POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS CHALLENGES


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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Political Science

University of Houston


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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts


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By

Murad Gafarov

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis is focused on defining what political responsibility is and how it is derived and reinforced, with specific focus on contemporary liberal democracies, as they struggle with the notion due to their legalistic nature. The understanding of responsibility often struggles from abstraction that surrounds it. This works attempts to develop rational arguments for the importance of responsibility. First of all, human history and collective memory is not possible without responsibility. Second, liberal democracies depend on political responsibility for its stability. The main theoretical finding of this thesis emphasizes the role of judiciary in promoting and protecting political responsibility. It is proposed that out of all members of a democratic government judges are the most capable of apprehending political responsibility and incorporating it into democratic theory. In addition, this works provides an analysis of some major works in the history of political thought, ranging from ancient Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle to more contemporary thinkers such as Jan Patočka and Jacques Derrida, in order to examine the notion of responsibility under different approaches.

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## INTRODUCTION

During his time in the Oval Office, President Harry Truman displayed a table sign with the expression "the buck stops here,"[1] meaning that responsibility cannot and shall not be passed to someone else. Today, the notion of responsibility is more likely to find its place in the appendix of political discourse. Paradoxically, recent democratic theory is frequently used to condemn opposing and controversial opinions. The blame is almost always externalized and the possibility of one's own fault is immediately disregarded. A dialogue between politicians often turns into mutual indictment, and growing popularity of social media only contributes to such tendencies. There are certain problems that this strategy presents. Evidently, it complicates and slows the process of resolving a disagreement by rejecting views deemed unacceptable. However, what presents an arguably larger concern is that developing a habit of always pointing to the problem in others undermines the sense of responsibility and accountability. Thus, individual responsibility is often overshadowed by discussions of individual rights, which jeopardizes political responsibility as a result.

If we look at the history of political thought, responsibility played a pivotal role in the understanding of politics for early thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle. Nevertheless, with traditional values somewhat weakening, the discourse on responsibility is left unattended. Contemporarily, the relevance of responsibility in politics is often overlooked by both politicians and political scientists. In many ways, this may be due to the fact that defining responsibility presents a challenge of its own. It is not easy to break with philosophical abstraction that surrounds it, especially from a liberalist perspective. The liberal democratic perspective focuses too much on what an individual *can* do—or rather,

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[1] This expression is likely derived from the game of poker, where a knife with a buckhorn handle was traditionally used to indicate the dealer. If the person did not wish to deal, they could "pass the buck" (Mathews 1951).

has the right to do—and not at all on what they *should* do. Consequently, this thesis is focused on defining what political responsibility is and how it is derived and reinforced, with specific focus on contemporary liberal democracies, as they seem to be the least capable of executing this notion due to their legalistic nature.

The word responsibility originates from Latin, where *re-* means "back" and *spondere* is "to pledge." From this comes the word *respondere*, which means "to respond, answer to." The word was translated into French as *responsible* and later adopted to English language. Responsibility then is the "condition of being responsible."[2] However, to have a sufficient understanding of what responsibility is it has to be put in a context and interact with the subject of responsibility. It is only in the context that enforcing potential of responsibility unfolds. In their book on this topic, Sarat and Umphrey (2011) examine various understandings of responsibility and connect political responsibility to *necessity*,[3] or acting out of necessity. This definition fits well with what this thesis attempts to establish.

What precisely is responsibility useful for in liberal democratic politics? A good citizen, according to Aristotle, is one who both rules and is ruled[4]. In democracies, every citizen is to some extent a political actor, at least potentially. Thus, political responsibility is particularly contingent on the personal. Does it then follow that one person choosing to vote is responsible for thousands of people who refuse to do so? And if so, what happens when this person does not admit his or her responsibility? The constitution certainly does not oblige us to consider the well-being of others. Therefore, political responsibility is thus reduced to an abstract concept with no enforcement.

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[2] etymonline.com

[3] See Sarat & Umphrey (2011), *Subjects of Responsibility: Framing Personhood in Modern Bureaucracies*, Chapter 1.

[4] See Aristotle's *Politics*, Book III, Ch. 1-5

There is often an underlying moral argument in the justification of existing or proposed policies and laws. The most obvious examples are abortion, the age of sexual consent, gambling regulation, and other circumstances in which the state is acting as a "parent." In a representative democracy, moral values surrounding these issues tend to differ between major political parties. Ironically, constitutions do not always contain necessary provisions for these and other issues, yet they are usually the source of political authority. Based on this reasoning, my argument strives to connect political responsibility in liberal democracies to judicial politics. However limited, political responsibility is necessary for a democratic regime. Ambiguities are unavoidable and constitutions alone cannot mitigate them. Theoretically, expected levels of neutrality limit judges as political actors. At the same time, they do require a certain degree of political and social integrity in order to perform their duties. From this I derive a theory that out of all the members of a democratic government, judges are the most capable of apprehending political responsibility and incorporating it into democratic ideology.

As mentioned, liberal democracies tend to be legalistic; but legalistic as opposed to what? Throughout this work, I distinguish and compare liberalism to two other main approaches—traditionalism and religion. Relatedly, a few examples of similar distinctions made by thinkers from the past help better explain it. In his lecture, *Politics as a Vocation*, Max Weber (1921) suggests that there are three "inner justifications" of legitimate political power. First is the authority of "the eternal yesterday," traditional rule exercised by patriarchs and princes. Second is "charismatic" authority as exercised by the prophet; however—and this addition is less consistent with the definition used in this paper—in a political sphere, this authority may be "the elected war lord" or "the great demagogue." The final justification is not so much authorial, but the "virtue of legality,"

or the rule "by virtue of the belief in the validity of legal statue" made competent by rationally created rules. Liberal democracies quite evidently belong to the last category.

Another example can be found in Geydar Dzhemal's lecture on traditionalism, where he claims that three main "mental attitudes"[5] exist in the world and in opposition to one another (2016). Liberal reality, as he puts it, is concerned solely with what is here and now, and occupies itself with the accumulation of material goods. Traditionalism—and here Dzhemal uses fundamental principles outlined by Plato—posits itself as perennial philosophy and believes in the existence of a philosophical paradigm which shall be accessed by exceptional individuals. Lastly, we have religion. Although in popular discourse religion is often considered part of the traditional order, it cannot be aggregated with traditionalism in political philosophy. Dzhemal interprets Plato's philosophy and the idea of eternal paradigm as the antithesis of Spirit in the religious sense. It is neither necessary nor possible to proceed further with this argument. For Dzhemal, the point is that religion is distinguishable from the traditionalist "mental attitude." Following a similar line of thinking, I also distinguish between three approaches: traditionalism, liberalism, and religion. In this thesis, I mostly refer to the first two, however, religious perspective will also be briefly examined to clarify how religion differs from traditionalism for political philosophy.

To provide a sufficient understanding of what political responsibility is and how it may differ depending on context, I first focus on the classical works of Plato and Aristotle. In the first section of this thesis, I develop several arguments for responsibility as central to politics and society based on esoteric reading and analyses of sections of Plato's *Republic*. For instance, responsibility is what stands behind Socrates' (in *Republic*) absurd condition that the Guardians must share children. The notable allegory

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[5] trans. from Russian

of the cave has the philosopher-king come back down and there is no agreement among scholars as to why. I propose an understanding of the descent as an act of responsibility. In addition, I discuss the implications regarding limits of responsibility to show, that for Socrates, there are none.

A more coherent argument for *limits* on political responsibility appears in Aristotle. In *Politics*, Aristotle insists on parental rather than political authority in the upbringing of future citizens, thus drawing the limit on family. Using analysis of political responsibility for virtue in Aristotle, as well as how these limits are revised by philosophers like Aquinas and Al-Farabi (Sweeney 2007, 2008), the first section concludes with highlighting both disagreements between Plato and Aristotle regarding the limits of responsibility for virtue, and the common ground in understanding the centrality of responsibility in politics.

The second section is an attempt to tackle the problem of abstractive interpretations of what responsibility is. Even in a philosophical sense, rationalizing responsibility is a challenge. In *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, philosopher Jan Patočka builds his argument around the significance of responsibility for the history of western civilization and its evolution. Patočka sees history itself as a manifestation of responsibility; the preservation of knowledge is in fact an act of responsibility of its own. History gives rise to "the phenomenon of collective memory," a notion discussed in recent literature as well (Temin & Dahl, 2007). This perspective permits us to consider responsibility (for history) as a universal value; therefore, responsibility may be rationalized based on the fact that our history in many ways depends on it. Jacques Derrida responds to Patočka in *The Gift of Death*, continuing the discourse on history as responsibility. Most importantly, based on Derrida's arguments, I briefly discuss what responsibility is in religious terms, and how it is not compatible with

political understanding. Philosophical and political responsibility depend on knowledge, but religious responsibility depends on faith. Since liberal democracies are for the most part secularized, this conclusion further emphasizes the importance of a rational argument for responsibility.

