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## **“The Evil that Men Do:” The Debased Democracy in the Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

This feature article reflects on the recent Philippine presidential election (2022) against the backdrop of Plato’s musings on democracy. In the *Dialogues*, Plato maintains a skeptical attitude towards democracy. For Plato, only the best qualified should wield the reins of leadership. But he grapples with one procedural problem: “How do people pick or elect a worthy leader to govern a nation?” This article contends that for all the faults and failings of democracy, it still is the most viable form of government to organize a society composed of flawed and egocentric human beings. It also maintains that since a free and fair election is one of the pillars of democracy, it is sacred and inviolable. Once it is debauched, then democracy fails. This is what happened in the 2022 Philippine presidential election. Owing to a systematic manipulation and deception of the Filipino voters, the democracy in the country is now debased.

**Key words:** *Plato, Democracy, Philosopher-king, Disinformation, Marcos*

### **Introduction: Plato and His Times**

It is generally asserted that the Greek thinker Plato is the greatest philosopher of all time, and it is difficult to dispute the assertion. For, indeed, Plato holds a double claim to the title. He did not only “invent” philosophy as a systematic discipline, as Bernard

Williams claims;<sup>1</sup> he also pondered and wrote on almost all the philosophical subjects there are under the sun—from metaphysics to epistemology (theory of knowledge), from cosmology to theodicy, from ethics to politics, from rhetoric to music (art), from psychology to physics, from death to the transmigration of souls, from finitude to immortality, etc. etc.

The speculative puzzles and problems that confront us today such as gender equality, the strengths and weaknesses of democracy, the meaning of truth, the virtue of good, the riddle of personal identity, the notion of right, justice, and freedom—all these have been anticipated and addressed by Plato a long, long time ago.

One can think of any topic in philosophy and be quite sure that Grandfather Plato had already said a word or two about it or discussed something related to it. It is beyond any doubt that he influenced, directly or indirectly, all philosophers who came after him. Such is the breadth of Plato's genius, and such is the breathtaking variety of his intellectual output that North Alfred Whitehead, an English mathematician-philosopher, goes so far as to claim, not without any good reason, that the entire Western philosophical tradition is just a series of footnotes to Plato's philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Plato spent his youth and early adulthood during the turmoil of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta—a confrontation which the historian Thucydides describes as “a major war and more momentous than any previous conflict.”<sup>3</sup> That protracted war which lasted for about twenty-seven years (431-404 BCE)—and which exhausted Athens's energy, wealth, and human resources—impacted in a considerable degree Plato's personal life, his general outlook, and his philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Williams, *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 148.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1929), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Martin Hammond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Bk. 1, 1.

Great works of art, philosophy, and literature have always sprung up in times of political upheavals and religious convulsions.<sup>4</sup> Dante Alighieri, Italy’s greatest poet, wrote the *Divine Comedy* at a time when the nation was reeling from the ill effects of its arduous struggle against the Catholic Church; Shakespeare’s works were conceived and crafted in the wake of the Reformation; Mozart’s masterpieces such as the Horn Concerto No. 4 in E flat major, the *Marriage of Figaro*, and the Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major were composed during those tumultuous times leading to the eruption of the French Revolution in 1789; Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* and Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* were classics written in the aftermath of that momentous Revolution.

But long before the appearance of these splendid works of imagination in the history of thought, Plato’s *Dialogues*—his philosophical writings—made their grand entrance onto the world stage on the heels of the Peloponnesian war.

In the year 407 BCE, when Plato was around twenty years old, he met the man who became the greatest influence of his life: the venerable Socrates. It is reported that Plato once dreamed of becoming a poet or playwright and tried his hand writing “heroic verses” and tragedies. One account informs us that he burned his poems when he realized that they pitifully paled by comparison with Homer’s splendid epics;<sup>5</sup> another tells us that he set them on fire after meeting Socrates and hearing him talk.<sup>6</sup>

In hindsight, Athens lost the war to Sparta partly owing to the treachery of the oligarchic Plataean traitors (now popularly known as a “fifth column”) who, in 431 BCE, betrayed their town Plataea, an ally

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas B. Macaulay, *The Works of Lord Macaulay*, ed. Lady Trevelyan, vol. 7 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875), 606.

<sup>5</sup> W. G. Tennemann, “Life of Plato,” in *Selections from German Literature*, trans. B. B. Edwards and E. A. Park (New York: Gould, Newman, and Saxton, 1839), 316.

<sup>6</sup> Ebenezer Macfait, *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Plato* (Edinburgh: A. Miller, 1760), 8.

of Athens, to the enemy—thus opening “the gates of war for the Greek world.”<sup>7</sup> During the Peloponnesian war, the first oligarchic régime was established in Athens in a coup with the connivance and assistance of Sparta. That council of the Four Hundred which attempted to obliterate the Athenian constitutional assembly and the jury-justice system lasted only for about a year (411 BCE – 410 BCE). Full democracy was restored thereafter in 410 B.C. in Athens.

The second oligarchic junta of thirty rulers was set up at the end of the war in 404 BCE. Styled as “the thirty tyrants,” the members of the Athenian cabal and their associates were all drawn from the elite families (i.e., the oligarchs) of the city and charged with the invidious task of crafting a post-democratic constitution based on the governing ideology of the *patrios politeia*, Athens’s ancestral way of life. Two members of the cabalistic régime were Plato’s relations: Critias, his first cousin and the leader of the junta, and Charmides, the younger brother of Plato’s mother Perictione. Since he was an heir to a distinguished aristocratic family—and since Critias and Charmides were his relatives—the young Plato was “invited” to be a member of the government of the junta.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not he accepted the invitation is not quite clear to us. But it is evident that Plato, at that time, was biding his time and observing in which direction the political wind shifts and blows. In particular, he was watching and waiting to see if the oligarchical

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<sup>7</sup> Luis A. Losada, *The Fifth Column in the Peloponnesian War* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1972), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Plato *Letter VII 324d* [*The Complete Works of Plato*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Glenn R. Morrow (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997)]. The authenticity of Plato’s *Seventh Letter* is disputed by scholars; although even critics concede that the author, if not Plato, knew Plato very well and was personally acquainted with the events and affairs narrated in the letter. Debra Nails, “The Life of Plato of Athens,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 3. Benjamin Jowett, however, points out one glaring mistake in the letter. Instead of thirty, the author of the *Seventh Letter* counts fifty-one tyrants (*Letter VII 324c*) in the second oligarchical junta—a blatant error which Jowett cites as a strong proof of the letter’s spuriousity—and that of the other putative Platonic letters. See *Preface to the Second and Third Editions of The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), xxviii.

government was “going to lead the city out of the unjust life she had been living and establish her in the path of justice . . .”<sup>9</sup>

### **Plato and the Question of Political Governance**

Plato who was an astute spectator of political events became very disappointed with the régime of Critias and Charmides. He was appalled not only by the grave abuses of authority and the bloody purges perpetrated by the junta but also—and this is something very personal to him—by its unjust act of implicating Socrates, “the justest man of [the] time,” in a crime to illegally apprehend the democratic general Leon of Salamis and execute him—thus “[making] Socrates willy-nilly a party to their actions.”<sup>10</sup>

In 403 BCE, the democratic forces deposed the second oligarchic government—ironically with the help of Sparta following a change of rulers in that city-state—after a furious battle fought in Piraeus (the Munychia) where Critias and Charmides were killed. In the aftermath, the rest of the thirty tyrants and their associates fled Athens and democracy was once again reestablished in that glittering city. The restoration of democracy revived Plato’s interest in public affairs and political life, although with less enthusiasm and optimism.<sup>11</sup> But if he ever entertained any sanguine hope that things would get better for the Athenian citizens with the restoration of democracy, that hope was quickly dashed. He was bitterly devastated that it was Athens’s democratic government—through its three accusers/prosecutors Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon—that found Socrates guilty of the charge of impiety—and of having corrupted the Athenian youth—and condemned him to untimely death.

In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato—or pseudo-Plato—writes with a deep sense of resentment:

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<sup>9</sup> Plato *Letter* VII 324d.

<sup>10</sup> Plato *Letter* VII 325a.

<sup>11</sup> Plato *Letter* VII 325b.

[C]ertain powerful persons brought into court . . . [my] friend Socrates, preferring against him a most shameless accusation, and one which he, of all men, least deserved. For the prosecutors charged him with impiety, and the jury condemned and put to death the very man who, at the time when his accusers were themselves in misfortune and exile, had refused to have a part in the unjust arrest of one of their friends (addition mine).<sup>12</sup>

After the death of his master Socrates, Plato who was only in his mid-twenties predictably lost appetite for active involvement in public service and political affairs—an interest which was briefly rekindled in his youthful mind with the revival of democracy. Socrates' death left an indelible mark on his life and way of thinking. He was profoundly shaken by the precariousness of things in his beloved city and by the convulsions that usually ensued with the change of any form of government—whether oligarchy or democracy. Given the shifting political tides of the time, it is neither surprising nor inexplicable then that Plato's thoughts and works were shaped in large measure by the events and affairs prevailing in the Athenian communal life. Questions about the nature of justice and virtue (*areté*), of politics and leadership, of equality and the common good—and many more—agitated the minds of Athens's intelligentsia and dominated the arena of public discourse.

One philosophical topic of special interest for Plato and the other students of Socrates is the issue of public governance and leadership. What is the best form of government hereabouts? How is the common good or the public interest best served—and preserved—in the political arena? How should the state be organized with its different groups with different interests and different needs? Who should be worthy to lead a nation? What are the moral qualities

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<sup>12</sup> Plato *Letter VII* 325b-325c.

that should be expected of those who aspire for the helm of political leadership? And how should the citizens of the city-state choose their leaders in a democratic government?

These questions engaged the philosophic curiosity and exercised the intellect of Socrates’ disciples. Contemplating the chaotic conditions under which Athens struggled at the time, and considering the dubious characters ensconced in the seats of power and leadership, Plato realized how “difficult” it was to rule a city well—and judiciously. He also saw how “unstable” the state of things was, and how urgent it was to remedy the ills and problems that bedeviled the Athenian body-politic.<sup>13</sup>

After some round of thinking and soliloquy, Plato concluded that “all existing states are badly governed and the condition of their laws practically incurable,” unless some miraculous cure and good fortune happily arise in the sphere of politics.<sup>14</sup> He then prescribed the proverbial medicine to the political maladies he seeks to cure:

I was forced to say, in praise of *true philosophy*, that from her height alone was it possible to discern what the *nature of justice* is, either in the state or in the individual, and that the ills of the human race would never end until either those who are sincerely and truly *lovers of wisdom* come into *political power*, or the rulers of our cities, by the grace of God, *learn true philosophy* (italics mine).<sup>15</sup>

The same thought and sentiments are expressed in Plato’s dialogue *Republic*:

Until *philosophers rule as kings* or those who are now called kings and leading men *genuinely* and adequately

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<sup>13</sup> Plato *Letter VII* 325c-325d.

<sup>14</sup> Plato *Letter VII* 326a.

<sup>15</sup> Plato *Letter VII* 326a-326b.

philosophize, that is, until *political power* and *philosophy* entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils . . . . And, *until* this happens, the constitution we've been describing in theory will never be born to the fullest extent possible or see the light of the sun (italics mine).<sup>16</sup>

We would like to draw the reader's attention to four important terms and epithets mentioned in the two extracts cited above: *nature of justice*, *philosophers (lovers of wisdom) as kings*, *political power*, and *true philosophy*.

To furnish the foreground and background of the ensuing discussions, it is instructive to briefly clarify the general context of these concepts, the elucidations of which will be unfolded presently.

In explaining the essence of *political power*—i.e., political leadership/governance—Plato conceptually ties it up with his elucidation of the *nature of justice* both at the level of the individual and at the level of the community or state. As shall be expounded, Plato's vision of an enlightened state is one in which those who rule "love wisdom"—that is, that the rulers should be philosophers.

Thus, in the ideal city (*Kallipolis*), the philosopher is king. The reign of the philosopher in a city-state constitutes what Plato envisions as the perfect *coincidence* between *political power* and *philosophy*. In Platonic terms, this is a triumph of *justice* because the equilibrium of things is established in the shared political life of the citizens.

But Plato makes it clear in the above citations that any aspiring political leader of a city-state or nation should love not just any kind of

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<sup>16</sup> Plato *Republic* V 473c-e.



wisdom, since one may possibly be deceived by an impression or semblance of it. To be a true lover of wisdom, one has to seek and find *true philosophy* (authentic wisdom). So, *before* there will be a philosopher-king, and *before* the “ideal” city eventuates in the actual situation, the search for *true philosophy* should first be undertaken. It is only when a person learns *true philosophy* and practices it in his/her life that he/she becomes a *philosopher-king*; and then he/she can organize a rational (ideal) city-state and lead a nation of freethinking citizens.

The four abovementioned concepts are, therefore, notionally intertwined. In the Platonic equation, the basis of *political power* (leadership) is the virtue of *justice* because it is reasonably *right* and *just* that only those who have learned to *love authentic wisdom* are worthy to wield power in the state on the given presupposition that they (philosophers) alone have pursued and found *true wisdom* (philosophy).

