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# Plato's philosophy of education in the early dialogues

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
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Thesis

PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION  
IN THE EARLY DIALOGUES

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. The problem of the thesis.

The problem of this thesis is to try to define Plato's philosophy of education in the early dialogues, its importance, and its relation to the later dialogues. Many authorities mention that Plato was one of the first great educational theorists, but there is an astonishing dearth of scholarly treatment on this aspect of his thought in relation to his philosophy as a whole. Volumes have been written on Plato's Ideas, his theory of knowledge, the Good and his political thought, but the only analysis devoted to the place of education in the Platonic system, at this writing, is Werner Jaeger's Paideia. This thesis does not presume to fill the need for a detailed analysis of Plato's educational theories as they pertain to his complete philosophy--it is to be hoped, however, that its structure will at least indicate the type of treatment that is needed. Texts that include Plato's educational ideas and deal with them to any extent usually limit the discussion to a description of educational concepts found in the Republic; this is understandable, but regrettable because there is a wealth of material in the earlier dialogues that helps in the understanding of Plato's precepts in the Republic.

#### i. Three aspects of education in Plato's dialogues.

There are at least three important ways in which to think of education in connection with Plato's dialogues. First, Plato is an

exceptionally fine teacher himself--he cannot be read passively. The dialogues delineate fundamental problems as polemics and it is the skillful presentation of these controversial issues that stimulates thought and makes the dialogues ageless masterpieces of philosophical literature. Because the educational method used by Plato is an integral part of his philosophy and because of its importance as educational technique, considerable space is devoted to the literary form of the dialogues.

The second aspect of the dialogues that is important educationally consists of the precepts that Plato describes, primarily in the Republic and the Laws. Many of these educational dicta are extremely cogent--for example, Plato's insight into the effect of environment and child psychology on training--but on the whole this is the least important and most easily dated part of Plato's educational philosophy, even though the most often cited; for that reason the practical rules and regulations and their application as discussed in the dialogues will not occupy an important place in this thesis.

The third and by far the most important phase of Plato's educational thought lies in its relation to the development of Plato's philosophy. Plato's theories on education are not afterthoughts to the rest of his philosophy; if the educational theories of most other philosophers who have noted the importance of education were burned their philosophy would hardly suffer. But in Plato's case, his works would be rather barren and in many cases meaningless without the frequent references to teachers

and teaching.

In reading the dialogues, Plato's personality, the personality of a pragmatic and very realistic artist and thinker who was striving to solve the problems of his day, is always evident. His method is not fragmentary or superficial, as these individual, informally written dialogues might lead one to think, but a unified development of organized and profound thought in which every element is reasoned and justified by a meaningful whole. Plato did not solve by any means all the problems that he raised, but he did bring up most of the questions that are still pertinent to philosophical speculation in such a way that they are a distinct contribution to philosophy because of the relations that he perceived to exist between the practical and the theoretical, the individual and the state, ethics and education, epistemology and metaphysics, and so on through the list of problems that have since become traditional with philosophy. His is philosophy in the "grand manner"--Plato tries to make use of all experiences in the effort to explain those experiences meaningfully in their many rich interpenetrations.

The emphasis that has been placed on Plato's Ideas and his realm of Forms in themselves is unjustified until it has been shown why and how they fit into the living fabric of Plato's thought. Unlike so much of modern philosophy, Plato did not develop separate disciplines with an eye to an exhaustive technical analysis or in the conviction that one pigeonhole of philosophical thought held all the answers.<sup>1</sup> His interest lay in the

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1. Cf. Wild, PTM, 128-129.

complete life, and his philosophy reflects the unceasing search for the justification of that life, as he saw it, and the attempt to organize the frame of mind and the social system in which such a life could be realized; therefore, to separate from the whole any part of Plato's philosophy is to do him an injustice. Since this thesis is concerned with one aspect of Plato's writings, a methodological problem immediately becomes evident: How can Plato's educational theory be discussed without a thorough analysis of his philosophy as a whole?

The first section of the thesis is an attempt to solve one part of the methodological problem by presenting an attitude towards his philosophy as a whole through a discussion of form in the dialogues. In order to obviate the problem of extracting "education" at the expense of its true place in Plato's development, the most important of the early dialogues have been summarized; conclusions and observations pertinent to his educational theory are interspersed among or added to the summaries. This procedure is necessarily a compromise; the summaries are not Plato--there is no substitute for the original dialogues--and they have perhaps made the exposition too long, but it is hoped that they serve a purpose in showing where the educational references have come from and the problems from which they arise.

ii. The educational approach to Plato.

Before Plato's time there was no organized educational system.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 111.

The proper education of a son was the responsibility of the father, and consisted of a rather elementary training, by slaves for the most part, in music, gymnastics and the proper use of arms.<sup>1</sup> Music, in the Greek sense, was the sum total of a folklore training in classic poetry, rhythm, harmony and perhaps the actual playing of some sort of musical instrument. It was the "finishing school" of the citizen-warrior; the content was the cultural heritage of a proud but rather unsophisticated race; its function was not to turn out scholars and pedants but stalwart citizens with the pride and ability to defend their city honorably. Until the "golden age" of the fifth century the teachers of Hellas were the classic poets, but with the intellectual stimulation of this age there was an increased demand for cultural education, and a class of teachers, the Sophists, arose to meet the need.

The Sophists represent more closely education as we think of it today; that is, they lectured on certain subjects for money, and although they have the reputation of having taught for the very practical purpose of preparing their students to defend themselves successfully in a court of law, they did discuss and develop theories that had no obvious connection with the workaday world--that is, purely educational and theoretical subjects. The Sophists do not represent systematic education, however; they were itinerant teachers; a student paid his money and took his choice.

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1. Plato, Prot., 325d-326d, Protagoras describes briefly the education of a youth of means; see also Laches, 178-184c.

Why is it that, with no tradition of systematized education behind him,<sup>1</sup> we find a highly organized and consciously directed program of education forming such an essential part of Plato's philosophy?<sup>2</sup> It is Werner Jaeger's thesis in his scholarly work Paideia, that Plato's philosophy is the natural development of the Greek cultural tradition dedicated to the search for a complete life, i. e., bios. Jaeger's thoroughly documented study presents a theory with which it is hard to disagree; the problem here, however, is to determine why Plato incorporates into his philosophy the education that he did, and to evaluate its importance in his total system.

The Sophists turned the mind of man from the abstract speculations characteristic of the Milesian and Ionian scientists to the problem of man and his place in the universe. Socrates rejected the Sophists' relativistic point of view but developed their concern for the problems of man. The aesthetic tradition of the full and noble life is here fused with the philosophical problem of the nature of the cosmos and the central problem now becomes the definition of the good life in relation to the totality of reality.

iii. Is "the good life" an educational problem?

What problems does "the good life" raise? First, is it possible to strive for the good life? --that is, is the good life the product of

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1. Nettleship, *EPR*, 5. "What may be called the first system of education is developed [in the Republic]."
  2. Cf. Barker, *GPT*, 37-40.

individual effort or is man merely born to be what he is? Is the realization of the good life nothing but a happy accident? The whole of Greek tradition assumes that honor and acclaim should accrue to the individual for exceptionally worthy deeds or noble traits of character.<sup>1</sup> Even though the notion of fate plays a very important part in Greek literature and thought, man is conceived as to some extent controlling his own destiny, and he is blamed or praised in accordance with what he is and what he does. It follows that only the virtuous can lead the good life, for it would be a contradiction in terms to say that a bad man could lead a good life. An unscrupulous man might lead a successful or a profitable life but not the good life. If success or accomplishment were the criterion, then the good life would be the reward of natural strength or craftiness and not the result of the moral effort of the individual.

Even if we assume that a man may improve through his own initiative, can he be aided in his attempt to become virtuous? Can virtue be taught? The nature of virtue must be defined before this question can be answered. What is virtue? Plato answers with the Socratic paradox that virtue is knowledge. It can certainly be taught, then. Very well, what kind of knowledge is virtue? Here we are on the verge of the epistemological, metaphysical and eschatological problems that furnish the ground for the nature of knowledge and therefore of virtue.

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1. Barker, GPT, 2. "A sense of value of the individual was thus the primary condition of the development of political thought in Greece."

But there is another aspect of Plato's thought just as pertinent and more directly concerned with the actual living of the good life: the social and the ethical.<sup>1</sup> If we assume that the individual has the knowledge necessary to be virtuous, what is his relation to other human beings? Can the individual become virtuous if he is separated from society or, if he is already virtuous, can he lead the good life apart from a community? The Greek organic conception of the individual and society was such that a man was thought to realize himself only in a social structure; in fact the highest form of self-realization came through society, that is, in some form of public service.<sup>2</sup>

If this is so, again we must ask what is the virtuous individual's relation to the social organization of which he is a part? He is indebted to the state in some respect since he was granted the opportunity to become virtuous in that society.<sup>3</sup> Then again, the individual has the self-imposed responsibility of trying to improve the community in which he lives because it is an intrinsic part of his life, and it follows that the good life could be realized to the fullest only in the best possible environment.<sup>4</sup>

How is the individual to effect an improvement in the state?

Obviously, by teaching others to be as virtuous as he is. People are

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1. Wild, PTM, 15-16.

2. Barker, GPT, 146. "To the Greek it was obvious that a good man must be a member of a state, and could only be made good through membership of a state." Cf. Nettleship, LRP, 5.

3. Plato, Rep., 596e; cf. Wild, PTM, 76.

4. Cf. Wheelwright, CIE, 175; Sabine, HPT, 39.

plastic and have an infinite capacity for improvement, but they also have the capacity to degenerate because of this plastic nature. It is a moral obligation that the man who would improve the people must know why he himself is virtuous and why the ends he would have others strive for are right. It would be a compound crime if he educated the people on the basis of mere opinion and it proved that this opinion were wrong, for then he would have made the people worse.

How is the conscientious person to acquire the strength of his convictions, the positive assurance that he will improve the people by his education? At this point it is necessary to go back and pick up the other thread of Plato's thought, for it now becomes absolutely necessary that the nature of knowledge, the metaphysical frame, the ultimate principle of all existence be known to the educator of the people so that he will know why the improvements he suggests are right.<sup>1</sup> The examination of his own virtue has led to the ground, the final justification of all social action. This knowledge of the Good in turn suggests the structure of the state and the nature of the education necessary for its perpetuation.

If the state is the best state possible and if it is founded on the complete knowledge of all of reality, then any change in principles will

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1. Cf. Field, POP, 23-27. There is a necessary relationship between morals and social organization; the attempt to find a criterion for moral judgment leads to the problems of epistemology and metaphysics. Field's introductory chapter, pages 7-27, is very similar to the argument of this thesis.

be for the worse. The state seen in this interpretation is not the end to which the individual must subjugate himself and in which the individual is lost, contrary to the opinion of so many modern critics who see in Plato the seeds of fascism or communism; it is the necessary medium for the realization of the good life for the individual. This becomes clear if the argument is carried out and we ask of Plato why the good life is worthwhile; why should the individual strive to be virtuous and why should he seek to improve the people? Socrates was executed for trying to do just that! The eschatological myths of the Gorgias, the Phaedo, and the Republic show the good life as the prerequisite for personal immortality;<sup>1</sup> whether this view is accepted or not it furnishes proof that Plato cannot be lumped together with the more despicable forms of authoritarian rule--his purpose was not to establish rule of the aristocrat at the expense of the common man but to create a society in which the highest and best ideals of man could be realized to the benefit of all citizens.<sup>2</sup>

iv. The educational importance of the problem of virtue.

When Socrates asks "Can virtue be taught?" it seems to be a fairly simple question, but its compound implications make it a very complex one to answer with any degree of clarity. It is by far the most important question in the early dialogues, and the one from which the rest of Plato's philosophy evolves. Before any answer, let alone a positive one, can be given, a decision must be reached as to whether anything at all can

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1. Plato, Gorg., 523a-526d; Phaedo, 107c-114c; Rep., 614b-621b.

2. Plato's aristocracy is of the mind not of birth or wealth.

be known. The epistemological question is of prime importance in developing a sound synoptic philosophy, but it is hardly the natural order of thought that it should occur to us at the beginning of an investigation on the nature of the good life. Plato presents the "vulgar" opinions that most naturally occur to the thinking person in quest of a rational basis for the life worth living, and it may be that these early dialogues are autobiographical in the sense that they represent Plato's attempt to define problems that he had not yet settled in his own mind.<sup>1</sup> The negative "conversational dialogues" set the stage, but there is no really positive advance in the dialogues until Plato offers an hypothesis on the nature of knowledge in the Symposium and the Meno.

Even if knowledge is possible, can virtue be known? To be able to answer this question we must know the nature of virtue--what is virtue?--or rather what must virtue be if it is to be taught? If virtue is teachable, it must be some form of knowledge; if knowledge is possible and if virtue is knowledge, there still remains the problem of whether knowledge can be taught. If we assume that knowledge can be taught, what other assumptions must also be made?--that is, if education is possible and desirable what else must we assume about man and the world in which he lives? Must we not affirm that education is a good thing if we are to seek it and spend time cultivating it? There must be some

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1. Bradley, ES. Bradley uses this methodology in his Ethical Studies and the development in the book is amazingly similar to the evolution of Plato's thought in the early dialogues and the Republic.

purpose in education or we are indeed wasting time searching for learning, and that purpose must also be good. Now we are faced with the problem of what "good" and "purpose" mean and just how they are related to education.

Plato treats this problem obliquely too by showing that things such as potential ability or material possessions are not good in themselves but depend for their value on proper use; in other words health, wealth, intelligence, etc., are not good if they are misused but they may be the source of values if they are used wisely. We still do not know what the good is, but Plato assures us that wisdom is necessary to it. Wisdom is a virtue, and the man who is truly wise will be temperate, just and courageous because these are the names of qualities that reflect "right usage" of possessions or character potentials. This is all very good, but can this "right usage" be taught?--that was the problem with which we started. Once the dialectic has reached this point, however, we are in a much better position to appreciate the importance of the question.

If virtue cannot be taught, there is no such thing as philosophy, as Plato defines philosophy. On the answer to the question, then, hangs a whole development of thought on the nature of man, his purposes, ends and ideals. If virtue cannot be taught, no man can be held responsible for his actions, and right and wrong are reduced to purely physical terms; we enter a completely determined universe, at least as far as ethics is

concerned, where good and purpose and consequently education have no meaning; where pleasure and power rule supreme and where there is no reason to prefer one set of values or pleasures rather than some other-- the satisfied pig is happier than the unsatisfied Socrates.

The educational problem of whether virtue can be taught implies the individual's search for the good life and happiness (virtue) and that the good life is social in character (education). It also contains all the root problems essential to Plato's social philosophy and the more technical thought that grows out of it. Plato's thought is easier to understand if the problems that education presents are kept in mind, for there is considerable evidence in the dialogues that they shaped a great deal of his thinking.

## 2. The purpose and method of the thesis.

The purpose of the thesis is to try to discover the lasting educational doctrines relevant to a way of life. There are many reasons for feeling that education today is failing in its primary purpose of preparing the student for participation in a full and rich life and furthermore that this failure is dangerous to democratic ideals. This is evident if the good and full life is defined in Platonic terms; that is, if we think of the good life as being realized only by a citizen who is consciously aware of society and his place in it and has been prepared to participate meaningfully in preserving the ideals of that society. Even though at first glance Plato's political structure would seem to be the direct antithesis of democracy,

an analysis of his educational purpose can be extremely useful to a democratic form of government.

The definition of democracy has evolved since Plato's day; in principle, at least, there is no vast difference between representative democracy and Plato's educational state. Theoretically, the best man possible should represent his constituents, both in a representative democracy and in Plato's educational state. The qualifications of candidates and the methods of selection are different, but the ends are the same. It is not enough to criticize Plato's absolute political system because it does not agree with some of our present-day ideals; democracy is not made safer by deprecating Plato or merely by showing the points of difference that make his thought incompatible with democracy. We must try to analyze the reasons behind his system. In this way much that is applicable to any social organization may be learned to our advantage. Plato's educational theory is such that it can be very useful as a touchstone for finding the weaknesses of education today. The implicit purpose of the thesis, then, is to furnish material for a comparison of present-day education with a total system of thought in which instruction and improvement form an integral and integrated part of a way of life and society.

The explicit purpose of the thesis is to gather material from and about the early dialogues that is relevant to education. The early dialogues are negative; that is, they raise problems and discuss them, but

leave the reader in confusion. Unless they are considered as a whole, there is not much about the "little" works that suggests anything of educational importance, but if they are thought of as an introduction to the later works they are essential to an understanding of the "educational problem" in Plato's writing, because it is in these "conversational" dialogues that we find the questions raised which make the "educational problem" significant to Plato's philosophy as a whole.

The fact that the early dialogues in this thesis have been oriented to the later ones, especially the Republic, makes it imperative that a considerable amount of space be given to the idea that the dialogues are in some respect an organic whole. The section on unity follows a brief chapter of historical background whose function is to indicate some of the influences to which Plato was exposed in formulating his thought. For a succinct historical introduction, the first two chapters of Sabine's A History of Political Theory are highly recommended.

Of the early dialogues, only the Ion and Cratylus have not been included. The Ion, on artistic standards, and the Cratylus, a burlesque of etymological derivations, do not add to the development of the argument and therefore have been omitted;<sup>1</sup> Jaeger has been followed in considering the Phaedo and the Phaedrus as later works. There has been no attempt to present the works in the exact order in which they were written, and the criterion of their logical connection has been how they

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1. The Cratylus, however, does contain some important epistemological material and the first suggestions of the Ideas in its concluding pages.

advance the "educational argument." The educational problem is certainly not the only one in the dialogues, and some other arrangement might suit other developments better.

Unfortunately the Republic cannot be included in the analysis of dialogues, but throughout the thesis the structural development of the Republic is the frame of reference for the exposition on the early dialogues, and while it is hoped that the thesis is intelligible in itself, an understanding of the Republic is a distinct aid. Since the Republic is Plato's best known work and the one upon which the most scholarship has been expended, its absence is perhaps not felt so much as that of the Laws. As A. E. Taylor says:

Plato's services to the theory of education, in particular have usually been grossly underrated, from an inexcusable neglect of the very thorough treatment given to it in what he probably regarded as his most important work [the Laws].<sup>1</sup>

The concluding essay is written with a deep appreciation of what has been left undone at the conclusion of the more formal development in the chapter on the Gorgias; an attempt has been made to combine the final summary of the results of the investigation with an outline of the relation of those results to Plato's philosophy as a whole and the importance of his "educational problem" to the world in which we live. So broad a purpose can be accomplished here only by using generalities that are highly tentative but nevertheless necessary in order that some justification

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1. Taylor, PMW, 463.

be shown for the claim that the early dialogues are vital to Plato's educational theory and his thought in general.

### 3. Sources and limitations of the investigation.

The main source for this thesis will be the dialogues of Plato which precede the Republic. Jaeger's Paideia was instrumental in the selection of the Protagoras, Symposium, Meno and the Gorgias for more detailed analysis than the other early works, but the order in which they are taken up has been changed to follow more closely the argument of the thesis. The other early dialogues are discussed at greater length here than they are in Paideia since they are not usually given much space in other works, even though there is much that is important in these dialogues. The early dialogues give various educational problems more detailed study than does the Republic, and thereby set the stage for the systematic development found in the Republic. The movement of Plato's thought from the ideal state to the second best represented in the Laws would entail a thorough examination of the Republic and also a careful study of the dialogues that are thought to bridge the gap between his two major works. Obviously so large a task is beyond the scope of this thesis; an analysis of the function of education in the second best state would presuppose an extensive knowledge of the development of Plato's thought; further, the meandering nature of the Laws makes the structural analysis of his argument and its relation to education a major work in itself.

The principle secondary source that will be referred to is Werner

Jaeger's Paideia. His development is very similar to that presented here and this thesis owes much to his scholarship--the chief point of difference is not a difference of opinion but of emphasis. Jaeger treats Plato's philosophy as the natural culmination of a Greek cultural Ideal.

Naturally The Republic and The Laws will be the real core of our exposition. Throughout, our aim is to take the picture of Plato which emerges from these books, and set it in its right place in the history of Greek thought. . . . We shall therefore not treat it as the detached system of philosophical concepts, but try to show. . . the organic function it has within the general movement of Greek thought and the development of Greek tradition.<sup>1</sup>

The chief concern here is with the degree to which Plato's analysis of society, the individual and the good life reveals the necessity for a definite purpose in education and how the "educational problem" in turn shaped his thought.

R. C. Lodge's book Plato's Theory of Education is rich in specific educational references from the dialogues, but in general Lodge discusses education in the narrower sense of instruction or training rather than from the broader aspect of paideia as used by Jaeger and this thesis. This work is very valuable, however, for its voluminous cross references to passages relevant to education. Plato's Theory of Man, by John Wild, while not primarily concerned with Plato's educational theories, supports the general position of the thesis by pointing out that the social and ethical aspects of Plato's thought have not been given their due because of the

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 84.

modern preoccupation with his theory of knowledge and his metaphysics. G. C. Field's work The Philosophy of Plato is a very readable survey of Plato's philosophy which contains many valuable insights; the only disadvantage is its lack of documentation.

George H. Sabine's A History of Political Theory contains four chapters that are pertinent to the thesis (chaps. 1-4). The material is lucid and accurate and the criticisms are thoughtful, but this work also suffers from a lack of documentation. John Dewey, who will be considered very briefly in the conclusion, offers a theory of education in Democracy and Education and Experience and Education that is not too far removed from the interpretation which is placed on Plato in this thesis. Volume I of K. R. Popper's The Open Society and its Enemies is a bitter criticism of Plato's political philosophy; it represents well the type of attack that is all too frequently made upon Plato's views in the name of democratic ideals--the type of attack that misses the spirit of Plato completely and reads into his ideas on communal life and his absolute ruler an argument for modern communism and fascism. Some of Popper's criticisms are undoubtedly valid, but their edge is dulled by a tremendous bias and frequent misuse of quotations from the dialogues.

R. L. Nettleship's beautifully written little volume The Theory of Education in Plato's Republic is easily the most brilliant work consulted in the preparation of this thesis. In contrast to Lodge's rather

prosaic approach to Plato's theory of education, Nettleship's creative insights leap from every page as he describes simply but profoundly, as Plato himself might, the sweeping ideas that lie behind the artful development of Plato's arguments. This book cannot be recommended too highly, not for Plato's theory of education alone, but also for the many flashes of intuition which reveal so clearly the true nature of Plato's thought and the inexhaustible mine of ideas that the dialogues contain. Nettleship's little masterpiece, however, is limited to the Republic and therefore is not really pertinent to the thesis until the Republic is discussed in the final chapter. This fine little volume would be much more useful, too, if it were documented.

These are the principal sources of the thesis and some of the reasons why they have been chosen. The remaining works that have been used will appear in footnotes.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PLATO'S THOUGHT

#### 1. Greek cultural ideals.

Plato as the flowering and culmination of Greek culture can only be appreciated historically. We can picture him at the crossroads of Greek thought, during a climactic period in Hellenic history, building a highway and helping himself to paving blocks from smaller arteries now and then to construct a six-lane causeway of ethics, religion, metaphysics, politics, epistemology and education over which thousands upon thousands would pass in centuries to come. All the various mortars of Greek philosophy cement the bricks together in an imposing architectural structure that stands as a monument to the versatility of the human mind. The quickly moving traffic passes over elements of Parmenides and Heraclitus accurately arranged according to Pythagoras and approaches majestic spans that vault earthly things and soar skyward in keeping with the design of Parmenides. The beauty and function of the whole can only be seen from high above and in those early days before man took wings, divine flight was furnished by mystic insight that probably originated in Orphic religion. This is the structure, but the intensely human element is furnished by a homely attendant who seems to run most of the gas stations along the way to keep the traffic moving towards its goal. Some people think the highway was all his idea in the

first place and that Plato built the road just to give Socrates a chance to talk to the customers.

This highway runs along so smoothly that it takes a bit of looking to notice that it passes confidently over some mean and treacherous country and that it took a great amount of engineering and thought to make the trip seem a very simple and pleasant excursion. It takes an engineer to appreciate fully all the problems that were involved.

Some of the problems are purely structural; others are functional and historical, but it might be best to go back and see if the events leading up to this system in any way elucidate the reasons for its construction.

The ancient Greeks were an amazing race and in many ways a very difficult one for the twentieth century to understand. The tremendous versatility and vigor of the Greek mind produced a culture that has never been surpassed in the richness and originality of its products. They were ruthless in war, sensitive in art, brilliant in theory but often inept in practice, politically minded but unable to establish a stable society, and hero worshippers who condemned or exiled many of their most powerful political and intellectual figures. The Greeks seem to have had very little compromise in their souls; it is little wonder that moderation came to be considered a cardinal virtue among them. Yet underlying these conflicts of the Dionysian

and Apollonian strains there runs a strong current of consistency in the very tension that was prevalent, and—due in part to that tension—a cultural unity. Even though the various city states could not seem to get along politically they never lost the feeling of their racial homogeneity nor the awareness of their common cultural heritage. It comes as a surprise to the modern reader that Thucydides could be exiled from Athens for bungling a naval assignment and then feel perfectly free to visit his former enemies in order to gather information for his famous history of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>1</sup>

One of the dominant factors in Greek life and one of the hardest for us to comprehend is the identification of the citizen with his city state.<sup>2</sup>

The citizen has rights, but they are not attributes of a private personality; they belong to his station. He has obligations too, but they are not forced on him by the state; they flow from the need to realize his own potentialities. The Greek was happily free both from the illusion that he had an inherent right to do as he pleased and from the pretensions that his duty was the stern daughter of the voice of God.<sup>3</sup>

This political view is interpreted by Werner Jaeger in his survey of Greek culture as only one aspect of a larger organic conception pertaining to all of their society and culture; the striving for realization

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1. Bury, HG, 430.
  2. Cf. Barker, GPT, 2-3.
  3. Sabine, HPT, 19.

of individual potentialities within an organic cultural pattern he calls paideia, the Greek for education.<sup>1</sup> But as Jaeger points out, the Greek conception of education was much broader than the English word implies; it was the sum total of all the aspects in the complete development of personality. The closest that English can come to paideia in one word is "culture."<sup>2</sup>

Education in this sense and the individual's responsibility to the state had its roots in the aristocratic, agrarian society of the early city state. The Greek ideal of the noble man or nobility of person Jaeger calls areté. The conception seems to have much in common with the medieval ideal of chivalry, in that birth and position exacted certain standards of behavior but not necessarily any formal factual education. Originally areté meant warlike spirit; this definition and its origins in an agrarian feudal society parallels the medieval ideal of chivalry in many respects, which tends to support the hypothesis that areté, like chivalry, was an ideal of tradition that slowly evolved and changed until it represented the highest virtues of man. The Greek concept of virtue or areté differed from Christian chivalry in that the Greeks placed little emphasis on truth or honesty as prime qualities of the noble man. The worth of truth and honesty is characteristically

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1. Jaeger, PAI, I, xiii-xxix.

2. Jaeger, PAI, I, xxii.

Asiatic, and probably entered Greek thought during the Persian wars.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The cultural revolution of the 5th century.

The Persian wars shifted the scene of Greek culture from the colonies to Athens, since the vital part that Athens played in the victory over the Persians made this city state the leader of Hellas. The victory and the place as the leading community among the Greek city-states produced a national pride, reflected in the magnificent works of the Golden Age, and moved the Athenians to imperialistic ambitions. Their supremacy on the sea furthered this aim and soon this small Attic community became a center of commerce and activity. The expansion of trade and commerce in the sixth and fifth centuries produced material wealth and an urban class of merchants who demanded an ever increasing share in the government, while the growing cosmopolitan atmosphere placed more and more emphasis on factual knowledge. The scientific schools of the Greek colonies, which had been more or less closed societies, found a public eager for their knowledge; this was especially true in Athens.<sup>2</sup>

In the feverish emulation of intellectual forces which this greatest period in the world's history brought with it, the thought everywhere gained recognition that in every walk of life the man of knowledge is the most capable, the most useful and the most successful.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Brightman, Minutes of Seminar in Value Theory. Boston University, Spring, 1948.
  2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 7; 123.
  3. Windelband, HP, 67.

The rising democratic tendencies gave impetus to this attitude and in response to the need for a more complete formal education there arose a class of itinerant teachers—the Sophists. The courts and the assembly of Athens held the bulk of political power and were composed of hundreds of people, so that rhetoric or oratory became the chief means to political success.<sup>1</sup> The man who could continually sway the mob could remain in power; therefore the Sophists who became teachers of argumentation and rhetoric found many clients. The unsavory reputation of being able to "make the worse seem the better" was probably attached to them because they charged a fee for teaching, thereby limiting education to the wealthy. This incurred the distrust of the majority of the people.

Greek philosophical thought, until the time of the Sophists, had concerned itself almost wholly with speculations on the nature of the universe, in an attempt to discover one principle that would explain the origin of the cosmos and the order they observed in the universe. The practical application of education to society and its attending social influences, however, changed the emphasis from the objective speculation of Nature to a consideration of man himself in society.

In this way Greek science took an essentially anthropological or subjective direction, studying the inner activities of man, his ideation, and volition, and at

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1. Sabine, HPT, 10.

the same time lost its purely theoretical character and acquired a preponderantly practical significance.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately this humanistic, rationalistic and practical bent with its original confidence in "man as the measure of all things" soon degenerated into an all consuming skepticism and relativism that found political expression in the Sophists' doctrine of The Law of Nature.<sup>2</sup> Of the Sophist, Antiphon, Sabine says: "He asserted flatly that all law is merely conventional and hence contrary to nature."<sup>3</sup>

The economic expansion, wars and general instability of the fifth century B. C. resulted in rapid changes in the government and destroyed the old personal regard for law that had existed in the early city state; the constitution as a legal structure external to the citizen took its place. This view is eloquently stated as a "contract theory" of government by Glaucon in the Republic.<sup>4</sup> Law and government are represented as artificial hobbles placed on the strong and dominant for the protection of the many and the weak; but this is not natural. The strong and individualistic need not heed these laws to their disadvantage—the strong should appeal only to Natural Law.<sup>5</sup> Acceptance of this attitude necessarily destroys the organic conception of society, but it is easily understood.

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1. Windelband, HP, 68.  
2. Windelband, HP, 68.  
3. Sabine, HPT, 30.

4. Plato, Rep., 357a-362c.  
5. Cf. Plato, Gorg., 482c f.

When the bulk of the citizens demand equality with those who feel themselves superior by birth, intelligence, and education, the rules of the political game change; instead of feeling a responsibility for the less privileged, the aristocracy found itself in competition with the common man and deemed any means of success available to all and that only the weak would not take advantage of any situation. This attitude probably reflects a reaction against external law by the aristocracy who previously were the law by virtue of their actions and character; that is, the law was considered as an intrinsic component of the free citizen and the nobleman; the hero-leader was freely granted honor and respect as typifying the ideals and law of the state. In return it was his responsibility to protect those ideals and the citizens at large.

### 3. Socrates.

It is from this atmosphere that one of the most amazing characters in history emerges. The historical Socrates is a polemic subject for the scholar, but there is a minimum of information about him on which there is little or no argument. He was a real person, a contemporary of Plato's, who was condemned to death and executed by the Athenian democracy in 399 B. C. He must have had a tremendously influential personality if we judge by the works he inspired and by the very fact that he was executed. He must have been considered dangerous by those in power even though he took no direct part in politics;

this could only mean that he exerted a considerable influence among many who were politically active. The exact nature of his philosophy will never be known, and the point at which Socrates leaves and Plato enters in the dialogues is impossible to determine, but it seems relatively safe to assert that he opposed sophistic relativism, that he attempted to derive universal concepts through dialectical inquiry into definitions and that he probably is the author of his most famous statement in the dialogues: "virtue is knowledge." According to Aristotle he was mainly concerned with ethics and the definition of universals. Aristotle specifically states, however, that Socrates did not posit universals apart from particulars.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates might be thought of as returning to the old school of natural philosophers in that he is searching for the underlying principle in the universe, but as accepting the newer humanism in that he looks to man himself for the answer.<sup>2</sup> The natural philosophers lost man in their objective speculations; the Sophists found man but no place for him. Socrates attempted to find man's place in the universe, which necessarily resulted in his trying to establish an aim in life—a real value for living which is expressed so dramatically in the Apology: "the unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>3</sup> The ground

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1. Aristotle, Met., A, 6, 987a32-b10; M, 4, 1076b17-32; M, 9, 1086b2-7.
  2. Cf. Pater, PAP, 81. "Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven to earth."
  3. Plato, Apol., 38b.

for his way of life probably found expression in his very personality and in his doctrines that virtue is "one," that men do evil because of ignorance, and that true knowledge is found through the "eye of the soul." Jaeger says of him:

It was Socrates' summons to men to care for their souls that really turned the mind of Greece towards a new way of life. From that time onwards, a dominant part in philosophy and ethics was played by the concept of life, bios—human existence regarded not as the mere lapse of time but as a clear and comprehensible unity, a deliberately shaped life-pattern.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Influences on Plato's thought.

This, then, if it has been interpreted correctly, is an admiration of the background for Plato's philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The attempt to unravel the tightly knit fabric of Plato's work results in loose ends and needless volumes of interpretive material.<sup>3</sup> There is so little that is superfluous in Plato that it is much the wiser policy to let his work speak for itself. The essence of Plato is unity; to try to extract one element (such as education) does an injustice and leaves much that is pertinent unsaid. Platonic scholars are probably correct in attributing an organic unity to the body of Plato's writings, a theory which does not

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1. Jaeger, PAI, I, 46.

2. Cf. Demos(ed.), DOP, xi, for short background of Plato's thought.

3. Mackay, Rev. (1941), 15. Mackay criticizes, as inadequate, scholarship that emphasizes Plato's form at the expense of his philosophical content and vice versa. See Ch. III, of text, the unity of the dialogues.

at all deny the existence of development in the dialogues.<sup>1</sup>

All of the great cultural ideals and intellectual theories of Greek civilization, with the notable exception of Democritus' atomism, find an organized expression in the gigantic intellectual and spiritual synthesis of Plato's dialogues.

His philosophy is a reintegration of the preceding stages of Hellenic culture. For Plato takes up deliberately and systematically the various problems of the Pre-Platonic period and works them out on a higher philosophical level.<sup>2</sup>

Man has probably speculated on the problems that still confront philosophers ever since the animal became rational, but it remained for the Greek mind, in Western civilization, to develop systematic consideration of these polemic issues and thereby "invent" philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The first systematic attempt to explain anything, of which we have record, is found in the Milesian school of natural philosophers or physicists. Much of their thought had its roots in the great epic poems of Homer and Hesiod.

The early Milesian natural philosophers established cosmological speculation as a science (in the Greek sense of the word science) but did not find a vital place for man in the universe. Heraclitus and Parmenides represent the attempt to solve the problem of change and

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 105. See pp. 39-44.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, x. Cf. Zeller, POA, II, 147-148, for the philosophical influences on Plato's thought.

3. Jaeger, PAI, I, xxi.

identity and an inquiry into the existence or non-existence of a per-  
 during being. Protagoras' theory of perception and the sophistic con-  
 cern for man and man's problems alone, produced skepticism and  
 relativism while demonstrating man's importance to man. Socrates  
 accepted the humanistic attitude of the Sophists but attempted to find  
 a standard or universal basis for man's actions on which to establish  
 a meaningful way of life. He gave ethics and the Greek ideal of areté  
 a normative basis and in so doing emphasized the importance of defini-  
 tion or the universal concept.<sup>1</sup> Pythagoras stands to one side in the  
 logical intellectual development of Greek thought with his number theory  
 and religious mysticism. His number theory was not incorporated as  
 an essential organic part of Greek thought until Plato gave it prime  
 importance in educational training and borrowed the real existence of  
 concepts apart from the human mind as the Idea or Form of sense  
 objects.<sup>2</sup>

If in addition to these intellectual strains we add the traditional  
 Greek cultural ideals of organic society, rule of the best (aristocracy),  
 the political nature of the free Greek citizen, the influence of the epic  
 poets, music and gymnastics, and the political situation in Plato's  
 time, we begin to see the tremendous scope of the problem that Plato

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1. Taylor, Art. (1947)<sup>2</sup>, gives a good, short account of Socrates' life and character.
  2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 104. According to Aristotle (Met. M and N), Plato tried to interpret the Ideas as numbers at one time in his development.

set for himself when he began to arrange and systematize all of Greek thought within the framework of a critical attitude towards the society of his time<sup>1</sup> in an attempt to rescue a declining culture with a new synoptic ideal in which all of these elements would have a function in demonstrating a meaningful and purposive way of life.<sup>2</sup> In a great tradition of organized thought, Plato represents both a continuation and culmination of that tradition.

The nature of Plato's synthesis is clearer if the historical development of the philosophical and cultural problems is kept in mind, and it is noted how one by one all these various problems and influences find a place in his solution. It is only in this way, for instance, that we can appreciate the importance of his repeated criticism of the poets.<sup>3</sup> Education, as this thesis will attempt to show, is the means by which his philosophy takes on meaning. Poetry and Rhetoric were Plato's main rivals in education, and since he considered them incompletely or not firmly grounded, that is, without a complete understanding of the purpose of education, the poets and Sophists are the objects of much critical discussion in the dialogues. In the light of modern poetry, it is hard to understand the educational importance of the Greek epics for Greek society, but until the Sophists expanded the content of learning,

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1. Cf. Nettleship, LRP, 6. Plato is not "merely reflecting on human life, but [is] intensely anxious to reform and revolutionize it."
  2. Cf. Demos(ed.), DOP, x.
  3. Plato, Rep., 391 ff.; 606e ff. Laws, 886c; 890a.

the poems of Homer and Hesiod and the poets who recited and interpreted them were the educators of Hellas.<sup>1</sup> Plato's evident attention to the form of his dialogues and the poetic beauty of his works probably reflects the importance he attached to meeting poetry on its own ground to defeat and replace the older educational ideal with his own. Of course Plato does not propose that poetry should be abandoned; rather he continually stresses its educational importance when used properly in his educational structure.<sup>2</sup>

The political chaos in Athens during Plato's youth, the Athenian defeat at the hands of Sparta, and Socrates' execution by the Athenian democracy are bound to have affected Plato's thinking. Shorey's viewpoint on the interpretation of the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues seems the most plausible: "The Socrates of Plato is an ideal, too good to be true, the mouthpiece of Plato's opinions."<sup>3</sup> The low place assigned to democracy in the Republic and the character of Socrates in the dialogues clearly demonstrate two of these influences, but the degree to which Sparta was used as a model for the Republic is not nearly so evident. It is probable that Plato was impressed with the greater military efficiency and stability of the Lacedaemonian city—

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 214. Plato, Prot., 339a; Laws, 810c. Cf. Cornford, ROP, 321 ff.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 215.
  3. Shorey, Art. (1926), 577.

state but he was also aware of its many defects.<sup>1</sup> His ideal state grows logically from his own premises and incorporates the "myth" of Sparta where it does not contradict any other part of his thought. It is inconceivable that he built the Republic around an idea of the Spartan state.<sup>2</sup> His later work, the Laws, proves that he was not interested in absolutism or rule of the aristocracy as ends but only as means to the best society.

Thus in his old age, if not in his youth, Plato is at one with the tradition of his people in distrusting everything savoring of absolute and irresponsible power, and in placing the sovereignty of law at the very basis of political theory.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Plato, Laws, 635b-636d.
  2. Cf. Wild, PTM, 108.
  3. Morrow, Art. (1941), 107.

## CHAPTER III

## THE UNITY OF THE DIALOGUES

1. Is the question of the unity of the dialogues important?

Plato's philosophy is contained in approximately thirty dialogues, some of which are of doubtful origin, but for the most part it is fairly certain that the dialogues are Plato's and that they have survived practically uncorrupted. To us they represent Plato's philosophy, but, as we shall see, Plato denies his literary offspring as philosophically legitimate.<sup>1</sup> In what sense do these dialogues represent his philosophy and how are they related to one another? Even more fundamental, are they related at all?

In a sense, the form of the dialogues creates the problem—are these dialectical dramas separate artistic works that use the evolution of ideas as the tour de force in each work separately or is there a consistent philosophy expressed in these artistic masterpieces? Are they expressive of an evolution of thought? If the dialogues do form a unified body of philosophical thought unique to Plato, what is its basis and what is the evidence in the dialogues for that unity? Why is the problem of the unity of the dialogues important to the student of Plato's theory of education? For one thing, there are certain problems which become very important if the relation of the dialogues is asserted but

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1. See pp. 48, 52-54 for Plato's opinions that philosophy cannot be written.

which would not exist if the dialogues were taken separately. Secondly, the unity of Plato's philosophy is a necessary assumption if a central problem or subject, such as education, is followed throughout the various dialogues. Further, belief in a basic unity allows the explanation of a point which may not be fully developed in one dialogue, by means of another work in which the same problem has been discussed more fully in a different context.

Finally, a definite statement on the relation of the various dialogues makes explicit that which is implicit in so many treatments, especially critical treatments, of Plato's philosophy. Many who quote Plato from various works indiscriminately, to prove their own contentions, do not bother to preface their remarks with any statement as to their concept of Plato's philosophy as a whole. Plato's range of thought and his style are both conducive to proofs, in his own words, that he is sinner or saint depending on which you wish to make him; that is, as long as the overall picture of his philosophy is ignored. Since the argument in this thesis is that education is the fulcrum around which Plato's practical, social philosophy and his theoretical thought revolve, it is essential that the problem of unity be made explicit, although an exhaustive treatment is neither attempted nor intended.

## 2. Plato's quest in relation to unity.

Many of the important doctrines in Plato's dialogues can be

found in the thoughts of his predecessors; in fact, Plato often mentions his sources informally in the dialogues.<sup>1</sup> Is Plato merely an eclectic, then? Hardly, for there is much too much enthusiasm and sincerity evident in his philosophical dramas to accuse Plato of having been a sterile and uninspired collector of philosophical opinions. There is an originality of content and an artistry of form that stands in evidence of Plato's having been anything but a second-hand dealer in shopworn ideas.

It is true that Plato borrowed freely and often from earlier Greek thinkers, but not indiscriminately; he recognized that there must be some truth in any position held honestly by men of sincere and thoughtful natures. The men who preceded Plato not only furnished much of the actual content of Plato's philosophy but also created one of the central problems in his work. How could so many divergent theories with various claims to truth be brought into line and harmonized? If there were some greater principle under which they could all be subsumed and arranged in an order of truth, it might be done. Such an attitude would furnish a core from which to develop a theoretical philosophy.

The claim has been made, however, in the argument of this thesis, that Plato was primarily a practical-moral philosopher attempting to solve the problems of the individual and society in his own politically turbulent times in order to rescue a culture obviously on the wane. Is

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1. The characters in the dialogues, i. e., Cratylus, Protagoras, Gorgias and Parmenides, indicate Plato's sources. See pp. 125 ff.

it possible that so large a task as an intellectual synthesis of previous philosophies could be accomplished while remaining consistent with practical morals and politics? If the technical development had moral and social problems as its content, it might be accomplished. For instance, if instead of the purely logical argument of "the One and the Many" we substitute the problem of temperance, courage and wisdom as they are related to virtue, the logical structure remains the same but the content is practical and can be compared and correlated with experience.

If Plato's range is this wide, what proof can be brought forward that a collection of conversations represents any such thing as a social philosophy that fills out a skeleton of consistent theoretical thought? Further, what is the evidence which would support the contention that education is the instrument, the method and the mortar by which the two are cemented into one total architectonic structure?

### 3. The arguments for unity.

The question as to whether or not Plato's dialogues represent a consciously worked out system of philosophy has been argued pro and con from many different points of view. Some scholars are of the opinion that the dialogues are merely artistic reproductions of conversations which were actually held by Socrates; some go so far as

to assert that the so-called "Socratic dialogues" were written by Plato while Socrates was still alive.<sup>1</sup> Still others, such as Ritter and Wilamowitz, consider the dialogues to be separate prose-poetry dramas not primarily concerned with a consciously developed philosophy.<sup>2</sup> It does not seem likely, however, that a man who had no greater purpose in his writings than the creation of beautiful prose-poetry would have founded the Academy.

There is a large body of Platonic scholars who have asserted, in opposition to these various theories, that there is a fundamental unity in the dialogues.<sup>3</sup> In many respects their opinions are similar but they do vary in their emphasis and they do cite different aspects of the dialogues as being the most conclusive evidence for the coherent development of Plato's thought.<sup>4</sup> Schleiermacher was the first to suggest that the dialogues contained a premeditated plan systematically carried out. He based his theory on the logical connection of the content of the dialogues, showing that the later works presupposed the discussions in the earlier works. It is now widely held that he

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 373, n.5.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 383, n.2. Wilamowitz, PLA, I, cited by Jaeger, PAI, II, 126 and n.1, 388.
  3. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, Ch. 2 and notes on the problem of the historic Socrates, the order of the dialogues and their unity; also, II, Ch. 4 for the organic unity of the dialogues.
  4. Cf. Zeller, POA, II, Ch. 3. Zeller has copious notes in reference to Platonic scholarship in the 19th century on the unity and the order of the dialogues.

overstated his case for logical systemization but his brilliant work set off an entirely new approach to scholarly research in Platonic philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In reaction to the theory that all of Plato's dialogues had an organized pedagogical purpose<sup>2</sup> scholars were quick to point out that there were internal inconsistencies in the dialogues which would tend to disprove Schleiermacher's position that they represented a logically worked out system of unified thought; also, the negative and inconclusive "Socratic dialogues" were cited as evidence that Plato, himself, had not reached any conclusion on the problems raised by the earlier dialogues.<sup>3</sup>

Paul Shorey reasserted the unity of the dialogues in The Unity of Plato's Thought; he gave the theory new life by suggesting that the dialogues reflect the development of Plato's thought within a philosophical position that did not change in its broad outlines or fundamental tenets. This thesis would explain the internal inconsistencies while affirming the over-all unity of the dialogues.<sup>4</sup> Jaeger's opinion is very similar to Shorey's; he thinks that there is a consistency in the central problem of all the dialogues that could not have been

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1. Cf. Zeller, POA, II, 99-117. Shorey, WPS, 66, does not believe that Schleiermacher intended so dogmatic an assertion and that his theory was not overstated but rather misinterpreted.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, III, 183.
  3. Cf. Ch. 5, pp. 104-107 for the educational purpose behind the negative ending.
  4. Cf. Shorey, WPS, 65-73, for a later statement on unity which reaffirms his earlier conclusions in The Unity of Plato's Thought.

accidental. "The central problem around which they all move, with such awareness as to exclude any possibility of chance in their composition, is the nature of arete." <sup>1</sup> Plato, he feels, knew what he was doing from the first; this is demonstrated by the logical manner in which the dialogues follow one another, expanding and explaining problems that had been mentioned previously without reaching any conclusion. <sup>2</sup> Wild, on the other hand, who characterizes Plato as a practical moralist, brings Plato's use of the term techné forth in evidence of the synthetic nature of his philosophy. <sup>3</sup>

The synthetic, practical nature of Plato's approach to philosophy is made evident by his employment of the term techné in a peculiarly wide sense to cover both what we call pure science or theory and what we call art, craft, or practice. <sup>4</sup>

Raphael Demos represents another attitude; he points out that "Plato's philosophy is summed up in the life of reason. . . . For Plato, philosophy meant also a way of life." <sup>5</sup> The unity of the dialogues, according to Demos, is an expression of a personal and evolving outlook on life as it should be lived. Plato's philosophy is not systematic; it avoids any formulation in a rigid pattern. This theory of unity, although it is based on a subjective response rather than internal evidence,

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 89.

2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 92-97, 105 for the unity of the dialogues and the historical argument. See nn. on 383-384 also.

