Plato's Counsel on Education

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Plato's dialogues can be read as a carefully staged exhibition and investigation of *paideia*, education in the broadest sense, including all that affects the formation of character and mind. The twentieth century textbook Plato—the Plato of the Myth of the Cave and the Divided Line, the ascent to the Good through Forms and Ideas—is but one of his elusive multiple authorial personae, each taking a different perspective on his investigations. As its focused problems differ, each Platonic dialogue exhibits a somewhat different model for learning; each adds a distinctive dimension to Plato's fully considered counsel for education. Setting aside the important difficult questions about the chronological sequence in which the dialogues were written and revised, we can trace the argumentative rationale of Plato's fully considered views on *paideia*, on who should be educated by whom for what, on the stages and presuppositions of different kinds of learning.[1] Those views are inextricably connected

[1] Although I believe we don't know, and won't ever know the actual sequence in which Plato wrote the dialogues, I shall, for the sake of convenience, refer to the conventionally accepted ordering of early, middle and late dialogues. I am both ill-equipped and dis-inclined to discuss the learned detailed controversies about the chronological order in which the dialogues might have been written. As a master stylist, Plato can vary his style to suit his theme. Arguments from one dialogue referring to another seems an unreliable indication of chronology. Even Plato and/or his editors might—as we all do—insert a later thought/discovery into the later editions of earlier works. Nor are arguments based on Socrates' age in any given dialogue provide convincing clues to the chronology of composition: his age is fixed to suit the thematic motif of each dialogue.

Although each of the Platonic dialogues is self-contained, with a distinctive central focus, most have indirect implications for the concerns that are at the forefront of other dialogues. For instance, though epistemological questions—e.g. what distinguishes knowledge from opinion?—are not at the forefront of the *Lysis*, *Laches* or the *Symposium*, those dialogues show how Socrates tries to move from opinion to knowledge: they provide examples of the investigations into the difference between the two that are the focus of the *Theaetetus*. Similarly, though the *Timaeus* appears to echo the *Republic*, the project of constructing a well-ordered cosmos, forming a well-ordered *politeia* and achieving a harmonious soul—inform one another. These three projects shed light on one another, as different species of the same genus: constructing a complex well-ordered system—be it a cos-

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with his views about the structure of the soul, about the virtues and the politeia that can sustain a good life; and about cosmology and metaphysics.

Plato's Plot

The early Socratic dialogues raise formidable problems about how we learn and about what constrains our ability to learn. Among other things, they exhibit the beginning—and the limitations—of inquiry, of learning and not-teaching. Aside from the kind of mimetic learning that forms the larger part of a person's habits of speech and action, most learning begins with received opinions and practice: a storehouse of a culturally solidified way of life, with commonplace distinctions and classifications, with an evaluatively charged vocabulary. By a process of encompassing critical reflection, inquiry attempts to move to a reasoned closure, one that ideally corrects as well as explains belief and practice.[2] But the early maieu-

[2] Sometimes, but not always, correction involves revolutionary change. The rhetoric of such transformations is, as no one knows better than Plato, extremely complex. On the one hand, the 'reformer' must speak with the vulgar: he'd lose all hope of persuasion if he did not. On the other hand, he has a radically different conception of 'what is to be done.' And, as if this ambiguity were not burden enough, a *logos*-ridden, *agathos*-ridden philosopher like Plato also undertakes to *explain* the obscure object of all

mos, a polis or a soul—whose distinctive "formally idealized" parts are to function in mutual harmony.

Be all that as it may, the sequence of the dialogues can nevertheless be rationally reconstructed as forming a train of thought, a staged investigation, with each phase raising questions and problems that press the inquiry forward. Independently of whether it is chronologically correct, the (accepted conventional sequence of) early, middle and late dialogues can be read as forming a single extended dialogue. The Platonic corpus, so ordered, exhibits the unfolding of a train of thought. Such a reading brackets, at least for the time being, questions about consistency. (Parallel: In principle, we could press questions of consistency on each individual dialogue, but in fact each dialogue is best read as exhibiting a train of thought, one thing leading to another.) I shall consider the dialogues as forming a continuous 'argument' about what Platonic paideia involves: its structure, its social and political ramifications, its ontological presuppositions. Each stage of that sequence plays a crucial role in the unfolding of the whole; each adds a dimension to Plato's complex, considered counsel on education. It may well be—I have no opinion on the matter—that an investigation of the argumentative rationale of Plato's views on mathematics or pleasure or the Good might arrange the dialogues in a different sequence.

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tic or elenchic dialogues, each apparently set to answer a specific definitional question ('what is—(courage, piety?)') are manifestly incomplete. Taken in isolation, they do not issue in adequate definitions, both because the virtues are interdependent; and because all well-reasoned definitions are interdependent. As the epistemological triad of the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* show, definitions ramify to form a complex structured system.

The middle transitional dialogues distinguish Socrates' quest for knowledge from the performances of the sophists and the 'teachings' of the poets. They lead directly to the *Republic*, an investigation of the educative role that the *nomoi* of a polis—its ethos and institutions—play in forming the pre-reflective opinions and habits upon which all inquiry rests. Because opinion is embedded and expressed in social practices and political institutions, the task of the wise educator has political ramifications. Since a sound *politeia* is the central condition for a sound education, Plato turns to the education of rulers who structure the life of the polis ... and of the philosophers on whose wisdom they depend. Platonic rulers are to be guided by a concern for what is true as well as by what seems good and desirable: their education raises vexed practical and philosophic questions about the relation between civic and philosophic education. In what sense, if at all, does a sound civic life depend on philosophic inquiry ... conducted by whom, to what effect?