Before we delve more deeply into the significance and the integrative functioning of the four concepts introduced in the foregoing, it is incumbent on us to say some general remarks on one socio-cultural phenomenon that made itself manifest in the political scene of the fifth-century B.C. Athens.

### **Plato and the Sophists**

The phenomenon which we are referring to is the appearance of the Sophists, the itinerant teachers who travelled from one city-state to another instructing young students and eking out a living in the process. In some respects, the advent of the Sophists is an intellectual movement of the time.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 48.

The Greek name *Sophist* is etymologically derived from the noun *Sophia* (wisdom) and the adjective *Sophos* (wise). Initially, the term *Sophia* denoted a special kind of skill or craft. In the epics of Homer, a shipbuilder, a steersman, and a sculptor are all *Sophoi* in their respective spheres of specialization.<sup>18</sup> Apollo is considered a master musical player, a *Sophos* with the lyre.

But the word *Sophia* is not only associated with practical expertise but also with innate talent or gift. It is said that he/she who has knowledge *by nature* is wise (*Sophos*).<sup>19</sup>

In its original signification, the name *Sophist* designated the character of a poet or rhapsode, the main office of whom was to give practical instruction and moral counsel.<sup>20</sup> This explains why the Sophists were chiefly known as lecturers or teachers during the time of Socrates and Plato. A sophist wrote and taught precisely because he had some skill (e.g., playing the lyre) or some knowledge (e.g., ethics) to impart.<sup>21</sup>

There came a time, however, when the term *Sophos* was used to describe a person who had become too clever to the point of being impertinent, conceited, or proud. Where before the verb *sophisesthai* signified practicing *Sophia*—i.e., employing and teaching a specific skill—it later evolved to mean “to trick or deceive, or to be over-subtle.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, at some point, the epithet *Sophist* became a disreputable name. And it was Aristophanes who held the distinction of turning the epithet into a term of abuse signifying deviousness and casuistry.<sup>23</sup> In his *The Clouds*, the mocking Aristophanes tells us that when Socrates promised the young Pheidippides to turn him into a shrewd sophist,

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<sup>18</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 28-9, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 33.

the latter responds, “A poor pale-faced devil, you mean?”<sup>24</sup> “A well-disposed mind, with righteous thoughts, is a better inventor than any *sophistes*,” a fragment of Sophocles reads.<sup>25</sup>

In our time, one who makes a fallacious or devious argument is engaged in sophistry; and one who pretends to know more than one actually knows is also a sophist—or pretentious dabbler.

During the fifth century, the streets and agoras of Athens were swamped with a crowd of *Sophists* who were mostly of foreign extraction<sup>26</sup> such as Protagoras of Abdera, Gorgias of Sicily, Hippias of Elis, Prodicus of Ceos, and Thrasymachus of Chalcedon—to name a few famous figures. Because they were outsiders and immigrants who brought along with them bizarre teachings, ideas, and opinions from their places of origin, they were, unsurprisingly, regarded with some “vague sense of dislike” by many Athenians, especially by those citizens who did not like strangers with strange aspects and strange beliefs roaming around the city and frequenting its public squares.<sup>27</sup>

In Plato’s *Dialogues*, it is difficult to characterize the Sophists as a class with rigid description and conclusive categorization.<sup>28</sup> What they taught to their students covered a wide array of subjects such as physics (science), ethics (the study of virtue [*areté*]), philosophy, mathematics, music, astronomy, and rhetoric (the art of the *logos*)—and many other assorted kinds of topics. The subjects which the Sophists instructed their pupils varied from one teacher to another depending on their individual backgrounds such as academic education, practical training, line of specialization, and even personal bent. A Sophist may be known for his knowledge in ethics; another for

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<sup>24</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> David D. Corey, *The Sophists in Plato’s Dialogues* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 2015), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 12, 33-4, 40, 44.

<sup>28</sup> To distinguish a philosopher from a sophist is difficult to make, since “[t]here is no single method or mode of discourse that separates the philosopher from the sophist.” Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-3.

his skill in mathematics or music. Overall, we cannot label the Sophists as representing a particular school of thought.<sup>29</sup>

But although no definitive depiction of the Sophists as educators can be made respecting their academic credentials and the subjects they taught, there are two characteristics that generally distinguished them as a species: first, they charged their pupils with fees; second, most of them were well-versed in the art of rhetoric.<sup>30</sup>

It was reasonable that the Sophists charged their students for their teaching services; and this point should not be taken against them. For, after all, how could they as foreigners biologically survive in a first-rate city such as Athens where the living conditions were presumably high—without collecting fees? Besides, many Sophists were actually experts in their specialized spheres of study; although, we hasten to add, some of them were criticized for charging their students of exorbitant fees—thus earning the epithet “paid hunters of rich young men.”<sup>31</sup>

Protagoras, the most celebrated Sophist of the time, was a deep thinker who bequeathed to posterity the famous dictum that the human being is “the measure of all things,” which became the byword of relativism. He wrote many learned treatises such as *Truth* (or *The Overthrowers*), *On the Gods*, *The Art of Eristic*, *On the Constitution*, and the curious work *On Wrestling*.<sup>32</sup> His knowledge in law and politics recommended him to be appointed as the lawgiver in the Athenian colony of Thurii, a city in the south of Italy.<sup>33</sup>

Many Sophists were teachers of rhetoric and accomplished rhetoricians themselves—a fact which stood them in good stead in the democratic Athens, “the veritable hall of Greek wisdom.”<sup>34</sup> For, in

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<sup>29</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Ugo Zilioli, *Protagoras and the Challenge of Relativism: Plato's Subtlest Enemy* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Zilioli, *Protagoras and the Challenge of Relativism*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Plato *Protagoras* 337d.

those bygone days, there was a big demand for teachers of public speaking. An articulate, spellbinding orator had a great deal of chance of becoming a successful politician in the elective assembly (*ekklēsia*)—and eventually emerging as a leader or statesman of the polis. The prospect of political leadership was the most distinguished and attractive career open to the ambitious sons of the Athenian aristocratic families.<sup>35</sup>

It was no surprise then that wealthy families employed the services of Sophists and rhetoricians to train their heirs not only in the craft of persuasion and argumentation but also educate them in the art and knowledge of politics (a practical science).

So it came to pass that the office of the politician (*politeuomenos*) became an applied profession requiring the skill of oratory and the ability of weaving facts and information to persuade the crowd of listeners. And the Sophists had a field day conscripting and coaching eager pupils—and collecting fees.

“What I teach is sound deliberation (*euboulia*), both in domestic affairs—how best to manage one’s household, and in public affairs—how to *realize one’s maximum potential for success in political debate and action*,” Protagoras avows.<sup>36</sup> This revered Sophist, the proponent of relativism, seemed to have made himself literally “the measure of all things” because he amassed a great fortune plying his trade—becoming both very rich and very famous along the way.<sup>37</sup>

In his *Dialogues*, Plato views the Sophists with some philosophic disquietude but never with personal dislike or antagonism.<sup>38</sup> At times, his portrayal of them is funny and mildly caustic; but he never regards

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<sup>35</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 38-9.

<sup>36</sup> Plato *Protagoras* 318e-319a (italics mine).

<sup>37</sup> Socrates says that Protagoras was the first Sophist who collected fees for his teaching services. Plato *Protagoras* 349a.

<sup>38</sup> T. H. Irwin, “Plato: The Intellectual Background,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65.

them with contempt and resentment.<sup>39</sup> He takes them seriously because he knows that many of them are scholars in their own right, and some of them are really men of good moral standing.

In the dialogue *Meno*, Plato represents Socrates chiding Anytus for being too critical and harsh on the Sophists. “Has some sophist wronged you, Anytus, or why are you so hard on them?” Socrates asks.<sup>40</sup> Socrates goes on to point out how can he (Anytus) judge the Sophists, whether they teach well or not, if he has not met any of them. It is said that Socrates himself employs in his conversations with his students and adversaries the rhetorical devices/techniques of the Sophists and rhetoricians such as the “probability argument,” depiction of character, antithesis, cross-questioning, *diairesis* (an art of drawing distinctions), and parallelism.<sup>41</sup> The orator Aeschines even calls Socrates “the Sophist.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Plato’s Criticisms of the Sophists and the Theory of Forms**

On the whole, Plato’s criticism of the Sophists is based on a threefold objection: first, his disapproval of the main emphasis or focus of their teachings; second, his critical appraisal of the theoretical (i.e., philosophical) assumption that underpins their views and mode of instruction; and third, his apparent displeasure with their habit of collecting professional fees from their students—the least serious accusation which can be easily deflected, as we shall see.

Firstly, in his *Dialogues*, Plato takes the Sophists to task for teaching their students how to demolish an adversary in a debate and sway the views of the masses—even if the mode of persuasion they

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<sup>39</sup> Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 37. Plato has Socrates saying in a rather caustic manner that he knows “one man, Protagoras, made more money from this knowledge of his than Phidias who made such notably fine works, and ten other sculptors.” Plato *Meno* 91d.

<sup>40</sup> Plato *Meno* 92b-92c.

<sup>41</sup> McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 4; Corey, *Sophists in Plato’s Dialogues*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 34.

employ is riddled with fallacies and contradictions.<sup>43</sup> The main consideration is not to convince people with the power of truth—or the force of knowledge and reason—but to impress them by a display of oratorical talent and skill. The emphasis is on the manner (method) rather than the matter (knowledge) of the disquisition.

As long as an orator delights, dazzles, and draws the crowds to his/her side, the question whether or not the speech contains truth is of little moment. In the dialogue *Gorgias*, Socrates is quoted to assert that rhetoric as the Sophists employ it is actually not a skilled art (*technē*). “I call it flattery, basically,” he asserts.<sup>44</sup>

For the Sophist or the Rhetorician, the primary concern is to achieve the intended objective—i.e., to get what one wants—which he has set to accomplish. And even if what it takes is to attain one’s end (i.e., interest, advantage, and benefit) by gratifying or indulging the people’s basic instincts and prejudices, then so be it. In the *Republic*, Plato faults the Sophists for pandering to the biases of the crowds,<sup>45</sup> unaware that the masses are “the greatest sophists of all.”<sup>46</sup>

In brief, the primary focus or objective of the Sophists is not to impart real knowledge to their students through good reasoning but to equip them with rhetorical skills to persuade their listeners—i.e., the people, the members of popular assembly, and the judges and jury in the courts<sup>47</sup>—and win them over to their cause, thereby accomplishing the determined goal or end.

In the dialogue *Sophist*, Plato charges the Sophists for being pretenders to knowledge. “Is it obvious by now,” asks the interlocutor (the Visitor) in the dialogue, “that (the Sophist is) a kind of cheat who imitates real things?” He continues, “Or are we still in

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Plato *Gorgias* 518c-519b.

<sup>44</sup> Plato *Gorgias* 463b; 465a.

<sup>45</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 493a-493a.

<sup>46</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 492a.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Plato *Gorgias* 471e.

any doubt about whether he truly knows all the things that he seems to be able to engage in controversies about?”<sup>48</sup>

The point is, a Sophist who instructs a young man to be a politician not by teaching the authentic art (*knowledge*) of political statesmanship<sup>49</sup> but the methods of persuasion in order to gain the approval of the crowd and score political points is just engaging in the craft of “likeness-making and appearance-making.”<sup>50</sup>

The charge that the Sophists are experts in the practice of “likeness-making and appearance-making” leads us to Plato’s second criticism of his adversaries. For Plato, what appears good or just in the empirical world does not give us the true *logos* of the thing. Appearance or image—or opinion—is not knowledge. The problem with the Sophists is, that they are more concerned with appearances or impressions, not real knowledge.

In the dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates saying that an explanation of the *logos* of things (“the nature of whatever things”) requires an ability to give an account of it or state the cause of it.<sup>51</sup> That is why a person who is possessed of knowledge is one who can “give an account of what he knows.”<sup>52</sup> Conversely, a person who is unable to furnish an account of what he/she claims he/she knows does not know.<sup>53</sup>

In this respect, a person who has knowledge is superior to one who is merely interested in appearances and images apprehended through “sense perceptions.”<sup>54</sup> For instance, an individual who has knowledge is able to form “a correct judgment”<sup>55</sup> on a given issue or question but an ignoramus cannot. A mining Engineer is a better judge

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<sup>48</sup> Plato *Sophist* 235a (italics mine).

<sup>49</sup> For Plato, statesmanship is a kind of knowledge. Plato *Statesman* 292b-292c.

<sup>50</sup> Plato *Sophist* 236c.

<sup>51</sup> Plato *Gorgias* 465a, 500e-501a.

<sup>52</sup> Plato *Phaedo* 76b.

<sup>53</sup> Plato *Republic* VII 531e.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 76b.

<sup>55</sup> Plato *Theaetetus* 201c.



of precious stones than a scheming politician on the grounds that the former has studied the various kinds of metals and minerals of the earth.

