

# Animal Republics

## Plato, Representation, and the Politics of Nature

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It is something of a truism among contemporary French theorists that Plato's vision of politics is an elitist one that legitimates authoritarian schemas of non-democratic representation. I challenge this version of Plato the anti-democrat, exemplified here by Jacques Rancière and Bruno Latour, by considering Plato's aesthetics and politics in light of the representation of nonhuman animals in the *Republic* and *Timaeus*. In these texts we see a Plato who solicits the voices of nonhuman animals in order to elicit cacophonous conversations on epistemology, ethics, and politics. While conventional views of Platonic animals emphasize their role as representatives of wildness in need of taming, I use the work of Christina Tarnopolsky and Peter Euben to argue that these texts are incitements to listen to the voices of nonhumans in the reformation of both philosophy and politics. These voices are not included by Plato merely to constitute the order of Rancière's "police logic," but instead set up a "zoopolis" where human and nonhuman come together in strange, incomplete, but often productive encounters. Bringing Plato, Rancière, and Latour into a dialogue on the topic of nonhuman representation challenges conventional notions of "Platonism," but more importantly it produces a more nuanced vision of the contemporary ecological *polis*.

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### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever realized, all of a sudden, that someone has been trying to get your attention for some time without you realizing it? Perhaps it's the barista at the local coffee shop who keeps calling your name (scribbled so nicely on the to-go coffee-cup), while you have been staring at the latest updates on your Facebook news feed (another picture of Sarah's "kitteh," oy). Or perhaps it's the student in your large lecture class with raised hand, who sits on the right side of the classroom and fails to understand that you have the unfortunate habit of generally looking only to the center and left of the room when soliciting questions. But it isn't only other humans who are looking at us, trying to get our attention while we blithely insist on ignoring them. Primatologists have recently (and all of a sudden) come to a startling realization about chimpanzees (*pan troglodytes*) in captivity. For some time, researchers have known that these chimpanzees will communicate using "the raspberry" (I know this better as "the Bronx Cheer"), but they didn't realize the full dimensions of what they were hearing until recently. Wild chimpanzees apparently never make this kind of utterance, and while captive chimpanzees were using it to communicate, it never dawned on primatologists that

something new was going on. The chimpanzees had apparently developed a new means of getting food (this is what the Bronx Cheer does for chimpanzees in captivity, whatever it may do in other contexts), but it was a means they developed specifically in order to communicate with humans (Hopkins, Tagliatela, & Leavens, 2007).

Primatologists call this communication "a form of social tool use" (Hopkins et al., 2007, p. 285), so that in getting our attention the chimps were also manipulating humans (the primatologists themselves) as their tools, which is notable in and of itself for the gestalt shift it entails: not only are nonhumans adept at social tool use, which many had earlier thought was confined to humans, but the direction of agency had been flipped on its head, since it was now the nonhumans who were the directors of the humans and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this, captive chimpanzees' use of the raspberry to communicate demonstrates two things of significance: 1) the emergence of novel behavior in captive primates as a dynamic cultural innovation, and 2) a second level of emergence, predicated upon the first, which I will term an instantiation of a form of politics. This second level of emergence is the researchers' sudden realization (*exaiphanes*, as the Greeks might have put it) that a mutually opaque set of representations intertwined to create a complex politi-

cal situation. The primatologists (pre-realization) represented the chimpanzees as research subjects, complicated ones perhaps, though not subjects capable of innovating in this particular way. The chimps, for their part, also represented the primatologists, seemingly more perspicuously than the researchers since it was the chimps who realized a novel way of talking with the primatologists, before the primatologists devised their own instrument to better represent the chimps.<sup>3</sup>

In thinking about the connection between the ruptural origin of politics and the perplexing work of non-human political representation that attends it, the recent works of Jacques Rancière and Bruno Latour, on the one hand, and the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, on the other, form an uneasy pairing that can help to sift through some of the questions that arise as we ponder these chimpanzees and their raspberries. Rancière's writing draws exemplary attention to the conflictual emergence of politics, where politics is the response by those excluded from the present social order who declare (all of a sudden) that a wrong has occurred. For Rancière, politics *is* the clash between what he calls two logics—on the one side the logic of the “police,” and on the other side the logic of “the equality of all speaking beings”—so that politics always marks a point of disagreement rather than consensus or agreement (Rancière, 1999). Latour, on the other hand, develops his own conception of “political ecology” as a framework for rethinking and reordering political life, but for him politics is more concerned with creating possibilities for collective action than it is with dissensus and conflict, as it is for Rancière. For Latour the modern polity has been, up until now, based on a fundamental fracture between those who purportedly know the transcendental laws of “Nature” (those who know the “facts”), and those who instead insist on the special place of humans as social beings endowed with freedom (those who maintain the independence of “values”) (Latour, 2004, pp. 30-31). Each group has contended for superiority, with scientists claiming expertise to decide matters of important public policy (nuclear winter, global warming) against defenders of “the social representation of reality,” resulting in a deep incoherence in contemporary politics (e.g., is global warming a “fact” or “merely” a social representation?). Unlike Rancière, however, Latour contends that settlement, composition, and construction are the fundamen-

tal tasks of politics (he will name the two basic tasks of political ecology as “the power to take into account” and “the power to put in order” [Latour, 2004, p. 200]). I will suggest in what follows that both thinkers—Rancière the defender of agonism and disorder, and Latour the con- vener of the “Parliament of things” where there is “no reality without representation” (Latour, 2004, p. 227; p. 222)—are essential to thinking about our chimpanzees and the thorny question of nonhuman politics that they raise.

Staging this conversation between the two contemporary French thinkers and Plato is useful for a few reasons. First, while Rancière and Latour are invaluable guides to conceptualizing the origins of democracy and the institutions necessary to its functioning, both are haunted by anthropocentrism to varying degrees. Plato's philosophy presents a non-anthropocentric vision that can challenge this humanism, but (and this is the second reason) by returning to Plato we also see that the traditional image of Western philosophy as thoroughly human-centric (Sorabji, 1993) needs emendation. I will also argue for a Plato who is an ally of democratic politics rather than an opponent, as both Rancière and Latour have (wrongly) contended, and that Plato's utility for democratic theory is accentuated by attending to the moments of human/nonhuman community in his thought.

