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# **Equality in the context of democracy in Plato's philosophy<sup>1</sup>**

**Beata Urbliková**

**University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava**

beata.urblikova@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** The paper deals with the understanding of equality in the context of democracy in Plato's philosophy. At first it clarifies kinds of equality which can be found in Plato's dialogues especially *Laws*, *Gorgias* and *Republic*. Then it focuses on democracy – its origin and characteristics and it also analyses Plato's criticism of democracy through equality. The paper concerns human nature, requirement for the rule of experts in relation to equality.

**KEY-WORDS:** Plato, equality, democracy, techne.

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The topic of the paper is the analysis of the understanding equality in the context of democracy in Plato's philosophy. Plato is well-known as a critic of democracy. Various authors – theorist of democracy Robert A. Dahl can serve as an example – even describe him as an enemy of democracy. Their arguments are based – as Dahl writes – on Plato's guardianship in the meaning of inequality among people. What type of democracy does Plato criticize? How does he understand equality in democracy and what concept of equality does he advocate? Are people equal or not?

The aim of the paper is to answer these questions. The beginning of the paper clarifies Plato's understanding of the term equality which is explicitly presented in *Laws* and *Gorgias* and it points out more specific kinds of equality which are present in *Republic* as well. Then it focuses on the origin of democracy and its characteristic in Plato's concept. In the end, it analyses criticism of democracy through equality based on the dialogue *Republic* and it clarifies and puts into wider contexts Plato's arguments. The criticism of equality focuses on Plato's requirement for the rule of experts.

### **The problem of equality**

At the beginning of this paper, it is important to emphasise that Plato recognizes two forms of equality (*ἰσότης*) – arithmetical<sup>2</sup> and geometrical – *ἰσότης ἢ γεωμετρική*. The paper focuses on the critique of democracy through arithmetical equality; however, it is important to clarify both types of equality to prevent changing of them; moreover, calling them inequalities. This distinguishing of equality can be found primarily in *Laws*<sup>3</sup>, but it can be also found in other dialogues<sup>4</sup> including *Republic* in which it is present even though it is not expressed explicitly.

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<sup>2</sup> The term arithmetical equality is not used by Plato, it cannot be found until Aristotle – τὴν ἀναλογίαν ἐκείνην ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ἀριθμητικὴν (EN: 1132a 1). Plato speaks about this equality as equality according to measure, weight and number, he works with it descriptively, does not name it directly as it is in the case of geometrical equality.

<sup>3</sup> *Leg.* 757b-c

<sup>4</sup> *Gorg.* 508a, *Tim.* 31b-32c

Plato writes about both types of equality in *Laws*:

„For there are two kinds of equality (ἰσοτήτοις) which, though identical in name, are often almost opposites in their practical results. The one of these any State or lawgiver is competent to apply in the assignment of honors,—namely, the equality determined by measure, weight and number (τὴν μέτρῳ ἴσην καὶ σταθμῶ καὶ ἀριθμῶ),—by simply employing the lot to give even results in the distributions; but the truest and best form of equality (τὴν δὲ ἀληθεστάτην καὶ ἀρίστην ἰσότητα) is not an easy thing for everyone to discern. It is the judgment of Zeus, and men it never assists save in small measure, but in so far as it does assist either States or individuals, it produces all things good; for it dispenses more to the greater and less to the smaller, giving due measure to each according to nature; and with regard to honors also, by granting the greater to those that are greater in goodness, and the less to those of the opposite character in respect of goodness and education, it assigns in proportion what is fitting to each,” (*Leg.* 757b-c).

The first mentioned equality is one that can be found in democratic constitution. This equality according to measure, weight and number is connected to the lot. People who are different in abilities, property or virtues get something to the same degree, or more precisely wise and unwise gets the same rights. No one is preferred according to any criterion. As we show later, Plato refuses this type of equality. This type of equality is in the opposition to geometrical equality (ἰσότης ἢ γεωμετρική) which is considered to be the best and truest. This form of equality dispenses more to the greater and less to the smaller one. The main principle of geometrical equality is: everyone gets what he deserves while the criterion can be property, virtues or birth<sup>5</sup>. In the context of Plato people get what belong to them according to portion – according to nature.

<sup>5</sup> We can find some kind of geometrical equality in Solon’s work. He distributes the portion of political rights according to annual profit (Porubjak 2013, 35). Plato in *Laws* refers to Solon as the one of the poets in whose writings can be found the fairest and best about the laws (*Leg.* 858e).