Overall, from the philosophical point of view, the chief fault of the Sophists is that they eschewed the notion of an unchanging reality behind sensible phenomena (appearances) and espoused the ideas of subjectivism, skepticism, humanism, and relativism.<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the Sophists’ empiricism, Plato proffers, as we shall explain shortly, his metaphysics of idealism, the centerpiece of which is the theory of *Forms*. It is against the backdrop of Plato’s metaphysics that one can adequately comprehend his philosophical critique of sophism.

But before dealing with Plato’s *Theory of Forms*, let us address, briefly, his apparent objection to the Sophists’ practice of collecting fees from their students. We may recall that in his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon writes that Socrates censures the Sophists for accepting payment for their teaching services.<sup>57</sup> Socrates maintains that such a practice compromised their freedom because they felt obliged to be deferent to anyone who could pay their charges. But he (Socrates) was unhindered to enjoy the company of anyone whom he liked to be with. For wisdom must be freely received and shared with friends. Xenophon quoted Socrates as saying with derision that “those who sell their wisdom for money to anyone who wants it are called Sophists.”<sup>58</sup>

In his *Dialogues*, Plato alludes, a number of times, to the Sophists’ practice of charging fees. Let us cite three instances. In *Greater Hippias*, Socrates mocks Gorgias for having “made a lot of money and took it out of the city.”<sup>59</sup> The Visitor in *Sophist* alleges that “the hunting of rich, prominent young men” is the trade of the Sophists.<sup>60</sup> In *Protagoras*, Socrates makes fun of Protagoras by telling

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<sup>56</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 39.

<sup>58</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 36.

<sup>59</sup> Plato *Greater Hippias* 282c.

<sup>60</sup> Plato *Sophist* 223b.

Hippocrates, the son of Apollodorus, that Protagoras will make him (Hippocrates) wise if the price is right.<sup>61</sup>

But although Plato (or Socrates) said many unflattering, biting remarks about the Sophists' habit of taking money for their instruction, he never made any moral denunciation of them insofar as their habit of collecting money was concerned.<sup>62</sup> As previously mentioned, Socrates in *Meno* even defends the Sophists from Anytus' unjust accusations. To condemn the Sophists as a class for earning their keep<sup>63</sup>—and to single them out for corrupting the youth<sup>64</sup>—is both unreasonable and unfair, to say the least. After all, if artists, doctors, and lawyers charge their clients, why not the Sophists?

From the preceding discussions, it is fair to hold that Plato's criticisms of the Sophists have more to do with the speculative assumption that informs the content and method of their teachings.

As we have observed previously, Plato's formulated his philosophical critique of sophism in the light of his metaphysics. We have also remarked that the Sophists were basically empiricists who abandoned the Parmenidean view that a permanent reality lies behind the sensible world. They would, for instance, repudiate the notion that a nation's cultural conventions (habits and practices), religious convictions, and human laws are permanent aspects of human experience because they are actualities of an unchanging world.<sup>65</sup>

Protagoras' dictum that on every issue there are two competing views—and his thesis that one should make the weaker view stronger to win an argument—exemplifies the Sophists' empiricist take on things. What matters is not which position is better and juster but that which a debater can conveniently exploit to

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<sup>61</sup> Plato *Protagoras* 310d.

<sup>62</sup> David Blank, "Socratics Versus Sophists on Payment for Teaching," *Classical Antiquity* 4, no. 1 (April 1985): 6.

<sup>63</sup> See David D. Corey, "The Case Against Teaching Virtue for Pay: Socrates and the Sophists," *History of Political Thought* 23 (2002): 189-210.

<sup>64</sup> Corey, *Sophists in Plato's Dialogues*, 205.

<sup>65</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 48.

achieve his design or purpose—good or bad.<sup>66</sup> If this is the case, then truth is particularized and knowledge relativized. “Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not,” Protagoras affirms.<sup>67</sup> In the Protagorean configuration, truth depends on how human beings—“the measure of all things”—perceive and interpret truth, whatever it is.

Plato did not agree with such an empiricist conclusion. We recall that in his theory of *Forms* (ideas [*eidē*]), Plato posits two different worlds: the sphere of the sensible and realm of the *ideas*. The former is this valley of tears in which earthlings live—the fleeting terrestrial sphere. The latter is the immutable world of the intangibles such as the *ideas/forms* of justice, goodness, circle, etc.

Plato’s theory of *Ideas* holds that things in this corner of the universe are not “real” in the sense that they are mere reflections of the *Forms* in the noumenal realm “existing” independently of human mind and perception. They simply participate in the being of eternal *forms*, by virtue of which these material objects *are* what they are.

That we see beautiful things in the material world is not because they are beautiful in/by themselves, but because they “share” in the perfect and immutable *form* of the Beautiful. “[I]f there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything,” Socrates tells Cebes in the dialogue *Phaedo*.<sup>68</sup>

In the hierarchy of the *forms* the Good is ranked the highest on account of which every good thing derives its *being* good.<sup>69</sup> The *form* of the Good holds primacy over others precisely because it enables

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<sup>66</sup> Guthrie, *Sophists*, 51.

<sup>67</sup> Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Diels’ Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), sec. 80. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Plato *Phaedo* 100c-100d.

<sup>69</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 505a.

every other *idea* in the Platonic world to be what it *is* and do what it *does*—that is, “to shine,” “to show itself,” and be “seen.” The Platonic *Good* is “the idea of ideas,” the “what-which as such, τὸ ἀγαθόν.”<sup>70</sup>

Human beings pursue things which they think are good but do not “adequately grasp” the *Good* itself because it cannot be perceived by the senses,<sup>71</sup> since it is only “intelligible” to the contemplating intellect.<sup>72</sup>

We now understand why Plato was philosophically critical of the Sophists. It was not because of the moral character of their persons, not because of their practice of collecting money fees from their students, but because they were thinkers who denied a higher and immutable reality—i.e., the perfect world of *Forms*—beyond the realm of the perception and the physical phenomena.

Plato dealt with the philosophical problems and puzzles from the high standpoint of his metaphysical idealism. Philosophical topics such as the nature of knowledge and truth, the idea of the afterlife and the immortality of the soul, and the meaning of human virtues such as courage, goodness, and justice are expounded in terms of the *ideal* which, in Platonic terms, is actually the *real*. To know—and to understand—means to know the *form (idea)* of a thing.

Plato’s metaphysical idealism has been subjected to critical appraisals over the centuries. Aristotle, Plato’s brightest student, remains the severest critic of his master’s theory of *Forms*. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance, Aristotle writes that “[our] present (philosophical) inquiry does not aim . . . to know what excellence (virtue, goodness [(*areté*)] is” but to *become* good/virtuous men and

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” trans. Thomas Sheehan, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173, 175. “The idea of the good’ . . . is the name for that distinctive idea which, as the idea of ideas, is what enables everything else. This idea, which alone can be called ‘the good’ . . .”

<sup>71</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 505e.

<sup>72</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 507b; cf. *Timaeus* 51d-3.

women.<sup>73</sup> Such a view diametrically runs counter to Plato’s insistence that to become good one must first know what good (virtue [(*areté*)]) is. We do not intend to defend Plato in this essay. But it is interesting to point out here that everyone has his/her own *ideals* (perfect images) of things and persons—ideal house, ideal government, ideal friend, ideal leader, etc. Where do our *ideals* come from? And how does the limited human mind apprehend these perfect models and archetypes? Does Plato’s idealism still make sense in our time?

### The Question of Justice and Leadership

We have previously remarked that Plato’s understanding of political leadership is conceptually linked with his notion of justice. These two Platonic ideas are elaborated at length in the *Republic*. It helps to hold in mind that this dialogue was written sometime in 380 B.C. about eleven years after the death of Socrates and during the period in which the restored Athenian democracy of 404 BCE—it ended in 322 BCE—was flourishing.

In examining Plato’s views on justice and leadership, Athens’s democratic setting shall furnish the context—i.e., the Athens in which Socrates and Plato lived—and the theory of *Forms* the metaphysical horizon.

Plato’s analogy of the ship illustrates perfectly his conception of political leadership in a democracy. Aboard the ship are the following characters, namely, the shipowner, the sailors, the passengers, and the worthy steersman. The shipowner is styled as the “bigger and stronger than everyone else on board” simply because he owns the ship and underwrites its voyage.<sup>74</sup> Both the sailors and the passengers may be lumped together under the inclusive Greek word

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<sup>73</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b27 (additions mine). See Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>74</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 488a.

*nautai*.<sup>75</sup> Whoever is chosen to be the helmsman will navigate the ship on the high seas.

The ship is still moored in the port at the moment because the sailors/passengers are arguing among themselves who should be the captain—each of them claiming that he should be the skipper, even if none of them has gone to a nautical school to learn the science of sailing.<sup>76</sup> Powerful and wealthy though he is, the shipowner is slow on the uptake, hard of hearing, and his knowledge of navigation is almost nil. Each of the sailors and passengers is now pestering the shipowner to hand over the rudder of the ship to him.

It happened before that the sailors drugged the shipowner when he didn't give in to their demands, threw their competitors overboard, took the helm of the ship, and steered the ship while eating and carousing.

Both the shipowner and the sailors/passengers are oblivious of the fact that a certified captain is one who is acquainted with “the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds, and all that pertains to his craft . . .”<sup>77</sup> They do not even have any working notion whatsoever that there exists a science of steering a ship properly. And they dismiss the person most deserving to be the ship's navigator as “a real stargazer, a babbler, and a good nothing.”<sup>78</sup>

In Plato's simile, the ship represents a city-state or country, the shipowner the citizens (*dêmos* [the assembly of all citizens]), the sailors/passengers the self-absorbed politicians (“our current politicians”), and the steersman the philosopher.<sup>79</sup> The images of “the sky, the stars, and the winds”—the elements of nature that belong to the upper region of the earth—symbolize the *Forms* in the perfect

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<sup>75</sup> David Keyt, “Plato and the Ship of State,” *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, ed. Gerasimos Santas (MA, USA, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 191.

<sup>76</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 488b.

<sup>77</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 488d.

<sup>78</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 488e.

<sup>79</sup> Plato *Republic* VI.489a-489c.

world. Understanding how these three elements comport is vital to the actual navigation during ancient times when the compass and other modern navigational instruments were unavailable to mariners.

The central point of the analogy is that the helm of ship should be given to the master-navigator who knows how to sail the ship and rule the waves and the winds. In the middle of the ocean, it is the captain who should be in command—and no else, the shipowner included—because he alone has the expertise and the experience to steer the ship to its destination. And just as the shipowner should never give the tiller of his ship to a person who is inexperienced and ignorant of navigation, so the citizens of a city or country should not turn over the helm of leadership to an upstart who is unschooled in the art of statecraft.<sup>80</sup>

Under the ideal circumstances, the persons aboard the ship know and keep their designated stations. Once the ship weighs anchor, the skipper sets its proper course and steers it to its charted destination. The shipowner does not interfere with the steersman because he is unacquainted with the craft of navigation. The task of the sailors is to obey without hesitation their captain on whose skillful hands the safety of everyone depends.

If everyone discharges his office dutifully and justly, then the voyage unfolds smoothly and ends safely. And when such a situation obtains, there is not only tranquility in the journey but also “justice” in the sense that all persons aboard the ship preserve their rightful roles and perform their proper jobs.

With the analogy of the ship in mind, we can now comprehend Plato’s notion of justice vis-à-vis his understanding of leadership in a democratic context. We have previously remarked that in the *Republic* he expounds what justice is at the individual and the communal levels. Plato starts his exposition by examining the nature and characteristics

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<sup>80</sup> Keyt, “Plato and the Ship of State,” 197, 203.

of a just city. A just city-state, he holds, is one in which the different agencies and groups perform well their proper functions and avoid encroaching into the others' spheres of authority and influence.<sup>81</sup>

Like the characters in the simile of a ship, each group pursues and performs its function—and avoids meddling with the other—in order to achieve a state of stability for the city.<sup>82</sup> But “if one of the unworthy soldiers” attempts to become the ruler of the city, then such an inroad into another sphere of competence will bring the city to destruction.<sup>83</sup> Or, putting it another way, if the military mounts a coup d'état and forcibly takes over the reins of power and leadership in a democratic country, it will lead to chaos and eventually bring its people under the iron fist of dictatorship. “[T]he turmoil and straying of [the] parts are injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, ignorance and, in a word, the whole vice,” Socrates points out.<sup>84</sup>

In Plato's vision of an ideal state, the citizens are classed under three general categories: the rulers of the city; the soldiers who defend it; and the rest of the citizens (*dêmos*) consisting of farmers, workers, and artisans. To these three classes correspond roughly three virtues, namely, wisdom, courage, and temperance (self-control). In a happy and just city, the rulers (philosophers) are wise, the soldiers courageous, and the working-class moderate, self-disciplined, and obedient.

The tripartite delineation of virtues is not a neat and strict distinction, since the virtue of moderation, for instance, should permeate all the classes of the citizens: “[M]oderation spreads throughout the whole [making] the weakest, the strongest, and those in between.”<sup>85</sup> Nor is Plato's elucidation of the organization of the ideal city simplistic or quixotic. In fact, it is philosophically stimulating and sophisticated, as it envisions, for instance, the necessity of

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<sup>81</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 432b-434c.

<sup>82</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 443e.