Rancière's conception of politics, as the site of the clash between police and egalitarian logics, can be expanded and deepened by reframing his exclusion of nonhuman voices through Plato's inclusion of these voices. Latour's “politics of nature” can be seen as the furthering of Plato's solicitation of nonhuman entities, via the creation of representative institutions, while Plato's critical “disruption of the sensible” (Tarnopolsky, 2010) may indicate lacunae in Latour's new vision of the institution of the Commons.

The roadmap for the rest of the paper is as follows: in the next section, “Plato, Archipolitics, Science,” I will first explicate how Rancière and Latour help us to reconceive of the political, before moving on to their mistaken critique of Plato's supposedly authoritarian “archipolitics.” This accomplished, I will then explore Plato's concept of metempsychosis as a key tool in the critique of anthropocentrism in the second section, “Plato's Transmigrating Souls.” In the final section, “Why Latour and Rancière Might Listen to Plato,” I then sketch the

political lessons that may be gleaned from Plato, not just on behalf of Rancière and Latour, but also with a view to the creation of the zoopolis to come.

### PLATO, ARCHIPOLITICS, SCIENCE

Rancière and Latour are particularly useful for thinking about the political engagement of humans and non-humans. While Rancière explicitly denies that animals can be shoe-horned into his definition of politics because they fundamentally lack speech (and he accepts something like the conventional Aristotelian or Heideggerian distinction between humans and animals),<sup>4</sup> given Rancière's own radical statements on pedagogy (see below) there is no reason to concede that he possesses the master interpretive key to his own writing (Chambers, 2013). Remember that for Rancière, politics is an event that stages the clash between the police order and the order of equality, and politics for Rancière is never about ordering or agreeing but always about the making-present of a wrong or miscount. That clash erupts precisely on the terrain that animal ethicists explore today. Rancière describes the revolt of the plebs in the Roman Republic along lines that are very familiar to anyone in animal studies: the patrician orator Appius Claudius denies that the plebs should be bargained with, because (to use Aristotle's terms) they merely make sounds (*phōne*) rather than have speech (*logos*).<sup>5</sup> As Rancière puts it, summarizing Appius:

Between the language of those who have a name and the lowing of nameless beings, no situation of linguistic exchange can possibly be set up, no rules or code of discussion ... The order that structures patrician domination recognizes no logos capable of being articulated by beings deprived of logos (Rancière, 1999, p. 24).

But of course, Rancière goes on to show how this denial of the capacity of speech to the plebs, which is the hallmark of any police order (that "structures the sensory order that organizes ... domination" [Rancière, 1999, p. 24]), is thwarted when the plebs

establish another order, another partition of the perceptible, by constituting themselves ... as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them these. They thereby execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the pa-

tricians ... In a word, they conduct themselves like beings with names. (Rancière, 1999, p. 24)<sup>6</sup>

To my mind this sounds like a fairly precise description of the encounter between chimpanzees and primatologists and the chimps' adoption of the raspberry, though Rancière himself is unwilling to make this connection. That he fails to do so is perhaps because, in addition to the quasi-Aristotelian fetishization of a certain kind of speech-act (that he denies to nonhumans), he is unwilling to concede what is for Latour a (pragmatic) first principle: "no reality without representation" (Latour, 2004, p. 222).

Latour is useful to pair with Rancière, then, because Rancière's agonistic politics tend to privilege the presence of a speaking agent as a kind of auto-authentication device—a "real" speaking being is one that speaks in their own name, to claim the wrong of the police order and thereby create a moment of politics—and while this may be the case with the lab chimpanzees, it not clear that such a speaking agent either is always or must always be present. Latour includes nonhumans from the outset in his new political body, variously called "the parliament of things" or "the collective," though it is not so much a noun as a process: "a procedure for *collecting* associations of humans and nonhumans" (Latour, 2004, p. 238). He flattens Rancière's ontological hierarchy between humans and nonhumans by treating everything—humans, plants, animals, prions, hurricanes—as ontologically equal (which is not to say they are politically equal!). Everything for Latour is a "proposition," and every proposition must be represented (by "reliable witnesses") and evaluated alongside other representations to see whether it should be included in the collective, and how that inclusion might take place. As an example of this representation, Latour talks about prions (the entities that apparently cause Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), though any other "person" or "thing" would do just as nicely. In the case of prions, until they were represented (through sets of scientific procedures) by "spokespersons" (the scientists) they could not be considered for membership in the collective. When they are represented, of course, the collective then can decide how to "take account" of them, and while in the immediate case this resulted in the deaths of millions of cows killed to stop BSE's spread, this response was not inevitable (Latour, 2004, pp. 111-114). Latour's set-up of a collective based on two powers,

those of “taking into account” and “putting in order,” includes the very real possibility of different outcomes than what happened with the “Mad Cow” panic, but would require a different basis for evaluating the moral claims made for certain kinds of “propositions” like the cows in the UK and the chimpanzees in the lab. And while Latour gives us a sense of procedures that could allow for such moral inclusion, it is to Plato that I will turn to push Latour in this direction.

However, in staging this conversation between Plato and these French thinkers, on the ground of animals and ecology of all places, I am aware that my reading of Plato goes against the common interpretation of the Athenian adopted by his Gallic interlocutors. Though Rancière and Latour come from divergent traditions within the French academy—Rancière was a student of Althusser before “going rogue,” while Latour was trained as a sociologist who then nearly invented “science studies”—both imbibed a similar conception of the relevance (or irrelevance) of Platonic philosophy for their endeavors: Plato, through his mouthpiece Socrates, stands for almost everything that is wrong with the tradition of political philosophy. Not surprisingly, neither Rancière nor Latour place much emphasis on the dialogical character of Plato’s work, unlike contemporary classicists such as Christina Tarnopolsky (2010, 2014) and others who follow the interpretive strategies opened up, variously, by Leo Strauss (1964) or Peter Euben (1997); instead, they read Socrates as a dogmatic stand-in for Plato to himself.