3. Wild, PTM, 27, 22-34.

4. Wild, PTM, 45.

5. Demos (ed.) I, DOP, x, viii.

would seem in many ways to be the most conclusive since the "spirit" of the dialogues would suggest this conclusion and, too, there is no entirely consistent evidence for any other point of view. A vital and growing personality could and would be concerned with different problems at different times, even though its method and attitude might remain essentially the same.<sup>1</sup> A great philosopher "may preserve definite convictions while experimenting with a variety of formulations for these convictions."<sup>2</sup>

There are then three general types of argument that have been asserted for the unity of the dialogues: (1) the logical; (2) the belief in a unified purpose in the works; (3) the more subjective aesthetic response to the personality of the author. All three are useful in trying to analyze Plato's works. When the dialogues are seen in their relation to each other, a wealth of pertinent material is revealed. In addition to the value of trying to see the thread of the argument as it develops, the scholarship spent on trying to ascertain the order of the dialogues has unearthed the complex formal structure of these dialogues which seem so simple at first glance.

The unity of the dialogues is especially important to the argument of this thesis for two reasons: (1) the assertion here is that Plato

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1. Demos(ed. ), DOP, I, viii. The dialogues have "a method and a unity. The unity is that of an intellectual personality that is growing."
  2. Demos(ed. ), DOP, I, viii.

does have a purpose that appears constantly in the earlier dialogues in relation to education—the value of virtue and its relationship to life in society; (2) material from the earlier dialogues will be used because they treat certain aspects important to education more fully than they are treated in the Republic, and this material will be used to substantiate the argument of the thesis. Such a procedure, of course, assumes that there is a consistency of development sufficient to warrant treating these dialogues as a prolegomena to the Republic.

#### 4. The educational importance of form.

Any philosopher who feels that he should put his thoughts on paper must do so in the hope that his readers will benefit from his insights—in this sense all philosophy has an educational purpose. It is a rare and happy exception, however, when the form of the writing itself supplements the content in furthering the end of enlightening the reader. The judicious balance that must be maintained for the dramatic form and the poetic allusions to add to rather than detract from the intellectual substance demands a rare artistic gift and a firm mind; in this respect, Plato stands unrivaled in philosophical literature for the successful use that he has made of structure and style to delineate abstract problems and stimulate the reader. The form and the content of the dialogues cannot be separated; therefore, the contribution that the very form of the dialogues makes to Plato's educational purpose must

be given consideration.

In his own time, Plato had two strong competitors in the field of education—the schools of rhetoric and the ancient poets—both of which placed a great deal of emphasis on eloquence and style. That, plus the fact that, according to tradition, he, himself, at one time aspired to be a dramatist, makes it not at all strange that Plato should be very conscious of form in his philosophical writings.<sup>1</sup> As important, if not more so, are his own opinions that education should be pleasant and should draw from the student what he already knows in order to show the importance and relations of that knowledge to a totally conceived life.<sup>2</sup> Education should lead gently and mould the soul; it should inspire interest and confidence so that the student will find within himself the enthusiasm to pursue difficult problems to a conclusion. The factual content of education is not nearly so important as the attitude towards life and the zeal for the truth which real education can foster. The artistic form of the dialogues admirably fulfills all of these requirements laid down by Plato himself.<sup>3</sup>

##### 5. Plato's analysis of form in the Phaedrus.

In the Phaedrus, Plato discusses the importance of form to

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1. Hartland-Swann, Art. (1951), 3-18.
  2. Cf. Lodge, PTE, 168-170. Lodge states that Plato's dialogues follow his own dictates and educational ideals of what literature should be.
  3. Cf. Plato, Phaedr., 264c-271a.

aesthetics and pedagogy. In its broad outlines, the Phaedrus is a criticism of rhetoric. Plato's criticism is directed at the rhetorician's purpose of trying to persuade or convince a person or group to accept an opinion without any concern for the actual truth of that opinion. He has Socrates show that no orator could be sure of the success of his rhetorical arguments unless he actually knew the real nature of the distinctions that he used to convert the truth.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the orator would have to be a philosopher first to be certain of his defense against another rhetorician. A true philosopher has no need to pervert the truth, but in either case, form is essential to a convincing argument.<sup>2</sup>

To be successful, an argument should be presented with close attention to form. It should begin with a definition of the subject under discussion.<sup>3</sup> The topic should then be developed logically and organically, for "every discourse ought to be a living creature."<sup>4</sup> The body of the discussion should be divided into two general categories: first the "comprehension of scattered particulars in one idea.... The second

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1. Plato, Phaedr., 269b-c.

2. Jaeger, PAI, III, 182-183. There is some scholarly dispute as to whether the Phaedrus was written before or after the Republic. Jaeger considers the Phaedrus a late work (see nn. 2-6, 330-331). Actually it would seem to make little difference since Plato must in fact have been aware of the formal discipline described in the Phaedrus before he put it on paper—even his earliest dialogues follow the outline in the Phaedrus.

3. Plato, Phaedr., 263d.

4. Plato, Phaedr., 264c.

principle is that of division into species according to the natural formation."<sup>1</sup> Plato proposes that these principles be adhered to in addition to the rhetorical principles of documented facts, logical proofs and the evaluation of probable future events.<sup>2</sup> Not only do the individual dialogues hew to the line of these formal dictates, but the dialogues as a whole, especially the earlier dialogues, constitute just such a formal program.

Why is Plato so concerned with form? Because the rhetorician or the philosopher who teaches scientifically is moulding the soul, and correct form is a prerequisite to scientific teaching. Time and again Plato has Socrates warn students that they are putting their souls in jeopardy if they seek knowledge without knowing what their education should consist of or why they want it.<sup>3</sup> The teacher's "whole effort is directed to the soul; for in that he seeks to produce conviction."<sup>4</sup> Plato often satirizes and condemns the Sophists and the teachers of rhetoric for this reason—they are not interested in the effects they produce on the total personality of their students but only in the successful manipulation of other men's opinions—and Plato is definitely not interested in using the conventional opinions of "the people" as a criterion for truth or for political organization.

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1. Plato, Phaedr., 265e.

2. Plato, Phaedr., 266e.

3. Plato, Prot., 312-314c. especially.

4. Plato, Phaedr., 271a.

## 6. Philosophy as a form of education.

Plato states, in the same vein as in Epistle VII,<sup>1</sup> that the written word cannot carry the burden of transferring knowledge to the student; it is a shoddy substitute for direct discourse, "the living word of knowledge which has a soul and of which the written word is properly no more than an image."<sup>2</sup> The form of a discourse or of writing is important if the argument has a purpose and a justification in relation to the truth. The purpose is education and the justification is the improvement of the "soul."

But he who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much which is not serious, and that neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, is of any great value, if, like the compositions of the rhapsodes, they are only recited in order to be believed, and not with any view to criticism or instruction; and who thinks that even the best of writings are but a reminiscence of what we know, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally for the sake of instruction and graven in the soul, which is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness, and that such principles are a man's own and his legitimate offspring; —... and who cares for them and no others—this is the right sort of man.<sup>2</sup>

The temptation exists to rest the case here, for his own words cannot be improved upon. It is clear, then, that Plato was very much aware of the educational importance of form and, in addition to his own

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1. Plato, Ep. VII, 341b-343a; see pp. 52 ff.

2. Plato, Phaedr., 278a; italics mine.

statements, the form of the dialogues is the best evidence for that awareness—the dialogues are masterpieces of educational literature.<sup>1</sup>

Plato must have felt that philosophical knowledge was best approached as a sort of education. His dialogues are models of it, and propaganda for it. They are educational, not only because of their power to excite the reader's sympathy and anticipation and to release his own intellect from its trammels, but also because, by seeing the repeated failure of sincere efforts to reach the truth, he comes to realize the difficulty of true knowledge and to understand the hitherto unexamined presuppositions on which his life is built.<sup>2</sup>

A philosopher and teacher who repeatedly reaches the end of a dialogue with a negative conclusion must have had a purpose—it could not have been mere chance or a literary device alone. What is his purpose? Could it be anything but a way to make the reader self-conscious of his own presuppositions and ignorance?<sup>3</sup> He could not do this without his great gift for making mental gymnastics dramatic and interesting. Plato has mastered the tight, formal organization of his works to such an extent that he is free to capture the emotion of the living moment in beautiful language. This in itself is characteristic of Plato's thought—freedom is the result of self-discipline.

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 105-106.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 105-106.

3. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 90.

No other writer has approached Plato's skill in concealing a rigid and intricate structure of reasoning beneath the flowing lines of a conversation in which the suggestion of each thought as it arises seems to be followed to an unpremeditated conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual drama is the perfect medium for exploiting his own talent, for it allows Plato to go beyond the written word. His dramatic presentation in the dialogue form captures the emotional overtones of conflicting personalities and ideologies. The stirring personal qualities of Socrates, in particular, which are so vividly and warmly portrayed are as important as the philosophical problems; they round out the man who is the concrete example and the inspiration of Plato's educational program.<sup>2</sup>

The beauty of the style, the humor and the drama, the personal tone and vivid character portrayal, the conflicting views and the use of the dialogue are all formal methods that help Plato educate the reader by eliciting his participation and stimulating his interest.<sup>3</sup> It is amazing how he can anticipate where a reader will find the going particularly difficult; in almost every instance he will introduce a summary of the argument or a myth after an exceptionally abstruse passage.

His use of the myth is in itself a beautiful and highly developed educational technique. Plato often uses them to summarize an argument

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1. Cornford, PTK, viii.

2. Cf. Zeller, POA, II, 159-160. Zeller shows the importance of Socrates as an ideal and as a unifying element in the dialogues.

3. Cf. Field, POP, II.

or to present the essence of a doctrine that is beyond expression in any other form. His myths and poetic analogies are so simple and so skillfully worked out that long after the details of the prose argument have been forgotten its essentials are retained through recollection of the myth.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the best example of his educational use of analogy or the myth is also his most famous—the analogy of the Cave.<sup>2</sup> This example is especially pertinent here because it is an analogy of the educational process which leads to the knowledge of the Good. Unlike so many analogies, Plato's do not obscure or distort the real meaning of the problem at hand; they serve a true educational purpose in explaining and simplifying difficult concepts.<sup>3</sup>

Plato's distinctive contribution to philosophy lies in these composite images [myths] which are so poignantly portrayed as to incite the mind to the further task of formal analysis, and so carefully constructed as to lead it from the very beginning along the proper lines.... The earlier dialogues are filled with vivid pictures taken from the life of Socrates, and other images, ... constructed with great skill to prepare the way for dialectical analysis.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Cf. Nettleship, LRP, 10. Plato's picturesque method of presentation often disguises the logical structure of his works. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 151.
  2. Plato, Rep., 514 ff.
  3. Cf. Barker, GPT, 119-120. Barker refers to analogy as a method of the dialogues and criticizes some of the comparisons made—especially that of the artisan with the statesman.
  4. Wild, PTM, 205.

### 7. The riddle of the Phaedrus and Epistle VII.

If Plato's philosophy is a form of education there would certainly seem to be a real philosophical purpose behind the writing of the dialogues; but if we take Plato at his word, the Phaedrus and Epistle VII raise an interesting problem, for in these works he states that philosophy cannot be written. If philosophy cannot be written, what do the dialogues represent? Plato gives an answer in the Phaedrus.

Then the philosopher will not seriously incline to 'write' his thoughts 'in water' with pen and ink, sowing words which can neither speak for themselves nor teach the truth adequately to others. No, that is not likely--in the garden of letters he will sow and plant, but only for the sake of recreation and amusement; he will write them down as memorials to be treasured against the forgetfulness of old age, by himself, or by any other old man who is treading the same path. He will rejoice in beholding their tender growth;... this will be the pastime in which his days are spent.<sup>1</sup>

Must we concede the day to those who hold that the dialogues are intellectual dramas without any overall purpose? Should we take Plato seriously? In the above quotation he himself notes growth; does this show that the despair of conveying truth through writing is a reflection of old age disappointed by the failure of earlier writings to produce the desired results? There seems to be some evidence for this supposition, if the seventh Epistle is accepted as genuine; for in Epistle VII the very same sentiments are stated and the events mentioned in the letter show

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1. Plato, Phaedr., 276d.

conclusively that this letter was written late in life. If the Phaedrus is not a late dialogue and if the earlier works are not a serious attempt to write down his philosophy, what do they represent? A fully developed theory one way or the other is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis, but we may note certain broad features of the dialogues and propose a tentative hypothesis.<sup>1</sup>

In a sense, Plato's dialogues bear out his contention that his philosophy was never written and that real philosophy cannot be written. The dialogues are without a doubt real philosophy by modern standards if not by Plato's; does this not show that the fault is with us--we have lost the "seriousness" that Plato refers to and in many cases modern philosophy has become an intellectual chess match rather than a program for living. When Plato says that he has never written his real philosophy, the ambiguity would seem to lie in the definition of real philosophy.

The impatience Plato often displayed with quibbling over words,<sup>2</sup> although he could quibble with the best, reflects his attitude that real philosophy is the deep concern with life as a result of which one seeks a theoretically sound orientation, a consistent pattern of beliefs that can be lived; it is the enlightened soul with an enthusiasm for truth and an affinity for searching out the fundamental problems of life.<sup>3</sup> Real philosophy, then, cannot be separated from the desires, conflicts and

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1. Cf. Field, POP, 183-184.

2. Cf. Plato, Euthyd., 278c.

3. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 25 ff.

resolutions of the living philosopher, but in actual discourse he can, by example, transfer the spark as Socrates transferred it to Plato, and light up the soul of his listener. Mere words, regimented as they are one after the other cannot trace out the difficult course that is real philosophy and a way of life.

Plato may never have written his philosophy, but his dialogues come as close as is possible to the living word and that transfer of inspiration which is "like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark."<sup>1</sup> This is the educational importance of the form of the dialogues taken as a whole. The conversational style or "Socratic method" in the individual dialogues is another aspect of Plato's educational use of formal devices.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Plato, Ep. VII, 341d.
  2. Cf. Nettleship, LRP, 8-9.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SOCRATIC METHOD

#### 1. Plato's use of the Socratic method.

In addition to the pedagogical value of the form of the dialogues taken as a whole, the way in which Plato has Socrates conduct the individual discussions also serves a very important educational function. The method is probably that actually used by Socrates in his conversations, but Plato makes it his own and an integral part of his intellectual dramas.<sup>1</sup> The method is no small part of the vital movement that Plato creates in his works.

His great literary discovery was that there is enormous dramatic charm and excitement in the powerful advance of a purely philosophical or scientific research, striving towards its goal in a succession of new and starting evolutions.<sup>2</sup>

The dialogues do not express things in unalterable form. It is sometimes difficult to decide which character expresses Plato's own sentiments, so forcefully does he present what we should think would

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 19-20. See also n. 11, 373; Aristotle is thought to have held that the dialogues were a new literary form. Pater in Plato and Platonism thinks of Plato as the first philosophical essayist and maintains that the loose organization possible in a series of essays is characteristic of Plato's personality and times (see 174-196 especially.) Cf. Zeller, POA, 123.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 90.

be the opposition's argument. Glaucon's speech for injustice at the beginning of Book II of the Republic is a good example; Plato presents the case so well that it seems to be a very impractical thing to want to be just.<sup>1</sup> Opposing views are seldom rejected or ignored; they are brought into the spotlight and attacked obliquely in an attempt to show that the position is inconclusive or only partially true. The dialogues rarely make a frontal attack; instead they lead off in a different direction, and when a principle is reached the dialectic returns to the original proposition and a contradiction immediately becomes evident.

Seen in this light, each of the Platonic dialogues is an education of men away from the false if cherished views of the "first blench" back again, but on a higher level, to the faith by which they act.<sup>2</sup>

The opinion expressed in Epistle VII that a thing or object of knowledge cannot be stated in an unalterable form would explain the choice of the dialogue as a medium to express the attitude, method and difficulty of philosophical thought.<sup>3</sup> Plato says that "benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy" is the method which leads to the intuitive grasp of reality "in a flash" so that the mind is "flooded with light."<sup>4</sup> Plato's own description of the Socratic method can be found in several of the dialogues.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Cf. Plato, Rep., 358b-362b.

2. Barker, GPT, 119.

3. Plato, Ep. VII, 341b-343a.

4. Plato, Ep. VII, 344b.

5. Cf. Robinson, PED, 3-10.

## 2. Plato on the Socratic method.

In the Apology, Socrates justifies the use of his method, the elenchus, as having been commanded by the gods who called him the wisest of men despite the fact that, in his own opinion, he had no wisdom at all. By examining men reputed to be wise he learned that he had more wisdom than they because he was at least aware of his ignorance.<sup>1</sup> Even the threat of death did not cause him to abandon God's order to fulfill the philosopher's mission of searching into himself and other men.<sup>2</sup> In this role it was his duty to sting his fellow citizens and all men into the concern for and the improvement of their souls.<sup>3</sup>

In the Meno, Socrates questions a slave about a problem in geometry in order to demonstrate that knowledge is the recall of truth already known to the soul. The slave solves the problem solely through the guidance of Socrates' questions even though he has had no previous training in geometry. The episode graphically reveals Plato's faith in the power of reason to apprehend truth if it is properly incited to seek truth and if the birth of the idea is attended by a capable "midwife." Reason can apprehend relations and knowledge without didactic indoctrination if the problem is clearly stated and the inconsistent conclusions are pointed out; this is essentially the method that Plato employs to

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1. Plato, Apol., 22.

2. Plato, Apol., 29d.

3. Plato, Apol., 29e-30b, 30e-31a.

instruct the reader in the dialogues.

During the questioning, Socrates turns from the slave and explains to Meno how important the realization of ignorance is to the quest for knowledge. When the slave realizes that he is in error he becomes eager to acquire the truth actively instead of submitting passively to teaching.<sup>1</sup> The assertion in the Meno is that philosophy begins in wonder and that elenchus or the Socratic method of question and answer supplies that wonder.<sup>2</sup> "Elenchus is thus a method of teaching. . . . It does not, however, actually increase knowledge, but only prepares the ground for it."<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the passages in the Apology and the Meno describe the purpose and method of the question and answer technique of Socrates and the dialogues, but in the Sophist Plato explains the technique as it relates directly to teaching. In an attempt to define the nature of the Sophists, the Stranger analyzes the various characteristics that seem to be common to the Sophists. The Sophists are obviously some sort of teachers; they try to change men's opinions or purge their souls of ignorance since ignorance exists only in the soul.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Plato, Meno, 84a-d.

2. Cf. Robinson, PED, Ch. 2, for a good short analysis of the Socratic elenchus.

3. Robinson, PED, 12.

4. Plato, Soph., 228d.

"Again, of the various kinds of ignorance, may not instruction be rightly said to be the remedy?"<sup>1</sup> When the Stranger goes on to describe how the soul is purged of ignorance, he is describing the Socratic elenchus.<sup>2</sup> How is it that the method of Socrates is attributed to the Sophists whom Plato continually criticizes?

Plato would seem to be pointing out a very important educational truth: the method does not distinguish "the nobler Sophists"<sup>3</sup> from Socrates but the purpose does. In the Sophist, Plato describes the Socratic use of question and answer in connection with Sophistry to demonstrate how difficult it is to distinguish the true philosopher from the fraud, for the Sophist may indeed purge the soul of ignorance—but it is ignorance of false opinion which he will purge and not ignorance of the truth. The passage in the Sophist from 229a to 231c is then actually a description of the Socratic method:

When a person supposes that he knows, and does not know; this appears to be the great source of all the errors of the intellect. The sort of instruction which gets rid of this is termed education. Education admits of further division; one method appears to be rougher, and another smoother. There is the time-honoured mode which our fathers commonly practised toward their sons—either of roughly

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1. Plato, Soph., 229a.
  2. Cf. Cornford, PTK, 177-187 and Wild, PTM, 273-284 for the relation of this passage (Soph., 226-231) in the Sophist to the Socratic method. Both feel that it is really a description of the Socratic elenchus.
  3. Plato, Soph., 331b.

reproving their errors, or of gently advising them; which varieties may be correctly included under the general term of admonition. But whereas some appear to have arrived at the conclusion that all ignorance is involuntary, and that no one who thinks himself wise is willing to learn any of those things in which he is conscious of his own cleverness, and that the admonitory sort of instruction gives much trouble and does little good—accordingly, they set to work to eradicate the spirit of conceit in another way.

They cross-examine a man's word, when he thinks that he is saying something and is really saying nothing, and easily convict him of inconsistencies in his opinions; these they then collect by the dialectical process, and placing them side by side, show that they contradict one another about the same things, in relation to the same things, and in the same respect. He, seeing this, is angry with himself, and grows gentle towards others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions, in a way which is most amusing to the hearer, and produces the most lasting good effect on the person who is the subject of the operation. For as the physician considers that the body will receive no benefit from taking food until the internal obstacles have been removed, so the purifier of the soul is conscious that his patient will receive no benefit from the application of knowledge until he is refuted, and from refutation learns modesty; he must be purged of his prejudices first and made to think that he knows only what he knows, and no more.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that Plato not only describes the Socratic method but shows that its use, in Socrates' mind at least, is joined with the conviction that no one does evil intentionally and that

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1. Plato, Soph., 229a-231c. This passage has been edited and condensed by the author from the Jowett translation.

all ignorance is involuntary. The danger of faulty education is also indicated by this passage; for, as Plato admits, the elenchus is a method common to both the real educator and the Sophist.

### 3. Elements of the Socratic method.

Plato has adequately described the main features of the Socratic method and its general purpose, but it would seem worthwhile to note some of the various devices that he uses in actually carrying out the method. Very often in the earlier dialogues Socrates treats the argument as if it were independent of the participants; that is, as if the logos were working itself out through the discussion. It is often Socrates' attitude that the truth evolves from the conversation and that he, as well as everyone else, does not know what the truth is when the conversation begins.

This profession of ignorance is characteristic of Socrates;<sup>1</sup> not only is the reader certain that Socrates has his tongue in his cheek, but his audience in the dialogues is often unconvinced of his ignorance. Plato's use of Socratic irony is an effective dramatic device which he has Socrates employ in order to keep the conversation going when an opponent becomes adamant as a result of his poor showing in the dialectic. He also uses the device to introduce the elenchus or the questions and answers; many in their pride expound their wisdom and

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1. Plato, Charm., 165b, 175d.

make themselves vulnerable after Socrates has sought their help and confessed his lack of knowledge.

In the use of questions and answers, several features that are an integral part of the method can be mentioned. First there is the evolution of ideas and the movement of thought which is often the only concrete accomplishment that can readily be shown in the earlier dialogues. Even when the dialogue reaches a negative conclusion there is the intimation of an answer; of a higher truth in the light of which the dialogue was conducted. The sincerity of the inquiry, even where another's ignorance is being exposed, reveals that the discussion is not conducted solely for the purpose of refuting some opinion but for the very serious purpose of revealing some truth.<sup>1</sup> Often there is a real concern shown for the improvement of the person engaged in the discussion with Socrates and since the reader is just as much that other person as the character in the dialogue we feel that Plato's purpose at all times is greater than that stated in the dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

There is a good deal of argument for argument's sake in the dialogues; usually this type of argumentation appears in the dialogues in contrast to the serious argument carried on by Socrates.<sup>3</sup> Plato is demonstrating that he could, if so inclined, engage in all the tricks of

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 64.

2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 36-37.

3. Cf. Euthyd., Prot. and Craty. especially.

the Sophistic trade, be it the analysis of the classic poets, a play on words or a flowery oration on some trite subject. In the Euthydemus he proves that a dog is the father of his owner, in the Protagoras he shows that poetry can be interpreted at will to agree with the speaker's opinions, and in the Phaedrus Socrates delivers a long ornate speech on love, which he debunks as soon as he is through.

The general tone of the inquiries is that of sincere regard for the essentials of the argument and the persons engaged in it. The drama and the passion that Plato achieves by manipulating both the characters and the deepest questions of life is often startling in its power and amazingly convincing in its effect. In the last few pages of the Phaedo, for instance, Plato has woven the question of immortality into the fabric of the personal tragedy of Socrates' death. He adds grandeur to the death of Socrates and conviction to his theory of immortality.

True to almost any argument and to his own dramatic sense, Plato shows that Socrates' skill in using the dialectic often incurred the wrath of his adversary, at which point he has Socrates become ironical or actually humorous in order to restore a genial tone to the discourse. Many times Socrates is the butt of the humor himself as when Meno declares that Socrates is like an electric ray in looks and in his ability to numb an opponent.<sup>1</sup> In these different ways, then, Plato supplies the

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1. Plato, Meno, 75d.

warp woven into the woof of the dialogue structure to give the complete and brilliant tapestry a play of surface color and design. Beneath these more obvious manipulations of formal technique, however, lies a deeper significance, a practical purpose.

#### 4. Choice and the Socratic method.

Whenever we are faced with a problem in which a choice must be made for a mode of thought or a form of action we are confronted with a practical situation. Plato's dialogues continually force this type of choice upon the reader.<sup>1</sup> He does not present us with a didactic treatise expounding one point of view exclusively; he delineates the argument and, although it is usually clear which side he prefers, it is up to the reader to decide whether he has proved his case in the face of the very good arguments which he often states for the opposition. It is characteristic that Plato is the first to present the difficulties that he sees inherent in some of his own doctrines.

By making the choice the reader's responsibility, Plato is conducting the development of thought in a manner true to life; he does not pose as a sage or an oracle to be consulted on the details of living well;

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1. Wild, PTM, 35. "Whenever we confront such a contrariety, we are confronting the sphere of the practical. . . . Plato's dialogues. . . are constantly presenting us with just such a contrariety. Hence we must regard him as primarily a practical rather than as a theoretical philosopher."

he only suggests the fundamental principles. By forcing the problem upon the reader, Plato is demonstrating a great truth: no man can decide for any other what he should do in the face of an actual conflict. By bringing to light, however, the primary problems of life, the purpose, attitude and the methods to be consulted, Plato is trying to establish a frame of reference, a guide to the wisest choices and the best life.

The Socratic method does in truth little more than clear the ground. . . that one may have a fair chance of knowing, or seeing, perhaps: it does but put one into a duly receptive attitude towards such possible truth, discovery, or revelation, as may one day occupy the ground. . . ; it does not provide a proposition, nor a system of propositions, but forms a temper.<sup>1</sup>

The paradox of Plato's style is that he affirms an absolute truth but uses a method which least reveals it. This is consistent with his whole educational theory that real knowledge is not "taught." You can only guide a person to the point where the truth is self-realized.<sup>2</sup>

#### 5. The question and answer technique.

The wisdom of Plato's oblique method is shown by the fact that his works have not grown old. Plato confronts the reader with the fundamental principles and problems of life in bold fact and in a way true to life.<sup>3</sup> For this reason Plato's works are still the best

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1. Pater, PAP, 188.

2. Pater, PAP, 188 ff.

3. Cf. Pater, PAP, 192.

introduction to philosophy ever written, even if the reader finally rejects the doctrines unique to Plato, such as the realm of Forms.<sup>1</sup> The dialogues presuppose nothing but an intelligent reader; they lead gently and gradually introduce the more complex theoretical questions in an atmosphere that vibrates with the importance of thinking about these matters. Plato goads the reader on with the "gadfly" of Socratic questions which he uses to arouse the sluggish will.<sup>2</sup>

The dialectic is logic, plus persuasion; helping, gently enticing a child out of his natural errors; carefully explaining difficulties by the way, as one can best do, by question and answer with him.<sup>3</sup>

The dialectic of the dialogues is best thought of as a mind in conversation with itself--first as it took place in the mind of Plato and then as it takes place in the mind of the reader with Plato's guidance. They represent the self-scrutiny and evaluation of possible solutions that occur to the thinking mind in connection with some difficulty.<sup>4</sup>

As Robinson states, Socratic irony and the elenchus, as used by Plato in the dialogues, are not without their negative aspects.<sup>5</sup> Socrates' profession of ignorance is often hypocritical and his satire

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1. Cf. Wild, PTM, 34.

2. Wild, PTM, 32. Wild suggests that practical doubt, such as that aroused by the Socratic method is out of place in a theoretical discussion.

3. Pater, PAP, 182.

4. Pater, PAP, 183.

5. Robinson, PED, 7-10.

bitter. His barbed questions arouse anger in his fellow citizens time after time, as he admits in the Apology,<sup>1</sup> and often his opponents are embarrassed and ridiculed in public to the delight of the audience.<sup>2</sup> Nor is Socrates above the use of eristic arguments to set up "straw-men" which are easily knocked down.

In general, the early dialogues are destructive; that is, they attempt to explode popular misconceptions, the accepted definitions and attitudes, the conventional and uncriticized pattern of life into which men fall; they jar us out of the mental rut of our opinions and beliefs but they do not suggest any concrete solution other than the worth of thinking about the issues raised--the early dialogues raise problems but give no answers.<sup>3</sup>

Should this stand as a criticism of the Socratic elenchus and the dialogues? It must be remembered that this procedure follows Plato's theory that the search for wisdom begins in admitting ignorance. But why is Plato willing to present Socrates in an unfavorable light as a hypocrite and antagonist? First, it is held to be a God-given duty to "sting" men and show them their false conceit; since no one likes to have his ignorance proven, many naturally become angry. Second, the hypocrisy and antagonism may have a negative effect on the

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1. Plato, Apol., 31b.

2. Plato, Soph., 230c.

3. Cf. Pater, PAP, 180 ff. Pater refers to the process as the "gradual suppression of error."

characters in the dialogue but it is a positive educational device from the reader's more objective position. The negative approach stimulates the reader and creates the tour de force which carries the dramatic and life-like evolution of ideas along, eliciting the reader's participation and making the problems his also.<sup>1</sup> The negative aspects of the dialogues, to which Robinson objects, are actually positive pedagogical aids from the reader's point of view.

#### 6. Midwife and gadfly.

The Socratic method is broadly composed of two distinct approaches: the first, exhortation or encouragement, is used when the conversation involves a person who admits his ignorance and who wants to learn.<sup>2</sup> As a general rule, Plato places Socrates in conversation with an intelligent youth when he uses this approach and Socrates then "leads gently" and acts as a "midwife" to the youth's newborn ideas. The Theaetetus, Charmides and Lysis are examples of the dialogues which use this method throughout, whereas Books I and II of the Republic contrast the methods. In Book I, Socrates uses, for the most part, the negative and ironic approach of the "gadfly" to refute Thrasymachus' power theory of government, whereas in Book II he is

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1. Cf. Lodge, PTE, 190. "It is almost impossible for an intelligent reader not to project himself into these problems and participate in the discussion."
  2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 37-38; 62 ff. for an analysis of exhortation and refutation as used in the dialogues. See also Wild, PTM, 74, for Plato's method.

serious and sympathetic in treating the same subject with Glaucon. Socrates is fighting fire with fire in the first Book; in Book II he is educating.

The "gadfly" technique is that of examination and refutation which Socrates uses against opponents who profess to know; he uses this procedure with those who claim that they can teach others what they know. This second method, then, is usually used when Plato portrays a Sophist as Socrates' adversary. Here the task is first to refute an objectionable opinion, to "purge" the argument, so that education may begin.

The development in both cases is usually the same; an hypothesis is proposed; Socrates then cites particular cases, very often from the crafts or professions but always from experience, and asks the respondent for his opinion on these analogies from life.<sup>1</sup> The conclusions from the particular cases are then compared to the preliminary definition and shown to be in contradiction or to extend beyond the original definition. As Pater describes the method:

The thought was to be adjusted first to the phenomena, to the facts.... To the thought, secondly, to the conception, thus articulate, it was necessary to adjust the term; the term, or 'definition,' by which it might be conveyed into the mind of another.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 89.

2. Pater, PAP, 178.

Only the control which Plato exercised over the form, his artistry in making it dramatic, and the freedom of the dialogue could succeed in this long and complex process.<sup>1</sup>

When the first definition or hypothesis is shown to be faulty another is suggested which seems to compensate for the shortcomings of the first, and the procedure is repeated; the dialectic may continue to a conclusion of sorts, usually in a myth, or it may be dropped as hopelessly confused. The important point for the practical significance of the method is that the theoretical inquiry is continually compared to life as it is actually lived. There is a constant alternation of abstract definition and commonplace analogy in the dialogues or, as Wild calls it, "the upward and downward path";<sup>2</sup> a constant comparison of the essential nature of life that lies behind the facts with those facts; a continual adjustment and readjustment of theory and practice.<sup>3</sup> This point is brought out time and again as Plato compares the practices of the doctor, the cook, the trainer, the pilot, etc., to the subject under discussion.

#### 7. The correlation of opinion and behavior.

There is a very important purpose behind Plato's use of these

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1. Cf. Pater, PAP, 178 f.

2. Wild, PTM, 31-32.

3. Jaeger, PAI, 178, Jaeger characterizes Plato's method: "An effort to attain ideals of universal validity, and a lively awareness of all the concrete facts of the life in which he is living."

commonplace analogies; he is trying to show that man often acts more wisely in individual decisions of his everyday life than he does in the much more important but much more difficult problems of his life considered as a whole and, even more important, that his actions are often in direct contradiction to what he thinks he believes.<sup>1</sup> A man may be very careful in his selection of a shipbuilder but perfunctory in his selection of a statesman or an ethical code. He demands that the shoemaker, the cook, and the pilot know their business but in ethics or politics he makes no such demands on himself or his leaders.<sup>2</sup>

This importance of Plato's use of techne, which Wild cites as proof that Plato is a practical thinker first and foremost, becomes evident, for if we demand that our technicians have specialized knowledge of their crafts, why should we not demand the same of the politician and,

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1. Cf. Nettleship, *EPR*, 7-8. "When we have to do with the mental atmosphere we are liable to forget [the truths of every day life]." Lodge, *PTE*, 231-232. Socrates appeals "from their technique, their commonplaces, and their thesis, to their own self, their full and complete self; and it is this, the complete self of Protagoras, of Gorgias, of Thrasymachus and the rest which finally sits in judgment upon the theses at first maintained, and either rejects them or accepts amendments which are more adequate expressions of the full experience, not only of the individual participants in the discussion, but of the whole group, including the readers of the Dialogues."
  2. Plato, *Prot.*, 319a f. Wild, *PTM*, 122-123. "Why should human history reveal this universal tendency, as evident in our own as it was in Plato's day, to follow reason so wholeheartedly in the arts and crafts taken one by one, but to deprive her of all actual authority in the broad direction of life itself?"

more important, why should we not demand the same of ourselves? What is more important than to know the art of living well? And if living is an art, a techne', shouldn't we have knowledge of that art?<sup>1</sup> The only way we can know the best, as Plato indicates in Ion,<sup>2</sup> is to know all the possibilities before judging and also the standard by which to judge--an impossible task empirically but one which, nevertheless, shows that "the unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>3</sup>

Here we have the central problem in Plato's philosophy: What knowledge reveals the art of living well? What is its nature? How can it be known? Can it be taught? Plato's search for universal definitions is an instrument for the plain knowledge of facts; his is the practical concern for sufficient definitions of experience in terms of the individual and society; ones that would satisfy the above questions. Plato refused to accept the moral relativism that resulted from the Sophists' individualism and their Law of Nature; he also refused to give up the individual values of the person to "statism" or endanger them with an epistemological or a metaphysical monism. Because he wanted both the individual and a cohesive society, Plato's search is for objects that would satisfy the needs of the individual and guide man towards the

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1. Cf. Cornford (tr. ), ROP, 8. Plato "adopted Socrates' belief that there should be an art of living analogous to the craftsman's knowledge and consequent ability to achieve a purposed end."
  2. Cf. Plato, Ion, 351c-352c.
  3. Plato, Apol., 38a.

realization of the best possible society.

Before this objective can be reached, however, Plato has to establish the inconsistency between what we think and how we act. True philosophy is a way of life and our opinions, if we would be true philosophers, must be based on knowledge so that our beliefs and our actions will be of one cloth.<sup>1</sup> The practical significance of the Socratic method in all of its aspects, then, is that it underscores again and again the need for harmony between thought and action.<sup>2</sup>

Our ideals and ends must be such that we can live with them and maintain our self-respect. To establish this fact as necessary is an educational problem; conventional opinions and prejudices must first be removed. The program which will gradually reveal that knowledge which is the art of living is also an educational problem. Finally, the knowledge which discloses a life consistent with theory carries with it an intellectual responsibility; it shows the obligation for accepting the task of "teaching" others.<sup>3</sup>

#### 8. Summary of Plato's methods.

To summarize: the dialogues give evidence of an objective, a unity of purpose--to stimulate self-education in becoming a virtuous citizen with a thirst for true knowledge. The earlier dialogues,

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1. Cf. Plato, Laches, 193e.

2. Cf. Wild, PTM, 119.

3. Cf. Plato, Rep., 519d f.

in keeping with Plato's own principles, introduce and define the problems; they are protreptic to the constructive dialogues where the definitions are applied to the particulars and arranged in a hierarchy of values. The Republic is, of course, the central work here. The later works, in which technical problems are probed with greater thoroughness, may be thought of as the investigation of the proofs for the metaphysical and epistemological tenets upon which the Republic was built. Here Plato is investigating his own first principles and he runs into some trouble, of which he is well aware, not so much with his own conviction and knowledge but with their formulation in words that do not have sufficient dimensions for conveying truth.

The dialogues as a whole have a formal structure consistent with Plato's educational method. They have a beginning in definitions, a hierarchical development in relation to life and a conclusion that seeks to show that the definitions are based on true knowledge of first principles. This is his educational method "writ large." Within each dialogue there is essentially the same development. Plato uses myths, allegories, poetic allusions and dramatic contrasts of personalities and ideas to carry the reader along and to inspire the hope of self-enlightenment. In addition to these "progressive visual aids," the dialogue itself is a formal principle purposely chosen in the attempt to capture the "living word" so that the argument can "defend itself" and thus "kindle the spark that lights up the soul."

The dialectic of the conversation has been shown to contain two primary principles, exhortation and examination, exercised in conjunction with the various formal devices cited above, i.e., myths, allegories, etc. In addition to the formal structure of the argument there is the dramatic structure which incorporates humor, Socratic irony, the ideal of Socrates and the sense of a living evolution of ideas which Plato's artistry imparts to the unfolding problems. The emotional overtone of the whole reflects the sincerity of a personal search and the concern for basic issues--a sense of real importance permeates all the dialogues.

It is possible to carry the analysis to absurd lengths in claiming a premeditated educational purpose for every detail of structure. It is hardly reasonable to suppose that we can tell exactly where a conscious formal structure serves rather than commands the poetic genius of Plato's highly creative mind. The consistency of formal structure and Plato's own statements as to the importance of form in instruction, however, belie any theory that the dialogues are the product of artistic inspiration alone. We must remember that for Plato the Beautiful is the Good; anything that is truly good will be beautiful and its beauty lies, for the most part, in its form.<sup>1</sup> Again, we must keep in mind that the form is not composed merely of the physical dimensions; the

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1. Cf. Plato, Sym., 210a-212a.

physical relations suggest the true content composed of all the possible conclusions that could be drawn from particular premises which are consistent and harmonious. If we think of the form of the dialogues in this light, then the complex involutions and convolutions, so harmoniously resolved, cannot be thought of as anything but consciously planned with a purpose, here held to be fundamentally educational--a purpose to educate his fellow man with an ideal of higher truth and to show, through the dialogues, that that truth, though difficult to obtain, is possible to obtain through self-enlightened discipline of the "soul."

Finally the practical significance of the dialogues and in particular the Socratic method, lies in the constant exhortation to bring opinion into line with action; to make philosophy a way of life in which theoretical knowledge furnishes the ground and the support for practical action; to destroy the unanalyzed conflicts between belief and behavior.

Plato calls us back to first questions and first principles. His purpose is to foster the growth of the human soul towards the good; and true again to the logical order, he does not attempt to suggest methods of achieving this end until he has subjected the soul to an analysis, so that the teacher may know what it is that he is set to treat before he begins to think how he shall treat it.... As always he asks, not necessarily for our assent, but for a resolute effort to clear our minds of hazy half-truths and windy phrases and to think the whole matter out again from the beginning, bringing the means into relation with the end.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Leeson (intro), EPR, vii.

## CHAPTER V

## THE CONVERSATIONAL DIALOGUES

1. An introduction to the problem of virtue.

The early, or conversational dialogues, as they will be referred to here, are so evidently concerned with virtue in relation to the individual and so clearly show the importance of education in that relationship that we must start by considering them briefly. The interrelation of various problems and some of the later developments in the dialogues can best be appreciated after examining these protreptic works, in which Plato often states briefly but explicitly the difficulties that have shaped his thoughts.

Charmides, Lysis, and Laches are an introduction to Plato's philosophy; they use the Socratic method in the form of exhortation--an invitation to learning which expresses confidence in our ability to reason through problems, although it brings to light at the same time the common presuppositions and prejudices of the reader.<sup>1</sup> These dialogues all deal with individual virtues and virtues of the individual. It is an egocentric beginning which asks: What is the nature of the virtues to which individuals aspire?

The conversational dialogues might be thought of as the attempt of an individual to understand himself in relation to those values that

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, Ch. 4, and especially 90 ff.

seem fundamental to personal happiness. It is a psychologically sound beginning in the individualistic concern for personal well-being. There are frequent suggestions that virtue extends beyond the egocentric regard for one's self but such suggestions are, at this stage, often questioned by Socrates as possibly limiting personal happiness. He does so, however, without defining "happiness." When happiness is defined in the later dialogues, it becomes clear that the issue was clouded in these early works in order to make the problem vital to the reader. The negative approach allows the reader to "find" the right direction as he argues with the many obviously superficial arguments presented by Socrates. Even though many of the refutations offered by Socrates are shallow, they are never entirely devoid of good sense; these cunningly contrived questions gently push us into the "correct" solutions, since the answers which would "defeat" Socrates at this stage of the development are the ones that Plato will arrive at himself in the later works.

The dialogues start in the right place--with the person as an individual. It is in the area of personal moral values that most men disagree and are most often guilty of sloppy reasoning--they are the basis of disagreement on broader social questions. In the Euthyphro, Socrates explains his constant concern with moral problems; if the question at hand is one that can be empirically verified, it is senseless

to argue about it--let an actual experiment answer the argument.<sup>1</sup>

But what differences are there which cannot be thus decided, and which therefore make us angry and set us at enmity with one another?... I will suggest that enmities arise when the matters of difference are the just and the unjust, good and evil, honourable and dishonourable.<sup>2</sup>

Each virtue is a good consciously sought, and each has attending consequences that are intellectually judged to be good or bad. Everyone admits that courage is a good quality to have, that temperance is a good personal characteristic and that it is good to be wise. Plato is asking in these dialogues: What is the basis of our value judgment that this or that is good? If there is justification for thinking some things good and others bad, what can be more important to life conceived of as richer than mere existence than the discovery of the standards by which right choices and actions are governed? In these short dialogues he is preparing the culture for a colony of ideas that may take root and thrive on the barren surface that is most men's minds.

Before the broader problems of the just and the unjust, etc., are introduced, however, Plato places in the foreground the virtues that are personal, in order to establish the fact that the virtuous individual is the frame of reference and "the good life" for the individual the goal of his philosophy. Plato inherited the problem of the "good life" from Socrates,

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1. Plato, Euthyph., 7c.

2. Plato, Euthyph., 7d.

who was concerned with ethical universals and the improvement of the individual soul or the total personality.<sup>1</sup> The dialogues, then, begin at the beginning with the individual and his active concern for himself in the quest for happiness.<sup>2</sup> And again, in keeping with the normal order of thought, the first questions which arise are the moral questions involved in choosing a way of life. Plato insists that we must first know what these various virtues and values are in order to decide on a way of life.

The conversational dialogues all have an educational setting either explicitly, as in the Laches and Euthydemus, or implicitly as in the Charmides and Lysis. In the Charmides, Socrates, who has just returned from battle, establishes the tone that pervades these works. He says: "I, in my turn, began to make enquiries about matters at home--about the present state of philosophy, and about the youth. I asked whether any of them were remarkable for wisdom or beauty or both."<sup>3</sup> These informal dialogues show Plato's concern and that of the historic Socrates for the youth of Athens and their education.

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, Ch. 2 and especially 23 ff; also 87 ff.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 94-96. Jaeger believes that Plato's object in these dialogues is to prepare us for his "political" education in the later works, especially the Republic. It is true that the virtues discussed are the same as the cardinal virtues of the "statesman," but nowhere in these works does Plato move beyond individual ethics.
  3. Plato, Charm., 153d.

## 2. Charmides and the virtue of temperance.

Socrates, fresh from the battlefield at Potidaea, is introduced to Charmides, an Athenian youth renowned for his beauty and intelligence, on the pretext that he is a doctor who can cure Charmides' headaches.<sup>1</sup> Socrates tells him that he will cure his headaches but first he must treat his soul, "for the part can never be well unless the whole is well."<sup>2</sup> The cure is effected by the use of charms, "and these charms are fair words; and by them temperance is implanted in the soul and where temperance is, there health is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body."<sup>3</sup> Since Plato considered the Socratic elenchus to be an educational device, the allegory here is evident; the headache that Socrates is referring to is ignorance and the cure is instruction.<sup>4</sup>

In order to discover whether or not he will have to use the charms, i. e., elenchus, before giving him the medicine, Socrates asks Charmides if he is temperate. When Charmides evades a direct answer, Socrates proposes that they inquire into the nature of temperance together and we find that Socrates is exercising his "charms" before effecting the cure.<sup>5</sup>

Charmides' first definition that temperance is quietness is

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1. Plato, Charm., 155b.  
 2. Plato, Charm., 156e.  
 3. Plato, Charm., 157a-b.

4. Cf. Plato, Charm., 176a, Charmides realizes that the "charms" are instruction.  
 5. Plato, Charm., 158e.

rejected on the grounds that temperance is a good and noble thing and that many things that are good are not quiet.<sup>1</sup> The implication is that all good and noble things have something in common, i. e., that they are in some respect temperate, and that quietness is not inclusive enough. Socrates points out further that "the life which is temperate is supposed to be the good."<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that temperance is falsely equated with the good life and that much of the inconclusive nature of the dialogue results from this implication, for temperance cannot satisfy all the conditions of the good life. In this negative fashion, Plato makes the point that arete' is a unified attitude towards life and that it is good to the extent that it is based on the knowledge of such aspects of virtue as temperance.

i. Critias--"the doing of good actions."

The definition that temperance is modesty is quickly rejected since an inferior man may be temperate even if he has nothing to be modest about.<sup>3</sup> The next definition, "temperance is doing our own business" brings Critias, its author, into the argument to defend this definition.<sup>4</sup> Critias restates the definition to mean that temperance is "the doing of good actions."<sup>5</sup> Socrates immediately asks if this is enough; "are temperate men ignorant of their temperance?"<sup>6</sup> In other

1. Plato, Charm., 159b-c.

2. Plato, Charm., 160c.

3. Plato, Charm., 160d.

4. Plato, Charm., 162d.

5. Plato, Charm., 163e.

6. Plato, Charm., 164a.

words, consequences are not the only criterion of the temperate man; his intentions must be good, too, and to be well grounded, intentions must be based on knowledge.

To be temperate is to act wisely, but a doctor or a craftsman does not always know, even if his intentions are the best, that his skill will ultimately produce good.<sup>1</sup> Temperance is not based entirely on technical knowledge or good intentions; wise action must include self-knowledge founded on a set of values that may be used to evaluate the probable consequences of that action.

Socrates' questions reveal the necessity for a personal set of values by which to judge an act as good or bad; Critias therefore redefines temperance as self-knowledge. Since temperance or wisdom (now equated since temperance is self-knowledge) is the knowledge of something, it must be a kind of science; as a science it must be a science of something. Socrates asks Critias: "What is that which is not wisdom, and of which wisdom is the science?"<sup>2</sup> "Wisdom alone," Critias answers, "is a science of other sciences, and of itself."<sup>3</sup>

Socrates interprets Critias' statement to mean that wisdom, temperance, and self-knowledge mean that a man would "know what he knows, and what he does not know."<sup>4</sup> Actually this is Plato's own position

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1. Plato, Charm., 164b f.

2. Plato, Charm., 166b.

3. Plato, Charm., 166c.

4. Plato, Charm., 167a.

but here it is thrown into doubt by Socrates who asks if it is possible to know what is not. The solution of the Eleatic paradoxes that are at the bottom of this problem were of great concern to Plato. John Wild claims that Plato solved the essential points of these paradoxes in the Parmenides, Theaetetus and especially in the Sophist where he shows that "false opinion" consists of things that are truly known but falsely conjoined.<sup>1</sup>

ii. Practical doubt of the science of science.