<sup>83</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 432b.

<sup>84</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 444b.

<sup>85</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 431e-432a.



educating each class of citizens as part of the process of founding the *Kallipolis*.

The limited scope of this essay does not allow us to enter into a comprehensive discussion of Plato’s exposition of how a *Kallipolis* is organized in its structural details. (For instance, to start with a clean slate, Plato prescribes the deportation of all inhabitants over ten years old, so that the philosopher-king will be able to form and establish the *Kallipolis*—an interesting proposition which needs no elucidation here).<sup>86</sup> It is sufficient for us to say that the key insight that underpins Plato’s vision is the idea that a well-governed city is characterized by a harmonious functioning of all its agencies; and, as a consequence, such a city becomes just, happy, and good. “A city [is] thought to be just when each of the three natural classes within it [does] its own work, and it [is] thought to be moderate, courageous, and wise because of certain other conditions and states of theirs,” Socrates explains.<sup>87</sup>

The virtue of justice is the fourth feature of a *Kallipolis*, a quality which is identified with the virtue of goodness. Since every aspect of the city functions well, and since there is stability and happy coordination among the parts of the whole, then the city *is* good. If a city-state is correctly created and organized, then it is “completely good . . . [because] it is wise, courageous, moderate, and just.”<sup>88</sup>

Parenthetically, a city-state or a nation is created because human individuals, since they are not self-sufficient, band together to address and satisfy their desires or needs by giving to, and receiving services from others. So “people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers;” and that is how a city came into existence.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Plato *Republic* VI502a-502b, VII. 540e-541a.

<sup>87</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 435b (additions and emphasis mine).

<sup>88</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 427e.

<sup>89</sup> Plato *Republic* II 369c.

As the people are, so is the city. For the image of a just city reflects the character of a just person. In the *Republic*, the soul of the human individual—or human nature—manifests a three-tiered division which corresponds in a general way to the tripartite classification of citizens in a polis: the rational, the spirited element, and the appetitive (desires).

Reason (i.e., the rational part [*logis tikon*]) differs from the appetitive (*epithumētikon*) in that it can overrule the latter's operation as in the case of a person abstaining from drinking alcohol because it is bad for his/her health.<sup>90</sup> The spirited part (*thumoeides*) is quite vague, but it has something to do with the human sense of shame, disgust, and anger.<sup>91</sup> It differs from the appetitive in the sense that one's desire, for instance, to see pornographic film overcomes one's sense of shame. Reason differs from the spirited part in that a self-possessed and reasonable person can contain or control his anger because it is the right thing to do.

A troubled soul is one in which the appetitive (e.g., the desire to eat) and the spirited part (e.g., the feeling of anger) dominate its actions;<sup>92</sup> while a happy and just soul is that in which “the rational part [rules], since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole.”<sup>93</sup> As the just and good city is that whose parts perform their roles properly, so a human person is just and good in which each element of his/her soul functions well in their respective domains.<sup>94</sup>

What Plato therefore envisages both for the ideal polis and the ideal human person is the harmonious functioning of the different parts of the whole. This happy balance of things which is regulated by wisdom or reason exemplifies Plato's idea of what justice is and, corollary to it, what a good city is all about.

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Plato *Republic* IV 439c-439d.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Plato *Republic* IV 439e-440a.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Plato *Republic* II 353e

<sup>93</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 441e.

<sup>94</sup> Plato *Republic* IV 441e.

Parenthetically, Plato’s notion of justice as harmony is derivative of the eternal law of the Greek *Moirai*. (Fate/Destiny). The *Moirai* is the highest actuating principle in Greek mythologies, which embodies the idea or belief that every dimension of reality—or every god in Mt. Olympus—governs its own apportioned and exclusive domain. Each should guard its own frontier as well as respect other boundaries.

Zeus is the master of the heavens, Poseidon the lord of the sea, and Hades the chief of chilly darkness. Quarrels among the gods erupt when one of them intrudes into the sphere of influence of the other. In the same way, mortals should observe the unspoken law of the *Moirai*, the infraction of which—called *hubris*—will remain neither unnoticed nor unpunished. Any proud individual who aspires to be godlike goes beyond the designated limits given to humans and will, sooner or later, be struck down by the gods—that is, he/she will meet his/her just comeuppance (*nemesis*).<sup>95</sup>

In Plato’s elucidation of a just city-state—or a just human individual—there obtains not only a congenial coincidence or cooperation of the components, but also the hierarchy of values and virtues, on top of which stands the *ideal* of reason (wisdom). Just as the rational part of the soul rules its subordinate elements, so, too, the wise philosopher-king governs the citizens of the ideal city—and so the skillful captain charts the course of the ship and steers it on the high seas.

### **Plato and the Complexities of Democracy**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1947, Prime Minister Winston Churchill rose and delivered a speech to the House of Commons where he uttered the following memorable lines:

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<sup>95</sup> F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculations* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), 16.

Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, *it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time*; but there is the broad feeling in our country that the people should rule, continuously rule, and that public opinion, expressed by all constitutional means, should shape, guide, and control the actions of Ministers who are their servants and not their masters (italics mine).<sup>96</sup>

Churchill has been praised for his astute commentary on the essence and virtues of democracy. Because of the incisiveness of the insight expressed in the quotation, his axiom recently became known as “Churchill’s hypothesis.”<sup>97</sup> Those who doubt the wisdom of democracy in all its forms and decry its many shortcomings and imperfections must test their conviction by asking themselves if they truly want to eschew living in a democratic country and settle down under the repressive regime of Putin or the rampaging military dictatorship in Myanmar.

If yes, then the “Churchill hypothesis” disintegrates.

Of course, Churchill is not the only thinking public figure who said something smart about this quaint human invention—and convention—called democracy. His contemporary, the unsinkable philosopher Bertrand Russell, also remarked something as ingenious as Churchill’s disquisition: “Democracy is the process by which people choose the man who’ll get the blame.”

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<sup>96</sup> Read Churchill’s speech: PARLIAMENT BILL (Hansard, 11 November 1947), (accessed July 27, 2022).

<sup>97</sup> Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian W. Haerpfer, *Democracy and its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Baltimore, USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 12, 21-1.

By many it has been said that Plato hates democracy because it is said to be “unstable,” and that it is very susceptible to the shenanigans and cretinism of those who dishonorably govern the city (or country)—men and women who are grossly avaricious and grievously debauched. We doubt if Plato really detests democracy from the philosophical point of view; and we shall explain why in the following discussions.

In the *Republic*, Socrates savages with withering sarcasm the Athenian democracy’s utter lack of criteria to test the worthiness and ability of those who aspire for political leadership or public service (Isn’t it “a divine and pleasant life, while it lasts?” he asks); its egregious mockery of the law by allowing convicted and, presumably, wealthy criminals to roam around the city scot-free (Isn’t “a sign of sophistication?” he asks); its moral depravity in corrupting the citizens from early childhood (Isn’t it a mark of high-mindedness? he asks); and its nincompoopery in tolerating demented politicians and demagogues to run for public office (“Isn’t it magnificent?” he asks).<sup>98</sup>

How correct and compelling Socrates’ commentary was about the conditions and convolutions of his time and milieu! But he might as well have talked about ours today. We express our appreciation to Socrates or Plato for his splendid analysis—seasoned with delightful irony and sarcasm—of the depravities of democracy. But his philosophic lamentations neither surprise nor scandalize us. For, in truth, the sins and woes of democracy are intrinsically written into its warp and woof, both in theory and praxis.

The precariousness of the democratic rule—and its vulnerability to the tremors of moral corruption and turpitude—deeply puzzled Socrates and Plato and stirred their philosophic interest. Is there a viable alternative to democratic governance? Is oligarchy or timocracy a better option? Or, perhaps, the monarchical rule will work more efficiently in governing the weak, craven, and

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<sup>98</sup> Plato *Republic* VII 557e-558b.

selfish human beings? Why not try military dictatorship or autocracy (totalitarianism) or communism?

And, we may add, what sort of leader do we really want to lead us—a king, a dictator, plutocrat, or a democratically elected leader like Joe Biden of the US? These were the questions with which they grappled in their philosophical discussions.

Unthinking people tend to compare democracy at its empirical worst with, for instance, the communist rule or even dictatorship at its imagined best.

This reasoning is glaringly fallacious. It is true that under a communist régime—say that of Xi Jinping and his Chinese Communist Party—trains run on time and individuals are expediently huddled as a pack (e.g., millions of Chinese are easily put under lockdown like cattle) and march as one political body to the beat of the drum. Some political observers even cite as an affirmative argument that under Communism China has become a wealthy country and a world's military superpower.

Fair point.

But why, we ask, are the tens of thousands of young Hongkongers—the contemporaries of Agnes Chow and Joshua Wong, the youth leaders who bravely spearheaded the sustained resistance to the repressive policies of Hongkong's pro-China government and were jailed for doing so—leaving the former British colony to immigrate to England, Canada, and the US?

Why not go to mainland China instead? Or to Putin's Russia, for that matter? We leave it up to the reader to figure it out himself/herself.

In the Philippines, disputatious Filipinos, who were perhaps pining for some form of strongman rule, were exuberant when

Rodrigo Duterte became president, the foulmouthed and uncouth mayor in whom they reposed their naïve hope and optimism for a better Philippines under his rule.

Well, they deservedly or undeservedly got their wish.

But after six brutal years of Duterte’s régime<sup>99</sup> characterized by remarkable incompetence and crudity, the country has found itself in a far worse situation than in any other in its history. In the wake of the devastations of Dutertismo, the fervent hope was that Filipinos had learned in a hard way the moral of what Thomas Jefferson said in the evening of his life: “[A]n elective despotism was not what we fought for.”<sup>100</sup>

But, now, the clueless Filipinos, once again giving in to their incurable penchant for sadomasochism, “elected” the son of the crafty dictator—the father of Marcos Jr. led them to one of the darkest periods in their history—for another six-year-round of political *kababuyan* (approximate translation in English: partisan debauchery or depravity).

More on the son of the dictator in a while. In the meantime, back to Socrates and Plato.

For all the faults and failings of democracy, and no matter how vehemently he deplored it, Plato must have grasped that there was no better alternative to democracy both in the theoretical terms and the practical terms. He must have realized that the Athenian democracy actually worked.<sup>101</sup> It is interesting that Plato did not recommend any set of political programs or plans to reform Athens’s democracy—although in the dialogue *Laws* he offers some proposals

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<sup>99</sup> Read the latest developments on the Philippine brutal war on drugs: [The Philippines’ ‘war on drugs’: What will change after Duterte? | DW News - YouTube](#), (accessed, July 27, 2022).

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>101</sup> Irwin, “Plato: The Intellectual Background,” 62.

on how to best frame a constitution; but these proposals are more conceptual than pragmatic suggestions.<sup>102</sup> Nor did he explore in his *Dialogues* the enticing prospect of staging an antidemocratic revolution with the purpose of supplanting the prevailing Athenian democratic state and replacing it with an oligarchical government.<sup>103</sup>

It is not unreasonable to suppose then that Plato would have endorsed, perhaps reluctantly, Churchill's avowal that "democracy is the worst form of Government *except all those other forms.*" In the *Republic*, Socrates tells Plato's brother Adeimantus that depraved and sick the democratic state might be in itself, it is "full of freedom and freedom of speech," and that "it contains *all* kinds of constitutions on account of [that] license."<sup>104</sup> Socrates then concedes grudgingly that "anyone who wants to put a city in order, as we were doing, *should probably go to a democracy . . .*"<sup>105</sup>

Margaret Thatcher, the feisty British Prime Minister, would have agreed with Socrates. In her second Carlton Lecture, delivered on the 26<sup>th</sup> of 1984 and entitled "Why Democracy Will Last," Thatcher, in her rousing peroration, declares with abounding confidence that—although democratic states in the past have "voted for measures which lead to their own destruction"—"[d]emocracy *does work and will endure.*"<sup>106</sup>

Endure it will. But democracy will, as always, be threatened by enemies both within and without; and, sometimes, it will be its own worst enemy. That democracy is inherently flawed in its abstract determination and concrete application is not, in point of fact, difficult to comprehend. For its weaknesses reflect the very defects of human nature; and so, like anything human, the concept of democratic governance will constantly fall short of expectations when it collides

<sup>102</sup> Cf. John M. Cooper's *Introduction to Laws*.

<sup>103</sup> Irwin, "Plato: The Intellectual Background," 62 (*italics and addition mine*).

<sup>104</sup> Plato *Republic* VII 557b.

<sup>105</sup> Plato *Republic* VII 557d (*italics mine*).

<sup>106</sup> Read Margaret Thatcher's speech: [The Second Carlton Lecture \("Why democracy will last"\) | Margaret Thatcher Foundation](#), (accessed, July 27, 2022) [*emphasis mine*].



with reality—that is, when well-meaning men and women, who are imperfect themselves, try to apply it and make it work in the actual settings of everyday life.

What is fascinating about democracy as an idea is that its essence is constituted by two very simple but inexorable principles: first, the “rule of the majority,” or “majority consent” or, “the people’s will;” and, second, the election of a leader.

