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Plato's Solution to the Ideological Crisis of the Greek Aristocracy

The division of labor is a skillful deployment of man's powers; it increases society's production—its power and its pleasures—but it curtails, reduces the ability of every person taken individually.

—Adam Smith

The Wealth of Nations

If it is legitimate to see in Sophokles' *Philoktetes* an implicit appropriation and transformation of sophistic anthropology and educational theory, it must be acknowledged that such a reading places a heavy burden of meaning on the frame of ancient myth which constitutes the poet's narrative raw material. That frame, as Sophokles has tailored it, is just a story of three men on a deserted island. This cannot be in any real sense a society, and even as a putative metaphorical image of a society it is remarkably restricted—just two older men battling for the adherence of a third, younger man. There are no women, no children, no economy other than the elemental survival efforts of one of the men. The form of Greek tragedy is inextricably bound with the profoundly ambiguous and indirect communicative mode of mythic narrative.

When we turn to the *Republic*, we find an explicit examination of not only the constitutive elements of a society but also the issue of the modes of communication. One cannot but be struck by the will of this text to be explicit, to escape from the shadow world of mythic, narrative representations and spell out at last the "whole truth." We are accordingly tempted to read it on its own terms as somehow the final word. It is just the sort of text that the New Right has in mind when it celebrates the classics as monumental repositories of eternal truths.¹

¹Is it an accident that one of Allan Bloom's major intellectual endeavors before *The Closing of the American Mind* was a militantly proclaimed and mechanically executed literal translation with notes and an interpretive essay of Plato's *Republic*? One brief sample suffices: "Socrates, in leading them [his pupil interlocutors] to a justice which is not Athenian, or even Greek, but is rather human, precisely because it is rational, shows the way

Both the liberal denunciations of the *Republic* by Karl Popper (1963) and the equally passionate (in its own quiet English way) defense by Guthrie (*HGP* 4) tend toward a certain monumentalizing of Plato, treating him as an atemporal essence to be combatted or protected in the light of atemporal projections of personal faith. While I focus primarily on Plato's ideological contributions in the long discourse of inherited excellence, what I explore most in this text are its contradictions, its puzzling lacunae, the questions posed by its shifts in tone from mystic rapture to savage bitterness and despair, from confident protreptic to ferocious diatribe—all the complex ways it is imbedded in the muck of a real, unique historical conjuncture. To explore these is not to disparage Plato, nor to lock him safely in an irretrievably dead past, but to try to come closer to the sources of the *Republic's* relevance for us—caught as we are in our own unique historical muck.

Ideology and History

A work of the magnitude of the *Republic* does not emerge from a vacuum. But how we conceive of its background or context is not so simple. It is a response, but not a reflection. What the text responds to is in a substantial sense the raw material out of which it is produced. These raw materials include both what the author repudiates and what he or she transforms from a specific culture and society. To adapt a famous saying of Marx, authors make texts, but not under conditions of their own choosing. Moreover, how one envisions the fullness of what this text responds to is not available simply as a straightforward inference from the text itself, for the strategy of passing over in silence what is deeply disturbing is among the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of ideological warfare.² Thus the silences in the text may be fully as revealing of the meaning of the *Republic* to its own audience as what we have in our text.

One of the fascinations of the *Republic* is how consciously it designates what it rejects as a "system of representations" (Althusser 1969:

to the truth about political things and develops the extremely complex relationship of that truth to civil society. These questions are most relevant to modern man, although they are perhaps harder for him to understand than for men of any previous generation" (1968: 309–10).

²In focusing on meaningful silences and the raw materials of literary production I am indebted to the work of Pierre Macherey (1978). Pindar declares, "What is without god is best passed over in silence," suggesting a conscious strategy of suppressing denigrated material. Macherey tentatively proposes what becomes the title and point of departure of Jameson's *Political Unconscious* (1981). I am not concerned in dealing with Plato to distinguish systematically what I consider conscious or unconscious silences.

231), an imaginary or dream relation to reality, which is embedded in specific apparatuses (compare Althusser 1971: 143) of the democratic state (the assembly, the courts, the theaters, the army camps; *Rep.* 6.492b5–c2). For most readers it is Plato, rather than the Sophists whom he follows, and most of all in the *Republic*, who first designates this whole realm of the cultural sphere (broadly defined) as the decisive site of political struggle (compare Althusser 1971: 147). The self-consciousness and explicitness of much of the *Republic* would seem then to free it of a meaningful unconscious and to render its silences irrelevant; but, as I hope becomes clear, the situation is not so simple.

The notion of a meaningful silence is inherently problematic. The field of what might be left out as opposed to what is actually in the text seems potentially infinite and easily lends itself to a *reductio ad absurdum*. There must then be at least some hint, a symptom as Althusser would say, that the author is somehow aware of what is silenced and has reasons for this silence which admit of meaningful analysis (Macherey 1978: 125–28).

Such an approach implies an inevitable circularity between the text and sources outside the text about the text's potential raw materials. An uncritical survey of what any handbook might designate as the subject matter of the *Republic* suggests the multiple levels and spheres of reality to which we may envision the text responding: politics, economics, education and culture, philosophy, the meaning of justice. Thus the specific political institutions of Athens and Greece, the internal politics of Athens and to some extent the rest of the Greek world and at least its recent political history, the economic structures of Greece and its economic relations throughout the Mediterranean, the contemporary content and practice of education in Athens and Greece, whatever was available to Plato within the broadest conceivable purview of philosophy, the whole range of ideas and institutions associated with justice—all these are potentially relevant to assessing the *Republic* as a response to its concrete historical moment.

Finally, as suggested above, we must consider Plato's response on the level of form. Admittedly, in dealing with a literary text there is always an inevitable distortion that accompanies the analytic advantages of a separation of form and content. But if the medium is literally the message, it remains true that different messages are in fact conveyed within what broadly may be called the same medium. In a work as radically self-conscious about media as the *Republic*, we must also consider in what sense its own medium entails a response to the range of available options.

The paralyzing vastness of this array can be somewhat narrowed if we assume that one responds only to what one perceives as requiring a

response, in short, what is perceived as a threat or a crisis. On this view, the institution of slavery, which for an older orthodox Marxism was virtually the only aspect of antiquity worth talking about, does not qualify. Even Gouldner, who is close to that orthodoxy, acknowledges: "Although Plato recognizes the tensions between masters and slaves—indeed, he has no doubt that slaves will, given the chance, murder their masters—these are viewed as within the nature of things. Slavery is not regarded, as other tensions he discusses, as a source of disunity to be remedied or a diversity to be mediated" (1969: 78). This is not to deny that such elements as slavery, so deeply naturalized in the consciousness of the Athenian citizenry, leave no traces in the thought processes of the text.³ But Plato, born in the early 420s⁴ and writing the *Republic* perhaps in the decade of the 370s,⁵ had lived through and, one may say from his other presumably earlier writings, thought through several more immediate crises than slavery. That these included especially those of the latter half of the fifth century is a reasonable inference from Plato's choice of a form that specifically sets the issues in an earlier historical context, even if we cannot precisely fix the dramatic date of the dialogue.⁶ At the same time, this historical displacement is one of the most obvious factors that justifies our looking for structured silences: fateful changes had taken place between 409, the latest dra-

³I admire Gouldner's ingenious speculations, based as they are on Farrington's more orthodox Marxism, about the relation between a free aristocrat's socialization in a slave-owning society and a metaphysics that sees the "material universe as a disorderly subject" (194). I even agree that "Greek slavery is intrinsically conducive to a view of the material universe as a disorderly subject" (195). But the best textual evidence Gouldner cites is from the *Laws*, written at a time when perhaps indeed "the latent social problems implicit in slavery are slowly becoming manifest social problems" (195). In treating the *Republic*, I am more concerned with those problems that leave more readily discernible symptoms in the text than the single admittedly revealing fantasy Gouldner cites from *Rep.* 578e. One can as easily and more relevantly say of the *Republic* that Athenian democracy was, from the perspective of an Athenian aristocrat, intrinsically conducive to a view of the material universe as a disorderly subject. In this I am nearer the emphasis of the Woods (1978) on laboring citizens, though I did not look at their work until I had worked out my own analysis.