The third section addresses how popular movements of past centuries have contributed to today's understanding of individual rights. This matters since the progress of individual rights may have certain implications for how individual responsibility is perceived over time. While the importance of popular movements in our recent history cannot be robbed of its outstanding achievement for improving the status of many groups, there are still concerns. Thus, in the first part of the section, I examine Ortega y Gasset's critique of how a liberal approach endangers both societal and political stability in *The Revolt of the Masses*. It has been argued that Ortega y Gasset himself makes a "liberal" argument, although against democracy, and interpreting him as a strictly traditionalist thinker is a mistake (Westler & Craiutu, 2015). Accordingly, my interpretation focuses on what the rise of the masses means to the notion of political responsibility, and based on implications derived from this perspective, I suggest that Ortega y Gasset is indeed closer to a traditionalist understanding of political responsibility.

Edmund S. Morgan's outline of how popular sovereignty emerged in modern day democratic superpowers insists on the importance of "fiction telling" for sustaining any regime, including a democratic one. Fiction telling is by no means lying; Morgan claims that "In order to be viable, in order to serve its purpose, whatever that purpose may be, a fiction must bear some resemblance to fact" (1989, p. 14). However, to prevent fiction from turning into a lie, it must be clear who is responsible for fiction telling. Morgan presents another way to understand political responsibility universally—telling fictions predicated on the survival of a regime.

In section four, I examine what value judicial systems may bring to the promotion and protection of political responsibility. To frame this argument, I use Paul Ricoeur's *The Just* and *Reflections on the Just*. As part of his work on ethics, Ricoeur examines the differences between philosophy of law and political philosophy as they regard the law. Ricoeur also draws connections between responsibility and justice. In the preface to *The Just*, Ricoeur proposes that "*war* is the insistent theme of political philosophy and *peace* that of the philosophy of law" (2000, ix). The great value he places upon the judiciary is in many ways consistent with many of my arguments. Ricoeur claims that, after all, "there exists a place within society—however violent society may remain owing to its origin or to custom—where words do win over violence" (ix). He repeatedly refers to Plato and Aristotle to discuss justice and how it develops in political thought throughout time. Furthermore, I look for evidence in recent research on democratization and how it forms not only political but individual responsibility akin to it. An individual in a democratic society, as free as he may be, needs to feel a sense of political responsibility to sustain the democratic regime and his conditions under it. What this implies is, for instance, the ability to make a judgement based not only on what benefits oneself, but also based on the needs of the democratic society. If the government chooses to oppose a certain group, but at the same time *I* individually benefit from it, it is nevertheless my responsibility to oppose the deviation. The persistence of such behavior for the well-being of a democracy has been argued to be of fundamental importance (Weingast 1997).

As political discourse has developed, the role of responsibility has also been reconsidered, and often ignored. It is rarely considered explicitly, remaining open for interpretation. The notion of political responsibility gets lost in continuous denial of traditional values and responsibility becomes repressed and perceived as secondary to political discourse. Yet, this uncertainty is what this work strives to overcome by

emphasizing more or less concrete arguments for the importance of coherent ideas about

political responsibility and the role of the judiciary in preserving it. It is a challenge to

create a universal argument for responsibility; for if we do not recognize its utmost

significance, we place much at risk.

I.    POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN TRADITIONAL APPROACH

***The Descent: Responsibility in Plato's Republic***

One of the main challenges of Plato's *Republic* is the immediate need to make a decision on how to approach the reading. An exoteric reading of *Republic* is used to establish Plato as proto-totalitarian thinker; for example, Karl Popper deems Plato an enemy of the open society (1945). On the other hand, esoteric reading, which has been advocated for by Leo Strauss (1952), often places objectivity at risk. It requires substantial effort and precision and yet has no authority to rely on since the accuracy of esoteric meaning can never be confirmed[6]. While both approaches have their limitations, exoteric reading suffers from them considerably more: the absurdity of certain claims in *Republic* if taken at their "face value" is simply not consistent with the overall consciousness of Plato's philosophy. The notion of responsibility is not explicitly discussed in *Republic*; nevertheless, an esoteric reading allows us to understand the importance of political responsibility for Plato's vision of the state.

At the beginning of the dialogue, the discussion of morality starts with Socrates' response to Cephalus, an older man, who does not participate in the rest of the dialogue. Cephalus's ideas on moral responsibility represent a religious perspective, which Plato finds necessary to outline but immediately breaks with. Cephalus admits to Socrates that with age and the nearing of death, a person begins to think more about what "goes on in Hades" (Waterfield 1998, 330d) and how deeds in this life can affect the next one. Socrates does not present an argument against, as he calls it, "a thoroughly commendable sentiment" (331c) itself, but only against its political application. For Cephalus, the responsibility to do what is moral comes from faith; however, political responsibility cannot depend on faith. If, for Cephalus, justice is returned debts and due honor to the

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[6] See also Arthur Melzer's *Philosophy Between the Lines* (2014), especially chapters 1 and 2.

Gods, for Socrates giving back what is owned is not always a virtue since it may cause more harm than justice[7].

It seems then that at the beginning of *Republic*, Plato separates the religious from the political. Cephalus' belief in God and another life provides him with a source of virtue and responsibility for virtue is thus self-imposed. Polemarchus practically forces Socrates to stay, and Thrasymachus joins the dialogue in an aggressive manner, accusing Socrates of always asking questions and looking for applause instead of answering them. In a way, Thrasymachus thinks that Socrates is unwilling to accept responsibility for knowledge he possesses. Both Polemarchus and Thrasymachus represent an immediate need for the political to define itself with transparent arguments and motives. It is only logical for Thrasymachus that by now Socrates ought to hold a view on morality, which he refuses to share. Ironically, Thrasymachus himself asks to receive a payment for sharing his knowledge. He forbids Socrates to base his argument on benefit or advantage of morality. Socrates responds with an example, asking Thrasymachus to imagine what it would be like explaining what twelve is but to "make sure you avoid saying that twelve is two times six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three" (337b). Socrates insists that morality cannot be thoroughly examined using strictly conventional knowledge. He easily breaks with a religious approach, but does not rush to embrace a political approach. If we work with the proposed idea that each character stands for a particular approach, Socrates then represents a philosophical approach to juxtapose the religious and political.

The necessity of morality becomes apparent for individuals sharing a common interest. The common interest may very well be that political stability and personal well-

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[7] Socrates says: "I'm sure everyone would agree that if you'd borrowed weapons from a friend who was perfectly sane, but he went insane and then asked for the weapons back, you shouldn't give them back, and if you were to give them back you wouldn't be doing right, and neither would someone who was ready to tell the whole truth to a person like that" (p. 8).

being depends on it. Hence individuals engaged in common action must consider the consequences of their own behavior and take responsibility. As one of his arguments for the superiority of morality, Socrates establishes that there can be no agreements among groups of people without them admitting to moral responsibility first. Even a group of criminals will need to possess some sense of it: "if we ever claim that immoral people have been effective and have performed some concerted action together, then we are not telling the whole truth, because if they were absolutely immoral, they'd have been at one another's throats" (352c). The urgency of some common moral understanding provides an individual with initiative to admit to at least some kind of responsibility for his or her behavior. If I act immorally towards other members of my group, I weaken the agreement made between us, and hence expose myself to immoral action. To provide individuals with a strong incentive to admit to their moral responsibility, the same moral standard has to apply to all. It must also be enforced. It does not seem that there is a more appropriate way to enforce certain moral values than through political authority, and thus, we arrive at the notion of political responsibility.

Socrates' position on motives for a good person to accept power predicts an image of the philosopher king. He considers a person whom prestige or money alone cannot tempt to rule. A good person will do it to avoid the punishment: "The ultimate punishment for being unwilling to assume authority oneself is to be governed by a worse person, and it is fear of this happening, I think, which prompts good men to assume power occasionally" (347c). It needs to be noted that this may happen only *occasionally*; Plato is realistic about applying his theory to real world politics (*Republic* is not yet built). Political power is acceptance of responsibility, but it cannot simply manifest itself once an individual comes to power. A perfect ruler has to possess a sense of responsibility in the first place to understand how political power can benefit him and

how he, in return, can be of value to the state. Socrates goes on to say that "were a community of good men to exist," there would be no competition to gain power, but only competition to avoid it (347d). Essentially, political power here takes a form of sacrifice and through fear has a self-imposing force. To tie this in with an earlier argument, Socrates claims that "no branch of expertise considers its own advantage, since it isn't deficient in any respect: it considers the welfare of its area of expertise" (342c). Thrasymachus brings forth an argument that a shepherd considers what is good for the sheep only in so far as he himself benefits from it. Socrates carefully "dissects" the argument, suggesting that shepherding itself cannot consider anything but the welfare of the sheep. He draws a parallel to the ruler who simply rules, i.e. only considers the well-being of subjects. Socrates claims that the problem lies in the fact that power (as in the power of the ruler) alone can never benefit the ruler, and this is the reason why hardly anyone is ever satisfied with power and thus demand wages (346b). Socrates insists on separating branches of expertise; authority itself is responsibility for the subjects. If authority produces any harm that means that the ruler in engaged in other branches of expertise and is motived by some other factor, such as money making, for instance.

Once Plato starts "building" his perfect state, the primary role of both personal (moral) and political responsibility becomes even more evident. I propose that through examining formal and informal provisions of the regime Socrates describes, we can also comprehend what are the limits for political responsibility if there are any at all. Socrates understands the formation of community emerges from the insufficiency of human beings who cannot fulfill their own requirements on their own (369b). Socratic community in *Republic* has each of its member perform no more than one job based on the proposition that "it is impossible for one person to work properly at more than one area of expertise"

(374a), as well as to ensure quality (just as the ruler is only to rule, and the problem arises from the fact that ruling alone is never satisfactory).

