of Ideas which Socrates expounds to his interlocutors is very hard to understand; to begin with, it is utterly incredible, not to say that it appears to be fantastic" (STRAUSS, 1964, p. 119). For Strauss, the same applies to Xenophon, who was even more comical than Plato, as he writes in a letter to Jaboc Klein dated February 28, 1939:

> The Xenophon affair is progressing slowly but steadily: I'm beginning to see land (or sea). There's now no question at all that Xenophon's Socrates is identical to Plato's - only Xenophon portrays Socrates even more veiled, even more clearly as he really was, than Plato. And besides, he's much more Aristophanic (= obscene) than Plato. I think you'll have a good laugh when you read my essay and see it in the text (because of course, I won't translate the dirty bits). The philologists are indescribable idiots!" (STRAUSS, 2001, p. 569).

For Strauss, Plato and Xenophon, distancing itself from the "way of Socrates", establishes the foundations of political philosophy and "classical political rationalism". This rationalism is deeply aware of its own limits, and this, for Strauss, is its distinctive mark compared to the unrestrained political rationalism of modern times[29]. These reflections on the limits of *logos* in social

ISSN 2357-7975

and political life[30] have left a lasting legacy in later political philosophy, especially in republican thought. A legacy visible, for example, in republican critiques of pure democracy, in the view of natural aristocracy as the ideal regime, albeit difficult to implement, in the construction of mixed government and the rule of law as the best possible regime, in the republican insistence on the importance of an edifying teaching (a discourse of virtues), as well as in the consideration of the political importance of religion. These elements will be present in various thinkers within the republican tradition, even though some of these elements have gradually been abandoned in several Western countries after modern Enlightenment and liberalism[31].

For Strauss, there was a significant agreement between the classical philosophers and Aristophanes, which had been forgotten due to the Christian reading of Plato and Aristotle that tended to identify Socrates' teachings with those of Plato. In Strauss's view, rediscovering this great agreement among the wise about the limits of *logos* in social and political life would only become possible after the implosion of this classical-Christian tradition, which culminates in Nietzsche. For Strauss, Aristophanes was an important turning point for the foundation of classical political philosophy, and Nietzsche was a turning point from which one could return to classical political rationalism, "Aristophanes' political posture seems to foreshadow Nietzsche's political posture" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 8). However, Nietzsche was not able to decipher the "sphinx-like nature of Plato"[32] and fully understand the political significance of his philosophy because Nietzsche took Aristophanes' criticism of the young Socrates as if it applied to the Platonic Socrates (*Ibid.*). For Strauss, this was Nietzsche's mistake, as he failed to realize that Plato had agreed with Aristophanes regarding Socrates' rationalist *hubris*. By not perceiving this, Nietzsche failed to grasp the eminently political significance of Platonic philosophy — meaning its artistic and political nature rather than its metaphysical nature. Thus, Nietzsche would also have failed to see the comic dimension of the writings of Plato and Xenophon. In this sense, we can assert that in Strauss's interpretation, the Platonic political philosopher was already a kind of "artist-philosopher" as elaborated and praised by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*[33]. However, the classics preferred a prudent artist-philosopher, while Nietzsche lacked prudence[34], as he was still trapped in the tradition he sought to overcome[35], a tradition with messianic traits unknown to the classics[36].

In the final lines of *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Strauss states that it is impossible to say whether the way the Platonic-Xenophontic Socrates is presented "owes as much to poetry as the Aristophanic Socrates' and 'it is also equally diffi-