⁴Guthrie (*HGP* 4.10) opts for 427 B.C. Davies (1971: 333) gives a fuller account of reasons for 428–27. The standard older date (e.g., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 1949) was 429, to coincide with the death of Perikles.

⁵Guthrie (*HGP* 4.437–38) considers c. 374 the prevailing view. MacKendrick (1969: 12) opts for "publication" of the *Republic* in 372 on the grounds that Plato sets down fifty-five as the age of one's maximum intellectual powers, a slightly silly hypothesis but not perhaps incompatible with the coy indirection of Plato's self-praise elsewhere in the *Republic*.

⁶Guthrie (*HGP* 4.437–38) reviews various dates and opts for Taylor's 421 as a rough approximation. Although it is generally recognized that Plato is little concerned with chronological accuracy, I am inclined to believe that the battle of Megara referred to at *Rep.* 368a is far more likely to be the one in 409 than in 424. My reason is the perhaps circular one that only in 409 would Plato himself have been of military age and therefore legitimately included in the striking praise of the "sons of Ariston."

matic date posited for the dialogue, and c. 370, the latest date proposed for the completion of the *Republic*.⁷ Is it remotely plausible that Plato could be responding exclusively to the crises remembered from his twenties without at least filtering them through the hindsight of a man who had lived into his fifties?

What Crises?

The first blatant political crisis undergone by Athenian democracy was the demonstration of its vulnerability to oligarchic subversion and domination (the Four Hundred in 411 masterminded by Plato's relative Antiphon; the Thirty imposed by Sparta in 403 and among whom were Plato's relatives Kritias and Kharmides). Then, after the death of Perikles, Athenian democracy suffered increasingly from what Hignett (1958: 259–68; see 280–84) describes as a constitutional separation of word and deed. The Periklean model of aristocratic *strategoi*, who both articulated and carried out policy, was largely supplanted by orators who persuaded the assembly which paths to follow and by professional military men who carried out the assembly's decrees.⁸ At the same time, the success of the Spartan full-time military machine seemed to spell the doom of the versatile democratic citizen-soldier, who farmed in the cool months, rowed or acted as hoplite in the hot ones, and participated in the business of government to the extent that his geographic location, leisure, and inclination allowed.

But if the model democracy seemed to be self-destructing, the model oligarchy was also manifesting some striking drawbacks. The enormous moral prestige of Sparta, particularly in the eyes of non-Spartan aristocrats, had been seriously impaired by the brutality, insensitivity, and greed so abundantly displayed in their brief period of unchallenged mastery of the Greek world (Cartledge 1987: 82–96). In an amazingly short period they succeeded in alienating their oldest allies (Thebes and Corinth) and pushing them into the arms of their oldest enemies (Athens and Argos). In any case, after the battle of Leuctra (371 B.C.) the unique economic basis of their way of life, the enslaved Greeks

⁷Cross and Woosley (1979: xii-xiv) describe the problem only to mystify it: "There is no abrupt change between the closing quarter of the fifth century and fourth century when he was writing the *Republic*. The problems about moral standards and about government . . . are perennial problems anyhow." If nothing else qualifies as an abrupt change, at least the decisive defeat of the Athenian empire in 404 should give one pause about this judgment.

⁸B. Strauss qualifies this generally valid analysis with examples from the 390s of several successful generals who were also politically active (1987: 14).

of Messenia, was dismantled (A. H. M. Jones 1967: 94–146; Davies 1978: 147–64).

Finally, autocratic rule—whether inherited as in the case of Archelaos of Macedon (reigning 413–399) or the result of a forcible seizure of power as in the case of Dionysios of Syracuse (reigning c. 406–367)—had taken a new lease on life with the predominance of mercenary soldiers in the fourth century (Davies 1978: 202–11). Polos in the *Gorgias* actually names Archelaos as an ideal, one vigorously defended by Kallikles later in the dialogue and confidently consigned by Sokrates to the tortures of Hades at the end of that dialogue. Dionysios is never named in the extant dialogues of Plato, a suggestive silence, but the “Seventh Letter” recounts repeated journeys by Plato to his court in the vain hope of implementing the program of the philosopher-monarch.⁹ Indeed, we are tempted by a hindsight not available to Plato to pronounce the monarchic form of government the wave of the future in light of Philip’s and Alexander’s subsequent subjugation of the exhausted city-states of Greece.¹⁰ It would be more accurate to say that, as a consequence of the record of both democracy, dependent on an amateur military and an amateur bureaucracy; and oligarchy, torn by the feuds of men bent above all on individual power and revenge, authoritarian monarchy—supported by professional mercenary armies and a new class of well-trained, professional bureaucrats (Davies 1978: chap. 10)—loomed on the horizon as an alternative with enormous appeal to some segments of the old ruling classes.

The condition of the economy can be separated only arbitrarily from the political and social crises of the period. The collapse of the lucrative sea empire of Athens and its humiliating defeat by oligarchic Sparta brought in their wake an insoluble economic crisis for the restored democracy, and the attempt to revive the empire in 377 fostered old hostilities without dramatically improving the economic situation.¹¹ It is plausible to infer that, even before the fall of the empire, the war costs imposed on what Davies calls the liturgical class (the 1–2 percent of the citizenry capable of annually bearing the cost of outfitting a trireme;

⁹On the genuineness of the “Seventh Letter,” see, in addition to Guthrie *HGP* 5.401–2 n. 1, Raven 1965: 20–26. Both Raven and Guthrie are at pains to read this evidence exactly as Plato, or his apologist, would most like it to be read. That Plato had serious misgivings about the whole project is plausible enough, but that he actually went to Sicily three times suggests to me at least that he had some hopes beyond gratifying his friend Dion.

¹⁰For important qualifications, see Gomme 1937: 204–47.

¹¹See Davies 1981: esp. 24, French 1964: esp. 175, A. H. M. Jones 1964: 3–20, Meiggs 1972: 255–72, and Ste. Croix 1981: 292–93. Ste. Croix’s note 37 on 607 gives an impressive list of evidence for the economic straits of fourth-century Athens. B. Strauss 1987 is an admirably succinct and well-documented account of the economic, social, and political consequences of the foreign and civil wars of Athens.