Although it is tempting to sweep the entire discourse on the Guardians under one category, Socrates imposes strict formal duties that are not to be confused with methods of promoting responsibility. This distinction is noted by Socrates himself: "These instructions will sometimes be in direct conformity with law, but sometimes—where we've left the possibility—they'll simply reflect our legal principles" (458c). The political system described in *Republic* predetermines many circumstances for the Guardians. Their education has to carefully mold the desired character with "a philosopher's love of knowledge" and passion and strength (376c). Interestingly, Socrates suggests that the education will start by telling children stories that are not true but "contain elements of truth" (377a). The state is then responsible for stories children learn: "our first job, apparently, is to oversee the work of the story-writers" (377c). This also applies to poets, who are ought to compose within "the broad outlines" (379a). Socrates notes that God must always be portrayed as he really is—good. Education of the Guardians is thus political responsibility of the state that claims its right to determine what sort of moral lessons children shall learn through stories and how they are to perceive God. Another proposition that can be made regarding Socrates' censorship on poetry is that he understands how poetry often shapes our understanding of culture and history. We study particular periods not only based on "dry" facts, but also based on the works of art produced during that period. Poets are responsible for the historical image of the state, and thus Socrates finds it necessary to regulate how that image is shaped.

Socrates grants the rulers power to lie "for the good of the community, when either an external or an internal threat makes it necessary" (389b). Quite a lot depends on a lie in *Republic*. And yet, the lie must be first of all noble, and second, carry the seed of

truth within it. There are many conditions about how lies are to be told, which, in a way, turns them into another form of political responsibility. When children are born, they are not raised by their biological families but by the entire community, and parents have no knowledge of which child is theirs. One may argue that this is not a lie but merely truth being withheld; and yet, the success of such an arrangement would require lies. In any case, for obvious reasons, such an arrangement does not seem plausible, and it is doubtful that Plato has not thought this through; therefore, I propose to understand the implications of sharing children as a way to awaken the feeling of responsibility. In other words, because I do not know which child mine is, I will treat every single one as such. Once again, the realization of this is not possible, nor should it be. The Guardians sharing children is first and foremost a metaphor for sharing responsibility.

The explanation Socrates explicitly provides is that through such provisions, unity can be achieved, and more genuine guardians are likely to arise. This approach has come under criticism in Aristotle's *Politics*, which will be discussed in the second part of this section. Until then, let us move on from the Guardians to the Philosopher-Kings and allegory of the cave. Based on Socrates' claim that communities must have philosophers as kings, I establish that responsibility for Plato comes from knowledge and understanding reality itself, in all of its aspects.

Warning about the "swamping" effect of such a statement, Socrates proposes one change that may fix current political systems, none of which is perfect: "Unless communities have philosopher as kings… unless political power and philosophy coincide… there can be no end to political troubles…" (473d). Philosopher do not merely have knowledge of "reality"; they are the only ones who possess a proper understanding of what reality is. Their love of knowledge forces them to "undeniably love that thing as a whole, not just some aspects of it" (474c). Others merely have beliefs, based on

generalizations or fragments, but only the philosopher has access to knowledge. Someone who appreciates beauty has no knowledge of beauty itself, but only of the plurality of beautiful things and lives in a dream-like state (476b; 493c). It takes a philosopher to see "things in itself, in its permanent and unvarying nature" (479e). The difference between those who are philosophers and those who are not is the difference between believing and knowing.

To understand what constitutes reality for Plato would require a careful examination of his more philosophical (rather than political) works[8]. Essentially, Plato imagines a realm of ideas—and only ideas are perfect and true. Ideas may have a variety of realizations, but it is nearly impossible for them to be identical to perfect ideas; some may merely come closer. Prior to introducing his argument on philosopher kings, Socrates establishes that what he is trying to construct is a "theoretical paradigm" (472d), which does not necessarily exist in practice. Grasping this theoretical paradigm is the ultimate task of philosopher kings, as it is the only "reality." This line of thinking is used in the allegory of the cave; there is no reality in the cave, but mere shadows.

In the allegory of the cave this gap is represented by a physical obstacle. As we know, people are chained to the ground inside the cave. Behind them is a wall of fire, on the other side of which are people "who are carrying all sorts of artefacts" (514b). Through fire, these artifacts produce shadows on the wall of the cave. Those who are chained can see neither fire nor artifacts, but only shadows and they believe these shadows to be the true and only nature of things. Then one of them is set free and finds his way out of the cave. After the initial shock of light on his eyes, he is finally able to see, and what he sees is reality. Having experienced the true light of the sun, he becomes the philosopher king, who then returns back to the cave.

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[8] For example, see Plato's *Timaeus* (Waterfield 2008).

There is no agreement among scholars regarding why he has to return. It has been proposed that essentially the descent is an act of justice and the return does not mean that the philosopher king cannot leave the cave again (Caluori, 2011), or that he must return to prevent the enemies of philosophy to reign (Aronson, 1972). The notion of compulsion is another popular interpretation (Strauss, 1964; Bloom, 1968; Brown, 2000). I suggest, based on everything we examined in this section, that it is his ultimate responsibility as a possessor of "the truth" to do so. It must not be confused with the Kantian natural imperative, or in other words, duty, as previously argued (Hall, 1972). Duty, I argue, is something that can be satisfied, be done with (like military duty). Responsibility is a never-ending sense.

In a way, he returns to rule, although he does not care about power itself. Here, I want to bring back an earlier argument made by Socrates that a good man will not assume power but will only to prevent someone less qualified from doing so. If knowledge of reality automatically carries this sense, mainly because knowledge provides access to paradigm, then having been exposed to the true light, the philosopher-king has no choice but to accept his responsibility and return back in an attempt to bring everyone else closer to the truth. Socrates realizes that upon his return, other prisoners will not believe him and claim that "he'd come back from his upward journey with his eyes ruined" (517a). This makes the return even less appealing for the philosopher-king; yet makes it possible to argue that in the absence of any rewards, the only incentive that remains for the philosopher-king is realization of his responsibility.

Since the philosopher-king is the greatest ruler any community can have, we can conclude that for Plato political responsibility comes from knowledge of the divine paradigm. Once "the truth" is acquired, it pushes itself against "mere shadows" through the sense of responsibility. The philosopher loves knowledge in its complete sense;

therefore, it is his responsibility to assure its preservation in the world of shadows and beliefs. His personal responsibility here is inseparable from his political responsibility as the ruler. It does not have to be justified; it is not what he believes but what he knows. This helps to also address the last question: what are limits to political responsibility? I conclude that for Socrates in *Republic* there are none. Based on the community he imagines and how carefully he considers the rules for the Guardians to live by, Socrates grants the ruler/legislator the right to interfere in every aspect of the Guardians' lives. Furthermore, if communities are ruled by philosopher-kings there can be no abuse of political power. The philosopher-kings will always look in the direction of the ideal and will have no interest of their own but love for knowledge. There is an objective theoretical paradigm; it is our responsibility to derive it and constantly strive to arrive closer.

### *Aristotle and Political Responsibility for Virtue*

Plato's *Republic* is not a totalitarian state. It is rather a utopia. Nevertheless, it provides us with a sense of framework within which political theory may be developed. No matter how Plato himself chooses to apply his ideas, they present, as Socrates puts it, the broad outline and force one to think of different aspects of politics, including political responsibility. Aristotle's criticism of particular provisions described in *Republic*, specifically those regarding the Guardians, is not so much on the question of *how* but of *why*. In *Politics*, Aristotle critiques the idea that the Guardians share women and children not necessarily because this idea is absurd (although, he admits that it would not be possible), but because the unity that is to be achieved through this is not desirable in the first place. Thus, this disagreement between Aristotle and Plato is primarily on limits of political responsibility.

While for Socrates there are no limitations, for Aristotle the limit of political responsibility is family. Aristotle's initial reflections in *Politics* on the formation of a political society allows us to understand his vision of the role of the family as the main authority on the moral development of children. The subject of limits to political responsibility within Aristotle's philosophy has been covered by Sweeney, who, in his turn, presents counter-arguments to Aristotle made by Al Farabi and Aquinas (2007; 2009). Based on Sweeney's commentary on *Nichomachean Ethics* and my analyses of the first book in *Politics*, I argue that although Aristotelian view on political responsibility differs from Plato's by the sort of limitation that is imposed on it, responsibility, nevertheless, remains a crucial aspect and serves the same purpose of directing towards a virtuous life.

There are two sides to the Aristotelian critique of Plato's vision of the perfect community for the Guardians. He does not believe the practical realization of such system to be plausible. As one of the reasons, he states: "The resemblances between children and parents must inevitably lead to their drawing conclusions about one another" (Barker 1995, 43). This critique is not necessarily useful for the purpose of this paper. I have repeatedly noted that the community of the Guardians cannot possibly exist, just as *Republic* as a whole, and serves only as a metaphor. There are also strong reasons to believe that Plato himself was aware of it. Thus, I suggest focusing on a more substantial criticism of Plato's reasoning behind the idea of the Guardians sharing women and children.