The 'late' dialogues articulate the ontology that supports the possibility of well-formed knowledge and action-from-knowledge. Reasonably, then, the late dialogues exhibit and elaborate another technique of inquiry: the discovery/construction of a taxonomic schema that locates the genus and differentia of basic classifications within a structured schematic whole. Rather than addressing 'What is a sophist/pleasure/statesman?' questions seriatim, apparently independently of one another, the later dialogues exemplify a systematically structured investigation into such questions.[3] All the

[3] The political motifs of *The Republic* move the investigation towards the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. The ontological motifs lead to the problems of the *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides*, which in turn lead the discussion to the *Sophist*, and *Statesman*. On one reading, the *Timaeus* can be set with the *Republic* as an account of the construction of a unified harmonious system; on another, it can be read as a cosmological investigation of problems set by the epistemological/methodological trilogy. Similarly, the *Philebus* can

desire. In one way, the deflection of proper desire 'just happens.' But in another, it must be comprehensible: for it were not, the world would be wayward, not properly a cosmos at all. *Republic* Books 8 and 9 testify to Plato's resolutely undertaking to explain both psychological and political waywardness.

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maieutic practices and methods of analysis that are dramatically portrayed in the various phases of the Platonic corpus remain in place within Plato's fully considered counsel on *paideia*.

Plato's Socrates

Plato designed the early dialogues to show Socrates innocent of the charge of impiety and of corrupting the young. The manifest topics of those dialogues—the virtues that are central to Athenian civic life—circle about the issues that would best reveal whether Socrates deflected his companions from the values and gods of Athens. The drama of the dialogues—Socrates' conduct in discussing these virtues—shows that he did not overtly introduce new, unorthodox views, indeed that he didn't introduce views at all. Socrates' procedure in shared inquiry—and there is no other kind—is informal. Because it is closely fitted to the experience, temperament and opinions of his companions, it cannot be neatly formulated as a set of rules.[4] (Consider how the temperaments of Thrasymachus and Theaetetus, Laches and Nicias, Crito and Euthyphro, Protagoras

[4] Because they are, as best I can judge, irrelevant to Plato's considered views on education, I propose to ignore the contemporary discussions about the proper formulation and significance of the *elenchus*. Recent commentators have attempted to formulate a relatively formal rule for elenchic inquiry; they've also argued about whether positive conclusions can be drawn from elenchic discussions. See Gregory Vlastos' characterization: 'a thesis is refused when, and only when, its negation in derived from the answerer's own beliefs. Respondents must undertake to say only what [they believe] that they believe.' Gregory Vlastos, 'Elenchus and Mathematics,' *American Journal of Philology*, 1988, esp. fns. 14, 19, 30. Vlastos thinks that—at least in the *Gorgias*—the elenchus can reach positive ethical conclusions. ('The Socratic Elenchus,' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1983.) Also see Richard Robinson, S. Marc Cohen and Gerasimos Santas in Gregory Vlastos, ed., *The Philosophy of Socrates* (New York, 1971); and Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, (Oxford, 1977), pp. 63ff.); Hugh Benson, 'The Problem of the Elenchus Reconsidered,' A*ncient Philosophy*, 1987 and 'The Priority of Definition and the Socratic *Elenchos*,' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1990. Many of these essays are reprinted in William Prior, (ed.) *Socrates* vols 1–4 (Routledge, 1996).

To be perfectly frank, I think entirely too much has been made of this matter. Beyond his stricture that contradictions are an indication of confu-

be read as an ontological investigation of the relation between the indeterminate *apeiron* and logos-defined determinateness, or as an ethical investigation of the relation between Intelligence and pleasure in the good life.

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and Glaucon affect the unfolding of 'their discussions with Socrates.)[5]

While the manifest focus of the dialogues is ethical, their latent focus is logical and methodological: they are dramatic exhibitions, enactments of Socrates' attempts to develop—to formulate and analyze—the methods/techniques of sound reasoning. In a way, they present a dramatic performance of the origins of logic. Whether the content and method of these early dialogues reveal a Socrates whose tentative/provisional opinions, whose relentless cross-questioning and ironic unmasking presented a genuine threat to Athens' conception of itself is a dark question. A passionate friend of shared inquiry, ready to talk about anything and everything with all-comers may indeed have been an, 'enemy to Athens', self-conception and self-presentation.[6]

[5] See 'Character, Mind and Politics: The Socratic Case,' in *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art* Jim Hopkins and Anthony Savile (eds) (Blackwell, 1992).

[6] Students in an advanced seminar on Greek philosophy (given in the People's Republic of China in 1981 and in the United States in 1996) were asked to participate in a mock-trial of Socrates, using only the early dialogues as evidence in the prosecution and defense. Since the Chinese judicial system was, in 1981, dramatically different from that of Athens or the States, it was difficult to get the students to carry out the assignment. But when they did manage it, their votes replicated those of the Athenian tribunal: they held Socrates guilty by a close margin of a thread-bare majority. The American undergraduates were asked to make two judgments, first assuming themselves to be Athenians, and secondly in their own persons. As Athenians, they condemned Socrates by a slender majority; as Americans, they exonerated him by a strong majority.

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sion or error, Socrates would not attempt to formulate a rule for the argument. Properly understood, the *elenchus* reveals tensions and ambiguities among a person's beliefs and practices. It assumes that a person's budget of opinions and practices should form a consistent system; and that contradictions indicate ambiguity, confusion or error. Such apparent conflicts can in principle be reconciled by a new interpretation of commonplace opinions. Socratic questioning is contextual, open-ended, hospitable to tentative provisional positive conclusions ... that may well be over-thrown in the next turn of the discussion. His discussions exhibit an early ancestral version of Rawls' method of reflective equilibrium, with a focus on its first steps, those intended to show that there is a discrepancy between a person's specific considered judgments and the general principles (or definitions) he takes themselves to believe. The actual work of adjustment and adjudication goes beyond (what has commonly be identified as) the *elenchus*. It is is detailed, content-and context-bound. Unlike Aristotelian logic, the *elenchus* and the method of reflective equilibrium are heuristic guides, rather than rules for sound reasoning.