1981: 9–28) played a significant role in driving even those aristocrats who had originally been enthusiastic supporters of Periklean democracy to explore ever more radical oligarchic alternatives.¹² A second economic, social, and political consequence of this development was the physical and economic decimation of the old ruling class not only in thirty years of foreign war but as well in the ferocious factionalism of the last decade of the fifth century (B. Strauss 1987: 54–55).¹³ Beside this gradual diminution of the old aristocracy we find the increasing prominence, beginning already in the wake of Perikles' death and dramatically expanding in the fourth century, of nouveaux riches.¹⁴ Finally, though the matter is debated, there is significant evidence for a general economic decline not only of Athens but of all Greece in the fourth century.¹⁵

How should we conceive of the educational and cultural crisis to which the *Republic* putatively responded? I believe that a key dimension is what Havelock has called the literate revolution (1963, 1978, 1982). He contends that well into the fifth century the majority of Greeks, whether they had learned the alphabet or not, continued to “process” their relation to the world in oral terms, in the concrete, sensuously engaging publically performed discourse of poetry. Meanwhile, an ever wider gap was opening between this majority and the elite, whose longer education gave them the opportunity to absorb and begin to think through the implications of a world perceived, analyzed, and reconceived through the medium of texts. The emergence of institutions of advanced learning, such as Isocrates' school (in the late 390s B.C.), provided a formal structure for consolidating this growing split. Certainly the *Republic*, insofar as it is manifesto for a concrete institution, the Academy, represents on this level at least an eminently practical response.

Vernant and many others, pointing to written laws and constitutions as well as to other sorts of public inscriptions including *ostraca*,

¹²Field (1967: 5), cited with approval by Guthrie (*HGP* 4.12), argues that the war was especially burdensome to the Athenian ruling class. This claim is disputed by A. H. M. Jones (1964: 23–30) and Ste. Croix (1981: 290), but Ste. Croix acknowledges (291) that the attempted coup of 411 was carried out by the “wealthiest Athenians: the trierarchs (Thuc. VIII.47.2)” — exactly Field's point. We might add that Plato himself describes democracy in Bk. 8 as a form of government in which “the drones pasture on” the rich, who in turn are described as “most orderly/upright by nature” (*kosmiotatoi phusei*, 8.564e6–13). But the sense of “especially” in assessing such burdens has much to do with the virtual monopoly of cultural production by the ruling class.

¹³B. Strauss also argues that the disproportionately large number of *thetes* killed in the war actually lessened the tensions between rich and poor: “Politics might [otherwise] have taken on a more radical colour” (1987: 58).

¹⁴On the nouveaux riches of the fourth century, see MacKendrick 1969: 3, 5–6, and B. Strauss 1987: 47–50. For the fifth century, see Connor 1971: 155–68, Ste. Croix 1981: 290, and Davies 1981: 68–72.

¹⁵In favor of decline see Ste. Croix 1981: 294, citing Rostovtzeff (1941) and Mossé (1962).

present an alternative picture of widespread functional literacy as early as the sixth century.¹⁶ But this evidence points also to a whole new impetus for a specifically democratic oral culture: the polis opened new realms for public discourse in the political and juridical spheres and committed significant resources of the state to religious events where poetic discourse inevitably became, if it had not been so before, the dominant medium for articulating the entire community's representations of its values, conflicts, anxieties, and aspirations—in Althusser's terms, key ideological apparatuses of the state and the site par excellence of ideological struggle. The twin developments of rhetoric and public poetry in Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries might thus be said to reinvent a new oral age in which, regardless of the number of technically literate citizens, the medium of oral, artful speech dominated every aspect of life and thought.

In this framework, what we can tell of the nature of formal education for the fortunate few males needs to be kept in tandem with what we know of the massive public education conducted in the *panyx* (assembly), the agora, the courts, the theater of Dionysos, and other festival locations and encompassing in many cases the entire population including women, slaves, and children.¹⁷ Both forms of education seemed to involve a tremendous amount of memorization, internalization, of poetic discourse. Xenophon's representation (*Symposium* 3.5–6) of someone who claimed to have memorized all of Homer, when it is set beside Aristophanes' frequent parodies of tragedy and epic and Plutarch's story (*Nicias* 29) of Athenian sailors who won their freedom in Syracuse by singing choruses of Euripides, confirms the picture Plato's own dialogues give us of Athenians who always have lines of Homer, lyric, and drama at the tips of their tongues and—more to the point—who consistently cite poetry as a warrant for an enormous array of social values and practices. The institutional threat of the Sophists' advanced education available for any males who could pay for it was twofold. Within the established ruling class it threatened the system of interfamily alliances. This system in turn was sustained in no small measure, it seems, through the practice of aristocratic pederasty completely imbedded in the twin institutions of the gymnasia and the symposia, which constituted the very essence of the old Athenian *paideia*.¹⁸

¹⁶Vernant 1982: esp. 52–54, Marrou 1982: 43, and Murray 1980: 91–99.

¹⁷"It should be remembered that the way of life of the city itself constituted a powerful informal education" (Barrow 1976: 13). Though there is no uncontested evidence, there seems to be general agreement today that women were present at Greek drama; see Picard-Cambridge 1968: 264–65. On women's religious festivals, see Pomeroy 1975: 75–78 and Zeitlin 1982. On Athenian festivals in general, see Parke 1977.

¹⁸On the "old" Athenian education, see Marrou 1982: 36–45; on pederasty, 26–35. Marrou stresses the anti-intellectualism of the world of sport and gymnastics but recog-

A more obvious political and social crisis triggered by the Sophists was the rise of so-called "new men" with skills formerly monopolized by the aristocracy in Athenian politics. We have independent evidence in Thucydides and Aristophanes of the ferocious, ruling-class bitterness inspired by Kleon and other new men in Athenian politics.¹⁹ The range of Lysias' clients attests independently to his political success, and Plato himself offers powerful evidence for the impact of this "mere" metic on Athenian intellectual life.²⁰

As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the Sophists' education involved a great deal more than how to play tricks with words. But their focus on an ever more self-conscious practice of the art of verbal persuasion had a contradictory relation to the new orality of fifth-century Athens. On the one hand, it inevitably fostered that orality by heightening the excitement of public discourse, which under their influence became more sensuously gratifying—more poetic—even as poetry became more rhetorical (J. H. Finley: 1967; Denniston 1952: 10–21). On the other hand, their theorization of the power of language deepened the growing sense of an unbridgeable epistemological gulf between the world represented in sensuously gratifying poetic and rhetorical discourse and the analytic constructs achieved through the textual vision.²¹ Here the Sophists were simply pursuing specifically in the

nizes the symposium as the site par excellence of aristocratic homosexual *paideia*. See also Dover 1978: esp. 202–3 and Havelock 1952: 95–108.

¹⁹Thucydides 3.36.6–41; 4.21.3–22.3 and 39.3; 5.16.1. Aristophanes refers to Kleon constantly: *Birds* 6, 299–300, 377, 502, 659; *Knights* 976; *Clouds* 586, 591; *Peace* 47; *Frogs* 569; and *Wasps* passim. Connor (1971: 163–68) is at pains to stress the anti-intellectualism and lack of culture of the new politicians. Kleon, the prime example, may not have been adept on the lyre at the symposium (see *Wasps* 1220–42 and MacDowell, ad loc.), but he was no untutored orator. B. Strauss (1987: 12) assumes that those who governed Athens c. 400 "could afford to be educated by sophists" and, citing the allusion to Kleon at a symposium, questions Connor's belief that Kleon did without a network of political allies (*philoi*), relying "exclusively on oratory to build a political following" (16). Many of the fourth-century nouveaux riches, however, shared the political quietism MacKendrick (1969: 3) notes as characteristic of much of the old aristocracy; see also Carter 1986: 155–86 on Plato's relation to this withdrawal from political activism (*apragmosunē*).