One of the primary tasks for Socrates was ensuring that "every person is not plurality but a unity" (p. 127). Aristotle is extremely skeptical of building a community based on such incentive. He argues that the Socratic system will contribute not to unity but to the loss of sense of "Mine" and "Not Mine," which in its turn will lead to general

apathy: "The scheme proposed in the Republic means that each citizen will have a thousand sons: they will not be the sons of each citizen individually: any son whatever will be equally the son of any father whatever. The result will be that all will equally neglect them" (p. 42). According to the theory in this thesis, Plato understands that a strong sense of responsibility is likely to emerge in a parent and tries to build on this factor. Aristotle expects the opposite result. There are further problems that may emerge from a Socratic system. Aristotle argues that offences committed against family members are different from offences committed against people who are not relatives. When every other individual is a relative/non-relative this distinction ceases to exist, and offences are likely to happen with more frequency (p. 43). Aristotle believes that the division into one's own and that of others contributes to the development of responsibility, and depriving the Guardians of this separation also deprives them of such a fundamental feeling.

If for Socrates moral education of individuals is political responsibility, for Aristotle the political system may only serve as a sort of safety net. Primarily, ethical behavior and virtue are the responsibility of parental authority rather than political authority. Plato cannot entrust parents with the proper education of children, particularly the future Guardians. He finds it necessary to control even stories through which children learn about life. Since the kings are philosophers, political authority comes from knowledge and is only available to a special few who are able to comprehend that reality. Therefore, these special few are to both oversee the moral education of children and assure its prosperity in the adults.

For both Plato and Aristotle, there is a natural good that ought to be accessed through education: "Although virtue is not contrary to nature, it is not so natural that individuals can make themselves virtuous: they need to be made virtuous" (Sweeney

2007, p. 548). For Plato, education depends on the noble lie told by "responsible" rulers, and it cannot be left up to family to provide sufficient education. However, since the rulers, in their turn, gain knowledge through accessing theoretical paradigm, the "authority" to educate is natural. Aristotle takes a simpler approach: for him, the external force that educates has natural authority "because families are natural" (p. 548). While children are to learn theoretical virtue through their primary education (including the one they receive from parents), the role of political rulers is to "make citizens good by habituating them; that is, by making them repeatedly perform good actions" (p. 549). Note that the ruler gains the power of compulsion only once children become citizens and only "if not compelled to be good from youth, a much more severe form of compulsion is necessary to make one good" (p. 549). In both cases, there is an external force that is ought to make individuals virtuous. The difference is that the limit to political responsibility for Aristotle is clearly drawn from family.

There are two thorough responses to Aristotle's perspective on political responsibility for virtue: Al-Farabi's and Aquinas'. Paradoxically, one of the most prominent Islamic philosophers, Al-Farabi, disagreed on placing the limit on family and instead suggested that the limit on political responsibility should be drawn from religion. Al-Farabi can be considered Aristotelean, as well as Platonist, in so far as he accepts that politics are for virtue (Sweeney 2009, p. 819). Religion for Al-Farabi is one of the many images of the actual "essence" (p. 820). In this sense, we should bring Al-Farabi closer to Plato; religion (in his case Islam) is the noble lie. However, if Plato (as I have attempted to prove) completely separates religion from politics, Al-Farabi sees in religion that very "noble lie" necessary[9] to educate people. Consequently, the philosopher-king for Al-Farabi becomes the prophet legislator. For the perspective of this thesis, the attempt to

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[9] see Al-Farabi's *Political Regime* (Butterworth 2001).

"merge" the political with the religious is not the appropriate method. It is not clear whether Al-Farabi deliberately underestimates the religious approach and tries to "sweep" it under the category of noble lies told to the masses in educational purposes, or whether he understands the magnitude religion may eventually reach. Interestingly, Al-Farabi's approach eliminates the problem of the descent discussed earlier. The prophet-legislator must "return" as he is responsible for what has been revealed to him. The problem of responsibility based on revelation is discussed in the succeeding section.

Let us return to the main reason why I consider Al-Farabi's perspective (as interpreted by Sweeney) significant for the purpose of this section. For Al-Farabi, "the capacity to receive religion is diverse and unequal" (p. 821), and thus political responsibility for virtue must be limited to religion. And yet, it is not clear who is ought to possess the authority to educate. It certainly cannot be the ruler since political responsibility is limited to religion, and yet the prophet-legislator is to rule.

As for Aquinas, Sweeney only goes as far as to suggest that there are two ways to understand the limit on political responsibility. On one hand, he finds that Aquinas may be arguing for the "synthesis of faith and reason" (2009, p. 845), which once again is not a practical argument to use from the perspective of political responsibility. Also, this perspective substitutes political responsibility for public responsibility, thus making the notion even more complicated. Public responsibility is something that depends heavily on cultural circumstances and may not always be applied universally. In other words, public responsibility may be suitable for Aristotelean "village" but not for polis. On the other hand, Aquinas can be seen as reinforcing Aristotelian limits. In this case, however, Aquinas "ends with the problem of the use of force against heretical and apostate Christians" (p. 846). Regardless of their end goal, both Al-Farabi and Aquinas in Sweeney's interpretation attempt to merge the religious with political while remaining in

a Platonic and Aristotelean framework. While this framework may speculate on the classical Greek approach, further examination of political responsibility requires us to isolate political from religious approaches and rationalize the notion of responsibility as much as possible, which is the purpose of the next section.

By identifying arguments regarding political responsibility in classic works of Plato and Aristotle, I hope to establish that for the Greek thinkers the notion of responsibility was of primary importance. In this thesis, I work within the suggested framework of separating the three major philosophical approaches. Although the distinction itself in the first place may be arbitrary, I hope to have made it clear why I consider Plato and Aristotle's views traditionalist. This does not imply that their philosophical beliefs were alike; it is more of the opposite. It is mostly about their perspective on the human condition and the mutual idea that politics is for the higher good, not solely for regulation and the protection of rights. Their far-reaching influence in politics, philosophy, and religion makes this analysis an appropriate basis for further comparison of what responsibility means in different understandings.

II. RESPONSIBILITY IN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

***Jan Patočka's Philosophy of History as Responsibility***

Before proceeding further to examine the effects of democratization and popular movements on the understanding of political responsibility, it is timely to "digress" into philosophical as well as religious aspects and revisit one of the suggestions made earlier: political responsibility is not possible without individuals admitting to their own responsibility first. The first section has defined what political responsibility is and how it may be connected to personal responsibility; however, it remains unclear what personal responsibility is in and of itself. The main question regarding personal responsibility is how it may be derived? Does it depend on what one knows or what one believes? Personal responsibility taken out of political context allows a comparison between responsibility in the political sense, which depends on knowledge, and responsibility in religious approach, which depends on faith. In addition, it provides a chance to examine the extent to which responsibility may be rationalized and present a universal value.

Jan Patočka in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* provides a philosophical interpretation of how human history evolves around the notion of responsibility and largely depends on it. By dividing the life of civilization into pre-historic and historic, Patočka examines what defines the human condition at each period. Jacques Derrida in *The Gift of Death* further develops Patočka's ideas on history *as* responsibility. Most importantly, Derrida's focus on religion helps to understand why religious responsibility does not always translate into political responsibility and may even have the opposite effect.

In the first essay, Patočka brings attention to the concept of natural world, referring to works of phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel. Patočka describes two general ways to understand the natural world: as what appears or as a

phenomenon. The natural world as what appears is what natural science attempts to grasp. However, things are made real not simply by their appearance, but also by "pure phenomenon" (1975, p. 4), as Patočka summarizes Husserl. In other words, in almost everything that appears before us we perceive not only physical appearance, but a certain meaning associated with it. A clay statue may have a different value depending on what sort of meaning is applied, or on what manifests itself. It has both material value (as a piece of clay) and phenomenological meaning (as if one would believe a clay statue to possess a spirit). Patočka also connects the phenomenon and manifestation to the notion of concealment/unconcealment. While the meaning of something is concealed in the understanding of the natural world as it is, it becomes unconcealed with the discovery of meaning, or of what not only appears but also manifests itself. The natural world, as it is, thus cannot impose a sense of responsibility, only meaning can. History, too, then, as will be discussed further later, does not present value as a mere sequence of events; its value lies in its meaning.

The distinction between two understandings of the natural world leads Patočka to connect the perception of the world as only what appears to the period of "prehistory." I suggest that we may understand prehistory as the state of nature discussed by several philosophers of early modernity/modernity. Patočka also calls it "the preproblematic world" (p. 12), as in human life prior to the discovery of the problematic character (the phenomenal meaning of things). But when exactly does the transition to history take place? Patočka states that in the preproblematic/prehistoric world, humans do not see themselves at the center of the world, and their life resembles "that of nonhuman animals who obviously live in order to live" (p. 14, 15) for the exception that, for humans, there remains the possibility of problematization, for humans possess "the key" to unconcealment. It is the potential to discover the meaning of things, relations between

humans and the world. The reason why prehistoric individuals may remain ignorant of problematic character, or of phenomenal meaning, is the burden of work. They realize the necessity of physical work to their preservation, and in the absence of mass means of production, are forced to be occupied with work at all times. Work, therefore, prevents humans from escaping the context for bare, mere survival.