Most Anglophone political theorists know Rancière through *Disagreement* (originally published in French in 1995, and translated in 1999), where he loads upon Plato the dubious honor of founding the tradition of “Archipolitics,” which “reveals in all its radicality the project of a community based on the complete realization of the *arkhê* of community, total awareness, replacing the democratic configuration of politics with nothing left over.” (Rancière, 1999, p. 65) What Plato inaugurates, in essence, is the replacement of politics by philosophy, in the name of a “geometrical equality” that will eliminate the unruly hurly-burly of democracy. But well before *Disagreement*, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière had seen that Plato, again through his puppet “Socrates,” was the real opponent to be reckoned with.<sup>7</sup> In that text it is again Plato’s authoritarianism that is Rancière’s target, though it is the seemingly emancipatory character of So-

cratic pedagogy that draws his ire. Socrates appears as something quite other than he is, Rancière claims, since in Socrates’ claim that he is wise in nothing save the knowledge of his own ignorance one would think that Socrates can hardly be an authority on anything. Not so!

This is the secret of good masters: through their questions, they discreetly guide the student’s intelligence—discreetly enough to make it work, but not to the point of leaving it to itself ... In this case [the *Meno*] Socrates interrogates a slave who is destined to remain one. The Socratic method is thus a perfected form of stultification. Like all learned masters, Socrates interrogates in order to instruct. (Rancière, 1991, p. 29)

In Socrates’ profession of ignorance Rancière finds only pretense, though this fiction is all the more effective as a tool of mastery since it feigns to liberate as part of the technique of enslavement.

Placing these two narratives together, then, we can see that for Rancière Plato is doubly suspect as a resource for democratic politics. He is condemned as an outright anti-democrat for his construction of the archipolitical alternative to politics, but even in his seemingly aporetic moments, in those dialogues termed “Socratic” for their purported fidelity to the “historical” Socrates (as distinguished from those that reflect the philosophic system of the mature Plato), Rancière sees Plato undermining the possibility of democracy.<sup>8</sup> Socrates never actually believes that he knows nothing when he “interrogates” the ordinary men of Athens (or their slaves), so that what appears to be the demonstration of radical human equality (even the slave in *Meno* knows geometry!) is in fact just the treachery of the “learned master,” who wants to foist a program of anti-democratic “geometrical” equality upon an unsuspecting (democratic) populace. What better way to teach the proles that they should buy into the archipolitical order than to show them that they themselves actually possess geometrical knowledge already, and that they have but to contract with someone like Socrates who can help to pull it out of them?

Latour’s critique of Plato echoes Rancière’s, though it is not “Archipolitics” that Latour accuses Plato of constructing, but “Science” which claims to speak on behalf of “Nature.” Latour sees in Plato’s Socrates (Plato’s puppet) the origin of the dogma that the real world as it exists is essentially inaccessible to ordinary humans—in

Plato's case it is the beyond-human Forms, which are translated into "Science's" knowledge of the invisible laws of physics in modernity—which necessitates the rulership of experts (philosophers or scientists) over the ignorant mob (Latour, 2004). Because the *demos* is always inclined to be inhuman, since it does not know how to control itself and its only true possession is force (the force of larger numbers), Latour claims that Plato devises the doctrine of the Forms (and the philosopher's unique access to them) as a means of "controlling inhumanity by means of inhumanity"; the philosopher/scientist's grasp of the inhuman knowledge of "Nature" must be used to temper the mob's tendency to act barbarically (Latour, 1999).

As I have already alluded to in passing, there are a number of reasons for suspecting that the authoritarian version of Plato is inaccurate, regardless of what is going on with nonhumans in the Platonic dialogues. Leo Strauss was among the first prominent readers of Plato in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to suggest that one cannot simply read Plato's mind into the Socrates of the *Republic*, since Socrates is a character in a dialogue much like Macbeth is only a role in a play, and as such not speaking *simpliciter* for Shakespeare. For Strauss this implies that a careful reading of a text like the *Republic* requires that one adopt the methodological principle that true philosophers never mean what they say literally, and in Strauss's interpretation of Platonic irony he finds a serious critique of the perennial irrationality of democratic politics. In this sense Strauss comes close to Rancière's and Latour's position on Platonic philosophy as essentially anti-democratic, though Strauss comes to this conclusion by reading ironically rather than literally (as do Rancière and Latour). But this dialogical interpretation of the dialogues need not result in an authoritarian Plato, as it has been taken up by Peter Euben, who follows in the tradition of Hannah Arendt and Sheldon Wolin rather than Strauss, to imply something quite different from Strauss's claim. Rather than seeing in Plato a continuing contest between philosophy and politics, in which the job of the philosopher is to inoculate himself and his followers (and perhaps the polity itself) from the dangers of democratic politics, Euben sees a fruitful if tensional relationship between Platonic philosophy and democracy. Plato may be a critic of democracy, Euben contends, but he is best seen as engaged in an agonistic embrace with Athenian politics rather than offering a wholesale rejection

of democratic life, in the same way that Arendt offers a stinging rebuke of contemporary democracy in the name of the lost possibilities that inhere in democratic activity (Euben, 1997; 2003). In a similar vein Christina Tarnopolsky sees Plato as a friendly critic of democracy, since his dialogues eschew foundations and performatively disempower any claims to final authority:

[T]he *Republic* as a whole offers its reader the possibility of choosing the life of Socratic and Platonic philosophizing, which requires the courage to accept the groundless grounding of a life devoted to constantly questioning one's groundings, even while it also involves positing the very grounds that are constantly being pulled out from under one ... democratic engagement need not be based on a one-sidedly heroic, tragic, inhuman, or for that matter, Pollyannaish, view of our ourselves or our fellow citizens, because we might all of us be in the gutter, even while we are also looking up at (and down from) the stars. (Tarnopolsky, 2014)

For my purposes it is useful that Tarnopolsky closes her piece on satyr-plays with this reference to the oscillation between the gutter and the stars, since, as we will shortly see, this is precisely the route taken by souls moving through animals to the heavens in Plato's *Timaeus*, and this image helps bring us to the connection between Plato, democracy, and animals.