ISSN 2357-7975

cult to say whether the profound differences between the Aristophanic Socrates and the Platonic-Xenophontic Socrates should not be attributed to a profound change in Socrates himself' (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 314). However, it seems that the hypothesis to which Strauss is more inclined is the first, namely, that the Socrates of Plato and Xenophon is a poetic creation with political ends, for in these final lines of the book he refers, in parentheses, to passage 314c of Plato's Second Letter, in which Plato writes that 'no writing of Plato exists or will exist, but those that now bear his name belong to a Socrates who has become beautiful and young. Farewell, and believe me; and now, to begin with, read this letter repeatedly and then burn it' (PLATO. *Second Letter*. L.2.314c). A Socrates who "has become beautiful and young" has been beautified in the dialogue which is a work of art. On several occasions, Strauss emphasizes that Plato presented his thoughts "exclusively in works of art, and not in treatises" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 150), therefore, the characters are creations of the author according to his purposes. We know the Platonic Socrates only through Platonic writings. The same applies to the Socrates of Xenophon, whose mode of writing, according to Strauss, can be compared to that of Jane Austen, for "not speaking about the sad and terrible things, but in any case remembering the good things" (*Ibid*., p. 134). Therefore, if the representations of Socrates in Plato and Xenophon are responses to the problem of Socrates presented by Aristophanes, and if Plato and Xenophon agree with Aristophanes' criticism, as Strauss argues, then their representations of Socrates aim to address the problem identified by Aristophanes, correcting the way Socrates is presented to the city. In this correction, the Socrates constructed by Plato and Xenophon, according to Strauss, "understood the essential limitation of reason and speech in general, and, therefore, the nature of political things" (*Ibid*., p. 159) and is presented as someone who possesses self-knowledge, *phronesis*, and a responsible commitment to the city (*Ibid*., p. 162)."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Who ultimately wins the dispute over wisdom, philosophy or poetry? In his reflections on the problem of Socrates, Strauss brings Aristophanes, Plato, and Nietzsche together in a genre of reflection and writing marked by the confluence of poetry and philosophy. On the one hand, it seems that philosophy maintains superiority, since the poetry admitted in Platonic philosophy is of a "ministerial" type, not autonomous. However, Strauss affirms that "neither Platonic dialogue nor poetic work is autonomous; both are ministerial, both serve to lead men to an understanding of the human soul" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 180). In the final

ISSN 2357-7975

paragraph of *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Strauss states that for the Platonic Socrates, "The truth discerned by poets must be integrated into the all-comprehensive truth with which the philosopher is concerned; or the true knowledge of the souls, and hence of the soul, is the core of cosmology (of the knowledge of the things aloft)" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 314). On the other hand, two paragraphs before, Strauss had written that:

> From on high one does not see human beings as they are (*Peace* 821-23) Hence not the sophist-philosopher but the poet is able to raise and answer the question that Socrates never raises, let alone answers, as to the godness of the gods. Socrates, one might say, is a leader of souls without being a knower of souls. If this is so, the truth discerned by the sophist-philosopher about things aloft must be integrated into a whole that is the concern of the poet, despite the fact that that whole is a part of the all-comprehensive whole with which the sophist-philosopher is concerned (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 313).

How should we understand these passages? Was Strauss elevating the role of poets above that of philosophers? If we separate Strauss's premises in his lectures on the problem of Socrates, we have that: Premise 1: The philosopher seeks knowledge of the whole. Premise 2: For Platonic philosophy, the key to knowledge of the whole is knowledge of the "psychology of souls" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 134 and 180). Premise 3: Poets are superior to philosophers in the knowledge of the psychology of souls (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 179). Premise 4: Knowledge of the whole is never attained; it is merely a pursuit. A problem then arises: If the philosopher seeks knowledge of the whole (P1), then he needs to know the psychology of souls (P2). If poets are superior to philosophers in the knowledge of the psychology of souls (P3), then philosophers are at a disadvantage in this pursuit. However, Strauss does not conclude that poetry supersedes philosophy. It seems more likely that he points to a reconciliation between philosophy and poetry in political philosophy, which would be important not only because of the political necessity of noble illusions, but also because if the psychology of souls is a key to the knowledge of the whole, then the incessant pursuit of knowledge of the whole can be more complete and rich by bringing together the complementary skills of philosophers and poets. For Strauss, this convergence seems to offer a more complete path to wisdom. After all, both poets and philosophers begin with the experience of *thaumazein* (wonder). While wonder motivates both, poets delve into the world's textures and intricacies, often embracing ambiguity, whereas philosophers strive for clarity and universality. In classical political philosophy, these two dimensions become complementary: poetry, alongside its per-

ISSN 2357-7975

suasive and edifying power, enhances the understanding of human psychology and values, while philosophy grounds this understanding in the quest for truth. This synergy fosters a more comprehensive approach to wisdom, blending the rigor of philosophical analysis with the depth of poetic insight. In this synthesis of classical political philosophy, philosophy attains the self-awareness that Aristophanes' Socrates lacked, recognizing its dependence on the city and thereby acquiring a sense of self-control.