It is when humans discover a way to escape the circle of work and death, that they begin to acquire history in the proper sense. To put it differently, history begins when mere preservation is joined by a desire for continuity: "Individuals die but the human species preserves itself in a generative continuity through the passion of generations. In this way, humans participate in the divine order" (p. 18). The transition to history happens when humans "seek to secure their life pro futuro" and when in them "arises a social memory that outlasts the individual: writing" (p. 13).

Through writing and collective memory "there is something like immortality" (p. 21), or at least realization that "remaining an individual after death depends on those who continue to relate to the dead" (p. 22). Here, Patočka provides us with an example of collective responsibility. History becomes important to living since they know that they too will one day be dead, and history is the only way to continue to relate to this world. According to Patočka, prehistoric communities are nothing but a great household, while once history in its proper sense begins, we enter a different, but not less important public sphere[10].

Patočka focuses closely on the transition to history in the second essay. Writing gives way to the "phenomenon of collective memory" (p. 28); however, as Patočka observes, narrative about the past does not solely deal with actual events in history. We do not study history as strictly a series of chronological facts. History, too, in a sense,

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[10] See also Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958).

constantly manifests meaning beyond simply what is. Otherwise, it would be "the curious phenomenon of an ahistorical history" (p. 28). It provides human civilization with a character. If we accept Patočka's proposition that history begins with the discovery of problematic character and desire to provide humanity with a sense of continuity, and if we consider how it depends on collective responsibility, an argument can be made that history, as we understand it today, starts with responsibility. For contemporary liberal democracies, collective memory is of inmost importance. Recently, in a similar manner, Temin and Dahl have argued that we understand the injustices of the past and present through collective memory (2017). They suggest that collective memory is what shapes political responsibility of today. Nevertheless, although their argument remains relevant, Patočka thinks at a much larger scale.

In the third and fourth essay, Patočka provides his analysis and commentary on the history of Europe, starting from the rise of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the twentieth century, taking up question of progress, religion, and nihilism. While these two essays are important for understanding Patočka's work as a whole, for the purposes of this section I proceed forward to the fifth essay. Here, Patočka is concerned with the question of whether technological civilization is decadent, and most of Derrida's response focuses on the arguments made here. Patočka claims that a life can be considered decadent "when it loses its grasp on the innermost nerve of its functioning […] while thinking itself full it is actually draining and laming itself with every step and act" (p. 97). This definition seems to be more consistent in regard to prehistoric civilization. Does it then mean that Patočka's concern for modern technological age being decadent is the concern for "historicity" itself? Patočka states that there are two possibilities[11] of "coming to terms" with life: identify with its burden (hence accept responsibility) or escape into

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[11] Patočka clarifies that the two possibilities are not equivalent, since only one can be the "right" one.

"inauthenticity and relief" (p. 98). He argues that responsibility is the only form of true

freedom and is "something more powerful than our free possibility" (p. 99). "Free" life

belongs to the realm of work and is granted to us as a burden. What Patočka means is that

in "prehistoric" life, people are merely engaged in work for survival; they cannot be

authentic selves, since they all are "enslaved" by the burden of life in the same manner.

Patočka then comes back to emphasize the difference between two possibilities of

life: responsible/authentic and demonic/orgiastic. The latter makes itself known through

ecstatic feeling, such as sexuality, and although pretends to be freedom, cannot actually

be it. It is rather a form of forgetfulness that does not provide us with any authentic

meaning. Patočka, in earlier essays, praises Plato for supplying the western civilization

with the notion "the care for the soul" and even claims that it is what gave rise to Europe

(p. 83). I make this reference in order to provide an example of what can be considered in

the category of responsible and authentic. The care for the soul is what pushes humans to

rise above decadence. The rise is necessary as it is how history originates (p. 102).

Patočka draws a parallel between Plato's (and later Aristotle's) ideas regarding the soul

and their vision of the state and claims that these are "different aspects of the same thrust

which represents a rising above decadence" (p. 103). Patočka too connects the allegory of

the cave to responsibility, although in a slightly different manner. He uses interpretation[12]

that connects the act of ascent to subordination of the orgiastic to responsibility: "the

orgiastic is not removed but is disciplined and made subservient" (p. 106). It is thus

responsibility and not duty, as emphasized earlier. It does not end once the historical level

has been achieved. To abandon a responsible/authentic life is to accept a decadent one.

According to Patočka, Greeks understood and incorporated this into their vision of

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[12] See Eugen Fink (1970).

politics; therefore, in a traditional approach, we have a comprehensible notion of political responsibility.

### *Derrida's Response to Patočka in "The Gift of Death"*

Jacques Derrida unfolds some of Patočka's arguments with greater emphasis on religion. *The Gift of Death* examines the notion of responsibility in a religious context. His analysis helps to reveal the problematic nature of a religious approach to politics. Although some argue that this book can only be understood "against the backdrop" of Derrida's *Violence and Metaphysics* [13] (Hanson, 2005), I use *The Gift of Death* to briefly outline the religious approach and thus highlight the importance of separating it from traditional and liberal ones:

> Christianity, after all, understands the Good differently than Plato – as a self-forgetting goodness and a self-denying (not orgiastic) love. It is not the orgiastic – that remains not only subordinated but, in certain respects, suppressed to the limit – yet it is still a *mysterium tremendum. Tremendum*, for responsibility is now vested not in a humanly comprehensible essence of goodness and unity but, rather, in an inscrutable relation to the absolute highest being in whose hands we are not externally, but internally. (Patočka 1975, p. 106)

If Plato subordinates the orgiastic to responsibility, religion requires a complete break. It is only once this break takes place that "religion comes into being" (Derrida 1992, p. 3). Internal, rather than external, the presence of the Good is what forces the transition from Platonism to Christianity (p. 6). Derrida makes an interesting point about Plato's allegory. If the ascent is the movement towards the truth, away from false and mysterious, then there is a fundamental problem, which has been circulating in philosophical discourse for

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[13] See Writing and Difference (1967)

a long time: who is the first one to leave the cave? Thus, as Derrida puts it, "the first conversion still retains within it something of what it seems to interrupt. The logic of this conservative rupture resembles *the economy of a sacrifice* that keeps what it gives up" (p. 8). While in the first section I have argued that the descent is an act of responsibility, we may consider that the ascent is also. The philosopher-king leaves as he is not satisfied with the life in the cave and knows that there is something greater. He is drawn out by responsibility. Hence, responsibility becomes a formidable force. From this it is even more important to understand what contributes to the first "awakening." Patočka also admits that Plato attempts to "subject even responsibility itself to the objectivity of knowledge" (p. 110). Nevertheless, the Platonic approach rests on the inexplicable. Does religion solve this problem then?

According to Derrida, the answer is both yes and no. A religious approach insists on the secret: "It keeps responsibility apart and in secret. And responsibility *insists* on what is apart and secret" (p. 26). To put it in simple terms, the origin of responsibility is not to be questioned. It leads directly to the Good. Revelation in a religious sense is responsibility. It cannot be properly explained; one simply receives it and becomes responsible for it. Perhaps it is useful to bring up an example of Abraham that Derrida uses. When God asks Abraham to kill his son, he places upon Abraham a responsibility not only to act, but to act in accordance with "secret." For what he needs to do can have no justification and he keeps quiet to "avoid the moral temptation" (p. 61). For the others, if anything, it is irresponsibility, and yet for Abraham it is "absolute responsibility before God" (p. 61). Therefore, in a religious approach, personal responsibility is not necessarily useful for political responsibility—quite the opposite.

It may be concluded then that the drastic difference between Platonic philosophy and a religious approach is that, for Plato, responsibility depends on knowledge, while in

religion it depends on faith. The purpose of this effort is to rationalize responsibility as much as possible and have a clear understanding of what political responsibility is. Consequently, a religious approach, while remaining substantially important in understanding history and philosophy, is not appropriate for the questions posed here.

The main reason to include this section was to understand what rational argument may be presented for personal responsibility, since without it neither collective nor political responsibility is possible. Understanding its primary importance to history and avoidance of decadent life is as far as responsibility can be rationalized in philosophical terms. In a way, individuals have incentive to be responsible as much as they care for history and their role in history, whether individually or collectively. At the end of the fifth essay, Patočka suggests that perhaps the question of whether technological civilization is decadent is not the right one. Instead, the question should be "whether historical humans are still willing to embrace history" (p. 118). To rephrase this question, one may ask whether historical humans are still willing to embrace their responsibility? With this question in mind, let us proceed further.

III. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PEOPLE

### *Liberalism as a Challenge for Political Responsibility*

It is the technological progress of roughly the last two centuries that brings about Patočka's concerns for the decadence of life. At the same time, and as never seen before, each generation is becoming more and more advanced compared to previous ones. Progress has never moved so fast. Patočka even notes that certain thinkers believe that only in the last few hundred years has history truly begun (p. 95). This is what Jose Ortega y Gasset calls the height of times. However, the Spanish thinker did not have many reasons for optimism despite such a historical vantage point.