The mentions about geometrical equality can be also found in *Gorgias* in which Plato writes: “Now you, as it seems to me, do not give proper attention to this, for all your cleverness, but have failed to observe the great power of geometrical equality (ἰσότης ἢ γεωμετρικὴ) amongst both gods and men: you hold that self-advantage is what one ought to practice, because you neglect geometry (γεωμετρίαν),” (*Gorg.* 508a). In this part Socrates reproaches Callicles the opinion that people have to make an effort to get more and do not respect geometrical equality. Geometrical equality applies to both - gods and people; therefore, it is superior to arithmetical equality. This equality claims that everyone has to have according to merit and not less or more than he deserves.

Besides these two basic types of equality, we can find more specific ones in Plato's philosophy. Gender equality is present in *Republic*. Despite the fact that many authors abandon it<sup>6</sup>, Plato gives equal rights to both genders on the basis of theory about the human nature. In Plato's context, we speak about three types of nature that are present in every soul, i.e. we do not recognize female and male soul. Plato states the analogy presenting the difference between the nature of male and female as a difference between the bald and long-haired (*Resp.* 454c-d). Another part of his argument lies in the idea – if only female or only male professions do not exist, then male or female soul do not exist as well (*Resp.* 455a-e). “Then there is no pursuit of the administrators of a state that belongs to a woman because she is a woman or to a man because he is a man. But the natural capacities are distributed alike among both creatures, and women naturally share in all pursuits and men in all—yet for all the woman is weaker than the man,” (*Resp.* 455d-e)<sup>7</sup>. Plato refers in various parts of *Republic* to women as the weaker gender; however, he enables them, just as it goes for males, to be a part in running of the state. Females have the same opportunity as males to become rulers. Equality for both genders lies in the fact that they have the same opportunities and the only thing that limits them is their nature. That is why both genders will be equally educated— they will exercise and practice arithmetic and other sciences together. The only thing that could destroy their chance to become a

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<sup>6</sup> As an example can serve Popper, K. R. (2011).

<sup>7</sup> compare Xen. *Symp.* II, 9.

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ruler will be nature, not gender. However, in Plato's context, genders equality exists at the expense of the institution of family which he cancels because women need to have the same space for gymnastic and musical education as men. Plato is progressist in his conception of gender equality; some authors even mark him as the first feminist<sup>8</sup>.

In the Blackwell encyclopaedia, Alan Gewirth depicts another type of equality – equality of opportunities in the meaning: „whose educational system is designed to give equally talented and virtuous children an equal chance to achieve unequal social positions. If talent and effort are considered an alterable part of children's environment rather than part of their identities, then equality of opportunity implies radical equalization of results,“ (Gewirth 1991). This is confirmed by the part 423c-d and 415b-c (myth about the origin of classes) in *Republic* in which Plato states that the guardians should not have mercy on their descendants in the case that they have lower nature and should be sent to class to which they belong. On the other hand, the guardians should be open to the movement of descendants from lower classes to theirs, because the nature is decisive, not family relationships or heredity. Plato concludes this part with words: „and the purport of all this was that the other citizens too must be sent to the task for which their natures were fitted, one man to one work,“ (*Resp.* 423d). It is also possible to understand the equality of opportunity in wider context – security of opportunities to get equal talent for everyone, or opportunity for free choice of profession without regard to nature – in this understanding we cannot name Plato egalitarian.

As it was mentioned before, Plato in *Republic* explicitly names only gender equality because equality of opportunity and geometrical equality are implicit and arithmetical equality is present in the critique of democracy. Equality is the fundamental problem of democracy because it causes its end. But before we start to talk about negative aspects of arithmetical equality it is important to analyse beginning of democracy and its connection to absolute equality.

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<sup>8</sup> Lucas, J. R. (1973), Crossman, R. H. S. (2013).

## The origins of democracy

The *Republic* Book VIII starts with the depiction of the deterioration of the best form of government into tyranny. This deterioration goes through various stages – the best form, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. We focus on transformation of oligarchy into democracy. This transformation causes the change of relationship between people and laws (and offices), but also relationship between people themselves. In oligarchy people exist in some kind of hierarchy – “the rich hold office and the poor man is excluded,” (*Resp.* 550c-d), with the beginning of democracy people become more equal. What is the cause of this change? The answer to this question also clarifies the reason why democracy is usually called as government of the poor.