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NOTES

[1]Harvey Mansfield's interview with Bill Kristol on May 11, 2015. Transcript available at: https://conversationswithbillkristol.org/transcript/harvey-mansfield-iv-transcript/, accessed on May 13, 2024.

[2]When citing classical texts, we will use line numbering that follows the standard conventions of classical studies.

[3]Sommerstein's translation uses the term "reflectory" (1982). Other translations, such as Henderson's (1992), opt for the term "thinkery" to describe the place where Socrates taught his students.

[4]Some translators, like Alan H. Sommerstein (1982), prefer to translate as "Better Argument" and "Worse Argument". Leo Strauss preferred the terms Just Speech and Unjust Speech, and we will adhere to that nomenclature.

[5]To see a good discussion of these conventional interpretations of the play *The Clouds*, see DOVER, 1968, pp. xlv - lvii.

[6]"According to Hegel, "Aristophanes was correct in the *Clouds*, that he did Socrates no wrong," and "Aristophanes belongs as much as any other in this circle of luminaries of the Greek world." (HEGEL, 2006, pp. 143). When explaining the moment of the plot where Pheidippides gives reasons to beat his father, Hegel comments, 'The exaggeration for which Aristophanes could be faulted here is his consistency in pushing the dialectic to its bitter end; but in that, he was not unjust to Socrates.' (HEGEL, 2006, pp. 144). For Strauss, in this regard, we should pay attention to what Hegel

ISSN 2357-7975

writes in the section on "Art-Religion" of the "Phenomenology of Spirit" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 115 -116). For example, see *Phenomenology of Spirit* §746 (HEGEL, 2018, p. 428-429). Hegel's stance seems to inherit, to some degree, Aristotle's critique of Socrates' intellectualism: "Concerning Aristotle's criticism of the principle of Socrates, we should note here that he says Socrates placed virtue exclusively in knowing. He would have made virtue into a science, but that is not possible. All knowing is tied to reason, but reason is in thinking only, (...) so Socrates does away with the alogical aspect of the soul, to which belong ethical custom" (HEGEL, 2006, p. 139).

[7]According to Kierkegaard, "Aristophanes came very close to the truth in portraying Socrates." (*Aristophanes in Socrate depingendo proxime ad verum accessit*). KIERKEGAARD, 1991, p. 18. See also p. 111.

[8]In Nietzsche's personal library, as noted by Campioni (2003, pp. 112-114), there exists a significant collection of Aristophanes' texts, along with records of the latter's name in several annotations preceding *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's initial major work.

[9]Based on Bolzani Filho's (2014) findings, recent studies still indicate uncertainty about the true historical identity of Socrates. For him, these portrayals should be regarded as literary creations, with authors striving for authenticity to resonate with Athenians of the era. If that is the case, it makes no sense to dismiss as false the representations of Socrates in Aristophanes compared to those of Plato. For Strauss, "the Platonic dialogues are admittedly not reports, but works of art; they do not permit us to distinguish incontestably between what Socrates himself thought and the thoughts that Plato merely ascribed to him. In a letter that has come down to us as Platonic, it is said, 'There is not now nor will there be any writing of Plato'; but those writings which are now said to be his belong to Socrates having become fair (noble) and young (new). The Platonic dialogues “idealize” Socrates. Plato never vouches for the authenticity of his Socratic conversations. Plato is not a historian" (STRAUSS, 1966, p. 3-4).

[10]"In fact, nowhere in the play, after Strepsiades knocks on Socrates' door, do we find any reference to Socrates receiving payment for his teaching. Only once is there a very casual reference to some kind of gift that Strepsiades offers to Socrates out of gratitude. Socrates is not a sophist in Aristophanes. Socrates is not a money-seeker but a needy individual who also leaves his companions needy and is still insensitive to his own and his companions' needs" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 120).

[11]"We have, then, now to investigate the corruption of the Greek world in its profounder import, and may denote the principle of that corruption as subjectivity obtaining emancipation for itself. We see Subjectivity obtruding itself in various ways. Thought — the subjectively Universal — menaces the beautiful religion of Greece, while the passions of individuals and their caprice menace its political constitution" (HEGEL, 2001, p. 286).

[12]For the relationship between philosophical activity, relativization of communal values, and animosity between intellectuals and common citizens in this regard, see also DOVER, 1968, p. xxxviii.