This rapid technological progress in combination with the development of liberal political thought has exacerbated the problem of responsibility. Technological progress, as we will see in Ortega y Gasset's work, makes individuals overly confident in the fact that they live in the absolute best of times. With the development of mass production and scientific discoveries made possible by technology, individuals feel more self-autonomous over their life and the "natural world" as discussed earlier. This fact in itself is not a problem; the problem is how this feeling of superiority over the past has been reflected in politics. Progress has affected the need for specialized knowledge; information is widely available and always at our disposal. Politics is perceived in a similar manner—everyone can be engaged in the political process without possessing any special attributes. Nevertheless, politics require at least admitting to responsibility. Can people be responsible for themselves and even for each other? What happens to political responsibility when people suddenly gain access to various aspects of political and social life that were limited to a select few in the past? How does it change the way we perceive and relate to history?

While democratization and popular movements of the past have significantly improved the individual conditions of a considerable number of people, they have also left the notion of political responsibility in uncertainty. This section outlines the problem of political responsibility in a liberal approach first using Ortega y Gasset's arguments in *The Revolt of the Masses*. Ortega y Gasset starts the book with an imposing attack on liberalism (not necessarily liberal democracy yet) which guides politics. Throughout the book he takes different aspects of liberalism under consideration; yet he sees in it causes of extremely complicated circumstances that he writes under. While certain circumstances have changed significantly and for better, there are still unsolved problems of liberalisms and this is why I find it necessary to discuss *The Revolt of the Masses*. It has been previously argued that Ortega y Gasset's arguments extend beyond a simple understanding of the political left and right (Westler & Craiutu, 2015). Although true in many ways, their approach to Ortega y Gasset's criticism of liberal ideas is quite optimistic and does not tackle the problem of sustainability.

Second, I examine a different perspective on how we may understand political responsibility using Edmund S. Morgan's *Inventing the People*. Morgan suggests that popular sovereignty, just like any other regime, depends on "fiction telling" for sustainability. Fiction telling is not lying, but it may turn into one. It is therefore the responsibility of the popular sovereign to prevent this from happening.

### *The Rule of Mass-Men as a Problem*

Perhaps later than he imagined, the great democratic revolution that Tocqueville wrote about has since conquered most of Europe. Political systems of major Western powers may have significant institutional differences, but they nevertheless all operate under similar democratic ideals. Human rights and liberty have become fundamental

values without which a "civilized" society is hardly imaginable. At the same time, however, the European continent saw the rise of Bolshevism, Fascism, and, not long after, Nazism. This is the context in which Ortega y Gasset writes *The Revolt of the Masses*.

From the very first paragraph, Ortega y Gasset makes a strong claim that Europe is in the greatest crisis—the rebellion of the masses, "the accession of the masses to complete social power" (1930, p. 11). At the same time, the author suggests that these words are not to be understood in a strictly political sense, as public life is not only political. Public life is equally "intellectual, moral, economic, religious" (p. 11). Thus, it is not extended suffrage, for example, that Ortega y Gasset is critical of but the increasing ease of access to many other aspects of life. Although crises of this kind have occurred several times in the past, it never happened at such magnitude; with time and technological progress the world has become more and more connected, making "the multitude quantitative and visual", which is what we may understand in sociological terms as "social mass" (p. 13). Ortega y Gasset then defines society as "a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses" (p. 13). Minorities are distinguished as specially qualified individuals, who place great demands on themselves. For mass men on the other hand, "to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort towards perfection" (p. 15). Individuals belonging to both categories can be found across all financial classes; however, Ortega y Gasset notes that "lower" classes tend to possess more individuals of "minus quality" (p. 16). Yet, the main point is that it is not simply enough to be born into wealth—one has to admit to his or her own responsibilities. By placing greater demands on themselves, individuals become specifically qualified in certain matters. Society depends on these specifically qualified individuals since there are "operations, activities, and functions of the most diverse order,

which are of their very nature special, and which consequently cannot be properly carried out without special gifts" (p. 16). This includes anything from art to functions of government to public affairs. Here one may draw a parallel to Patočka's fifth essay: to accept responsibility is to acquire authenticity, while to reject it is to escape and become the mass.

Masses have gained access to many pleasures of life, and there can hardly be anything wrong with this fact in itself. The problem, as the first chapter concludes, is that masses assumed their rights to activities that they are simply not qualified for. This brings to mind the Aristotelean argument that democracy rises based on the assumption that those equal in one respect are necessarily equal in others. For Ortega y Gasset the fault is not in democracy as such; he claims that under the old democracies "tempered by a generous dose of liberalism," the individual "bound himself to maintain a severe discipline over himself" (p. 17). The problem he sees with his time is what he calls the triumph of a hyperdemocracy, "in which the mass acts directly, outside the law, imposing its aspirations and its desires by means of material pleasure" (p. 17). If previously in democracies masses grew tired of politics and "handed [it] over" to specialized persons, now they take it for granted and believe in their right "to give force of law to notions born in the café" (p. 18). The mass rejects what it finds different, including everything excellent and specifically qualified. Thus, it does not simply refuse to admit to its own responsibility, but limits others'.

Ortega y Gasset develops the notion of the height of time, which is the very top of the "historic level." The average man, as he claims, "represents the field over which the history of each period acts; he is to history what sea-level is to geography" (p. 24). Recently, the historic "mean-level" reached the point that previously could only be achieved by aristocracies. What follows then is that the modern age sees itself as superior

to past periods and "the man of to-day feels that his life is more a life than any past one" (p. 35). At the same time, the realization that technological progress will only continue forward with each succeeding age with ever-growing force makes the modern time feel as though it is only the beginning. Ortega y Gasset concludes the notion of the height of times as "superior to other times, inferior to itself" (p. 37). Considering that previous sections pointed to the importance of history for responsibility, the feeling of constantly "beginning" certainly makes it easier to dismiss responsibility. It undermines history itself. While there are more goods available and technologies are more advanced than ever before, Ortega y Gasset's concern is that the world itself, humanity, "simply drifts" (p. 44). Personal lives and responsibilities are left completely unattended, and "the world which surrounds the new man from his birth does not compel him to limit himself in any fashion" (p. 57). The authority of "eternal yesterday" as Weber defined it is replaced by indefinite possibilities of the new beginning. Individual virtue loses its value; it presupposes uniqueness and discipline, which is contrary to total equality and permission to everything. Ortega y Gasset claims that it is individual excellence that made this life possible, and yet, it is that very excellence that the mass breaks with almost immediately: "Thus is explained and defined the absurd state of mind revealed by these masses; they are only concerned with their own well-being, and at the same time they remain alien to the cause of that well-being" (p. 60). The noble life is the life of servitude to a higher standard (p. 63). Yet, the mass men consider themselves the highest and absolute authority, which does not recognize anything superior, and even less, anything that subjugates them to effort.

Essentially, we are left with the problem of responsibility. In order to manifest itself, responsibility must necessarily limit the individual. However, as Ortega y Gasset emphasizes, masses refuse to admit to any limits. Once politics are handed over to the

people, then so is political responsibility. What then is the political responsibility of the people? Responsibility for oneself, for one's knowledge, inevitably requires an individual to limit his instinctive desires, and act in accordance with what he needs, not wants, to do. Responsibility for someone forces an individual to think beyond his own well-being and even act contrary to his own interests. Liberalism focuses on individual rights and holds them above everything else; each citizen is a participant in politics at least to some extent. If citizens then fail to take responsibility for themselves, only claim their rights to act in a certain way, and refuse to consider any interests contrary to their own, political responsibility becomes practically absent.

The main issue for Ortega y Gasset is not with liberalism per se, but with the fact that it coincides with the rule of the masses. As observed in recent literature (Westler & Craiutu, 2015), liberalism has undeniable advantages for the Spanish author: "Liberalism is that principle of political rights, according to which the public authority, in spite of being all-powerful, limits itself and attempts, even at its own expense, to leave room in the State over which it rules for those to live who neither think nor feel as it does, that is to say as do the stronger, the majority" (p. 76). This is the kind of liberalism that held together democracies mentioned earlier. However, the combination of the power of the masses, progress, and its rise at a historical level, make liberalism simply unsustainable. Ortega y Gasset deems it "a discipline too difficult and complex to take firm root on earth" (p. 76).

Perhaps, Ortega y Gasset's arguments are too acute; yet, once again, I insist on considering the political environment that he writes from. Liberal democracies today are more "educated" and experienced. Nevertheless, the political responsibility of "the people" remains an inherent problem. Democratic institutions based on legal authority, seems to be the most obvious solution. The last section examines this possibility.

However, before proceeding further, there is one more perspective that may help us better understand the problem of political responsibility.