From these two postulates flow other fundamentals of democracy such as the framing of a constitution, the legislation of the laws of the land, the establishment of a particular form of democracy (direct democracy or representative democracy), the creation of governmental agencies, the formation of political parties, the distribution and balance of power between the judicial, the executive, and the legislative branches of the government, the protection of free speech, the free and active participation of an independent media and the NGOs in the sphere of public discourse, etc., etc.

The **first** principle is so breathtaking in its simplicity that even a neanderthal can grasp it. In its roughest form, the notion of democracy is illustrated by the following analogy. Ten hikers are discussing among themselves whether to shoot the rapids on a rickety raft or trek by foot to reach their destination, which is the more prudent thing for the group to do.

Since they cannot unanimously agree on the matter at hand, and since arguments are getting heated, they decide to settle it by vote. Seven are in favor of shooting the rapids, three against—the majority wins. So, even if the three wise men are right in thinking that it is foolhardy to proceed with the dangerous plan, they have to follow the wishes of the seven idiots (the majority). At the end, all of them, both the wise and the stupid, perish.

Of course, the three wise men could have opted out. But why did they participate in the vote, if they had intended to do at the end

what they wanted anyway? And why, by Jove, did they agree to join the group in the expedition in the first place? Were they not bound by the unspoken pact contracted by the individuals before they embarked together on the adventure? (In political philosophy, we may broadly call it the “social contract theory,” which needs no treatment here).

In everyday life, the most viable procedure to adjudicate on disagreements or conflicts among individuals and groups is simply by casting vote or arriving at a consensus to settle them. The long history and collective experience of earthlings who have freely chosen to live in a community or society have shown that there seems to be no other way—or, more precisely, no better way.

Parenthetically, it is ironic that the Chinese Communist Party Congress which is held every five years (the next one will be in November 2022) votes and approves by majority vote the members of the Central Committee. Of course, the voting process is just a rubber-stamping exercise. Even the Catholic Church which is hierarchical in character elects by majority vote its supreme Pontiff for life, which is a curious departure from the original act of Jesus Christ personally appointing Peter as the Rock of the Universal Church

At bottom, democracy is about the will of the majority in whose hands raw power and authority reside. In our time, no thinking man would ever propose to establish a monarchy as a substitute for a constitutional democracy; although a wag once said that he would happily opt anytime for a monarchical form of government if he were anointed king, either by human decree or divine command. Nor would anyone—or any nation, for that matter, excepting perhaps feckless Filipinos—prefer one-man dictatorial rule to Lincoln’s democratic government.

At some point in his philosophical career, Plato must have realized that majority rule was not an instrument to ensure that wise decisions were made in popular elections and in running a democratic

government. In fact, many bad decisions and actions were taken by a presidential or parliamentary government in the past—as will be in the future.

The essence of majority rule is that it is not only the most serviceable way hereabouts to conciliate the competing interests and needs of individuals/groups in a society but also the most practical way—i.e., in practical terms—to elect a leader who is reasonably acceptable, although not necessarily the shrewdest, to the citizens (*dêmos*).

It is an intrinsic flaw—or strength?—of democracy as a human invention that even a dunce can be elected by a popular will to public office. That is why in a direct or representative democracy it would be laughable if a candidate insisted, after losing an election, that he/she must be the one to hold the contested post of leadership on the grounds that he/she is wiser, sexier, smarter, and, therefore, more deserving than the actual winner. It is horrendously laughable, we may add, for a presidential aspirant to falsely claim that the election in which he/she lost is rigged and proclaim himself/herself the winner.

The fascination of majority rule in a democracy lies in the fact that once the will of the people is determined in a fair and honest election, the citizens in an implicit but irrevocable way repose their trust and confidence in the ability—or inanity—of their chosen leader to discharge his/her duties and obligations. This means that the people bestow on the hands of the elected leader all the executive powers and the authority to exercise those awesome powers in charting the course of the nation.

The integral but oftentimes imperceptible beauty of democracy is that once a leader, say a President or Prime minister, is ensconced in the seat of power through a democratic election, he/she enjoys that hallowed prerogative of making decisions and taking actions on particular matters of national interest, even if the polls indicate that the course of action that he/she will take is contrary to the wishes of

the masses—for example, raising taxes which the voters always oppose.

In *Profiles in Courage*, John F. Kennedy maintains that in a democracy it does not always happen that the will of the majority or the popular opinion is followed and fulfilled. The role of a democratic leader is to exercise his/her judgment and decide on what he/she thinks is the best course of action that will redound to the good of the people, within the statutory limits stipulated by the Constitution. And this means that some decisions or actions of a President or Prime Minister will not always and necessarily coincide with the people's will.

That the people vote a leader into office implicitly means they have confidence in his/her judgment and his/her ability to execute that judgment from a position where he alone determines what is good and what is advantageous for the nation.<sup>107</sup> A leader is not a political “seismograph” invented to track the swings in popular sentiment or opinion. For, ultimately, democracy is “faith in the ‘wisdom of the people;’” and “it is [this] kind of faith on which democracy is based not simply the often frustrated hope that public opinion will at all time under all circumstances promptly identify itself with the public interest.”<sup>108</sup>

The most sacred pillar of democracy is the process whereby leaders are chosen in a free, fair, and credible election. This is the **second** constitutive element of democracy. It is only through the ballot box that the people's will is determined, decided, and declared. And the only time that the citizens get to exercise their collective power is when they go out to vote and elect their leaders. In other words, the votes of the people in the ballot box represent the supremacy of *People-Power*—notwithstanding the cynical observation of a wag who once said that true power actually resides not in those who vote but those who count the votes.

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<sup>107</sup> John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2003), 15.

<sup>108</sup> Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, 15.

To establish a strong and functioning democratic government, it is imperative that the integrity of the election process must be protected and preserved at all times. For the entire edifice of democracy stands on that fundament. Take that variable away from the equation, and you will have no democracy to speak of. To bastardize an election by any fraudulent method such as vote-padding, vote-buying, and voter’s intimidation is to kill democracy at its very inception. For how can democracy establish itself in the nurturing ground of politics if the main root that holds its vital fluid is ripped and severed?

When Donald Trump falsely charged that the US 2020 Presidential election in which he roundly lost was tampered, he struck at the tender radix of democracy and perilously pushed his country to the brink of chaos. Trump’s crime was simple in its configuration: he insidiously cast doubt on the electoral process on which hinges the survival of democracy in his country.

Democracy is very fragile; and Trump’s post-US-2020-election caper exposed its fragility in a most shocking way. For even an advanced country such as the United States with a strong democratic tradition is not impervious to the threats and shocks from within; and that a dangerous man like Trump with a cultlike following can wreak havoc on well-established democratic institutions and even tear the very fabric of democracy.

This is precisely what Margaret Thatcher meant when she said in her second Carlton Lecture, “If we look wider, in the past or the present, we see not only how rare but how *vulnerable* democracy is: the brief flowering of Athens in the ancient world; the instant destruction of the fledgling Russian democracy in 1917 by Lenin’s coup d’état; and the infancy of most real democracies outside Europe now.”<sup>109</sup> To protect democracy from both internal and external threats, the vigilance of the citizens is of utmost importance; and such

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<sup>109</sup> Thatcher, *The Second Carlton Lecture*.

vigilance should neither flag nor fail at all times. Otherwise, as the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico warned, a democratic state hobbled by internecine conflicts and the degeneracy of its citizens would slide to what he called the new barbarism.<sup>110</sup>

Let us conclude this section by quoting once again the formidable Margaret Thatcher: “[i]f we are to preserve and indeed strengthen democracy, we must encourage those forces which sustain it, which are friendly to it, and identify and isolate those elements which subvert it, which are its enemies.”<sup>111</sup>

### **Marcos Jr. (The Philippine Philosopher-King?) and the Deranged Democracy in the Philippines**

In the preceding section, we have identified two fundamental pillars of democracy: the principle of majority rule and the process of electing leaders in a democratic state. These two constituent elements are inextricably linked and mutually sustaining. The principle of majority rule finds articulation in the electoral exercise, on the integrity of which depends the very concept of democracy as a form of government where the people’s will or people’s power holds sway. Once a credible electoral process is secured, then the foundation of democracy is firmly laid.

The natural hope is that the voters in a democracy will always think of the common good when they exercise their right of suffrage—not their private interests. This is the most reasonable way in which they pick the best leaders who will lead the nation and ensure that the ship-state will sail smoothly.

Let us revert to Plato’s simile of a ship.

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<sup>110</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science: The Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, trans. David Marsh (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), [1106].

<sup>111</sup> Thatcher, *The Second Carlton Lecture*.

If we go by the analogy, and if we keep in mind that a smooth-sailing ship is Plato’s image of an ideal, democratic city,<sup>112</sup> the skilled captain is presumably—i.e., if we stretch a bit our imagination—chosen by majority vote (or by acclamation?) by those aboard the ship before it sets sail.

This scenario presupposes three things. First, the shipowner, the sailors, and the passengers are mindful that the anointed steersman has the proper know-how to discharge his office competently and responsibly. Second, all of them follow the principle of meritocracy<sup>113</sup> which holds that the one who is most qualified for the office of leadership is elected—a principle which dovetails neatly with Plato’s notion of justice. And third, all of them are actuated by the sense of the common good—that is, the skillful helmsman will safely steer the ship to their destination.

Thus, there obtains a happy situation in which every individual observes his proper station and dutifully performs his designated role: the helmsman steers the ship, the sailors obey the captain, the sober shipowner keeps his mouth shut, and the rest of the passengers also keep quiet.

But this “happy situation” is just a reverie of the idealist, which is, in short, just a pipedream. (Jacqueline Kennedy once described her husband “as an idealist without illusion,” oblivious of the fact that a person “without illusion” is, well, a realist.) In a world overflowing with craven egotists and ravenous opportunists, such a state of things rarely eventuates, if at all. People almost always vote based on their selfish interests and elect leaders who they think will more likely satisfy those interests.

That being said, there is one fundamental thing in a democratic government that should never ever be compromised: the credibility of the electoral process. If a democratic election is bastardized, or if

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<sup>112</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 488a.

<sup>113</sup> Plato *Laws*, 757b-757c.

the will of the people is undermined, then democracy is irreparably deranged and doomed to failure.

In the simile of the hikers, the process of deciding to shoot the rapids is conducted openly and fairly. The three wise men are not cowed to submission to go along with the decision of the group. The will of the seven idiots—i.e., the will of the majority—is kept and followed.

That is how democracy should work in principle at the barest minimum.

Fisher Ames, a judge in the Massachusetts Supreme Court, once said that “democracy is like a raft [;] it never sinks but, damn, your feet are always in the water.”<sup>114</sup> The image of the raft, however, is a metaphor more suitable to illustrate the inviolable essentiality of democratic election. If a protruding hard rock gashes the raft careening in the swelling, surging river, or if the canoeists themselves overturn it, then it capsizes and everyone will be carried away by the torrent.

The same is true with the electoral process in a democracy. If it is subverted, as Trump attempted to do during the US 2020 presidential election, then the democracy sinks in the river of chaos.

The Philippine 2022 presidential election is a most disturbing case of the bastardization of a democracy. It is the newest dark phenomenon in the history of politics, **a spectacle that baffles the rational mind**. For how could a son of a former dictator and his wife who robbed the country of billions of dollars,<sup>115</sup> imposed a dictatorship

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<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*, 51.

<sup>115</sup> Marcos Sr. is one of the most notorious and rapacious thieves of all time. The Marcos Family and its parasites stole about 5 to 10 billion dollars from the Filipinos. In 1968, three years into his first term, Marcos and his wife Imelda deposited the amount of \$950,000 into their bank account in Credit Suisse in Zurich under the aliases “William Saunders” and “Jane Ryan.” Their declared income tax returns from 1949 to 1984 was only 16.4 million pesos. Raissa Espinosa-Robles, *Marcos Martial Law: Never Again* (Manila: Filipinos for A Better Philippines, Incorporated, 2016), 25-6.



rule on the country, subverted its democratic institutions, and caused untold miseries and sufferings on the Filipinos, got “elected” to the highest office of the land?

We would like to stress here that these foulest crimes of the Marcoses are not products of hallucination.<sup>116</sup> They are incontestable facts which neither the subjective interpretations of historians nor the partisan ravings of politicians can either distort or deodorize in the sphere of historiography. Such is the self-evident actuality—i.e., the proofs are readily available and irrefutable—of the profligacy of the Marcos Sr. era that it already acquired the incontrovertibility of historical truth.

For what reason on heaven, earth, and hell then did the Filipino people “choose” Marcos Jr. to be the leader of this benighted country?

Under normal circumstances, a thinking and decent human biped will never vote for a candidate who is laughably unfit to lead the nation—a person who does not have the barest credentials and the least moral attributes to recommend him/her for the public office for which one aspires.

By Jove! What made the Filipinos think that Marcos Jr. was qualified to be their President? And how did Marcos Jr.’s cranial convolutions churn out the bright idea or inspiration that he possessed the necessary mental resources and moral wherewithal to seek the presidency?