The question of whether it is possible for the science of science to exist is left open to doubt; Socrates shows that in the case of magnitudes, numbers or any relations that depend on the senses or the emotions the idea of self-relation is incredible. Socrates indicates that there may be "self-related things" but that a "great man" is needed to determine this inherent property.<sup>2</sup> It may be that Plato has his own theory of Forms in mind at this point, but he adds significantly that these inherently self-related things, if they existed, would have to satisfy at least one condition.<sup>3</sup>

I am not certain whether there is such a science of science at all; and even if there be, I should not

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1. Wild, PTM, 247-272, 284 ff.
  2. Plato, Charm., 169a f.
  3. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 92-93, 96-98, and especially 101. Jaeger feels that Plato did have the theory of Forms in mind in these early dialogues.

acknowledge this to be wisdom or temperance, until I can also see whether such a science would or would not do us any good.<sup>1</sup>

Here, it would seem, is at least a partial answer to Santayana's comment on the Platonic "supersensible ideals" in The Sense of Beauty; Santayana admits that such ideal values may truly exist, but that it does us no good to suppose that they do if we can never know them (that is, experience them).<sup>2</sup> Plato has anticipated Santayana, since he demands that a "science of science" satisfy the very conditions which Santayana feels would have to be an integral part of the Ideas--that "supersensible ideals" can be known and that they "do us good."

Far from being an airy speculator unconcerned with everyday life, Plato is at all points interested in the practical application of a consistent set of values to life as it must be lived; he asserts the primacy of practical, moral philosophy. This view is strengthened if we take Socrates' reference to the "science of science" as meaning technical philosophy. Socrates refuses to admit that this "science of science," even if it can know what you know and what you do not know is the same as "self-knowledge," which was Critias' last definition of temperance.<sup>3</sup> The knowledge of knowledge or the science of science would not have any practical content; that is, it would be the awareness that you had some

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1. Plato, Charm., 169b.

2. Santayana, SÖB, 89.

3. Plato, Charm., 170a-b.

kind of knowledge but it could not be the knowledge of anything in particular, therefore it could not be self-knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Knowledge is of something, and whether or not it is known to be true depends upon specific knowledge and verification. It takes a doctor to determine if another man knows what he is talking about in relation to health and disease.<sup>2</sup> Thus practical experience, technical knowledge, and the investigation of the "facts" of experience are the prerequisites to a sound philosophy. These thoughts shape all of Plato's philosophy; they foreshadow the theory of Forms and the Philosopher-King. That in the Charmides these thoughts are associated in Plato's mind with the Philosopher-King and the well ordered state is certainly indicated.

We should have found out those who knew, and have handed the business over to them and trusted in them.... The house or state which was ordered or administered under the guidance of wisdom, and everything else of which wisdom was the lord, would have been well ordered; for truth guiding, and error having been eliminated, in all their doings, men would have done well, and would have been happy.<sup>3</sup>

No sooner has Socrates made this suggestion than he doubts whether using wisdom to order the state would be beneficial since it implies the division of labor and a controlled society.<sup>4</sup> Are the benefits

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1. Plato, Charm., 170b.

2. Plato, Charm., 170c-171c.

3. Plato, Charm., 171e-172a.

4. Plato, Charm., 172d.

of an ordered society sufficient compensation for the limitations of personal freedom? Will man be happy if he is governed by what is best rather than by what he individually thinks is best?

Let us suppose that wisdom is such as we are now defining, and that she has absolute sway over us; then each action will be done according to the arts or sciences, and no one professing to be a pilot etc. when he is not... Now I quite agree that mankind, thus provided, would live and act according to knowledge, for wisdom would watch and prevent ignorance from intruding on us. But whether by acting according to knowledge, we shall act well and be happy, my dear Critias, --this is a point which we have not yet been able to determine.<sup>1</sup>

Critias, who is now probably speaking for Plato, insists that happiness would be impossible without knowledge, but, he agrees with Socrates, not all kinds of knowledge lead to happiness.

The life according to knowledge is not that which makes men act rightly and be happy, not even if knowledge include all the sciences, but one science only, that of good and evil... But that science is not wisdom or temperance, but a science of human advantage.<sup>2</sup>

The dialogue ends, apparently having resulted in nothing more than a series of contradictions and paradoxes. In spite of the negative results, however, Socrates assures Charmides "that the more wise and temperate you are, the happier you will be."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Plato, Charm., 173b-c.
  2. Plato, Charm., 174c-d.
  3. Plato, Charm., 176a.

### 3. The method of the smaller dialogues.

The "conversational dialogues" and that portion of the Euthydemus which will be considered follow the method of the Charmides very closely. The Charmides was chosen for a more detailed treatment because of its broader scope--it touches on almost all the problems raised in the other works and its method is characteristic of the other "conversational" works. All the little dialogues portray Socrates in discussions with youths of Athens or in discussions about them, as in the Laches. The style is light and moves quickly, without halting to investigate in a profound manner any of the many bypaths suggested by the argument.

In these dialogues, Socrates does not refute the opinions of others so much as he confuses the subject under consideration. A definition of virtue is proposed, usually by a youth, and Socrates then cites some case not covered by the definition; another is offered and Socrates again shows an exception or a contradiction. Much of the uncertainty arises from the ambiguous usage and association of undefined terms such as good, happiness, knowledge, etc., with the as yet undefined "virtue" under discussion. That there is a definite purpose behind these "red herrings" is certainly indicated by the systematic way in which Plato goes about clarifying these terms, as they apply to virtue, in the later dialogues.

In all these dialogues Plato has Socrates engaged in conversation

with persons reputed to have the virtue around which the argument revolves. This device serves to emphasize the dichotomy between behavior and belief that exists in many persons who have not critically examined the principles which govern their lives. These unanalyzed contradictions are the source of Socrates' epigrammatic statement that "evil is ignorance";<sup>1</sup> it is also the source of Plato's efforts to show that personal values must rest upon knowledge.

The characters in the dialogues who are virtuous but who cannot describe their virtue emphasize how difficult it really is to define virtue. Charmides is a temperate youth who cannot tell what temperance is; Lysis and Menexenus are the best of friends but the definition of friendship escapes them; Laches and Nicias are battle-tested generals but they cannot agree on any description of courage.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Personal virtue and knowledge.

The chain of thought that weaves its way through these conversational dialogues from personal virtue to knowledge may be stated simply and succinctly. The Euthydemus, from 278e through 283a, contains most of the essential points of the argument in the same order as they are stated in the brief summary below.

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1. Cf. Plato, Prot., 345b, 353 ff.; Euthyd., 281e; Meno, 77 f.
  2. Cf. Plato, Lysis, 212b; Charm., 158b-c; Laches, 193e.

i. Virtue and personal happiness: In all these dialogues, virtue is asked to satisfy at least one condition; virtue must not infringe on personal happiness since it is supposed to be good, and it should contribute to happiness.

ii. Happiness and good fortune depend on virtue: Personal happiness and good-fortune depend, in some respect, on virtue; the references to this point are often less obvious in the Charmides, Lysis and Laches than those to pt. i., but there is no doubt that in Plato's mind, virtue is a more concrete term and that it is only in terms of virtue that happiness has any meaning.

iii. Can virtue be acquired? If virtue is not only consistent with but necessary to happiness, can virtue be acquired? --that is, can virtue be learned? --or are virtue and happiness accidents of personality and birth?

iv. How can virtue be learned? If virtue can be acquired, can it be taught? If it can be taught, who should teach it? --what are the necessary qualifications of the teacher?

v. What are the ends of education? If virtue can be taught we must know the ends sought to be sure that we are learning the right thing. To know the end is to be able to define it; thus the purpose of all these dialogues, on the surface at least, is the definition of virtue.

vi. Virtue depends on some kind of knowledge: Virtue, whatever it is, depends on some kind of knowledge which includes but goes beyond the technical knowledge of matters of fact. The indication is that this knowledge is some form of moral judgment.

i. Virtue and personal happiness.

Socrates relates his experience with the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, two Sophists who used to teach fighting in armor but who now are prepared to teach virtue.<sup>1</sup> Their facile display of refuting any statement fails to impress Socrates; he does not believe that they can seriously mean that the sophistic arguments used to trip Cleinias, no

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1. Plato, Euthyd., 273d.

matter what he says, are the "teaching of virtue" which will make a man good whether he wants to be or not.<sup>1</sup>

For if a man had all that sort of knowledge that ever was, he would not be at all the wiser; he would only be able to play with men, tripping them up and oversetting them with distinctions of words.<sup>2</sup>

Socrates takes over the argument and directs the questions to show how he thinks the discourse should proceed to investigate wisdom and virtue. "What human being is there who does not desire happiness?"<sup>3</sup> And then characteristically, as when any virtue is discussed for the first time, Socrates asks if it should be considered a good and noble thing.<sup>4</sup> In what sense the virtues are "good things" is left for the reader to decide, and since the individual is the focal point in these writings, it is easiest to think of this "good" as subjectively profitable or valuable--as good for me.<sup>5</sup>

It has already been noted (see p. 87) that in the Charmides Plato seems hesitant to suggest the rule of the wisest and the division of labor since these things might be inimical to individual happiness.<sup>6</sup> The basic assumptions of the Republic are questioned in the spirit of the individual who assumes the existence of a social structure from which he benefits but who does not realize that social obligations necessarily

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1. Plato, Euthyd., 277d f; 274 e..

2. Plato, Euthyd., 278b.

3. Plato, Euthyd., 278e;  
cf. Charm., 173e; p. 86 f.

4. Cf. Plato, Charm., 159c.

5. Cf. Plato, Charm., 160b; 160c.

6. Cf. Plato, Charm., 171c-173c.

limit his own definition of freedom. The emphasis on personal happiness in these dialogues would make it seem that happiness is the end for which virtue exists. In a sense this is so; psychologically it is so as we begin our study of virtue. Happiness is completely subjective, and since virtue is being investigated in these introductory dialogues from an egocentric viewpoint, what is more natural than to confuse happiness with ideals?

Happiness, however, is not an object of knowledge; it has no specific content; it may be the attending psychological quality of any realized value. One of the tests of virtue is that it contributes to personal happiness. While Plato plainly states this thesis over and over again, he plays a variation on the theme more subtly; it is all the more powerful since the repeated conjunction of virtue and happiness gradually becomes an insistent "happiness depends on virtue." The proposition that "all happy men are virtuous," which might have seemed violently objectionable at first, appears perfectly normal by the time we reach the Euthydemus.

ii. Happiness and good-fortune depend on virtue.

Socrates shows that happiness is realized through specific values; "shall we not be happy if we have many good things."<sup>1</sup> He lists the things people usually think of as essential to happiness--health, wealth,

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1. Plato, Euthyd., 279a.

appearance, power, etc.; to these he adds temperance, justice, courage, and wisdom. Mere possession of "good things," however, does not make a man happy. "A man who would be happy must not only have good things, but he must also use them."<sup>1</sup>

The proper use of his "goods" depends on knowledge of that possession, for "what do possessions profit a man, if he have neither good sense nor wisdom?"<sup>2</sup> It turns out, then, that possessions are not good in themselves;<sup>3</sup> it takes intelligent action to realize the potential value of anything.<sup>4</sup> The conclusion, then, is that "wisdom only can make a man happy and fortunate."<sup>5</sup>

It is now evident that this direction was indicated in the introductory section of the Lysis. Lysis' parents want him to be happy, but they do not, on that account, allow him to do as he pleases; in fact, his actions are very much controlled.<sup>6</sup> His own slave tells him what to do; this is because he does not have the experience or knowledge to govern all his

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1. Plato, Euthyd., 280d.

2. Plato, Euthyd., 281b.

3. Plato, Euthyd., 281a-282.

4. Dewey and Childs, TEF, 288. It is interesting to note that Dewey, who is generally critical of Plato, is in agreement with him at this point. "It is the business of a philosophy of education...to transform a preference which is blind...into an intelligent choice--one made, that is, with consciousness of what is aimed at, the reasons why it is preferred, and the fitness of the means used."

5. Plato, Euthyd., 282c.

6. Plato, Lysis, 207e f.

actions himself.<sup>1</sup> Socrates' objection in the Charmides that the limitations imposed by the rule of reason might not be consistent with personal happiness are partly answered by this observation in the Lysis. Happiness does not lie in doing anything that you want to do, but in doing what you have sufficient knowledge to do with understanding. "In things which we know everyone will trust us."<sup>2</sup>

### iii. Can virtue be acquired?

The various ways in which virtue and happiness are allied in the "little" dialogues naturally suggest the thought expressed by Socrates in the Euthydemus: "If only wisdom can be taught, and does not come to man spontaneously."<sup>3</sup> All men want to be happy, and if happiness is the quality psychologically concomitant with virtue, they will certainly be interested in whether virtue can be learned. Ostensibly, this is the subject of the whole dialogue; the brothers have claimed to be able to teach virtue and Socrates is waiting for this great event to take place.<sup>4</sup> The problem, however, is not answered in the Euthydemus. The other "conversational" dialogues do not question that virtue can be taught; they proceed, confident that virtue can be acquired--if only it can be defined.<sup>5</sup> Not one results in a definition. The cumulative effect of one negative result

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1. Plato, Lysis, 208c.  
 2. Plato, Lysis, 210b.  
 3. Plato, Euthyd., 282b.

4. Plato, Euthyd., 273e.  
 5. Cf. Plato, Lysis, 210d;  
Laches, 179e-180b;  
Laches, 186b.

after another is to throw a shadow across the possibility of acquiring virtue; especially since the persons in the dialogues who fail with Socrates exemplify the virtue they seek to define. Plato is building up the importance of the issue of teaching virtue which points ahead to the Protagoras, by using the negative endings.

iv. How can virtue be learned?

It might seem foolish to ask how virtue can be learned when it has not yet been decided that virtue can be taught at all, but Plato does tell, very generally, how virtue should be taught if it can be taught. If it does not "spring up spontaneously," virtue is too valuable a personal asset to leave to chance acquisition; the youth must be properly educated.<sup>1</sup> Proper education is a very difficult and a very important thing; therefore, the advice of experts should be followed and not necessarily the opinion of the majority.<sup>2</sup> These experts should be proven teachers who have knowledge, experience and good training; if you wish to see youngsters well educated, seek out the best teachers.<sup>3</sup> The good teacher improves the soul of his students through some sort of knowledge, which we now suspect to be knowledge of moral principles.<sup>4</sup> The type of teacher Socrates describes in the Laches is the same as that exemplified

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1. Cf. Plato, Laches, 178 f. Lysimachus and Melesias criticize their famous fathers, Aristides and Thucydides, for educating them poorly; they blame their undistinguished record on their lack of proper training.

2. Plato, Laches, 184e.

4. Plato, Laches, 185e.

3. Plato, Laches, 185; cf. 201a-b.

by Socrates himself in the Charmides and Lysis.<sup>1</sup> The very opposite of the good teacher is portrayed in the Euthydemus by means of a vicious satire on Sophistic methods of teaching. The whole dialogue is a criticism of false teachers; from the beginning, where it is asked if virtue can be taught, to the bitterly critical end, Plato contrasts the serious purpose of Socrates with the mental "hocus-pocus" of the Sophists.

The "inversion" of education and the good teacher is skillfully outlined by Socrates in his "tribute" to the artistry of the Sophists.<sup>2</sup> Their "magnanimous disregard of any opinion" (they will refute anything), their "public-spirited denial of all differences, whether good or evil, white or black, or any other" is "praised" by Socrates.<sup>3</sup> He comments that their "education" is quickly learned: "I observed that Ct esippus learned to imitate you in no time."<sup>4</sup> He warns them that they had better not give any more "public entertainments," or they will lose money because their easily learned commodity will no longer be scarce.<sup>5</sup> If we reverse these characteristics we have a general description of the good teacher who alone is able to answer the question as to how virtue can be learned.

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1. Cf. Plato, Laches, 185 ff.

2. Plato, Euthyd., 303b ff. See Wild, PTM, for use of term "inversion."

3. Plato, Euthyd., 303d.

4. Plato, Euthyd., 303e. The italics are the author's.

5. Plato, Euthyd., 304a-b.

v. What are the ends of education?

A good teacher is essential for good education, but additional information is needed in order to determine what the teacher should teach. "Would there not arise a prior question about the nature of the art of which we want to find the masters?"<sup>1</sup> Socrates explains that when a person "considers anything for the sake of another thing, he thinks of the end and not of the means."<sup>2</sup> Teachers and education are but a means to some other end which differs with any given subject. At first it seemed that happiness was the end sought in learning virtue (see point i. ), but it developed that happiness is realized through knowledge and virtue. The Euthydemus draws these threads together by proposing that "good things" make us happy if we have sufficient knowledge or power of judgment to use them to the best possible advantage.<sup>3</sup> As the dialectic moves forward, happiness takes on a deeper significance, a moral cast, which at every step is more closely associated with "the good." It retains, however, the ambivalent trait of seeming to be a nebulous end, psychologically speaking, dependent on both virtue and material goods.

Plato is preparing us, in these little dialogues, to accept education in its highest form as "improvement of the soul."<sup>4</sup> The immediate

1. Plato, Laches, 185b.

2. Plato, Laches, 185d.

3. Plato, Euthyd., 280b-282a.

4. Cf. Plato, Laches, 185e.

ends of education, therefore, are those "virtues" which will improve the soul. The phrasing here is awkward because we do not yet know that Plato thinks of virtue as one whole composed of various aspects such as wisdom, courage and temperance or that in his psychology Plato compares the tripartite soul to these three "virtues." We have seen, however, that the correct use of a "possession," such as the potentiality for being virtuous, involves knowledge of it.<sup>1</sup>

If we know what temperance, wisdom, or courage is, we should be able to define it; this is the positive meaning of Socrates' single-minded pursuit of definition in these dialogues. "What is that common quality, which is the same in all these cases?"<sup>2</sup> The objectivity of universal ethical definitions is necessary if virtue is to be taught.<sup>3</sup> Charmides comments, when the dialogue ends without having reached a conclusion: "How can I know whether I have a thing, of which even you and Critias are, as you say, unable to discover the nature? --(not that I believe you)."<sup>4</sup> In a negative fashion, typical of these works, this statement says that to know is to be able to define; the parenthetical remark is a significant hint that the inconclusive ending must not be

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1. Plato, Euthyd., 281b.

2. Plato, Laches, 191e; cf. 192b.

3. Cf. Plato, Lysis, 219d-220b, where Plato differentiates intrinsic values from instrumental values; the "ends" or intrinsic values are those with some sort of objectivity.

4. Plato, Charm., 176b.

taken too seriously. To Plato, the more comprehensive importance of seeking accurate definitions lies in the search for objective truth. "For is not the discovering of things as they truly are, a good common to all mankind?"<sup>1</sup> If there is no objectivity in value judgments there is no basis for improvement through education, or for education itself.

vi. Virtue depends on some kind of knowledge.

Throughout the smaller dialogues, knowledge has been related to the various "virtues" discussed, but just what this knowledge consists of or what it knows is never made quite clear. We are told that it is the knowledge of "good and evil"<sup>2</sup> but good and evil are not defined other than in the cryptic statement that "wisdom is the only good and ignorance the only evil."<sup>3</sup> We are left with no real understanding of what Plato means by knowledge after reading these works. He has given enough examples, however, of the distinctions that can be made between different "types"<sup>4</sup> of knowledge, to give an idea of the direction his thought is taking.

The identification of temperance and wisdom in the Charmides led to the examination of the "science of science." This "pure knowledge"

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1. Plato, Charm., 166d.
  2. Plato, Charm., 173d and especially 174c-d; Laches, 194 and 196.
  3. Plato, Charm., 281e.
  4. There is no real evidence in these dialogues that knowledge is thought of as a hierarchy; there is some evidence in the Euthydemus but not enough. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 92 ff. Relation of the "little" dialogues to later works. Jaeger believes that Plato had the Theory of Forms in mind when the "little" works were written.

was criticized as not being knowledge of anything in particular.<sup>1</sup> The knowledge of particular things or even the "science" of some field or subject, such as medicine, is not that type of knowledge which will insure our happiness.<sup>2</sup> All that the science of medicine can reasonably insure is better health; it cannot guarantee that better health will make an individual a better or happier person.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge should be sought, however, for "if you discard knowledge, you will hardly find the crown of happiness in anything else."<sup>4</sup>

The Lysis begins with a short discussion of happiness and personal freedom.<sup>5</sup> Lysis is limited in his actions and choices because, as Socrates points out, he lacks experience and knowledge. Immediately after assuring Lysis that many of the values in life depend on knowledge and experience,<sup>6</sup> Socrates turns to Lysis' best friend and says: "You have experience, tell me then, when one loves another, is the lover or the beloved the friend; or may either be the friend?"<sup>7</sup> Menexenus has a friend and he has experienced friendship, but he is at a loss to define love, which is assumed to be the essence of friendship.

The difference between experience as a form of knowing and the experience of an emotion seems to be the only way of explaining why

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1. Plato, Charm., 169c ff.

2. Cf. p. 85 f.; Plato, Charm., 174c.

3. Cf. Plato, Laches, 195c.  
Cf. p. 87.

4. Plato, Charm., 173d.

5. Plato, Lysis, 207e f.

6. Plato, Lysis, 210b.

7. Plato, Lysis, 212b.

Plato used the introduction that he did; he definitely shows its separation from the rest of the dialogues by having Lysis called from the scene and by starting the inquiry into friendship as soon as Lysis leaves.<sup>1</sup> A passage in the Lysis, which is almost identical with one in the Symposium, states that love does not depend on knowledge but rather on the desire for knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Since this is part of Plato's explanation of love in the Symposium, it is reasonable to suppose that the introduction was used as a contrast in showing the unique position enjoyed by love as the motivating force which incites the potentially virtuous person to seek that knowledge which will make him truly virtuous.

In the Laches, at the very beginning of the argument, courage is conceded to be a part of virtue. Later in the dialogue, Nicias defines courage as "the knowledge of that which inspires fear or confidence in war, or in anything."<sup>4</sup> The nature of that knowledge is not revealed in the Laches, and Socrates is quick to point out that this definition implies the knowledge of good and evil in the past, present and future, which would make courage equivalent to the whole of virtue.<sup>5</sup> In a negative way, Plato is telling us the definition of virtue itself.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Note similar development of love in the Symposium.

2. Plato, Lysis, 218b; cf. Symposium 203e-204a.

3. Plato, Laches, 190c.

4. Plato, Laches, 195a; this is very similar to Plato's definition in the Protagoras. Cf. p.140 f. of text.

5. Plato, Laches, 198a-199a.

6. Both the relation of a part of virtue to the whole and its connection with knowledge anticipate the Protagoras.

The Charmides and Laches end with the conclusion that temperance and courage respectively are somehow related to the knowledge of good and evil; the Lysis shows that freedom of choice and responsibility are interdependent and that they depend on knowledge. As these little dialogues move separately in the same direction, it becomes evident that much of the confusion in these dialogues stems from the failure to distinguish "judgment" from "knowledge." Plato's distinctions between the "types" of knowledge lead to the realization that moral judgment is equivalent to wisdom or true knowledge and that virtue and moral judgment are one and the same. In this way Plato is preparing the way for the Protagoras where virtue is considered to be knowledge.

This line of reasoning is better shown in the Euthydemus' more positive development than in the other conversational dialogues. In character with the negative endings of these works, the Euthydemus does not solve the problem with which it starts--"can virtue be taught"?--but the dialectic has moved beyond the association of parts of virtue with knowledge. Virtue is no longer erroneously attached to temperate acts or courageous deeds; it is shown to consist of rational judgment in relation to a total scheme of living well. A truly virtuous man will act courageously when courage is demanded or temperately when temperance will accomplish the greatest good.

The man of knowledge is better off than one without it; knowledge is good and virtue is good. The proper use of good things depends on

true knowledge or wisdom.

Seeing that all men desire happiness, and happiness, as has been shown, is gained by a use, and a right use, of the things of life, and the right use of them, and good-fortune in the use of them, is given by knowledge, --the inference is that everybody ought by all means to try and make himself as wise as he can.<sup>1</sup>

This sort of fuzzy alliance between undefined virtue and undefined knowledge, hinging on their mutual goodness, exists in all these smaller works, but as we finally associate the temperate man, the courageous man, the friend and the teacher we begin to see that not only is the wise man more likely to be virtuous, he is the only one who can be truly virtuous. That there are individuals who are virtuous without knowing the grounds for their virtue is amply demonstrated throughout these dialogues. These persons, however, are not truly virtuous; they may easily lose their virtue, since it is not based on rational conviction, and furthermore they cannot teach it to others.

The virtuous man who is ignorant of the rationale for that virtue might be thought of as virtuous in absence of evil whereas if he knew, he would be virtuous in spite of evil. For instance, a dolt might be trusted with both goods and money because he does not have the wits to value either. He is honest because he does not have the brains to be dishonest. An intelligent person, however, who values both goods and money, and

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1. Plato, Euthyd., 282a.

resists the temptation to steal or cheat because of his convictions must be thought of as morally honest; he has chosen that action which is consistent with his own values. In this sense, then, he "possesses" honesty to the extent that he can justify his actions to himself. The greater his knowledge, the more he possesses honesty; that is, the greater is the number of different circumstances in which he can act with conviction.

#### 5. The negative endings and education.

It may seem farfetched to suggest that the negative endings of the smaller dialogues should aid Plato's development of the idea that virtue can be taught, but they do serve that purpose whether Plato intended them to or not. These little dialogues show how difficult it is to define ethical universals; in fact, they cause us to doubt whether virtue can be defined at all. If virtue can be "possessed" by individuals but cannot be known objectively, that is, defined in some sense, then virtue certainly cannot be taught. In retrospect, we can see that this is one of the implications of the smaller dialogues; in the Euthydemus, the problem of teaching virtue is stated as such, but this dialogue also ends negatively. The Charmides, Laches and Lysis cast doubt upon particular aspects of the virtuous life as intelligible; the Euthydemus does the same thing to virtue as a whole.

If virtue cannot be defined, if courage, temperance, and wisdom remain unrelated characteristics of individuals that cannot be acquired,

then, certainly, virtue cannot be taught and the association of education and virtue is foolish. Experience shows, however, that some people do "learn virtue" and it is Plato's purpose to make education in virtue as scientific as possible. It is his aim to analyze the fundamental principles that govern virtue in order to reduce the element of chance, in learning or teaching virtue, by means of a systematic education which would insure everyone the opportunity to realize fully their potential for virtuous living. Thus, if some people do acquire virtue, it is because something is known; if it is known we should be able to define it and if we can define it, in some way, it can be taught. The negative dialogues indicate the direction that the investigation must take; they also show how the investigation centers around knowledge as the link between the individual and virtue.

The conversational dialogues are inconclusive for several reasons: first, virtue is considered as a personal attribute of benefit to the individual, but the social responsibility of the virtuous citizen is not mentioned. The good life is too narrowly conceived in these dialogues. In the second place, the "parts" of virtue are seen to depend on knowledge, but since they are considered separately the fact that it is knowledge of moral judgment which apprehends "parts" of virtue in relation to life as a whole escapes notice.

So the negative result of the dialogue is inextricably connected with the synoptic character of the dialectic enquiry.... Starting with enquiries into the nature

of all the special virtues, [Plato] shows that any attempt to define one of them inevitably ends in tracing it and all the others back to virtue in itself, from which alone it can be understood.<sup>1</sup>

Virtue itself is discussed by Socrates in the Euthydemus,<sup>2</sup> but virtue is not defined, so that even though judgment is shown to be the prime factor in personal well-being, the problem remains unsettled because it is not shown what that knowledge must differentiate between or in relation to what it is to judge. All the suggested definitions in these little works have valid aspects because they are based on experience, but the "scattered particulars" must be gathered in order for them to make sense.

The Charmides, Lysis, Laches and Euthydemus have shown that virtue, since it is good, must make us happy; furthermore, they have indicated that to be truly happy is to be virtuous. Other than that, the positive contribution of these dialogues lies in the problems that they raise; we have seen the problems evolve from very lifelike investigations into the nature of the special virtues. They give us the reasons for Plato's concern in later works with the relation of the special virtues to virtue itself, his differentiation of kinds of knowledge, his preoccupation with the grounds for moral judgment, and his persistent attention to education.

The fountainhead of wisdom is the awareness of ignorance; the Socratic

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 103-104.
  2. Plato, Euthyd., 278e-283b.

method, the elenchus, is based on this principle. In the conversational dialogues, Socrates is practicing his method, not only on Charmides, Lysis and Cleinias but also on us, the readers. By forcing us to think, Plato is showing that we often do not know what we thought we knew about such things as temperance, courage, and wisdom--the negative endings are essential to his purpose.

When we observe in reading them that not one of the little dialogues concludes with the expected results, but all turn into a question mark at the end, we feel a philosophical excitement which has a profound educational influence.<sup>1</sup>

This is the educational method of the dialogues at work.

The problem of education is intrinsically connected with social obligation; how does the virtuous individual or rather the citizen stand in relation to the state? What can be expected from the state in the way of guidance? What can the state expect from him as regards service or duty? These problems are not considered in the "little" dialogues. As an introduction to these questions, let us turn to the Euthyphro, Apology and the Crito to observe what happens to the virtuous citizen, Socrates, as he goes about his business in the state.

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 105-106.

CHAPTER VI  
VIRTUE AND SOCIETY

The virtues that have been discussed in the conversational dialogues may all be thought of from the purely egocentric point of view; courage, wisdom, temperance, and even friendship do not necessarily need to be considered in a social context. In these early works, Plato has avoided the question of how these virtues are connected with the life of the individual in his community; they have been abstracted, as it were, from the living context of the individual in society in order to be considered in themselves. Much of the confusion in the conversational works stems from this fact, as is indicated by their negative endings.

The Euthyphro, Apology, and the Crito extend the drama beyond the narrow confines of the individual, and present Socrates on a wider stage as the virtuous individual faced with life in society. In the earlier dialogues Socrates was seen trying to help others define virtue; in the "Socratic dialogues" we never lose sight of virtue, but definition is not the primary function of these works. In them we see virtue in action, as personified by Socrates. Courage in the face of death, wisdom in his advice to the people, and temperance towards his unjust judges are all exhibited in their turn by Socrates in these poignant dramas, which accurately etch the character of the man who is Plato's educational prototype.

### 1. Euthyphro.

The Euthyphro seems, at first, no different from the conversational dialogues. When Socrates asks Euthyphro to "explain the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious" we can be forgiven if this seems to us to be an old story;<sup>1</sup> here is Socrates up to his now familiar trick of inquiring into the nature of virtue. Unlike the conversational dialogues, however, the Euthyphro is not negative in ending alone; it is negative throughout. The only positive statement in the dialogue links piety to justice as a part, but this thought is immediately lost and never returned to for development. Unlike the previous dialogues, the Euthyphro never associates piety with knowledge; in the light of the earlier writings, this is a distinct departure. The only purpose of the dialogue would seem to be the criticism of the conventional ideas of piety expressed by Euthyphro.

The ready admission on the part of Euthyphro that piety is a part of justice may seem strange to the modern reader, but it furnishes an insight into the trial of Socrates on the criminal charge of impiety. While the Greeks were extremely tolerant of religious cults they also demanded obedience, in act at least, to the laws of the state governing religion. Socrates was accused of violating the laws of the state, and it is the judicial character of religion in Athens that elicits the immediate

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1. Plato, Euthyph., 6e.

acquiescence on the part of Euthyphro to the idea that piety is a part of justice. Piety, then, cannot be thought of as a strictly individual virtue, since to be pious meant to conform to a certain social pattern. Of course, this is the opinion of the Athenians, and Euthyphro, as a super-typical Athenian, cannot suspect what Socrates means by piety or justice. We can think of the Euthyphro as keynoting the transition from virtues of the individual to the virtuous individual in society.

In the dialogue, Socrates meets Euthyphro and in the course of conversation tells him that he is going to be accused by Meletus of corrupting the youth of Athens.<sup>1</sup> Socrates remarks, ironically, that Meletus is the only statesman to begin in the right place by cultivating virtue in the youth--Socrates has not forgotten the prime issue of the conversational dialogues.<sup>2</sup> Euthyphro, a soothsayer, will also be involved in litigation; he has come to the Porch of King Archon to press charges against his father for murder.<sup>3</sup> His father chained a servant who had slain another servant in a drunken rage and the killer subsequently died from lack of attention.<sup>4</sup> Euthyphro has no qualms about his proceeding because his father committed an impious act, and in matters relating to piety he has exact knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

As we would suspect, Socrates shows a great interest; the

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1. Plato, Euthyph., 2e.  
 2. Plato, Euthyph., 2e.  
 3. Plato, Euthyph., 3b-c.

4. Plato, Euthyph., 3d-4a.  
 5. Plato, Euthyph., 5a.

profession of exact knowledge on any subject is enough to arouse the "gad-fly" in Socrates at any time, and here is an expert on the subject for which he himself is about to be tried. "Tell me," he says, "what is the nature of this idea [of piety], and then I shall have a standard... by which I may measure actions."<sup>1</sup> Piety, Euthyphro replies, is what is dear to the gods.<sup>2</sup>

Euthyphro agrees with Socrates that arguments are not usually about empirical facts which can be verified, but about ethical standards-- the just, good and evil, the honorable, etc.<sup>3</sup> The stories of the gods, which Euthyphro specializes in, tell of disagreements between the gods. It follows that these disagreements would also be over moral issues; therefore, the same things are loved and hated by the gods, and the same things, then, might be considered pious by some gods and impious by others.<sup>4</sup> How can Euthyphro know if his father committed a pious or an impious act in letting a murderer die? If we now think of Socrates accused of corrupting the youth, we see Plato's criticism of any such idea of piety being used to judge Socrates. We also see why Socrates, who has a much more refined idea of piety,<sup>5</sup> would not use the stories of gods, which formed the basis of the religious laws, in his own defense; he could not do so and maintain his integrity.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Plato, Euthyph., 6e.  
 2. Plato, Euthyph., 6e.  
 3. Plato, Euthyph., 7d-f.

4. Plato, Euthyph., 9a-b.  
 5. Cf. Plato, Apol., 35e.  
 6. Cf. Plato, Gorg., 521d-522e, for Plato's explanation of Socrates' defense.

Euthyphro's succeeding definitions are no better understood by him; the more acute logical analysis demonstrated by Socrates, in the later part of the dialogue, shows how profoundly he has considered the nature of piety, which makes his trial for impiety that much more ironical. In each case, as Euthyphro remarks, his arguments get up and move away from him under fire of Socrates' questions--as far as he was concerned they would "never have stirred."<sup>1</sup>

The dialogue seems to be taking a more positive direction when Socrates says, "I will myself endeavor to show you how you might instruct me in the nature of piety. . . . Is not that which is pious necessarily just?"<sup>2</sup> But Plato portrays Euthyphro as resorting to verbiage and obviously becoming impatient of having his "exact knowledge" disintegrate and sift through his fingers.<sup>3</sup> Socrates shows Euthyphro that prayers and sacrifices, as he understands them, are foolish. He comments, rather sarcastically, that Euthyphro must really know what piety is to take the part of a murderer against his own father and that he should therefore tell Socrates what it is. Euthyphro decides that he is in a hurry and must leave; thus Socrates is left to face his trial without Euthyphro's "expert" help.

Plato makes it obvious that Euthyphro does not understand the

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1. Plato, Euthyph., 11d.
  2. Plato, Euthyph., 11e.
  3. Plato, Euthyph., 14b.

true nature of law or piety; his equivocation stands in contrast to Socrates' real piety and reasoned concern for the law and justice in the Apology and the Crito. Socrates' behavior is consistent with his beliefs--in these dialogues he epitomizes the ideal of harmony between theory and practice.

## 2. Apology.

The Apology, as its title would suggest, is not so much Socrates' defense against the accusations brought against him as a justification of his way of life and his philosophy, since the two are synonymous in his case. When Socrates describes what he feels is his god-given duty, there can be no doubt that he conceived the mission of the philosopher to be that of an educator of the people and the state. The fact that this way of life has resulted in his trial on the charges of impiety shows that even so lofty a vocation could not be pursued with impunity; society cannot be ignored by a man who would teach, even if his method be the negative type used by Socrates. Socrates was aware of the pressure that can be brought to bear by society, and he explains that he shunned political life because a man who acted on conviction could not long endure in politics.<sup>1</sup> The Apology reveals many of the problems which face the

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1. Plato, Apol., 31e; cf. 37d where Socrates refused exile because he felt that he would probably also be driven out of other countries for teaching. Cf. 32a: "He who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one."

man of principle when his mission is not understood by a society with different standards from his own; it poses the problem: How is the iconoclast or the saint related to the society in which he must live?

As the Apology begins, Socrates is addressing the court and asking them to be patient with him, since he will present his case in his own way, depending on the eloquence of truth rather than the eloquence of a prepared oration such as is usually heard in the courts.<sup>1</sup> He explains that he is in court because of two sets of enemies; those that he has made in the past and those who are his opponents in the trial.<sup>2</sup> The enemies that he made in the past became angry because he pursued the mission that he felt the Delphic Oracle had imposed on him when the prophetess declared that no man was wiser than Socrates.<sup>3</sup> Convinced of his own ignorance, he examined the politicians, the poets and the artisans in turn and finally became convinced that he could not refute the oracle.<sup>4</sup> These men professed knowledge which they did not have; at least Socrates was aware of his ignorance and this gave him a slight advantage in wisdom.

And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make inquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Plato, Apol., 17b.  
2. Plato, Apol., 18e f.  
3. Plato, Apol., 21a.

4. Plato, Apol., 22a.  
5. Plato, Apol., 23b.

In this way Socrates made many enemies among the most powerful groups in the state: no one likes to have his ignorance exposed, especially in the presence of others. These, then, have old grievances to settle.

The accusations of his present enemies are easily disposed of when Socrates engages Meletus in the elenchus.<sup>1</sup> In refuting the charge that he intentionally corrupted the youth, Socrates states a preamble for the philosopher-educator's purpose in society--stated negatively.

The good do their neighbours good, and the evil do them evil. . . . If a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me, I am very likely to be harmed by him; and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too--so you say, although neither I nor any<sub>2</sub> other human is ever likely to be convinced by you.<sup>2</sup>

It would follow that the "good man" would improve his neighbor; that is, do him "good." Thus we have the educational function of the "good man" or the philosopher. When we add this little line of reasoning to the examination of men's opinions, it becomes evident that Socrates, as he says himself, is the "gad-fly" of the state for its own good and, it might be added, in order to have good neighbors himself.<sup>3</sup>

Socrates refuses to abandon his philosophical mission of searching into himself and other men even in the face of death, for that would be a known evil and he will never avoid a possible good, such as death, to

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1. Plato, Apol., 24c-28.

2. Plato, Apol., 25e.

3. Plato, Apol., 30a f.

embrace a certain evil.<sup>1</sup> Socrates feels that his role as a teacher of the people is justified and he does not intend to give it up.

For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private.<sup>2</sup>

When the verdict is returned, Socrates is neither surprised nor really unhappy and he will not give in so much as to plead for a mild punishment. "I will not say of myself that I deserve any evil, or propose any penalty. Why should I?"<sup>3</sup> He will not allow the shadow of a doubt to pass over the conviction that his way of life was right and honorable; a way of life which he summarizes as follows:

Reflecting that I was really too honest a man to be a politician and live, I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself; but where I could do the greatest good privately to every one of you, thither I went, and sought to persuade every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests, and look to the state before he looks to the interests of the state; and that this should be the order which he observes in all his actions.<sup>4</sup>

When Socrates receives the penalty of death, he tells the court that they cannot avoid censure by killing men; the easiest and best way

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1. Plato, Apol., 28e-29b.

2. Plato, Apol., 31a-b.

3. Plato, Apol., 37b.

4. Plato, Apol., 36c.

to avoid the criticism of others is to improve themselves.<sup>1</sup> As for their penalty, death holds no fears for him; in the past his "inner voice" has always warned him when his conduct was leading him into evil, and he has not heard it at any time during the trial; therefore, he feels that death must be a good thing.<sup>2</sup> He advises his judges to "be of good cheer concerning death" for no really evil thing can happen to a good man in life or in death.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Crito.

How far we have moved from the realm of the egocentric is emphasized in the Crito where the discussion revolves around the individual's regard for the law. How does the individual stand as regards the law if he has been unjustly convicted of a crime? Socrates certainly has been unjustly condemned to death for impiety. Should he, as Crito suggests, make good his escape, if not for his own sake, then for the sake of his family and friends? The law in the Athenian democracy, since there was no judicial system as we think of it today, very concretely represented the opinion of the people; therefore, this question means: How is the virtuous man to act in relation to the formulated opinion of his society? He cannot compromise and remain faithful to his own values and purpose, but neither can he fulfill that mission in opposition to the

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1. Plato, Apol., 39d.

2. Plato, Apol., 40a f.

3. Plato, Apol., 41c.

opinion of the citizens as a whole. Socrates' uncompromising spirit, which refused to condescend to the people in court, his refusal to violate the laws of Athens by appealing to the mob's emotions or to vindicate himself by means of sophistic interpretations of the religious myths, have condemned him more than the charges brought against him.

After being sentenced to death, Socrates awaits the arrival of the ship from Delos which is the signal for his execution. He awakes one morning to find Crito already in his cell; the ship is to arrive very shortly and Crito has come once again to try to convince Socrates that he should accept the aid of his friends, and escape. Crito's arguments seem quite plausible in the light of Socrates' unjust conviction. Socrates agrees to flee if they can prove that their previous conclusions about justice and the law were in any way wrong.

Has the argument which was once good now proved to be talk for the sake of talking--mere childish nonsense? That is what I want to consider with your help, Crito--whether, under my present circumstances, the argument appears to be in any way different or not.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Apology, and especially in this passage, two points mentioned previously are very evident: 1. actions must agree with belief; 2. philosophy, for Socrates and for Plato, is a way of life. Socrates insists that any action suggested by Crito must be

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1. Plato, Crito, 46d.

consistent with the values and principles that have governed his life. "Not life, but a good life, is to be chiefly valued. . . . And a good life is equivalent to a just and honourable one."<sup>1</sup> The fact that he is now in jail condemned to die does not change those principles; nor does the fact that he was unjustly accused warrant returning evil for evil, should escape prove to be an evil.

Socrates then acts as the Laws of Athens which have come to interrogate him and Crito.<sup>2</sup> The Laws say that the state could not exist if anyone who felt like it could disregard the law whenever he considered himself unjustly accused.<sup>3</sup> Further, the Laws point out that Socrates has moral obligations to the state which he summarizes for them.

For, having brought you into the world, and nurtured and educated you, and given you and every other citizen a share in every good which we had to give, we further proclaim to any Athenian by the liberty which we allow him, that if he does not like us when he has become of age and has seen the ways of the city, and made our acquaintance, he may go where he pleases and take his goods with him. . . . But he who has experience of the manner in which we order justice and administer the state, and still remains, has entered into an implied contract that he will do as we command him. And he who disobeys us is, as we maintain, thrice wrong; first, because in disobeying us he is disobeying his parents; secondly, because we are the authors of his education;

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1. Plato, Crito, 48c.
  2. Plato, Crito, 50b-54d.
  3. Plato, Crito, 50b.

thirdly, because he has made an agreement with us that he will duly obey our commands; and he neither obeys them nor convinces us that our commands are unjust; and we do not rudely impose them, but give him the alternative of obeying or convincing us;--that is what we offer, and he does neither.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates has demonstrated his satisfaction with Athens and the Athenian law by remaining in the city constantly and raising his family there. If he had been primarily interested in preventing his execution, he could have proposed exile as his punishment, but he had claimed that death was more desirable; would it be manly to change his mind now, just because death was approaching?<sup>2</sup> By accepting death, Socrates is keeping faith with his life, and dies innocently wronged; but if he escapes he negates his life and does wrong for which many innocent people might suffer.<sup>3</sup> It would mean breaking his agreement with the state, destroying faith in the law, jeopardizing his friends and casting shame on his family--all for a short period of mere existence. If he revoked his sentence of his own accord by escaping, he would in effect renounce virtue, law, and justice; since they make life worth living, that which would remain to him would be mere existence. In accepting death he is the only one to suffer and in thus accepting death his life is justified--besides, death may be a good.

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1. Plato, Crito, 51c-52a.
  2. Plato, Crito, 52c.
  3. Plato, Crito, 53b ff.

#### 4. Law and justice.

The contrast between law and justice begins in the Euthyphro. This may not seem evident at first, but as has been pointed out, piety is part of the laws of the Athenian state. Piety is never associated with knowledge, in the Euthyphro, in the way in which each of the virtues discussed in the little works was, and there are no leading questions on the part of Socrates that suggest a series of seemingly plausible conclusions, as there are in the early writings--the Euthyphro is destructive throughout. What purpose does the Euthyphro serve, then? That it is meant as an introduction to the Apology is evident both by the references to Socrates' impending trial and the subject of the dialogue. But why should Plato want to introduce the Apology with a completely negative discussion of piety, even if impiety is the charge brought against Socrates?

Euthyphro is a soothsayer, an expert on matters pertaining to piety, but he cannot maintain a consistent line of reasoning when defending his definitions of piety. He is not an ordinary citizen, such as those who will judge Socrates; he is the type of person who forms the opinions of the people. In his self-righteous conviction he never doubted his knowledge and, as far as he was concerned, he never would have except for Socrates. If Euthyphro cannot satisfactorily define piety, how can the people? The Athenian idea of piety is shown to be based on

mythological stories and the opinion of uninformed people; and since there was no system of jurisprudence in Greece, the opinion of the people in the Athenian democracy was the law. For this reason, rhetoric and sophistic argumentation were extremely important to the politician in that society. Socrates' refusal to use "all the tricks of the trade" in his defense, makes the contrast between law and justice, in these three dialogues, that much more ironic.

Plato, then, by exploding the opinions of piety based on mythology and all the other common definitions expressed by Euthyphro, is showing that the court had no valid basis for judging the only really pious person in their midst. In the Euthyphro, piety was admitted to be a part of justice, and yet in the Apology we see the perversion of justice in the name of law.

All the dialogues discussed so far have revolved around virtue; they have suggested that personal happiness depends on virtue, but we do not know exactly what that virtue is. In the Apology we see it exemplified in every word and action of Socrates. The previous error of limiting the consideration of virtue to the individual is shown in its falsity; with no uncertainty, Plato shows that the man of virtue is a teacher and a philosopher whose every act is rooted in the very fibre of the whole man and whose philosophy is a profound conviction--a way of life--the primary function of which is the improvement of himself and

his fellow citizens. But what of the personal happiness that was supposed to be the concomitant of virtue? In the Apology, Socrates' virtue leads to tragic consequences but, and this is the fundamental criticism implied by Plato, it is not the fault of virtue but of the law as it existed in Plato's time; how can justice be obtained if law is subject to such vagaries as the whims of an uninformed mob?

We have seen that the problem of virtue lay at the bottom of the improvement of the individual for his own sake, and now the problem has taken on a broader social significance, for Socrates' unjust conviction stands as a criticism of law on the part of that virtue which he personifies. If a "man should want good neighbors," is he justified in using Socrates' method of trying to improve men in spite of themselves? Here we find one of the basic problems that underlie Plato's theory of education. Virtue is a personal attribute and the good society depends on virtuous men as individuals, but how shall "most men" be improved if they do not care to be improved and if "most men" govern the law? "Most men" became angry with Socrates when he tried to educate them, and since they controlled the law he was condemned to death.

The conflict between law and justice had become acute in Plato's time; the chaotic times in which different forms of government succeeded one another in rapid fashion were crystallized in the Sophists' theories of Natural Law and the relativity of ethical principles. The old

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aristocratic idea of the essential unity of the citizen with his state and its laws had broken down; individual ethics replaced arete, and law, external to the citizen, replaced justice. The whole movement of an age seemed to be caught up and symbolized in one tragic incident when Socrates calmly took the cup and drained off the last bitter drop of hemlock. Plato's task was to invert the order so that Socrates would be the rule rather than the exception, and law and justice would once more be united. If this is kept in mind, Plato's theoretical, social revolution through the educational state in the Republic will seem much more cogent.