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But does the Plato of *The Republic* and the early maieutic dialogues think that (—as Aristotle was later to put it—) all men by nature desire to know, that they can tolerate an open-ended examination of received pieties? Plato seems of two minds about this matter. On the one hand, the Socrates of the early dialogues implies that every man strives for what is good; and surely he thinks knowledge is among those goods, if anything is. He is ready for unbridled inquiry with all-comers. And yet few of his companions are ready to follow him. By *The Republic*, fundamental philosophic inquiry is reserved for a few well-tested, well-formed few. On the one hand, most of the participants in these early dialogues are like the prisoners in the Cave; they resist seeing things as they are. At best—and it is an improvement—they become confused and dimly see that they did not know what they thought they knew. Their heads must be forcibly turned, they must be dragged towards the light of truth. On the other hand, the ascent up the Divided Line, the movement from *phantasia* to opinion, from opinion to systematic reasoning and finally to insight is internally impelled by erotically charged reflection. In contrast to the Cave, the Divided Line represents inquiry as a natural unforced progression, moved by a desire for an encompassing teleologically ordered explanatory system that can reconcile the apparent contradictions of unexamined opinion.

Plato seems equally evasive about the qualifications for wise rule. On the one hand, wise rulers must have unfettered minds, capable of seeing and internalizing the multiple perspectives that must be harmonized in the polity. On the other hand, they should not be weathervanes shifting with the prevailing winds of public opinion: they must be firmly and properly directed, prepared to form rather than to express opinion. They must be ideologically correct. A theory of mind stands behind these apparent dilemmas. Knowledge does not consist of isolated items of information or insight. On the one hand, mind and character—beliefs and desires—are thoroughly fused; their proper development is inseparable. An opinion/belief is neither a psychological event nor a statement (to be put) in propositional form, to be evaluated as true or false, validly or invalidly inferred. Its meaning and evaluation rests in a person's—indeed in a society's—systematically ordered aims and commitments. As *Republic* 2 would have it, the significance and propriety of judgments about reliefs on the Parthenon (or a decision to build the Long Walls) are measured by their service to civic thriving. In this mode, Socrates and Plato can be read as psychological/linguistic functionalists ... with an added ideological dimension. On the other hand, Plato presents Socrates as holding that the mind's best insights carry it beyond its civic functions,

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indeed beyond the physical world, beyond its own embodiment. In this mode, Plato represents Socrates as a proto-neo-Platonist. Whether or not he deliberately intended to do so, Plato shows the Socrates of the early dialogues to be less in command of the movement of the elenchus—the critical investigation of the larger, systematic consistency of a belief—than recent commentators suggest. It is, of course, Plato rather than Socrates who is in command of the development of the dialogue, in command of the representation of Socrates at work.

After the introductory dramatic performances that exhibit some of the participants' pre-reflective assumptions and practices, Socrates engages his companions in a critical examination of the commonplaces they offer as definitions of central civic virtues, piety, courage, friendship. The participants typically begin with a set of core examples. Since these are merely examples, they manifestly do not qualify as definitions. But they remain as (corrigible and re-interpretable) test cases for further proposals. Other definitions are offered: some are—in the light of the rest of the interlocutor's opinions—shown to be too broad or too narrow. The evaluative implications of others do not accord with the views of the (presumptively) wise or with deeply entrenched practices of praise and blame. The critical examination of these opinions exhibits—and attempts to articulate—relatively formal criteria for sound definitions. So, for instance: a definition of justice, courage or friendship should characterize all and only those instances that exemplify it. The definition should not be so narrow as to exclude what seems a clear example, nor should it be so broad as to include instances that seem (by common opinion) to lie outside its scope. And above all, it should retain the evaluative connotations of the concept. For instance: courage and justice are, as virtues, *kalos k'agathos*, shiningly admirable and good. A proposed characterization that permits harmful or undesirable actions to qualify as genuinely courageous or just must therefore on that account be defective. The early dialogues do not issue in definitions; but the reader (though rarely the participants) may have learned-from examples!—something about how to test candidates for an adequate definition.

The Socratic model of learning and inquiry rests on a set of guiding presuppositions:

(1) Whether he realizes it or not, every reasonable person intends his beliefs and desires to form a consistent system. Because we all naturally and unselfconsciously strive for our good, truth is the obscure object of every belief, and what seems good—conducive to a well-lived, admirable life—is the obscure object of every desire.

(2) An individual's entrenched habits of thought and action are as

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much—and perhaps more—revealing expressions of his opinions and desires as what he sincerely reports himself to believe.

(3) Opinions and desires are not idiosyncratic: even when they are mistaken or express constitutional and temperamental quirks, they reveal and express the practices and assumptions of a culture and society.

(4) Although it is often difficult to diagnose the sources of intellectual disagreement, it is always a sign of confusion, bias or error. In principle, the fundamental beliefs of reasonable people should coincide.

As Plato represented them, Socrates' discussions exposed inconsistencies and ambiguities within his companions' budget of beliefs and desires. Since the participants in the discussions express the range of socially accepted commonplaces, those discussions also reveal implicit tensions within their culture. The success of such an inquiry depends on participants sincerely saying what they think, as concisely and clearly as they can; they are to avoid long-winded, evasive speeches; they must answer difficult questions honestly and be willing to follow the argument where it leads. (But an astute reader should see that it is the puppeteer Plato, working through Socrates, who leads the argument). The inquiry is intended to issue in increasingly general, more encompassing, systematically unified and justified opinions. Socrates knows how to bring inconsistencies to light, often to the discomfiture of his partners in discussion. But while he can hint at the direction of a resolution, he cannot confidently proclaim it ... without undertaking a similar systematic investigation of the standing of each proposed solution, seriatim. As he rightly insists, he is too ignorant to teach anyone anything. There is no short-cut solution to the problems of the apparent circularity of Socratic inquiry: in a sense every inquirer knows, and yet does not know, the object of his inquiry. If he doesn't know what he's trying to discover, he won't be able to evaluate proposed answers; if he does know, it seems he does not need to inquire.[7] For all of that, Plato's Socrates is not a philosophic sceptic: he is not so foolish as to announce a self-refuting general thesis. He means what he says:

[7] You can't look for what you don't know and don't need to look for what you know.' I believe that Diotima's speech (201E–204C). Diotima posits a *daimon*—an intermediatry between the divine and the human, between knowledge and ignorance—that combines contraries and that strives for what is noble and beautiful. See C. D. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings* (Princeton, 1988); Alexander Nehamas, 'Socrates as a Teacher,' *Essays in the Philosophy of Socrates* Hugh Benson (ed.) (Oxford, 1992) and *Plato's Meno*, A. Sesonske and Noel Fleming (eds) (Wadsworth, 1965), and William Prior (ed.) *Socrates* vols 1–4, (Routledge, 1996).