Again, in a normal situation, a son or daughter—with a saving modicum of decency—of a parent who has been charged and convicted of malversation of public funds in a small town in Romblon or Masbate will be regretful and ashamed of his/her parent’s misdeed and will never think of running for public office because to do so is not

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<sup>116</sup> See Primitivo Mijares, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos* (San Francisco, USA: Union Square Publications, 1976).

only a most disgraceful act to perform but a double slap in the face of his/her townmates.

But Marcos Jr.—and his siblings—has not only shown neither shame nor remorse over his parents’ dark deeds;<sup>117</sup> he has had the temerity to aspire for the leadership of the country they debased and laid prostrate. That is what we call pure gall.

The former *Philippine Daily Inquirer* columnist Solita Monsod wrote a piece desperately appealing to the common sense and decency of the Filipino voters, two days before the May 9, 2022 elections. She asked them in her column:

[D]o you really want a president who:

Lies about his accomplishments? Up to 2016, he told us he had degrees from Oxford and from Wharton. Lies.

Refused to obey a final and unappealable order of the Supreme Court 25 years ago (1997) sustaining a Court of Appeals decision declaring the Marcos estate to have a deficiency of P23 billion? After 25 years, interest and penalties have raised the bill to P203 billion. He has ignored the BIR and the PCGG’s demands for payment.

Failed to file and pay his proper income taxes while vice governor and governor of Ilocos Norte? Was convicted by the Regional Trial Courts, upheld by the Court of Appeals? Should actually be disqualified from running in any election?

Is too stupid (or acts stupid) to realize that the buildings and homes in the United States, the old-master paintings, the jewelry bought by his parents

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<sup>117</sup> Ayee Macaraig, “Marcos on Dad’s Regime: What am I to apologize for?” *Rappler*, August 26, 2015, Marcos on dad’s regime: What am I to apologize for? (rappler.com), [Marcos on dad’s regime: What am I to apologize for? \(rappler.com\)](https://www.rappler.com/marcos-on-dad-s-regime-what-am-i-to-apologize-for/), (accessed November 18, 2020).

must have been bought with money stolen from the Filipino people?

*Any rational Filipino, any one with even a smidgen of common sense would answer with a resounding “NO” to any and all of these questions (italics mine).<sup>118</sup>*

But horror of horrors, Marcos emerged as the “winner” in the presidential derby with the biggest electoral margin in the history of the Philippine presidential elections!

In the aftermath of Marcos Jr.’s “victory,” many good and rational Filipinos—at least those “with a smidgen of common sense,” as Monsod puts it—gloomily reflected on the somber event and painfully asked themselves how did the country that produced in the past world-class heroes like Rizal, Bonifacio, and Mabini get into this Himalayan mess?

How did we Filipinos sink so low in the morass of depravity and shamelessness? What happened to us as a nation? Someone has said that electing the son of a dictator as president is like a drunk-punch person returning to his/her vomit with relish. Predictably, many foreign observers find themselves at a loss to make heads and tails not only of the outcome of the Marcos electoral “victory” but also of the mystifying contortions of the beautiful Filipino mind.

What a shame!

So, how do we make sense of this “irrational” behavior of the majority of Filipino voters who “elected” Marcos Jr. as the steersman of their ship-state? We shall give our answer to the question presently; but let us review some opinions respecting the Marcos electoral phenomenon. By some it is alleged the Filipinos are now so sick and tired of politics in their country that they have become cynically

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<sup>118</sup> Solita Monsod, “A Heck of a Fight to Save our Country,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 7, 2022, [A heck of a fight to save our country | Inquirer Opinion](#), (accessed July 30, 2022).

numbered like zombies and don't care anymore who is elected as president because for them all candidates are the same anyway. Others maintain that many Filipino voters who are poor and illiterate are permanently stupid and irremediably corrupt because they trade their human dignity even for a paltry amount of money during election time without any qualms, without any hesitancy.

Still others claim that the Filipino people who have shown remarkable courage and patriotism in the past have now become a nation of self-seekers, so that they don't give a damn anymore to their country. And there are those who say that cheating in all forms during elections has already been a furniture in the dark side of the Filipino mindset.

We neither dispute nor endorse these assertions on the grounds that they contain in varying degrees the elements of both truth and fallacy. But we would like to point out that these views only show how desperately dire the political conditions have become in the country. In the column cited above, Winnie Monsod offers two possible answers to the question why Marcos Jr. maintained a commanding lead in the survey in the days before the election. Either the Filipinos have been "brainwashed" or ignorant of the facts; or, the surveys were wrong. The second possibility proved to be wrong; the first was correct—and we shall explain why.

In Plato's analogy of the ship, the sailors sometimes would "[stupefy] their noble shipowner with drugs, wine, or in some other way, [so that they could] rule the ship, using up what's in it and sailing while drinking and feasting . . ." <sup>119</sup> Socrates in the *Republic* identifies the sailors with the sophists, the rhetoricians, and the politicians in Athens who mastered the art/skill of oratory which, as we have seen, they employ as weapons to persuade or deceive the masses.

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<sup>119</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 488c.

Words are powerful, for they can either inspire or befuddle, heal or harm, inform or mislead, ennoble and debase. Gorgias writes in his *Encomium of Helen* that “some words cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, others stir those who hear them to boldness, some by *evil persuasion drug* and bewitch the soul.”<sup>120</sup>

If Plato and Gorgias were with us today, they would be astonished to know that ours is a time when toxic words permeate every layer and every crevice of human society. They would also be astounded to discover that there are such things called the virtual world of the internet and the online social media platforms where men and women disgorge with unsparing toxicity their malice, scorn, and bile on their fellow human beings. They would be shocked to know the huge volumes of lies uploaded online in seamless bytes, peddled as ungarnished truths, and consumed by present-day earthlings bewitched by the digital glitter of lying words.

They would also be massively intrigued by the modern phenomenon of trolls, bloggers, podcasters, vloggers, and media influencers who shape public perceptions and opinions with little or no disregard for truth. It is not that what they say online are all lies; it is just that many of these cyber mercenaries do not really care whether what they say is true or false, as long as they gain online following and promote their political ideologies or personal interests. These online hacks cannot be compared to the Sophists during the time of Plato and Socrates. At least, the Sophists had knowledge and skill to impart to their students and many of them were men of foresight, high intelligence, and principle. But these cyber hired guns sell themselves to the highest bidder to spread lies and disinformation in social media platforms with little regard for decency, fairness, and truth.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Keyt, “Plato and the Ship of State,” 196 (italics mine).

<sup>121</sup> Watch a documentary on trolls and media influencers: [Internet Trolls: The Unseen Force Behind Philippines’ Politics | Undercover Asia | CNA Documentary - YouTube](#), (accessed August 15, 2022).

Above all, Plato and Gorgias would be horrified to find out that we now live at a time in history called “the post-truth era”—the postmodern age when the virtue or value of truth does not matter much to people anymore. And, finally, they would be dumbfounded to hear Ralph Keyes explain to them that “[i]n the post-truth era we don’t just have truth and lies but a third category of ambiguous statements that are not exactly the truth but fall just short of a lie.”<sup>122</sup> In our time, deception has become a way of life and the emasculation of truth is the order of the day.

Plato must be turning in his grave, while Protagoras guffawing in his cold sepulcher. Nowhere is the castration of truth more glaring than in the sphere of politics. For instance, Donald Trump hawked the big lie that the presidential election in which he lost was rigged. Although it has been proven by the US Department of Justice and the state courts that no widespread electoral fraud happened, Trump’s fanatical followers and supporters refused to see that truth and doubled down on his conspiracy theory as proverbial fodder for sheep and cattle. Many Republican senators also fed in liberal amount their ultraconservative constituents with the same silage of untruth—echoing Trump’s myth of voter fraud in the very same electoral process in which they themselves were voted into office.

Nearly two years after President Joe Biden was declared winner in the 2020 US election, Trump continues to promote the brazen lie that he was cheated of victory, although he knows he lost. How do we explain such unconscionable lying? What can we say of a man who lies from the bottom of his belly to the root of his tongue without any trace of shame or embarrassment? And how do we make sense of the incredible fact that many Republicans still support and believe in him?<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>123</sup> Watch Trump’s supporters reaffirming their belief, trust, and confidence in him: [Hear what GOP voters in Wyoming have to say about Liz Cheney - YouTube](#), (accessed July 31, 2022); [‘Bunch of bull\\*\\*\\*\\*’: Reporter talks to Trump supporters in wake of hearings - YouTube](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

But we don't have to look outside our country to see this monstrosity of online manipulation and lies. The Philippine presidential election (2022) is the archetype of a *systematic* deception of a nation on the grandest scale ever.<sup>124</sup> There is no doubt in anyone's mind that Marcos Jr. “won” the presidency on the crest of a tsunami of falsehoods and disinformation. His presidential campaign was powered by a high-octane propaganda engine operated by an army of trolls and vloggers.<sup>125</sup>

A cursory look at the titles and headings of the articles/essays/news published by respected international newspapers/magazines about Marcos Jr.'s electoral “triumph” will give you, dear reader, some glimpses of this horrible truth: *The Economist*: “By Electing another Marcos, the Filipinos show how they have forgotten history;”<sup>126</sup> *Financial Times*: “Marcos myths lift dictator's son to power in the Philippines;”<sup>127</sup> *The New York Times*: “The Philippines has a New Liar Chief;”<sup>128</sup> *The New Yorker*: “The Triumph of the Marcos Dynasty Disinformation is a Warning to the US;”<sup>129</sup> *TIME*: “The World Should be Worried about a Dictator's Son Apparent Win in the Philippines.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Alan Robles, “Marcos' ‘confessions’: Philippines president-elect admits to ‘trolls’, needing guidance - and doing it for his parents,” *AsiaOne*, [Marcos' 'confessions': Philippines president-elect admits to 'trolls', needing guidance - and doing it for his parents, Asia News - AsiaOne](#), (accessed August 9, 2022).

<sup>125</sup> Richard Lloyd Parry, “My troll army won Philippines presidency for me, admits dictator's son Bongbong Marcos,” *The Times*, June 14, 2022, [My troll army won Philippines presidency for me, admits dictator's son Bongbong Marcos | World | The Times](#), (accessed August 1, 2022).

<sup>126</sup> *The Economist*, [By electing another Marcos, Filipinos show they have forgotten history | The Economist](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>127</sup> John Reed, “Marcos Myths lift Dictator's Son to Power in the Philippines,” *Financial Times*, May 11, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/adc60586-9267-43b5-be3b-f44ad4506d2d>, (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>128</sup> Sheila Coronel, “The Philippines has a New Liar Chief,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2022, [Opinion | The Philippines Braces for President Bongbong - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>129</sup> Sheila Coronel, “The Triumph of the Marcos Dynasty Disinformation is a Warning to the US,” *The New Yorker*, May 17, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-triumph-of-marcos-dynasty-disinformation-is-a-warning-to-the-us>, (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>130</sup> Jonathan Corpus Ong, “The World Should be Worried about a Dictator's Son Apparent Win in the Philippines,” *Time*, May 10, 2022, [Why the World Should Be Concerned by the Marcos Victory | Time](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

The fact that Marcos Jr.'s presidential bid was predicated on falsehoods is hardly disputed by anyone.<sup>131</sup> It has become so obvious that everyone now regards it as a matter of course or a natural thing, or a certitude in the natural order of things. Filipinos nonchalantly accept this ugly truth with a simple shrug or ejaculatory utterance: "So what?" ["*Eh, ano ngayon?*"].

In another time and place, the charge that a presidential candidate cheats his/her way to victory through lies and disinformation would be an abominable accusation. Not anymore. No one seems to be troubled about it any longer. Presidents Manuel L. Quezon and Ramon Magsaysay would have been eternally dismayed.

Even the Marcos family and its supporters don't seem bothered at all by the perception that they cheated the 2022 election through disinformation and deceit. But why would they feel distressed if people called them cheats and "*mga walang hiya,*" anyway?" (In 2018, the Marcos Matriarch Imelda was found guilty beyond reasonable doubt in a court of law and convicted of corruption in one case of graft among many.)<sup>132</sup> Has their hide not grown so thick that they can take the charge of corruption and cheating as a sweet punch of margarita?

So why be concerned about people's perception? After all, they have already regained power, and all they need to do is to keep the deception-machine at full throttle churning out lies and fictions to the max.

Welcome to the world of post-truth, filled with myths and lies!

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<sup>131</sup> Parry, "My troll army won Philippines presidency for me, admits dictator's son Bongbong Marcos," [My troll army won Philippines presidency for me, admits dictator's son Bongbong Marcos | World | The Times](#), (accessed August, 1, 2022).

<sup>132</sup> Jason Gutierrez, "Imelda Marcos Is Sentenced to Decades in Prison for Corruption," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2018, [Imelda Marcos Is Sentenced to Decades in Prison for Corruption - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#), (accessed August, 2022).