Plato is not criticizing law, as such, in the Apology, but law based on uninformed opinion. He goes out of his way to make this clear in the Crito, where the principle of the law is reaffirmed in the most dramatic form possible. Socrates refused to save his life, in order to preserve the principle of the law. The Crito furnishes an immortal picture of conviction and behavior harmoniously resolved in the virtuous citizen. In these dialogues we are given a concrete example of the virtues that were considered theoretically in the conversational dialogues. We have seen that virtue can be fully realized only in a social context and that the truly virtuous man is a philosopher with an educational mission, but we still do not know what virtue is, whether it can be acquired, or on what it is based. In the Protagoras these problems

are brought together and we find the first really positive step towards bringing virtue, the individual, and society together in a balanced relationship.

##### 5. Sophistic education vs. Socratic education.

The Protagoras is the first dialogue to investigate constructively the basis for those convictions and moral principles discussed separately in the conversational dialogues and exemplified by Socrates in the Apology and the Crito. The drama depicts the conflict between sophistic education, personified by Protagoras, and that of Socrates.<sup>1</sup> Socrates does not disagree with what Protagoras has to say so much as he questions his right to say it. This is emphasized by the fact that Socrates and Protagoras change places in the course of the argument so that Socrates, in the end, is defending Protagoras' original premise that virtue can be taught.

Protagoras is a venerable old man when the youthful Socrates engages him in conversation and proceeds to badger him without mercy or respect for his age and reputation.<sup>2</sup> His kind reception of Socrates is repaid by a resounding defeat in the dialectic of the argument; Socrates does not even allow him the sop of retaining the upper hand in the analysis of poetry. Regardless of this treatment, the old master graciously acknowledges the power that Socrates has in conducting an argument.

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 108.

2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 108.

Socrates does not attempt to refute Protagoras' sociological arguments for education--he lures him into his own province of the ethical standards in order to demonstrate that the Sophists had no right to profess the teaching of political arete.<sup>1</sup> The structure of the dialogue is such that Protagoras' views are presented in a favorable light even though it is obvious that his definition of virtue is ill understood by him and different from that of Plato and Socrates. That Protagoras is treated kindly is understandable, for much that he has to say, whether actually Protagoras' ideas or not, is incorporated into Plato's own thought, but Plato is showing that "right opinion" is not sufficient--the teacher of virtue must know why his opinion is right. The principles that Protagoras presents are almost without exception used by Plato in the Republic as necessary to the ideal state. This is another instance of Plato's method of introducing his own opinions in a negative light so that the reader will be familiar with them and realize their importance more fully when they are reintroduced at the proper time.

1. Liberal education and the soul.

Socrates, who tells the story of his discourse with Protagoras, is awakened by Hippocrates one morning; Hippocrates has heard the news of Protagoras' presence in Athens and wants Socrates to introduce him to the great Sophist immediately so that he can study with him, no matter

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 114-115.

what the cost may be. Socrates agrees; but first, since it is early, he tests Hippocrates' resolution by "examining" him.<sup>1</sup> He points out that learning from a Sophist is not like learning a trade or a profession; if it were, Hippocrates' object in studying with Protagoras would be that of becoming a Sophist himself.<sup>2</sup> To a youth of a noble and wealthy family this was indeed an embarrassing inference, since sophistry was not highly regarded as a profession. Hippocrates, who has a political career in mind, wants a liberal education, that is, culture or paideia, to further his ambition.<sup>3</sup>

Education of this sort, Socrates says, differs from training in the trades or the professions in one very important respect--it is entirely training for the soul; that is, it moulds the personality to a greater extent than any other type of education. If this is the kind of instruction which Hippocrates will receive from Protagoras "must not he make him eloquent in that which he understands?"<sup>4</sup> This is the problem from which the rest of the dialogue evolves. What does the Sophist know and what does he teach his students? Hippocrates does not know, but he was perfectly willing to risk his soul without ever questioning his own purpose or the qualifications of his teacher.

Are you aware of the danger which you are incurring?  
The soul is in question, but no sooner does this  
foreigner appear, than you instantly commit your

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1. Plato, Prot., 311b.  
2. Plato, Prot., 312b f.

3. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 109.  
4. Plato, Prot., 312c.

soul to his keeping. You call him a Sophist, but are manifestly ignorant of what a Sophist is; and yet you are going to commit yourself to his keeping.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates' warning at the beginning of the dialogue must be kept in mind, not only because it underscores the contrast between his own form of education, as stated in the Apology,<sup>2</sup> and that of the Sophists, but also because here Plato shows explicitly that education is first and foremost a matter pertaining to the individual. The fact that the individual "soul" is the basis of society and the end of education is emphasized here in plain terms.<sup>3</sup> The effect of education on the total personality, which is so fundamental to Plato's moral and political thought in the Republic, has been suggested in scattered phrases throughout all the previous dialogues, but in the Protagoras the whole argument emerges from the conviction that,

You cannot buy the wares of knowledge and carry them away in another vessel; when you have paid for them you must receive them into the soul and go your way, either greatly harmed or greatly benefited.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Plato, Prot., 313a-c, condensed by the author.
  2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 107.
  3. The "soul" or character of the total personality is the most individualized aspect of a person--that which sets him apart and distinguishes him from other men. It is also that which draws men together and makes them interdependent because of specialized talents and abilities peculiar to individuals. Plato's emphasis on the soul, then, indicates to what extent education is for the individual.
  4. Plato, Prot., 314b.

The harm that false education can do forms the basis of Plato's attack on the Sophists. They do not understand that the end of education is the moral improvement of an individual's character, and that all the good or profit of education stems from that moral improvement. In the Protagoras, Plato is not stressing his grievance against the Sophists for what they teach; he questions their right to teach at all. He asks for their purpose and demands that they show to what extent this purpose can be realized through education.

ii. Can virtue be taught?

Socrates approaches Protagoras at the home of Callias, where Protagoras and many of the most famous Sophists of the day are lodged, and immediately asks him what it is that he will teach if Hippocrates should become one of his students. Socrates interprets Protagoras' flowery answer to mean that he teaches the art of politics, and promises to make men good citizens; to this, Protagoras agrees emphatically.<sup>1</sup> Socrates, who says that he doubts if this art can be taught, cites the case of the builder and the shipwright; in matters concerning building or ships, these experts are consulted, but in the affairs of the state there are no experts (as Protagoras professes to be). In matters pertaining to politics everyone demands a say no matter what his profession may be. Here Plato is planting the seeds that grow into the idea of the Philosopher-King in the Republic by suggesting, again negatively, that experts are

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1. Plato, Prot., 319a.

needed in the art of politics. Socrates raises another objection: if political virtue or wisdom could be taught, virtuous men would certainly teach their sons, but very often the sons of famous fathers are undistinguished citizens.<sup>1</sup>

Protagoras explains, by means of an elaborate myth typical of Sophistic oration, that all men rightly have political opinions because all men are by nature political animals.<sup>2</sup> Socrates does not take exception to the idea that all men are political animals, and it may be assumed that Plato is using Protagoras here to express an idea characteristic of Greek thought in general and implicit in his own philosophy, especially in the Republic. That all men are social animals does not mean, however, that all men should or can be statesmen; all men are consumers, too, but that does not mean that they should all be farmers.

Protagoras then tries to show that virtue can be taught; for proof, Protagoras appeals to empirical fact. The belief that virtue can be taught is implicit in the very structure of society, and the behavior of peoples.

They do not conceive this virtue to be given by nature, or to grow spontaneously, but to be a thing which may be taught. . . . No one would instruct, no one would rebuke, or be angry with those calamities they suppose to be due to nature or chance.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Plato, Prot., 320a-b.
  2. Plato, Prot., 323a.
  3. Plato, Prot., 323d f.

In actual practice, however, men are punished for impiety and injustice which "may be described generally as the very opposite of political virtue."<sup>1</sup> Protagoras asserts that men are morally responsible for the choices and actions which are generally held to be governed by the character of the individual, and that injustice and impiety are the results of poor training and poor choices. Punishment, if it is sensible, is used to prevent future wrong, which implies that mankind feels that virtue can be taught.<sup>2</sup>

Plato, of course, agrees with these observations; it is the very type of reasoning which leads to his own educational theories, but he does not agree that social behavior is a sufficient ground for asserting that individuals or society can be improved by means of education. The argument would be circular and would result in the conclusion, typical of relativistic theories, that what is, is right. In other words, if social behavior is the source and standard for education, the result is conformity and not improvement. Education then would be merely acquaintance with a social environment--a far cry from the improvement of the "soul" which was Socrates' goal and the ground for Plato's educational revolution of society. The basic contradiction in a relativist's profession of being capable of teaching virtue to others is at the bottom

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1. Plato, Prot., 324a.

2. Plato, Prot., 324b.

of Plato's criticism of the Sophists in the Protagoras.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates' objection that virtuous men could not teach their own sons virtue is next considered by Protagoras. He asks Socrates, "Is there or is there not some one quality of which all the citizens must be partakers, if there is to be a city at all?"<sup>2</sup> If there is, and it should turn out that justice, temperance and holiness are a unified quality called manly virtue, and if "this is the quality of which all men must be partakers, and which is the very condition of their learning or doing anything else," then it would be strange indeed if virtuous men had their sons trained in all sorts of other things and omitted virtue.<sup>3</sup> Protagoras gives a brief synopsis of the type of education that a youth received in Greece before Plato and Isocrates founded their schools, in order to demonstrate that from the cradle youngsters were trained in virtue. "Education and admonition commence in the first years of childhood, and last to the very end of life."<sup>4</sup> The first explicit statement of the connection between "political wisdom," the separate "virtues" and virtue itself comes from the camp of the enemy! How typical of Plato that the point towards which all the previous dialogues were inexorably moving should be expressed first by the opposition. In this

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1. Cf. Plato, Theat., 171a. Plato mentions this very contradiction in reference to Protagoras. See 161-165; 178-183 for criticism of the Sophists in general.

2. Plato, Prot., 324e.

3. Plato, Prot., 325a.

4. Plato, Prot., 325d.

way he can "examine" the idea thoroughly without boring the reader and in the same dramatic evolution of thought show that Protagoras did not know what he was talking about.

Protagoras goes on to say that reading, writing, the works of the great poets, music and gymnastics--the core of Greek education--are all directed towards making a youth virtuous. When he has become of age, his fellow citizens continue his education, as do the laws of the state, for the very existence of the state "implies that virtue is not any man's private possession."<sup>1</sup> Protagoras has the conventional opinion of the virtuous man in mind; when he states that music, gymnastics, etc., are training in virtue he means that the man educated in this manner will be completely acceptable in society, thus making his road to political success easier. Plato, too, believes that these forms of training have a profound influence on the formation of character; and this is the very point--unless the purpose of education is clearly understood and its ends clearly defined, it may do more harm than good. Protagoras has, however, brought the definition of virtue around to include the political nature of man--the virtuous man is a citizen.

It is not the nature of virtue nor the limitations of virtuous individuals which cause their sons to turn out badly; it is the fault of the sons. Protagoras draws an analogy between the flute-player and the

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1. Plato, Prot., 327a.

virtuous father.

Do you imagine, Socrates, that the sons of good flute-players would be more likely to be good than the sons of bad ones? I think not. Would not their sons grow up to be distinguished or undistinguished according to their own natural capacities as flute-players?<sup>1</sup>

Political wisdom and virtue have been used interchangeably throughout this section of the dialogue by both Protagoras and Socrates; the analogy of the flute-player is inconsistent with Protagoras' myth about the gift of the "art of politics" which is shared by all men. The gift of political wisdom would have to be qualified to mean that all men are social animals but that natural virtue or political ability differs with each individual. This is exactly the position taken by Plato in the Republic. "Individual differences" is a necessary assumption in the Republic and it leads to the selection of the rulers of the state by educational elimination.

Regardless of the worth of what Protagoras has said, he has not explained what the nature of virtue is, that gives him the right to claim that he can teach virtue to others. Before any further advance can be made, virtue itself must be investigated; therefore, Socrates returns to Protagoras' statement that manly virtue was comprised of justice, temperance, and piety, without commenting at all on the rest of Protagoras' speech.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Plato, Prot., 327c.
  2. Plato, Prot., 325a.

iii. Is virtue one?

Socrates asks if justice, temperance and holiness--and he adds wisdom and courage--are separate parts related to a whole as the separate parts of the face are related to the whole face, or if they are parts of a homogeneous whole related in the same way as the parts of one piece of gold. Protagoras replies that they are separate things although closely related; a man does not necessarily have to have all the virtues in order to have some of them. A just man is not necessarily a brave man.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates proceeds to show that justice must certainly be considered holy and holiness just, and that folly is the opposite of both temperance and wisdom. Protagoras had already admitted that everything has only one opposite; therefore, wisdom and temperance must be very nearly the same. Though the logic may be questionable, Protagoras sees the point and refuses to continue answering Socrates' questions with brief replies. The company in turn refuses to let the argument end, and Socrates in order to appease Protagoras agrees to allow Protagoras to conduct the argument.

Protagoras proposes that they seek the definition of virtue by the analysis of poetry, where he feels that he will be on safe ground. "I am of opinion, Socrates," he said, "that skill in poetry is the principal part

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1. Plato, Prot., 329d.

of education."<sup>1</sup> The succeeding section is unimportant to the argument of the dialogue but its introduction is significant in the light of Plato's criticism of the poets and the Sophistic mode of education. Plato deliberately shows Socrates thinking that Protagoras' interpretation of Simonides' poem is correct and then setting out diabolically to prove that the opposite interpretation is more reasonable. Plato shows by this method that the interpretation of poetry as the Sophists used it was an intellectual game in which the end was rather the display of a facile wit than the search for truth. When he has sufficiently demonstrated through Socrates that he could vie with the Sophists on their own ground, Plato calls us back to the argument with an opinion of Socrates' on poetry which is the antithesis of Protagoras'.

The talk about the poets seems to me like a commonplace entertainment to which a vulgar company have recourse; . . . because they are not able to converse or amuse one another, while they are drinking, with the sound of their own voices and conversation.<sup>2</sup>

Socrates reviews the argument about the unity of virtue and asks Protagoras if he still thinks virtues are separate essences.<sup>3</sup> Protagoras answers that four of them are similar in some respects but that courage is "very different" from the others. Socrates shows that those who have knowledge are more confident about what they do than they were when they were ignorant. Protagoras agrees, but he will not admit that courage

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1. Plato, Prot., 339a.
  2. Plato, Prot., 347c.
  3. Plato, Prot., 350a-c.

is therefore wisdom; "the courageous are confident, but not all the confident are courageous."<sup>1</sup> Courage is a natural attribute and not a function of knowledge; although knowledge will help the man who is naturally courageous it cannot make him courageous if he is by nature a weakling. This seems a point well taken; in fact, it is another aspect of the individual differences inherent in man previously referred to as necessary to Plato's development in the Republic.<sup>2</sup> If knowledge and training could make a man courageous, Plato's elaborate process of weeding candidates educationally in order to locate the most courageous citizens for the Auxilliary or Soldier-Guardians would not be necessary. Because Protagoras is partially right, however, does not mean that he is entirely right. Protagoras is thinking primarily of physical courage, whereas moral courage is as important, if not more important, in Plato's definition of virtue. Socrates takes what seems to be an entirely different tack in order to bring out this point.

#### iv. Pleasure and pain.

Socrates brings up the relation between good-evil and pleasure-pain. Is pleasure a good in itself?<sup>3</sup> He asks Protagoras if, like the majority of mankind, he would agree that "a man may have knowledge, and yet that knowledge which is in him may be overmastered" by various emotions or passions.<sup>4</sup> Protagoras is a bit of an intellectual

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1. Plato, Prot., 351a.  
2. See p. 134.

3. Plato, Prot., 351e.  
4. Plato, Prot., 352c.

snob, and since he professes to be able to teach virtue, he cannot agree with the "many." "Wisdom and knowledge," he says, "are the highest of human things."<sup>1</sup> Socrates proceeds to carry on both parts of the argument in order to "instruct" the many who believe that choosing evil knowingly is the result of being overcome by pleasure.

Then you think that pain is an evil and pleasure is a good; and even pleasure you deem an evil, when it robs you of greater pleasures than it gives, or causes pains greater than the pleasure. If, however, you call pleasure an evil in relation to some other end or standard, you will be able to show us that standard. But you have none to show.<sup>2</sup>

The evil in pleasure lies in the consequences, not in the pleasure itself. Therefore, "being overcome by pleasure" means that the evil or painful consequences were not known at the time of the choice. A present evil or pain with an attending pleasant consequence, such as bitter medicine, is to be preferred to a present pleasure which eventually results in pain or evil. No man chooses pain knowingly unless a pleasure greater than the pain is his reward. Therefore, since in common opinion pain is equated to evil, no man chooses evil in spite of knowledge; men are overcome by pleasure because of their ignorance.<sup>3</sup> Thus Socrates shows that the common-sense definitions of pleasure-pain, good-evil, and error in judgment are at odds with one another. The very simplest of hedonistic theories must have a standard

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1. Plato, Prot., 352c.

2. Plato, Prot., 354c.

3. Plato, Prot., 357d.

of some kind in addition to pleasure itself.

It is absurd to assert that a man does evil knowingly because he is overpowered by a pleasure, if that pleasure eventually results in pain greater than the original pleasure.<sup>1</sup> If happiness depended on choosing that course of action which promised the greatest amount of present and future pleasure, then the "art of measure" which determined the choice would be fundamental to happiness and the good life.

But the art of measurement would do away with the effect of appearances, and, showing the truth, would fain teach the soul at last to find rest in the truth, and would thus save our life.<sup>2</sup>

"Being overcome by pleasure," then, is due to lack of knowledge in general and lack of moral judgment in particular.<sup>3</sup> Socrates has dispatched the opinion of "most of the world" and now returns to Protagoras.

The virtues of temperance, holiness, wisdom and justice, it has already been admitted, are very similar and are good. If the argument above were followed they would also, therefore, be pleasant, and a man would choose these values unless he were ignorant. The direction of the argument is clearly indicated, for if Plato can show that the coward is cowardly because of ignorance, then all five "virtues" will have a common opposite; Protagoras has conceded that all things have only one

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1. Plato, Prot., 355a.

2. Plato, Prot., 356d.

3. Plato, Prot., 357d.

mutually exclusive opposite.<sup>1</sup> It would follow that all the virtues would be one in some sense.

All the Sophists, including Protagoras, agree that "being overcome by pleasure" is due to ignorance and that "the pleasant is the good, and the painful evil."<sup>2</sup> They are agreeing with the "many," however, and not with Socrates, who has never said that he believes that pleasure is the good.<sup>3</sup> The company also agrees that "this inferiority of a man to himself [in allowing himself to be overcome] is merely ignorance as the superiority of a man to himself is wisdom."<sup>4</sup> They are also in accord on the idea that fear is the expectation of evil and since no man chooses evil or pain unless in ignorance, the coward is wise for avoiding danger and the courageous man is ignorant for choosing to face pain.<sup>5</sup> Courage is good, though, so this conclusion is intolerable, even though it follows from the argument.

If facing danger is honorable, and to be honorable is good, and the good is pleasant, then the coward who refuses to face danger does so because he is ignorant. There seem to be antinomous proofs which show that the man of valor who has a normal fear of battle is ignorant because he chooses to face an anticipated evil, and the coward is

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1. Cf. Plato, Rep., 439b, for a statement of the law of contradiction.

2. Plato, Prot., 358a.

3. Cf. Gorg., 497-498. "The good is not the same as the pleasant, or the evil the same as the painful." (497d)

4. Plato, Prot., 358c.

5. Plato, Prot., 359e f.

ignorant because he refuses to seek honor which is good and therefore pleasant. Plato is contrasting two kinds of courage--moral and physical. The distinction is made more clearly in Laches where, as we might suspect, the idea is introduced by Nicias, not by Socrates.

In Laches, Nicias defined courage as "the knowledge of the grounds of hope and fear."<sup>1</sup> Socrates observes that such a definition "cannot allow that any wild beast is courageous."<sup>2</sup> Nicias answers:

I do not call animals or any other things which have no fears of dangers, because they are ignorant of them, courageous, but only fearless and senseless . . . . There is a difference, to my way of thinking, between fearlessness and courage. I am of opinion that thoughtful courage is a quality possessed by very few<sup>3</sup> . . . --my courageous actions are wise actions.

It would seem that an understanding of this discussion of courage in the Laches is presupposed in Protagoras.

To seek danger without reason or fear would be foolhardy and not courageous, but if a man realizes the danger and faces it because or some higher value he is, in Plato's sense, really courageous. A man who avoids his duty is a coward, and he is a coward because he does not know of any values greater than mere existence; he is morally ignorant. A really brave man must understand and be able to justify his courageous actions--he must have moral conviction--or he

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1. Plato, Laches, 196d.
  2. Plato, Laches, 196e.
  3. Plato, Laches, 197a-b.

is not much better than a beast. It is his own "soul" that sits in judgment first and foremost on his actions and then the opinions of his fellow men. There is no greater punishment for a human being than to stand convicted before his mind's eye of being less than a man.

"Thoughtful courage," as Nicias puts it, is "a quality possessed by very few."

Plato has finally brought courage home, and although the dialogue seems to end without a conclusion there is little doubt that Socrates has summed up the argument in the following statement:

Protagoras and Socrates, you are strange beings; there are you, Socrates, who were saying that virtue cannot be taught, contradicting yourself now by your attempt to prove that all things are knowledge, including justice, and temperance, and courage, -- which tends to show that virtue can certainly be taught; for if virtue were other than knowledge, as Protagoras attempted to prove, then clearly virtue cannot be taught; but if virtue is entirely knowledge, as you are seeking to show, then I cannot but suppose that virtue is capable of being taught.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the argument, Socrates and Protagoras have changed places--a clever, dramatic device which allows Plato to criticize and utilize Protagoras' theories at one and the same time.

#### 6. Virtue, the individual and society.

The "conversational" dialogues in their investigation of the various aspects of virtue suggested that happiness was a concomitant of

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1. Plato, Prot., 361a-b.

moral judgment or knowledge. The separate aspects of virtue were considered as such, and did not take into account the association of the virtuous man with other men in society or the interrelationship of the "virtues" themselves.

The Socratic dialogues, in a sense, are the converse of the conversational works. The "virtues" are seen as one harmoniously resolved whole in the character of Socrates; the definition of virtue is not the purpose in the drama that depicts Socrates' trial and death; Socrates, by his actions, is that definition. This is no theoretical or abstract discussion, but living evidence that the virtues discussed in the conversational dialogues have been self-consciously realized at least once--in the life, thought and actions of Socrates. The virtues of the conversational dialogues are infused with blood and brought alive in a social environment in order to present the virtuous man in the round. Socrates is faced with a problem in the Apology that only his profound personal conviction and moral courage could have overcome--the way in which he faced both this problem and his death has made him immortal.

Socrates' treatment by the Athenians, when compared with the benefits that were supposed to accrue to the man of virtue as indicated in the conversational works, does not seem consistent at all. If Socrates exemplifies the virtuous man, in what way has his virtue brought him happiness? Socrates denied himself or was denied by others most of the values that the Greeks felt were necessary to happiness, and

for his trouble he was put to death! How can these facts be squared with the claims of the conversational dialogues? Either Socrates was wrong about virtue making a man happy or the ordinary conception of happiness is not what Socrates had in mind in the earlier works.

Socrates' declaration that his god-given mission was to admonish his fellow citizens to the "care of their souls" and his own calm acceptance of the penalty of death in justification of his way of life are proof that it is not the conventional idea of happiness that virtue assures. His philosophy, his virtue, was a way of life, a moral conviction, that made him a self-contained man, a happy man because his actions were the realization of the values he held to be the highest and the best. Socrates' happiness is the spiritual happiness of a man who can see his life as a purposive whole; a life constantly subjected to self-criticism; constantly evaluated in reference to the highest of values; the life worth living!

When the promise of personal happiness realized through virtue is contrasted to Socrates' trial and death, the tragic irony of the one virtuous man in a corrupt society being condemned for impiety brings into sharp focus the immensity of the educational goal which he tried and failed to materialize. Socrates' failure to educate the people and his conviction emphasize the conflict between law and justice which Plato felt destroyed the citizens' regard for the best interests of the state and thereby their own interest. All of society would have to be

"inverted" to accommodate the virtuous individual and to insure that the values that Socrates stood for would be the Law and would judge rather than be judged by unfounded opinion and caprice.

If happiness and the good life depend on virtue and if the realization of virtue depends on an educational revolution of society, what is virtue and can it be taught? There is no sense in proposing an educational inversion of values, using Socrates as a model, unless virtue is something that can somehow be known and taught. These are the problems considered in the Protagoras.

The Protagoras begins with the affirmation that paideia or cultural education moulds the "soul." Through Protagoras, the notion is established that man is by nature a political animal and that society is based on the assumption that virtue can be taught; he also is the first to assert that the virtuous man is a citizen. Protagoras tries to justify his assertion that virtue can be taught by a sociological analysis of conditions as they exist. "Plato himself always felt that the sophistic system of education was directly derived from actual political conditions."<sup>1</sup> Protagoras means by virtue that educational background and training in the conventional modes of behavior and thinking which will prepare a man to "get along" best in the accepted patterns of his society as it is.

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1. Jaeger, PAI, I, 311.

Plato is willing to accept Protagoras' analysis as evidence but not as the explanation of virtue or as a rationale of its being teachable; nor is he satisfied with the purpose that is implicit in Protagoras' description of virtue as a conforming to the mores when necessary and using them for personal gain when possible. Socrates' virtue is critical of existing conditions and aims at improvement, not conformity.<sup>1</sup> Socrates' virtue includes all of Protagoras' argument and goes beyond it. This is brought out when Socrates ignores all of Protagoras' magnificent speech except for one statement in which Protagoras referred to a "quality" necessary to the existence of the state--manly virtue--and stated that justice, holiness and temperance were parts of this quality. Socrates, at this point, is interested in virtue itself and not in a description of its effects on society or society's effects on it.

In seeking a definition of virtue, Socrates shows that no one part of virtue can stand alone; at least, not as he conceives the parts. What seems like a digression on the relationship between good and evil, and pleasure and pain, turns out to be a proof that any aspect of true virtue depends on the ability to make good judgments; judgment of choice can be validly made only in reference to knowledge. When Protagoras assents to the idea that an "art of measure" is needed if pleasure is

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1. The Socrates of the "Socratic dialogues" stands in contrast to the Philosopher-King of the Republic as an iconoclast, but Socrates is in an imperfect society whereas the Philosopher-King theoretically is in a perfect society.

equated to the good and pain to evil, Socrates has shown that even the standard which "most people" use in making choices depends on knowledge; a more refined standard would be certain to depend on knowledge of some sort.

Having reached this conclusion, Socrates is then ready to return to the problem of whether or not courage depends on knowledge. The distinction that he makes between moral courage and physical courage discloses the kind of knowledge and the type of judgment which is virtue to Socrates; moral courage depends on moral judgment, which in turn depends on knowledge of true values--the values which differentiate the courage of the beast from the courage of Socrates.

If virtue is a combination of political sagacity and individual character, and if it is knowledge which reveals the proper use of these qualities, then surely virtue can be taught, in some degree, even though individual differences must be taken into account. By the time this conclusion is reached in the Protagoras, we find that much light has been shed on many of the questions left unanswered in the "conversational dialogues." Of the six points mentioned in Chapter V (see pp. 90-104) the first two on the relation between virtue and personal happiness were answered sufficiently for the state of development reached in the early dialogues. The Socratic dialogues have added a great deal to the development of points iii-vi and have presented evidence which would seem to contradict the conclusions that have

already been reached in points i and ii. A restatement of points iii-vi in the light of the new material would seem to be in order.

iii. Can virtue be acquired? This question has been answered in the affirmative by the Protagoras.

iv. How can virtue be learned? Who should teach it? These questions have not been answered explicitly, but Socrates has shown in the Apology, by describing the elenchus, that virtue is rooted in "the criticized life"; the awareness of ignorance; the castigation of false pride and false knowledge and in care of the "soul." Socrates, in telling what he thought to be his mission in life, has depicted the teacher of virtue as a man of moral fibre, living his philosophy, improving his neighbor and himself with no thought for financial gain or personal fame, but guided by the highest values in search of the best life for himself and his society. These values, we know from the Crito, are principles arrived at rationally by Socrates; he does not allow his personal circumstances to change those principles which are the best that he knows. The Apology and the Crito answer, "Who shall teach," better than, "How can virtue be learned," by showing us the example of Socrates.

v. What are the ends of education? The Apology and the introduction to the Protagoras give us the answer that the end of education is the "moulding of the soul" in the ways of virtue. A rather cryptic answer at best, but this answer can be enlarged because more is now

known of the nature of virtue. The virtuous man is a citizen-- courageous, wise, temperate, just and pious; the virtuous man par excellence is also a philosopher, teacher, and a man dedicated to self-improvement and the improvement of others. The moral teacher of the Apology and the virtuous citizen of the Protagoras have not been associated yet, but both are necessary components of the Philosopher-King of the Republic.

In either case, however, the virtuous man is guided by knowledge of moral principles in his value judgments rather than by caprice, pleasure, or expediency; Socrates does not allow his imprisonment or impending death to influence his evaluation of the principle of law or of his obligations to the state. The end of education, then, is that knowledge which "moulds the soul" and reveals the standard, in relation to which "the art of measure" or judgment is applied to life so that the best possible choice can be made with conviction in any given instance.

vi. Virtue depends on some kind of knowledge: The Protagoras not only affirms this suggestion of the conversational dialogues, but also asserts that virtue is knowledge--the kind of knowledge which makes a man just, wise, temperate, pious and courageous. Other than this there is no real indication, in the dialogues discussed so far, as to what kind of knowledge virtue is. The prologue to the Protagoras reiterates that the knowledge of the professions and trades is not the kind of knowledge

that leads to virtue.

The Socratic dialogues and the Protagoras have answered some of the problems raised by the conversational works and in so doing have raised other questions:

1. What is the relation of the virtues to Virtue itself? Virtue is knowledge; all the aspects of virtue depend on knowledge and moral judgment, but they must be differentiated in some way or there would be no need for speaking of justice and wisdom and temperance, etc. How can they be differentiated and remain one?

2. What kind of knowledge is virtue? Virtue is knowledge, but the conversational dialogues, the Socratic dialogues and the Protagoras give only negative clues as to what kind of knowledge it is.

3. Is it possible to know? Virtue may be knowledge, but unless we know what is meant by knowledge there is no assurance that the nature of real knowledge is such that it can be taught to others. In the Protagoras it is assumed that anything which is knowledge can be taught but the Meno raises a question which is logically if not psychologically prior: Can anything be known? In other words, "knowledge" as used in the shorter dialogues is recognized as an undefined term--what exactly do we mean by real knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The answer to this question in many ways determines the answer to the problem of whether virtue can be taught.

4. How can virtue be learned? The Apology and the Protagoras have shed the vague illumination of dawn on this question, but with the definition of virtue and the supposition that it can be taught, this problem becomes more specific and more important.

5. What are the ends of education? As with point 3, this question has been answered very generally in the Socratic dialogues and the Protagoras; the end of education is the improvement of the "soul." This idea moves the argument forward a great deal and raises it to a higher level, but it also leaves the question unanswered as long as we neither know what is meant by the "soul" or what advantage there is in an "improved" soul over the common, garden variety. The problems of

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 124.

the conversational dialogues have not been solved--they have only moved upstairs.

6. Law vs. Justice: Socrates' unjust conviction brings out the dichotomy that had grown up in Athens between law and justice (personified by Socrates). This split is at the bottom of Plato's efforts to "invert" society.

7. The Philosopher-teacher and the virtuous citizen: The Apology and the Crito portray the virtuous man as a teacher with intense moral convictions; the Protagoras considers the virtuous man as a citizen, outstanding for his political wisdom. Are these two aspects of one man or two types of virtuous men?

8. If all men are political animals and virtue is knowledge and therefore teachable, why should "experts" in the art of politics be needed? Protagoras said that individual differences accounted for the fact that virtuous men could not teach their sons to be virtuous. If experts are needed because all men do not have the same aptitude for politics, how shall these experts be located and what "aptitudes" must they have?

9. Is happiness dependent on virtue? The life that Socrates led, as he describes it in the Apology, and his death are hardly the kind of arguments which would convince most people that the virtuous life is a happy one. The conversational dialogues insisted that virtue be conducive to personal happiness and intimated that happiness depended on virtue; happiness, however, was never defined in them. The only possible way in which they could be reconciled with the Socratic dialogues would be through a conception of happiness which differs from the ordinary one.

10. What is the criterion of "the good life?" The discussion of pleasure and pain in the Protagoras reveals that, even if pleasure is associated with the "good," the "art of measure" is the ultimate criterion in choosing between possible pleasures and that disvalues are chosen wilfully only through ignorance on the part of the person choosing who believes at the time of the choice that the disvalue is good. Is the "art of measure" the same as knowledge?--and if it is, what is it the knowledge of? Plato cannot drop the idea of the "art of measure" once he has raised the question of what the criterion of goodness is and what it contributes to true happiness.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 124-125.

In the Symposium, Meno, and Gorgias many of these problems are taken up again, on a higher level, explaining, searching, raising new problems and preparing the reader for the synthesis that is found in the Republic.

## CHAPTER VII

DIALOGUES INTRODUCTORY TO THE REPUBLICPART ONE: THE SYMPOSIUM AND MENO

The discussion of Love in the Symposium represents a return to the egocentricity of the conversational dialogues at a much higher level; there are many similarities between the Symposium and the conversational works, especially the Lysis. The dialectic has returned to the individual and the desires of the individual, but the "self" under consideration is much more polished from the buffeting that it has received in the conversational and Socratic dialogues. The Symposium brings us back to the consideration of individual happiness and its relation to the values of the "good life," which in the Apology seemed to be in conflict.

The Symposium depicts a private party given by Agathon for his friends. Plato has exercised great care in assembling the guests; each person in the dialogue represents a typical aspect of Greek culture--each actor on the stage symbolizes an attitude towards life and each in his turn expresses some aspect of experience, characteristic of his attitude, as the essence of Eros or Love.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of Eros is fundamental to Plato's philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 176 f.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 174. This entire section follows Jaeger's brilliant chapter (Ch. 8) in Paideia--especially in the significance of Eros to Plato's philosophy as a whole and the interpretation of the speeches that precede Socrates' and their relation to the myth of Diotima.

His teaching about friendship is the nucleus of a theory of politics which treats the state primarily as an educational force. . . Friendship is the fundamental form of all society, in so far as society is not only a natural but a moral and spiritual association of human beings.<sup>1</sup>

The scene itself, a symposium of friends, is also symbolic. Plato uses the contrasting speeches to demonstrate the superiority of philosophy over poetry and the other narrower conceptions presented by their "symbolic" champions;<sup>2</sup> it also shows the educational potentiality of the symposium, especially the symposium as Plato thought of it.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. The introductory speeches.

Phaedrus, the first speaker, calls Eros the oldest of the gods and, as a true pupil of the Sophists, quotes the classic poets to prove his point. His main contention is that Love excites men to noble ambitions and areté, on which the existence of friendship and the state depend.<sup>4</sup> The dialogue begins by assigning an exalted moral purpose to Eros. Pausanias criticizes Phaedrus for being so general, and proceeds to describe more specifically the nature of Love which, as he sees it, is primarily erotic.

Pausanias asserts that the ideal ground for erotic relationships

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 174.

2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 176.

3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 176. "Plato was the founder of the new philosophical form of the symposium."

4. Plato, Sym., 178d f. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 180.

cannot be understood unless it is realized that there are two kinds of Eros--the vulgar and the divine.<sup>1</sup> The common form of love is indiscriminate lust, while divine love is an educational force which seeks to develop the personality of the beloved.<sup>2</sup> Pausanias is speaking of homosexual love; it may seem strange that any edifying aspects could be reasonably proposed for such love, but among some Greeks, especially in Sparta, it was felt that homosexual love was an idealized form of education.<sup>3</sup> Pausanias cannot distinguish between his two types of love by referring to the nature of that love, but only by referring to the attitude of the lover.<sup>4</sup> He has difficulty in bringing the erotic side of love into line with the values of "divine" love, in contrast to Diotima's resolution of the erotic and educational powers of Eros; that is, the values that make divine love divine are values independent of the erotic force of love.

Eryximachus, who is a physician, presents a more naturalistic opinion--he agrees that there are two kinds of love, but adds that love is not limited to the attractions of human beings.<sup>5</sup> Love is a principle that operates in all things, including the divine. In an analogy to his profession, Eryximachus likens the noble form of love to the desire "of the healthy," and the ignoble form to the desire "of the diseased."<sup>6</sup> Eros is the proper balance or harmony of opposites in nature; thus, health is

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1. Plato, Sym., 180d.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 180.

3. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 180 ff.

4. Jaeger, PAI, II, 181.

5. Plato, Sym., 186a.

6. Plato, Sym., 186b.

a harmonious blending of opposites, and sickness a disturbance of that balance.<sup>1</sup> By means of Eryximachus' speech Plato shows "that Eros can be subjected to a scale of values."<sup>2</sup>

The medical conception of the bodily physis resembles Plato's conception of the spiritual and ethical physis in this--it implies a standard, a norm to which the physis ought to conform.<sup>3</sup>

Aristophanes, the comedian, spins a fantastic myth when his turn comes to speak. As with all these speeches, Aristophanes' contribution is characteristic of the "type" in subject and treatment. His effort is therefore brilliant, dramatic and humorous, but his story also has a profound meaning based on penetrating insight. Aristophanes tells of a heroic age when mankind was composed of spherical beings with two heads, four arms, four legs and such strength and cunning that Zeus split them in two for fear they would overthrow the gods.<sup>4</sup> In their original "complete" state there were three kinds of mortals: the male, the female and the neuter, which was half male and half female. Ever since he was divided, man has sought for his "other half."<sup>5</sup> Physical attachment is the least of this attraction.

For the intense yearning which each of them has towards the other does not appear to be the desire of lover's intercourse, but of something else which the soul of either evidently desires and cannot tell, and of which she has only a dark and doubtful presentiment.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Plato, Sym., 186e.  
 2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 183.  
 3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 183.

4. Plato, Sym., 189d ff.  
 5. Plato, Sym., 192d ff.  
 6. Plato, Sym., 192d.

Aristophanes' myth explains the dual nature of love much better than Pausanias' disquisition by associating both the erotic and the aspiring effects of Love with "man's metaphysical yearning after the wholeness which is forever impossible to the individual nature."<sup>1</sup>

Love is a part of the process of self-perfection or self-completion which is a felt need of all men. "This symbolism draws Eros right into the process of educating and building up the personality."<sup>2</sup> Aristophanes combines the psychological analysis of Pausanias with the theoretical generalization of Eryximachus in his extravagant farce to present an idea of Love which includes all the forms of love that exist between human beings.

Agathon's eulogy of Eros does not have the psychological incisiveness of Aristophanes' uproarious tale or the theoretical structure of Eryximachus' analysis--his contribution is poetic. Without saying anything in particular, Agathon pays tribute to all the fine qualities of this most noble of gods, Eros. The beauty and fervor of his speech describe more aptly than its content the power that Love has to inspire men to noble sentiments and creative deeds. This beautifully poetic laudation is the perfect backdrop for Socrates' speech which follows; the contrast brings out how Socrates was "infinitely superior to him both in the strength of his passions and in the depth of his knowledge of love."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 184.

2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 184.

3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 186.

## 2. Socrates and the myth of Diotima.

In commenting on Agathon's speech, Socrates says: "I think you were right, my dear Agathon, in proposing to speak of the nature of Love first and afterwards of his works."<sup>1</sup> In the short dialectical passage which follows he shows that he does not agree with Agathon, however, as to what the nature of love is. The way in which Socrates approaches the problem of love is typical of him, and represents Plato's educational attitude very well; he is looking for an explanation of love--not merely the description or analysis of the manifestations of love. In the speeches that precede Socrates', various aspects of experience have been set forth as the essence of Love; Socrates' task is to show that the nature of love, as he conceives of it, is such that it can explain various experiences which are associated with it.

Phaedrus has proposed that Love is the oldest of gods, since Love is the principle which brings social order out of chaos; in other words, the essence of Eros is the social harmony that it brings into being by inspiring noble ambitions in men for the sake of their beloveds. Pausanias stresses the erotic force of Love which may be good as an educational force or bad as lust. Eryximachus feels that Love is a natural force existing throughout nature as the harmony of an object with what is proper or natural to it, and that Love is the mean between

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1. Plato, Sym., 199d.

extremes.<sup>1</sup> Love as a "measure" of a thing's harmony is subject to degrees depending on how well "adapted" a thing is to its environment. Aristophanes adds the profound psychological insight that love is the longing for self-realization, for "wholeness," which reflects the metaphysical search for self-perfection. Agathon, by the sensuous passion of his eulogy to Love, demonstrates the creative power of love--which is not erotic--although he does not contribute any positive view through the speech itself.

All the speakers, except Aristophanes, have referred to Love as a god, and Agathon has been the most extravagant of all in his praise of Eros; therefore, Socrates turns to him and asks: "Is Love of something or of nothing?"<sup>2</sup> Agathon replies that it is of something and Socrates proceeds to demonstrate that Love cannot be a god. "Love of something" expresses the desire for something which is not possessed; love cannot be a god because it expresses want and is not perfect in itself as a god should be.<sup>3</sup> Socrates introduces the myth of Diotima to explain what the nature of love is.

i. The lesser mysteries of Diotima.

Plato is a master of presenting things in the most effective way possible; it is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the myth of Diotima

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1. Cf. Popper, OSE, 61 ff., for a critical analysis of "spiritual naturalism."

2. Plato, Sym., 199e.

3. Plato, Sym., 200a.

is purposely presented the way it is, not only to preserve the cheerful atmosphere of the dialogue,<sup>1</sup> but also to show Socrates learning the true nature of love from the wise priestess Diotima; in this subtle fashion Plato indicates that the "mysteries" of love can be learned.

It was Diotima, Socrates says, who told him that love cannot be good because it is incomplete. It is not evil either, but rather a spirit that ranges between the mortal and immortal world forming a contact for man with the eternal--"the wisdom which understands this is spiritual."<sup>2</sup> Love, then, since it is a conscious desire for something which we do not have, is an awareness of incompleteness or ignorance, which, as Socrates says in the Apology,<sup>3</sup> is at least some degree of real wisdom.

No god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want. . . . For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is of the beautiful; and therefore Love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom, and being a lover of wisdom is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant.<sup>4</sup>

This ingenious explanation of man's curiosity proposes that love is the

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 187. The myth of Diotima allows Socrates to use the dialogue form without destroying the good feeling of the gathering.
  2. Plato, Sym., 202a-203a. As Prof. Brightman points out, this passage shows well Jowett's attempted use of the New Testament style in his translation. Cf. Lodge, PTE, 239, n. 15.
  3. Plato, Apol., 21d. See p. 114.
  4. Plato, Sym., 204a-b.

motivating force in man's desire to know.

Goodness and beauty do not lie in love; they are the objects of love, which desires to possess goodness and beauty.<sup>1</sup> "And what does he gain who possesses the good?" Diotima asks, and Socrates answers, "Happiness."<sup>2</sup> All men desire happiness through everlasting possession of the good,<sup>3</sup> but most men do not know that this desire is love, because "one part of love is separated off and receives the name of the whole";<sup>4</sup> that is, erotic attraction is the part which is usually called love.

For you may say generally that all desire of good and happiness is only the great and subtle power of love; but they who are drawn towards him by any other path, whether the path of money-making or gymnastics or philosophy, are not called lovers--the name of the whole is appropriated to those whose affection takes one form only--they alone are said to love, or to be lovers.<sup>5</sup>

The spirit of love arises through man's desire to create and propagate so that he may attain immortality, for if "love is of the everlasting possession of the good, all men will necessarily desire immortality together with good: Wherefore love is of immortality."<sup>6</sup> Men are willing to run great risks and even to die for their children or the honor of their name in order to preserve their identity among men for all time. "I am persuaded," commented Diotima, "that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame

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1. Plato, Sym., 204d-e.

2. Plato, Sym., 204e.

3. Plato, Sym., 206a.

4. Plato, Sym., 205a.

5. Plato, Sym., 206a.

6. Plato, Sym., 205b.

of immortal virtue."<sup>1</sup>

Not all men, however, seek immortality through heroic deeds or children:

But souls which are pregnant--for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies--conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions?--wisdom and virtue in general. . . . But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice.<sup>2</sup>

A much higher form of procreation than propagating children is that of the teacher who sows the seeds of ideas in his protégé, attends their birth and nurtures them; that is, the man who acts as the Socratic "midwife."<sup>3</sup> Even more worthy are the universal teachers such as Homer and Hesiod; and the most exalted of all are the lawgivers, the true statesmen, such as Lycurgus and Solon.<sup>4</sup> These, Diotima says, are the lesser mysteries of love; the greater mysteries are "more hidden" and can be known only if they are pursued "in a right spirit."<sup>5</sup>

ii. The higher mysteries of Diotima.

The brief section on the "higher mysteries" of love is extremely important, especially since there is no exposition of love in the Republic. This passage (210b-212a), in its educational program follows the Allegory of the Cave very closely; also, the analysis of love leads to

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1. Plato, Sym., 205d.  
2. Plato, Sym., 209a.

3. Plato, Sym., 209b.  
4. Plato, Sym., 209c f.  
5. Plato, Sym., 210a.

Platonic Ideas or Forms just as the analysis of justice does in the Republic. The omission of any detailed treatment of so important a concept as Eros in the Republic can only mean that Plato presupposed that readers of the Republic would have a thorough knowledge of the Symposium. The Symposium is not a chance creation; the tight formal structure, the beauty, the dramatic but logical evolution of ideas and the care that has obviously been given to this masterpiece show that the work was important to Plato. And we have already noted above that Plato associated the highest form of self-love and wisdom with temperance, justice and statesmanship. The highest expression of the natural instinct for personal immortality is found in the social and political values. Plato's views on Eros are absolutely necessary for an understanding of the Philosopher-King in the Republic.

Diotima explains that for a person to be able to comprehend the higher mysteries of love, his education should begin in youth;<sup>1</sup> a youth should be exposed to beautiful objects and guided by his instructor to love only beautiful forms. Gradually the student should realize that "the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another," and finally that "beauty in every form is one and the same."<sup>2</sup> As his education proceeds, the student may come to realize that beauty of the "mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form."<sup>3</sup> The awareness that ideas

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1. Plato, Sym., 210a.

2. Plato, Sym., 210b.

3. Plato, Sym., 210c.

can be beautiful leads to an appreciation of the beauty of institutions, law and the sciences, until "at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere."<sup>1</sup>

And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. This... is that life above all others which man should live.<sup>2</sup>

Seeing beauty absolute, with the "eye of the mind," empowers the beholder to bring forth realities and not merely images.<sup>3</sup> Socrates concludes the myth significantly by stating that he is convinced that Diotima's theories about love are right. "And being persuaded by them, I try to persuade others, that in the attainment of this end [of happiness and immortality] human nature will not easily find a helper better than love."<sup>4</sup>

It was, [Plato] held, impossible, to neglect the inexhaustibly renewed energy and enthusiasm of man's irrational powers, if one hoped to reach the height of illumination which was possible for the spirit looking upon the Idea of Good. The thought on which The Symposium is based is the union of Eros and paideia.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Plato, Sym., 210d.  
2. Plato, Sym., 211c.  
3. Plato, Sym., 212a.

4. Plato, Sym., 212b.  
5. Jaeger, PAI, II, 178.

### 3. Alcibiades' biography of Socrates.

Socrates has no sooner revealed the Idea of Beauty, than Alcibiades bursts into the room roaring drunk and elects himself master of the feast until everyone else is drunk, too. He remarks that this trick will not work on Socrates, who, when forced to, can drink any quantity of wine without showing the effects.<sup>1</sup> The company complies with Alcibiades' demand but asks in return that he fulfill the rule of this symposium and deliver an encomium to Love. Alcibiades declares that when Socrates is present he will praise no one else, not even Eros.