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if he is too ignorant to teach anyone anything, he is certainly not about to expound a general doctrine, and certainly not one as blatantly self-defeating as dogmatic scepticism. Quite on the contrary, he resolutely commits himself to the continuity of inquiry. Having, in the *Meno* (84 ff.), come perilously close to scepticism in formulating the paradox of inquiry, he brings the discussion to a proposed 'solution:' if the soul were immortal, then it might—even in its present embodied finite condition—be able to recover or recollect what it once knew. It would then in one sense know, and in another not know, what it seeks. But Socrates is careful not to offer this solution as something he himself knows or can demonstrate. There is no more eloquent credo for the continuity of inquiry than Socrates' response to his dilemma: 'I am not altogether confident of all of this [i.e. that the soul can be ignorant of what it seeks, yet be a critically able to recognize it]. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think we think we ought to inquire into what we don't know than if we give way to the idle notion that there is no knowledge, and no point in trying to discover what we do not yet know—for this, I am ready to fight as best I can in word and deed.' (*Meno* 86 B–C). His resolve is his resolution to the (alleged) paradox of inquiry. That resolve leads Plato to attempt to articulate a theory of oppositions/contraries—between morality and immortality, ignorance and knowledge, ugly and beautiful, bad and good—that is prefigured in Diotima's lyrical *mythos* of *daimones* as messengers between the divine (or souls of the Golden Age) and an individual mind. The details of Plato's view of contraries is, I believe, one of the preoccupations of the post-*Parmenidean* dialogues: the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.

The consequences of this phase of Plato's account of education indicate inquiry to be an unending task, one that is more akin to Peirce's fallibilism than it is to Descartes' analytic method. Education prepares a person for the patient reflective work of bringing opinions and practices into a consistent, well-reasoned whole. Because the process engages character traits and as well as habits of mind,—because Plato links the two at their deepest level—the formation of character and of opinion are co-ordinate.[8] The early dialogues appear to counsel educators to engage every participant individually in the active work of inquiry: to test (what they think) they believe, to extend the scope of those beliefs by elucidating their inter-connections, and to adjudicate conflicts between opinions and practice. This is an excruciatingly painful and risky enterprise. Because it involves the entire scope of an individual's habits and practices, because it can set him at odds with his culture

[8] See 'Character, Mind and Politics: the Socratic Case,' op. cit.

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and society, it can engender confusion and despair. Socrates' partners in discussion must really want to know the truth about something, or at least to sort out what seems confused or contradictory.[9] Since the Socratic figure challenges and disturbs their unwarranted confidence in unexamined opinion about matters of fundamental importance, he must be seen as trustworthy, having their real interests at heart. The relation between inquiring companions is dominantly erotic, subdominantly eristic. The constructive discovery/recovery of truth and the destruction/unmasking of empty pieties go hand in hand.

Plato's Reflections on Socratic Inquiry

With examples of Socratic inquiry at hand, Plato turns his attention to its philosophical implications and presuppositions. *The Meno*, *Symposium*, *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* respond to the charges that Socrates is a masked and evasive sophist, and a dangerous one at that. These dialogues begin to formulate the general philosophical views that are implicit in Socrates' attempt to discover truths by patient cross-questioning, his giving tradition and inspiration voice ... without according them ultimate or automatic authority.

Socrates' discussions might seem to endorse Protagoras' view that man is the measure of all things. Indeed he might seem to be a Protagorean ... but one who, unlike Protagoras himself, runs the further risk of leaving his companions shaken in their beliefs without finding sensible guidelines for practical life, and so worse off—in their own terms—than when he found them. Plato must show that Socratic inquiry moves towards, and is guided by what is true, that Socratic irony is not merely a tendentious and destructive mask intended to expose the emptiness or confusion of common opinion. These transitional dialogues differentiate inquiry from sophistry, systematically well-grounded knowledge from traditional platitudes or ad hoc opinion. Sophists and orators attempt to bring their audience (what passes for) power, elegance and success. Socrates questions the measures of success: he distrusts fame, pleasure and political power, unless they are directed towards achieving The Real Good.

[9] Of course many of Socrates' interlocutors—Thrasymachus for example—did not want to pursue the truth. Did they nevertheless learn something? On the one hand, it seems they may have become worse, more entrenched in their eristic ways, through their encounter with Socrates. On the other hand, the very fact that they became angry suggests that Socrates had affected them, disturbed their confidence in their wayward views. Presumably Plato envisages the reader as the ultimate audience of Socrates' inquiries.

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Education in The Republic

The beginning of inquiry is culturally specific, but its aim goes beyond the contingencies of time and place. The movement from the particular towards the universal and necessary is, at least for the guardians, rulers and philosophers presented in *The Republic*, a carefully staged affair. The starting point of that education forms a common culture shared by all members of the polity: 'children's pastimes,' myths, music, gymnastics, and public art, the statues and sculptures in the city and on the temples. As it is projected in *The Republic*, the program of education is strict and strictly enforced against novelty. (423–4) The point of earliest education is 'to instill a spirit of order and reverence for law.' Needless to say, myths and public art are to present admirable figures of gods and men for imitation. Waywardness and license are not to be represented at all. Even when they are shown to come to a bad end, they capture the imagination; and what captures the imagination, sets the beginnings of imitation. Music must be simple, calm, well-proportioned, designed to promote measure and harmony in the soul. (*Republic* 3, 398–403) Similarly, gymnastic training should be designed to strengthen a healthful well-balanced body, capable of ascetic endurance. (*Republic* 3. 409–411) Beyond the education common to all, that of the future ruler-guardians continues to arithmetic, plane and solid geometry, astronomy, harmonic theory. (*Republic* 7,. 521–537). Finally, a few steadfast and trustworthy inquirers, men and women with philosophic ability and temperament begin the formal study of dialectic.