### *Politics of Fiction-Telling*

One of Ortega y Gasset's concerns the fact that masses never had to admit to responsibilities but at the same time acquired power before they learned to do so. Morgan's work sheds light on how the sovereignty of the masses became possible. The concept of majoritarianism, according to Edmund S. Morgan, developed under the monarchy just like representation began before the sovereignty of people. Some form of majoritarianism has always been necessary as a way to reduce the rule of many to the rule of one; the masses had to consent to the divinity of the king and impose responsibility to give consent on behalf of those who otherwise would not. Monarchies, and especially absolute monarchies of the past, are unlikely to be associated with the consent of the public. And yet, Morgan opens his book, *Inventing the People*, with the claim that "all government rests on the consent, however obtained, of the governed" (1989, p. 13). Furthermore, Morgan proposes a theory that "the success of government […] requires the acceptance of fictions" (p. 13). It is important to note right away that by fictions he does not necessarily mean lies, as they must "bear some resemblance to fact" (p. 14). Fictions are required to support authority. This is equally applicable to any regime, from monarchies to democracies; however, the extent to which fictions actually resemble fact may significantly vary. Any government has a need to explain itself, whether to its own citizens, or to other governments. It must have established values that it can turn to. Liberal democracies, as this work has already discussed, base themselves on the fundamental importance of individual rights and the notion that all men are equal.

Morgan provides a thorough historical account of England and America, and the transition from absolute monarchy to democracy. People under absolute monarchy were not allowed to be directly involved in the government, relying on representation alone. For it was more convenient for the king to interact with one representative, rather than with the entire community he represented. This worked for the Commons as well, as they were able to isolate the king from the people and act on their behalf. The king was isolated by the continuous repetition of the story of his divinity. He was so praised that politics eventually grew to be considered beneath him. The Commons, while supposedly being both the rulers and the ruled, exempted the king from all of his responsibilities and the need to keep fiction alive. The goal of the majority had thus changed. If before they were to give their power to the king who was considered perfect and knew exactly what people wanted, now the goal of the majority was to rule through representatives. Notwithstanding this power, they continued to pass it by inertia. Thus, the power of representatives grew stronger with time. They isolated the king and the majority, unwilling to rule over themselves, had no choice but to delegate their power of the majority to representatives. However, one might argue that the king made a mistake by placing responsibility to keep his fiction alive into someone else's hands. With time then, the Commons manipulated this fiction, and rendered the king's power irrelevant.

The idea of the divine king had to be abandoned and by this time it was fairly easy to do so. In a way, the Commons imposed the same source of authority on the king as has been imposed on themselves. The king made representatives responsible before the people, while he himself was responsible before no one. The representatives in return made the king responsible before the people. When you set the people as the source of authority for political power, they become a formidable force. The consent of God is not

possible to demonstrate; however, not only can you acquire the consent of the people, but you can also easily manipulate them.

Morgan makes an interesting point regarding the advantages of fiction telling. It requires us to look at the necessity of fiction telling under a different perspective. The make-believe world of politics, authority, and liberty exists so close to the "real" world as to force the latter to adjust and better fit the structure imposed by fictions. Can it be, then, that it is not politics that creates a necessity for fiction but that fiction and make-believe are the prerequisites for any political order, even the most primitive ones? Does the value that Morgan sees in fictions correspond with Plato's perspective? After all, *Republic* itself is a fiction. Most importantly, responsibility, too, can be promoted through fiction, just as much as moral lessons are taught to children through imaginary stories.

If so, it follows that modern liberal democracies are no less dependent on fiction. Taking this statement into consideration, we may derive another definition of political responsibility. In this case, responsibility means making sure that the power to tell fictions does not turn toward deception. Constitutions often reflect defining ideologies of a state. Are not ideologies also a kind of fiction? Therefore, in the last section, I turn to those who are responsible for the correct interpretation and understanding of constitutions.

## IV. RESPONSIBILITY AND JUSTICE

### *Defining Responsibility in Judicial Framework*

Responsibility in a political context is directly related to the question of authority. Authority is not the domination of the ruler over the ruled. On the contrary, it bears the burden of sacrifice. To gain political authority is to accept responsibility for others, not to subjugate them. However, strictly speaking, our understanding of authority today varies significantly from how it was perceived in the past. The fiction of the divine authority of the kings has been either destroyed or politically "sidelined," the authority of religious order proved unpractical for the western world, and the authority of "the charismatic leader," as formulated by Weber, is simply too risky to admit to, considering its recent history. What is left then is the authority of the people and the legal contract designed by them. Can this still be considered authority in the same sense? Paul Ricoeur argues that the notion of political authority is neither steeped in the past, nor been replaced. It is transformed, but nevertheless preserved. What has changed is the fact that a right to refuse to give credit to authority now has to be "reserved" (2007, p. 105). Thus, I suggest that while liberal democracies today indeed recognize the authority of constitutions and democratic values, the aforementioned interrelation of authority to responsibility is considerably weakened. Consequently, in this section, I arrive at the heart of the main argument of this thesis: political responsibility is a problem of liberal democracies, and while it cannot be resolved completely, a strong and independent judiciary can help keep the notion alive.

Paul Ricoeur takes up the question of authority, responsibility, and justice in essays and lectures collected in *The Just* and *Reflections on the Just*. Ricoeur places great value on the judiciary, in a similar manner as this section attempts to do, and I therefore refer to his arguments. The most interesting aspects of his perspective are his reflections

on the difference between responsibility in strictly a judicial sense and responsibility as a vague philosophical notion. The French thinker then connects the two understandings and approaches the question of autonomy. "Just as moral philosophy" requires some reference to the good, Ricoeur claims in the preface to *The Just* (2000, xvi), justice presupposes the power of "the good" exercised by one agent *on* another; at the same time, "the good" must avoid turning "power over" and thus turn to suffering, misuse of language, and manipulation. Impartiality is a crucial aspect of justice. Ricoeur asks: "What accounts for the link between the impartiality of judgement and the independence of the judgement and the independence of the judge if not the reference to the law?" (xvii). The "universal" validity attached to the law is that very power that obliges without oppressing. As a result, those who possess this power, i.e. the judges, inevitably admit to a great responsibility.

People are active political actors in democracies. They elect officials who represent them, but no matter how much support politicians gain from their constituents, all of them have limited terms outlined in the constitution. Officials have the power to pass bills and even amend the constitution, but hardly to change it. Thus, the constitution, while remaining a mere text, is the highest political authority in democratic regimes. For obvious reasons, the constitution cannot cover every potential issue, and therefore relies on the interpretation of the judges. Early in this thesis, I have made a claim that out of all members of government, judges—and in this case I mean the Supreme Court judges—are the most capable of comprehending the notion of responsibility, since they work in close proximity with the highest source of authority. However, in a juridical context, I must revisit the basic question of what responsibility is.

Ricoeur distinguishes between responsibility in juridical and philosophical senses. He states that, while in civil law, responsibility has a firm definition in a "juridical plane," being an obligation to accept punishment or to compensate for fault, it is not well

established within the philosophical tradition (p. 12). Ricoeur also suggests considering the concept of responsibility not on the basis of the phrase "to respond," but as the impulse "to impute" (p. 13). To make someone responsible is to attribute "an action to someone as its actual author" (p. 14). An action of the "author" relates either to the effects it causes to the "receiver" of an action. The effects can never be accurately calculated in advance. Responsibility is not limited in time; it has far, at times even untraceably far, reaching effects. This is consistent with the idea of separating responsibility from duty based on the fact that the former can never be completely fulfilled. Yet, justice cannot accept such a statement; impartial judgment faces the challenge of isolating the act from its infinite potential consequences: "Simply neglecting the side effects of an action would render it dishonest, but an unlimited responsibility would make action impossible" (p. 33). An individual bears legal responsibility for the action and not for what it may cause in ten years. In a way, this becomes compensation without punishment, thus compensation without fault (p. 25). Responsibility itself is then placed at risk. For this reason, Ricoeur proposes moving away from responsibility as obligation while remaining in the context of judiciary.

What may present a greater challenge is understanding the preventive force of responsibility. As Ricoeur puts it, "the jurist extends a hand toward the moral philosopher under the sign of preventive prudence" (p. 28). The judges have the power to establish precedent, which is particularly important for the Anglo-American judicial system. In the essay "The Act of Judging," Ricoeur provides two definitions for the act of judging: to judge is to express an opinion and to judge is to give value or to assess. Then, putting them together, he formulates: "A third degree of force expresses the encounter between the subjective and the objective sides of judgment" (p. 127). To judge thus is to take a stand. Nevertheless, the possibility of setting a precedent makes judgment in the judicial

sense something more than simply taking a stand. Ruling acquires a further reaching effect. Precedent brings the notion of responsibility in the judicial sense closer to a philosophical understanding of it.

In the aforementioned preface, Ricoeur states that political philosophy deals with the theme of war, while the philosophy of law is occupied with peace. This, perhaps ambiguous statement, further emphasizes the importance of a strong justice system and its preventive (sanctioning) power. The judges punish harmful action, decide what sort of compensation the victim deserves, and try to set a precedent to prevent further violence. However, the judiciary does not only prevent violence caused by the offender. It also makes sure that society is not involved in vengeance; to make it certain that punishment does not exceed committed crime is one of the most challenging and yet important aspects of justice. Therefore, judgment sanctions not only the offender, but also the victim. This is important for democracies. The majority may decide many political issues, but it may not punish. If the majority, the people, is what constitutes a State, then judgments sanction it from acting "like a criminal in the figure of the executioner" (p. 140). Thus, the notion of political responsibility manifests itself in democracies in the figure of the judiciary; it limits and protects the people.