### PLATO'S TRANSMIGRATING SOULS

Following Euben's Arendtian Plato and Tarnopolsky's Rancièrian Plato,<sup>9</sup> I want to claim that Plato is disrupting rather than shoring up the "distribution of the sensible" for his readers, but I also want to add to their accounts by considering how Plato's animals (which both Euben and Tarnopolsky leave aside) shift the composition of commons. I am interested in how Plato horizontalizes the relations between humans and nonhuman animals, in particular through his development of the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul in numerous passages across at least seven dialogues. I contend that the combined effect of including these nodes of boundary-blurring into our conception of Platonic ethics brings him into proximity with philosophical radicals like Rancière and Latour, though Plato will also be useful in pushing Rancière and Latour in directions that they might not have chosen themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Metempsychosis is not a topic that receives a great deal of attention in political theory circles these days, though this neglect is an historical contingency; in the philosophical circle of the Neoplatonists, for instance, it was a going concern for hundreds of years (O'Meara, 2003). Why this idea receives such treatment today is not difficult to understand—there are not many card-carrying believers in reincarnation receiving their PhD in political science or philosophy departments in North America—but looking at the extant Platonic corpus should give some pause to the ready dismissal of its salience to Plato. The basic concept of metempsychosis, that each human and nonhuman animal body is inhabited by a soul, and that this soul leaves the body after death and finds a new body (human or animal, without any necessary distinction) in which to be reincarnated (theoretically, almost *ad infinitum*), appears in at least seven of Plato's roughly 36 dialogues.<sup>11</sup> For comparison's sake, the idea that the soul is tripartite<sup>12</sup> is commonly attributed to the “mature” Plato in the secondary literature, but appears explicitly in only three texts.<sup>13</sup> It seems, however, that when contemporary interpreters think of transmigration they take it to be something marginal to Plato's philosophy, perhaps because it appears often in mythic form, and perhaps because unlike the tripartite theory, it bears no resemblance to any currently accepted theory of the self (unlike, say, the way that the Freudian psychological structure resembles Plato's). But how might we think about Plato differently if we took metempsychosis to be as important to his philosophy as the divided soul? Can Rancière's authoritarian reading of Plato be sustained if we bring metempsychosis from the margins to the center?

Given its association with New Age philosophy and the “theosophy” of Blavatsky et al., metempsychosis may seem downright silly to many contemporary Westerners, but this derisive stance is hardly sustainable in a multicultural world where hundreds of millions of Hindu practitioners believe in it.<sup>14</sup> Still, for secular Western readers of Plato the idea does not pose much occasion for reflection—if long-dead Plato wants to dabble in myths about the afterlife in order to make his philosophy more palatable, what of it?<sup>15</sup> But our tolerance for Plato's dalliance cannot be so easy. If Plato's version of metempsychosis, in particular his adoption of the Pythagorean doctrine that souls move freely between human and nonhuman bodies, appears like a quirk to us, then we have failed to

appreciate the force of the idea for any potential audience that Plato might be imagining. Plato's Athens was a political community that did not know “toleration” as a concept, at least in the sense that we generally accord to the practice of religious pluralism in liberal democratic polities today. Citizens were required as a normal part of the duties of being a citizen to take part in the religious festivals of the city—the Greater Dionysia at Athens, the festival to which we owe the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, was inseparably both civic and religious—as the division between public and private (*ta idia*) was drawn along different lines. Much like Saba Mahmood's account of the entwining of the roles of citizen and believer in contemporary Egypt, Athenians thought of religion more through ritual practice than through the inner voice of conscience (Mahmood, 2004). They saw no contradiction between their democratic governance and the prohibition of impiety (*asebeia*), and we know of many prosecutions for violations of the religious sensibilities of the *demos*, including, most famously, the cashiering of Alcibiades in the Peloponnesian War (documented in Thucydides 6.27-32, 6.60-61), as well as the conviction and expulsion of the philosopher Anaxagoras.

I mention all this because it helps us to see how intolerable Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis would have been to the average Athenian (or Greek, for that matter), since it is based in the heterodoxy of Pythagorean beliefs about the relationship between humans and animals that were antithetical to the civic religion of the polis. As is well known by now, Athenian civic life was dependent upon animal sacrifice, since nearly every public event required that an animal be ritually killed in order to consecrate the occasion. There were many civic festivals that were thematically arranged around ritual slaughter, like the Bouphonia (the word means ox-slaying) in Athens, where an ox was slain at an altar on the Acropolis (Burkert, 1983), and the origin of “tragedy” in the Greater Dionysia has been linked with the killing of the *tragos* (goat) to honor Dionysius.<sup>16</sup> But more often than not, it seems, animals were sacrificed without being the centerpiece of the event, though we cannot be certain since we have no records of the total number of animals killed in any year. Since any meat that was consumed in Athens came through sacrifice, animals killed must have numbered in the tens or hundreds of thousands annually, and most would likely have come through more quotidi-

an rituals like that which attended the opening of business at the Athenian Assembly. Before each of these meetings, which occurred at least once per month, city officials would cut the throats of piglets and sprinkle the blood over the seats where the *demos* would soon gather. How many piglets were killed for this ritual, and how extensive the blood-spatter needed to be, we are again unsure of, but the general point is that such rituals were so commonplace that the cumulative effect of the civic machinery of sacrifice was to make ritual animal death inseparable from various dimensions of Athenian daily life—political, economic, and religious (Burkert, 1983).

The Pythagorean belief that souls move freely from humans to animals and back again provides the basis for a stark repudiation of this entire civico-religious edifice. Pythagoreans such as Empedocles enjoined their fellow Greeks to end the practice of animal sacrifice and also to shift to a vegetarian diet, since, in one of Empedocles' more memorable sayings, he imagines that the cries of the sacrificial animal may actually be the screams of a deceased father, about to be sacrificed by his still-living son (Fragment 430). Pythagoreans were known to have formed their own independent communities, but were also regarded as a source of disorder within existing polities because they would not participate in rituals that were simultaneously political and religious—there was no way to be a “good” Athenian while simultaneously criticizing and opting out of such activities. The metaphysical doctrine of metempsychosis was thus much more than an idiosyncrasy; rather, metempsychosis was a threat to a civic order grounded in a theology of sacrifice that did not separate theological and political spheres (Detienne and Vernant, 1992, pp. 6-7).