²⁰The *Phaedrus* purports to give us the text of one of Lysias' speeches which inspired sufficient enthusiasm to be memorized by the young aristocrat Phaidros. The scene of the *Republic* is the home of Lysias' father Kephalos, where aristocrats are much in evidence. Lysias is also mentioned twice in the little dialogue *Kleitophon*.

²¹E.g., Gorgias: "Nothing exists; second, even if it exists it is inapprehensible to man; third, even if it is apprehensible, still it is without a doubt incapable of being expressed or explained to the next man" (*D-K B 3*, trans. Kennedy in Sprague 1972), or Protagoras on the gods: "Concerning the gods I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist, or what form they might have, for there is much to prevent one's knowing: the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of man's life" (*D-K B 4*, trans. O'Brien in Sprague 1972). Cf. Democritus on sense perception: "There are two forms of knowledge, one genuine, one obscure. To the obscure belong all the following: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. The other is genuine, and quite distinct from this" (*D-K B 68*, trans. Kirk in Kirk and Raven 1957).

realm of language the explorations of the *physikoi*—Herakleitos, Parmenides, Empedocles, and the Pythagoraeans—which opposed in more and more categorical terms the realm of the senses, of engendering and of dying, to the stable structural determinants revealed by (literate) analysis. Whether these were termed *logos* or *philia* or *theos* or *harmonia*, they were equally inaccessible to the senses and equally at odds with the oral poetic version of reality.²²

As we have seen, in their social and anthropological speculations both the Presocratic teachers and the Sophistic teachers of rhetoric forged a fundamental ideological assault on the philosophical foundations of the domination of society by an aristocracy of birth. If human beings were like other animals and their most relevant features were their intelligence and capacity to learn and to form social bonds, then claims to power based on descent from divinity emerged as quite irrelevant. Though the Sophists acknowledged *phusis* in the sense of superior innate endowments, education became far more decisive than inherited qualities.²³

In any case, the Sophists seem to have dissociated completely innate abilities from specific genealogy. Protagoras' analogy, in Plato's dialogue named after him, of a city where everyone is single-mindedly engaged in flute playing acknowledges that there are natural differences in individuals' abilities, but it specifically denies that these are likely to be transmitted from parent to child. Such differences are purely accidental and relatively insignificant compared to the impact of the mobilization of all the educational resources of the city toward guaranteeing that everyone is at least an adequate flute player. Thus we find Protagoras resorting to such new coinages as *euphuēs* or *aphuēs pros ti* (with or without natural talent for something) with no indication of this talent deriving from parentage.²⁴

Protagoras offers the first extant serious analysis of the socialization process, education conceived of in the broadest terms, ranging from the ministrations of nurses and parents to the whole array of public discourses learned in formal education and by participation in the cultural and political life of the state. The breadth and subtlety of this conception went far toward questioning the long-established associations

²²See Guthrie *HGP* 1 and 2. For a specifically Marxist analysis of this development (not in my judgment entirely convincing), see Thomson 1961 and Sohn-Rethel 1978.

²³E.g., "Education requires natural ability [*phuseōs*] and training [*askēseōs*]" (Protagoras *D-K B 3*). But "more become excellent [*agathoi*] from practice [*meletēs*] than from natural endowment [*phusios*]" (Democritus *D-K B 242*).

²⁴These usages pervade Protagoras' "great speech" in Plato's dialogue of that name. That they are not purely platonic is suggested by phrases such as "without natural endowment for learning [*aphuēs es mathēsin*]" (Democritus *D-K B 85*; cf. Democritus *B 56*, *B 109*; Pythagoras *D 11*).

of *phusis* with stability, permanence, and immutability—pushing the concept nearer, as we have seen already in the case of Neoptolemos, to mere potentiality, which, deprived of the right education, might be quite easily perverted. Democritos articulates perhaps the most subversive juxtaposition of *phusis* and education: “Nature and teaching are similar. And the reason is that teaching transforms the rhythm of a human being, and in changing the rhythm creates the nature” (*Hē phusis kai hē didakhē paraplēsion esti. Kai gar hē didakhē metarhysmoi ton anthrōpon, metarhysmousa de phusiopoiei*; *D-K B 33*). The bold coinage *phusiopoiei* (lit. “makes nature”) claims for education fully equal power with *phusis* to determine the actual constitution of the individual. The power of this analysis, supported by real-life instances of the mediocrity of some sons of Athens’ greatest political and military figures (*Prot.* 319e3–b3, 328c5–d1; *Laches* 179a1–d7) left no room for the aristocratic confidence of a Pindar in the automatic emergence of aristocratic superiority. At the same time, the Sophists’ emphasis on success through education contributed to the professionalization of politics that ultimately spelled the death of the democracy that had summoned the Sophists into existence in the first place.

Plato's Response: The Form and Structure of the *Republic*

Prose

As Macherey has argued, “the work contains its ideological content, not just in the propagation of a specific ideology but in the elaboration of a specific form” (1978: 116). In considering Plato's response to the diverse developments reviewed in the previous section, I begin on the formal level with Plato's medium of communication. The Presocratics and lawgivers of the sixth century may tentatively be given credit for the invention of prose, if by prose we mean specifically the composition, recording, and dissemination of nonmetrical communication.²⁵ It is surely not accidental that this formal innovation corresponds with the first recorded assaults on the poetic *paideia* of Homer and Hesiod (Havelock 1982: 220–60). Perhaps even more revealing is the presence of this same critical note in Xenophanes (*D-K B 10, 11, 12*), who chose to communicate in the poetic medium. It is as if he calls attention to the apparent contradiction between his repudiation of the oral-poetic vision of reality and his desire to compete with that view in a medium

²⁵See Denniston 1952: 1. For a subtler meditation on the implications of the emergence of prose, see Kittay and Godzich 1987, which focuses on medieval Europe.

so deeply entwined with it. The formal innovation of the Sophists was to compose in prose writing a specifically political discourse that had previously been framed orally. The consequence was to some extent a new politics. The combination of more tightly structured argument and more sensuously engaging style must have widened the gap between those who could afford such training and those who could not. As we have already indicated, this is arguably an anti-democratic side of their practice. But to the extent that their new discourse was poetic, it bathed the business of democracy in the aura of the heroic world. To the extent that it applied new analytic perspectives to that practice, it underlined the fundamental break with the values of the heroic world. The speeches in Thucydides, especially those of the Sophists' chief sponsor, Perikles, are perhaps our best indication of this dual movement.²⁶

Plato's formal response in the *Republic*, dramatic dialogue, is in one sense something he had already employed for perhaps thirty years—in the dramatized conversations between Sokrates and others. The relation of this dialogue form to the mimes of Sophron or to mostly lost attempts by other pupils of Sokrates to preserve or imitate the flavor of actual socratic conversations is much debated, but the existence of some immediate models, however remote they may have been from what we have in Plato, nonetheless suggests that here too there is no creation ex nihilo.²⁷ On the contrary, Plato's handling of the dialogue form in the *Republic* suggests that he is attempting to compete with the dominant media of Greek culture before him—Homeric epic and tragedy—while implicitly being trapped in the very mode of representation he seeks to overthrow and supplant.²⁸

Much has been written about the philosophical and psychological advantages of platonic dialogue form, its capacity to engage the reader in the actual struggle for the truth and its dramatization of Plato's battles against part of his own nature (e.g., Friedländer 1958: 154–70;

²⁶For me, the best analysis of the fusion of heroic aura with new techniques of analysis in the speeches of Thucydides remains de Romilly's (1963). See also J. H. Finley 1967 and Stadter 1973. There are also valuable comments scattered through Connor 1984.