In her recent article in the *New York Times*, Shiela Coronel, the director of the *Toni Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism* at Columbia University, writes that Marcos Jr.’s election as president did not actually come as a surprise.<sup>133</sup> It was something expected. She is right. Jonathan Corpus Ong, writing for *TIME Magazine*, agrees with her.<sup>134</sup>

People who use social media platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube* to get news and entertainment, communicate, and share information are extremely vulnerable to what Daniel J. Levitin—in his bestselling book, *Weaponized Lies: How to Think Critically in the Post-Truth Era*—calls “counterknowledge” which comes in the guises of “half-truths, extreme views, alt truth, conspiracy theories, and, the more recent appellation, ‘fake news.’”<sup>135</sup>

In cyberspace, people are more disposed to uncritically believe what they read, hear, and watch in the untrammelled realm of the social media, where unquantifiable mass of online materials—information, gossips, half-truths, fake news, bigoted opinions, and whatnot—proliferate without control, without regulation.

A big lie twitted, or posted, or uploaded online and spread by a million people four million times in massive “cascades”—i.e., the unhindered traffic of retweets from one digital platform to another (think of Donald Trump’s thousands of tweets from *Twitter*)—bears a tremendous impact on the shaping of people’s thoughts, perceptions, and behavior.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Coronel, “The Philippines has a New Liar Chief,” *Opinion | The Philippines Braces for President Bongbong - The New York Times* ([nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)), (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>134</sup> Ong, “The World Should be Worried about a Dictator’s Son Apparent Win in the Philippines,” *Why the World Should Be Concerned by the Marcos Victory | Time*, (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>135</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *Weaponized Lies: How to Think Critically in the Post-Truth Era* (New York: Dutton, 2016), 2. The term “counterknowledge” was originally coined by Damian Thompson, a British journalist.

<sup>136</sup> A big lie twitted, or posted, or uploaded online and spread by a million people four million times in massive “cascades”—i.e., the unhindered traffic of retweets from one digital platform to another (think of Donald Trump’s thousands of tweets from *Twitter*)—bears a tremendously negative impact on the shaping of people’s thoughts, perceptions, and behavior. Sinan Aral, “How Lies Spread Online,” *Gray Matter, New York Times*, March

Marcos Jr.'s disinformation apparatus effectively exploited the unbridled social media platforms to sow lies and weaponized them to his advantage. It is well-known, for example, that Vice President Leni Robredo had been the constant target of lies and disinformation in the run-up to the 2022 election.<sup>137</sup> She has been painted by Marcos Jr.'s supporters as a weak leader, tagged as a communist sympathizer, and mocked as a dullard. Marcos Jr. who keeps a low-key, analgesic profile in public does not carry out the attacks himself. His army of paid media influencers and trolls does it for him—sustaining “a flourishing ecosystem for political lies.”<sup>138</sup>

Parenthetically, Marcos Jr. was not the first who weaponized online falsehoods and fictions. Rodrigo Duterte won the presidential race in 2016 partly because his legions of trolls and vloggers inundated *Facebook* with lies and false accusations against his rivals.<sup>139</sup> This, too, is not disputed. Even Duterte's pledge to solve the drug problem in six months is just an empty boast, a bogus promise, a cruel lie—as he himself admitted.<sup>140</sup>

“Counter-knowledge”—that is, online lies, bigoted views, and half-truths—is the modern version of what Socrates in the *Republic* refers to as *evil persuasion drug*. It dulls the senses of people and

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8, 2018, [Opinion | How Lies Spread Online - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>137</sup> Gelo Gonzales, “Robredo is top target of disinformation in initiative's January 2022 fact-checks,” *Rappler*, February 2, 2022, [Robredo is top target of disinformation in initiative's January 2022 fact-checks \(rappler.com\)](#).

<sup>138</sup> Camille Elemia, “In the Philippines, a Flourishing Ecosystem for Political Lies,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/06/business/philippines-election-disinformation.html>, (accessed July 31, 2022).

<sup>139</sup> “Duterte ‘institutionalised’ disinformation, paved the way for a Marcos victory,” *Asia Pacific Report*, [Duterte ‘institutionalised’ disinformation, paved the way for a Marcos victory | Asia Pacific Report](#) (accessed August 2, 2022); Elemia, “In the Philippines, a Flourishing Ecosystem for Political Lies,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/06/business/philippines-election-disinformation.html>, (accessed July 31, 2022); see *Steven Feldstein, The Rise of Digital Repression: How Technology Reshaping Power, Politics, and Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>140</sup> Watch Duterte admitting his promise to end the drug problem of the country in six months just a campaign boast (*kayabangan*): [Duterte on promise to end drug problem in 3-6 months: 'Nagkamali talaga ko.'](#) - YouTube, (accessed August 1, 2022).

stupefies their mind, so that they cannot think straight and tell what is right or wrong, true or false. The online *evil persuasion drug* is imperceptibly administered to people in the digital eco-system of politics, within which thrive various echo-chambers in *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *TikTok* and *YouTube*, where individuals and groups find information, opinions, and views that mirror and reinforce their biases and preconceptions.

One Marcosian echo-chamber holder named Jovalyn Alcantara—popularly known to her 23,000 *TikTok* followers as Mami Peng—uploaded a video in *YouTube* where she tells her viewers that the Philippine national debt rose to \$50 billion under Corazon Aquino’s presidency, which is a blatant lie. When a *New York Times’s* journalist fact-checked her, she just shrugged it off saying, “So what if it’s incorrect?”<sup>141</sup>

The question arises as to how can people in the echo-chamber know that the information they get is true or false? How will they know if they are being fed with lies or being deceived? The people in the online abodes operated and patrolled by podcasters, vloggers, and media influencers are like “brains-in- the-vat.”

The “brain-in-a-vat” hypothesis is a thought-experiment which imagines a scenario in which a brain is removed from a person’s cranium, put in a vat in a laboratory, kept alive by proper nutrients, and its synapses, irradiated by electric nerve impulses, connected to a supercomputer. The supercomputer then tweaks the brain’s neural transmissions causing it to have new conscious experiences which are qualitatively different from the original ones it had when it was still encased in the owner’s cranium. The brain thinks that it still has a body, and that its experiences of the external world are real—although they are not. The hypothesis underpins the 1999 science-

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<sup>141</sup> Elemia, “In the Philippines, a Flourishing Ecosystem for Political Lies,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/06/business/philippines-election-disinformation.html>, (accessed July 31, 2022).

fiction movie *Matrix* in which the sensible world is a virtual reality generated by the supercomputer: “The Matrix.”

The question is, how can the “brain-in-a-vat” know that it is in a vat, and that its conscious experiences are actually simulated? The “brain-in-a-vat” hypothesis which is an argument for global skepticism is a modification of the Cartesian thought-experiment which is designed to discover the ultimate foundation of knowledge.

Although the Cartesian *thinking-Ego* knows self-reflexively that “it exists,” Descartes still has to bring in God as the final guarantor of truth. God the Eternal Truth who created the universe will never deceive us, Descartes avows.

In the case of the “brain-in-a-vat,” can it say to itself “I am in a vat?” We shall not join Hilary Putnam and other epistemologists in debating whether or not the “brain-in-a-vat” can arrive at the self-awakening insight and say: “I’m-in-a-vat.”<sup>142</sup> We would like to deal with this subject at some other time.

But for now, keeping in mind the “brain-in-a-vat” hypothesis, it will be interesting to know if a person inhabiting a tightly sealed echo-chamber of disinformation can know that it is being fed with lies and falsehoods. Is there a way out of that echo-chamber?

The answer is yes. In principle, a thinking person can discern and realize he/she is being deceived and eventually sneak out of the disinformation echo-chamber; but it will be an extremely difficult task to accomplish because it requires a radical rebooting of his/her mental contraption and reprogramming of his/her entire way of thinking.

What worries us, however, is not how people can disentangle themselves from the intricate web of disinformation. It is most disturbing that there are people who *know* they are being deceived—

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<sup>142</sup> See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

or know they are wrong or incorrect in holding a particular opinion/view—and yet choose to “stick to the lie.” Mind you, these are not unlettered people but supposedly intelligent and enlightened bipeds. Why do they refuse to see the truth?

This, however, should not surprise us. There are people hereabouts who willingly blind themselves from seeing the truth. For them, truth doesn’t matter at all. Did somebody not say a long time ago, “If you are blind, you would not be guilty of sin[;] but since you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”<sup>143</sup>

On May 14, 2022, three days after the presidential election, Antonio Contreras of *Manila Times* writes the following in his column *On the Contrary*:

*THE people have spoken.* Whatever allegations of fraud hurled will fail in the face of a science that predicted this lopsided victory. . . . The petitions [filed in the Supreme Court to cancel Marcos’s candidacy] are bound to fail since they are facially without merit. . . . *Marcos Jr.’s victory is, however, something that does not solely rest on his virtues or accomplishments. It coasted on the brand name he carries, but what pushed him to soar even higher was the fatally flawed campaign of his principal opponent, Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo (additions and italics mine).*<sup>144</sup>

Hello! Planet Earth? Is Contreras your citizen? What “virtues or accomplishments” of Marcos Jr. is he referring to? What kind of “brand name” is he talking about? Does Contreras think that the name “Marcos” is a trademark of honesty and integrity? And what does he mean by his statement that “[t]he people have spoken?”

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<sup>143</sup> The Gospel of St. John 9: 41 *New International Version* (NIV).

<sup>144</sup> Antonio Contreras, “The tragic and fatal flaws of the Robredo campaign,” *The Manila Times*, May 14, 2022, [The tragic and fatal flaws of the Robredo campaign | The Manila Times](#), (accessed August 1, 2022).

Surely, Contreras who styles himself “a political scientist by academic training and profession” is not unacquainted with the dark history of the Marcos family and its crimes and abuses during Martial Law. Certainly, Contreras knows that Marcos Jr. lied about his academic credentials, and that he was found guilty of tax evasion and failure of filing income tax returns from 1982 to 1985 and was convicted for that. Does he think Marcos Jr. is the Philippine version of Plato’s philosopher-king?

Never mind the *fact* that the Marcos family did not pay the P23 billion in estate tax—which is reported to have swollen to P203 billion owing to interest and penalties—that the Supreme Court ordered them to do in 1997 (Contreras calls it a “so-called crime”); never mind the *fact* that Marcos Jr. lied about his academic credentials; and never mind the *fact* that the Marcoses and their cohorts continue to spread myths and false narratives in the social media. Contreras in his column gives Marcos Jr. a kid-glove (or velvet glove?) treatment and goes after Leni Robredo who, for some baffling reason(s), is always the target of Contreras’s ire—blaming her that “[s]he should have avoided a direct political fistfight, and should have launched a charm offensive to convert Marcos and Duterte supporters to her side.” What an impertinent analysis!

When some of his “former friends and colleagues” in the academia criticized his political views and, according to him, “[blamed] solely [. . .] disinformation and fake news” for Robredo’s electoral loss, Mr. Contreras moaned in a strain of doleful lament, deploring how in the Philippines “academic tribalism [morphed itself] into cancel culture.”<sup>145</sup> Contreras points out in another column that pro-Robredo academicians should undertake “an inquiry into the larger context [in order to know] that such phenomenon (i.e., the disinformation campaign of the Marcos’s supporters) was in reaction

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<sup>145</sup> Contreras, “Academics and partisan scholarship,” *The Manila Times*, May 14, 2022, [The tragic and fatal flaws of the Robredo campaign | The Manila Times](#) (accessed August 1, 2022).

to or an attempt to neutralize the pro-Robredo bias of mainstream media.”<sup>146</sup>

Really? Is Contreras telling us that the Marcos Jr.’s disinformation juggernaut which generated lies and falsehoods before and after the presidential election was invented “to neutralize the pro-Robredo bias of mainstream media?” But why fault Robredo and the mainstream media, instead of blaming the disinformation campaign waged *systematically* by the Marcos Jr.’s militia of trolls? What evidence does Contreras have to support his sweeping claim that the mainstream media is “biased” towards the Marcoses?

Contreras urges his former friends and colleagues in the academe whom he labels as pro-Robredo to inquire into “the larger context” or meaning of the phenomenon of online disinformation and falsehoods. But why, we ask, doesn’t he do the probing into its broader picture himself? Since he is “a political scientist by academic training and profession,” perhaps he will find out that the phenomenon of the Marcos’s disinformation war machine is not an invention “to neutralize the pro-Robredo media” but an essential part of the broader, sinister, and *systematic* strategy to revise and rewrite history.<sup>147</sup>

Contreras writes in his column that “[t]he people have spoken.” By this he means that Filipinos should accept the fact that Marcos Jr. won the election by a landslide and get on with their lives. Never mind if he did it by fraud and lies. It appears that it’s okay for

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<sup>146</sup> Contreras, “Academics and partisan scholarship,” (accessed August 1, 2022) (additions mine).