Oligarchy is based on the understanding wealth as the good. People satisfy only their basic needs and the other needs are considered to be useless – they ignore unnecessary appetites because of the accumulation of wealth – they do not spend money on unnecessary goods. Oligarchic people want to accumulate wealth and that is the reason why they refuse to enact prohibition to spend the wealth wastefully. Because of this fact young people misspend wealth while the other citizens buy their property and give them a loan, and because of that wealth citizens become wealthier and more respectable. From young people who used to have wealth and power become the poor without rights. Plato describes this situation: “And there they sit, I fancy, within the city, furnished with stings, that is, arms, some burdened with debt, others disfranchised, others both, hating and conspiring against the acquirers of their estates and the rest of the citizens and eager for revolution,” (*Resp.* 555d-e). There arise seeds of democracy - the unsatisfied poor meeting the rich realizing their weaknesses.

This revolution causes the establishing of democracy as desirable and ruling government as well as punishing and deprivation of power of the rich: „And a democracy, I suppose, comes into being when the poor, winning the victory, put to death some of the other party, drive out others, and grant the rest of the citizens an equal share in both citizenship and offices—and for the most part these offices are assigned by lot,” (*Resp.* 557a). With the beginning of democracy people become completely equal. Democracy is the government which makes people equal or in

Plato's words – democracy assign equality to equals and unequals alike (*Resp.* 558c). Why Plato refuses arithmetical equality? What negative aspects this equality brings? Why Plato talks about equality between unequals?

## Human nature

Plato's negative relationship to democracy is caused by equality. One of Plato's arguments against arithmetical equality is based on human nature. In *Republic* Plato presents human nature created by three-part soul. These three parts are in a hierarchical relation (ruling part changes, but the soul is always hierarchical), and this hierarchy is reflected in the best state by three classes. While soul consists of appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν), spirited (θυμοειδές) and reasoning (λογιστικόν) part<sup>9</sup>; the state consists of working, guardian and ruling class. People are classified as producers, guardians or rulers in the best state according to ruling part in their soul. That means that the parts in the soul are as well as people in state in the same relationship of dominancy and subordination. People whose soul is ruled by reasoning part are dominant because they are able to achieve the good, justice and beauty itself and subordinate their behaviour to these values. People whose soul is ruled by spirited part are lower in the hierarchy. They are helpers to the philosophers but their dominating part can be influenced also by appetites; therefore, they cannot be equal to the philosophers. People ruled by appetites are at the lowest level in society because they could never achieve the highest virtues. Desires influenced them to that way that they are unable to follow certain aim. Why Plato comes with the different nature that divided people into dominant and subordinate?

In Plato's conception, everyone has some kind of predisposition for a certain kind of profession – someone is able to do it better than others; therefore, people who have predisposition to rule should do it. Necessarily, it causes hierarchy in which those who rule and guard the *polis* have higher status than workers who are subordinate for the good of the state and also for their own. Introduction of

<sup>9</sup> Each of these parts is connected to one virtue - σωφροσύνης καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ φρονήσεως (*Resp.* 433b).

arithmetical equality ignores human nature. Plato writes: "The interference with one another's business, then, of three existent classes and the substitution of the one for the other is the greatest injury to a state and would most rightly be designated as the thing which chiefly works it harm," (*Resp.* 434b-c). Plato understands unfulfilled human nature – the misuse of predispositions – as a crime, injustice; therefore, equality that makes equal rulers, guardians and workers and enable choosing career not according to nature but according to arbitrariness is unacceptable. Democracy is against the nature because it ignores human nature – human predisposition for some kind of profession that is defined by hierarchy in the soul.

In democracy, people are assigned to offices by lot, not by abilities. So that unwise people, people ruled by appetites, make decisions about the *polis*. This type of state cannot achieve justice and happiness, unlike the best state, in which people are divided according to their abilities. Santas in his work supports Plato's conception of different human nature and writes: "One can dispute the natural lottery assumption to some extent, but when it is applied only to the three major social functions (providing, defending, and ruling), it may be mostly true: can we claim that all human beings can be equally good at provisioning their city, defending it, and ruling it, if they are given similar educations? Perhaps only an extreme behaviorist would," (Santas 2010, 172). People are separated by inborn abilities, skills, talents – Plato realizes that; therefore, he insists that everyone has to do the job in which he can achieve perfection. Making people equal to the level in which everyone can do any job is unthinkable because this type of the *polis* cannot achieve perfection – justice – happiness - they are dependent on using human potential.