What do each of these studies—taken individually and cumulatively—contribute to individual and civic thriving? Arithmetic goes far beyond the kind of practical calculation used in the crafts, trade and farming. (524D–526C) The habits of mind it develops set the stage for rational planning, for seeing beyond the confusions and contradictions of appearances to their true proportion and measure. In coming to understand of 'the properties of units and number that can be grasped by pure thought,' future guardians acquire the ability to distinguish a true unity from a conglomerate, a well-formed from an unbalanced proportion. Geometry further develops the ability to abstract from the physical properties of objects, to recognize that they exemplify and are explained by their formal properties. It should not be surprising that Plato thinks that both arithmetic and geometry help 'to bring the soul to consider pure truth;' but it is surprising that, without any explanation, he also says that the Guardians are to study arithmetic and geometry 'with a view to war.' (525–6)

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Like the task of constructing Chinese puzzle boxes, solid geometry adjusts different 'figures' to one another to form a well-ordered whole. Of what use are such studies to a ruler *as ruler*? These are the very abilities exercised in constructing a complex unity composed of distinctive parts. The parallels between constructing a well-formed polis and understanding the construction—the architecture—of a well-ordered cosmos should be obvious. Taken together, the synoptic study of maths evokes the synoptic vision of the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*: the Demiurge structures the cosmos from various geometrical forms, and rulers structure the complex unity of the polis from the various types of souls that constitute it. Both are guided by the Good, as a unifying principle. The generic rectifying ideas of mathematics—*unity*, *harmony*, *proportion*—are ingredients in morality and politics.

Astronomy moves the study of cosmic harmony to a yet more abstract level. When it is properly studied—mathematically rather than by observation—it carries the mind to the intelligibility and beauty of the motions and relations of abstract 'objects': it strengthens the soul's participation in cosmic harmony. The abstract principles of harmony complete and perfect mathematical studies. Beyond legislating the music of childhood and civic festivals, they serve as guidelines for constructing a harmonious city and concordant soul. Of course in a sense children had been studying harmonics—music and music theory—from childhood; and it is an important feature of music that it is *both* sensuous and abstract. But in one sense, children hadn't, strictly speaking, been doing harmonics. Although they had been continuously moving towards such knowledge, awakening it in themselves, they had initially only been absorbing discrete and unconnected bits of partial proto-'knowledge.' Similarly: the earliest introduction of primitive arithmetic and solid geometry typically use visual examples. But when properly taught, they dispose the mind to see the structure of interconnected Forms within physical phenomena, and then to contemplate them as pure Form.

Why should mathematics—largely conceived in all its varieties—play such a crucial role in the education of rulers and philosophers? Why should its increasingly synoptic structure seem central to the construction of a just polity? Consider a speculative tale, a reconstruction of a Platonic train of thought. Suppose that the discovery of the incommensurability of the side and diagonal of a perfect square was initially perceived to threaten the Pythagorean hope that the cosmos exhibits—instantiates—a measured, rational order. Suppose that Theaetetus and Eudoxus discovered a formula—a *logos*—that provides a rational solution to the threat of irrational

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incommensurability. Suppose Plato thought that harmonically sensitive mathematics provides a rational solution to the generic threat of cosmological disorder expressed in mathematical incommensurability. Suppose that he thought that coordinating the different 'parts' or classes of the polity, each with its distinctive temperament and aims, presents a problem directly analogous to that of (apparent) geometric incommensurability. If the distinctive aims and desires of the various classes—characterological temperaments—are fundamentally incommensurable, the dangers of conflict and irrationality may also seem to threaten the possibility of a stable political order. (More about this later.) Suppose that Plato became convinced that harmonically sensitive mathematics holds the key to knowledge of the Good as the principle (*archē*) of cosmic order, and so implicitly the key to the direct connection between mathematics and justice as 'giving each his due.' In this frame of mind, Plato might reasonably assign increasingly abstract, synoptic mathematical studies pride of place in the design of an educational program. An educational program organized around a mathematics synoptically focused on the study of harmonically sensitive proportional formulae might help assuage Plato's fears of political irrationality: it might offer the hope of rationalizing apparent incommensurabilities. Far from recommending mathematical education simply on the grounds that it is useful in implementing public policies—building bridges, constructing effective warships—, Plato is making the more radical claim that it is at the core of deciding *whether* building bridges or warships is a Good Thing.

Of course none of these studies—ranging from 'children's pastimes,' myths and music to the highest and noblest reaches of astronomy—are school 'subjects,' information to be absorbed or rules to be applied; nor are they cordoned off from one another as separate 'fields.' As measures to be instantiated in the ordinary practices of the city, they are designed to form habits of thought-and-action, active dispositions and skills to be acquired as second nature. And they are to be integrated with one another. (531 C–D). These studies combine theory and practice; they are simultaneously abstract and applied; they are intended to form the character and habits of a rational soul. They are selected and structured to enable rulers to instantiate and construct a well-formed *polis* as a harmonious whole composed of properly proportioned interdependent parts, guided by the Good as a Unity-that harmonizes-distinct-parts.

But there are some ideas (those of mathematics and of justice) and some abilities (those involved in recognizing inconsistencies) that cannot, without circularity, be derived from elenchic reflection.

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The education of wise rulers must therefore move towards a vision of the Good, to the ideas and ideals that govern any well-proportioned order. Men and women who have absorbed the mathematical-logical structure of cosmic harmony, and who have the passion and the aptitude for philosophic devotion are introduced to dialectic. (*Republic* 7, 531–540).

But unless we take the whole of *The Republic* to exemplify it, Plato does not offer a description of dialectic, let alone an analysis. Recognizing the inadequacy of the 'early ' elenchic dialogues that address 'What is—(courage, piety, philia)?' questions in isolation, seriatim, philosophically minded citizens and philosophically minded readers are prompted by the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetatus* to turn to the triad of epistemological dialogues. Investigating the relations among the Intelligible Forms, they treat knowledge as an interconnected system of explanation. Future philosopher-rulers acquire the techniques of the method of division: they practice 'cutting at the joints;' they map taxonomies, tracing the proper differentia of such generic classifications as 'pleasure,' 'sophist' and 'statesman.' Eventually, after fifteen years of carefully guided practical experience in coordinating civic life, they move from assumptions and hypotheses to the contemplation of the Good as the unity and order of these systematically connected Forms. Although Plato doesn't actually say this, these studies of Abstract Forms seem all the more perfect—all the more beautiful—because they show how the Good rules the world. The Good is (if we can put it this way) all the more perfectly Good because the abstract Ideas of forms and motion can be used as models for structuring the world ... and the polis. And properly seen, abstract form and motion are all the more perfect because they can also serve as models for well-ordered systems.[10] To be sure Plato prefers eternity and transcendence to change and contingency. But (what we might call) his proto-neo-Platonism allows him to take the immanence of the Good—the activity of instantiating harmony—as an additional mark of its beauty and perfection.