Socrates, Alcibiades says, is like the busts of Silenus because his grotesque exterior hides the golden images of the gods within.<sup>2</sup> He is also like Marsyas, the satyr, because of his ability to "possess the souls" of those who listen to him and charm them with his words until they become self-critical of the life they are leading.<sup>3</sup> Alcibiades glimpsed the inner spirit of Socrates and, since he had a very high opinion of his physical attractiveness, he felt sure Socrates would fall in love with him and reveal all that he knew to him.<sup>4</sup> The profound spiritual power of Socrates, however, conquered Alcibiades, and the beautiful youth fell in love with the ugly man which, for the Greeks, "was the very height of paradox."<sup>5</sup> Through Alcibiades,

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1. Plato, Sym., 214a; cf. 176c, 220a.

2. Plato, Sym., 215a.

3. Plato, Sym., 215e f.

4. Plato, Sym., 217a f.

5. Jaeger, PAI, II, 196.

Plato is showing the profound power of the highest form of Eros-- Socrates' Eros--in contrast to the sensuous attraction of Alcibiades' Eros.

Alcibiades tried every means to seduce Socrates, but his erotic passion was no match for Socrates' spiritual Eros and in every case he was rejected. Alcibiades' tragedy lies in his refusal to yield his "soul" to Socrates' desires because he loved the popularity and flattery of the crowd more than the harder path of true Eros and virtue.<sup>1</sup> Socrates does not consider erotic satisfaction just payment in return for an education in virtue.

Later, Alcibiades had an opportunity to observe Socrates in battle. His physical endurance was amazing, as was his ability to stand extreme cold; when everyone else was suffering from frostbite, Socrates, in his threadbare toga, was padding across the ice in his bare feet. His courage in battle was exceptional. In one engagement he saved Alcibiades' life; Alcibiades received the prize for valor but he says that it should have gone to Socrates. At Delium, with the army in full flight, Socrates and Laches<sup>2</sup> retreated in good order and escaped because their very bearing spoke that here were two Athenians who would conduct themselves honorably to the last.<sup>3</sup> Socrates physical accomplishments, his courage, self-control and spiritual depth

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1. Plato, Sym., 218c f.  
2. Cf. Plato, Laches, 181b.

3. Plato, Sym., 221a-b.

make him totally different from any other man that has ever existed.<sup>1</sup>

Plato has used Alcibiades very cleverly to reveal Socrates' character-- it is a mark of Plato's insight that he recognized the various facets of Socrates' personality and realized that this ugly duckling was a new and rare species, in many ways the precursor of Nietzsche's Superman.

Alcibiades concludes his eulogy to Socrates by again comparing Socrates to Silenus:

His words are like the images of Silenus which open; they are ridiculous when you first hear them; he clothes himself in language that is like the skin of the wanton satyr--for his talk is of pack-asses and smiths and cobblers and carriers, and he is always repeating the same things in the same words, so that any ignorant or inexperienced person might feel disposed to laugh at him; but he who opens the bust and sees what is within will find that they are the only words which have a meaning in them, and also the most divine, abounding in fair images of virtue, and of the widest comprehension, or rather extending to the whole duty of a good and honourable man.<sup>2</sup>

The symposium degenerates completely into a drinking bout when a group of revellers enter; as day breaks, Socrates is conversing with Aristophanes and Agathon, who are the only ones still awake, but they are drowsy and soon fall asleep. "Socrates, having laid them to sleep, rose to depart.... At the Lyceum he took a bath, and passed the day as usual."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Plato, Sym., 221d.
  2. Plato, Sym., 221e-222a.
  3. Plato, Sym., 223e.

#### 4. Eros as personality potential.

Alcibiades is used very cleverly by Plato in the Symposium; he arrives late and therefore does not know what has been said previously by Socrates or any of the other guests. His praise of Socrates flows from his own convictions, since he could not have been prejudiced in any way by the previous speeches. His description of Socrates the lover is completely consistent with the myth of Diotima, and we find that Socrates gradually emerges as the epitome of Eros. As the Socrates of the Apology gave us a concrete picture of virtue, so the abstract discussion of love is summed up in the Symposium by means of Socrates' character. The parallel between Alcibiades' independent account of Socrates' Eros and the myth of Diotima is Plato's method of showing once again that Socrates the teacher is consistent with Socrates the man.

The pathos in Alcibiades' conflict of values lies in his own cognizance of the fact that he has, in his weakness, chosen the less noble life, when he might have fully realized his own Eros, his own destiny, by submitting his soul to Socrates' teachings. The tremendous importance of proper education is shown by Alcibiades' flagrant misuse of his unusual potential, his natural ability, due, Plato indicates, to his rejection of Socrates' paideia. The unusual man has the potential

for great evil as well as great good;<sup>1</sup> the training and education that he receives determines to a large extent the use that he makes of his potential, his Eros.

i. Eros and areté.

The myth of Diotima presents Eros as a spirit, a natural force characterized by man's desire to know. As a natural force or life-spirit, Eros is neither good nor bad; it is potential power inherent in the individual which may be good or evil, depending on how it is used. As a universal characteristic of living things,<sup>2</sup> this life-force incorporates Eryximachus' theory of the universality of the principle of Love. As a partial description of Eros, Eryximachus' theory is perfectly consistent with Plato's, "for Plato holds that between the moral and the physical cosmos there is perfect harmony."<sup>3</sup> In its highest form, love, as the desire for the highest values, the good, is distinctly moral but its basis is "natural." As the potential of an individual for self-expression or self-realization, Plato's definition of eros utilizes Aristophanes' intuition of the primordial striving for completeness imbedded in the very essence of man.

The personality potential of the individual is the source of individual differences; not everyone makes eros manifest in the same way

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1. Plato, *Rep.*, 491e. "The most gifted minds, when they are ill-educated, become pre-eminently bad."
  2. Eryximachus' theory, as a principle governing all things in the universe, is very similar to the ideas of the pre-Socratic Naturalists and Empedocles in particular.
  3. Jaegar, *PAI*, II, 194.

nor do all persons have eros in the same degree. To appreciate the difficulty of speaking of eros it might be well to try to think of the meaning of "character." To say that a man is an artist or a politician or a schoolteacher does not tell us, except by way of formalized prototypes, what his character is, although his occupation is certainly important to that character. We may say that a man is friendly, honest, creative, intelligent, etc., and come closer to describing his character, but he may have other qualities which would make him unworthy of the tribute that Hamlet paid his father: "He was a man, take him for all in all."<sup>1</sup>--a mute tribute to a man's individuality and, paradoxically, his universality, for somehow we know what is meant when it is said of a man that he has "character"--that he is a man.

If from character, which would be analogous to areté, we abstract the "potential," the foundation upon which character is reared, we may be approaching "eros" as Plato is using the word in the Symposium. This irrational force, this dynamic promise of the character and personality of the individual must be nurtured, guided and sublimated if the "soul" is to identify itself with the highest values towards which it is capable of aspiring. "Thus the concept of Eros becomes an epitome of all human striving to attain the good."<sup>2</sup> Eros precedes areté--

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1. Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act. I, Sc. 2, 1. 89.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 189.

a man must have eros in order to be virtuous--"divine inspiration" or natural capacity precedes rational insight.<sup>1</sup>

In the Protagoras virtue has been defined as knowledge. In the Meno Socrates admits that there have been virtuous statesmen in the past, but they were not able to teach the citizens virtue; these men, he says, were guided by "true opinion" which seems to be like divine inspiration. It might be said, then, that eros is to true opinion as areté is to true knowledge.

Both eros and areté have the "good" as their object; the good that an individual may strive for is defined in part by the eros with which he is gifted and in part determines the use that is made of that potential; Plato's description of eros does not seem entirely irrational nor does areté seem to be wholly rational. The confusion lies not with Plato but with the very nature of the subtle psychological distinctions that Plato is trying to draw into some kind of order. In the Republic Plato resorts to the tripartite soul in order to make these distinctions, but love or eros is not mentioned. In the Phaedrus the tripartite soul is definitely linked with love. The dialogues discussed so far have led us to believe that the various "virtues" are united in areté, but in the Republic the cardinal virtues equal justice when they are in harmony. While this may seem very perplexing, it actually shows the richness of Plato's insight into the very complex problems of the self--far from

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1. Cf. Plato, Meno, 99e-100a.

being entirely contradictory, these different statements are all basically concerned with the same problems and give a full-bodied theory of personality. We are not concerned here with Plato's psychology or his theory of the soul, as such, but it must be kept in mind that eros in the broad sense with which Plato uses it is extremely difficult to discuss without making distinctions that are artificial. Let it suffice to say that eros, or latent personality, is plastic within limits; it can be brought to its highest pitch by proper training--self-discipline and education--but all the training in the world will not make a genius out of a moron.

ii. Eros and self-expression.

Eros, then, is subject to degrees, and this innate ability or potential accounts for the differences between men. In a given group the potential for painting may run from negligible to the level of genius. Suppose there are ten persons and we assign each a "potential quotient" ranging from 1 for the poorest artist up to 10 for the best. It may be that the poor artist realizes 99% of his potential and the best only 70% of his. Artistically speaking, the 70% effort of the best student is infinitely superior to the 99% result of the poor student, but in regarding the test from the standpoint of character we must respect the poor student for doing his very best. Considered in this light, Eros is subject to degrees according to native ability and realized potential. Eryximachus' idea that the degree of eros which a given thing had was

reflected in its "harmony," reappears in the myth of Diotima as a loftier concept--as the degree of harmony that exists between a man's potential and the values towards which he strives. It now becomes apparent that it is not entirely correct to speak of a man's eros as potential ability. Behind any ability stands the motivating force, power or desire which determines to a great extent the degree to which any ability will be developed by the individual.

All forms of motivation, desire or aspiration, not merely erotic attraction, are examples of the force of love, and all forms of love aim at individual happiness.

Every strong and deep urgency of our nature must ultimately be connected with happiness, and must be deliberately guided and controlled with reference to it.<sup>1</sup>

Happiness comes with "possession of the good,"<sup>2</sup> and by the "good" is meant that which is natural or essential to our very nature--that which is in harmony with our eros.<sup>3</sup> The desire for happiness and the good, then, is due to love;<sup>4</sup> a strange sounding statement, indeed, until we think of this love as self-love, self-respect, the active regard for self-realization. This is "the fundamental fact of all Platonic ethics--that man can never desire what he does not think to be good for him."<sup>5</sup> What he thinks good for him depends on his eros and his education--his

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 189.  
 2. Plato, Sym., 204e.  
 3. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 189.

4. Plato, Sym., 205d.  
 5. Jaeger, PAI, II, 189.

"creative" self-expression is as refined as the sense of values which discloses and determines the objects of his love.

Men seek self-expression because they desire immortality, and they desire immortality because happiness is the concomitant of the "everlasting possession of the good."<sup>1</sup> The type of "generation" or creation through which a man seeks to propagate himself reflects his level of eros. Erotic love and physical procreation are the lowest forms of eros--thus part of Pausanias' theory of love is accounted for. Love which inspires the creative works of the poets, artists, etc., is the next highest type of self-expression; this is Agathon's love. The spirit that imbues the true and universal teachers is higher still and incorporates Pausanias' notion that sex in its most refined form is educational. The most inclusive and most sublime love of all, however, is that of the statesman, the lawgiver who is concerned with "the ordering of the state and the family." The assertion that man is a social animal and that the "brotherhood of man" is implied in what order there is amongst men has been anticipated in Phaedrus' speech. Phaedrus gives Love credit for stimulating men with the finest social motives and bringing order out of chaos by inspiring men to arete' and noble deeds. In all its various aspects, eros remains the quest for self-fulfillment and happiness as Aristophanes' myth portrayed it. The various contributions

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1. Plato, Sym., 206e, italics mine; cf. 205d.

of the different speakers have all been assimilated in Socrates' generalized theory of eros.

5. Self-love, education, and the Philosopher-King.

The potential for the highest ends of eros, however, does not insure the attainment of those ends. Education and self-discipline are also necessary. As Diotima explains, this training should begin in youth with an environment of good and beautiful things, develop to the appreciation of good and beautiful principles and finally, if the student has the proper "spirit," to a knowledge of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness as they apply to all things. "Eros is now the force which educates the lover himself, by carrying him from lower to higher stages."<sup>1</sup> The gradual revelation of eternal truths, dependent on individual insight and training is very similar to Plato's development in the Republic and especially in the Allegory of the Cave.

The strong parallel is important, since in the Republic the final justification for granting political "power" to the Philosopher-King depends on his knowledge of the Good. The "power" of the "lover of wisdom" rests on the same basis--an intuitive grasp of the Ideas of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. "Power" is used here in the sense of applied "force," applied potential. As we might think of electricity in general as "force" and electricity applied to something specific as

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 192.

"power," so we can think of eros as a natural force which gives an individual power if properly used. Power would be equivalent to eros plus values. It seems reasonable to suppose, since there is nothing incompatible between the lover of the Symposium and the Philosopher-King of the Republic, that they are one and the same person seen from different perspectives. The Philosopher-King is certainly "the lover of wisdom" personified, and the most sublime object of love in the Symposium is statesmanship.

Plato's egocentric theory of Eros in the Symposium does not try to compromise the desire for personal gain--the desire for "my good," "my happiness," and "my immortality" is at the heart of all Love, considered in the broad sense in which Plato is using eros. Plato does try to show that true self-love leads to the search for the best life possible. The man of true eros gradually comes to associate his good, his own self-fulfillment, with the highest values and the good of others; thus it is that the statesman represents best, supernal Eros. The striving and struggle of the "lover" to satisfy the conditions of his true and noblest nature reveals the necessity of going beyond his own immediate values in the attempt to come to terms with his own destiny. "The philosophical self-love which Socrates reveals [is] the ultimate basis of all Eros, the yearning to attain one's true nature."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 190.

Self-love in the sense of self-awareness, self-imposed responsibility, self-education is very similar to Aristotle's concept of "self-love."<sup>1</sup>

Eros interpreted as love for the good is at the same time the urge of human nature towards real self-fulfillment and self-completion, and is therefore the impulse towards education and culture in the truest sense.<sup>2</sup>

This idea of Love, as Jaeger states, forms the basis for "humanism," for the realization that what we are to be is to a great extent our own responsibility causes a self-conscious "distinction between man the individual as given by nature, and man the higher self."<sup>3</sup> Plato does not, however, carry this individualism and humanism to the point where "man is the measure of all things"; rather he stresses the similarities amongst the individuals who differ. Men are different and they do have different values but insofar as they have true eros, they will approach identical terminal truths, as a limit, from different points. Men are not different so much as they are incomplete. The longing for eternal beauty, goodness and happiness stirs the soul of every man and, Plato feels, goodness and beauty seen in their true state are the same for all men.<sup>4</sup> Education, as Plato says in the Republic, cannot put sight in the eye of the soul; it can only point the soul in the right direction so that

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 190. "Diotima's words are the shortest and best commentary on Aristotle's conception of self-love."
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 190.
  3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 195.
  4. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 195.

the eye of the soul may see true values for itself.<sup>1</sup>

The Philosopher-King in the Republic makes much more sense if Eros is included in his character. The Symposium might be thought of as a justification for the Philosopher-King seen through his own eyes, whereas in the Republic the Philosopher-King is objectively justified from the point of view of the state. Alcibiades, in his praise of Socrates, not only restates Diotima's description of eros, he goes beyond the theoretical discussion. There can be no doubt that Plato meant Alcibiades' speech to depict Socrates as the prototype of Eros; Alcibiades not only describes Socrates in relation to erotic love but also in relation to courage, temperance and wisdom--the cardinal virtues of the Philosopher-King in the Republic. Alcibiades has also glimpsed "the golden images" within Socrates and even though he cannot understand them he can feel the force of the eternal values which Socrates "possesses."

If the reflection of the Philosopher-King can be seen in the eros-inspired man, is it not reasonable to suppose that the converse is also true--that the Philosopher-King is a true lover? The Philosopher-King in the Republic receives nothing for his efforts--nothing material, that is. Plato's insight was that the Philosopher-King could exist only if his preferred position were a position of personal and not social preference. The natural eros of the Philosopher-King has been directed by

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1. Plato, Rep., 518c f.

himself and his education to the point where he accepts a responsibility whose only real reward is his own self-respect or the fulfillment of his self-love; this self-realization, through knowledge of the Good, assures the true philosopher and statesman of immortality on the Isle of the Blest. The Philosopher-King, then, is an individual in the fullest sense of the word. His self-imposed and self-accepted responsibility forces him back into the Cave and imposes the thankless mission of the educator upon him.

An analogy from recent history might be made between Mahatma Gandhi and the Philosopher-King in order to show the workings of eros and the kind of "power" that the Philosopher-King would exercise. Gandhi's political power, in the ordinary sense of the word, was nil, and the material benefits from his position of preference, non-existent. His power was moral and his reward was the realization of his eros.

If this interpretation of Plato's theory of Eros is accepted it becomes clear that happiness does not depend on material possessions or conventional values but rather on the realization of individual potential. It would be easy to take this theory as very similar to "The Law of Nature" stated by Callicles in the Gorgias and Thrasymachus in the Republic--and it is--but Plato does not let the "naturalness" of eros run amuck in the wilderness of relativism. He goes to great pains in the Gorgias to show that the superior individuals who shuck

the chains of herd morality and conventional law in order to realize "natural" values are in fact substituting one set of unanalyzed, conventional values for another without real concern for their own eros. Plato proposes that that which is truly natural is harmonious and that men educated to proper self-love would not divide into classes in a struggle for fruitless power.

If happiness, then, is a profoundly personal concomitant of "natural" harmony between an individual's Eros and the values he seeks to realize, it immediately becomes clear that the Socrates of the Apology is not a paradox at all. The early dialogues conjoined happiness and virtue. In the Apology Socrates is virtue personified but it was not clear how he could possibly be happy. Eros, as defined in the Symposium, reveals why Socrates could undergo his sentence "happily." Socrates had accepted the responsibility of the "gad-fly" imposed by divine inspiration and he consistently sought the highest values demanded by his Eros--he refused to negate that Eros by behaving in any way which was incompatible with it, even if it meant his own death. He remained faithful to himself and his values and therefore could meet his death without fear. Virtue and happiness are not immiscible--they imply each other. The conclusions of the "conversational" dialogues concerning happiness are valid, then, and now we can appreciate more fully why they are valid.

## 6. The Meno.

The conversational dialogues and the Protagoras constantly move in the direction of associating virtues and values with knowledge, and in the Socratic dialogues those virtues and values are personified by Socrates, the philosopher, the man of wisdom. But in the Socratic dialogues there was something else, a moral conviction, a "spirit," which reappears in the Symposium as eros. Plato has introduced an irrational element, a divinely inspired source of man's motivations for values which also determines to a certain extent the values for which he can strive. The desire for immortal perfection and happiness is the wellspring of this irrational drive for self-expression and self-realization. The Meno draws together virtue, knowledge, immortality and divine inspiration or true opinion in a negative discussion reminiscent of the conversational dialogues. The Meno draws the threads together, but there is no solution in this dialogue.

Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?<sup>1</sup>

In the opening lines of the Meno the problem of the dialogue is stated. The question of whether virtue could be taught was answered in the Protagoras by showing that "virtue is knowledge"; since knowledge can be taught, it followed that virtue could be taught, but the Protagoras

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1. Plato, Meno, 70d.

did not show what kind of knowledge virtue is. The Meno indicates for the first time<sup>1</sup> the type of knowledge which Plato feels is the basis of virtue.

It is a new type of cognition, which cannot be learned from anyone else, but, if the thought in the soul of the enquirer is led on in the right way, arises of itself.<sup>2</sup>

i. What is virtue?

When Meno asks Socrates if virtue can be taught, Socrates replies that he cannot answer the question because he does not know what virtue is.<sup>3</sup> Meno does not see why the definition of virtue should cause any difficulty and explains that "virtue is relative to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do."<sup>4</sup> Socrates politely rejects Meno's swarm of virtues. He points out that there are many different kinds of bees but insofar as they are all bees they have something in common. Socrates is willing to admit that there are many virtues, but it is not the differences between virtues that interest him; rather it is the essence of virtue, the common property which makes a virtue a part of Virtue.

Meno finds it very difficult to follow Socrates. Finally, Socrates resorts to an analogy from geometry.<sup>5</sup> A square, a circle and a triangle

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1. Actually, the myth of Diotima has already discussed this type of knowledge, but in connection with eros--in the Meno this kind of knowledge is definitely connected with virtue.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 171.
  3. Plato, Meno, 71a.
  4. Plato, Meno, 71e-72a.
  5. Plato, Meno, 74b-76d.

are all different, but they are all geometric figures; what is the common property which makes them all figures? Meno still does not comprehend until Socrates phrases his questions and answers in the jargon of Gorgias, Meno's teacher. The subtle satire in this passage is directed at the effects of Sophistic education, which crams the student's head full of glib phrases and leaves his power of reasoning attenuated. Meno does not really understand Gorgias' definitions of "figure" or he could apply the same type of reasoning to "virtue." He cannot abstract from particular cases the factor common to them all.

Jaeger devotes a considerable portion of his chapter on the Meno<sup>1</sup> to the logical relationships that he feels are indicated by it. First, the Meno shows the connection between the Ideas and virtue.

The 'something' through which all the separate virtues can be seen to be not manifold, but one and the same, Socrates calls the eidos. . . . The Platonic eidos is always worked out in relation to the problem of virtue.<sup>2</sup>

Jaeger feels that the Meno is proof that Plato never did identify his Ideas with "logical concepts" or "universals." The essence of virtue is the sum of all that can be said about virtue "as a whole."<sup>3</sup> "The answer to 'What is virtue?' is not a definition, but an Idea."<sup>4</sup> The Platonic Idea is both a logical universal and an ontological entity, but Plato never posited the existence of the universal apart from the

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 161-166.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 162.

3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 163.

4. Jaeger, PAI, II, 163.

particular, Jaeger asserts, because he had never abstracted universal concepts as such.<sup>1</sup>

Whether Plato was conscious of the niceties of the logical distinctions between a logical universal and his Ideas, as logical distinctions, is a moot question; whether it would have made any difference in his formulation of the Idea (assuming that he was ignorant of the logical distinction) is another. The technical exposition of the later dialogues is handicapped, no doubt, by Plato's limited technical vocabulary, but his practical, moral philosophy suffers very little. The epistemological and metaphysical status of the Idea seems at times confused and awkward because Plato could not or would not use a formalized technical jargon; but the Idea as a practical standard of choice and behavior is more "scientific" because of the amalgamation of abstract critical thought and actual behavior. Neither uncriticized behavior nor doctrinaire consistency are sufficient as standards, even if they are "true opinions" harmonious with the Idea, if they have not been "verified" in reference to one another.

Socrates' lengthy explanation and numerous analogies finally accomplish their purpose and Meno defines virtue as "the desire of things honourable and the power of attaining them."<sup>2</sup> In a manner by now familiar, Socrates shows that things "honourable" are good and that no

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 164-165.

2. Plato, Meno, 77b.

man consciously chooses anything for himself that is evil. If he chooses an evil, he has made the choice thinking that it was good. Since all men naturally desire what is good for them, Meno's definition of virtue need not include "the desire of things honourable" and therefore reduces to: Virtue is the power of attaining the good.<sup>1</sup>

The questions which Socrates asks and the conclusion which is reached indicate clearly that "power" and "good" are understood by Meno to have been used in the conventional sense and not that of the Symposium. Socrates argues, as he does in the Euthydemus,<sup>2</sup> that health, wealth and all the "good" things of life are good only if justly acquired and justly used--he does not go on to ask if just decisions must be based on knowledge, for that would anticipate the central question of the dialogue. Meno's definition of virtue, Socrates says, reduces to "justice," which is a part of virtue; therefore the definition is circular and does not explain anything.<sup>3</sup> We cannot explain "the nature of virtue as a whole through some unexplained portion of virtue."<sup>4</sup> The definition of justice in the Republic is entirely consistent with the above argument as far as it goes, and this is the first indication that justice, as Plato uses the term in the Republic, is analogous to areté or virtue.

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1. Plato, Meno, 77b-78c.

2. Cf. Plato, Euthyd., 280d-e.

3. Plato, Meno, 79b f.

4. Plato, Meno, 79e; a partial explanation of the negative, conversational dialogues.

ii. Socrates and the Slave.

At this juncture, Meno breaks in with an argument that he has learned from Gorgias, which states that it is impossible to learn anything. If a man knows, "he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire."<sup>1</sup> Meno's borrowed theory causes Socrates to state the doctrine of reminiscence as an alternative which is opposed to Gorgias' skepticism. "Reminiscence" is a purely hypothetical theory of knowledge as stated by Socrates in this passage, with no direct connection to virtue. Many wise men have held, Socrates says, that the soul is immortal; if the soul is immortal, it is entirely possible that the soul has seen and known everything and is therefore able to bring to mind all things if properly stimulated by learning or recollection. The process of bringing to light things already known, however, is not easy.<sup>2</sup>

Socrates puts the theory of reminiscence to a test with one of Meno's slaves, a young boy who has never studied any geometry, to see if the boy can "recall" the correct solution to a geometric problem. The only aid that the slave receives is the stimulation and guidance of Socrates' questions.<sup>3</sup> After a few questions the young boy realizes that his first answer was wrong and Socrates turns to Meno and says:

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1. Plato, Meno, 80e.
  2. Plato, Meno, 81c-d.
  3. Plato, Meno, 82a-84a.

Do you see, Meno, what advances he has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first, and he does not know now; but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor fancies that he knows. He is better off in knowing his ignorance for we have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance. But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he fancied he knew until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know? Mark now the farther development. I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the enquiry with me; and do you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining anything to him, instead of eliciting his opinion.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates continues questioning until the boy "sees" the correct answer without being told what it is. It is possible to question much of Plato's oversimplified demonstration, but more important are the positive insights revealed by the little drama. The "non-directive" technique employed by Socrates shows once more the importance he attached to the awareness of ignorance in the quest for knowledge. The passage also brings out Socrates' "progressive methods," by stressing student interest, student participation and one other factor not emphasized so often among progressive educators: the instructor must have a profound knowledge of the subject under discussion in order to know that the argument is moving in the right direction. Another question implicit in this section is that of how we arrive at any meaningful

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1. Plato, Meno, 84a-d.

solutions to problems--what does it mean to "see" the answer to some difficulty when we were "blind" to the solution an instant previous to the insight?

Since the young slave has recalled things that he had not learned, Socrates proposes that knowledge must be the remembrance of things already known to the immortal soul.<sup>1</sup> "I like what you are saying," Meno comments when Socrates concludes. Plato indicates through Socrates his approval of the type of argument and his awareness of technical difficulties.

And I, Meno, like what I am saying. Some things I have said of which I am not altogether confident. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know;--that is a theme which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.<sup>2</sup>

Plato's educational credo is contained in this statement. There is no sense in assuming a premise which negates philosophical speculation or the value of philosophy at the beginning of an inquiry. Plato is asserting the primacy of practical, moral reason in the face of theoretical objections.

### iii. Can virtue be taught?

Virtue has not yet been defined, and Socrates insists that he cannot tell whether or not it can be taught if he does not know what it is;

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1. Plato, Meno, 85c-86b.

2. Plato, Meno, 86c.

but since Meno seems more interested in this question than in the definition of virtue, Socrates proposes that they proceed by hypothesis; that is, what are the minimum conditions that virtue must satisfy if it can be taught? First if it can be taught, it can be known. "Then if virtue is knowledge, virtue will be taught?"<sup>1</sup> If it is taught and it is virtue it must be good. But is virtue knowledge? In order to find out if virtue is knowledge, Socrates suggests that they pursue an investigation of how knowledge and virtue are related to goodness. Virtue is good; if there is any good which is not knowledge, it may be virtue, "but if knowledge embraces all good, then we shall be right in thinking that virtue is knowledge?"<sup>2</sup>

Socrates now returns to the argument that was dropped when he interpreted Meno's first definition of virtue to be the equivalent of justice. Virtue, he says, is good and is profitable. There are other things, such as wealth, beauty, etc., that are also good if properly utilized, but they may be harmful if used improperly.<sup>3</sup> The value of the potential goods depends on the wisdom exercised in using them.

And in general, all that the soul attempts or endures when under the guidance of wisdom, ends in happiness. . . . If then virtue is a quality of the soul, and is admitted to be profitable, it must be wisdom or prudence, since none of the

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1. Plato, Meno, 87b.
  2. Plato, Meno, 87d.
  3. Plato, Meno, 87e.

things of the soul are either profitable or hurtful in themselves, but they are all made profitable or hurtful by the addition of wisdom or of folly; and therefore if virtue is profitable, virtue must be a sort of wisdom or prudence?<sup>1</sup>

If virtue is knowledge, then good men are not by nature good but are made good by instruction--but this supposition may be erroneous. If it is true it can stand examination, for "a principle which has any soundness should stand firm not just now, but always."<sup>2</sup> Here we have the first real indication of the kind of knowledge that Plato has been looking for--eternal and objective values.

#### iv. Who are the teachers of virtue?

If virtue is knowledge and is taught, there must be teachers and disciples; Socrates is testing the soundness of the theory that virtue is knowledge by asking who the teachers of virtue are and whom do they teach? Socrates asks this question of Anytus, one of the men who accuse Socrates in the Apology of corrupting the youth. Plato cleverly introduces Anytus as a satirical aside and as a justification of Socrates, for he shows Socrates making a complete fool of this smug philistine on a question that he should certainly be able to answer if there had been any grounds for his accusation in the Apology.<sup>3</sup> Anytus is the son of a wealthy and distinguished father and therefore represents the kind of

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1. Plato, Meno, 88c.

2. Plato, Meno, 89c.

3. The confusion in tense, of course, arises from the Apology's having been written before works depicting Socrates earlier in life, in which actions that have not as yet happened to him are justified or explained.

person that Socrates is going to ask about.

Socrates suggests that perhaps the Sophists are the teachers of virtue--at least, he says, they profess to be. Anytus is aghast at such a thought, even though he has never studied with a Sophist and knows nothing about them.<sup>1</sup> The Sophists can hardly be as bad as Anytus thinks, Socrates comments, for some of them, such as Protagoras, have enjoyed very good reputations over a long period of time. If they had been as bad as Anytus painted them they would have been found out and discredited. In any case, if the Sophists are not the teachers of virtue, who is? Any Athenian gentleman, Anytus answers, who has learned virtue from the previous generation of gentlemen.<sup>2</sup>

Socrates admits that there have been many virtuous men in Athens, but that does not prove that they were teachers of virtue. Themistocles was a good man, but his son was undistinguished even though he was given every advantage of education available in Athens at the time. If virtue could be taught, would not Themistocles have taught his son himself instead of having him trained in minor accomplishments such as horsemanship, fencing, and so forth?<sup>3</sup> The same is true of

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1. Plato, Meno, 92c. This dramatic bit shows Anytus as inordinately prejudiced against the Sophists, even though he knows nothing about them; and in the Apology, one of the charges brought against Socrates is that he is a Sophist. Anytus typifies the fifth century Babbitt in his narrow-minded conventionalism.

2. Plato, Meno, 93a.

3. Plato, Meno, 93e.

Aristides, Thucydides and other famous Athenians.<sup>1</sup> Anytus, who can see his own case in Socrates' references, becomes enraged and warns Socrates that if he persists in questioning people he will come to a bad end.

Meno concedes that there is no unanimity of opinion among his countrymen on the possibility of teaching virtue.<sup>2</sup> The poets contradict themselves and are in such confusion that they cannot be the teachers of virtue. It seems that there are no teachers of virtue, which would appear to be evidence that virtue cannot be taught.<sup>3</sup> Meno argues that there have been good men; if virtue cannot be taught, how are they to be accounted for? That is not the only difficulty the argument has caused. Socrates observes that if there are good men and their goodness depends on wisdom in using their attributes, and if knowledge can be taught, the argument is involved in a hopeless contradiction--it would appear that virtue cannot be knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

v. Knowledge and true opinion.

Socrates suggests that they have created undue complications because they have not made any distinctions between "true opinion" and knowledge. He proposes that the way out of the dilemma is to recognize that "true opinion" is as good a guide to action as knowledge is, but that

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1. Plato, Meno, 94 ff.; cf. Prot., 320a and Laches, 179 ff.

2. Plato, Meno, 95b f.

3. Plato, Meno, 95d-96a.

4. Plato, Meno, 96d.

a person who is guided by right opinion cannot teach virtue to others.<sup>1</sup>

Now this is an illustration of the nature of true opinions: while they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul, and do not remain long, and therefore they are not of much value until they are fastened by the tie of the cause; and this fastening of them, friend Meno, is recollection.<sup>2</sup>

This distinction between "true opinion" and "true knowledge," Socrates states, is one of the few things of which he is sure.<sup>3</sup>

And therefore not by any wisdom, and not because they were wise, did Themistocles and those others of whom Anytus spoke govern the states. This was the reason why they were unable to make others like themselves--because their virtue was not grounded on knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

The conclusion drawn is that virtue is neither natural nor acquired but that it is an instinct given by divine power to the virtuous.<sup>5</sup> This instinct cannot be supposed to be accompanied by reason or knowledge "unless there may be supposed to be among statesmen some one who is capable of educating statesmen."<sup>6</sup> Such a man and his virtue would be "a reality among shadows."<sup>7</sup> But, Socrates declares, as the dialogue draws to a close, all this cannot be decided until the nature of virtue itself is investigated--an investigation that is postponed until the Republic.

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1. Plato, Meno, 97.

2. Plato, Meno, 98a.

3. Plato, Meno, 98b.

4. Plato, Meno, 99b.

5. Plato, Meno, 99c-100a.

6. Plato, Meno, 100a.

7. Plato, Meno, 100b.

It may seem that the dialogue has ended without reaching any conclusion but actually it has advanced the argument considerably. Socrates never does refute the paradox that it is impossible to learn what we do not know, which is brought up by Meno during the argument; instead he proposes a practical alternative. He proposes that theoretical philosophy should not run counter to life as it must be lived, but should form the basis of the best life possible--a theory of knowledge should form the foundation of education for citizenship and statesmanship. The dialogue began with an inquiry into the nature of virtue, but when Meno used the paradoxical argument that nothing can be known, Socrates in turn proposed the theory of reminiscence which suggests that knowledge is the recall of things already known to an immortal soul.

Gorgias' argument that it is impossible to teach knowledge to someone else is true to a certain extent, in the light of Socrates' definition of knowledge. Knowledge is not acquaintance with facts, it is an understanding of the meaning of those facts--an understanding which is impossible without the active cooperation of the student and which has a profound influence on the student's personality or soul.

True learning is not passive reception, but a laborious search, which is possible only if the learner spontaneously takes part in it. Plato's whole description makes it clear that scientific or philosophical enquiry has a moral effect, and steels the character.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 170.

Knowledge of this type certainly cannot be taught in the ordinary sense of the word, and Plato does not mean by education what is usually meant-- education is a lifelong process in which the intellectual and physical environment play an extremely important part. This is the reason that Plato's educational theories cannot be separated from the rest of his thought.

The educational paradox used by Meno is not merely eristic logic; it has a good deal of sense in it, as any educator should know. Even if education is defined in a narrower sense than Plato's paideia (as it is today), there remains the methodological problem of whether a student should be asked to assimilate facts that he cannot really appreciate in the hope that understanding will eventually come, or whether a broad perspective should be presented in the hope that the student will be stimulated to dig out the facts for himself. Plato employs both methods in the Republic, but it is only the latter which is thought of as real education. Because real education is the search on the part of the individual himself, we can now appreciate Socrates' use of the elenchus to convince people, as he did Meno's slave, of their ignorance; for the motivation to seek actively for real knowledge has its origins in the awareness of ignorance that carries with it the hope of enlightenment.

The theory of reminiscence is not connected with virtue until the end of the dialogue, when "true opinion" is differentiated from knowledge. True opinion, Socrates shows, is an insufficient standard for political

action, for virtuous men of the past have not been able to improve the citizens or teach others virtue; in fact, they could not even keep the virtue that they had, once they entered public life. True opinion is a divine instinct for making correct value judgments and as such is almost identical with eros in the Symposium, which was also described as an intuitive drive towards values. In the Symposium, Diotima relates the educational process by which eros could be directed to knowledge of Beauty and Goodness--knowledge which would reveal reality rather than images of reality.

The Meno ends on the seemingly skeptical note that until there is some virtuous man whose knowledge is secured by the "tie of cause" and who is capable of teaching statesmen, the question of whether virtue can be taught will have to remain in doubt. If, however, true opinion is analogous to eros, and it would seem that it is, we can anticipate the conclusions that will eventually be reached and also the kind of education that will guide the man of true opinion to true knowledge, and make of him a statesman who can educate others in virtue. The Symposium presents the argument that egocentric eros is most completely realized in the statesman. The Meno develops the idea that the "divine instinct" of the virtuous man must be governed by the knowledge of eternal values, objective norms that are good for all time. The virtuous man, then, combines eros or divine inspiration and true knowledge. The egocentric "eros" of the Symposium is developed in the Meno into politically

significant "true opinion" and shows that natural ability must be guided by eternal values.

The knowledge of eternal truths, it was hypothesized earlier in the dialogue, was known to an immortal soul which, under favorable conditions, recalls what it has always known. In some of the later dialogues Plato formulates this thought in other ways to suggest how the soul "knows," but he never doubts that it is the soul which truly knows nor is any doubt cast upon the theory of reminiscence,<sup>1</sup> or the material effect that knowledge has upon the soul. The connection between the theory of reminiscence and virtue indicates the kind of knowledge that is virtue. In the Meno, Plato

deliberately centers the discussion on the origin of knowledge. But we must remember that, throughout, he means the knowledge of virtue and good-- i. e. the new, Socratic knowledge. And that knowledge is inseparable from its object, and incomprehensible without it.<sup>2</sup>

Since it is the immortal soul that is educated or nurtured, we can appreciate Plato's concern with education and also the full meaning of his warnings in the earlier dialogues that faulty education is dangerous to the soul. This new type of knowledge which Socrates proposes as the basis of real education, determines the type of education that shall be used in the Republic for the training of the Philosopher-King--education

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1. Cornford, PTK, 5.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 161.

of the total individual which prepares him to grasp for himself the principles that govern his own virtue. Plato feels that the intuitive knowledge which is awakened in the soul is the basis of real virtue, and it becomes clear why it has been so difficult to define virtue and education and why the conversational dialogues were inconclusive--in a sense, virtue cannot be defined! The only real definition of virtue is the virtuous man, the man who knows--the dialectic has returned to the Socrates of the Apology and the Crito as the only definition of virtue that is possible.

Since it is the actual individual who is the definition of virtue, it is now evident what Socrates' cryptic assertion that "virtue is one" really means--virtue is the unity of various virtuous traits harmoniously resolved in the personality of a person who has the knowledge necessary to make valid moral judgments. The harmony of the soul, knowledge, and moral choice are all based on eternal values known to the soul--in a sense, then, as Jaeger points out,<sup>1</sup> virtue is united in the Idea. A virtuous individual's knowledge of what ultimately governs his virtue is the Idea. Education as the process of the dialectic cannot be defined in so many words either--it is an experience, "the awakening of the inherent capacities of man."<sup>2</sup> Plato's philosophy is centered in virtue and education and, since they are experiences of the individual's soul, we can now accept more readily his statement that his real philosophy was never written nor could it be written.

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1. See p. 183.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 167.

CHAPTER VIII  
 DIALOGUES INTRODUCTORY TO THE REPUBLIC  
 PART II: THE GORGIAS

The Gorgias is Plato's longest dialogue, excluding the Republic and the Laws. Dramatically it is less effective than the Symposium or the Protagoras because its form is so very complex. Various arguments are developed simultaneously; many of the important passages are highly condensed, and some of the most interesting statements are not developed at all. The Gorgias often seems redundant, but it is an extremely important dialogue because, of all the works discussed so far, it gives the clearest picture of the nature of Plato's political thought and its close association with education and his moral philosophy. The questions that lie behind the argument are: Must the politician or rhetorician be a just man? What are or should be the aims of the politician?

Gorgias, who developed rhetoric, represents a formidable philosophical opponent to Plato's thought, because he challenged the power of reason to find any reality in experience beyond the flux of sense experience. "Even if Reality could be known, knowledge of it could not be communicated to others."<sup>1</sup> Gorgias is skeptical of the possibility of any real knowledge and even if it is possible, he is sure that it cannot be taught to others.<sup>2</sup> This "technical" skepticism--it is doubtful that

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1. Fuller, HP, 106.

2. Cf. Plato, Meno, 80e; see p. 186.

Gorgias ever applied or advocated it in his practical, ethical thinking-- was carried over into the political thinking of Plato's time by his students, who advocated a power theory of politics and ethical relativism on the grounds that they were Natural. According to this doctrine of Natural Law, success and power were the marks of "natural" areté and were the means to happiness. Plato with his idea that virtue is knowledge, that real political success depends on self-realization, not power, and that happiness is the reward of virtue, cannot let the theories that Gorgias proposed or inspired go unchallenged.

Rhetoric represents more than a form of education with which Plato did not agree; it represents in a way the spirit of the times that Plato wanted to revolutionize. The realistic, the pragmatic, the bourgeoisie had reacted against the excessive intellectualism which they felt the Sophists typified, but there was implicit in the candid nonmoral tenets of rhetoric a directness of action that appealed to the Athenian mind and, as long as its nonmoral character was not made evident, it did not offend their conventional values.<sup>1</sup> "The sophistic movement was a purely educational phenomenon, whereas rhetoric was the new culture as it affected the state in practice."<sup>2</sup>

Plato the moralist could not accept the ethical relativism implicit in rhetoric; Plato the philosopher found Gorgias' skepticism

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 136-137. 2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 127.

intolerable; Plato the political theorist did not agree that power was the end of political action, although he did agree that the superior should rule; in addition, Plato the educator was in competition with schools of rhetoric that owed their existence to Gorgias, who invented the "art." The Gorgias is a criticism of a form of education which advocated material success and political power without regard for ethics as its ends. Nothing could be more completely opposed to Plato's own educational program, and this, it would seem, is the reason for his giving so much space to its refutation in the Gorgias. Plato is not creating a philosophical system for its own sake; his thinking is critical and is propounded with the idea of founding a better society by practical educational methods.

His efforts were always directed towards bringing the best state into existence somehow, and uniting those qualities which are usually separate on earth, power and wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

Plato's criticism of the theories characterized by Gorgias in this dialogue is primarily practical and not theoretical; therefore, his main argument is not with Gorgias but with his disciples.

From a criticism of rhetoric, as it was used in the politics of his time, Plato develops the ideals necessary to statesmanship; ideals necessary for the personal value of a healthy "soul" and the social value of a good state. In the Protagoras the political nature of virtue is lost

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 98.

in defining virtue itself, while in the Meno, the political necessity of virtue is introduced at the end of the dialogue and remains undeveloped. The Gorgias assembles these dialogues by critically analyzing the prevailing political ideals of power and unbridled individualism--ideals which, if accepted uncritically, have no "measure."

The "goodness" of political action or, for that matter, of any choice is the "measure" which should be used by the statesman to guide his personal activities (as we have seen in the Symposium) and those of the state. The true statesman must know what ends the state should work for and must be able to teach others what those ends are if the state is to continue to be governed by the best possible choices for the citizens as individuals and as a whole. The Gorgias is more critical than constructive; that is, the political sentiments of the time are criticized and positive correction is hypothesized, but the dialogue goes no further than establishing the need for a normative ethics as a foundation for statesmanship and society. The importance of the virtuous statesman-educator and the need of a moral basis for society, demonstrated in the Gorgias, is the prologue to the ideal state and the Philosopher-King which evolve from the attempt to define justice in the Republic.

### 1. What does Gorgias teach?

Plato's use of Gorgias as a symbol of rhetoric is much the same as his use of Protagoras to symbolize sophistry. As a further parallel,

Gorgias is characterized sympathetically; it is not against Gorgias personally that Plato is marshalling his forces; it is the use of the "art" that he developed that Plato wishes to castigate. The dialogue begins with an investigation as to what rhetoric is. When Socrates asks Gorgias what he teaches, he receives a straightforward answer: "Rhetoric, Socrates, is my art,"<sup>1</sup> an art which he professes to be able to teach to others.

What is the art of rhetoric concerned with, Socrates wants to know. It cannot be defined as discourse or the art of using words exclusively, since there are other arts to which these definitions apply.<sup>2</sup> Gorgias answers that rhetoric has to do with the greatest and best of human things--"being that which gives to men freedom in their own persons, and to individuals the power of ruling over others in the several states."<sup>3</sup> Gorgias' definition presupposes a knowledge of what the greatest and best of human things are and ultimately his definition equates "good" to "power." There is no doubt that Gorgias is using "power" in the ordinary sense and not in that attributed to eros and areté in the Symposium, for he says:

What is there greater than the word which persuades the judges in the courts, or the senators in the council, or the citizens in the assembly, or at any other political meeting:--if you have the

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1. Plato, Gorg., 449a.

2. Plato, Gorg., 449d.

3. Plato, Gorg., 451e-452d.  
Cf. Taylor, PMW, 107.

power of uttering this word, you will have [others working] not for himself, but for you who are able to persuade the multitude.<sup>1</sup>

In the final analysis, "persuasion is the chief end of rhetoric."<sup>2</sup>

Persuasion, Socrates observes, is common to all forms of instruction. In recognizing rhetoric as a form of education, it is Plato's purpose to bring out the fact that you persuade a person with some object in mind; mutual benefit and personal gain are the most general classifications into which the purposes of persuasion can be divided. What is the subject about which rhetoric persuades and what is its object?<sup>3</sup> These are rather awkward questions, since rhetoric has no "subject" and cannot be objectively defined; it can be defined only in terms of the effect it produces. "Rhetoric," Gorgias answers, "is the art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies, . . . and about the just and the unjust."<sup>4</sup> Socrates will return to this admission that the rhetorician can distinguish the just from the unjust later in the dialogue.

Socrates proposes that there is a distinction between knowledge and opinion and that either may be used as the basis for persuading others; Gorgias agrees.<sup>5</sup> The rhetorician does not pretend to teach or persuade others on the strength of knowledge; "then rhetoric, as would

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1. Plato, Gorg., 452e.

2. Plato, Gorg., 453a.

3. Plato, Gorg., 453d.

4. Plato, Gorg., 454b, italics mine.

5. Cf. Meno, 97 f.; see p. 192-193.

appear, is the artificer of a persuasion which creates belief about the just and the unjust, but gives no instruction about them."<sup>1</sup> That is true, Gorgias says, for no large multitude could be informed, in a short space of time, about things such as justice. Gorgias tries to defend himself against the criticism implicit in Socrates' questions; that is, that rhetoric may be used to perpetrate injustice since it is not necessary that the rhetorician's persuasive ability be based on knowledge or concern for the truth of what he is talking about. The rhetorician, Gorgias states,

can persuade the multitude better than any other man of anything which he pleases, but he should not therefore seek to defraud the physician or any other artist of his reputation merely because he has the [forensic] power.<sup>2</sup>

For this reason Gorgias disavows any responsibility for abuses of that power on the part of his students.<sup>3</sup>

"The rhetorician," Socrates comments, "need not know the truth about things; he has only to discover some way of persuading the ignorant that he has more knowledge than those who know?"<sup>4</sup>

"Yes, Socrates, and is not this a great comfort?"

Gorgias has already admitted that the rhetorician is concerned with the just and the unjust,<sup>5</sup> and he is therefore forced to acknowledge

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1. Plato, Gorg., 455a.

2. Plato, Gorg., 457a.

3. Plato, Gorg., 457b.

4. Plato, Gorg., 458c f.

5. Plato, Gorg., 454b.

that the rhetorician must know the nature of justice in order to be able to distinguish between them.<sup>1</sup> Gorgias cannot deny, at this point, that the man who knows what is just will be just, without placing his "art" in a bad light. "According to the argument," says Socrates, "the rhetorician must be a just man," who will never willingly do an injustice.<sup>2</sup> But Gorgias has said that if a rhetorician misuses his power, the injustice is not to be blamed on the teacher; the inference is that not all rhetoricians are just men--a flat contradiction of Gorgias' previous statement.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. What is the definition of rhetoric?