The counter-argument can be formulated in this way: humans are able to develop through education. In this context Woodruff writes: „They [Plato and his followers] did not believe in any form of education that could qualify ordinary citizens to govern themselves,“ (Woodruff 2005, 30). People can develop their abilities but these abilities are distributed unequally so similar results cannot be expected. If the guardian has better abilities to estimate danger, better physical ability, the worker will not achieve similar results in these fields. Plato reminds that this is the problem of democracy. Man who is not virtuous and arbitrary satisfied various desires – one day he gets drunk, the other he drinks only water and eats



modest food, or one day he is bone idle and the other he exercises his body – can decide about the *polis*. This type of person starts devoting to philosophy and “And frequently he goes in for politics and bounces up and says and does whatever enters his head” (*Resp.* 561d). This person is volatile, changing opinions and unvirtuous, he can be a speaker of the assembly and people listen to him. So the *polis* can approve regulations that are unacceptable to it. Plato brings the threat of bad speakers and their influence into focus in his dialogues<sup>10</sup>. For the city and also for this type of person it is better to listen to the philosopher who knows the good and knows what is convenient and inconvenient for the *polis*. Therefore, this type of people is superior to workers. The philosopher has necessary abilities which, if they are properly developed, make him an ideal ruler; the others are not able to achieve that level of development.

Plato refuses to accept democratic equality in the meaning that the same part should belong to everyone, because it would mean that wiser and more talented philosophers would be equalized to workers. In various parts of *Republic*, Plato refers to substantial differences between these “classes”. In this context the equality is understood mainly as equality of opportunity – every person has a chance to become whoever he wants. But Plato meets also other types of equality prevalent in Athens: *isonomia* – equality before the law and *isegoria* – *equal right to speak* in the *assembly*. Previous mentioned types of equality are bad for the city. Arithmetical equality tries to make equal inequality by nature and to give the right to speak in assembly to all citizens. Sartori in compliance with Plato writes: “Inequality can be attributed to acts of god; equality can result only from the acts of men. Inequality is “nature”; equality is denaturalization,” (Sartori, 1987, 337). It is obvious that when Sartori speaks about inequality he thinks of geometrical equality which is present in the nature and in relationship between gods, while arithmetical equality has been created by humans.

Plato’s objection against arithmetical equality is still topical in this context. If we understand the nature – *cosmos* as a model for society, and nature makes people

<sup>10</sup> see *Gorg.* 452d, 459a-b and also Wollner U. (2010a) especially part named The rule of the demagogue (126-129).

unequal, it is consequent to insist on inequality between people. Patočka (1992), as it is presented by Wollner (2010b), says that „Socrates finds in cosmos the model as well as the space to be the only coincident and suitable for human as he should be.“ Afterwards Wollner adds: „The highest, divine principle serves for the particular soul directed to it as a model and from this model it gains its own *λόγος*. On this strong gained model is based genuine thinking; if it is based on this paragramatical model, it gains certainty and divine truth,“ (Wollner, 2010b, 231).

Plato's critique of quantitative equality is justifiable with respect to *cosmos*. Plato does not consider balancing differences between people because it is against his ideal. This idea is supported by Robert Hall who responds to geometrical equality present in *Gorgias* using following words: “Plato is here developing a cosmic principle to unify the physical universe with the moral by predicating of the cosmic macrocosm a principle of geometrical equality that brings order within it as well as within society and the human microcosm of the soul“ (Hall 2004, 24).

## **Democratic Man**

Plato presents the opinion that the constitutions reflect kinds of soul (*Resp.* 445d). What other way can previous mentioned characteristics get into the *polis*, if not through man? Harrison realizes it when he points out interesting connection between equality and the absence of knowledge: „Modelling the state on an individual, he tries to show up the absurdity of treating every person's opinions equally by considering how absurd it would be if someone were to hold that every one of his own desires and beliefs were to be treated equally, that is considered to be equally good and given equal rights. But, if there is knowledge, all opinions are not of equal value; hence adopting the views of the majority is not the right way to make decisions,“ (Harrison 2001, 28-29). Plato bases the character of democratic man on his impossibility to distinguish unnecessary and necessary appetites (*Resp.* 558e-559d). Democratic man applies principles of equality on his appetites, while he considers them to be equal; therefore, they are equally worth to be fulfilled.