It takes all of this to answer the questions posed in Book I of the *Republic* 'Why be just? Is the just life more flourishing, happier (*eudaimon*) than the licentious or luxurious life?' The fully considered answers show that a sound *paideia* radically transforms common conceptions of 'pleasure,' 'honour' and 'power' as constituents of a *eudaimon* life. Understanding the proportions of cosmic harmony—instantiating them in his own soul—moves a philosopher to attempt to bring it about in the mini-cosmos that is the polity. The conjoined development of mind and character enables philosophi-

[10] I realize this may not sit well with the principles of ranking offered in the *Philebus*. I cannot address, let alone solve that problem in this paper.

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cally-minded rulers to order themselves towards justice. Properly understood, a eudaimon life 'gives each thing its due.' The rulers' education should have equipped them to structure a harmonious polis; and that of the philosophers should have set them to investigate the harmony of the cosmos. Of course the claims of justice sometimes requires them—as it does other citizens—to make sacrifices, tethering the independent exercise of their distinctive skills and temperaments to serve the common good. Consenting to serve the common good—giving priority to the whole of justice rather than to their philosophic inquiry—carries some residual reluctance. Temperamentally, philosophers prefer to contemplate the eternal forms, the order of the cosmos without returning to the messy and sometimes despairing work of ruling. Nevertheless, since they are also temperamentally ruled by reason, they will, for a time, make those sacrifices willingly and wholeheartedly. (More about this later.)

Education for The Republic

Taken as a whole, the *Republic*, with its background in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, appears to have dramatic, revolutionary consequences for education. The education of the rulers is the pivotal fulcrum of all education: they structure social practices and institutions; they regulate and direct culture, they effectively form the opinions, desires and practices of all sectors of the polis. The mentality and character of ordinary folk like Euthyphro, Meno, Lysis, Nicias and Laches—the interlocutors of the early dialogues—express the *ethos* and *nomoi* of their polis. To be sure, they often disagree with one another. Their individual constitutions, experiences, temperaments and abilities—even their family genealogies—affect their habits and perspectives.[11] And significantly, their disagreements reveal the cracks and fissures, the conflicts that indicate—without diagnosing—the malformation of their culture.

[11] Consider Plato's pervasive (and ambiguously ironic) use of genealogical motifs (of parentage and etymology) as a way of tracing significant similarities. *Euthyphro* 2A; *Laches* 178A; *Lysis* 204E; *Euthydemus* 271A–272A; as to origins of names: *Cratylus* 383A–384D; *Theaetetus* 144A–E; *Critias* 107D–108D. Although these motifs are often introduced in the dramatic opening byplay of the dialogues, that byplay expresses the common beliefs and practices that each dialogue explores. The heuristic role of genealogical and etymological motifs as a mode of recognition serves as an image of the deeper 'logical' genealogical exercises of the *Sophist* (217A), the lineage of the taxonomic divisions in the *Statesman* and the Stranger's genealogical story ((*Statesman* 270E ff.).

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While these differences can indicate individual idiosyncracies in constitution and upbringing, the features that are significant in distinguishing responses to Socratic inquiry—and types of education—can be characterized by reference to the general structure of the tri-partite soul. All three parts of the soul—the appetitive, the spirited and the rational—are species of desire active in every soul, each make a distinctive contribution to the vitality of the whole. Differences in their strength and configuration differentiate types of individuals: it marks their primary desires and potentialities as producers, soldier-guardians, or as philosopher-rulers. Ideally, each type requires somewhat different educational discipline to achieve its best potentiality in a justly ordered soul. So, for instance, productive souls focused on pleasure and gain need to acquire a special weight of moderation and temperance; soldier-guardians set for courage must remember what is genuinely worth fearing and hoping at just those times when they might be most inclined to fight for honour; and of course wisdom, as the ability to think 'all things considered,' giving each thing its proper due and measure, is the virtue of philosopher-rulers. (441C–445B).

Any viable, relatively enduring complex polity depends on the contributions of distinctive psychological types, each class marked by its subsidiary aims and functions. Differences in the relative power and configuration of these classes distinguish types of political systems, as they are organized for production and wealth, or for military activity, or for philosophic rule. (434D–441D). Each type of political system projects an educational regimen (they believe) best suited to maintain their priorities. In the ideal state, all three classes—the productive, the soldier-guardians and the philosopher-rulers—are under the guidance of reason. But only the philosophers are directly ruled by rational deliberation: their physical appetites and passions, their desires and energies are specified and directed by reason. Of course production and military strategy also require a good deal of acute rational calculation. But the non-philosophic classes do not set their own ultimate aims, or determine their proper places in the polity. They must willingly consent to listen and to follow philosophic rulers.