When it becomes evident that Gorgias has contradicted himself, Polus, one of his disciples, breaks into the conversation angrily. The contradiction arose, he claims, because Gorgias was ashamed to admit that justice and injustice were no concern of rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> He wants to know what Socrates thinks the art of rhetoric is. In Socrates' opinion, rhetoric is not an art at all "but the habit of a bold and ready wit, which knows how to manage mankind: this habit I sum up under the word 'flattery'."<sup>5</sup> Socrates carries out this humorous but meaningful satire by saying that the soul, like the body, has two arts which attend it; gymnastics and medicine tend the body while legislation and justice are

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1. Plato, Gorg., 460b.  
 2. Plato, Gorg., 460c-e.  
 3. Plato, Gorg., 460e.

4. Plato, Gorg., 461b.  
 5. Plato, Gorg., 463b.

their counterparts in the care of the soul. There are four counterfeit arts which correspond to the true arts but a counterfeit art "having no regard for men's highest interests, is ever making pleasure the bait of the unwary, and deceiving them into the belief that she is one of the highest value to them."<sup>1</sup> No form of flattery is an art or techné because it cannot give any rational explanation of the nature of its own application. "And I do not call any irrational thing an art."<sup>2</sup> Socrates concludes by summarizing the forms of flattery. Cookery is the form of flattery that takes the place of medicine; cosmetics and garments that of gymnastics; sophistry is the flatterer's form of legislation, while rhetoric is his substitute for justice.

This section gives a good insight into a very important concept in Plato's thinking--the concept of techné. Plato's aim is to make politics and ethics into "arts"; an art or techné is grounded on special, almost theoretical knowledge, that includes and goes beyond experience; that is, it includes specific training for certain ends, but it is not pure theoretical knowledge because it is always connected with actual practice.<sup>3</sup>

Plato often uses analogies from the professions, especially medicine, because the combination of practical experience and theoretical knowledge and investigation exemplified by these vocations is similar to the method

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1. Plato, Gorg., 464e.

2. Plato, Gorg., 465a. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 131 and n. 30, 389.

3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 129-130.

that he feels should be followed in founding a science of ethics and a science of politics.

The good life, which is always Plato's aim, cannot be realized without the art or techné of "measurement" and by contrasting the true arts of medicine, legislation, etc., with the sham or flattering arts, he shows that the latter do not have the rigorous character nor the clearly defined purpose of the true techné.<sup>1</sup>

The techné was the ideal on which Socrates believed knowledge should be modelled. It is easy to see why, if we remember that the ultimate aim of all Plato's search for exact knowledge was a practical aim, namely, the science of the state. . . . Political science is based on a complete theoretical understanding of reality. In this case Plato is postulating a new science of politics, and explains what it is by contrasting it with the political rhetoric of his day.<sup>2</sup>

i. Power is not an end in itself.

Polus is dumbfounded at the analogy between rhetoric and flattery--rhetoricians have great power in the state. They can kill or

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 130.

2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 130. Jaeger may have overemphasized the importance of techné in relation to knowledge in this section; in connection with ethics and politics it seems more reasonable to assert that the techné is to be founded on knowledge, rather than that the knowledge should be patterned after the techné, even if it is meant only that it should be patterned after techné methodologically. See Wild, PTM, 88 ff., for a presentation that tempers that of Jaeger. Wild stresses the subordinate role of techné to life. "The arts advance only by first dividing and then conquering, one step at a time, but a man lives and acts as a whole all at once."

exile men with impunity. Socrates denies that this is really power if power is held to be a good,<sup>1</sup> and Polus does assert that power is good. The ability to sway the mob is not real power, Socrates says, for tyrants and rhetoricians "do literally nothing which they will, but only what they think best."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the rhetoricians must continually please the mob by doing or saying what they think will best suit the circumstances, and not what they may really think is the better procedure. Therefore, they are ruled by the opinion of the mob in the end and have no real power at all; they cannot appeal to a self-determined standard of what is best for themselves, but must continually resort to a standard of expediency.

Power for its own sake is not really power at all; power used as the means to ends consciously sought and known to be good is the only meaningful use of political control, for "if a man does something for the sake of something else, he wills not that which he does, but that for the sake of which he does it."<sup>3</sup> Men will the ends and not the means of their actions and in willing they seek ends that are conducive to their good. No man wills what he does if he does evil, for doing evil is ultimately injurious to himself.<sup>4</sup> Polus has admitted that power is good and, further, that what is done without reason is evil.<sup>5</sup> Polus, of course,

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1. Plato, Gorg., 466b.

2. Plato, Gorg., 466d.

3. Plato, Gorg., 468c; cf. Laches, 185d.

4. Plato, Gorg., 468d.

5. Plato, Gorg., 467a.

has been thinking of power as good in the sense of its being materially advantageous, whereas Socrates is thinking of it as morally good or, if misused, morally evil. If great power is a potential moral good, the tyrant or rhetorician who uses it to kill or exile men without reason is not only evil but he does not have great power, for he cannot control himself or his willed decisions because the ends that he has willed are senseless and therefore evil. "Doing injustice is the greatest of evils," even greater than suffering injustice.<sup>1</sup>

Polus comments that with views such as these, Socrates could not even tell whether a great king were a happy man or not. "And I should speak the truth; for I do not know how he stands in the matter of education and justice."<sup>2</sup>

"What! and does all happiness consist in this?"

"Yes, indeed, Polus, that is my doctrine."

ii. Doing injustice is the worst evil.

Socrates states that it is impossible to be unjust and happy;<sup>3</sup> doing injustice is worse than suffering it and if an injustice is done it is better to suffer punishment than to escape and be thought just.<sup>4</sup> Socrates proceeds to prove his point, even though he uses basic tenets from

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1. Plato, Gorg., 469c; cf. Rep., 347e ff. This is the problem with which the Republic begins.
  2. Plato, Gorg., 471a.
  3. Plato, Gorg., 472c.
  4. Plato, Gorg., 473b-c.

Polus' own philosophical position. Things are considered beautiful in relation to some standard; that is, they are usually called beautiful in relation to the pleasure they afford or to their utility.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, laws and institutions can be thought of as beautiful if they are pleasant or useful.<sup>2</sup> Polus agrees to this criterion and its application to the "beauty of knowledge."<sup>3</sup> Socrates is not presenting his theory of beauty but that of the Sophists, in the same way that he presented pleasure and pain in the Protagoras as the criterion of good and evil that "most people" hold.

Polus, who feels that pleasure and pain is the criterion of good and evil, admits that doing evil is a greater disgrace than suffering injustice, but despite this he asserts that it is better to do injustice than to suffer it.<sup>4</sup> The contradiction that seems so glaring when stated in this way is in reality not nearly so evident--most people suffer from this very conflict, which is obvious only from a thoroughly analyzed moral position. Polus has the same difficulty that Protagoras had with courage.<sup>5</sup> He has failed to see that he is using in a nonmoral sense a term whose very meaning depends on the existence of morality. Injustice is morally bad, but "injustice" has no meaning unless a moral frame of reference is assumed; to say, as Polus does, that injustice is better in some cases

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1. Plato, Gorg., 474d f.  
 2. Plato, Gorg., 474e.  
 3. Plato, Gorg., 475a.

4. Plato, Gorg., 475b-e.  
 5. See p. 140-142.

than justice (by this, it must be remembered, he means materially beneficial) makes sense only if the "good" that results from injustice is considered nonmorally--but this is impossible, for "injustice" has no meaning in a nonmoral situation. Polus, who stated that justice and injustice have no place in rhetoric, finds it impossible to argue for an order of precedence among values while remaining nonmoral. He found it impossible to deny that doing evil is a greater disgrace than suffering injustice; this admission concedes the existence of morality and is enough to destroy his whole case that rhetoric is not concerned with justice and injustice, for it is inconceivable that moral good can result from injustice. Socrates is trying to show that a potential material good is good only if its acquisition and use are also moral.

If pleasure and pain is the criterion of good and evil and if doing evil is a greater disgrace than suffering injustice, and disgrace is an evil, then Socrates has shown by Polus' own admissions that doing evil is worse than suffering injustice since disgrace as the greater evil would also be the most painful. In order to show that it is better to accept just punishment than to escape, Socrates proposes that in every action there is an agent that acts, and a patient that is acted on, and that the patient is affected according to the way the agent acts.<sup>1</sup> If the agent punishes justly the patient suffers justly and therefore honorably. The honorable

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1. Plato, Gorg., 476b-d f.

is good and therefore either pleasant or useful, to use Polus' standard, and the person punished justly is benefited; that is, his soul is improved.<sup>1</sup>

"Injustice and intemperance, and in general the depravity of the soul, are the greatest of evils!"<sup>2</sup> As medicine frees a man from disease, so punishment, if it is deserved, frees the soul from injustice and the man who suffers punishment is better off than the man who escapes punishment;<sup>3</sup> what, then, "is the great use of rhetoric... in helping a man excuse his own injustice?"<sup>4</sup> Socrates has shown that rhetoric is of no use to the politician, or rather, to the statesman, for it does not represent true power. He has also shown why he thinks that accepting punishment, if deserved, is better than "protecting yourself" with the aid of rhetoric.

### 3. Callicles' argument for Natural Law.

Callicles, who is to present a more forceful statement of Natural Law and egocentric individualism than Polus, is amazed, and assumes that Socrates is jesting; for if he is not, "the whole of human life is turned upside down."<sup>5</sup> Callicles, who is a politician and therefore representative of the type of person that he and Socrates are arguing

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1. Plato, Gorg., 477a-b.

2. Plato, Gorg., 477e.

3. Plato, Gorg., 478a-c; cf. Prot. 324b, punishment is senseless unless it is a form of education; see p. 131.

4. Plato, Gorg., 480b.

5. Plato, Gorg., 481b.

about, finds it difficult to associate moral conviction, such as Socrates', with politics. As a "flatterer" of the people, Callicles must constantly consider the opinions of the majority and he warns Socrates repeatedly that he should do so too; but Socrates is not interested in pleasing the majority of people; he is interested only in seeking a consistent set of values with which he can live beneficially as an individual and as a member of society. "I would rather... the whole world should be at odds with me, and oppose me," he says, "than that I myself should be at odds with myself, and contradict myself."<sup>1</sup>

Callicles chides Polus, for in admitting that to do injustice was more dishonorable than to suffer injustice, he made the same mistake Gorgias had made; such moral considerations are only relevant to "the popular and vulgar notions of right, which are not natural but only conventional."<sup>2</sup> The superior individual should follow natural law rather than conventional law, because the conventional law is made by the majority, who are weak, in order to protect themselves from the strong.<sup>3</sup> This is not just. "Justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior."<sup>4</sup> The bold-faced hypocrisy of Callicles and his ilk lies in their willingness to flatter the mob that they despise in order to obtain power--power as a means to their own pleasure. Callicles' anti-democratic position is the final philosophical extreme

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1. Plato, Gorg., 482c.  
2. Plato, Gorg., 482e.

3. Plato, Gorg., 483b.  
4. Plato, Gorg., 484d.

which Socrates must defeat in the name of moral politics.<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy, Callicles grants, has a place in education, but if it is pursued past youth it makes a man effeminate.<sup>2</sup> In the practical world a man must learn how to handle himself realistically--there he will learn the value of rhetoric. Socrates is a case in hand; he is endangering himself by not knowing how to defend himself in court. The challenge is clear-cut; Socrates is to represent philosophy and Callicles rhetoric. Callicles, with the examples of Gorgias and Polus in mind, will not founder on the rocks of moral distinctions as easily as they did. Socrates does not equivocate about his position either.

Now there is no nobler enquiry, Callicles, than that which you censure me for making, --What ought the character of a man to be, and what his pursuits,

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1. Popper, OSE, I, 102-104. Popper presents the thesis that the Gorgias, since it shows Socrates attacking Callicles' theory of the rule of the superior, is a Socratic dialogue, whereas the Republic is a Platonic dialogue--the difference being that the Socratic dialogues are humanistic and "protectionistic" while the Platonic dialogues are "historicistic" and totalitarian. There is no justification, however, for this arbitrary distinction. The Gorgias and the Republic are not opposed; they only seem so because Popper insists on seeing the Philosopher-King as a tyrannical dictator which, it is true, Socrates does attack in the Gorgias. In the Gorgias, Socrates is not attacking the theory that the best should rule--he is denying that those who are incompetent and think they are superior should rule. In other words, he is asking what the standard of the best should be; in so doing, the Gorgias is a necessary preface to the Republic because it helps to distinguish the tyrant from the Philosopher-King by investigating the nature of political power.
  2. Plato, Gorg., 483c-486e. Callicles represents the realistic conservatives who opposed philosophy as unpractical and vitiating to the will. See p. 200.

and how far is he to go, both in maturer years and in youth?<sup>1</sup>

i. Who are the superior men?

In carrying out this purpose, Socrates engages Callicles on the question of what it is that makes the superior man superior. At first Callicles maintains that the stronger, the better, and the superior man are the same thing but when Socrates points out that the weak as a whole have more physical power than any one superior individual and would therefore have a "natural" right and not merely a conventional right to make the laws and define justice as equality, Callicles is forced to define "superior" in terms other than physical power.<sup>2</sup> With Socrates' guidance, he affirms that the wiser and better should rule and, Callicles adds, they should have more than the inferior.<sup>3</sup> In what way, Socrates wants to know, must a man be wiser in order to warrant a larger share--and what should it be a larger share of?--if a man is a shoemaker and the wisest about shoes, should he have the largest and most shoes?<sup>4</sup>

The wise politicians who are valiant and able are what he meant, Callicles says, and not the superior craftsmen--Callicles thus includes courage with wisdom as the mark of a superior man and concludes that the wise and courageous should rule the state and have more than their subjects.<sup>5</sup> Callicles' constant insistence that the rulers have more than

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1. Plato, Gorg., 487c.

2. Plato, Gorg., 488d.

3. Plato, Gorg., 490a.

4. Plato, Gorg., 491a f.

5. Plato, Gorg., 491c.

their subjects shows Plato's awareness of the corrupting influence of this motive of personal gain in the politically ambitious and in this way prepares us for the necessarily frugal existence of the Philosopher-King in the Republic.

This is all very well as far as this "superior" individual is a political ruler, but what are his personal characteristics? "Every man is his own ruler, but perhaps you think that there is no necessity for him to rule himself; he is only required to rule others?"<sup>1</sup> Socrates is suggesting that the ruler must also be temperate. If Socrates shows that the superior man must be temperate in order to rule, the cardinal virtues of the Republic will have been shown to be necessary to a ruler even if Callicles' Natural Law is taken as the original premise. Callicles objects violently to this proposal. Temperance is more easily associated with morality than courage and wisdom and if Callicles admits that the superior individual must have a personal standard of behavior in order to rule, Socrates would have the same lever that has already caused Polus and Gorgias to contradict themselves. Callicles does not make the task easy for Socrates; he denies that the superior man must be temperate and states his case for egocentric hedonism as the natural and therefore right criterion of behavior.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Plato, Gorg., 491d.

2. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 140-141.

I plainly assert, that he who would truly live ought to allow his desires to wax to the uttermost, and not to chastise them; but when they have grown to their greatest he should have the courage and intelligence to minister to them and to satisfy all his longings.... And the truth is this:--that luxury and intemperance and licence, if they be provided with means, are virtue and happiness--all the rest is mere bauble, agreements contrary to nature, foolish talk of men, nothing worth.<sup>1</sup>

If happiness depends on satisfying desires, the happy man can never be satisfied--his soul is like a leaky vessel or a cask which can never be filled.<sup>2</sup> Scratching, Socrates observes, will relieve an itch and as the gratification of a desire it is pleasant; does it follow that the man who itched all over constantly would be happier than a man with an occasional cutaneous irritation?<sup>3</sup> This analogy seems absurd to Callicles but he does not see that any pleasure hounded to excess just because it is pleasant in some circumstances is just as absurd. As long as Callicles makes no distinction between good and bad pleasures and as long as he feels that only the experience of desire pleasantly satisfied is happiness, he must accept the scratching analogy. Callicles continues to maintain that all pleasure is good; he does agree, however, that courage and knowledge are not the same as pleasure.

Callicles, the Acharnian, says that pleasure and good are the same; but that knowledge and courage are not the same, either with one another, or with the good [i. e. pleasure].<sup>4</sup>

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1. Plato, Gorg., 491e-492c.

2. Plato, Gorg., 493b-c.

3. Plato, Gorg., 494b-e.

4. Plato, Gorg., 495d.

If we keep in mind that Callicles has proposed that the superior individual is wise and courageous, the type of contradiction that he is involved in is clearly evident and the devious course of Socrates' argument becomes more intelligible.

ii. Is pleasure the good?

Socrates proposes that good and evil are mutually exclusive and that all things are either one or the other but not both;<sup>1</sup> also, that "all wants or desires are painful" and that in satisfying a desire, pleasure and pain are present simultaneously since the desire is pain and the satisfaction is pleasure.<sup>2</sup> "For are they not simultaneous, and do they not affect at the same time the same part, whether of the soul or the body?"<sup>3</sup> If this is so and if good and evil are mutually exclusive, then pleasure cannot be the good since pleasure and pain exist in the same thing at the same time whenever a desire is satisfied.

The inference is that the good is not the same as the pleasant, or the evil the same as the painful; there is a cessation of pleasure and pain at the same moment; but not of good and evil, for they are different.<sup>4</sup>

At this point Socrates introduces a thought that foreshadows the theory of forms in the Republic: "Are not the good good because they have good present with them, as the beautiful are those who have beauty present with them?"<sup>5</sup>

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1. Plato, Gorg., 495e.  
 2. Plato, Gorg., 496d-e.  
 3. Plato, Gorg., 496e.

4. Plato, Gorg., 497e.  
 5. Plato, Gorg., 497e.

The foolish, the wise, the cowards and the brave all experience pain and pleasure in about the same degree and often about the same things; therefore it is not the experience of pleasure or pain that differentiates the wise from the foolish or the courageous from the cowards.<sup>1</sup> "But surely the wise and the brave are the good, and the foolish and the cowardly are the bad?"<sup>2</sup> Callicles affirms this observation by Socrates and since he could not have arrived at this conclusion using the pleasure (good) and pain (evil) "possessed" as a standard for differentiating the good from the bad, he has tacitly admitted that some standard for moral judgment does exist; but first Socrates must wrest from him an affirmation that some pleasures are good and others bad.

Good and evil men both experience joy and pain and if pleasure is the criterion of "good" the evil man may have even more pleasure because he indulges himself more; it follows that "the bad man is as good and bad as the good, or perhaps even better" if it is asserted that the "good and the pleasant are the same."<sup>3</sup> Plato is indicating the complete relativism inherent in egocentric hedonism--a relativism in which good and bad have no meaning. Callicles can hardly accept this conclusion, since it would destroy the validity of his primary contention that some men are by nature superior and should rule and have more than the inferior, by right of Natural Law. Callicles is on the horns of the dilemma: if he continues to assert that pleasure is the

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1. Plato, Gorg., 497e-499b.

2. Plato, Gorg., 498c.

3. Plato, Gorg., 499b.

good, there is no ground for proposing that the superior should rule, and the conventional law of the herd is as good as any; if he wants to maintain that the superior should rule, he must admit to a standard of the "good" other than pleasure, and if he admits that pleasure is not the standard he will have a hard time denying that temperance is a necessary characteristic of the ruler.

Callicles retires from his stand concerning pleasure as the good; he pretends that he has really believed that "some pleasures are good and others bad" all the time.<sup>1</sup> Once Callicles makes this concession, the argument continues much the same as it did in the Protagoras.<sup>2</sup> Callicles grants the validity of the previous argument which showed that "the good is the end of all our actions, and that all our actions are to be done for the sake of the good, and not the good for the sake of them," and that pleasure is sought for the good and not the good for the sake of the pleasure.<sup>3</sup> "Will depends on choice, and... what we always choose in willing is the good."<sup>4</sup> As in the Protagoras,<sup>5</sup> Socrates contends that in order to choose the pleasures that are good you must "have art or knowledge of them in detail"--once this point is made, Callicles can no longer argue that philosophy should not continue beyond youth since

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1. Plato, Gorg., 499c. This is the admission Socrates sought when he used the scratching analogy. (494b f.)

2. See pp. 137 ff.

3. Plato, Gorg., 499e; cf. Gorg., 467c ff.

4. Jaeger, PAI, II, 142.

5. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 142-143 for a comparison of the Gorgias and Protagoras.

the province of philosophy is value judgment or, as Socrates says:

"You will observe that we are arguing about the way of human life; and to a man who has any sense at all, what question can be more serious than this?"<sup>1</sup>

iii. Temperance and the statesman.

In order to distinguish rhetoric from philosophy, Socrates returns to his analogy of the flattering arts, whose only end is to produce pleasure, and the true arts based on knowledge, which seek the good.

You and I have agreed that there is such a thing as good, and that there is such a thing as pleasure, and that pleasure is not the same as good, and that the pursuit and process of acquisition of the one, that is pleasure, is different from the pursuit and process of acquisition of the other, which is good.<sup>2</sup>

The true arts make "provision for the soul's highest interest" and are based on knowledge and awareness of the purpose that they are meant to fulfill. The flattering arts depend on routine and the experience of what has produced pleasure in the past.<sup>3</sup> Poetry, music and tragedy aim only at producing pleasure and if poetry were stripped of music, meter, and rhythm the result would be rhetoric. This uncomplimentary comparison of poetry to the flattering arts is the first of many critical passages in which Plato denies that poetry is a true art and thereby denies that the poets are reliable founts of knowledge; the poets often reveal truths but

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1. Plato, Gorg., 500b-c.

2. Plato, Gorg., 500e.

3. Plato, Gorg., 501a-c.

their inspiration is inconsistent and irresponsible because it is not governed by reason. Rhetoric, the prose counterpart of poetry, is the flattering art which Socrates claimed it to be, unless Callicles can present some new evidence. Callicles says that it is true that some rhetoricians are merely flatterers but there are also those who are really concerned with the welfare of the people.

I am contented with the admission that rhetoric is of two sorts; one, which is mere flattery and disgraceful declamation; the other, which is noble and aims at the training and improvement of the souls of the citizens, and strives to say what is best, whether welcome or unwelcome, to the audience.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note the qualifications that Socrates demands of the "noble rhetoric"--qualities that would make the rhetorician identical with the philosopher, as Socrates defines the philosopher.<sup>2</sup> Socrates wishes to know which ones among the rhetoricians that Callicles knows have these qualities. There are none living, Callicles replies, but Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades and Pericles are examples from the past.<sup>3</sup> Socrates, however, does not agree that these men were "improvers of the people." "Will not the good man, who says whatever he says with a view to the best, speak with reference to some standard and

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1. Plato, Gorg., 503a, italics mine.

2. Cf. Phaedr., 262b; 270d ff. for a more detailed comparison of the rhetorician and the philosopher in which the "noble rhetorician" is compared with the philosopher.

3. Plato, Gorg., 503b.

and not at random?"<sup>1</sup> Regularity and order in reference to some standard, the methodology of the techné, is necessary to realize the good--the good soul is therefore in order and harmony; it is lawful and thus temperate and just.

With this line of reasoning, Socrates shows that temperance is necessary to the statesman and the cardinal virtues of the Philosopher-King in the Republic are finally united in the "noble rhetorician."<sup>2</sup> The goal of the true rhetorician will be to "implant justice in the souls of his citizens... to implant every virtue and take away every vice."<sup>3</sup> As a doctor does not allow a sick man to gratify his desires at the expense of a cure to the body so the statesman should not indulge the soul of the citizen at the expense of its health--and justice and temperance are essential the soul's health. Self-control and temperance, then, are better than the license that Callicles advocated earlier in the argument.<sup>4</sup>

Callicles refuses to continue the argument when this contradiction becomes evident but Gorgias intervenes and asks that they finish. Socrates summarizes the argument, which has shown that pleasure is not the good but rather that the good is good because of some virtue present in an object or person.

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1. Plato, Gorg., 503d;  
cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 145-146.  
2. Plato, Gorg., 504d.

3. Plato, Gorg., 504e.  
4. Plato, Gorg., 505c.

But the virtue of each thing, whether body or soul, instrument or creature, when given to them in the best way comes to them not by chance but as the result of the order and truth and art which are imparted to them.<sup>1</sup>

The soul which is orderly, the temperate soul, then, is better than the intemperate soul; it is virtuous because of the order and truth that it has received from the proper education of its eros. The temperate man will do what is proper for him to do in relation to man and gods; he will be just, and holy and courageous too.<sup>2</sup> Again we find the unity of virtue expressed by Plato, this time in relation to temperance and justice.<sup>3</sup> The temperate man "cannot be other than a perfectly good man, nor can the good man do otherwise than well and perfectly whatever he does; and he who does well must of necessity be happy and blessed."<sup>4</sup> Temperance and justice are mandatory for a well-ordered state and the happiness of the individual, since anyone who is not just and temperate is incapable of friendship.

And philosophers tell us, Callicles, that communion and friendship and orderliness and temperance and justice bind together heaven and earth and gods and men, and that this universe is therefore called Cosmos or order.<sup>5</sup>

Areté or excellence is not the result of chance but of the deliberate order achieved by a thing through the exercise of the art peculiar

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1. Plato, Gorg., 506d.  
2. Plato, Gorg., 507a-b.  
3. Jaeger, PAI, II, 146.

4. Plato, Gorg., 507b.  
5. Plato, Gorg., 508a.

to it. "Everything becomes good when its own peculiar type of order, its cosmos, becomes supreme and is realized in it."<sup>1</sup> If the good is understood in the broad sense in which Plato seems to intend that it should be, "ethics is only a special case of the effort made by all things to achieve perfection."<sup>2</sup> The Symposium described eros as the motivating force in man's quest for self-perfection--a quest realized most completely by the statesman who has utilized his eros by controlling it and directing it towards the highest values.<sup>3</sup> In the Symposium, the dialectic starts with self-love and arrives at the statesman; in the Gorgias it starts with the problem of the statesman and arrives at the conclusion that friendship is the basis of society. The lover of wisdom in the Symposium and the "noble" rhetorician of the Gorgias are essentially the same "statesman" and both are necessary for an understanding of the Philosopher-King.

#### 4. The statesman as an educator.

Socrates next investigates the statement that he could not defend himself, his family or his friends because he is not a rhetorician. He reiterates his belief that to do evil is worse than to suffer it--is there, then, any means by which a man can protect himself justly?

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 146.
  2. Jaeger, PAI, II, 146.
  3. See pp. 162 ff; 175 ff.

By what devices can a man succeed in obtaining the two advantages, the one of not doing and the other of not suffering injustice? must he have the power, or only the will to obtain them? . . . Is the will only sufficient, and will that prevent him from doing injustice, or must he have provided himself with power and art; and if he have not studied and practised, will he be unjust still?<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that good intentions are not enough to insure the goodness of an act; Plato includes the utilitarian precept that the consequences are important too.<sup>2</sup> A person must have correct training, knowledge and experience in order to have the "power" to avoid doing injustice, even unintentionally. Justice is an art, a techné, because it includes the theoretical intent and the practical consequence in the same way that a master cabinetmaker must have a design in mind and the ability to execute it--lacking either, he is not a master of his techné. As far as ethics is concerned, Socrates is proposing that moral education is still necessary to insure that intent and consequence are both satisfied, even if a person already has a "good will." You can intend what is right only if you know what is right and you can be sure of the consequences only if you have the power to fulfill your aims.

In many ways this is one of the most important passages in the dialogues for an understanding of Plato's ethics, politics and educational theory. It is one of the most explicit statements of the twofold nature of

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1. Plato, Gorg., 509d-e, italics mine.

2. See pp. 82-83 for a similar development in the Charmides.

all his philosophy and it is especially enlightening because of the obvious reference to Socrates' trial in this part of the dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

The Apology shows us a virtuous man who refuses to use anything but the truth in his own defense and since it is the use of this truth that has brought him to trial in the first place, Socrates is helpless--he will not retaliate unjustly, that is, defend himself rhetorically. For his attempt to educate the people in the ways of virtue and justice, he received the death sentence. The rank injustice of Socrates' death crystallizes the problem of virtue in contrast to conventional morality and that of law as it is related to justice.

And what art will protect us from suffering injustice, if not wholly, yet as far as possible? . . . I think that such an art is the art of one who is either a ruler or even tyrant himself, or the equal and companion of the ruling power.<sup>2</sup>

The answer to the problem posed by Socrates' death lies, for Plato, in the just statesman, the paradox of the Philosopher who is to be King--a development that has already been suggested in connection with the exegesis of the Socratic dialogues.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the frequent references in the Gorgias to Socrates' lack of ability to protect himself are allusions to Socrates' trial. That Plato should refer back to that tragedy in connection with a criticism of rhetoric indicates the place that Socrates' death has in

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1. See especially Plato, Gorg., 521d-522e.    3. See pp. 123 ff.  
2. Plato, Gorg., 510a.

connection with the conflict between nonmoral law and justice. The whole of the Gorgias contrasts nonmoral law or rhetoric with justice, which is championed by philosophy in the person of Socrates. The actual Socrates had the will and the power not to do injustice; he had the will but not the power to protect himself from suffering injustice. Rhetoric, the flatterer of the people, represents an unjust form of law, and it is this that Plato is going to such pains to criticize in the Gorgias. In the above passage, Socrates suggests that the only way a really virtuous man can avoid injustice is for the virtuous individual to be the law. He must not only have the art, which Socrates had, he must also have the power, which Socrates did not.

It may seem that Plato's solution overemphasizes the protection of the virtuous citizen, that he is proposing that the state exist for the sake of the statesman. This is hardly the case. Plato sees in the just statesman the answer to the best possible society. The twofold nature of Plato's philosophy alternates constantly between the individual and society; all of his thought can be put in terms of subjective individuality and objective society. Eros is highly individualistic but its highest expression is political; areté is a personal attribute but only the citizen can be truly virtuous; knowledge depends on subjective insight but one must be educated to the point where that knowledge can be grasped; the Good and the Ideas are objectively true but subjectively realized; knowledge of the Good leads to personal immortality but it also imposes

a social responsibility; intent is subjective and the consequence as far as it concerns others is objective; and so forth.

Plato's dialectic and his insistence that his philosophy never was written can best be understood in regard to this alternating perspective. The individual and society can be brought together only by means of education; education in the broadest sense; education thought of as the meeting of individual minds which, though inviolably personal, do or should have common ends. This meeting of minds, the search for the common ground which is the Idea, takes the form of the dialectic and works itself out in serious conversation; because this is philosophy for Plato, he could truly say that his philosophy was never written. We have seen that he suggests that the just individual must have power in order to protect himself from injustice and we will see that he proposes that the just individual with the power must be an educator.

i. Power--the ability to live well.

Callicles heartily agrees that in order to be sure he will suffer no injustice, a man should have power as a ruler or even a tyrant. He is, however, thinking of "power" in the conventional sense once more, so Socrates contrasts the use of power in the hands of an unjust tyrant and power in the proper hands.<sup>1</sup> The unjust tyrant will not tolerate better men than himself around him and will despise inferiors; therefore, he will choose his friends from persons who are willing to fawn, but who

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1. Plato, Gorg., 510b.

are similar to himself.<sup>1</sup> This is the course recommended by Gorgias, Polus and Callicles as the way for a man to become "great" and have "power," since the citizens of the Athenian democracy are also tyrannical.

But if you suppose that any man will show you the art of becoming great in the city, and yet not conforming yourself to the ways of the city, whether for better or worse, then I can only say that you are mistaken.<sup>2</sup>

If the underling is like the tyrant, can he avoid doing injustice which, because it corrupts the soul, has been admitted to be the greatest of evils?<sup>3</sup> But if you do not conform, Callicles says, you endanger your life, whereas the study of rhetoric would save you.<sup>4</sup> There are many other arts, Socrates says, which preserve life, but they are not pretentious. Swimming will save your life too, when it is necessary to know how to swim; your life is in the hands of the navigator on an ocean voyage--why should these arts be less respected than rhetoric?<sup>5</sup> Not living but living well is the object of life.<sup>6</sup> Is expediency and pleasing people in order to gain evanescent political power worth what it costs the soul? Socrates does not think so, for he says: "I would not have us risk that which is dearest on the acquisition of this power."<sup>7</sup>

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| 1. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 510b f.; cf. <u>Lysis</u> , 214b ff. | 5. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 511c-512a. |
| 2. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 513b.                                | 6. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 512b.      |
| 3. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 510e.                                | 7. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 513a.      |
| 4. Plato, <u>Gorg.</u> , 511c.                                |                                     |

Socrates' argument sounds good to Callicles, but he is not quite convinced as yet. Socrates then describes power in the right hands and how it should be used.

ii. Power--the ability to do good.

There are two processes of training all things, including body and soul; in the one, as we said, we treat them with a view to pleasure and in the other with a view to the highest good. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Pleasure has been shown to be a false standard--the highest good remains. The object of the highest good is the greatest improvement of the soul or the body, depending upon which is being ministered to.

And must we not have the same end in view in the treatment of our city and citizens? Must we not try and make them as good as possible? For we have already discovered that there is no use in imparting to them any other good, unless the mind of those who are to have the good, whether money, or office, or any other sort of power, be gentle and good.<sup>2</sup>

The improvers of the people must have ability, training, knowledge and experience to be able to educate the people properly.<sup>3</sup> The true politician should be tested as a builder might be for proficiency in his techné, his art, before being given power: who were his teachers? what has he accomplished?<sup>4</sup> To all this Callicles agrees. Socrates then confronts this man of the world who has advised him to get his head down out of the clouds, this successful and practical practitioner of rhetoric, with the question:

1. Plato, Gorg., 513d, italics mine.

2. Plato, Gorg., 513e-514a.

3. Plato, Gorg., 514a-b.

4. Plato, Gorg., 514c f.

who has he as a politician improved?<sup>1</sup> The point is painfully relevant; in spite of his vigorous prosecution of the case for rhetoric, Callicles is deflated with one sharp pin-prick of Socratic observation. Callicles cannot claim any real good to have been the result of his powers of persuasion, and yet it has been granted that the duty of the public man is the improvement of the people.

Callicles is not alone, however; Pericles, Cimon and the other "great" statesmen that Callicles mentioned previously did not improve the citizens either.<sup>2</sup> Pericles was tried and convicted by the people he was supposed to have educated and made better; either he was guilty and not a true statesman because he was dishonest or, if he was innocent, he was not a true statesman because he neglected his job as an educator who should have taught the people not to be unjust. The other statesmen of the past suffered similar fates at the hands of the people they should have made good; they were not real statesmen, they were flatterers of the people who actually made them worse rather than better.<sup>3</sup>

I do think that they were certainly more serviceable than those who are living now, and better able to gratify the wishes of the State; but as to transforming those desires and not allowing them to have their way, and using the powers which they had, whether of persuasion or of force, in the improvement of their fellow-citizens, which is the prime object of the truly good citizen, I do not see that in these respects they were a whit superior to our present statesmen.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Plato, Gorg., 515b-c.  
2. Plato, Gorg., 515c-517a.

3. Plato, Gorg., 517b ff.  
4. Plato, Gorg., 517b.

Because he has the power and the opportunity to teach the people, no statesman can be unjustly put to death by the city that he ruled.<sup>1</sup> The case of the statesman is much like that of the Sophists, who profess to be teachers of virtue and then accuse their pupils of not paying their fees or of wronging them in some other way. Does there "not appear to . . . be a great inconsistency in saying that you have made a man good, and then blaming him for being bad?"<sup>2</sup> The only public man who is safe from being treated unjustly by the city is the man who removes injustice, as a doctor would a tumor. When the argument has reached this conclusion, Socrates asks Callicles:

Am I to be the physician of the State who will strive and struggle to make the Athenians as good as possible; or am I to be the servant and flatterer of the State?<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the argument, Callicles advises the latter course, repeating once again his warning that if Socrates does not conform he may be brought to trial. In an obvious reference to the actual trial of Socrates, Plato has Socrates prophesy that he probably will be accused by some miscreant--"nor shall I be surprised if I am put to death."<sup>4</sup>

Socrates anticipates his death because he is "the only or almost the only Athenian living who practises the true art of politics."<sup>5</sup> As the only politician of his time, he looks to what is best and not what is

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1. Plato, Gorg., 519c.  
2. Plato, Gorg., 519b.  
3. Plato, Gorg., 521a.

4. Plato, Gorg., 521d.  
5. Plato, Gorg., 521d.

most pleasant, so that if he were brought to trial he would be tried "as a physician would be tried in a court of little boys at the indictment of the cook."<sup>1</sup> The cook could show all the pleasant and tasty things that he had given them in contrast to the bitter potions, medicines, diets, etc., of the doctor. The doctor's only defense is the truth, but his claim that he did all these unpleasant things for their own good would hardly be convincing to little boys.<sup>2</sup> Socrates' own fate would be much the same; his only defense would be the truth, which would not sound very convincing to people who were accustomed to being pleased and flattered, especially since his truth is an indictment of their moral frailty.

And if any one says that I corrupt young men, and perplex their minds, or that I speak evil of old men, and use bitter words towards them, whether in private or public, it is useless for me to reply, as I truly might:--'All this I do for the sake of justice, and with a view to your interest, my judges, and to nothing else.'<sup>3</sup>

Even though it may mean his death, this is the only defense that Socrates wants, for no real harm can come to the just man.

##### 5. Reward and punishment of the soul.

Socrates tells a myth to show graphically what he means by saying that the good man can suffer no real harm and that injustice is the greatest of evils. The myth in the Gorgias is very similar to the

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1. Plato, Gorg., 521e.

2. Plato, Gorg., 522a.

3. Plato, Gorg., 522c.

eschatological myths that conclude the Phaedo and the Republic.<sup>1</sup> In the Phaedo, when Socrates says that "the soul when on her progress to the world below takes nothing with her but nurture and education,"<sup>2</sup> he expresses very well the essence of the myth in the Gorgias. It must be remembered that paideia has a wider connotation than is usually associated with education; real education is defined in terms of the soul by Plato--that which affects the soul, any conviction, action or choice that changes, adds to or destroys a part of the total personality is a form of nurture or education. In the myth this is pictured by a soul that bears visible scars of indiscretions or injustices committed in life.<sup>3</sup> The condition of the soul determines whether it travels to Tartarus for punishment or to the Isle of the Blessed and eternal happiness. Education, which has so much to do with the condition of the soul is therefore very important to our eternal well-being.

Of those sent to Tartarus, the ones who suffer most are the kings and tyrants who were unjust. For them there is no hope of being released from punishment, so they serve as examples for the souls that are being corrected by punishment. They are forever damned, "for they are the authors of the greatest and most impious crimes, because they have the power."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Plato, Phaedo, 107c-114c; Rep. 614b-521b.

2. Plato, Phaedo, 107d.

3. Plato, Gorg., 524d f.

4. Plato, Gorg., 525d.

And yet in that very class [of rulers] there may arise good men, and worthy of all admiration they are, for where there is great power to do wrong, to live and to die justly is a hard thing, and greatly to be praised, and few there are who attain to this.<sup>1</sup>

Plato's avowed purpose of utilizing power for public and individual good can be seen once more in the above passage, which foreshadows the coming of the Philosopher-King in the Republic.

An interesting sidelight of the myth is furnished by the board of judges which passes on the condition of the souls: Minos and Rhadamanthus are Asiatic and Aeacus is a European.<sup>2</sup> In confutation of theories like those of Popper and Kallen, who would make of him a totalitarian "racist," Plato allows souls from all over the then known world into his heaven, and even allots for them judges who will not be prejudiced. There is no pressing reason why Plato, if he were a racist, should introduce this description of the judges at all; but if he held, as the use of the Slave in the Meno might indicate, that the highest values in life are possible to any soul, depending on its eros and education, then the different judges make sense as an indication of that feeling.

Socrates concludes the myth by affirming his belief in its essential truths and by stating his purpose in life: "I desire only to know the truth, and to live as well as I can, and, when I die, to die as well

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1. Plato, Gorg., 525d.

2. Plato, Gorg., 524a.

as I can."<sup>1</sup> The order of procedure proclaimed by Socrates in the Apology is confirmed<sup>2</sup>--before a man can participate in politics to his benefit and that of the people he must be virtuous.

When we have practised virtue together, we will apply ourselves to politics, if that seems desirable, or we will advise about whatever else may seem good to us, for we shall be better able to judge then. . . . Let us, then, take the argument as our guide, which has revealed to us that the best way of life is to practise justice and every virtue in life and death.<sup>3</sup>

#### 6. The Gorgias and the nature of man.

Plato chose to criticize rhetoric because of the influence of orators in the Athenian politics of his day, and also because there were teachers who professed that training in rhetoric was the correct education for guiding the policies of the state.<sup>4</sup> The connection between education and the state in the Gorgias is shown by Plato's shift from the use of "virtue" to that of "justice." In the Protagoras, the political implications of education emerge from a discussion of whether virtue can be taught; it is assumed that man is a social animal and that a truly virtuous man is a citizen, a political animal. The relation of the citizen to the state is not developed in the Protagoras, however; the Gorgias is the first dialogue really to explore this relationship. Whereas "virtue" has the quality of pertaining particularly to the individual, "justice"

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1. Plato, Gorg., 526d.

2. Plato, Apol., 36c; see p. 116.

3. Plato, Gorg., 527d-e.

4. Jaeger, PAI, II, 153.

has the broader connotation of involving the moral association of citizens, and Plato's use of "justice" in the Gorgias may be thought of as indicating the evolution of his thought from the individual to the citizen to the statesman and finally to the Philosopher-King.

Why is it that Plato's criticism of rhetoric in the Gorgias is much more vehement than was his criticism of sophistry in the Protagoras? -- both claimed to teach the art of politics.<sup>1</sup> Plato's argument with Protagoras was not with his alleged purpose or with his sociological rationale for education, but with his assertion that his rationale justified his purpose; Plato questions Protagoras' grounds for claiming to be able to teach virtue and his definition of virtue. When Socrates and Protagoras change places, we understand that it is not the practice of sophistry that Plato objects to, but the fact that the Sophists can give no valid justification for being able to teach that which is good for their students if their relativistic philosophy is also asserted.

Plato's antagonism is much more pervasive with rhetoric than with sophistry; it is a criticism both of the practice and ends (or lack of ends) of rhetoric. Rhetoric is proclaimed as a techné, an art of politics, concerned with the greatest and best of human things; this is also Plato's aim and, since his definition of "techné" and its purpose is very different on almost all counts from the propositions upon which rhetoric is

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1. See Jaeger, PAI, II, 142-143, for the differences and similarities between the Protagoras and Gorgias.

based, he must meet and defeat them before stating his own. Rhetoric is a particularly important educational opponent because, as Callicles presents the argument for its use, it represents implicit presuppositions on the nature of man which are diametrically opposed to Plato's much more so than do Protagoras' teachings.

Rhetoric presents the platform: that the end of politics is power; that man is basically selfish and must jealously protect his interests at all times--it is better to do injustice than to suffer injustice; that man is a pleasure-seeker only; that law is conventional and does not apply to the superior men who can make their own law; that ethics has nothing whatsoever to do with politics. In opposition to this, Plato proposes: that the end of politics is human happiness; that man loves himself and therefore will not willingly do injustice, which is the greatest evil to his soul; that man seeks the highest good and not pleasure alone; that the superior individual is subject to law to an even greater degree than the ordinary man because he knows what law is and will not knowingly choose other than the good which it represents; that the highest expression of morality is political--eros is fully developed in the statesman. These differences are more sharply defined in each of the three stages of the argument in which rhetoric is represented successively by Gorgias, the rather staid but not unreasonable teacher; Polus, the pretentious but naive student; and Callicles, the experienced and forceful politician.

The true nature of the rhetorician is shown by Plato in the Gorgias through the three defenders better than it is in any argument in the work. They characterize the various weaknesses of rhetoric and the "power motif" that underlies the wish to "persuade" people at will; for all of Callicles' vigorous arguments in the cause of the natural right of the superior to rule, his ideas reveal a basic insecurity--he wants power in order "to have more" than his natural inferiors and to be able to protect those advantages. Callicles, of course, is speaking of material possessions--Socrates' rebuttal is that the really superior man has more than his inferior to begin with and does not need power to get more; but he is thinking of the character and virtues of the individual. The really superior man is in a position to give, but what he has can not be taken away from him except through his own injustice. The just person, if he is not in a position of authority, however, is in a precarious situation as far as having injustice done to him; he has only the truth to defend himself with and nothing seems more defenseless than the lone truth that appears naked and modest among a mass of lecherous half-truths.

Socrates says we must learn to protect ourselves against the danger of doing wrong. That protection can be given only by knowledge and the understanding of the good, 'the political techne': for since no one does wrong willingly, everything depends upon that techne.<sup>1</sup>

The political techne is one that the ruler must have, and the chief duty imposed by that techne is the education of the people.

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 147.

i. Gorgias' inconsistency.

The first stage of the argument is far from a refutation of rhetoric; Socrates is guilty of considerable sophistry as he forces Gorgias into a contradiction by showing that the means and the ends of rhetoric are opposed if rhetoric is held to be "good." Gorgias claimed that the ends of rhetoric are the "greatest and best of human things" and that rhetoric is concerned with the just and the unjust; but the means--persuasion without the slightest regard for its being based on knowledge or concerned with truth--is entirely inconsistent with those ends. It is also evident from the discourse that rhetoric cannot be defined in terms of its subject matter or its purpose; the purpose to which the power of persuasion will be put depends on the individual with the rhetorical ability.

Rhetoric's greatest defect is that there is no objective knowledge, no firm philosophy and view of life behind its words--it is inspired not by an ethical code but simply by ambition, unscrupulousness, and the lust for success.<sup>1</sup>

This self-aggrandizement is summed up as Natural Law, which makes certain assumptions as to the nature of man but which is not a "view of life" since the relativism implicit in this position must allow every "superior" man to define his own pleasures and ends.

Polus tries to avoid the contradiction that Gorgias fell prey to by denying that the ends of rhetoric are concerned with ethics at all but

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 135.

he maintains that rhetoric is an art and that the end of rhetoric, power, is good. Socrates first explains why he does not recognize rhetoric as an art; it is not an art because it has no rationally defined subject; it is only a manner of speaking without any rational purpose; its only purpose is to flatter the listener so that the speaker may get what he wants whether what he wants is good or not. Socrates must demonstrate that power is not an end in itself in order to complete his case and he does this by showing that the rhetorician must continually keep the pleasure of the mob in mind; therefore, none of his decisions are entirely his own. Polus' defeat comes, as Callicles points out, in a manner similar to Gorgias', and again the sophistry involved negates the complete refutation of rhetoric; but the issues are now clearly defined. As Socrates says, the result of the argument with Callicles, the third contestant, should represent the truth.<sup>1</sup>

ii. Callicles and Natural Law.

The argument with Callicles is serious throughout and the dialectic is tortuously complex. Callicles presents an unvarnished, nonmoral extreme of Gorgias' position, and he maintains a much more consistent argument than either of his predecessors, so that Socrates is forced to take up one at a time the various links in his chain of reasoning. Callicles justifies the use of rhetoric on the ground that some men are by nature superior and that it is only just that they should rule and have more

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1. Plato, Gorg., 486d f.

material possessions that their less gifted fellow-citizens. Callicles, in effect, is trying to meet Socrates' moral arguments before they arise by asserting that rhetoric need not be defined objectively; it is not concerned with morality or ethics; it needs no rationale or justification--the superior man is its rationale and its purpose. Rhetoric represents power over other men, and the end of power is the satisfaction of the desires of the individual--no other purpose is necessary.

The urge to obtain power is an impulse rooted too deeply in human nature to be disregarded. . . . It compels us to take up a definite attitude on the question of the nature and value of power.<sup>1</sup>

Power, as we have seen in the Symposium, is closely related to eros, the will to self-realization; whether the urge to power remains as Callicles defines it or is sublimated to meet Socrates' definition of self-realization as areté or justice depends on whether the will to power is governed by a techné, whether eros is educated scientifically to the highest good. The education of eros to the highest good depends on active self-love, which implies for Plato not only moral interest in one's self but also a political interest in the citizens of the state. A whole ethics depends on the use that is made of "power."

Socrates attacks Callicles' position by showing that the "superior" man's "power" must lie in something other than physical strength--the superior man must be wise and courageous. Callicles accepts these

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 132-133.

added qualities readily, for he cannot suspect that wisdom and courage, as Socrates defines them, are moral terms; but he balks at including temperance among the characteristics of the natural ruler--the superior man should not be under compulsion from any source, even his own will. He should be free to indulge his fancies and appetites whenever and however he desires; what good are freedom and power if a man cannot do as he pleases?