Democratic man as well as the state is unable to distinguish good and beneficial from bad and unbeneficial. Both miss the criteria on differentiation

between them so that the state's selection is based on lot and the individual fulfils all of his appetites. But this way of existence comes to the end. Man cannot live way of life in which he ignores necessary i. e. existential needs. The same evil for society is democracy. Plato sees in it seeds of illness, destruction and termination of society. This society as well as man is very tolerant because any value, group of people or laws does not prevail.

Equality affects also the laws therefore Plato talks about democracy as about anarchy: "And the freedom from all compulsion to hold office in such a city, even if you are qualified, or again, to submit to rule, unless you please, (...) and again, the liberty, in defiance of any law that forbids you, to hold office and sit on juries none the less, if it occurs to you to do so," (*Resp.* 557e). The result is ignoring of the laws and decisions of the court. People sentenced to death or exile walks freely (*Resp.* 558a). People themselves make decisions about what is acceptable for them or what is not, their choices are individual, not universal, because everyone has the right to choose. Democracy is the synonym of freedom and every restriction, even the one supported the city, is considered to be evil. The basic good for democracy is freedom that makes equal every law and gives people freedom to make decision which law they are going to abide.

Equality in each sphere makes unity, which is crucial aspect of running the society, impossible. Annas emphasizes: „In a democracy the breakdown of unity is complete; there is not only no universally recognize common good, but no universally respected common government,“ (Annas 1981, 299). In the context of Plato's philosophy the unity is the synonym of justice and good. If the city is not unified, then it is not possible to achieve anything, because people cannot unite (*Resp.* 351d-352d). Democracy stresses the individual who makes decisions about submitting the law or holding office by himself or which appetites to fulfil and that cause individualization of the society. Human criteria are created by individual decisions and it is not possible to make them universal. Saxonhouse presents similar opinion and writes: „The democratic regime exalts the idion, that which separates, makes us distinct from the others; and the democracy of Book 8 has the openness to incorporate all those distinctions, to allow for what is our own, and not to demand the sharing qualities, place, friends. Democracy here is the private regime in which

we act as individuals, not as parts of common enterprise," (Saxonhouse 1998, 278). Saxonhouse clarifies the reason why democracy cannot progress and achieve perfection, justice or good. Democracy is fragmented society which is unable to unify and secure the cessation of troubles and happiness (as it is in the case of the best form – *Resp.* 473d-e).

In democracy equality spreads and as Plato says equal and unequal become equal. Hitz writes about spreading equality: „they have pursued „liberty“ to the point of denying the most basic kinds of authority – the authority of age, wisdom, and most memorably, species (562e-563c)“ (Hitz 2010, 117). Democracy makes equal father and child, foreign and citizen, teacher and student, olds and youngs, merchant and slaver, man and woman. Equality eliminates respect which means that people with coming of freedom and equality start to fear. Behaviour is not regulated by laws when people decide to ignore them, or by the authorities because they are absent in democracy. After all Plato himself says that people condemned to death or exile avoid their punishments. The negative aspect of democracy – equality, which is not explicitly named, is the fear. Plato satirizes arithmetical equality to that point that he speaks about higher status of animals: “how much freer the very beasts subject to men are in such a city than elsewhere. The dogs literally verify the adage and ‘like their mistresses become.’ And likewise the horses and asses are wont to hold on their way with the utmost freedom and dignity, bumping into everyone who meets them and who does not step aside...” (*Resp.* 563c). If animals can bump into people without consequences, how do people behave in relation to themselves, if man is able to act worse than animal? Plato speaking about equalization of animals points out the absurdity of the requirement of democracy for arithmetical equality. All people cannot be equalized with respect to hierarchy in soul, predisposition or their social roles. All of these aspects of inequality are beneficial for society.

### **Rule of τεχνίτης**

Robert Dahl in his book *On democracy* writes: “The claim that government should be turned over to experts deeply committed to rule for the general good and superior to others in their knowledge of the means to achieve it – Guardians, as Plato called them – has always been the major rival of democratic ideas,” (Dahl,

1998, 69). Aspect that disrupts conception of democratic equality according to Plato is the requirement of the rule of experts. Plato understands political skills as *technai*. Other example of *techne* can be knowledge and skills of physician, people search for an expert on health when they are ill and when they are going to decide about the polis they ought to search for expert on the polis.