²⁷Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1920: 2.21–31) reviews various attempts to find preplatonic sources for the socratic dialogue. Although he insists on the absence of real models, he notes crucial antecedents in comedy and in the sophistic *agōnes logōn* (31). In a similar vein, see Friedländer 1958: 137. Adam 1963 on 5.451c notes Plato's partiality for Sophron and an apparent allusion to his *gunaikeioi mimoi*.

²⁸Bakhtin (1981: 22–26) focuses perceptively on the novelistic aspect of the socratic dialogue. This parallel holds especially well for the dialogue's relation to other genres: "The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, re-formulating them and re-accentuating them" (5). On the other hand, Bakhtin does not seem to see any contradiction between the new valorization of the present, of the openness of the historical moment (7, 11, 30) in this form, and the specific other-worldly metaphysics of Plato.

Guthrie *HGP* 4.56–66). More recently we have been enlightened about the “metaphilosophic” function of dialogue (Griswold 1988: 143–67). But these and other claimed advantages must also be situated within the context of Plato’s profound ambivalence toward writing and his equally profound distrust of all sensuously engaging discourse, a distrust that stems in part from the literate revolution.²⁹ The elaborated dialogue with richly drawn characters, thematically suggestive settings and actions, is *not* the same as dialectics, the rigorous cooperative and confrontational quest for ever more logically complete and coherent formulations. One may well argue that the former leads to the latter, but the latter by no means requires the former—as is clearly demonstrated by the example of the sophistic antithetical arguments.³⁰ That in fact Plato was aware of a profound tension between the two seems clear. The whole direction of Plato’s philosophical development is toward a medium of expression as devoid of sensuously distracting ambiguities as possible. The fact that his low opinion of most people leads him on occasion to defend an admixture of play with serious philosophy or the fact that most readers prefer that mixture does not diminish this tension.³¹

The form of the *Republic* as a whole is a conversation repeated by Sokrates speaking in the first person to an unspecified audience. Among generally acknowledged earlier dialogues, only the *Lysis* has precisely this form. The *Protagoras* and *Euthydemus* begin with short sections of direct dialogue after which Sokrates narrates the rest to his interlocutor. At *Republic* 3.392d5, Sokrates suggests a fundamental tripartite division of forms of mythic narration between simple narration

²⁹Guthrie (*HGP* 4.56–60) and Friedländer (1958: 110–25) both discuss the issue of writing, but only in terms that justify Plato’s own practice, while reassuring us that what we have is worth reading. Guthrie even uses Plato’s attack on writing in the “Seventh Letter” as the epigraph for his first volume on Plato (*HGP* 4.1). Jacques Derrida (1974 and 1981) has put the platonic denigration of writing on a wholly different plane. He sees the disparagement of writing as the necessary, prerequisite mystification for the founding of Western metaphysics. There is a tantalizing potential overlap between Derrida’s conception of this role of writing and Havelock’s association of literacy with the growth of abstract thought (see esp. Havelock 1963). Havelock commented (alas rather superficially) on Derrida in his last book (1986: 50). In “Plato’s Pharmacy” Derrida also notes, citing Vernant, the democratic aspect of writing (1981: 144 n. 68).

³⁰E.g., Protagoras’ *Antilogikoi* (*D-K* B 5), the anonymous *Dissoi logoi*, and Aristophanes’ parody in the debate between different *logoi* in the *Clouds*, where to be sure some *ēthopoia* enters. See Kerferd 1981a: 59–67.

³¹“Not only are the poets expelled, in *Republic* X, from the ideal state, but the poetic strain gradually vanishes from Plato’s writing until, in the *Laws*, little remains but a prosaic monologue” (Raven 1965: 79). Cf. the conclusion of Stenzel that by the time of the *Timaeus*, which he views as very late, “one thing alone is an object of serious Philosophy—a mystical and spiritualized *meteōrologia*, a religious astronomy, with which Plato surely reaches his farthest distance from Socrates” (1973: 22). For some qualifications, see Guthrie *HGP* 4.56–65, Friedländer 1958: 164–70, and Desjardins 1988: 110–25.

(*haplē diēgēsis*), imitation/representation (*mimēsis*), and a combination of the two. Dithyrambs are his only example of simple narration, tragedy and comedy are pure imitation, and Homer is analyzed as the prime example of the mixture of narrative and imitation. Sokrates then offers a detailed analysis of the psychological and moral damage done by any *mimēsis* except of what one already is or seeks to become. On these grounds there is a certain distancing involved in the choice of a narrated dialogue over the most common form of those dialogues assumed to be early, namely, direct dialogue or pure *mimēsis*. Nonetheless, virtually all of Sokrates' interlocutors in Bk. 1 are inadequate models of the *kalos k' agathos* ("true aristocrat," lit. "beautiful and good"), who alone is worthy of imitation (see 396b10–c3). Moreover, even if by a certain stretch one could argue that all the interlocutors after the second beginning in Bk. 2 are truly *kaloi k' agathoi*,³² the fact remains that from the perspective of the more radical critique of *mimēsis* in Bk. 10 Plato is still using a Homeric mixture of narrative and drama which he invites his audience to reject, a form of discourse conspicuous by its absence from the advanced curriculum of the true philosophers described in Bk. 7.³³

The Superdialogue as Critique of Dialogue

Readers of earlier dialogues would be familiar with periodic challenges and counterdefenses of the dialogue form but would be quite unprepared for the staggering length of the *Republic*. Accepting here for the sake of argument Guthrie's cautious chronology and the standard pagination of the Renaissance Stephanus edition, we find the longest dialogue before the *Republic* to be the *Gorgias* at 81 Stephanus pages. The presumed earliest examples of the platonic dialogue average 10–20 pages. The *Republic*, with roughly 280 Stephanus pages, represents a major departure that generates a new "convention," so to speak.³⁴ Beside the more familiar sorts of passages in which a speaker (Thrasymachos) attacks dialogue as such is a whole string of passages in which the very project of continuing so complex a line of argument summons forth repeated expressions of hesitation, fear, or embarrassment by Sokrates followed by assurances that it is indeed worth the trouble and by exhortations not to flag from completing the task

³²In fact, the "evil" Thrasymachos rather surprisingly says a word or two at 5.450a5–6.

³³For an impassioned defense of the consistent relevance of myth to all of Plato's work, see Friedländer 1958: 171–210.

³⁴A few pages seem to be taken up with irrelevant matter between each book in Stephanus pagination. Guthrie (*HGP* 4.434) notes, "The *Republic* . . . is almost five times as long as the longest dialogue so far considered."

(*ergon*).³⁵ We may compare this procedure with Barthes' hermeneutic code (1974: 19, 262–63): here too the reader is invited to participate in solving a kind of tantalizing mystery, and in this case we are repeatedly reminded that it is the mystery on which ultimate happiness both in this life and hereafter depends.