Ricoeur considers one of the main functions of the act of judging to be the establishment of the just distance. He sums this up at the end of "The Act of Judging":

> "It is the just distance between partners who confront one another, too closely in cases of conflict and too distantly in those of ignorance, hate, and scorn, that sums up rather well, I believe, the two aspects of the act of judging. On the one hand, to decide, to put an end to uncertainty, to separate the parties; on the other, to make each party recognize the share the other has in the same society, thanks to which

the winner and the loser of any trial can be said to have their fair share in that

model of cooperation that is society." (p. 132)

The judiciary is thus not only occupied with protecting political responsibility, but also

with promoting it. Liberal individuals, as discussed in the previous section, are brought

up in the context that emphasizes human rights. While individual rights are a crucial

aspect of any peaceful society, it may overshadow the sense of responsibility for others.

The problem then is not just that we cannot be responsible for ourselves, but that we

struggle to be responsible for each other. This is a fundamental problem of liberal

democracies. The notion of responsibility is constantly at risk.


### *Responsibility and Democracy*

Once democracies have been properly established in the western world, the

question of stability becomes more pertinent. Can a democratic regime be stable? One of

the main concerns is the fact that democracies by their virtue must include a variety of

opinions, which may not only be different, but also conflicting. This has produced

arguments that suggest participation must slow down to "catch up" with the process of

"associating together" (Huntington 1965). Does not "the art of associating together"—and

Huntington uses Tocqueville's terminology here—also imply accepting responsibility for

fellow citizens? In the same paper, Huntington suggests that political development should

be reversable in order to define both development and decay; however, political changes

have no such irreversibility.

How should one take responsibility for a fellow citizen? A possible answer to this

question can be found in Weingast's paper on problems of democratic stability. In

democracies, Weingast states, consensus about the role of interests and values is often

absent (1997). There must, then, be a self-imposing equilibrium. Politicians have to

respect limits on their behavior. And it is on these limits that a social consensus needs to be achieved. People may disagree on multiple issues, have different interests and values; however, they must hold the same view about transgression. The sovereign may transgress against different groups of people at different times. It is the responsibility of citizens to oppose transgression, even when they benefit from it, as often might be the case. Ultimately, democratic societies may include diverse opinions, but they have to agree on what must be considered transgression and limit government against it when necessary.

The expectation that individuals will oppose transgression even if they personally benefit from it may be considered unrealistic by some critics of liberalism. Ricoeur is also aware of this theoretical problem: "Someone may ask whether there is not something purely utopian in having confidence in the capacity of ordinary citizens as regards rationality, that is, their aptitude for putting themselves in the place of another, or, better, transcending their place" (p. 57). Yet, Ricoeur immediately states that such skepticism is contrary to the state of nature theory (or the original position, as he calls it): "But without this act of confidence, the philosophical fable of the original position would be only an unbelievable and irrelevant hypothesis" (p. 57). He elaborates on his statement to suggest that, without the ability to put oneself in the place of another, there would be no social contract, no civil society, and, most importantly, no political systems. It is the recognition of another as equally capable that first makes the contract necessary and then allows civil society to form. Nevertheless, much depends on which contractarian theory we are working with. The Hobbesian individual only considers another in so far as they are capable of doing harm. Leaving the state of nature is leaving the state of constant war. Recognizing one another solely as beings capable of doing harm will struggle to produce

a sense of responsibility. Individuals might feel more responsible for themselves, for their role in the social contract, but hardly for one another.

I do not argue that individuals in liberal democracies of today are necessarily selfish and perceive each other only in terms of the potentiality to harm. However, we cannot completely eliminate this possibility. The main argument of this thesis needs to be as universal as possible. Perhaps, some societies have a stronger sense of political responsibility, while others need a strong judiciary to protect and promote it. For example, in *Political Regime*, Alfarabi suggests that in a perfect city jurisprudence would simply not exist. We are far from reaching the kind of perfection Alfarabi envisioned. Judicial politics are necessary for any society striving to live in peace. Ricoeur asks: "Does not the law rest on the victory language gains over violence?" (p. 76). We must not expect that individuals will be too occupied with understanding their responsibility for others. After all, it may not be fair to place responsibility for one another on individuals, especially liberal individuals, leaving at "the height of times." The judiciary, theoretically, has the ultimate sanctioning power. It may resolve a conflict between two individuals, an individual and a State, or even two States, as in the case of international courts. When someone fails or refuses to admit to their responsibility, the judiciary has the power to intervene, and it is the virtue of impartiality that legitimizes their right to do so. The judiciary is thus is a safety net of political responsibility.

In this thesis, I remain within theoretical boundaries. The view of the judiciary presented here makes the role of judges reminiscent of Platonic guardians. In practice, the judiciary often becomes extremely politicized, controlled by other branches of the government, or simply undermined by the actions of the judges themselves. At the same time, there is extensive research proving that one of the most important aspects of the democratization process (especially when transitioning from authoritarianism) is judicial

reform. North and Weingast, for example, point out that making the judiciary politically independent from the Crown contributed significantly to the defeat of absolute monarchy in England (1989). Other scholars show that many authoritarian regimes prioritize control over the judiciary in order to hold on to their power (Ginsburg, 2008; Hilbink, 2007; Magalhães, 1999). Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship on democracies pays relatively little attention to judicial politics.

Liberal democracies have a fundamental problem of political responsibility. Their legalistic nature often makes the problem even greater. They limit the perspective to what one has the right to do, rather than to what one is responsible for. As a result, many politicians of today struggle to comprehend the notion of responsibility. They choose to condemn one another and always find fault in an external source, even for their own shortcomings. By always externalizing "the enemy," the problem, they therefore absolve themselves of any responsibility. The only "authority" they still hold in high regard is the "authority" of the law, the constitution, and even that happens to come under attack. Therefore, democracies depend on a strong and impartial judiciary to preserve responsibility.

**CONCLUSION**

People of today easily embrace the role of the victim. One of the biggest lessons we can learn from the philosophy of law is that victims, too, must be responsible. The discourse of today tends to confuse responsibility for "collective memory" with responsibility for action. In the past, many people were hurt by the most outrageous injustices; nevertheless, today, people cannot be held accountable for the sins of their predecessors. What they may be held accountable for is not forgetting to prevent the horrors of the past from happening again. The preservation of history, of all its lessons, is perhaps the strongest and most universal argument for responsibility.

The notion of responsibility admittedly suffers from vagueness. In this thesis, I have tried to leverage a clear, rational argument as best as possible. Moreover, the concept of political responsibility is no different. Even if we define it in a broader sense as being the responsibility of a State for its subjects, it remains unclear how such responsibility can be limited and prevented from turning into domination. Another question is how responsibility is derived and what it depends on in a political context. To better answer these questions, I suggest a division of three different approaches— traditional, religious, and liberal. The findings suggest that in a traditional approach that follows the philosophy of Plato and the idea of a theoretical paradigm, responsibility depends on knowledge. That is precisely why in *Republic* Plato claims that philosophers ought to be kings. They have access to the highest knowledge, to the knowledge of higher good, and are therefore the most capable of comprehending responsibility and admitting to it. Religious responsibility depends on faith, and therefore, throughout history has repeatedly proved itself practically impossible as a basis for the political state. Obviously, many states still operate under religious law, but since the main focus of this paper is western democracies, a religious approach may be easily ignored.

Lastly, we are left with the liberal approach that has emerged in the last several centuries. Liberalism places equality and rights at the center of its fundamental values. As a result, it nurtures self-centered individuals, unwilling to admit to any kind of responsibility. Responsibility unavoidably limits an individual; however, the liberal individual is rarely willing to accept any limitations. And if it is precisely these individuals that make up a liberal democratic state, then what happens to political responsibility? At the end of his famous lecture, Weber said: "The honor of the political leader, of the leading statesman, however, lies precisely in an exclusive *personal* responsibility for what he does, a responsibility he cannot and must not reject or transfer" (p. 14). Individuals today think very little of their personal responsibilities, and so do the politicians as their representatives. Political discourse today has turned into an endless search for the external source of problems.

Thus, the main argument of this thesis is that, out of all the members of a democratic government, judges are the most capable of comprehending the notion of responsibility. Accordingly, I have provided arguments in the last section for the importance of the role of the judiciary as a "safety net" of political responsibility. Due to the fact that liberal democracies are almost always legalistic, judges are the only members of government who can be trusted with authority, since they are required to remain impartial and fair, unlike any other political actor. Such a high regard for the judiciary unfortunately remains purely theoretical. Oftentimes, judges pursue their own political agenda and are directly involved in interparty conflict. In America, for example, Supreme Court judges have an official party label. Nevertheless, it is the Supreme Court that outlawed segregation in the United States. This is an example of how the judiciary made a responsible decision when the people failed to do so. And yet, judicial politics are considerably understudied, especially in comparison to other fields of political science.

In the end, I hope to have brought attention to the problem of political responsibility in liberal democracies and its potential solution through prioritization of the judiciary. While it may not always be the case that judiciary keeps the notion of responsibility alive, especially since in reality judges tend to become politicized, the theoretical argument is there. It may not be visible from "the height of times," but political responsibility remains as important for politics today as it was for Plato's *Republic*. Thus, liberal democracies today have two choices: either individuals must accept political responsibility for themselves and each other, or they must recognize how much depends on the virtue of the judiciary and its promise to remain impartial and just. Whatever solution we choose, the buck must stop here.

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