The proposition – ruling is *techne* - in the meaning that it can be learned leads to the conclusion that it has some experts; hence, everybody cannot learn it. Therefore, Plato refuses democracy as the constitution which can be ruled by anyone. Wolff sums it up: „If ruling is a skill, and a skill that can only be attained by the few, then democracy seems plainly absurd or irrational,“ (Wolff 2006, 75). Democracy is irrational system because experts do not make decisions about the polis based on knowledge but common people whose decisions are based on irrational impulses (feelings, needs) make them. Absurdity of democracy is based on arithmetical equality because it is not ruled by people who are experts in *politike techne*.

Roberts points out the fact that this idea appears already in Plato's early dialogues: „These certainly include the underlying premise of both early and late Platonic dialogue that most people are ignorant and have incorrect perceptions about right and wrong,“ ((Roberts 1994, 73). Robert's opinion is supported by dialogue *Crito* set before *Republic*. Socrates disproves Crito's argument that Socrates should escape from the prison and avoid death penalty because of opinion of people (people could reproach Crito that he could save Socrates but he didn't do that). Socrates clarified him that he should not take opinion of people – all people into consideration, but opinion of wise – experts. Socrates uses analogy of physical health when people search for physician or trainer and do not concern opinion of common people (*Crito* 46b-48a). In this part Socrates asks: “Well then; if he disobeys the one man and disregards his opinion and his praise, but regards words of the many who have no special knowledge, will he not come to harm?” (*Crito* 47c). Socrates describes coming of injustice as coming of unhappiness, and it comes when people do not take opinion of experts into consideration. If we want to attain only the polis in which people live happily and rulers take care of them and do not them an injustice, non-experts cannot rule because they are a sign of coming evil into city.

Subsequently, Plato continues this thought in *Republic* in the context of epistemology, which various authors describe as elitist – only the chosen group can attain true knowledge. Santas sums it up: „Plato has worked up a potent combination of (1) too sparsely distributed high intelligence, (2) too high a standard of knowledge for ruling, and (3) this knowledge as the basis for governing,“ (Santas 2010, 167). Only small group of people can attain knowledge necessarily to rule; therefore, the rest of citizens should not rule. Their decisions are not based on rational thinking, but they are stimulated by feelings or desires – irrational stimuli. This kind of people is evil for the *polis*. Plato mentions it in *Republic*, when he refers to lowest class – producers to the rabble: “And do you not find this too in your city and a domination there of the desires in the multitude and the rabble by the desires and the wisdom that dwell in the minority of the better?” (*Resp.* 431d). In this part Plato divides citizens into rabble and better – uneducated workers and educated philosopher. In other part of *Republic* Plato says: “that neither could men who are uneducated and inexperienced in truth ever adequately preside over a state“ (*Resp.* 519b-c). It supports the idea that the most of people are incompetent to rule because they can harm the city, its citizens and themselves.

In favour of argument that ruling is *techne*; therefore, it should be performed only by experts Plato uses analogy of ship (*Resp.* 488a)<sup>11</sup> in which he creates the parallel between the shipmaster and the philosopher in the state. The shipmaster is distinguished by height and strength, he has the knowledge of navigation but he is slightly deaf and of similarly impaired vision; therefore, sailors call him: „star-gazer, an idle babbling, a useless fellow“ (488e-489a).

The sailors hold the view that they could do position of the shipmaster better. They have never learned the art; therefore, they present the idea that the art cannot be taught at all. In their belief they try to persuade or force the shipmaster to pass helm on them. But they do not realize knowledge necessarily to this art – the shipmaster „must give his attention to the time of the year, the seasons, the sky, the winds, the stars“ (*Resp.* 488d). Therefore, when they gain the rule over the ship, they drink and

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<sup>11</sup> This analogy appears even in Theognis' work (667-682) who uses the symbolism of ship as the *polis* that moves towards ruin because educated ship captain is unseated by uneducated sailors. See Porubjak 2010, 111-118.