Plato refers to Pythagorean metempsychosis repeatedly, as I have already noted, and these references include dialogues in his early, middle, and late phases. I want to look at two passages here, to give some sense of what he is doing, one from the *Timaeus* and one from the *Republic*. In the *Timaeus* Plato discusses the nature of the universe from its creation, primarily through the character of Timaeus, an astronomer. Timaeus says that souls were first created and each linked with a star in the heavens, but due to “necessity” each soul descended into a human body for its first incarnation. If each soul behaved well during its time on earth, controlling its anger and fear and living in love, it returned to its star to continue living

there (perhaps eternally, though Timaeus is not explicit on this point). Those souls who failed to live such an upright life were sent into the bodies of women in their next life instead of returning to the stars, and if they again lived poorly as women they were sent into various kinds of animal body, in accordance with the kinds of life they evinced previously (42ff). So, for instance, Timaeus says that “the race of birds was created out of innocent light-minded men who, although their minds were directed towards heaven, imagined, in their simplicity, that the clearest demonstration of the things above was to be obtained by sight, these [souls] were remodeled and transformed into birds, and they grew feathers instead of hair” (91c). Those who were less philosophic became quadrupeds with their heads oriented toward the earth (since they did not ponder that which was more divine, according to Timaeus), and (here is the connection with Tarnopolsky's gutter) “the most entirely senseless and ignorant of them all” became fish and oysters in “the most remote habitations as a punishment of their outlandish ignorance” (91c-92c). Timaeus' account is, by his own admission, merely “probable” (29d), and it relies on a hierarchical relation between humans and animals (as well as maintaining hierarchy between different types of humans), though this is not the hierarchy that one might expect. Unlike later philosophers who will fundamentally demarcate humans and animals based on the possession of rationality (Sorabji, 1993), in Plato's hands the bright line is much muddier and bespeaks of fundamental continuity rather than difference.

The second passage I want to consider is the Myth of Er, from the *Republic*, where Plato (via Socrates' retelling of the story of Er, who died and returned from death) does something slightly different from what he does in the *Timaeus*. While the trans-species metempsychosis of this myth is not surprising given the general consensus on the influence of Pythagoras on Plato (Cornford, 1903; O'Meara, 2003; Porphyry, 2000), what is most notable here is what has gone least-observed in recent Platonic scholarship: Plato quite literally tells us (at least if the plain words of the Myth are considered) that we are killing the en-souled bodies of the just when we kill domestic animals.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps it is because *Republic X* has caused such consternation among Platonic scholars that this striking claim has gone unrecognized, but we can see important details about the animal/human rela-

tionship if we highlight the surface meaning of the myth instead of denigrating the relevance of these more literary passages in Plato.

Recall that Er has crossed into the afterlife, and is observing the process by which souls emerge from the heavens or hell and then choose their next life. To the extent that any commentators take the myth at all seriously, the common interpretive theme is to highlight Odysseus' choice of the life of a common man, particularly as this contrasts with those who mistakenly choose tyrannical lives in the erroneous belief that this will be the most pleasurable (as Glaucon and Adeimantus have been half-arguing from Book II onward). While this is surely important, consider the text that bookends this revelation. First, Er witnesses several Greeks from the heroic past make their choice, and this is the point where "the whole danger lies for a man" (618c) since the choice at this one brief moment will set the bounds to an entire mortal life and may well bring retribution for the entirety of the thousand-year sojourn in the underworld. Unjust deeds done in the course of a tyrannical life are "countless" and also have "no remedy" (618e), so the choice is doubly important for the chooser (who may suffer later) as well as his or her potential future victims.<sup>18</sup> The salience of philosophy to this choice is immediately demonstrated when Er sees the first person to choose, a nameless man whose goodness was a product of habit rather than thought, pick the life of "greatest tyranny" (619b). Er describes a number of other unnamed choosers as a group and the general nature of their choices, but does not mention any crossing of species boundaries until he reaches the descriptions of the heroes of Greek myth. At this point the choices of the heroes of the mythic past are revealed, and in succession the first four named legends choose an animal life: Orpheus that of a swan, Thamyris a nightingale, Ajax a lion, and Agamemnon an eagle. Each choice of an animal life is based on an aversion to humanity rooted in that particular soul's prior life; for example, Orpheus does not want to be carried by a human female before birth due to his death at the hands of women (620a-d). That the humans only choose animal lives because of a hostility toward other humans would seem to indicate that Plato is still functioning within the standard sacrificial framework at this point: these first figures of metempsychosis across the species border are not particularly friendly images of the human/animal relation, though they do not necessarily im-

ply that the animal lives themselves hold any antipathy toward human lives.<sup>19</sup>

Next, Er sees Odysseus placed by lot in the final spot<sup>20</sup> (just after Thersites tellingly picks the life of a monkey), and rejecting a life of ambition he finds a life discarded by all the others, "the life of a private citizen who minded his own business ... When he saw it, he chose it gladly, saying he would have done the same even if he had drawn the first lot." (620c-d) Most interpreters focus on Odysseus' choice, and ignore the passage that immediately follows it. Here Er/Socrates says: "Similarly among the wild animals there were moves into human beings, and into one another—the unjust changing into savage creatures, the just into gentle ones. Every kind of intermingling was taking place" (620d-e). So the transformations between human and non-human continue, following the changes seen in the earlier descriptions of Orpheus et al. But here Plato has added a rather important detail: savage lives are taken up by the unjust souls, while gentle animal lives are taken up by the just ones. The first part of this statement seems obvious enough, as we have just seen Ajax and Agamemnon turn themselves into predators for their next go-round, but the significance of the second part has generated little interest.