The assertion that pleasure is the good and that it is subject to no standard other than the satisfaction of desires forces Socrates to investigate pleasure and pain. Good and evil are mutually exclusive but pleasure and pain occur at the same time whenever a desire (pain) is being satisfied (pleasure). All men experience pleasure and pain but not all men are good; therefore, the distinction must rest upon some other basis. We cannot judge another person as good or bad on the basis of his pleasure, which is completely subjective; if we can say that a man is good there must be some objectivity to that value judgment, which would also be moral.

If Callicles continues to maintain that pleasure is the good he has no grounds for asserting that any man is superior to any other and no cause for rejecting conventional law as un-Natural. As soon as he admits that there are good and bad pleasures, however, his case against philosophy collapses--Socrates immediately wants to know how a man,

superior or otherwise, is to decide between good and bad pleasures if not by "an art of measure." And it is this "art of measure" with which philosophy is concerned; an art which discloses a way of life directed towards the good rather than pleasure alone.

Plato distinguishes true will from arbitrary desire. The man who does what he wants is running after a sham good which he desires. But the only thing he can will is a true good. For in desire he can always be deceived about the value of the thing desired; but no one can knowingly will what is bad and injurious.<sup>1</sup>

Power, correctly conceived, is the control of your own will in seeking the good; that is, in being just to yourself and others. But is it enough that the just man or the virtuous man be able to control himself and direct his irrational energies towards the highest good? --the truly good man in a corrupt society cannot protect himself from having injustice done to him (as happened to the actual Socrates). The truly just man can be guaranteed the advantages of moral goodness and physical security only if he has the power to govern himself and the state. If he had political power he would still will the greatest good for himself and the people, to make them better so that they would not treat him unjustly and would realize the highest values possible.

When Socrates compared the flattering arts with the true arts he said that justice and legislation were the legitimate arts that tend the

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 134.

soul--a rather strange statement until we think of it in connection with the development, which showed that real political power is possible only to the just person, and the just person must have an ordered soul, a "lawful" soul. That power, justice and education--that is, politics--are definitely related to the soul and its welfare is shown in the concluding myth.

Once Plato indicates that politics is a matter of the soul, it follows that education for citizenship or for statesmanship would be primarily education of the soul, and since it is to everyone's advantage that the citizens be good, the chief function of the state or the statesman is to educate the people to be better. Socrates ends the dialogue by indicating that the investigation is not over--before we apply ourselves to politics we must be virtuous--and we suddenly realize that "virtue," "justice," "soul" and "good" have not been defined in the Gorgias. The air has been cleared, however, and all the fundamental problems have been raised--it remains for the Republic to assemble them in a positive exposition.

## CHAPTER IX

## CONCLUSION

1. The problem so far.

The early dialogues are, in a sense, an attempt to define the personality and character of Socrates. We never lose the individual's perspective of values as they pertain to him personally, but the problem does expand from the very egocentric conversational dialogues to a consideration of the individual in society and finally to the individual's relation to social problems. The Symposium, Meno and Gorgias are more positive statements on the fundamental issues raised in the conversational dialogues, the Socratic dialogues and the Protagoras, but Plato's dialectic moves on and they in turn present problems that are not resolved until assembled in the magnificently simple structural development of the Republic. In each of these works, and in the other early dialogues, too, the movement of the dialectic shows that the highest values for the individual, as an individual, are realized in concert with the society of which he is a part; that is, the most complete individual is the person who sees that his own advantage is inexorably linked with the good of his fellow citizens.

With the conclusion of the Gorgias we complete the negative investigation of areté--Plato has raised all of the basic issues and has

shown the values and ends for which Socrates or the Philosopher-King will not strive; in so doing he gives us, to a certain extent, a positive definition of value and virtue. There is no real answer to the "educational problem" of whether virtue can be taught, in these dialogues, since we finally arrive at the conclusion that virtue cannot be defined! That is, virtue can only be defined as Plato has done in these dialogues taken as a whole--areté can only be defined by the actual existence of the virtuous man, and since we the readers and Plato know that such a man did exist, we know that virtue can be defined and taught--the definition is the Socrates of the early dialogues, the actual full-bodied Socrates in all of his complex amalgamation. Virtue cannot be separated from the choices, decisions and actions of the just man--the potential Philosopher-King!

If virtue is to be taught, however, we must redefine what we mean by teaching; but before Plato can justify a new meaning for education he must establish the need for a new definition. The early dialogues do just that--by subjecting the prevailing attitudes, theories and the various types of education of his own day to a searching analysis, Plato sets the stage for the positive development of his thought in the Republic.

The works that precede the Symposium, Meno and Gorgias state the problem of individual ethics: What is virtue and why should I want to be virtuous? The Socratic dialogues widen the scope of ethics by showing

that the man of character is intrinsically connected with society. The conflicting opinions, the confused definitions and the complex issues of the early dialogues show adequately the importance of clear, critical thinking on the fundamental problems of experience--the need for conscientious and consistent consideration of the educational problem. The most important questions of the previous writings are organized and worked up organically in the Protagoras--systematic analysis begins with an investigation of the nature of virtue which reveals even more fully, because the development is more systematic, the need for a better understanding of terms such as good, knowledge, happiness, and virtue itself.

i. Later developments in the educational argument.

The Symposium returns to the inquiry into the happiness of the individual--not happiness as related to "virtues" or material goods--but in connection with a profound study of "life-force" and self-realization. Happiness is shown to depend on the conscious development of man's natural potential, his eros. Socrates' generalized definition of love depicts man's irrational energy, his longing for self-perfection, as the "power" which inspires a man to struggle for knowledge of everlasting values, to express himself through the highest values to which his personal eros can aspire. Happiness, then, depends on the fulfillment of individual potentialities. The desire to express ourselves is natural, since all men seek eternal happiness and immortality; but unless eros is controlled and

educated towards true Beauty and true Goodness, our natural abilities may be expressed in unnatural ways that dissipate our energy.<sup>1</sup> True happiness depends on converting the irrational force of eros into the rationally directed realization of "the good life," the life harmonious with natural and immutable values. The statesman, Socrates says, is the person who is capable of realizing to the fullest the potential values of this life; the man with the potentialities of the true statesman is in a position to realize Eros most completely, provided that he does become the true statesman.<sup>2</sup>

The Meno might seem at first to be a restatement of the central question of the Protagoras, since it begins by asking once again if virtue can be taught; the analysis that follows is more concerned with the logic of the unity of virtue than the Protagoras was, but nothing essentially new is added to the argument. The theory of reminiscence, however, is a new and important thought; it suggests that the immortal soul can, under the proper conditions and with the proper education, recall the imperishable truths that it has always known. The theory of recollection does not become really important until the conversation shows that there are no teachers of virtue because virtuous men or statesmen of the past have not known "the tie of cause"; their opinions and decisions were directed

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1. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 23 f. Nettleship's analysis of "the love of wisdom" as a component of the "philosophic spirit" in the Republic shows a marked similarity to "eros" of the Symposium.
  2. Nettleship, EPR, 22. "Lovers of learning or wisdom... are said to enjoy the fullest experience and to live the highest life."

by divine inspiration or "true opinion," but since they did not know the ground for those opinions they could not teach others to be virtuous-- their eros was not secured by true knowledge. The Meno is the first dialogue to discuss virtue in connection with the epistemological problem of whether anything can be known at all. The theory of reminiscence is intrinsically conjoined with the immortality of the soul and transcendental norms--in this brief section Plato's epistemology and metaphysics are sketched positively for the first time in relation to the soul. The occasion for this disclosure is the educational problem. Plato offers the theory of reminiscence in the Meno as a rebuttal to Meno's "logical" argument that nothing can really be known; an argument which, if valid, would destroy the meaning of education.

The Gorgias is a criticism of rhetoric and, since rhetoric had so large an influence on the politics and law of Plato's day, the dialogue is also a criticism of Athenian values.<sup>1</sup> The argument takes place in three stages; the discussion with Gorgias shows that an unanalyzed conflict exists between ends and means in the "art" of rhetoric. Gorgias contends that rhetorical persuasion is not concerned with truth or knowledge but should, nevertheless, be used justly; he has claimed that the power to persuade others is the greatest of human goods, whether you know what you are talking about or not; but he also maintains a conventional view

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1. Cf. Gomperz, HAP, II, 331.

towards morality by asserting that because you have the power does not mean that you should be unjust. Gorgias does not see that there is any conflict in maintaining both positions, but how would a rhetorician who did not really know what he was talking about know if he were being just or unjust? This criticism runs through all the discussions and it is for this reason that Socrates is concerned with showing that to do injustice is a greater evil than to be the victim of it, for if you perpetrate evil when you have the power to do good, your own soul suffers.<sup>1</sup> In terms of eros, you have not realized your potential, and in terms of the theory of reminiscence, you have not secured your opinions with the knowledge of unchanging principles.

Polus is more consistent than Gorgias, but he too wishes to assert the advantage of nonmoral rhetoric while maintaining conventional moral opinions. Calicles, who sees clearly the inconsistency of his predecessors, flatly rejects all moral considerations in connection with the use of rhetoric. The superior man, he says, has a natural right to power; it is only just that the superior should rule. His argument is logically tighter than Polus' or Gorgias' and Socrates' elenchus is consequently much more complex and much more thorough than in the earlier part of the dialogue. In the end the discussion shows that the indiscriminate use of power has no

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1. Cf. Gomperz, HAP, II, 332. Gomperz refers to the conflict inherent in rhetoric as "that disposition to set happiness here and virtue there," but this gives the rhetoricians, as depicted by Plato, too much credit--they are not (cf. Meno, 95c) concerned with virtue at all but do give lip service to conventional moral opinions.

standard, no purpose or justification, other than the satisfaction of the desires of the person with the power; but pleasure, the only reason Callicles can give for wanting power, is no criterion for asserting the superiority of any man over any other, and Callicles has no grounds for his contention that according to Natural Law the "superior" should rule.

The Gorgias demonstrates that power and the ability to persuade others are only means and not ends in themselves and, since the just man wills ends and not means, power and rhetorical ability can be judged as good or bad only in the light of the ends for which they are used. The just man wills only ends that are good. Because he has his own best interests at heart and because his own best interests include the improvement of his fellow citizens, the just man's power is primarily power over himself, and his rhetorical ability should be based on knowledge of the good and should be used to educate the citizens. The man of integrity can be secure only in the best possible community, where his character and standards will not be subjected to unjust criticism--the truly just man, then, will be a statesman and an educator.

ii. Plato's criticism of Athenian education.

Plato's early dialogues continually criticize the various kinds of education available in Athens as being inadequate when contrasted to Socrates' paideia. Socrates' character and his mission as a teacher are essentially one, and the analysis of his character, in these dialogues, is

effected through an analysis of his education, the theory of which Plato unfolds negatively through a critical evaluation of his rivals. The Meno, as its argument evolves, shows that the four types of education current in Plato's day had failed to make men virtuous.

Meno, who has studied with Gorgias the rhetorician, cannot tell Socrates what virtue is and Anytus, who represents the conventional education of Athenian "gentlemen" is in no better a position with his prosaic opinions--Socrates cites the famous Athenians who were supposed to have been men of character but who could not teach their own sons virtue. When Meno re-enters the conversation he agrees that the gentlemen in his country are not in concordance as to what virtue is or how it should be taught; the Sophists were not in agreement either and Gorgias, who does not profess to teach virtue, does not think that it can be taught. The poets, the fourth class of educators, are so contradictory with themselves and other poets that they cannot be considered the guides to true paideia. These are the four types of education that are, in part at least, opposed to Plato's education--education which he indicates in the Meno is based on the soul's recall of eternal principles.

The conversational dialogues, concerned as they are with prevalent opinions of the time, show that traditional education had not prepared the citizens of Athens for inquiries such as those pursued by Socrates, and by showing these confused and conflicting thoughts, Plato exposes

the lack of a consistent attitude towards the fundamental moral problems of the individual--a failing due to faulty education. Time and again, Plato cites the virtuous men whose sons were given the best available traditional education, but who nevertheless turned out badly, in order to show that this education was not adequate.

The Sophists are criticized, in general, because their relativistic philosophy would seem to deny that there could be any ultimate purpose in education; their theory was not consistent with their practice, for the individual Sophists (Protagoras, for instance) did claim that their teaching had a purpose and that it was valuable to the students. Not all sophists taught subjects that were directly related to virtue--Plato is primarily concerned with those Sophists who claimed that they could teach virtue. The "virtue" that they considered to be the purpose of their teaching, however, was little better than the conventional mores of the traditional education--they prepared their students to be successful, but were not vitally interested in giving them any basis for choosing the best possible life, for making valid value judgments, or for seeing life as a unified whole. Factual information, Plato points out by his criticism of the Sophists, does not equal virtue, and success and material possessions do not make a man happy if he does not know how to use them wisely.

Plato is more critical of rhetoric than any other form of education, in his early works; he rejects the validity of Natural Law when it implies

license for those who think they are superior men; he also denies that pleasure is the criterion of the good and that man can be a nonmoral individualist; the basis of any society is eros, and the basis of a good society is justice. No man can do himself or society any good if he is content to persuade people to his views without any real knowledge of what he is talking about or any concern for the ultimate worth of his opinions, merely to gain political power. Since man wills ends and not means, the rhetorician should be concerned with the intrinsic value of the ends for which he speaks because they affect his well-being in the long run. Power and persuasion are only means; rhetoric cannot prepare a man to choose ends that are good; therefore rhetoric is not real education and the power it affords is not real power, since it depends on the people, who must be continually flattered if it is to be maintained.

The poets are rejected as educators because they contradict each other and themselves, and because they cannot give any rational explanation of what their poetry means. Agathon, in the Symposium, gives a beautiful speech in praise of Love, but compared to the other speakers his inspired contribution adds nothing of intellectual value to the discussion. The poets, Plato shows in the Protagoras, can be interpreted to fit the case, and in the Gorgias he lists poetry among the flattering arts, with little purpose other than the pleasure it affords. The poets, then, are not the true educators, either. Plato's criticism of the poets in the early dialogues is limited, but in the Republic they and artists generally are

criticized extensively.<sup>1</sup>

iii. Positive aspects of Plato's criticism of education.

The criticisms that are applicable to all these methods of teaching form the basis of Plato's own education. None of these types of learning mold the total personality with rationally defined purposes in mind or furnish the student with a consistent set of values; none of them install a self-critical attitude or the motivation for seeking the highest values in a life conceived as a unit; none of them furnish the ground for behavior consistent with belief, and all leave the fundamental problems of ethical living undefined or at best defined according to conventional values.

Because the moral individual is not critically analyzed, these forms of education speak of courage, temperance, justice, etc., as separate virtues, and because the moral individual is not taken as the focal point of society, the relation of the citizen to the state is not explained in terms of purpose; that is, the purpose of the state is not defined with regard to the purpose of the individual. If the purpose of the individual in society is success, or pleasure, or power, the character of the state will be analogous; that is, the structure of the state meets the requirements of the ideals of the individuals in the state.<sup>2</sup> If

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1. See Nettleship, *EPR*, 50-86 for a very fine analysis of the places in the *Republic* of "art," "music" and the criticism of the poets.
  2. Cf. Nettleship, *EPR*, 47-49. "The character of a people is responsible for its social and political life, and... education is mainly important because it produces or modifies that character and thus affects the public interests." (48)

the best state possible is the aim, then the individuals in the state must constantly appeal to the highest values in life; values which Plato felt were primarily moral. On the other hand, if the best possible life is the desire of the individual, he must seek to actualize the best possible state.<sup>1</sup>

In seeking to define the best life possible, Plato attempts to utilize the positive aspects of all the forms of education that he criticizes. One of Plato's unique contributions to philosophy is the use that he makes of the irrational motivations of men by showing that these "natural" drives can be organized into a meaningful whole; he proposes that powerful emotive forces should be governed by and directed toward a purpose so rationally appealing that the components of personality will be constantly directed by knowledge to the greatest good of the individual as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Plato does not condemn pleasure as pleasure but criticizes its use as the standard of life; he does not deny that love or eros is a value-- on the contrary, when sublimated it can be the source of the highest values. The will to power, as stated by Callicles, is also transmuted into a positive value; when seen in relation to the best interests of the "soul," the whole man, power comes to mean the power to will the good, the power to be just at all times; in other words, the power to control

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1. Cf. Nettleship, *EPR*, 98 f.

2. Field, *POP*, 97. "Complete virtue consists in the proper ordering and control of the various emotional tendencies by knowledge."  
Cf. Nettleship, *EPR*, 6, 10-11, 92-93.

one's self. The social instinct for the approbation of our fellow men is one of the hardest to overcome for the sake of the highest values; for this nonrational instinct is an insidious force that is allied with conventionalism, with the uncritical acceptance of the existing social pattern.<sup>1</sup> Plato proposes that this drive and other nonlogical emotive forces should be used to advantage in education; but an ideal strong enough to unify them meaningfully must first be shown to be possible--the Good in the Republic is that ideal.

By trying to integrate all the potentialities of man, all the various aspects of personality that are "natural," Plato demonstrates that no one personality potential or desire should be appealed to exclusively as the guide of "the good life." A predisposition to any one of life's many possibilities results in an "inversion" of values that is unnatural; the principle that should govern is the intrinsic goodness--the good--of any value seen in relation to all the values, purposes, and ends of life conceived as an organic whole.<sup>2</sup>

Intellectualism to the exclusion of action and pleasure makes a man effeminate and vitiates his will. Pleasure or power pursued without discretion makes of a man a "leaky vessel"; one that is insecure and insatiable. Love that does not aspire to the highest values makes man no

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1. Nettleship, EPR, 6-7. "The real educator and real sophist is public opinion itself."

2. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 23 ff.

better than a lustful animal. The educational program which would direct the "soul" to the insight necessary for "seeing" life as the harmonious resolution of natural potentialities is described in the Republic, but the Symposium, Meno, and the Gorgias indicate the basis for that program as it evolves from an investigation of the nonlogical drives of man.

The "educational argument" takes on a new meaning in the light of the Symposium, Meno, and Gorgias. The Symposium presents the thought that man's happiness depends on the fullest realization of his natural potential and that the motivating force behind self-realization is love, the desire for self-expression rooted in the longing for immortal perfection and happiness. The highest expression of this desire is the quest for wisdom, a desire which can be guided or educated to the point of fulfillment, but which cannot be satisfied by the transfer of factual knowledge from teacher to student.

Both the Meno and the Symposium state that the awareness of ignorance, the insight into the unrealized potentialities of man, is the beginning of real wisdom.<sup>1</sup> The person who is stimulated by this awareness may struggle on to real knowledge--the knowledge of unalterable norms known to the immortal soul. Such a man would be truly virtuous, truly just, and since the just man wills ends that are good and since the highest function of the just man is that of the statesman, he will accept the

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1. Plato, Meno, 84a-d; Sym., 204a-b. See pp. 187, 160.

responsibility and teach the people to be better. The truly powerful man is a just man, and he can protect himself and the principles for which he stands only if he is a statesman-educator who will rule on the basis of eternal values and not by "true opinion." Because he "possesses" true knowledge he wills ends that are truly good for himself and because he is an intrinsic part of society these ends will be good for the state.<sup>1</sup>

The best life possible and the good state are necessarily associated, and their materialization depends on the soul's recall of supernal essences. The possibility of the soul's recalling these eternal truths depends on the profound awareness of ignorance (Socrates the gadfly) and proper guidance (Socrates the midwife); thus it is that we come to realize the full importance of the need for Socrates' new paideia which will be primarily education for the "soul," the total personality, including its irrational elements.

## 2. The problems that foreshadow the Republic.

With the development in the Symposium, Meno and Gorgias in mind, let us return to the problems that were raised by the conversational dialogues and the Socratic dialogues for a brief résumé of how the "educational argument" stands as we approach the Republic.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 99-101. "The true interests of society coincide with those of its highest natures.... The knowledge of the principles which should guide human conduct... will make a man a true statesman." (100)
  2. See pp. 90; 150 ff.

i. Is it possible to know? The description of the assent to and apprehension of absolute beauty and goodness in the myth of Diotima and Socrates' theory of reminiscence in the Meno answer this question affirmatively by proposing that true knowledge can be known by an "awakened" soul.

ii. What kind of knowledge is virtue? Virtue is the knowledge of unchanging principles known to the soul and recalled when properly educated.

iii. How can virtue be taught? Virtue cannot be taught in the ordinary sense of the word, since virtue is not a subject or a "thing" but an actual person such as Socrates. The teacher can only elicit the cooperation of the student, who must search and strive for himself to reach true insights, by showing him his ignorance of true knowledge.

iv. What is the relation of the virtues to Virtue itself? Although the Meno reasserted that virtue is one, we still do not have any real answer to this question. The Meno showed that virtue depended on the soul's recollection of eternal values; therefore if virtue is knowledge, and knowledge depends on the condition of the immortal soul, we can hypothesize that virtue depends on the condition of the soul and look for this conclusion in the Republic, since the problem of defining justice in the Republic is the same as that of virtue in these earlier works.

v. What are the ends of education? The ends of education are the enlightenment of the individual through the properly educated soul to reveal the well ordered state; the life which realizes to the fullest the potentialities of the individual because it and the state in which it exists both aim at the "good."

vi. Does happiness depend on virtue? Only the truly good life is happy and the truly good life results from knowledge of ends which are good; a man who has this knowledge will not will ends that are not really good for himself, and the man who always wills the good is virtuous; therefore, happiness depends on virtue.

vii. Are the philosopher-teacher and the statesman the same? The Symposium, Meno, and Gorgias leave no doubt that the Socrates of the Apology and the statesman are one and the same.

viii. Law vs. justice: The Gorgias contrasts law and justice by opposing rhetoric and philosophy. Callicles represents nonmoral law and Socrates represents justice. When Socrates declares that the just man must have "power" in the state to protect himself and to educate

the people, Plato's answer to the conflict between law and justice is shown to be an educational revolution in which the virtuous man is to become the law. All doubts as to the nature of the statesman disappear when Socrates states that he is the only statesman of his time.

ix. Individual differences: If individuals differ in their natural abilities, their eros, how are we to determine who has the true eros?-- who is the "statesman?" This question, implicit in the Protagoras and the Symposium, is not answered in the early dialogues, which consider the virtuous man and the statesman as individuals--in connection with society it is true but nevertheless from the perspective of the reader who may be a potentially virtuous man--whereas the Republic describes the educational selection of the statesman objectively.

x. What is the criterion of the good life? In the Protagoras Plato raised the question of the standard, the "art of measure" by which choices are governed. Pleasure is the standard of "most people" but pleasure is rejected in the Gorgias as the standard; Socrates states that pleasures exist for the good and not the good for the pleasures; also the virtuous man always wills ends that are good. But what is the good? The theory of reminiscence proposes that the good for man is governed by knowledge of timeless values and the myth at the end of the Gorgias shows that the soul's condition is determined by the goodness of the ends willed; so we can hypothesize that the good affects the soul and depends on objective norms. Again it is left for the Republic to answer this question.

There are many other questions that are left unanswered by the Meno, Symposium, and the Gorgias; some of the most important ones in connection with education are: What is the relation of the individual to the State? How are we to think of the soul? How is the relationship between the soul and politics, indicated in these dialogues, to be thought of? What kind of education moulds the soul? What does Plato mean when he suggests that the just man should have the power in the state? What is the status of the good? How can it be known? How is the best possible life to be known? How is the best possible state to be known?

These questions push on beyond the educational problems of the early dialogues and cannot be given due consideration here; but they might be kept in mind during the very brief summary of the Republic that follows.

### 3. The Republic.

#### i. The relation of the Republic to the earlier dialogues.

Plato relates most of his ideas in the beautifully simple construction of the Republic, where he gives each conception its proper place in a complete social structure; in many cases, the real importance of his thoughts in the shorter dialogues can only be appreciated through the Republic and, conversely, much of the Republic presupposes the earlier dialogues.<sup>1</sup> The Symposium has shown that the desire to know is rooted in the very nature of man; the Meno reveals the kind of knowledge which Plato feels the statesman must have if there is to be any basis for social action; the Gorgias indicates why the statesman, for his own good and the good of society, must appeal to a moral standard rather than pleasure or power as the criterion of his own ends and those of the state.

The Gorgias does not place the statesman in society but is rather a critical introduction that clears the ground for the positive development in the Republic by analyzing the political ideals existing in Athens in Plato's time. To resolve the conflict between Athenian law and justice,

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1. Cf. Jaeger, PAI, II, 94-96.

Plato declares that a complete reorganization of Greek society is needed to accommodate a new kind of statesman, who will be primarily an educator. The Gorgias announces the aim

to bring the state back to its educational task. In such a state, and only in such a state, is it possible for an educational ideal like that of Socrates, which takes human perfection as its absolute standard, to be justified in its claim to be the basis of all the art of statesmanship.<sup>1</sup>

The ethical basis of social organization that develops in the Meno and is codified in the Gorgias is established as logically necessary to the ideal state in the Republic. The state, not the individual, is the ethical form of man.<sup>2</sup> Plato's emphasis on personal participation in education and his theory that education affects the soul and must be guided by a real concern for the true values of life would definitely indicate that the individual is the moral agent but that he can realize his full ethical stature only in the best possible society.

A brief summary of the structure of the state that leads up to the discussion of The Good, The Line and The Cave is all that can be attempted here--the nucleus of Plato's value theory and the importance of education in attaining these ideals appears in these relatively short passages which explain best in a condensed form the essence of Plato's philosophy in the Republic.

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 154.

2. Windelband, HP, 126.

The first Book of the Republic is a preface to the main body of the text proper; in this introductory book the current theories of the origin of law and morality are reviewed in a manner reminiscent of the conversational dialogues.<sup>1</sup> The discussion proceeds "until at last we seem to be left with the whole of popular opinion and experience arrayed upon the side of what is called injustice."<sup>2</sup> Socrates' argument with Thrasymachus is essentially a restatement of the points discussed in the Gorgias where power and irresponsible individualism are rejected as political ends.

The preliminary argument on the nature of justice ends negatively, but in response to a sincere desire on the part of Glaucon and Adeimantus to know a better definition than any proposed in the first Book, Socrates accepts their challenge to show that justice in the individual is good in itself even if the individual is not recognized by others as just. He is to demonstrate that justice, unrecognized and unrewarded, is better than injustice, even though the unjust man may be recognized and rewarded by popular standards as just. If we remember that this same problem occurred in the Gorgias where the discussion was concerned with the most propitious life for the individual, it is evident that the attempt to define justice in the Republic is, as with the earlier dialogues, an attempt to define "the good life."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Jaeger, PAI, II, 95.  
2. Nettleship, EPR, 2.

3. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 1-2.

Socrates proposes that in order to define justice they should erect a theoretically perfect state and then "look for its counterpart on a smaller scale in the individual."<sup>1</sup> The perfect state would necessarily be just, and if it reflects the values of the individual citizens, the components of the just individual will be "writ large" in the structure of the state.

ii. The ideal state.

Socrates states that society exists because individuals who are not satisfied with mere subsistence create the "luxury-loving state" in which individuals are not self-sufficient, and that society and the citizen are best and most efficiently served when the individual specializes in the task for which he is best equipped.<sup>2</sup> Society is therefore stratified according to function and ability, the producers forming the lowest group. The next higher group, the Auxiliaries or protectors of the state, occupy a position similar to the Spartan warrior class, and are chosen for additional education because of their courage and loyalty to the ideals of the state. The third and highest group is selected from the ranks of the Auxiliaries to receive still further education to fit them for the occupation of the Guardian or ruler of the state.

As Socrates describes the logical and psychological growth of the perfect state he also describes "as an element in its realization that what

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1. Plato, Rep., 368c, (Cornford, 55.)

2. Nettleship, EPR, 4. "The same limitations which force the individual into society also makes him a useful member of it."

may be called the first system of education."<sup>1</sup> This educational system has the dual function of preparing individuals for citizenship and of selecting the most promising candidates for the Auxiliary and eventually the Guardianship of the state. In general, the education described in the first section of the Republic can be classified under the same headings as the traditional Athenian education: music and gymnastics; both are concerned almost exclusively with the development of character by making the basic virtues habitual.<sup>2</sup>

One of the fundamental problems of education is to adjust the complementary but conflicting elements of reason and the adventurous spirit; music is meant to train the mind and gymnastics the courageous spirit.<sup>3</sup> Plato believes that the nature of personality or the "soul" is such that it assimilates, especially in the early years of youth, the character of its surroundings and the tenor of the education that it receives. Since all aspects of education have an effect on the moral fiber of the individual, all aspects of education are subjected to moral standards, and it is in this section that we first find a criticism of art and poetry made from the point of its total effect on the personality of the individual. Art and poetry can and should aid in education but to do so they must be consistent with the ends of that education.

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1. Nettleship, EPR, 5.

2. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 47. Anderson (intro.), Meno, 17. "Habit, for Plato, is the basis of morality."

3. Nettleship, EPR, 31.

When Socrates has shown the interrelationship of the various functions upon which the state depends, he summarizes the virtues of the state: it has wisdom because the most learned and the wisest have been chosen to rule; it has courage and good administration on the field of battle and in the state because the Auxiliary have been chosen for their bravery, intelligence and steadfastness; it has an all-pervading temperance because the better part controls the worse. From the analogy of the state, Socrates derives the conclusion that when everyone performs the function for which he is best suited, the principle operates which is in itself essentially the definition of justice for which they have been looking, and that it is the condition necessary to the harmonious state.

Justice as defined in relation to the state has essentially the same meaning when applied to the soul. Socrates points out that there seem to be three types of motivations common to all men that can usually be discerned in a situation of choice, and that these fundamental components of personality often seem to conflict with one another. There is the rational side of man; there is the willful or spirited element which, in the best natures at least, sides with reason when there is a conflict between reason and appetitive desires; and finally there is the many-headed Hydra of the acquisitive and appetitive desires--the basic drives and emotions common to the biological organism and the elemental form of desires that

are rooted in the very nature of man.<sup>1</sup> These three aspects of the soul are analogous to the three levels of the perfect state; the perfect man, therefore, will be governed by reason and maintain control over his desires with the help of his will; a procedure that will result in the harmony and self-control that produces temperance and the just man. Justice in the individual, as in the state, is necessary to produce perfection and internal harmony; therefore justice, recognized or unrecognized, is of the highest value to the individual.

iii. Knowledge of the Good.

The hypothetical state could be realized, Socrates says, only if philosophers were to become kings, or if a king were to aspire to true philosophical knowledge. The state which Socrates described in theory from the bottom up would, in practice, have to be established by the Philosopher-King from the top down. In order to do that, he would have to have true knowledge of the unchanging forms of reality obtained through reason, as opposed to opinions or beliefs obtained from the senses. The ultimate knowledge of reality is realized through knowledge of the Good. Justice in the individual now becomes extremely important, since only

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1. Plato's psychology is over-simplified here and the description above does not pretend to present an accurate picture of his theory of the soul; it is only meant as an indication of the structure of his argument. For more detailed treatments see: Nettleship, *EPR*, 5-29; Field, *POP*, 108-124; Fuller, *HP*, 151-152, 159; Brett, *HP*, Chaps. 4-9; Wild, *PTM*, Ch. 4.

a just man can realize the Good, and only a knowledge of the Good can reveal the true Form of justice.

If a man must be just to know the Good, we can appreciate the vital part played by the educational clime--the physical and intellectual atmosphere--that surrounds the potentially just man; Plato repeatedly emphasized the importance of the total environment because those who have the potentiality for the greatest good also have the ability to do the greatest harm if their personalities are not properly "nurtured."

It would at first appear that knowledge of the Good is not an end in itself, but a means to a good social structure. If, however, the good state is the ultimate Form for good men, and if a man can realize his potential only in the good state, the Good would become the purpose of life, for as Socrates says:

What advantages can there be in possessing everything except that which is good, or in understanding everything else while of the good and desirable we know nothing?<sup>1</sup>

What is the worth of justice or the ideal state if it is not known how or why it is a good or even that it is a good?

It is interesting to note that once the ideal state has been sketched by Socrates, the question of the possible existence of such a state immediately resolves itself into a discussion of the Philosopher-King and his knowledge of "the art of measure," the Good. From the Good,

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1. Plato, Rep., 504b, (Cornford, 215.)

Plato passes on to the Line which analyzes the ascent to knowledge of the Good epistemologically. It is not until Plato has described the state, the statesman, his standard of action and the possibility of knowing that standard that we have the final synthesis in the educational analogy of the Cave.<sup>1</sup> In this brief section, then, the order of the early dialogues is reversed and without a knowledge of the development in the smaller works it might seem that Plato's theory of education is merely the logical conclusion deduced from his metaphysics; it is here that the "practical" development of the early dialogues helps in understanding the place of the Good in relation to education.

Socrates does not define or explain the Good itself, but draws an analogy to the sun, which is necessary to sight and the visibility of the objects of sight, but is neither the eye nor the object seen.

This, then, which gives to the objects of knowledge their truth and to him who knows them, his power of knowing, is the Form or essential nature of Goodness... Both knowledge and truth are to be regarded as like the Good, but to identify either with the Good is wrong. The Good must hold a yet higher place of honour.<sup>2</sup>

A further analogy is made to the sun, which is necessary for growth and nourishment and yet is not the same as these processes.

And so with the objects of knowledge: these derive from the Good not only their power of being known but their very being and reality;

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1. See Wild, PTM, Ch. 5 for a well integrated discussion of the analysis of the Sun, Line and Cave.
  2. Plato, Rep., 508a, (Cornford, 219.)

and the goodness is not the same thing as being,  
but beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and  
power.<sup>1</sup>

Goodness then takes on the added meaning of the creative power responsible for the very being and the reality of the Forms, while at the same time it remains the ultimate reason or purpose that lies behind the flux of the phenomenal world; that is, the world of appearance exists so that Goodness can be realized by means of reason in order to establish that society which would be the ideal realization of mankind's function on earth--the well-being of man and his happiness; the life worth living.

In retrospect the Meno and the Gorgias now take on a fuller meaning, and conversely the necessity for the idea of the Good in the Republic becomes clearer. In the Meno true opinion as a guide to the action of statesmen was criticized because it could not be taught. The statesmen of the past did not know the final cause, the real nature of their own virtue. Socrates said that the true statesman must have real knowledge, but he did no more than hint what that knowledge should be. Now, knowing the position of the Good in the state, we can go back and complete the statement; true virtue and true statesmanship obtain from knowledge of the Good. Whereas the statesman appears in the Meno as an example of the kind of knowledge that is virtue, he appears in the Gorgias consciously developed as the object of all the previous definitions of virtue, knowledge and love. Again looking back, the statesman Socrates is talking about in

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1. Plato, Rep., 509c, (Cornford, 220.)

the Gorgias becomes much more comprehensible if the education and character of the Philosopher-King in the Republic are kept in mind, for they are one and the same.

The absolute necessity for the conception of the Good in the Republic is apparent if it is recalled that in the Protagoras and Gorgias Socrates forces an admission that the "art of measure" is the most important thing in life. He is criticizing sophistic education for not teaching with reference to some inclusive purpose, some objective norm. This same criticism occurs in the Meno, where true knowledge is shown to be known only in conjunction with a standard, and in the Gorgias, where meaningful political action towards ends is possible only if the ends are known and furthermore known to be good.

It is a fundamental paradox of human existence that only after you have done a thing can you know how you should have done it in the first place; it may help to think of the Good in this way. Plato himself admits the accidental nature by which the ideal state could be realized; an essentially just man, a man of superior eros, who is not satisfied with "right opinion," no matter how well it may fit the bill, but who struggles on to real knowledge is rare enough, let alone that he should have the absolute power necessary to establish the Republic. The knowledge of the Good alone can reveal to the ruler the right order and relation of things and people in society which will assure the perpetuation

of the ideal state and the welfare or happiness of its citizens. It is this absolute conviction of the rightness of things that allows the Philosopher-King to resist compromise and that makes him the teacher of the people. Once this absolutely right system of values is established, there is no need for any change in principles, for any change would be for the worse.

#### iv. The Line.

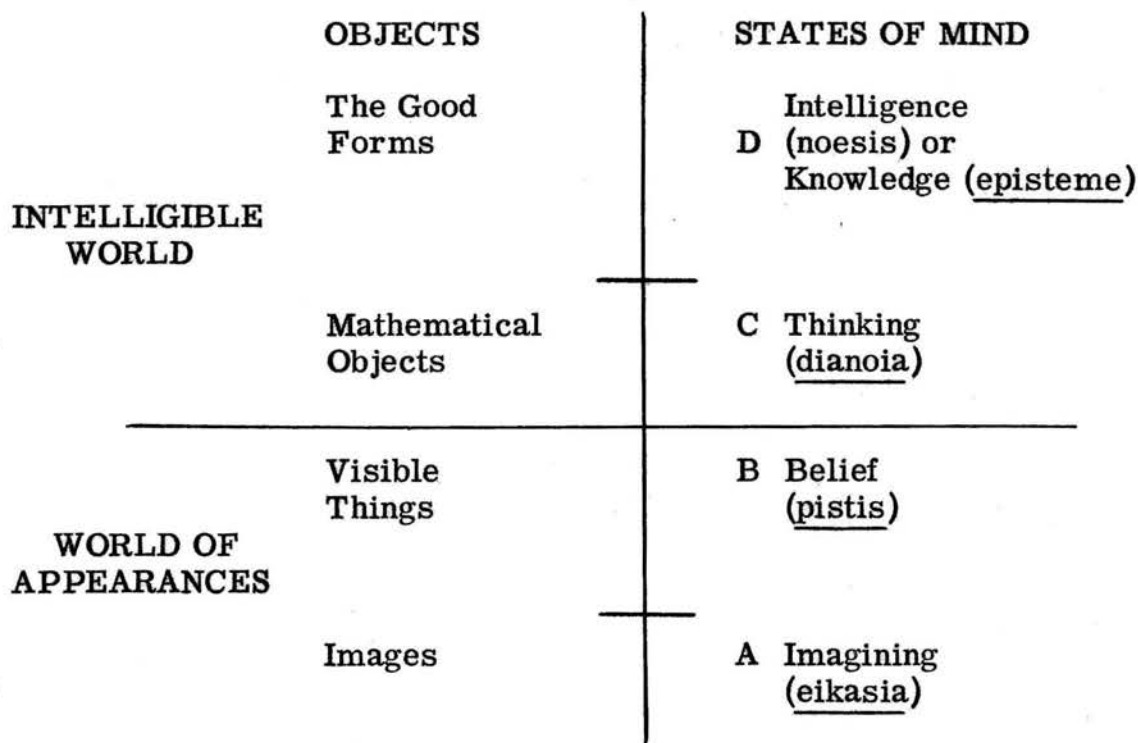
The Line which is introduced immediately after the discussion of the Good explains epistemologically the method by which knowledge of the Good is obtained. The four stages of cognition are essentially the same as the ladder of abstraction described by Diotima in the Symposium.<sup>1</sup>

In the brief exposition of The Line, Plato's dualistic attempt to resolve the problem of the flux in the sensible world and the necessity for permanence and objectivity in the standards which govern value judgments, is evident. He is trying to reconcile Heraclitus and Parmenides by using Protagoras' theory of sense perception abstracted beyond sensible objects.<sup>2</sup> The place of mathematics in this hierarchy of abstraction shows the influence of Parmenides' number theories which culminates in his own theory of eternal Forms that exist and receive their meaning from the Good.

The Line in Plato's analogy is divided into two unequal parts

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1. Plato, Sym., 210a-212b. See pp. 163-164.
  2. Plato, Rep., 534a, (Cornford, 254.)

and each segment is further divided into two sections of the same proportions as the original division.<sup>1</sup>



Section A represents the uncritical acceptance of sense perception and Section B the conceptions or beliefs about perceptual objects; true opinion as discussed in the Meno and the Gorgias would fall in this category. Section C is characterized by mathematical thinking because it uses actual things (geometrical diagrams) to make assumptions which are not criticized or proven and from which conclusions are deduced. Mathematical thinking "is compelled to pursue its inquiry by starting from assumptions and traveling, not up to a principle, but down to a conclusion"; intelligence or knowledge, on the other hand, "moves in the

1. Cornford, ROP, 222. The diagram reproduced here is from F. M. Cornford's translation of the Republic.

other direction, from an assumption up towards a principle which is not hypothetical."<sup>1</sup> Once having known this first principle, intelligence

may turn back and, holding on to the consequences which depend upon it, descend at last to a conclusion, never making use of any sensible object, but only of Forms, moving through Forms from one to another, and ending with Forms.<sup>2</sup>

The real meaning of the Good is contained here, for only knowledge of the final principle can disclose the true nature of the steps leading up to the Good.

These four states of mind, imagining, belief, thinking and intelligence increase in "clearness and certainty corresponding to the measure in which their objects possess truth and reality."<sup>3</sup>

#### v. The Allegory of the Cave.

In order to clarify and illustrate this rather abstract discussion of The Line and the Good, Plato introduces the justly famous Allegory of the Cave.<sup>4</sup> The entire allegory is an explanation of education and its counterpart, the uncritical acceptance of experience. As Plato says: "Here is a parable to illustrate the degrees in which our nature may be enlightened or unenlightened."<sup>5</sup> In the Allegory, Socrates tells of prisoners who have spent all their lives facing a wall in a cave chained

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1. Plato, Rep., 510c, (Cornford, 224.)

2. Plato, Rep., 511c, (Cornford, 226.)

3. Plato, Rep., 511e, (Cornford, 226.)

4. Plato, Rep., 514a-521b, (Cornford, 227-235.)

5. Plato, Rep., 514a, (Cornford, 277.) Cf. Wild, PTM, 180 ff.

in such a way that they cannot move their heads at all. Shadows are cast on the wall by images carried between a fire and the prisoner's backs. A modern version of the Allegory might utilize the analogy of a sound camera showing moving pictures on the wall of the cave.<sup>1</sup> Because the chained prisoners have never seen anything else, they accept the shadows that they see as reality, and if a prisoner were released and shown the source of these images he would probably not accept it as more real than the shadows unless educated to the conception gradually. If this poor fellow were dragged out of the cave, the sunlight would blind him; but slowly, as his eyes became accustomed to the light, he would see real objects in their natural surroundings and eventually realize that the seasons, life and all things depend on the sun (the good.) This freedom and knowledge of real things would cause him to pity the prisoners in the cave. Back in the cave his eyes, now unaccustomed to the gloom, would perceive the images on the wall but dimly and he would appear a dolt to his unenlightened companions who would laugh derisively when he tried to tell them that what they saw was not real at all.

In his commentaries following the Allegory of the Cave Plato says of the Good: "Without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matters of state."<sup>2</sup> The ascent

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1. Cornford, ROP, 223.

2. Plato, Rep., 517c, (Cornford, 231.)

from the cave to true knowledge, however, shows that education must be thought of as a guiding influence to the soul rather than a supply of knowledge for it. The function of education is "not to put the power of sight into the soul's eye, which already has it, but to ensure that, instead of looking in the wrong direction, it is turned the way it ought to be."<sup>1</sup>

The well-ordered state must be ruled by the best; therefore, says Socrates:

The business of us who are the founders of the State will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all--they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them... to remain in the upper world: they must be made to descend again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labours and honours, whether they are worth having or not.

But is not this unjust? he said; ought we to give them a worse life, when they might have a better?

You have again forgotten, my friend, I said, the intention of the legislator, who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Plato, Rep., 518c, (Cornford, 232.)

2. Plato, Rep., 519c-520a, (Cornford, 233-234.)

The above passage is often cited as proof of Plato's totalitarian tendencies, since not even the Philosopher-King is free from the obligation of serving the interests of the state. The "force," however, that makes them descend into the cave is a moral force; the Philosopher-Kings have been given a more thorough education than their fellow citizens and they must accept the responsibility of their favored position.

A state can never be properly governed either by the uneducated who know nothing of truth or by men who are allowed to spend all their days in the pursuit of culture.<sup>1</sup>

Those who have been especially educated and finally know the Good must return to the relatively distasteful task of ruling society, for "the law is not concerned to make any one class happy, but to ensure the welfare of the commonwealth as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Plato's philosophy in relation to education.

The structure of the Republic follows the development of the "educational argument." The inquiry starts by asking, "Why should I be just?" In other words, what is the value of justice to the individual? The analogy between the soul and the state that follows does not seem as strange with a knowledge of the early dialogues as it might if the Republic were considered by itself. Plato develops the idea that the values to which the individuals aspire determine the form of the state; the ideal state would

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1. Plato, Rep., 519c, (Cornford, 233.)

2. Plato, Rep., 520a, (Cornford, 234.)

then reflect the nature of the perfectly just soul.<sup>1</sup> The stratification of society in the Republic is based on the empirical fact that individuals do differ, that they differ in the degree of their eros. The perfect state and the just soul are harmonious with each other and themselves because they function organically; they unify diverse values purposively--and the purpose is the good life. Virtue is finally defined as the organic unity of virtuous elements in the soul--the soul which is harmonious because its eros is fully realized.

The actual existence of the state depends on the Philosopher-King whose justice is grounded on the knowledge of eternal values and not "true opinion." These values, or Forms, are revealed through the soul's intuitive knowledge of the Good. The analogy of the Sun indicates the metaphysical reality of the Good; The Line presents the argument that the mode of perception, the way in which an object is known, has a one-to-one correlation with its metaphysical status; that is, sense perception "knows" the least real objects whereas rational intuition discloses the most real objects. The Allegory of the Cave sums up the relation between education, epistemology, metaphysics and politics and shows the pivotal position that Socrates' new paideia has in those relationships. The prisoner would remain in the cave if he were not led gently--that is, educated in the Socratic manner--from the belief in the reality of the images, up out of the cave so that he can perceive for himself that all

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1. Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 3.

life depends on the Sun. It is his duty to return into the cave to educate his less fortunate companions with this knowledge. The release from the cave begins with education and ends with an educational mission.

i. Education and epistemology.

The educational problem of the early dialogues soon becomes an epistemological problem and, if we think of what Plato means by knowledge, it is easy to see why a theory of knowledge is implicitly connected with his metaphysics, ethics and political philosophy. So-called "factual" knowledge does not concern Plato in these dialogues; as he says in the Euthyphro,<sup>1</sup> there is no reason to argue about those things that are factual--they should be verified. The problem is not quite that simple; and in the Theaetetus Plato examines knowledge more carefully as it applies to the physical world.<sup>2</sup> In these early dialogues, though, Plato is thinking primarily of a type of knowledge that is a personal experience and therefore impossible, as he says, to put into words--the experience of "possessing" justice, or temperance or courage. How are these "possessed" ideals, the core of virtue, to be taught? As Socrates says to Callicles:

O Callicles, if there were not some community of feelings among mankind, however varying in different persons--I mean to say, if every man's feelings were peculiar to himself and were not

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1. Plato, Euthyph., 7b-c.

2. Wild, PTM, 260 ff. Wild analyzes the relation of knowledge and true opinion as Plato treats it in the Theaetetus.

shared by the rest of his species--I do not see how we could ever communicate our impressions to one another.<sup>1</sup>

If real education is concerned with the transfer of these "ideas," we immediately see the need for a new definition of education.

If true knowledge lies in the "possession" of these norms we can appreciate the fact that they cannot be "taught"; knowledge of the law does not make a man just; vast learning does not make a man wise. The difference between the wise and the learned man, the lawyer and the just man is in the use they make of their knowledge; that is, whether we can rely on them as persons of character and whether their knowledge has revealed the essential truths implicit in what they know. But how is the moral conviction of the wise man and the man of justice to be taught if it consists primarily of a personal experience, knowledge known to the soul?

Plato's epistemological theory takes on meaning in relation to the rest of his philosophy because it is no mere technical solution to the problems of knowledge theory. Self-knowledge in terms of ideal and eternal objects combines Socrates' divine inspiration, his eros, his intense personal conviction in truth and the power of logos with the Greek sense of history, the Heraclitean flux, the "fate" of great Greek literature. Part of the Greek tradition sees the world as an uncontrollable movement of events that often makes people victims of its senseless

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1. Plato, Gorg., 481c.

machinations; an equally strong tradition identifies that which makes man human with the body politic. Man is only man in society and he is to be honored or blamed in accord with his actions as a citizen.<sup>1</sup> The awareness of man the political animal and man the puppet of fate made the Greeks historically conscious; it is no accident that the first great historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, were Greek citizens. Plato's objects of knowledge not only had to solve the technical problems of previous philosophy in relation to "knowing" but also had to include Greek culture, since, as has been pointed out so often previously, his philosophy was a way of life and had to be reconciled with the cultural heritage that formed so much of life in the Greek city-state.