[13]NIETZSCHE, BT §14.

[14]The decline of "Marathonian" values is evident in what happens to the character Pheidippides, who begins the play *The Clouds* as a young knight, strong, courageous, bronzed, and content with life. However, after being "deconstructed" by Socrates, he ceases to be a knight, becoming thin, pale, unbelieving, and disrespectful. In this sense, the name Pheidippides was likely not chosen randomly by Aristophanes, as it belonged to a legendary Athenian soldier, a symbol of the strength and courage of the "golden ancient times". He became famous for running 246 km in two days from Ath-

ISSN 2357-7975

ens to Sparta to request reinforcements in the war against the Persians, and then running 42 km from Marathon to Athens to announce the victory over the Persians in the Battle of Marathon, which took place in 490 BC. When he returned to the Acropolis, he is said to have exclaimed, "We have won!" before collapsing dead from exhaustion.

[15]To do so, we will primarily utilize two of Strauss's works: the lectures titled *The Problem of Socrates*, delivered at the University of Chicago in 1958 and later published in the book *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (1989), and the book *Socrates and Aristophanes*, released in 1966. We will also employ other relevant texts by Strauss, such as *The City and Man* (1964) and *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952).

[16]For Kierkegaard, the *Clouds* reflect Socrates' own inner emptiness and "excellently denote the movement of thinking lacking any firm ground" (KIERKEGAARD, 1991, p. 112).

[17]Regarding the Unjust Speech as hedonistic, see NUSSBAUM, 1980, p. 64.

[18]"This then is one mark of liberty which all democrats set down as a principle of the constitution. And one is for a man to live as he likes; for they say that this is the function of liberty, inasmuch as to live not as one likes is the life of a man that is a slave" (ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 1317b). "Hence in democracies of this sort everybody lives as he likes, and 'unto what end he listeth,' as Euripides says. But this is bad; for to live in conformity with the constitution ought not to be considered slavery but safety" (ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 1310 a25–36). "A spirit of freedom governs our conduct, not only in public affairs but also in managing the small tensions of everyday life, where we show no animosity at our neighbours' choice of pleasures, nor cast aspersions that may hurt even if they do not harm" (THUCYDIDES. *The War of the Peloponnesians and Athenians*, II.37.2). See also ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 1318b.38–41; 1292a.4–13, 23–25. PLATO, *Republic*, 557b-c; PLATO, *Laws*, 698a-701e). To explore an interesting discussion of this Athenian conception of freedom, see HANSEN, 1997 and EDGE, 2009.

[19]When Strauss cites the example of cocks and beasts, he seems to be speaking in his own name to indicate the inherently problematic aspect of relying on nature as a source of normative valuation. The hypothesis makes sense when we observe the elusive character of his reflection in *Natural Right and History*. Being problematic doesn't mean that there isn't a need to appeal to a more solid foundation for valuations, but it raises a question about the artistic or essentialist nature of a possible recovery of natural right. On the problematic character of natural right, Strauss wrote in the introduction to his *Natural Right and History*: "Certainly, the seriousness of the need of natural right does not prove that the need can be satisfied. A wish is not a fact. Even by proving that a certain view is indispensable for living well, one proves merely that the view in question is a salutary myth: one does not prove it to be true. Utility and truth are two entirely different things (...) The gravity of the issue imposes upon us the duty of a detached, theoretical, impartial discussion" (STRAUSS, 1953, p. 6)

[20]Nussbaum (1980) describes two approaches to moral and civic education in 5th-century Athens. One of them was the traditional approach, based on communal authority and habituation, "which men used to adopt with their sons, and still do adopt very often. It consists partly in anger and partly in a gentler sort of exhortation, and the best name for it as a whole is admonition (*nouthetetiken*)" (*Ibid.*, p. 42). The other, more intellectualist in nature, argued that moral education would only be valid if guided by precise knowledge, similar to scientific knowledge, and that only specialists could teach it properly. The play *The Clouds* portrays Socrates as a supporter of this intellectualist position (*Ibid.*, p. 80). As Nussbaum notes, Plato and Aristotle, departing from

 ISSN 2357-7975

Socrates' intellectualist position, emphasized the importance of habituation in the moral development of citizens. This is exemplified in their reflections on *akrasia* (*Ibid.*, p. 87-94). Strauss's reading also points to a distancing of Plato from Socrates' intellectualist position, a distancing that, according to Strauss, defines the tone of classical political philosophy, and is also evident in Aristotle, Xenophon, and others.