I have noted already the frequent scholarly attention to the Pythagorean influence on Plato, and this is particularly emphasized in discussing his sometimes bizarre fascination with mathematics (and number more generally) as well as the doctrine of metempsychosis that Er's tale assumes. But there is this added element of Pythagorean influence that becomes all the more clear if we look at the *Katharmoi* ("Purifications") of the Pythagorean Empedocles, who was born about sixty years prior to Plato and who flourished in Sicily, where Plato journeyed several times.<sup>21</sup> It is precisely the transmigration of souls that provides the moral foundation for Empedocles' radical critique of Hellenistic sacrificial ritual, as the implications of trans-species metempsychosis lead to the most horrible of results:

A father takes up his dear son who has changed his form and slays him with a prayer, so great is his folly! They are borne along beseeching the sacrificer; but he does not hear their cries of reproach, but slays them and makes ready the evil feast. Then in the same manner son takes father and daughters their mother, and devour the dear flesh when they have deprived them of life. (Fr. 430)



Empedocles enjoins his fellow humans to “cease from evil slaughter” since they are “devouring each other in heedlessness of mind” (Fr. 427), in contrast to an earlier age where “it was the greatest defilement among men, to deprive animals of life and to eat their goodly bodies” (Fr. 405) and human/nonhuman relations were marked by comity: “all were gentle and obedient toward men, both animals and birds, and they burned with kindly love; and trees grew with leaves and fruit ever on them, burdened with abundant fruit all the year.” (Fr. 421) As in Er’s tale from beyond the grave, Empedocles also claims that acts of injustice committed during a lifetime will follow the doer for many more years, though he specifically links this punishment to the sacrifice and eating of animals:

There is an utterance of Necessity, an ancient decree of the gods, eternal, sealed fast with broad oaths whenever any one defiles his body sinfully with bloody gore or perjures himself in regard to wrong-doing, one of those spirits who are heir to long life, thrice ten thousand seasons shall he wander apart from the blessed, being born meantime in all sorts of mortal forms, changing one bitter path of life for another. (Fr. 369)

Empedocles mentions his own role in these cosmic cycles, “born once a boy, and a maiden, and a plant, and a bird, and a darting fish in the sea” (Fr. 383), in which he has played the part of the spectator horrified at the immorality of his fellow creatures, as he “wept and shrieked on beholding the unwonted land where are Murder and Wrath, and other species of Fates, and wasting diseases, and putrefaction and fluxes” (Fr. 385), and also his implication as a doer of these very same evil deeds: “One of these now am I too, a fugitive from the gods and a wanderer, at the mercy of raging Strife.” (Fr. 369)

Comparing these passages to Plato’s Er-tale is instructive, as it makes sense of what otherwise appears an odd addendum to Socrates’ capstone morality-play for those seemingly too dense to understand the actual philosophic argument of the *Republic* (as Bloom, 1968 claims). And Plato adds a compelling philosophic punch line to Empedocles’ religious story—it is not just our fathers, mothers, sons, or daughters whom we may be killing on the altar, but (worse, from Plato’s vantage) it is the souls of the just who meet with the sacrificer’s knife. It is only the just whose souls go into gentle animals, and

Greek sacrifice was never (not that I have found, at least) performed on wild animals. The gentle animal is the one sacrificed, and so we kill and eat the just. Perhaps the deed seems less horrific given that souls themselves are not really killed, as we see in both Empedocles’ and Er’s tales. But this does not lessen the moral implications from either Plato’s or Empedocles’ standpoint, since both are fully committed to metempsychosis but still maintain the necessity of severe punishments for malefactors.

### WHY LATOUR AND RANCIÈRE MIGHT LISTEN TO PLATO

There are certainly a great many things that I have no wish for Plato to tell Latour and Rancière, or at least I have no wish that Latour and Rancière give equal weight to all of the voices we find in the dialogues. While Plato’s Pythagorean commitments re-distribute the boundaries of the ethico-political community in all of the texts I have considered, there are some moments in which Plato’s leveling is less pronounced than others. That is, if there are times, as in the *Statesman* and the *Republic*, that Plato is closer to setting out a horizontal geography of animal and human selves, in the *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* Plato reinscribes a hierarchy between humans and animals. Though this hierarchy is not based on the kind of ontological distinction that some Cartesians might make, between humans with souls and animals as machines, in the *Timaeus* the movement from human to animal (at least in the “second birth”) is clearly a degeneration caused by a moral failure. Had those first humans been able to control their anger and desire, they would have returned to their stars and not moved into an animal body. So the implication is that these first animals, at least, while still possessed of the same soul that had earlier been in a human, were also souls that did not quite live up to their full potential. This version is not consistent with the path of the transmigrating souls in the myth of Er, however, since in Er’s tale the general movement is for just souls (in humans) to move into domestic animals, while unjust souls (in humans) will move into wild animal bodies. Though the *Timaeus* is probably a later dialogue than the *Republic*, there does not seem to be a compelling reason to substitute what seems later for what seems earlier as a general rule—otherwise why not just read the *Laws* and *Statesman* and forget about the *Republic*?—nor does Plato give us any argument for why one or the other may be

the “correct” version of metempsychosis. And for my purposes it does not matter much either way, since even in the more hierarchical story Plato would still be committed to the idea that animals and humans share souls (good, bad, or indifferent), thereby flattening out what had been (under humanism) a clearly hierarchical dichotomy between humans and animals. Even the mild hierarchy in the *Timaeus* would be subject to the caveat that the just soul in a human, if it were destined to return to its star at the death of the human body, would likely have come from an animal body in a previous life (think of the *Timaeus* “innocent light-minded” souls in birds, at 42d). It is the same souls that are in constant motion back and forth between human and nonhuman bodies, and whatever moral failings (in the *Timaeus*’ version) may attend those souls currently in an animal body, for Plato this would not justify the infliction of harm.

There is also no need for us to square these two somewhat divergent accounts of the soul’s afterlife if we follow Euben’s suggestion that finding ambiguity in Plato’s dialogues does not demand that we resolve it (Euben, 1997, p. 54), and instead ponder whether the “misdirections, reversals, impasses, incongruities, and warnings ... make the world seem strange and shocking” (Euben, 2003, p. 160). Tarnopolsky (2014) also counsels that we allow ourselves to adopt multiple perspectives on the dialogues (she is thinking of “genre-switching,” say between viewing the *Republic* as a tragedy, medical treatise, comedy, or satyr play) *seriatim*, allowing each perspective to undermine the conventions of the other without trying to reduce our account to any one narrative that subsumes all others. Both theorists suggest, then, that our time is not necessarily best spent in finding the one true Platonic doctrine, in part because the dialogues don’t seem to be trying to do this, and also because we cannot escape the ordeal of ambiguity in our own thinking even if somehow we find an interlocutor who was able to tame it in himself (“Plato”). In the case of our relations with animals, would it make any difference if Plato were unambiguously on the side of either the *Timaeus* or *Republic* narratives? These are merely “probable” accounts even if we take *Timaeus* (the character) at his word, but what is the word of a character in a 2500 year old dialogue’s telling of a myth? I would suggest that these versions of flattened ontology can at best be spurs to our own imaginative recasting of the world around us, par-

ticularly of how we imagine the worlds that other animals are already creating.