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feast – enjoy everything instead of assume the position of the shipmaster in the meaning of his obligation to the ship. Plato sums up this analogy in this way: According to sailors the shipmaster is useless as well as according to citizens is useless the philosopher. How could the ship float if the sailors take place of shipmaster? Who determines its goal? The sailors who enjoy everything on the ship but do not care about anything else? “Hence, and under these conditions, we cannot expect that the noblest pursuit should be highly esteemed by those whose way of life is quite the contrary. But far the greatest and chief disparagement of philosophy is brought upon it by the pretenders to that way of life, those whom you had in mind when you affirmed that the accuser of philosophy says that the majority of her followers are rascals and the better sort useless,” (*Resp.* 489c-d). Furthermore, Plato continues the idea that the ill person searches for a physician– person with *techne* to advise him. Not vice versa, a physician does not look for the patients. Therefore, nor the shipmaster neither the ruler beg their subjects for ruling. Wolff writes: „in other words, you would want to consult someone who had been specially trained to do the job. The last thing you would do is assemble a crowd, and ask them to vote on the correct remedy,” (Wolff 2006, 74). Afterwards he emphasizes that the health of the city is not less important than the health of individual. Therefore, political decisions require review and skill and it is necessary to leave them to the experts. In dialogue *Statesman* Plato describes what happens to the ship analogically to the *polis* when it is ruled by uneducated: “Many, to be sure, like ships that founder at sea, are destroyed, have been destroyed, and will be destroyed hereafter, through the worthlessness of their captains and crews who have the greatest ignorance of the greatest things, men who have no knowledge of statesmanship, but think they have in every respect most perfect knowledge of this above all other sciences“ (*Polit.* 302a-b). Uneducated bring to ruin the ship as well as the state; therefore, Plato strictly refuses arithmetical equality and accept geometrical that restrict political rights of citizens.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Analogy with ship can be found in Rawls’ work who writes: „The passengers of a ship are willing to let the captain steer the course, since they believe that he is more knowledgeable and wishes to arrive safely as much as they do,” (Rawls 1999, 233). Subsequently, he emphasizes that state is similar to ship at sea therefore plural

## Conclusion

Plato in *Republic* presents on the one hand defence of geometrical equality and on the other hand critique of arithmetical equality. Plato seems to be the defender of proportional equality between people which means the equality reflecting differences between people.

The position in favour of geometrical equality is defended by different human predispositions that are in hierarchical relationship and cannot be equalized without deterioration of the city or its citizens. In the context of different natures there are emphasized different predispositions that can get into perfection only by people they belong to. The idea of predispositions introduces *politike technē* or in other words idea that only experts (τεχνίτης) can rule because that is the only way how to achieve happiness and justice for people as well as the society.

Plato's position against democracy is obvious; he cannot accept it because of its basic idea – arithmetical equality. We can create hypothesis what position would Plato present if democracy will be characterized by proportional equality between people – wiser people could have more significant vote than the others<sup>13</sup>. The fact is that Plato cannot accept democracy with absolute equality from various reasons.

The first mentioned argument against equality is based on inequality by the nature. People are not equal by the nature because each of them has different skills, abilities, talents. Plato thinks in spheres of ruling, guarding and producing. One man has ability to do some profession; therefore, he should devote to it. He cannot achieve perfection in other profession so it is consequent that he has to do his own task connected to his predisposition. Subsequently, in this context it is important to emphasize treat of πολυπραγμονέω<sup>14</sup> or changing the job.

Critique of arithmetical equality is based on the understanding of *cosmos* as the model for human behaviour, while *cosmos* – the nature makes people unequal. People were born with various predispositions so that we cannot treat them equally.

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voting may be perfectly just (Rawls 1999, 233). Plato's geometrical inequality influence also authors of later periods.

<sup>13</sup> We meet this idea in philosophy of J. S. Mill (2009)

<sup>14</sup> to be busy about many things



Plato refuses the equality of people to that level that he speaks about equality of animals which seems to him absurd just as equality between people. Therefore, *cosmos* as the model makes people unequal; Plato does not see the need to balance the inequalities as it could be seen in philosophy of other authors<sup>15</sup>. It is natural to adapt to this form of inequality and that is the reason why he accepts geometrical equality. Everyone gains what he deserves according to *cosmos*.

The basic problem of equality still remains problem of incompetent majority that despite of incompetency make decisions about the state and harms the state as well as its citizens.

Mentioned Plato's arguments connected to inequality between people by nature, their various abilities or talents, incompetency of majority can be found in inegalitarian theories. But references to Plato's arguments are also present in egalitarian theories. These authors point out Plato's ideas in context of gender equality or equality of opportunity. Plato is a kind of ambivalent author and we can find the seeds of defence or critique of equality in his philosophy.

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**B.U.**

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<sup>15</sup> As an example can serve J. J. Rousseau (2010).

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