[21]Nussbaum (1980, p. 81) reminds us that Aristotle also rejected the Socratic denial of *akrasia* and cites the passages that demonstrate his criticism of Socratic intellectualism: *EN* 1145a22, 1116b4, 1144b18; *EE* 1216b3, 1230a7, 1246b34; *MM* 1182a17, 1183b8, 1190b28, 1198a10.

[22]It's known that Plato read and appreciated Aristophanes. "Nothing has made me reflect more on Plato's reserve and sphinx-like nature than this *petit fait*, fortunately preserved: that under the pillow of his deathbed no 'Bible' was found, nothing Egyptian, Pythagorean, Platonic, but Aristophanes. How could even a Plato endure a Greek life, to which he said 'no' without an Aristophanes?" (Nietzsche, BGE, §28). The earliest source of this comment by Nietzsche may be the 6th-century philosopher Olympiodorus the Younger, who stated that Plato found "great delight in Aristophanes, the comic writer, and in Sophron; from whom he benefited by imitating the characters in his dialogues. And it is reported that he was so delighted that when he died, copies of Aristophanes and Sophron were found even in his bed" (Olympiodorus, 2015, p. 73-74).

[23]Strauss even goes as far as to say that "Plato's *Republic* may be said to be the reply *par excellence* to Aristophanes. The political proposals of the *Republic* are based on the conceits underlying Aristophanes' *Assembly of Women*" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 125)

[24]In a letter to Jacob Klein dated 7/25/39, Strauss wrote. "The identity of Xenophon's and Plato's Socrates is beyond doubt: it is the same Socrates-Odysseus in both, and the teaching as well. The problem of the *Memorabilia* is identical to that of the *Republic*: the problematic relationship between *dikaiosyne* and *aletheia*, or between practical and theoretical life. The techniques of Plato and Xenophon are largely identical: neither writes in his own name; the author of the *Memorabilia*, just like the *Anabasis*, is not Xenophon, but an anonymous ego; in the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon is the only sycophant whom Socrates calls a 'fool'. As for the *nē kúna*, Xenophon does the following: he has Socrates tell a fable within which a dog swears by Zeus! This example probably shows most clearly what kind of dog Xenophon is. In short, he is absolutely wonderful and now my undisputed favorite" (STRAUSS, 2001, p. 574). In a letter to Jacob Klein dated 2/16/39, Strauss wrote: "Xenophon is my special favorite because he had the courage to disguise himself as an idiot and thus go through *millennia* – he is the greatest scoundrel I know – I believe that in his writings he does exactly what Socrates did in his life. In any case, morality is also purely exoteric with him, and about every other word is ambiguous. *Kalokagathia* was a swear word in the Socratic 'circle', like 'Philistine' or 'bourgeois' in the 19th century. And wisdom is essentially self-control in the expression of opinions – in short, there is a whole system of secret words here just like in Maimonides, so it's a godsend for me" (STRAUSS, 2001, p. 567)

[25]The "way of Socrates" is the uncompromising way of the purely theoretical man who has little interest in many issues that concern the city, has no patience with public dogmas that cannot be rationally supported, and does not make much rhetorical effort to mobilize the passions of the audience with the aim of persuading them. The "way of Plato", in turn, based on the assumption of the always less than rational character of social life, adopts a more prudent relationship with public dogmas and resorts to poetry and rhetoric. The differentiation that Strauss makes between "the way of Socrates" and "the way of Plato" owes

ISSN 2357-7975

much to Farabi's interpretation, which Strauss discusses in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952, p. 15-18): "The Platonic way, as distinguished from the Socratic way, is a combination of the way of Socrates with the way of Thrasymachus; for the intransigent way of Socrates is appropriate only for the philosopher's dealing with the elite, whereas the way of Thrasymachus, which is both more and less exacting than the former, is appropriate for his dealings with the vulgar. What Farabi suggests is that by combining the way of Socrates with the way of Thrasymachus, Plato avoided the conflict with the vulgar and thus the fate of Socrates" (STRAUSS, 1952, p. 16). In *The City and Man,* Strauss continues to elaborate this interpretation of the role of Thrasymachus in *The Republic* (1964, p. 73-88), where he writes that Thrasymachus "acts like the city, he resembles the city" (1964, p. 78), he is a skillful "rhetorician" who knows how to mobilize the "angry passions" of the crowd in a way that Socrates does not. Thus the poet-philosopher Plato through his characters Socrates and Thrasymachus indicates the difference between his way and the previous behavior of the "purely theoretical man" Socrates, which seemed to be, for Plato, exactly that described in *The Clouds*.