So what about those chimpanzees and their Bronx cheers? If we now may be more inclined to see this as the emergence of a communicative gesture that dynamically responds to the presence of humans, we can also see it through Rancière’s and Latour’s lenses, now refracted, or tempered, by Platonic impingements. Rancière’s denial of speech to nonhumans cannot stand scrutiny—at least in the case of these chimpanzees<sup>22</sup>—and with Plato’s push to see the potential continuities that stretch from human to nonhuman we can think of this innovation as something like an instance of Rancière’s “politics.” While we might be disinclined to think that such communication is sufficiently conflictual to satisfy Rancière’s criteria, there may be more agonism in this encounter than first meets the eye. Think, for a moment, about what the raspberry does in human communication: it generally marks a point of disagreement or derision, often expressed sarcastically as a cheer.<sup>23</sup> Raspberries can be playful, no doubt, and perhaps that’s how the chimpanzees learned the raspberry in the first place—from observing playful interactions between their human captors. But we could also view the raspberry as a more aggressive act by the chimpanzees—more in tune with the “Bronx” part of Bronx cheer—as a demand to be recognized and to have desires addressed that was articulated as best the chimpanzees knew how. There are differences between the chimps’ raspberries and Rancière’s tale of the cries of the pleb multitude assembled on the Aventine (Rancière, 1999, pp. 23-25), to be sure, but from the vantage of the patricians (Appius Claudius in Rancière’s example, or the primatologists in mine) it’s always difficult to tell the difference between “mere” voice and speech. Is it too far-fetched to imagine that the chimps understood only too well the contempt that hides behind the raspberry’s seemingly childish mien?

Perhaps Latour has less to learn from the anti-authoritarian Plato than does Rancière, on my account, since Latour is already on-board for bringing nonhumans and humans together in his new Collective. But if you recall the example I culled from Latour previously, about the prions and BSE, I would suggest that Latour’s politics can also gain from the encounter with Plato. Though Latour’s new institutions are not in principle opposed to

creating Plato's vegetarian republic, he himself is more concerned with the way that prions gain representation (through the scientists) than with what happens to the cows (their status is already settled for him, in some sense). But he is procedurally open to the cows' status in the Collective being reopened, and listening to Plato (no longer considered the author of "Nature") might help move him in this direction. For Latour's new parliament it is crucial that politicians and moralists weigh in on the matter of who is "to be taken in account" (the first power of the Collective) no less than scientists, and if we couple narratives like the primatologists' (Hopkins et al., 2007) with the moral force of the accounts in the *Timaieus* and the *Republic*, those cows begin to look (and speak?) very differently.

This is especially true if we consider the stretching (or what we could call "trans-ing") of the self that is accomplished in Plato's theory of metempsychosis, and how this would impinge upon Latour's construction of the Collective. Plato's text pushes us to see nonhuman animals not just as other beings "out there" who need to be included, but potentially as other parts of *our own* beings. He invites us to extend the self into other bodies, by recognizing that we have already been in those other bodies (in the past) and will be in those other bodies (in the future). And when we extend ourselves thusly we begin to see a "queer" self that is stretched temporally and spatially,<sup>24</sup> without the firmly bounded notion of self-identity that still seems present in Latour's conception of the scientist (or politician, or moralist) tasked with investigating cows and prions. Plato's concept of the transmigrating, trans-ing soul destabilizes the selves of the humans who act to compose Latour's Collective, inviting them to consider BSE from an alternate vantage: one that sees not just a disease whose "actants" (cows, prions) need to be considered, but as a crippling condition from which the scientists themselves, in some way, are *already* suffering (in their past and future lives).

I am not suggesting, of course, that Latour or Rancière need to adopt Plato's specific doctrine of metempsychosis (or that my readers believe it either). Plato's particular reasons for his belief are interesting enough, but I am more provoked by the affective bonds between nonhumans and humans that they creatively imagine, as well as by the questions that they force us to ask ourselves when we ponder human and nonhuman encounters. Who speaks to us when the chimpanzee razzes, or

the cow lows? What kind of political event is occurring, and how are we called to respond to it? Plato's animals do not provide determinate answers to these questions, but they intersect in surprising ways with posthumanists like Bruno Latour and radical democrats like Jacques Rancière. Like the plebs on the Aventine they erupt into our philosophic narratives, disturbing our humanist consensus and asking that *we* respond to *them*. And we would do well to heed Rancière's mistaken humanism (in denying speech to nonhumans) as a cautionary tale for the continuing process of nonhuman representation as it is taken up in Latour's Collective: there is no predicting just how the irruption of these new demanding beings will happen, as the declaration of wrong by those previously denied speech always comes all of a sudden.

There is also a parallel between the chimpanzees and Plato that only occurred to me as I was finishing this essay. Though my version of Plato has made appearances in the past, as I have noted (Painter, 2013; Porphyry, 2000; Dombrowski, 1984), Plato's Pythagorean leveling does not make many waves in political philosophy circles today. Nevertheless, as I have argued, he raises questions about human exceptionalism in the *Republic* and in many other dialogues, even though what he says is perhaps indirect and sometimes expressed *sotto voce*. All this leads me to wonder: are Plato's Pythagorean utterances analogous to the chimpanzees' raspberries? Were they too hiding in plain sight, all the while waiting (or demanding) to be noticed?

"What was that?" we say. "Were you talking to me?"

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Prior versions of this essay were presented at the 2014 annual meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, in St. Catharines, Ontario, and the American Political Science Association, in Washington, DC. Thanks to my fellow panelists and to my discussants Kendra Coulter and David Schlosberg, and also to the reviewers and editorial board at the journal for their very detailed (and much appreciated) commentary.

<sup>2</sup> This shift to an agentic view of nonhumans is broadly congruent with the diverse justifications seen in de Waal, 1982 (via primatology); Hribal, 2007 (via Marxist interspecies solidarity); Seeley, 2010 (via animal behaviorism/cognitive neuroscience); and Bennett, 2009 (via "New Materialism"). I do not take any particular stand on the grounds for such a claim, though given my later discussion of Latour, clearly I am sympathetic to the materialist/political ecology schema.