The two phenomena, the use of sensuously engaging discourse and the self-conscious attempt in the *Republic* to extend the scope of the dialogue, are intimately related and are reflected in the structure of the dialogue as a whole. The familiar argument that Bk. 1 is merely an early aporetic dialogue onto which a new form has been more or less awkwardly grafted (Guthrie *HGP* 4.437; Friedländer 1969: 63–67) is likely to be an error that contains a grain of truth. It is preferable, I think, to read the movement from Bk. 1 to the second beginning in Bk. 2 as a highly self-conscious meditation on the inadequacies of the dialogue form as earlier employed. It may also be implicitly a turning away from fundamental directions in socratic *praxis*—from confrontations with the unconverted, from what Ricoeur calls the school of suspicion, the “reduction of the illusions and lies of consciousness,” to the school of reminiscence, “the recollection of meaning” (1970: 32).³⁶

The dialogue begins with the exploration of the naive confusion about central moral issues of an ordinary man of the older generation (Kephalos, the father of Lysias) and proceeds to demolish a parallel naïveté in his son (Polemarchos), who relies on arguments that illustrate pointedly the consequences of his education in poetry. We then move on to a full-scale confrontation with a professional intellectual, a rival Sophist (Thrasymachos). Although this encounter does take the argument deeper—it is forced into the political sphere out of the initial private sphere—the rivalry and the fundamental character of the gulf between the assumptions of Thrasymachos and of Sokrates about the world lead to a frustrating stand-off, an *aporia*.

Bk. 2 begins again with two young interlocutors, who are already convinced of the inherent superiority of Sokrates as a human being and teacher. They share the fundamental epistemological premise that there is such a thing as justice in itself, apart from its consequences and from any particular just person or just action. This sort of interlocutor releases, as it were, a new Sokrates or at least one only glimpsed before

³⁵E.g., 2.368b3–c2, 2.369b2–3, 2.372a3–4, 2.374e6–11, 2.376c7–d10, 4.432b7–c5, 4.435c4–d9, 4.445a5–c2, 5.449c7–451b5 (this is probably the most elaborate one), 5.484a1–b1 (self-congratulation for efforts).

³⁶Cf. R. Robinson apropos of the *Meno*: “With the introduction of this method he is passing from destructive to constructive thinking, from elenchus and the refutation of other men's views to the elaboration of positive views of his own” (1953: 122, cited in Raven 1965: 62–63).

in the latter parts of those dialogues generally considered nearest the *Republic* in time of composition,³⁷ a Sokrates who expounds positive doctrine—but now at such length and in such detail that the very notion of “dialogue” is called into question.

From Dialogue to *Logos*

From Bk. 2 rare interventions by one of the interlocutors serve more obviously structural functions to shift the argument to a new level or a new topic. Glaukon's objection to the first ideal city proposed by Sokrates, the “city of pigs” (2.373d4), is the pretext for updating the imaginary polis to include enough of the complexities of a contemporary city to have a more immediate relevance than the initial rather Hesiodic utopia.³⁸ Moreover, the project now becomes the more politically immediate one of purging (3.399e5–6) a city suffering from inflammation (*phlegmainousan*, 2.372e8). Adeimantos' interruption to complain that the rulers get no happiness or advantage out of ruling (4.419a1–420a1) triggers a deeper analysis of the economic causes of dissension both within and between Greek cities. Adeimantos' question about the meaning of “women in common” (5.449c8) permits a detailed exegesis of arrangements for mating and rearing of infants. Within that exposition, Glaukon's expression of doubt about its feasibility (5.457d3) allows elaborations that culminate in the paradox of the philosopher-monarch.³⁹ Here objections by Glaukon (5.475d1) and later by Adeimantos (6.487b1) facilitate both the elaboration of a new epistemology and a sustained assault on Plato's professional and

³⁷For the middle dialogues, Guthrie's order of treatment, which is only partly a chronology he endorses and partly for convenience of exposition (*HGP* 4.53–54) is *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Menexenus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*. Raven (1965) argues for the following chronology: *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*.

³⁸Clay makes much of the fact that the founding gesture of the polis most fully elaborated in the *Republic* is the injustice of an acquisitiveness that necessitates war and therefore an army (1988: 28–29, 33). But it is precisely this will to turn away from a purely fantasized and ultimately irrelevant utopia and rather to deal with the real, corrupt society that motivates the most radical negations of that reality—in particular the abolition of private property and the family for the ruling class. Clay subtly surveys the ambivalences toward the possibility of realization of this polis, but his familiar solution of celebrating individualism all too conveniently endorses a total abandonment of *any* political relevance—something deeply alien to much that is most engaging in the *Republic*.

³⁹Okin (1979: 40) notes the sexism of the traditional locution “philosopher-kings.” Reeve, who devotes three pages to women, under the heading “Invalids, Infants, Women, and Slaves,” in a book of some 320 pages on “the argument of Plato's *Republic*” has titled his study *Philosopher-Kings* (1988). I should add that he treats Plato's radical suggestions with sympathy and goes out of his way to argue that even the drone women of the lower orders will perform the tasks for which they are suited by birth, which he takes to imply the full range of traditionally male-dominated crafts.

political competitors, who are blamed for the deplorable state of philosophy. This analysis in turn justifies a return to the issue of educating the guardians and the elaboration of an advanced curriculum that would prevent the aberrations from which philosophy is alleged to suffer.

These obvious examples of a functional role of interlocutors in organizing an essentially expository text must be considered alongside those new, frankly expository formulas for transitions: "What distinctions must we make next?" (3.412b8); "What's left for us in our law-making enterprise?" (4.427b1); "The next point is to establish securely from our argument [*para tou logou*] . . ." (5.461e8); "We must now examine the points of our argument agreed on [*ta tou logou homologēmata*] to see whether . . ." (5.462e5). It is the *logos* that now directs the exposition, which in turn is only facilitated by dialogue as such.

The Utopian *Logos*

These innovations are formal dimensions of a more basic aspect of the dramatically new form the expository role of Sokrates now takes. In the *Gorgias* and other dialogues presumed to be chronologically near the *Republic*, readers would have encountered myths that pointed by a cautious indirection toward the exposition of doctrines about which the author chose to express no certainty, only a plausible account (*kata ton logon ton eikota*, *Timaeus* 30b7).⁴⁰ They may also have encountered the elaborate distancing device of Diotima's reported doctrine in the *Symposium*. In the *Republic*, the device of the city *en logōi* involves the first explicitly utopian alternative to the status quo in Western literature. As modern readers, we may discern a utopian thrust in Homer's tragic vision of a perfect military meritocracy gone amuck. The Phaiakian episode in the *Odyssey* has long been thought to have a utopian dimension—so too Aeschylus' celebration of a *stasis*-free Athens or Aristophanes' fantastic alternative polis in the sky. These texts and many others were clearly raw materials for Plato's own utopia. In the *Republic*, however, the text itself confronts the gap between the existing reality and what can be represented in argument, *en logōi*.⁴¹ The ambiguity of the status of such a construct somewhere between *muthos* and *logos*, between *logos* and *ergon*, seems underlined by Sokrates' curious locution when he states the necessity of the philosopher breed (*philosophon genos*) achieving power as the essential condition before

⁴⁰Most scholars place the *Timaeus* later in the canon, but this phrase is often cited in defenses of Plato's use of myth.

⁴¹Manuel and Manuel (1979) begin their massive study of utopian thought by "bypassing . . . a rigid definition" (5). But Mumford begins his account (1962) with Plato's *Republic*. My point is only to focus on the new self-reflexiveness of Plato's gesture.

“the constitution which we mythologized in discourse achieve accomplishment in fact” (*hē politeia hēn muthologoumen logōi ergōi telos lēpsetai*, 6.501e2–5).