[26]"Let me state at the outset how in my opinion Plato settles the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. He emphasizes the need for the noble delusion; he therewith emphasizes the need for poetry. Philosophy as philosophy is unable to provide these noble delusions. Philosophy as philosophy is unable to persuade the nonphilosophers or the multitude; it is unable to charm them. Phi-losophy needs, then, poetry as its supplement. Philosophy re-quires a ministerial poetry. This implies Plato quarrels only with autonomous poetry. If he is to convince us, he must show that nothing which is admirable in poetry is lost if poetry is understood as ministerial" (STRAUSS, 1989, p. 171)

[27]Strauss quotes this aphorism of Nietzsche in his lectures on the “Problem of Socrates” (1989, p. 177), in *The City and Man* (1964, p. 136), and in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958, p. 40, note 47).

[28]“In its desire of truth, philosophy is a stranger wisdom that, in respect to the city’s opinion, is always *atopos*. The philosopher is always a stranger interpreting the *thaumazein* as search of knowledge, even when this entails a critical eye towards shared opinions, consolidated by the social, political, and religious tradition to which one belongs. However, precisely for this reason, philosophy has an intrinsically edifying character, showing the primacy of contemplative life over practical life, of comprehension over engagement” (ALTINI, 2022, p. 3)

[29]For Strauss, modern political rationalism possessed a messianic and activist component unknown to classical political rationalism. Altini (2022, p. 184-185) highlights Strauss’s critique of Kojève’s belief in the realization of utopia. Strauss argued that history lacks any inherent direction, dismissing both progressive and reactionary interpretations as unfounded. He contrasted modern utopias, which rely on social engineering to eliminate evil, with the classical pursuit of a natural, just order, whose realization was seen as uncertain and largely dependent on chance. Strauss saw Kojève’s vision of a universal, homogeneous State as misguided, warning that it would lead to a loss of humanity, akin to Nietzsche’s “last man”. Rather than striving for a final, perfect society, Strauss argued, political philosophy should resist messianic expectations.

[30]Altini also highlights this characteristic in Plato's *Laws*, a text considered by Strauss as Plato's main political work and as representative of the "classical political rationalism" that he sought to somehow recover: "From the fourth book of the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger does no longer speak as a teacher of future legislators, but rather as the adviser of an actual legislator, here and now. In particular, he underlines that wisdom is not a sufficient title to govern. The best political order pre-

ISSN 2357-7975

supposes an equal presence of wisdom and consent, coercion and persuasion, *sophia* and *doxa*, *phronesis* and *logos*, *nomos* and *physis*" (ALTINI, 2022, p. 211).

[31]On Strauss's relationship with liberalism see: SMITH, 2000; ZUCKERT & ZUCKERT, 2006; ARMON, 2019; LOBO, 2024;

[32]See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §28.

[33]To learn more about Strauss's interpretation of Nietzsche and Nietzsche's influence on his thought, explore the courses on Nietzsche that Strauss offered, available online at the Leo Strauss Center. Additionally, consult his article, *Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil* (STRAUSS, 1983), as well as significant studies by commentators, such as: ROSEN, 1987; LAMPERT, 1996; MCALLISTER, 1996; TANGUAY, 2000; MINER, 2012; PIPPIN, 2016; MENDES, 2023.

[34]"After having taken upon himself this great political responsibility, he could not show his readers a way toward political responsibility. He left them no choice except that between irresponsible indifference to politics and irresponsible political options"(STRAUSS, 1989a, p. 57)

[35]See MINER, 2012, p. 159-160.

[36]Strauss, in a letter to Scholem on 7 July 1973, wrote, "I have never been a supporter of messianism and I never will be" (STRAUSS *Apud* ALTINI, 2022, p. 192)

ISSN 2357-7975