<sup>3</sup> In the experiment reported in Hopkins et al. (2007).

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Iveson (2014) for the details of Rancière's denial of politics to animals.

<sup>5</sup> As I argue in some detail in another work, it is not at all clear how fixed this division is even for Aristotle, since he also considers bees, wasps, ants, and cranes to be political in more or less the same way as humans.

<sup>6</sup> This issue of names and the privileging of speech over silence and the nameless is addressed by Kalpana Seshadri's (2012) provocative musing on Derrida, Agamben, and animalization. It would behoove critical animal studies to ponder more deeply how to engage with namelessness as if it were not a privation.

<sup>7</sup> Rancière is similarly critical of Plato in *The Philosopher and His Poor* (2004), originally published in 1983, though his interest there has more to do with uncovering Plato's denigration of the artisan/imitator as a consequence of Plato's recognition that philosophy depends upon fiction (or, lying). Interestingly, Rancière begins his discussion of Plato with the "healthy city" (372a) that is the first city of the *Republic*, though in line with the traditional interpretation he discounts the possibility that this city is un-ironically called the best regime (something I have argued against, in Dolgert, in press).

<sup>8</sup> For a contrary view that takes the aporetic Socrates seriously see Nehamas (1998).

<sup>9</sup> I want to mark here a substantial divergence from Tarnopolsky's approach, though in many ways I find her version of Plato a sophisticated and eminently defensible one (and one that I prefer to most every other rival approach to Plato that I can think of). Tarnopolsky's Plato is almost wholly procedural or even Derridean, in the sense that Derrida's "ordeal of the undecidable" haunts every effort at constructing a final vocabulary (for the self or for the city). In Tarnopolsky's quotation above, I take this as exemplary of her orientation to see little of substantive value in the arguments in the *Republic*. Instead she counsels her reader to look at Plato's dialogue (at least when viewed through the lens of the satyr-play) as a methodological device (this puts it much more crudely than her elegant argument deserves). The polyvocal narrative, unreliable protagonist (Socrates), and ironic turn of the argument in the dialogue endeavor to create a certain kind of disposition in the reader—one attentive to the impossibility of an ethics or politics without remainders or tragic choice—that comes close to Derridean deconstruction, though Tarnopolsky is careful to talk of philosophy as both the "construction and *destruction* of worldviews" (2014). While I am also quite taken with Derridean interpretive methods, I am not as interested in the productive imagination performed in Plato's dialogues; indeed I am interested (in this essay at least) as much in the substantive figures conjured forth in Plato's metempsychotic dreams as in how these ideas might be working at the metaethical level (where I take it that Tarnopolsky's efforts lie).

<sup>10</sup> I have discussed two other horizontalizing thematics, separately: 1) the doctrine of the "vegetarian republic" in the *Republic* (Socrates' argument in Book II that the "healthy city" is implicitly a vegetarian one), in Dolgert (in press), and 2) the importance of animal-perception to philosophy in Plato's *Statesman*, in Dolgert (2012, unpublished). For a similar argument to mine on the first of these themes, see also Dombrowski (1984) and Painter (2013).

<sup>11</sup> *Meno* 81a, 86b; *Cratylus* 400b; *Phaedo* 70c, 80a; *Republic* 613e; *Timaeus* 41d, 90e; *Phaedrus* 245c; *Gorgias* 492e (see Long, 1948).

<sup>12</sup> Comprising reason (*logistikos*), spirit (*thumos*), and appetite (*epithumia*).

<sup>13</sup> The discussions in *Republic* and *Timaeus* are the most explicit, though the metaphorical treatment in *Phaedrus* seems close enough to merit inclusion. Coincidentally enough, like metempsychosis the doctrine of the tripartite soul *also* seems to be indebted to the Pythagorean tradition (see Stocks, 1915). The Pythagorean influence on Plato runs far deeper than the mathematical fetishism of the *Republic*.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Bhagavad Gita* we read: "Worn-out garments are shed by the body; Worn-out bodies are shed by the dweller within the body. New bodies are donned by the dweller, like garments." (2:22)

<sup>15</sup> See Bloom (1968), for example, for the idea that Plato's philosophic readers have no need for myths, which serve to cloak or make palatable Plato's ideas for non-philosophers.

<sup>16</sup> The exact origins of the *tragoidia* are obscure, and the connection with the ritual slaughter of goats is debatable. For contending theories see the collection edited by Winker & Zetilin (1992).

<sup>17</sup> While this is noticed by Porphyry (2000), here and elsewhere the Neoplatonists are generally ignored. Dillon (1995) is an important exception to this general trend.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the lack of remedy for these crimes partially explains the necessity of a thousand years of punishment (paying "ten times over for each offense" [615b]). But it is significant that Plato's theory of justice here is not a remedial one—though a thousand years of retribution may fall on the head of the doer of injustice, the injustice itself cannot be remedied or righted. I will attend to this later in considering the fate of animals in Platonic justice.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, just after Thamyris chooses the life of a swan, several other unnamed "musical creatures" follow him but choose a human life. So the life of an animal may be an implicit rejection of human life, but it does not indicate that animalized souls will bear any ill will towards human life.

<sup>20</sup> Socrates says that he had drawn "the last lot of all," though he goes on to describe the choices made by wild animals *after* he has described Odysseus' choice. Whether this means that this lot was simply the last one chosen by a former-

ly human soul and not *the last* is not entirely clear, since in 619e it is left open to doubt whether “the last” one really has very good options: “provided the way the lot falls out does not put him among the last to choose, the chances are, if Er’s report is correct, not only that he will be happy here ... [etc.]”

<sup>21</sup> All quotations from Fairbanks (1898, pp. 204-211).

<sup>22</sup> The evidence of animal speech (or animal intelligence that does not necessarily require speech) via ethology accumulates daily, in many more species than just chimpanzees and well beyond the mammalian order. For the deliberation of bees, as just one example, see Seeley (2010).

<sup>23</sup> I happily cite Urban Dictionary on this matter rather than a more standard dictionary: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Bronx+Cheer>, retrieved May 20, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2011) for the beginnings of a potentially rich combining/conjugating/clashing of metempsychosis and queer theory.

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