Rulers must take all these psychological differences—and the necessity of constructing a just and harmonious unity from apparently incommensurable 'parts'—into account in forming educational policies. The *nomoi* of most polities reflect—and also produce—social and psychological conflicts generated by the differences in the aims of distinctive psychological types and classes. They are likely to be unjust and to produce unbalanced and troubled, unjust citizens. Like the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, ideal rulers must form a

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harmonious whole composed of distinctive parts. But rulers are more limited than Demiurge by their raw material: their task is constrained by the varieties of constitutionally fixed temperaments and mentalities, each with its distinctive aims and perspectives. Besides being an expression of his genetic endowment, a person's mentality—his ambitions, his reaction to authority, his capacity for moderation—is a function of his polity. As Plato describes the decay and fall of political systems in Books 8 and 9 of *The Republic*, an accidental failure in the policy of strictly controlled eugenics would disorder the ideal city, leading it to a timocratic state directed to honour rather than justice; and in a fixed sequence of a continued set of failures of family and civic education, the polity would fall to an oligarchy of wealth, then to the chaos of egalitarian democracy and finally to despotism. (543A–566D) Reading Books 8 and 9, Plato's contemporaries would surely have vivid memories of the psychological and educational differences between oligarchies and democracies. They would be used to hearing, sometimes with admiration and sometimes with fear, about a Spartan timocratic education; and they might reflect on the way that recent Athenian political history affected the trial and condemnation of Socrates.[12] Constrained as they are by their political history and by the genetic endowments of their citizens, even wise rulers with an ideal education might flounder and fail.

In setting the educational agenda for the ideal *politeia*, Plato is prepared to extend matters very far in order to minimize the effects of chance and history on civic harmony. In a way, ensuring a sound education of its citizens—doing everything that will make them as just as possible—is the primary aim of the *politeia* and its *nomoi*. The project of achieving the proper balance of distinctive mentalities leads to nothing less than the eugenic programme of *The Republic*, supported by the myth of civic brotherhood. Population control—a well-formed eugenic reproductive policy—is central to preserving the order of a stable and just polity. Under the guise of a sacred (but actually fixed) 'lottery,' they are to arrange patterns of mating to attempt to retain the purity and to fix the proper numerical ratio among the three classes of (idealized) constitutionally-based psychological types: the 'golden' philosopher-guardians, the 'silver' auxiliary soldier-guardians, and the 'iron rest.' The purity and balance of the classes is the political analogue of justice in the soul: each part having its due measure and strength, its function doubly fixed by the contributions of its specialized nature *and* by its being ruled (over-ruled) by the needs/ends of the whole.

[12] See I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, Boston, 1988.

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Eugenic control is supported by the myth of the brotherhood of the various psychological types, all of them children of Mother Earth. The common acceptance of this myth—with its implication that the eudaimonia of each class depends on the fulfillment appropriate to each of the others—is essential to the unity and harmony of the polis. If believed, it should bind citizens to one another in mutual 'flourishing'. (*Republic* 3. 414–5).[13] Presumably it is among the basic myths that inform the play and education of all children. But Plato clearly thinks those myths are insufficient to maintain the purity and proper proportion of the classes required for a harmonious, just *politeia*.

The importance of eugenic control is marked by the fact that the pretence of a lottery of mating partners is the central ruling lie of *The Republic*. Curiously, commentators focus on the 'golden lie' of the myth of brotherhood, a tale which is not, by Platonic standards, false. As I see it, concentration on the 'golden lie' is a radical displacement of the real lie, the downright out-and-out lie of the marriage 'lottery'. After all, Plato thinks the myth of the metals represents something true.[14] By contrast, the regulations covering the eugenic policy embed an outright falsehood, no myth at all. Policy—resting on a theory about how justice and necessity—rather than chance/accident (*tuchē*)—should determine the outcome of the fake 'lottery' of mating partners. No lottery at all, except as a very bad joke.

[13] See Grote, *Plato* vol. 4 Ch. 35. 'It is indispensable ... that this fiction should be circulated and accredited as the fundamental, consecrated, unquestioned creed of the whole city, from which the feeling of harmony and brotherhood among the citizens springs.' (pp. 30–31).

[14] Like the Myth of the Metals, the myth of Er—a tale of immortality, of the harmony of the spheres, the rule of the daughters of Necessity, and each soul's choice of its type of life—is presented by Plato as a moral lesson that, if believed, may enable souls to live justly. It is presented as an image because Plato can't—not even in his Socratic persona—articulate the logos that would reconcile the rule of Necessity with his exhortation to *choose* a just life. That combination—the presumed compatibility of the rule of necessity with the reality of choice—seems incomprehensible. But nothing could be more shocking, more disturbing to Plato than a fundamental metaphysical truth that has an inconsistency at its core. It defies reason; and what violates logos cannot survive dialectical questioning. Yet Plato evidently thinks there is a shadow of truth in the tale, a truth that should be universally accepted. It must therefore be presented—it can only be presented—as a story, one which embarrassingly seems to modify the rigorous conditions set on such tales in Book 2.

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The Education of the Philosophers

Plato's views about the systematic character of belief, its dependence on the forms and reforms of civic life—his proposals for the distinctive education of rulers, philosophers and various types of citizens—generate a formidable set of problems. Why do philosophers agree to leave contemplation of the eternal order among the forms, and return to rule? They understand that human justice, like cosmic Justice, involves each part playing its role—giving each his due—in maintaining the harmonious good of the whole. Even the most Form-entranced philosopher sees that a philosopher's 'dues' to the polis requires his active participation in a just rule. Since the philosopher's nature is fully harmonious—since his knowledge guides his desires and actions—, he consents to play his part in ensuring the justice of the polity. In doing so, he does not act from an abstract conception of 'duty,' but from his nature and habits, from what he sees, knows and wants. Far from becoming impartial and detached through philosophic contemplation, his erotic attachment to philosophy also carries over to the object of his contemplation, to the Good and its instantiation in Justice ... and so to his proper activity in maintaining a just polity. Like all members of the community, he wholeheartedly accepts the myth of civic brotherhood, treating his own eudaimonia as connected with that of all the others. For all of that, the philosopher returns to the Polis-Cave reluctantly, setting aside his distinctive activity for the sake of the common good. Even when he consents to being checked by the claims of reason, the soldier-guardian remains spirited for honour: his contribution to the polity would be diminished if it did not. So too, the philosopher's contribution must retain his distinctive desires, even when he sees what justice requires of him. The distinctive natures and aims of each of the classes are necessary for the common good; and ideally each willingly, but with some reluctance listens to the claims of the dominant shared good. It is this feature of the *Republic*'s account of the education of the rulers that distinguishes Plato from the neo-Platonists who would counsel the ruler leave politics behind.