Between Dialogue, Treatise, and Myth

This utopian logos, by virtue of its systematicity, dictates, as I have tried to illustrate, the formal direction of its own exposition and exploration in an uneasy if provocative tension with the relative freedom of a real dialogue. Thus, for example, the long digression on the abolition of the family, philosophy, the good, and higher education (Bks. 5, 6, and 7) is sandwiched between a programmatic declaration by Sokrates at the end of Book 4 that the proper assessment of the ideal city requires analysis of contemporary alternatives and a lengthy pursuit of just that line of argument, in Books 8 and 9.

Once the city *en logōi* is complete and the conditions of discourse set by the ideal interlocutors have been met, it is again the issue of the form of discourse which forces on us the awkward, seemingly gratuitous return to the assault on *mimēsis*. But it is only after we have been exposed to the detailed psychology of Bk. 4 and the elaborate epistemology of Bks. 6 and 7 that we are in a position to grasp the full implications of the initial, concrete assault on representation in Bks. 2 and 3. The dominant modes of discourse in Athens are now measured against the reality of the eternal forms, even as, in the final myth, the life choices and pursuits of traditional heroes and Plato’s contemporaries are measured against the standard of the immortality of the soul. One may say that the final myth is overdetermined, but surely the author’s use of a myth in the immediate context of so categorical a repudiation of representation confronts the reader with a final juxtaposition that speaks of the tension between form and doctrine throughout the *Republic*.

General Characteristics of Plato’s Solutions

In the preceding discussion I have tried to show how on the formal level the major articulations of the argument of the text as a whole reveal a pervasive tension between how the argument is presented and what it affirms. I now argue that virtually every other component of Plato’s response to the perceived crises of his moment involves a parallel internal tension that constantly threatens the text with breakdown. Most broadly and obviously, the realizability, the ontological

status of the ideal city itself, is caught in an inescapable web of irrec-
oncilable tensions.

At times Socrates is strenuous in his defense of the possibility of realizing the project of the city *en logōi* and expresses his disdainful apprehension "lest the argument seem a mere prayer" (*mē eukhē dokēi ho logos*, 5.450d1–2). At perhaps his most desperate, he asserts that the ideal city may simply be "laid up as a paradigm in the sky" (*en ouranōi*, 9.592b2–3, a phrase which Guthrie, *HGP* 4.543, points out does not mean "in heaven"). Generally, in pessimistic moments, the characterization of the obstacles to the city's implementation appears quite insurmountable. The savagely anti-democratic parable of the ship of state (6.488a7–489a6) categorically precludes any effective role for the true philosopher. In response to a later question from Glaukon whether the true philosopher will be willing to enter politics, Sokrates gives the extraordinarily ambiguous answer, "Yes, by the dog—at least in his own city. Perhaps not in his native land, unless some divine chance befall him" (9.592a5–9). His own city turns out to be precisely the one they have envisioned and which may only exist in the sky. The analyses of the corruptions threatening the philosophical nature (*phusis*, see 6.489d1–5) and of the futility of private education culminate in ominous anticipations of Sokrates' own trial and execution (6.494e6), while the murderous ferocity of the shadow gazers in the cave toward one who has seen the light (7.517a5–6) scarcely inspires confidence. Then there is the inevitable final undermining gesture, marked by the weird discourse of the magic number (8.546a2–547a5), that since the ideal polis partakes inherently of the realm of the human and changeable, its rulers will eventually err in choosing breeding times and the state of affairs decline from the ideal. Thus the driving goal of political stability—freedom from *stasis*—which emerges as the most blatant, pervasive, and poignant component of Plato's response to his historical moment, is despairingly abandoned precisely *sub specie aeternitatis*.⁴²

This element of other-worldly despair raises the perhaps more fundamental question, explored, for example, by Jaeger, Guthrie, and more recently Clay, whether we should even take the *Republic* as a genuinely political text. Is it not rather all a metaphor for the real object, individual spiritual stability and harmony? Guthrie concludes after repeated protests that Plato never had a serious interest in implementing the city outlined in the *Republic*: "Essentially . . . the *Republic* is not a piece of political theory but an allegory of the individual human spirit,

⁴²It is striking that Plato begins his tale of decline with an invocation of the Muses and a mock-heroic allusion to Homer—a parody of *Iliad* 16.113: "the way indeed factionalism first fell upon [them]" (*hopōs dē prōton stasis empese*, 8.545d7–e1).

the psyche. The city is one which we may 'found in ourselves' (*HGP* 4.561, see 486).⁴³ So too Clay concludes, "In Kallipolis, Sokrates would be king, perhaps; but in Athens he is at least the ruler over the polity within his soul" (1988: 33). On this reading, the enabling analogy of the individual psyche to the polis, which is the literal pretext for the entire analysis of both the ideal state and those states and individuals that depart from it, emerges as incurably flawed or, as Clay would have it, reversed. There is support for such a reading in the recurrent notes of quietism throughout the *Republic*, moments when participation in any sort of politics in the real world is characterized as too dangerous or too degrading for a serious intellectual: he is "like someone who has fallen among wild beasts. . . . Inadequate to hold out against them alone. . . . he must keep quiet and do what is his own [*ta hautou prattōn*], like a man in a storm of dust and hard rain driven by the wind, he must stand apart under a small wall" (6.496d2–e2).⁴⁴

These tensions or ambiguities are, I believe, best appreciated in all their rawness rather than subsumed in some totalizing reading, whether defensive or denunciatory.⁴⁵ They do not imply a straightforward repudiation of the political sphere any more than they support a view of Plato as the unreflective proponent of a program he is promising to implement. Rather, they underline the inevitable tentativeness, the provisional character, of any solutions Plato may be proposing within the conditions of possibility briefly sketched above. Still, perhaps the most striking features of Plato's solutions are their radicalness and their self-conscious striving for comprehensiveness. If not all possible crises are met in equal detail, the thrust of Plato's utopian project

⁴³Cf. Jaeger 1945: vol. 2, esp. 347–57, "The State within Us." It is striking, however, that in his opening overview of the fourth century Jaeger writes: "But the men of that age, even Plato, still believed that their task was a practical one. They had to change the world, *this* world—even although they might not manage to do it completely at the moment" (2:4).

⁴⁴Cf. Guthrie *HGP* 4.486. It is striking that the key phrase describing justice, *ta hautou prattōn*, is here simply synonymous with the political quietism of the Athenian aristocracy in the fourth century on which MacKendrick comments (1969: 3–4). Carter (1986: 155–86) stresses the social and political roots of Plato's conception of the contemplative life (*bios theoretikos*).

⁴⁵Here I dissociate myself from Wood and Wood (1978: esp. 145–71). Their whole approach, while perhaps a salutary counterweight to the usual idealist decontextualization of Plato, ignores the element of radical negation in the *Republic*. Symptomatic of their reflectionism is the omission of all but the most cursory allusions to Plato's provisions for women. After noting that Spartan laws on marriages for heiresses were probably less rigid than in democratic Athens, they comment, "It is also worth noting that Plato, whose political doctrine is profoundly aristocratic and anti-democratic, proposes a considerable degree of freedom and equality for women—at least women of the ruling class" (1978: 50). This statement, not even formally part of their discussion of the *Republic*, and a three-line comment in a chapter on Aristotle (248) is all they see fit to say about Plato and women.

is to insist on the total integration of all the sources of the crises: politics, economics, education and culture, the dynamics of sociopolitical bonding, modes of representation, epistemology, and ontology are all subjected to a dazzling impulse of totalization.