<sup>147</sup> Glee Jalea, “Marcos pushes for revision of history textbooks: ‘You’re teaching the children lies,’” CNN Philippines, January 10, 2020, [Marcos pushes for revision of history textbooks: ‘You’re teaching the children lies’ \(cnnphilippines.com\)](https://www.cnnphilippines.com/story/marcos-pushes-for-revision-of-history-textbooks-2020-01-10/), (accessed August 1, 2022). “‘We have been calling on that for years. *Syempre ang nakaupo, under the influence of our opposition, pero ‘di rin naman tama ‘yun.* What has been proven wrong is that they continue to contend —essentially, you are teaching the children lies,’ Marcos said in a forum in Manila. ‘I think this is the very definition of revisionism. That is one important takeaway. We always knew that these were not true,’ he added;” see Anthony Esguerra, “Preserve the Truth: Historical Books, Documents in Danger as Marcos Family Returns to Power,” VOANEWS, June 11, 2022, [Preserve the Truth: Historical Books, Documents in Danger as Marcos Family Returns to Power \(voanews.com\)](https://www.voanews.com/news/philippines-2022-06-11/preserve-the-truth-historical-books-documents-in-danger-as-marcos-family-returns-to-power-2022-06-11), (accessed August 1, 2022).

Contreras. But considered in the light of the preceding discussions, we do not think that it's okay at all.

We have maintained that the electoral process is one of the two essential principles of democracy. As such, it should be kept free, fair, and honest, if democracy should work at the least. If an election is rigged or deranged by any fraudulent means, then democracy fails. By some it will be argued that granted the Marcoses and their supporters launched a campaign based on disinformation and fake news, the lies and deception which their trolls generated would *not* have materially affected the outcome of the election, and that Marcos would still have won with an overwhelming majority, even if the election had been fair and free.

We do not agree. But let's say that the falsehoods and fakes churned out by the Marcos well-oiled election machine were not enough to pull him through electoral victory, and that the big bulk of those who voted for him honestly believed that he was fit for the highest office. That does *not*, however, diminish the moral culpability of the Marcoses and their supporters.

The fact is, there really was a *systematic* machination orchestrated and enacted over the past years to deceive the Filipino people through massive disinformation and subterfuge.<sup>148</sup> Whether it was on a small scale or grand scale is only incidental. It is tragic for the country that the one who plotted to fool the Filipinos and succeeded in that act of deception is now ensconced in the seat of the presidency.<sup>149</sup> But the greater tragedy is that Filipinos now seem to

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<sup>148</sup> Gemma B. Mendoza, Networked propaganda: How the Marcoses are using social media to reclaim Malacañang, Rappler, November 20, 2019, [Networked propaganda: How the Marcoses are using social media to reclaim Malacañang \(rappler.com\)](#). (accessed August 2, 2022); Anya van Wagtendonk, How 'Bongbong' Marcos rewrote his brutal family history and won in the Philippines, GRID, May 11, 2022, [How 'Bongbong' Marcos rewrote his brutal family history and won in the Philippines - Grid News](#), (accessed August 1, 2022).

<sup>149</sup> Parry, "My troll army won Philippines presidency for me, admits dictator's son Bongbong Marcos," *The Times*, June 14, 2022, [My troll army won Philippines presidency](#)



accept with resignation Marcos Jr.’s electoral victory as a “legitimate” triumph achieved through democratic process.

At this point, we shall now answer the question raised previously: How do we make sense of the seeming “irrational” behavior of the majority of Filipino voters who “elected” Marcos Jr?

We do not subscribe to the view that the Filipino voters are “irrational” or stupid (*bobo*). Our answer to the question is simple. That Marcos Jr. got elected to the highest office of the land owes itself to “the evil that men/women do.” A network of lies and deception was put up by a gang of evil men/women who plotted to fool the Filipino people—evil men/women who succeeded in debauching our democracy by striking at one of its fundamental pillars: the electoral process. Such wholesale deception is a most heinous crime committed against our democracy. (By the way, I read somewhere that it was Gloria Arroyo who schemed, engineered, and brokered the unholy alliance between the Marcoses and the Dutertes.)

We agree with Ong’s assertion in TIME Magazine that the Marcos “restoration [to power] presents a democratic—indeed existential—crisis for the Philippines.”<sup>150</sup> However, we do not share his analysis that our primary concern in the post-election setting is to “consider why the communities resonate with, and willingly participate in, myth-making, misinformation, and historical revisionism online.”

Although the Filipino people are generally not stupid, the greater majority of them are susceptible to the machinations, shenanigans, and disinformation in the social media/platforms to which they have easy access, and from which they get all kinds of informational materials. Plato holds that the toiling and moiling

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[for me, admits dictator’s son Bongbong Marcos | World | The Times](#), (accessed August 1, 2022).

<sup>150</sup> Ong, “The World Should be Worried about a Dictator’s Son Apparent Win in the Philippines,” [Why the World Should Be Concerned by the Marcos Victory | Time](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

masses are always vulnerable to every form of flattery and demagoguery,<sup>151</sup> just as the shipowner in the analogy of the ship is easily manipulated and “drugged” by the sailors.

They cannot, Plato suggests, acquaint themselves with the knowledge of the *forms*.<sup>152</sup> He even compares the masses to a capricious beast which its “trainer” tames (i.e., flatter) by mollifying its desires and appetites. In the *Republic*, however, he makes it very clear that the laboring class (*dêmos*) should not be exploited by the rulers and guardians because they are the servants and protectors of the former.<sup>153</sup> He even respects the judgment of the masses<sup>154</sup> and believes that they can be educated.<sup>155</sup>

What happened in the Philippine presidential election (2022) is, to our view, actually quite easy to analyze. The fact that the Marcoses are back in power is not, we dare say, the fault of the “progressive” or “liberal” forces of civil society. They were not the ones who *systematically* engaged in the massive campaign of disinformation and fake news before, during, and after the presidential election.

The burden of guilt must be laid on those men and women with evil designs who sabotaged the integrity of our electoral process. Jonathan Ong points out that we should examine “why progressives have failed to offer hurt and traumatized communities any satisfying narratives to address their concerns, leaving far-right media manipulators to have full control of information voids.” And he adds: “[T]hey must acknowledge their failure to listen.”<sup>156</sup>

Fair point. But why lay the onus of blame on them, not on those “far-right media manipulators?” Surely, it is not the fault of

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Plato *Republic* IX 590c.

<sup>152</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 493e.

<sup>153</sup> Plato *Republic* V 463b.

<sup>154</sup> Plato *Laws* 950b-950c.

<sup>155</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 499e-500a.

<sup>156</sup> Ong, “The World Should be Worried about a Dictator’s Son Apparent Win in the Philippines,” [Why the World Should Be Concerned by the Marcos Victory | Time](#), (accessed July 31, 2022).

a watch-seller that a prospective client, whom he was not able to persuade to buy a watch in his/her store, purchased a fake one from a peddler who gulled him/her with smooth, lying words. Nor is it primarily the fault of the buyer who did not know he/she was being tricked.

But, ahh, “[T]he people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”<sup>157</sup>

The people who *systematically* deceived the Filipino people knew that what they were doing was morally wrong. But they did not have any scruples. They consciously and viciously undermined our democracy because of their insatiable greed and lust for power. They were evil in thought and deed. What they did to our country is something unforgivable. We say to them: Woe to you, evil men and women without conscience, without honor, without shame!

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds . . . who only take care of yourselves! . . . You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. . . . You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.<sup>158</sup>

Aristotle once said that “evil destroys even itself.”<sup>159</sup> Following Aristotle’s thought, St. Thomas writes in his *Summa Theologiae* that “if the wholly evil could be, it would destroy itself.”<sup>160</sup> In other words, even if you don’t fight evil, it will naturally destroy itself.

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<sup>157</sup> The Gospel of Luke 9: 41 NIV.

<sup>158</sup> Ezekiel 34: 1-5 NIV.

<sup>159</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* IV, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, “The Cause of Evil” (Prima pars, Q. 49), [Summa Theologiae that “if the wholly evil could be, it would destroy itself - Google Search](#), (accessed August 4, 2022).

On the day he was proclaimed “winner” of the 2022 Philippine presidential election, Marcos Jr. told his mother: “I did it for you and dad.”<sup>161</sup> How touching! Indeed, a son worthy of his parents.

### **Conclusion: On Truth and Democracy**

This essay is conceived against the background and foreground of Plato’s philosophical musings on democracy. In his *Dialogues*, Plato maintains a skeptical attitude towards democracy and thinks that it is hopeless to change for the better.<sup>162</sup> Democracy as a rule of the majority (*dêmos*) is constantly susceptible to be corrupted by those who are out to manipulate and fool the people by demagoguery and lies.

But despite democracy’s faults, Plato, as we have previously noted, realized at some point that there was no better alternative to it. Plato’s main concern about democracy is *how* people should choose leaders who will govern a city-state or country. The ideal situation is one where they elect leaders based on the principle of meritocracy which holds that only the best qualified must wield the reins of leadership.

But for the masses to make good choices in the democratic process, they have to be adequately educated, so that they can also become responsible members of society and citizens who are mindful of the common good—“[removing] their slanderous prejudice against the love of learning.”<sup>163</sup>

Democracy functions best in a state or country where the inhabitants are enlightened citizens. In other words, democracy in its

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<sup>161</sup> Robles, “Marcos’ ‘confessions’: Philippines president-elect admits to “trolls”, needing guidance - and doing it for his parents,” *AsiaOne*, [Marcos' 'confessions': Philippines president-elect admits to 'trolls', needing guidance - and doing it for his parents, Asia News - AsiaOne](#), (accessed August 9, 2022).

<sup>162</sup> See Plato *Gorgias* 521e-522a.

<sup>163</sup> Plato *Republic* VI 499e.

ideal visage is only for the enlightened. Plato believes that the masses (*dêmos* [the people]) should be ruled by those who have reason and wisdom,<sup>164</sup> not by those who are ignorant of statecraft and motivated by selfish interests. The people are generally gentle and docile; and if they are led by a good leader, they are capable of reaching the heights of greatness.

Plato would have been dismayed to see the Filipino masses in the past election taken advantage of, lied to, and fooled by those whom they voted into power. Perhaps, whatever little faith Plato had in democracy would have been further shaken if he saw what happened to our country. For nothing is worse in a democratic state than to have its people tricked in an election without knowing that they have been gaslighted and defrauded.

What is unique in the Philippine presidential election (2022) is the vicious tactic of *methodic* disinformation employed by the Marcoses and their supporters to influence the outcome of the electoral process.<sup>165</sup> This *systematic* deception did not only happen during the election period. It goes a long way back in time and will still continue in a foreseeable future.

There are those who point out—like Contreras of *Manila Times*—that Marcos Jr. was voted into office by an overwhelming majority of voters (31 million), and that he enjoys an undisputed mandate of the people. But can we truly speak of democracy in our country now if the president sitting in Malacañang gained power through massive trickery and fakery?

Can the Philippines still pride itself as a democratic country if the integrity of its election has been methodically compromised, emasculated, and deranged?

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<sup>164</sup> Plato *Republic* IX 590c.

<sup>165</sup> Read: “The Disinformation Winner of 2022 Philippines Presidential Election,” *Asia Centre*, [Disinformation Winner of 2022 Philippines Presidential Election - asiacentre.org](https://asiacentre.org), (accessed August 7, 2022).

Like any other democratic country, the Philippines is no stranger to all forms of election cheating such as vote-buying, vote-padding, voters' intimidation, etc. But this is the first time in its history that it experienced the sort of electoral fraud *systematically* perpetrated on the groundswell of disinformation and falsehoods, on a scale never seen before.

At this point, we would like to raise a question. Do you, dear reader, honestly consider Marcos Jr. a legitimate democratic president of the country *knowing* that he flimflammed his way to Malacañang by the foulest means of deception and disinformation? If you do, then a student who cheats in the comprehensive exams and is awarded summa cum laude as a result deserves to be applauded for his/her academic accomplishments.

If the Marcoses think they can revise or rewrite history, they are damn wrong.

No matter how much they try to deceive the Filipino people in the coming years, they cannot change the truth of history. As Winston Churchill once said: "The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is."<sup>166</sup>

The whole world knows the dark story of the Marcoses, their profligacy, their fakery, their brazenness—all these, history will not forget.

And we will never forget.

The paradox is, now that they have regained power, the Marcoses will be further exposed. Their hidden crimes will be revealed, their abuses highlighted. The more they try to suppress truth with lies, the more truth will shine brightly to defeat the darkness of deception. The Filipino people may be in stupor at

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<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Ze've Shemer, *Israel and the Palestinian Nightmare* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2010), 2.

present, but sooner or later they will shake off their torpor, overcome their forgetfulness, and recover their sense of history.

There are many Filipinos who truly love their country and are ready to make sacrifices for its sake. They will not allow the Motherland to remain in the shackles of lies and deception for long. They will break her fetters of shame and lead her out of the dark chamber into the bright field of hope—and truth.

In her closing statement—before the *January 6 Committee* adjourned—during the hearings on the attack on the US Capitol, Liz Cheney said that “[a people] cannot abandon the truth and remain a free nation.”<sup>167</sup> The Filipinos will fight for the truth until the end, just as their heroes in the past fought tyranny and oppression until death.

Let us close this essay by quoting the Good Old Book and tell those who deceived the Filipino people with lies and fake news:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Watch Liz Cheney delivers her closing statement: [Cheney Claims Trump Made Purposeful Choice To Violate Oath Of Office - YouTube](#), (accessed August 4, 2022).

<sup>168</sup> The Gospel of St. John 8: 44 (NIV).