How, then, do the philosopher-kings deliberate among themselves when they take their brief turns to rule? Do Socrates' conversations serve as models for the shared deliberations of the rulers of the Ideal City? Do their deliberations include the method of taxonomic division? As contingencies arise—a draught, an earthquake—the rulers may have to make important policy decisions about which they could reasonably disagree. How should food be apportioned and distributed during a famine? What priorities should guide rebuilding the city after an earthquake? The daily rou-

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tines of an ideal polity—however just and stable its organization—require decisions about which even mathematically minded, harmonically inclined philosophers may disagree. Plato leaves such questions unanswered. But good sense—no enemy to Plato—can help. Of course there will be no Thrasymachus or Alcibiades to create a fuss or diversion in the ideal state; and the philosopher-kings are, at a very general level, of one mind. They have had the same upbringing and education; and even more important, they have the same temperament, the same balance of faculties in the soul. The *nomoi* give general guidance: disturbing poets are to be exiled; and radically critical questions are to be suppressed. But it is no small matter to determine whether a Socrates is a disturbance, or whether Homer should be outlawed or edited. In its most general form, Socratic inquiry provides one—by no means the only one—model for deliberation. It is clearly the ancestor of Rawls' method of reflective equilibrium: a mutual and open-ended adjustment of considered judgments and general principles. 'Moral philosophy is Socratic ... [It attempts to adjudicate and balance] all possible descriptions to which one might plausibly conform one's judgments together with all relevant philosophic arguments for them'.[15] Fully developed, the method of reflective equilibrium encompasses the tasks of taxonomic division, the continual refinement of morally relevant distinctions. Even in the ideal polity, rulers need to differentiate cases requiring justice and from those requiring equity. Distinguishing good myths from bad poetry surely requires a good deal of discussion among even the wisest philosopher-kings.

What Can We Learn from Plato's Counsel on Education?

Can Platonic education serve as a model for education in any city, Renaissance Florence, Paris 1848, Beijing, Ottawa or Washington, DC, 1998? In one way it can; in another it cannot. Certainly the text does not provide conclusive answers. But evidence suggests that Plato projects the general structure of *paideia* anywhere at any time. He certainly thinks that an ideal model provides the most general directions,—a universal heuristic and guide—that any polity would do well to emulate as best it can, under the constraints of its history and circumstances. Moreover, the psychological theory so richly developed in the *Republic* is presented as a perfectly general theory about the human soul; and the political and educational extension of that theory is in place. To be sure, that educational counsel is not identical for Everyman. On the contrary. But it is—in its full form as

[15] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard, 1971), p. 49.

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including the aims and structures of the polity—an education designed to serve as an ideal model for all political systems. But Plato's lesson is ultimately dark: even the best philosopher-ruler is, with the weight of history and circumstance checking his efforts, unlikely to succeed in turning a bad polity into a good one; a bad régime can lead a polity astray beyond repair. While there is no clear counsel for where to begin the reform of corruption (other than that of saying it must start with popular myths and children's games), it is, for all of that, better to follow a model than to allow oneself to be carried by the currents of corruption. We are—and this is the gleam of Plato's hopeful light—in any case carried by a current towards what we conceive as good. And if there is anything foreshadowed by the myth/theory of recollection, that striving carries gleams of knowledge within it.

The most illuminating—and the most troubling—Platonic lesson is that a well-formed education involves nothing less than a well-formed *politeia*. ('It takes a whole village to raise a child.') If education is to promote *eudaimonia*,—if it is to form sound habits of perception and thought, desire and action,—it encompasses the smallest details of a the political system. In short, the ethos and *nomoi* of a polity—its economic and family arrangements, its popular art and even its architecture are the fundamental educators of the city. About all this, Plato is surely right.

But this insight appears to have terrifying consequences. A political system that undertakes to promote the best lives for its members will assume control of the most minute details of social arrangements. Censorship, marriage regulations, eugenic control, the lot. How can we have our Platonic insight without what surely appears to us as intolerable Platonic intrusion?

But Plato's political counsel does not attempt to reach into the finest policy details for all time, all places. It does not—and cannot—claim to chart specific policy directives for philosopher-kings in Florence, Paris, Beijing or Washington, D.C. Parallel: Consider the difference between a detailed banquet menu that specifies the exact quality, ripeness, measure and temperature for the preparation of each dish, with a schematic architectural blueprint that can be instantiated in different ways. The latter can be further specified and realized in brick or wood; it can be painted grey or white, landscaped with deciduous trees or a Japanese sand garden.[16] Plato's politically oriented educational counsel is a blueprint, a rough guide rather than a recipe. It is a schema for possible plans.

The history of Platonic interpretation is a history of controversy about the relative priority of the metaphysical and the political

[16] Contrast Cézanne and Diebenkorn with Holbein and Clouet.

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aspects of the philosophers' education. Platonic scholars—and would-be Platonists—profoundly disagree about Plato's solution to those problems; they even disagree about whether he resolved them. The history of Plato's influence on educational policy re-enacts those differences in interpretation. It should come as no surprise that the history of interpretations and appropriations of Plato's complex and layered views on education range from left to right, politically. Critics and supporters alike have presented him as advocating totalitarian ideological control. But he is also read as a vigorous opponent of any power-hungry regime. He outlined a plan for the education of an enlightened class of self-critical civil servants, set to develop the potentialities—and promote the flourishing—of every type of individual.[17] We are the inheritors of all those views. Conflicted as they are, they form our practices. In the best Socratic spirit, we find ourselves interlocutors ready to begin a Socratic inquiry ...., wherever our polity permits. It is ironic to reflect that like some modern nation-states, the polis projected by *The Republic* may limit such inquiry to a selected few who have themselves undergone ideological purification and training. Would the Guardians have joined the Athenians in condemning Socrates?[18]

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[17] See Myles Burnyeat, 'Plato as a 19th Century Educator,' in Amélie Rorty *Philosophers on Education: Historical Perspectives* (Routledge, 1998).

[18] This paper grew out of discussions with Myles Burnyeat. I am grateful to him for detailed comments and counsel. Eva Brann and David Reeve added helpful reminders; Jane Cohen, Catherine Elgin, Lawrence Segar gave me wise advice. Anthony O'Hear gave me benefit of some useful suggestions

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