To avoid the Sophistic assertion that all things are relative because the senses that know and the objects known are in a constant state of flux and therefore that there can be no abiding knowledge, Socrates tried to define universal moral values; whether he proposed that the validity of such definitions rested on the common nature of man as Plato has him say in the above quote from the Gorgias we cannot know. Plato took the Socratic dictum<sup>2</sup> "Know thyself" and the character of Socrates himself not only as a working model for the improvement of the individual soul but also as the standard for the ordering of the state--

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1. Plato, Rep., 617e, (Cornford, 335.) Cf. Nettleship, EPR, 40.

2. "Know thyself" was borrowed by Socrates from the oracle at Delphi.

an innovation imposed by Plato's historical sense that a change in values often brings about the degeneration of the state and by the conservative, aristocratic strain in his thought which harked back to better days when the best ruled because of their superior character and moral fiber.

Plato unites the traditions of the city-state, especially its conception of the organic society, with Socrates' faith in knowledge as the source of true virtue, and his humanism to redefine the ideals of the state and the education of its citizens by adding political power to Socrates' character, thereby making of him the Philosopher-King, who embodies the values of the state and is the educator of the people.

But how is the Philosopher-King to teach virtue if virtue is an "experience" intrinsically allied with the total personality of an actual person in actual situations of moral choice? If Plato had been satisfied to assert that virtue and knowledge were solely for the improvement of the individual soul through the intuition of transcendent essences he would have had to go no further than to propound a mystical philosophy based on revealed truth; but the added burden of trying to define true knowledge in terms that would not negate the values of life in this world but would organize them for human happiness on earth imposed certain educational qualifications on the nature of knowledge and virtue.

If integrity depends on knowledge and if the community depends on the individual citizens for its character, it follows that the well

ordered community will be that in which true knowledge is the criterion for the standards of the state and for its rulers. Such a program is feasible only if virtue is the knowledge of some object that a person can apprehend after being properly educated. If true knowledge is knowledge of some ineffable object revealed only to the chosen few who are "graced" by the divine insight--that is, if you cannot be educated to know--then the case for the assertion that "you owe it to yourself" to realize the highest possible values loses its moral force.

Standards of social behavior must have some objective status, and the knowledge which discloses these standards must likewise have objectivity; the senses and the objects of sense perception were obviously unreliable as norms and, since Plato had the example of Socrates before his mind, what could be more natural than associating Socrates' paideia with true knowledge? Socrates' education did not give information, but asked soul-searching questions that were clearly not concerned with sensible objects; yet the moral conviction exemplified by his death seemed to be grounded on knowledge more certain than any dogma, or theory based on factual knowledge. The spark that he kindled in Plato's soul moved Plato to analyze Socrates and his form of education in search of a new way of knowing and new objects of knowledge--having seen a virtuous man, Plato did not rest until he defined that virtue and the education upon which he felt it depended. The result was the Forms, which

had the objectivity necessary for social standards, but which were known by the rational insight of the virtuous man, who could be guided and inspired by the education that he received to realize knowledge of them for himself. The nature of the objects of true knowledge, then, determine the education that the potentially just man should receive.<sup>1</sup>

ii. Education and the Platonic Forms.

The Platonic Forms have had various interpretations; in fact, Plato himself gives several interpretations of their significance. It has been proposed that Plato should be taken literally; that the Forms represent actual archetypes that have a separate and eternal existence independent of man. Others feel that Plato's description of the Forms is only a picturesque attempt to formulate logical universals. A compromise proposes that the Forms are ideal values, eternal but unrealized except in the actual value situation involving particulars. The actual metaphysical status of the Forms, while hardly unimportant, is perhaps not so vital to education as the methodological aspect of the Forms.

Methodologically, the Platonic Forms are a simple concept, although a very difficult one to put into words without getting overly complex or ridiculously simple. Plato was willing to grant that what we know is

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1. Cf. Nettleship, *EPR*, 9. As Nettleship points out, the form of education is arrived at in the Republic through an analysis of "human nature." "In order to understand Plato's theory of education, we must understand his psychology." Both this statement and mine above assert the same fact from different points of view: education is for the soul.

dependent upon what we experience; even when he propounds the theory of recollection as the source of the knowledge of true relations, he states that it is the immediate experience which brings forth the recollection. Many persons, however, are exposed to the same types of experience, and whereas some use it to advantage, others either do not make use of that experience or else misuse it. The difference between the superior man and the lesser man is that the former exposes his experience to rational self-criticism and evaluation. In some cases the superior man is guided by "true opinion" or rational insight--the "feel" for the right choice in a given situation. The distinction between the two is extremely important. If true opinion is the highest form of knowledge that man can obtain, then truth is the exclusive property of the mystics who are fortunate enough to be divinely inspired. On the other hand, if rational self-criticism and evaluation can reveal objects of true knowledge, then the way is open to educating persons up to the point where the final synthesis is realized in an intuitive flash. Granted, the end product is a "mystical intellectualism," as Pater calls it, but it is a mysticism that can be nurtured by education.

In order to understand the nature of the Forms, let us refer, in true Platonic style, to the art of cooking. What is it that makes a superior cook? Experience?--certainly. Good recipes?--of course. But experience and recipes may be had by many people; what is the

personal quality that distinguishes the good cook from the mediocre? It might best be called craftsmanship--that active concern with past experience which has led to such sure knowledge that the cook can fly in the face of the written recipes to adjust for the particular case.

There is no one recipe for pie or for apple pie or even for a given kind of apple pie. A good cook will take into account the kind of pie, the kind of apple and the desired results, and then proceed on the basis of previous experience to produce the best result possible with the material given. Although there may not be any one recipe (or definition) of a pie, there is a certain "form" to pie making; a certain similarity of procedure, of content and of purpose. The man, therefore, who would be best qualified to judge the best actual pie would be the man who had the widest experience with the advantages of all the various types of pies that can possibly be made, provided, of course, that he had a serious concern for the best possible pie and the natural ability, the "good taste" to discriminate and choose the best.

Leonardo Da Vinci studied very carefully the art of making his painting vehicles and recorded exactly how the best solution could be obtained. Apprentices, intent on following the master's directions to the nth degree, continually got cloudy solutions, whereas the master, who not only knew the instructions but knew the reasons behind them, seemingly violated his own formula constantly; but his mixtures were

always clear. The form of truth as it applies to this world is not a static definition of any thing or things but such a knowledge of principles that amid the shifting sands a straight course may be charted towards a goal--the good life for onself and all men.<sup>1</sup>

It was Plato's contention that it was not beyond the reach of man to study the nature of temperance, courage, wisdom, justice, goodness, love, beauty and so forth in the same way as the pie expert would inquire into the nature of the best possible pie. Of course the "Form" of beauty is a much more difficult thing to grasp than the form of "perfect pie"; this is true of all the "Forms" and especially of the relationship of the Forms to one another, for it is only in the insight of how the individual Forms are related in goodness that the final truth is apprehended. Even this seemingly esoteric doctrine has an essentially simple explanation if it is thought of methodologically, although it is not easily stated.

Justice, we may agree with Plato, is good in itself; that is, we do not seek justice for any other reason than to be just--if we do we are not just. Beauty we may seek in itself; beauty is good--it is its own justification. This we may say of truth also. But if Beauty, Truth and Justice are good in themselves, what do we mean by good? If good here implies a value judgment, what is that which we use as a standard to judge principles which are themselves self-sufficient standards of action?--as it would seem they are, if they are good in themselves. The life which is

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1. Cf. Plato's statement on the nature of law, States., 294 ff. See p. 296.

truly good is the standard, for in the good life justice, truth and beauty all have their proper place. If we ask in what sense justice is good, the answer is that it is good as a necessary part of the good life. Granted, a life that is good may encompass the beautiful, the true and the just, but how is the good of the "good life" to be understood? Since Plato asserts the immortality of the soul we may conclude that the Good does not exist for the sake of life but that life exists for the sake of the Good. We have finally arrived at a point where we can say no more--the Good is the Good and that is all that it is possible to say on the basis of human experience.

The methodological interpretation of Forms as they apply to the practical choices and value judgments that we must continually make in life--choices important to ourselves, and those that include the welfare of others--is the ethical description of the Forms as they enter into the tissues of living; but what of the Forms themselves? This question forces Plato to a consideration of the metaphysical significance of the ideal values; he experimented with various explanations, none of which were wholly successful or free from vexing problems, and it is to his everlasting credit that he himself was the first to bring up every important criticism that has since been used against the theory of Forms. There is no space nor need for taking up the various metaphysical interpretations of the Forms; their practical significance is all that is

vital here and, although he formulated various doctrines, Plato never did reject the real and objective existence of ideal values.

iii. The Platonic synthesis.

Education as portrayed in the Allegory of the Cave guides the soul from the lowest form of perception to the highest; these modes of "knowing" have objects that vary in their degree of reality; when the soul "sees" the Good, its reality and "light" truly reveal these various degrees of reality for the first time; thus education, epistemology and metaphysics are integrally connected. The Good is the criterion of "the good life," and knowledge of it allows the just man to will ends that he knows are good; the knowledge of true reality, then, implies that the good life is the ethical life. The just man, to lead the ethical life, must have power in the state, he must be the law, and this in turn means that he must be an educator--the Philosopher-King--since ends consistently good imply the best society in which the happiness of the citizens, as a whole, must be given preference; and their happiness depends on their being made better and freely willing that the Philosopher-King should govern.<sup>1</sup>

Education, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology are in this fashion related and interwoven by Plato in the Republic, but the investigation is not at an end. The problem that started with the

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1. Plato, Rep., 431b f., (Cornford, 126.); cf. States., 276e.

individual's concern for his own well-being and evolved into a conception of the perfect state has advanced to the point where Plato must do what he says reveals the nature of reality--he must examine his principles. This investigation begins in the Republic, when Plato presents an analysis of the eternal Forms. His philosophy after the Republic is concerned with problems all of which are contained in embryo in the analogies of The Sun, The Line, and The Cave; but to enjoy the full importance of these problems, they must continually be related back to the "educational problem" and the ideal state.

#### 5. The later dialogues.

For all its tremendous importance, we have had little to say about the soul, as such, because Plato has so little to say about the nature of the soul in the early dialogues. The Republic, primarily through the analogy of the soul and the state and later the Myth of Er, increases our understanding of the soul a great deal and, while it is true that Plato's educational theories cannot be considered complete without a more thorough analysis of his psychology, the later dialogues add so much material of such great variety that the prerequisite definition of the soul cannot be arrived at on the basis of the early dialogues alone; therefore an evaluation of his theory of education in the light of his fully formulated theory of the soul is impossible in this thesis. The Phaedo, Phaedrus and, to a lesser extent, the Philebus are sources of Plato's theory of the soul in the later works.

None of the later dialogues are entirely unimportant to Plato's theory of education because of the close connection that exists between all the various facets of his thought; they consider, on a higher level, problems that we have already seen are important to education: the relation of the Forms to each other; the meaning of "being"; the nature of knowing and knowledge, and so forth throughout a list of questions that laid the foundation for philosophy in western civilization.

In the Phaedrus, Plato again criticizes rhetoric but not nearly so vehemently as in the Gorgias. The analysis of form and the theory of the soul in the Phaedrus are also important educationally. The Phaedo, as has already been mentioned, is very important because of its treatment of the soul, as is the Philebus, which is also significant because of its discussion of pleasure--a concept fundamental to the evolution of Plato's ideas on education, especially in the Protagoras and Gorgias.

The Timaeus, Parmenides, Theaetetus and the Sophist, concerned as they are with cosmology, metaphysics, epistemology and logic are key dialogues in forming a complete picture of Plato's philosophy, but of even greater significance to his "practical" moral philosophy is the re-evaluation of the state which Plato begins in the Statesman and to which he adds his final thoughts in the Laws.

In the Republic, Plato resolved the problem of the conflict between law and justice by making the just man the law; by adding "power"

to the personality of Socrates he created the Philosopher-King, whose right to rule was such that any law determining his actions would be unnecessary and might be unjust. To appreciate why Plato could so easily dispense with law in the Republic we might appeal to one of his own favorite analogies--that of the doctor. Why do we go to a doctor when we are ill? Why is it that we don't regulate by means of law the way a doctor shall go about diagnosing and treating our diseases?

We go to a doctor because he has knowledge which we do not have, because he has studied, observed and treated disease; that is, because he has the education, training and experience that we feel is needed to treat a problem which we do not fully understand. We go to the doctor of our own free will because we have faith that he has our best interests at heart, at least as far as physical health is concerned. We do not require that his judgment be governed by law, because we assume that he will know better than the law what is needed in each individual case, and that the nature of his profession is such that he will do what he judges to be best in all cases. In the same vein, Plato says of the statesman:

The best of all is that a man should rule, having wisdom and power both. Law does not adequately comprehend what is noblest and most just for every individual, and therefore cannot enforce what is absolutely best. The differences of men and actions, and the endless irregular movements of human things, do not admit of any simple, universal rule. And no art can lay down a rule which will last for all time. Unchanging rules are the death of art. Its strength has to be superior to law.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Plato, States., 294 ff.

The Statesman indicates Plato's movement towards reinstating law in the community even though he reaffirms his belief in the ideal of the Philosopher-King--but in the Statesman the completely just man is recognized as an ideal, too good to be realized on earth. Plato also classifies the types of states more carefully in the Statesman than he did in Book VIII of the Republic; he now recognizes two forms of democracy and assigns them more favorable positions in relation to other types of government than he did in the Republic. That Plato saw the conflict between law and justice in Socrates' death is once more shown when he remarks bitterly that with the readmission of law the execution of Socrates is justified, for "no one should presume to be wiser than the laws."<sup>1</sup>

Although Plato's philosophy evolved, he never gave up the ideals of the just individual in the perfect state. He refers to the state depicted in the Laws as the second best state. Whether Plato's experience in trying to educate Dionysius II to be a Philosopher-King discouraged him, or whether he simply lost faith in the ability of man to aspire to ideals so lofty as those in the Republic we cannot say; but whatever the reason was, it caused him to re-examine the state and readmit law as the ruling force in the community. The second best state places as much emphasis on education as the Republic does, but it is education

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1. Plato, States., 299c. f. Cf. Sabine, HPT, 75.

more as we think of it today and not clearly identified with Socrates' paideia. Since the Laws gives a great deal of power to various institutions in the state (especially the Ministry of Education) it is as important in many ways as the early dialogues and the Republic for the material that it can furnish for evaluating modern education.

Plato's attempt to temper the ideals of the early dialogues and the Republic with a more pragmatic approach to the problems of the state is not so successful artistically, but it shows that he realized that the omission of law in the Republic was an error--an error, however, in the direction of perfection and, because he found it difficult to admit that perfection was not the goal, the Laws does not resolve the problem of reintroducing law very convincingly. The failure is understandable, since the introduction of law destroys the moral force of the Philosopher-King--it justifies Socrates' death and thereby compromises Plato's ideal of education. When he gave up the ideal man and the ideal state, Plato was faced with the task of reorganizing his entire philosophy; a task that he was not equal to in his old age.

That the Laws does not succeed as the Republic did in solving its problems does not mean that it is not an important work--far from it. The practical measures that were waived aside in the Republic because they would be solved by the Auxiliary or the Guardians are important in the Laws, where Plato is emulating the legislators of the past, such as

Solon and Lycurgus, in describing the basic tenets of a working constitution. Many of his insights are extremely cogent, but his efforts to combine the best elements of existing states with the values of the Republic in a mixed constitution, the first of which there is a record, is not very consistent. The concept of the mixed constitution, the balance of powers, however, is in itself a valuable contribution to political theory--a theory that was developed by Aristotle and later by political theorists in Europe, notably Montesquieu.

Education under law rather than under the Philosopher-King becomes institutionalized in the Laws, and is closer to training than paideia; its chief function is to train the citizens to be in harmony with the law of the land. Plato spends more time on the methods, regulations, and administration of education than he did in the Republic and not so much with the product, the aspirations and ends of education; those, after all, are defined by the law more than the individual. Here we can note a strange phenomenon; education in the state governed by law is less democratic than education in the state governed by a benevolent despot; education that is democratic in its scope is authoritarian in its application and education that is aristocratic in its selection is democratic in its application! That is, Plato's education in the Republic is directed to the individual, under the assumption that the truly educated individual will be the perfect citizen. In the Laws Plato's aim is not

the perfect individual, whom he gives up as an ideal realized only in a divine realm, but a homogeneous citizenry where individuality is second to obedience to the laws. In more than one respect Plato's institutionalized education in the Laws is analogous to modern education.

#### 6. Criticism of Plato's educational theories.

Plato's philosophy has been criticized from many different and not always supplementary positions. His metaphysics, epistemology, theology and psychology have all received their share of objections, many of them anticipated in the dialogues themselves, but recently, with the picture of Fascism, Nazism and Communism freshly in mind, his philosophy has been attacked with renewed vigor because of its political implications, and the close connection in Plato's thought between education and the state has not been overlooked.

In many ways the degree of animosity directed at Plato himself, the ends and motivations imputed to him as a person treated in many cases as a Machiavellian contemporary, is a tribute to Plato the educator, his sustained ability to stimulate thought and his insight into vital problems. In general, Plato is stigmatized as antidemocratic or, if the defamation is more positive, as totalitarian or communistic. Because there are some grounds for all these "tags," and because they are "loaded" words in countries that are held to be run by democratic principles this "labeling" process is often as deep as criticism needs to go.

Plato's communism, limited as it is to the rulers, would have horrified Marx, for Plato holds that only the educationally prepared elite would have a sufficient range of values to allow them to live communal lives, to give up the provincial perspective of the "owner." His absolute rule is authoritarian and not totalitarian, a distinction which he often draws himself when he criticizes tyranny. The authoritarian Philosopher-King rules by right of reason and knowledge--the totalitarian tyrant by right of force. Plato is antidemocratic, but his definition of democracy and the present-day definitions are poles apart. Most ardent democrats who flay Plato would be scandalized if his definition were applied to them, yet they criticize him without noting the development in democratic ideals.

i. Plato's definition of democracy.

The constitution of Cleisthenes, adopted in 507 B. C., had been in effect for over a hundred years when the democracy condemned Socrates to death.<sup>1</sup> Political power under this constitution rested with the Assembly, composed of all male citizens over twenty, the Council of Five Hundred and the courts. The Council exercised control in many different directions, but "the great powers of the Council. . . were always dependent upon the good will of the Assembly."<sup>2</sup>

The Athenian courts occupied a position in the government which has no modern parallel and "were undoubtedly the keystone of the whole

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1. The oligarchy of The Thirty gained power briefly near the end of the Peloponnesian war.
  2. Sabine, HPT, 9. Italics mine.

democratic system."<sup>1</sup> The members of the courts were chosen by lot from a panel of six thousand which was elected each year by the demes; these courts were very large, hardly ever less than 201 and often a great deal more, and they served both as judge and jury without the "machinery that goes with a technically developed form of law."<sup>2</sup> The persons involved in the litigation had to present their own cases; each court was autonomous and therefore free from the dictates of precedence established by the decisions of other courts; the verdict of the court was final--there was no appeal, even though the decisions of various courts might contradict one another.

Election according to Greek ideas was an aristocratic method of selecting officials;<sup>3</sup> "to the Greek understanding...filling offices by lot was the distinctively democratic form of rule, since it equalized everyone's chances to hold office."<sup>4</sup> The magistrates and officials, as well as citizens, were accountable to the courts, composed of large numbers of citizens chosen by lot; the verdict depended on the defense and prosecution of the individuals involved and there was no recourse to judicial review. These are the reasons that rhetoric became the chief means to political power and also the reasons that Callicles could seriously warn Socrates that by ignoring the art of rhetoric he was

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1. Sabine, HPT, 9.  
2. Sabine, HPT, 10.

3. Sabine, HPT, 82.  
4. Sabine, HPT, 7.

placing his life in danger, since he would not be able to defend himself in court. An appeal to truth or ethical principles was not the best way to secure Athenian "justice," but rather the ability to persuade the court. The officials, since they were always subject to the whims of the court, had to keep the pleasures of the people in mind at all times.

Plato's definition and criticism of democracy grew out of the abuses to which this system was heir, as did his attacks on sophistry and the teachers of rhetoric. If the modern writers who criticize Plato for being antidemocratic are willing to accept that which he criticizes as democracy, then Plato stands convicted. Because there was no necessary consistency in decisions, because the verdicts depended on the fancies of large numbers of people who had no special qualifications and because justice was reduced to a forensic tug-of-war, Plato associated democracy at its worst with anarchy, similar to the orgies of "freedom" indulged in by the mob during the early days of the French Revolution; at its best he thought of democracy as a contest between "flatterers" of the people for political power. With the constitution of Athens in mind, it is easy to see how he arrived at these conclusions--conclusions for which he needed no more evidence than the death of Socrates.

ii. K. R. Popper's criticism of Plato.

K. R. Popper, in his far from objective attack on Plato in The Open Society and its Enemies classifies Plato, Hegel and Marx as the

chief proponents of the various forms of "historicism." The historicists "believe that they have discovered laws of history which enable them to prophesy the course of events. . . . The prophets who announce that certain events are bound to happen make propaganda for them, and help to bring them about."<sup>1</sup>

The text does not support Popper's contention that the ideal state is thought of by Plato as an historical fact, or that the degeneration of the state described in Book VIII happens because of necessary historical laws.<sup>2</sup> Plato's historicism, Popper asserts, is rooted in his frantic efforts to avoid the Heraclitean flux;<sup>3</sup> he sought stability by appealing to a Cretan and Spartan aristocratic tribalism in which the workers "are only human cattle."<sup>4</sup> "The origin of society is a convention, a social contract" based on the social nature of man.<sup>5</sup> But the nature of man, Plato's "biological naturalism," emphasizes both the subjection of the individual to the total organism of the state and "the natural inequality of man."<sup>6</sup> The analogy of the soul and the state in the Republic

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1. Popper, OSE, 3-4.
  2. Cornford, ROP, 53. In reference to logical construction of the ideal state in Book II, Cornford says: "Plato is not here describing the historical development of any actual state." Field, POP, 87. "The account of the stages of degeneration begins from the ideal city which had never in fact existed. . . so there is no ground for taking this account as an attempt to arrive at a law of historical development."
  3. Popper, OSE, 19, 29 ff.
  4. Popper, OSE, 39-40. See pp. 284-285 on Plato's historical sense.
  5. Popper, OSE, 64. Cf. Cornford, ROP, 53. Plato denies that society is "the artificial outcome of an arbitrary compact."
  6. Popper, OSE, 66.

shows that Plato thought of "the individual citizen. . . as an imperfect copy of the state";<sup>1</sup> his reference to the state as the soul "writ large" means, in Popper's translation, that "the city. . . is greater than the individual."<sup>2</sup>

Plato's identification of justice with an aristocratic ruling class, his "racism," his belief in slavery and finally his program for indoctrination completes the totalitarian pattern which Plato subtly and diabolically introduced into the Republic because he "did not dare to face the enemy openly."<sup>3</sup> It will be obvious, it is hoped, that this thesis is diametrically opposed to the interpretation Popper places on most of the above points--and the significance that he draws from all of them. A detailed study of Popper's frequent misuse of quotations or the arguments that he presents, especially in contrast to his own theory of "piecemeal engineering," is beyond the scope of this work, but a very brief analysis of his criticism of Plato's theory of education is perhaps justified.

Popper's entire criticism of Plato's theory of education, and a great deal of his criticism of Plato in general, depends on the distinction which he makes between the Socratic influence in Plato's dialogues and Plato's own philosophy. Equalitarian justice, the "protectionist" theory of the state, and the criticism of the irresponsible rule of the "superior"

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1. Popper, OSE, 67.
  2. Popper, OSE, 68.
  3. Popper, OSE, 80, 74-75.

in the Gorgias are noble ideas but they belong to Socrates;<sup>1</sup> the same concepts in the Republic take on a subtle totalitarian cast in Popper's eyes. Popper does not bother with the Symposium, which has a very embarrassing combination of humanism which according to Popper is distinctly Socratic and the Forms, which are equally Platonic.

All that is noble, equalitarian and inspiring, then, and Popper admits that there is much in the dialogues that is, belongs to Socrates, whereas all that is inimical to democracy, respect for the individual and true education belongs to Plato.<sup>2</sup> "Socratic intellectualism is decidedly equalitarian. . . . But this moral intellectualism of Socrates is a two-edged sword."<sup>3</sup> His stress on the need for enlightenment can easily be "misinterpreted as a demand for authoritarianism."<sup>4</sup> This is true, but it is hardly a "misinterpretation" on Plato's part--he announced this aim in the "Socratic" Gorgias, where he showed that Socrates could not accomplish his mission of establishing "equalitarian" justice unless political power rested in the hands of a just man.

Socrates and the Philosopher-King contrast two entirely different worlds--"the worlds of the modest, rational individualist and of the totalitarian demi-god."<sup>5</sup> Plato realizes the totalitarian nature of his education, Popper asserts, because "he demands that only those who are

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1. Popper, OSE, 102-103, 112.

2. Popper, OSE, 113-120.

3. Popper, OSE, 113.

4. Popper, OSE, 113.

5. Popper, OSE, 116.

past their prime should be admitted" to higher education--"he is afraid of the power of thought."<sup>1</sup> Popper cites the following passage as applying to the "highest form of education," i. e., the dialectical training necessary to the Philosopher-King.

When their bodily strength begins to fail, and when they are past the age of public and military duties, then, and only then, should they be permitted to enter at will the sacred field.<sup>2</sup>

The context from which this passage was taken states that Athenian education was in need of reform because it exposed the youth to philosophy before they were mature, and that, as a result, later in life they considered listening to a discussion on philosophy at best as a pleasant pastime, for "in all but a few the light is quenched more effectually than the sun of Heraclitus."<sup>3</sup>

Socrates goes on to explain how education should take place so that in the waning years of life a man can enjoy intellectual pleasures.

Boys and youths should be given a liberal education suitable to their age; and, while growing up to manhood, they should take care to make their bodies into good instruments for the service of philosophy. As the years go on in which the mind begins to reach maturity, intellectual training should be intensified. Finally, when strength fails and they are past civil and military duties, let them range at will, free from all serious business but philosophy; for theirs is to be a life of happiness,

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1. Popper, OSE, 117.
  2. Popper, OSE, 117.
  3. Plato, Rep., 498b, (Cornford, 206.)

crowned after death with a fitting destiny in the other world.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, according to Popper, is totalitarian education which is afraid of the power of thought!

While there is some merit in Popper's criticism, his dogmatism, in contrast to Plato's gentle guidance, in stating his case for democracy and his colored use of material as propaganda causes his every statement to be suspect.

### iii. Dewey and Plato.

A much more enlightened criticism in the cause of democracy has come from John Dewey. Dewey's criticism of "the classic tradition," which was entrenched in education at the turn of the century, is for the most part justified. He felt, however, that the classic tradition had its roots in Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato and Aristotle. As long as educators found their inspiration in the thoughts of these men, "progressive" education would not prosper. The emphasis on reason and the intellectual apprehension of true knowledge, he felt, detached "doing" from "knowing"; the scientific method as developed in modern times had demonstrated that all useful knowledge was realized from doing, experimenting, and verifying the facts of experience. Intelligence and the realization of values cannot be separated from "work," which had been cast into disrepute as menial and degrading by Plato and Aristotle, who

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1. Plato, Rep., 498b-c, (Cornford, 206-207.)

in their "quest for certainty" posited an unchanging realm of being that could be known to pure reason.

Because practical action involves change and insecurity and because of man's distrust in himself and his inability to explain good and evil, the certainty of absolute knowledge has appealed to man. This preoccupation with the "antecedently real" has been pursued at the expense of an understanding of social problems that arise and must be solved every day in actual life. Dewey's contention is that all the problems of philosophy "flow from the separation between theory and practice, knowledge and action."<sup>1</sup> His criticism, then, is that in the classic tradition, metaphysical presuppositions precede the facts of life, and that those facts are then distorted to fit the system; consequently man never does face "reality," because he is always trying to escape to a better and more permanent world which exists in his mind. Man's salvation lies in facing facts, in the scientific method, in participating in work and society; by learning through doing.

This thesis has tried to show that Plato's metaphysics grew out of a very keen awareness of the "facts" of life, a deep awareness of the educational problem, and that in trying to solve these problems Plato always sought to draw the individual and society, theory and practice into a harmonious unit. The above summary of Dewey's criticism of

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1. Dewey, TQC, 24.

the classic tradition does not pretend to do justice to his thought, but it would seem that his criticism is more applicable to an interpretation that tradition has called Platonic than it is to Plato himself.

On the positive side, Dewey proposes that education and philosophy are practically one; that education is the chief means to social improvement; that the ends of education and the values of society should be consistent and that education should develop the potentialities of the individual. He also holds that participation and student interest are fundamental to education and therefore that play and natural expression should be utilized rather than discouraged. The chief ends of education are social, Dewey feels, for education should prepare the student to participate meaningfully in society by instilling initiative and responsibility, by preparing the student to reorganize experience intelligently and purposefully. Education is of fundamental importance because it is the chief means of assuring the continuity of social values.

The only tenet which might be questioned as also applying to Plato's theory would be that of instilling initiative, but if we remember that real education for Plato consists of the active search on the part of the individual for true insight, it becomes evident that initiative is essential to Plato's educational theories, too.

The following quotations from various works by Dewey, collected in Intelligence in the Modern World, may help to indicate some of the

points upon which Dewey and Plato would seem to be in agreement.

Philosophy and education: "If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education."<sup>1</sup>

The importance of environment: "In the hands of one who is not intelligently aware of individual capacities and of the influence unconsciously exerted upon them by the entire environment, even the best of technical methods are likely to get an immediate result at the expense of forming deep-seated and persistent bad habits."<sup>2</sup>

Education and the formation of habits: "The problem and the opportunity with the young are selection of orderly and continuous modes of occupation, which, while they lead up to and prepare for the indispensable activities of adult life, have their own sufficient justification in their present reflex influence upon the formation of habits of thought."<sup>3</sup>

Education and growth: "Acquisition of skill, possession of knowledge, attainment of culture are not ends: they are marks of growth and means to its continuing.... Getting from the present the degree and kind of growth there is in it is education."<sup>4</sup>

"Growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the principle of continuity."<sup>5</sup>

Education and morality: "The educative process is all one with the moral process."<sup>6</sup>

Theory and practice: "It is the business of educators to see that the conditions of expression of the practical interests are such as to encourage the developing of these intellectual phases of an activity, and thereby evoke a gradual transition to the theoretical type....

"When any one becomes interested in a problem as a problem and in inquiry and learning for the sake of solving the problem, interest is distinctively intellectual."<sup>7</sup>

The teacher as a Socratic "midwife": "Since learning is something that the pupil has to do himself and for himself, the initiative lies with the learner. The teacher is a guide and director."<sup>8</sup>

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1. Dewey, IMW, 259.

2. Dewey, IMW, 619.

3. Dewey, IMW, 617.

4. Dewey, IMW, 628.

5. Dewey, IMW, 664-665.

6. Dewey, IMW, 627.

7. Dewey, IMW, 614.

8. Dewey, IMW, 615.

Freedom and individuality: "Freedom or individuality, in short, is not an original possession or gift. It is something to be achieved, to be wrought out."<sup>1</sup>

Society and education: "One factor inherent in the situation is that schools do follow and reflect the social 'order' that exists."<sup>2</sup>

Education and social institutions: "Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a meaning, a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals."<sup>3</sup>

Other points on which Dewey and Plato are in essential agreement are: that society is at its best when individuals are doing that for which they are best fitted; that one of the essential tasks of education is to find and develop the leaders of society and that an individual's place in society should be determined by natural aptitude and not by wealth or birth. Both believe that society and education are necessarily associated and interdependent, and that education should reveal the values of life and give the student the basis for an organized life in harmony with moral insight.

These many points of similarity between Dewey and Plato in their educational theories, however, may obscure the fact that there are fundamental differences in their thought--the differences are primarily epistemological and metaphysical. We have seen how important epistemology and metaphysics are to Plato's fully developed ideas on education, and it might seem strange that Dewey and Plato could be so close in their thinking on education and so far apart on the more technical aspects of philosophy. In this difference lies the criticism that Plato would

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1. Dewey, IMW, 627.      2. Dewey, IMW, 692.      3. Dewey, IMW, 629.

probably direct at Dewey. Dewey asserts ends and purposes both individual and social for education and also maintains that in the broadest sense education and morality are essentially one, but he is also a relativist; Plato would be sure to ask for the "art of measure" by which Dewey assays the ends of education and thereby the ends of society and morality.

Plato is related to Dewey in much the same manner that Socrates is to Protagoras, as Plato describes that relationship in the Protagoras. Plato can accept most of the positive statements that Dewey makes in regard to education, but he would then ask Dewey, as Socrates asked Protagoras, for the basis of those assertions; as Socrates rejected Protagoras' sociological arguments, so he would reject Dewey's scientific method, not because it is not valuable but because it is insufficient as an explanation of the facts of experience. The chief merit of the experimental method is the degree of control that it gives man over his environment--but this can only mean our physical environment, since as Dewey himself states, the technological advance of modern physical and social sciences has not yet reached the point where it has become "artistic or human" and that the limits in this direction are "moral and intellectual, due to defects in our good will and knowledge."<sup>1</sup> These limitations, Dewey insists, are not metaphysically inherent in the very nature of experience; there is no need to appeal to a metaphysical realm,

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1. Dewey, RP, 88-89.

since all that is needed for the realization of values is the organization of past experience and present needs.<sup>1</sup> "For reason is experimental intelligence, conceived after the pattern of science, and used in the creation of social arts."<sup>2</sup>

Dewey has a great deal of factual material to draw upon which was not available to Plato; but Plato's scientific attitude is generally overlooked or underestimated. "The common notion that Plato was 'unscientific' must be pronounced an error."<sup>3</sup> Even with the great amount of scientific knowledge that mankind has at his disposal and the tremendous advance he has made in controlling his environment, there has been no such advance, as Dewey himself notes, in man's control over himself. The ethical and educational problems that Plato raised are as pertinent today as they ever were, and the basis of his criticisms of Protagoras still apply in general to Dewey. If there are ends, and purposes and social goods implicit in education, they rest on an organized system of values which in the final analysis depends on some objective reasonableness, the evaluation of the facts of experience, and this the scientific method, work or doing will not furnish. The standard for evaluation is what Plato sought in his analysis of man, society and education-- the scientific method, doing and practical experience are essential tools in the search for the common meeting-place of men's minds, and Plato

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1. Dewey, RP, 89.

2. Dewey, RP, 89.

3. Brett, HP, I, 66.

would be the first to admit their importance in this respect, but they are not in themselves criteria for the ends or purposes that man must have if there is to be any sense in his attempt to organize life in society meaningfully.

Dewey himself realizes the limitations of the scientific method, and proposes that it takes active intelligence to utilize the potential values of our technological advances;<sup>1</sup> but "intelligence" is not the same as "reason" and knowledge cannot be reduced to the certainty of absolute knowledge apprehended by pure reason.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the relative merits of these different attitudes may be, it clearly appears that "practically" the argument is, as it should be since Dewey is a contemporary, in Dewey's favor. The classic simplicity of the Republic, even under ideal conditions, could apply only to a small and comparatively simple social structure. To think, therefore, of the early dialogues and the Republic as old-fashioned and worthless to a complex modern society is to miss the point entirely.

Their profound simplicity, their reduction of human experience to fundamental issues is what makes these dialogues timeless. That we cannot accept the notion of the Philosopher-King does not destroy the argument that underlies such an ideal; for the Philosopher-King anticipates the idea of specialized and institutionalized government that governs in the interest of the people and the idea that justice stands

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1. Dewey, IMW, 339 ff.

2. Dewey, IMW, 313 ff.

above the decisions of a group of people even though in that group the majority may have decided for an unjust act. In trying to arrive at a form of government that would protect such a person as Socrates, Plato was anticipating the idea that an individual or a minority group should not be subject to the irrational motivations of a mob under the name of law. That he could hardly anticipate the machinery of jurisprudence, judicial review, or the constituted rights of an individual does not destroy the worth of his analysis; in fact, because he was forced to think the whole problem through without the aid of such concepts, the basic relationships between the individual and society, education and knowledge, law and justice and all the other problems discussed in this thesis are delineated with a clarity that would be hard to achieve at present. It is primarily in the problems that he raises and the relationships that he notes that Plato's value lies for the present day.

#### 7. Plato and modern education.

Popper and Dewey were introduced in order to try to show, in part, Plato's relation to the modern world. Popper's entirely negative attitude towards Plato is super-typical of much of the criticism that Plato's philosophy is receiving at present from men who have reputations as scholars. The approach in this thesis has been positive throughout, but this is not meant to imply that there is no criticism which can be made of Plato's thought as it applies to the modern world; the worth of

thinkers from the past, however, lies in the contributions that they can make to the present--criticism is necessarily a part of evaluation; but it is hard to see how Popper's caustic repudiation of Plato adds to our understanding of problems that face us today. If such an attitude were to become universal, it is we and not Plato who would suffer.

The brief summary of some of John Dewey's educational tenets was added in an attempt to indicate that Plato's fundamental ideas on education are not necessarily opposed to the ideals of society in a representative democracy and may in fact be very useful as a basis for criticism of our educational and social values. Dewey's philosophy of education is admittedly designed for democracy. But his thought, as far as education and its function are concerned, is not irreconcilable with Plato's philosophy of education. It has been noted that democracy in Plato's day and democracy at present have certain fundamental differences--it cannot be doubted that Plato would have approved of many of the principles and institutions of representative democracy, for instance, the Supreme Court of the United States. In many ways the justices of the Supreme Court are analogous to Plato's concept of the Philosopher-King; the position is one of high honor and even with the political machinations involved in the appointment of justices, they must have a certain educational background and are chosen for proven ability and experience. The lifetime appointment and the freedom from overt political pressure has placed above reproach the motivations behind the decisions of these

men. Their opinions interpret the principles upon which our government is based; they are subject to no laws except their own consciences; they have no standard except the "spirit of the constitution" and justice as they see it. The analogy can be carried just so far, but it would seem that there is enough similarity to justify the thought that many of the principles which Plato tried to instill in the ideal state by means of the Philosopher-King have been incorporated in representative democracy through other means.

The principles that Plato sought to realize through the Philosopher-King are not necessarily limited to the institution of judicial review. Ideally they should apply to all officials in a representative democracy.

The constitution does not impose on the elected politician and his aids the duty to follow the dictates of public opinion. It is the essence of representative government that the politician is voted into office on the theory that he can defend the interests of the people better than the people themselves.<sup>1</sup>

This departure from the traditional idea of what a democracy should theoretically be reflects the pace and complexity of political events in the modern world. Once the idea gains favor that government, for the most part, is the responsibility of trained specialists, or at least men with the ability to "defend the interests of the people," Plato's educational argument and its close alliance with the political structure becomes extremely valuable.

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1. Strausz and Possony, IR, 496.

As regards education itself, Professor Blanshard and four compatriots made a survey in 1945 of philosophy in higher education, the results of which were published in Philosophy in American Education. The general consensus of educators throughout the country was that philosophy in education today was not (1) performing its function of integrating knowledge (2) or giving students a "community of mind" (3) or a consistent definition of their society (democracy), its meaning and ends (4) and that it has failed to give the student the basis, opportunity or guidance necessary for forming a "philosophy of life."

Our graduates have a fair stock of information; granted; but it lies about in their minds in fragments which need to be welded together to make a usable instrument. Secondly, they have been so busy boring educational holes, acquiring specialized knowledge and skills, that they now have little in common in the way of ideas, standards, or principles. Thirdly, they should understand better the nature and demands of the democracy in which they are to play their part. Fourthly, there is a want of clarity about the great ends of living, attachment to which gives direction and unity to life.<sup>1</sup>

If these are the failures of philosophy in education today, it becomes obvious why the principles behind Plato's theory of education are as important now as they were in his own day; for these are exactly the points that Plato tried to resolve into one harmonious whole in the educational state, where a way of life depends on knowledge which gives to the citizen a "community of mind" because the values of the individual are consistent with the values of his society.

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1. Blanshard, PAE, 10.

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Apology.

Charmides.

Apol.

Charm.

Pages

401-425.

3-27.

<u>Vol. I. The Dialogues of Plato (Continued).</u>		<u>Pages</u>
<u>Cratylus.</u>	<u>Craty.</u>	173-231.
<u>Crito.</u>	<u>Crito.</u>	427-439.
<u>Euthydemus.</u>	<u>Euthyd.</u>	133-171.
<u>Euthyphro.</u>	<u>Euthyph.</u>	383-399.
<u>Gorgias.</u>	<u>Gorg.</u>	505-587.
<u>Ion.</u>	<u>Ion.</u>	285-299.
<u>Laches.</u>	<u>Laches.</u>	55-79.
<u>Lysis.</u>	<u>Lysis.</u>	31-52.
<u>Meno.</u>	<u>Meno.</u>	349-381.
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis, Plato's Philosophy of Education in the Early Dialogues, is, as the title would suggest, concerned with the ideas on education that Plato discusses in the early dialogues. Plato's use of the dialogue and the Socratic method place him among the foremost teachers of all time, and some of his practical suggestions, and his educational precepts are extremely cogent, but it is with education in the larger sense of paideia or culture that this thesis is concerned. It has tried to analyze the place of education in relation to the development of Plato's philosophy by means of what here has been called "the educational argument."

The educational argument attempts to trace the course of Plato's thought from the investigation of virtue or arete' in relation to the individual who asks what it means to be virtuous and what the advantages of being virtuous are, to the problem which emerges from that investigation: Can virtue be taught? The examination of "popular opinions" in the shorter dialogues introduces this problem by showing the conflicting and fuzzy thoughts that are all too prevalent and the need that exists for clear and organized thinking on the subject of whether man can improve himself and whether he can be aided in that improvement by being "taught." The problem of virtue and whether it can be taught is essentially the same as the problem of "the good life." It is perhaps easier to see that if virtue is actively sought it will be sought because

it contributes to the "good life," but it is not so clear that "the good life" implies virtue--this is the fact which Plato wished to establish.

The problem of the good life and the problem of whether virtue can be taught are actually one, then; from a consideration of what the best possible life is, the social and practical problems of the individual and his relation to society are most easily seen, for the good life would necessarily include not only the individual's choices and actions in society but also that society itself, for it follows that the best possible life can be lived only in the best possible society. Once it is shown that the good life includes social problems, the question of teaching virtue becomes paramount, for if individuals cannot be influenced for their own good and the good of society by the education that they receive, there is little hope for social organization propitious to the conscious realization of the good life. In other words, if the good life is to go beyond the egocentric regard for personal welfare, man must be able to control to some extent the environment in which he lives, and one of the most important aspects of that environment, Plato felt, was the moral and intellectual climate which could only be governed by education.

The problem of teaching virtue, when fully investigated, contains all the technical aspects of philosophy. Beginning with the more systematic investigation of virtue itself in the Protagoras, the problem begins to snowball, for virtue is there defined as "knowledge," and happiness is said to depend on "the art of measure." The questions of what knowledge

is, what it means to teach virtue, what happiness consists of and what the "art of measure" is, eventually involve Plato's epistemology, psychology, metaphysics, axiology, and the rudiments of his theology. None of these technical aspects of philosophy are considered in themselves; they are all part of one ethical whole in which education plays a fundamental role.

By trying to integrate all the potentialities of man, all the various aspects of personality that are "natural," Plato demonstrates that no one personality potential or desire should be exclusively appealed to as the guide to "the good life." A predisposition to any one of life's many possibilities results in an "inversion" of values that is unnatural; the principle that should govern is the intrinsic goodness--the good--of any value seen in relation to all the values, purposes, and ends of life conceived as an organic whole.

Once the way has been paved by the shorter "negative" dialogues, the "educational argument" becomes more positive in the Symposium, Meno, and Gorgias. The Symposium presents the thought that man's happiness depends on the fullest realization of his natural potential and that the motivating force behind self-realization is love, the desire for self-expression rooted in the desire for immortal perfection and happiness. The highest expression of this desire is the desire for wisdom--a desire which can be guided or educated to the point of fulfillment but which cannot be satisfied by the transfer of factual knowledge from

teacher to student.

Both the Meno and the Symposium state that the awareness of ignorance, the insight into the unrealized potentialities of man, is the beginning of real wisdom. The person who is stimulated by this awareness may struggle on to real knowledge--the knowledge of eternal values known to the immortal soul. Such a man would be truly virtuous, truly just and, since the just man wills ends that are good and since the highest function of the just man is that of the statesman, he will accept the responsibility and teach the people to be better. The truly powerful man is portrayed in the Gorgias as a just man, and he can protect himself and the values for which he stands only if he is a statesman-educator who will rule on the basis of eternal values and not by "true opinion." Because he "possesses" true knowledge he wills ends that are truly good for himself and because he is an intrinsic part of society those ends will be good for the state.

The best life possible and the good state are necessarily associated, and their materialization depends on the soul's recall of supernal values. The possibility of the soul's recalling these eternal truths depends on the profound awareness of ignorance (Socrates the gadfly) and proper guidance (Socrates the midwife); thus it is that we come to realize the full importance of the need for Socrates' new paideia which will be primarily education for the "soul," the total personality including its irrational elements.

Plato relates most of his ideas in the beautifully simple construction of the Republic, where he gives each concept its proper place in a complete social structure; in many cases, the real importance of his thoughts in the shorter dialogues can only be appreciated through the Republic and, conversely, much of the Republic presupposes the earlier dialogues. The Gorgias does not place the statesman in society but is rather a critical introduction which clears the ground for the positive development in the Republic by analyzing the political ideals existing in Athens in Plato's time. To resolve the conflict between Athenian law and justice, symbolized by the unjust conviction of Socrates, Plato declares that a complete reorganization of Greek society is needed to accommodate a new kind of statesman, who will be primarily an educator.

The structure of the Republic follows the development of the "educational argument." It begins by asking what the value of justice is to the individual. Plato develops the idea that the values to which individuals aspire determine the form of the state; the ideal state would then reflect the nature of the perfectly just soul. The perfect state would come into being only if there could be a Philosopher-King whose justice would be grounded on the knowledge of eternal values and not "true opinion." These values, or Forms are revealed through the soul's intuitive knowledge of the Good. In the Republic, the analogy of the Sun indicates the metaphysical reality of the Good; the analogy of the Line presents the argument that the mode of perception, the way in which an object is

known, has a one-to-one correlation with its metaphysical status; the Allegory of the Cave sums up the relation between education, epistemology, metaphysics and politics and shows the pivotal position that Socrates' new paideia has in those relationships.

Education guides the soul from the lowest form of perception to the highest; these modes of "knowing" have objects that vary in their degrees of reality; when the soul "sees" the good, its reality and "light" reveal truly these various degrees of reality for the first time; thus education, epistemology and metaphysics are integrally connected. The Good is the criterion of "the good life" and knowledge of it allows the just man to will ends that he knows are good; the knowledge of true reality, then, implies that the good life is the ethical life. The just man, to lead the ethical life, must have the power in the state, he must be the law, and this in turn means that he must be an educator--the Philosopher-King--since ends consistently good imply the best society in which happiness of the citizens as a whole must be given preference; and their happiness depends on their being made better and freely willing that the Philosopher-King should govern.

Much of Plato's philosophy, and especially the idea of the authoritarian Philosopher-King is considered by some contemporary thinkers to be inimical to democracy; but Plato's definition of democracy and the modern ideal of representative democracy are vastly different, whereas the principles that are symbolized by Socrates and the

Philosopher-King need only be translated into modern terms for many of them to be completely in harmony with the best traditions of representative democracy. Plato's analysis of education and its relation to human happiness and society are especially valuable to an understanding of the fundamental problems of modern education.