Plato's Discourse of *Phusis*

In the impulse to comprehensiveness, the discourse of *phusis* plays a decisive role. *Phusis*, variously as "innate character" *with* strong connotations of derivation from a specific ancestry and *without* such connotations, as "authentic essence," even as the de facto equivalent of the platonic Form or Idea, is in constant combination and tension with terms denoting the whole range of the politically and historically contingent. Chief among these contingencies is the entire process of socialization, which, as we have learned from the *Protagoras*, includes rearing (*trophē*), childhood games (*paidia*), education (*paideia*) in the widest sense, as well as experience of the discourses of the courts, assembly, and theater. It is Plato's uses of and obvious investments in the discourse of *phusis* more than any tantalizing bits of plausible or implausible biography that lead me to presume to situate Plato's solutions in a specific class, the Athenian aristocracy.

Yet Plato is himself far too much a Sophist, far too imbued with their analyses of social existence and education to fit simply into so narrow a category. Broadly speaking, I would say that Plato constantly exploits for his own ends all the ambiguities of the term *phusis* without acknowledging that there are potentially fundamental conflicts in these usages. Indeed, the suppression of those sophistic teachings that lead toward radically different conclusions and goals constitute the major structured silence of the *Republic*.⁴⁶ One could never deduce from the brief squabble with Thrasymachos in Bk. 1 and the brief direct indictment of the Sophists in Bk. 6 how much of the argument of the *Republic* as a whole presupposes and subverts their doctrines by situating them in an entirely alien framework. Like Sophokles before him, Plato employs the critical insights of the Sophists in the service of a social and political goal categorically at odds with their own project. The older Sophists at least laid the philosophical foundations for a society based on equal access to participation by all adult males and the supplanting of force by persuasion. Plato's city is controlled by a highly trained, tiny elite—he seems indifferent whether it be a monarchy or an oligarchy (cf. 4.445d5–6)—recruited from a fully professionalized military, which is

⁴⁶In such a reading of the *Republic* I am indebted to Havelock (1957).

constituted as much to control its own population as to protect it from foreign enemies (see 3.415d9–e4, note the *malista*, “especially,” for domestic threats).⁴⁷ Persuasion as such plays no structural role in the society at large; it is useful only as necessary manipulation. Once the ideal city is constituted, we, the founders, must try to persuade not only the masses but even the new guardians of the “noble lies” about their origins.⁴⁸

The Sophists, as noted earlier, appeared to have launched a fatal attack on the philosophical underpinnings of the aristocracy’s pretensions to inherited superiority. If any innate superiority is accidental rather than a consequence of specific parentage and if education is far more relevant to the formation of moral qualities and capacity for rule—for these rather than simply physical or technical prowess were the chief content claimed for aristocratic inherited excellence—then it

⁴⁷Guthrie (*HGP* 4.467 n. 1) suggests that Popper (1963: e. g., 50–51) has grossly exaggerated, but he ignores the *malista*. Moreover, the whole elaboration of the analogy of the soul implies the exclusively internal focus of the repressive activities of the two higher elements of the soul on the lower, appetitive element (442a4–b3), which is explicitly equated with the ruled element in the city. The fear that this lower part might grow strong and undertake to “enslave and rule over what is not not appropriate to its race” (442a8–b3) is also explicit. Finally, it is internal discord, *stasis*, which is repeatedly cited as the great enemy.

⁴⁸Like so many other key motifs, despair of persuasion is introduced in the opening scene of the *Republic*. When Polemarchos playfully suggests that Sokrates and his companion must either defeat (*kreittous genesthe*) Polemarchos and his companions or remain, Sokrates replies, “Isn’t there one alternative left, namely, if we persuade you that we must go away?” Polemarchos in turn replies, “And would you be able to persuade us if we don’t listen?” “Impossible [*oudamōs*],” comments Glaukon (1.327c9–13). An examination of all instances of the infinitive form *peithein* throughout the *Republic* suggests how regularly the connotations of persuasion are negative. Thus at 2.361b3 the thoroughly evil man is envisioned as good enough at speaking to persuade his way out of trouble; at 3.391d6 the rulers will use persuasion on children about gods and demigods; at 3.414d3 Sokrates declares that he does not know where he will find the nerve (*tolmēi*) to persuade the rulers, soldiers, and rest of the city to believe the noble lie; at 5.458d5 he distinguishes geometric from erotic necessity, which is “doubtless keener for persuading and dragging the majority of people;” at 471e4 Glaukon suggests that they should try to persuade themselves of the questionable feasibility of Sokrates’ proposals about women; at 476e1, faced with the anger of one who has only opinion (*dokhazein*) but not knowledge (*gignōskein*), Sokrates asks coyly if there is not some way “we might appease him [lit. “divert him with a story,” *paramutheisthai*] and persuade him gently, concealing the fact that he is out of his mind”; at 6.489a10 Sokrates recommends teaching the parable of the cave to someone with a false view of the attitude of cities toward philosophers; at 7.525b12 Sokrates recommends “laying down a law [*nomothetēsai*] and persuading” future rulers to study mathematics seriously. In each case, persuasion involves either deceit, condescension toward the object of persuasion, or, as in the last, the addition of something stronger. Raven notes the citation in the *Gorgias* at 493a1 of the Pythagorean doctrine that “the part of our soul in which desires arise is liable to over-persuasion and vacillation to and fro” (1965: 53–54)—the same view as in the attack on *mimēsis* in *Rep.* 10.603a10–b2. Raven’s major reason for dating the *Phaedrus* after the *Republic* is the lack of any positive account of persuasion in the *Republic* (1965: 189–96).

seemed nothing was left of those claims. The sophistic critique of traditional religion undermined these same claims from a different angle. If anthropomorphic gods were a human invention, there was no ontological ground for a fixed hierarchy of human society.

Plato's response in the *Republic* takes both a mimetic or traditional paradigmatic form as well as a pragmatic, programmatic form. Plato's own brothers, Glaukon and Adeimantos, central figures in the mimetic dialogue, and by implication Plato himself constitute the primary paradigmatic demonstration of the continued validity of aristocratic *phusis*. The first line of the whole work contains an indirect sort of signature, *Glaukōnos tou Aristōnos*, the names of Plato's brother and father. Glaukon, the signature figure of the opening line, is again the decisive vehicle for the second, deeper beginning at the outset of Bk. 2. His consistent "courage" (*aei . . . dē andreiotatos*, 357a2) is offered as the motive that transforms what our narrator considered a complete dialogue into a mere prooimion. This passionate intervention, seconded and eloquently abetted by Plato's other brother Adeimantos, provokes the most extraordinary outburst of praise from Sokrates, who cites the opening of an elegy attributed to the lover of Glaukon: "Sons of Ariston, divine offspring of a glorious Man" (*paides Aristōnos, kleinou theion genos andros*, 2.368a4). The terms of this amazing self-praise by Plato, the son of Ariston, adumbrate some of the major themes of what I am referring to as the discourse of *phusis*.⁴⁹ Although the homoerotic context of the poem gives no hint of the forthcoming radical proposals about women, the focus on noble sons of a noble father is amplified by reference to the process of begetting (*genos* carries strong etymological echoes of *gignesthai*, "to beget") and thus anticipates Plato's eugenics. Plato's almost obsessive quest for the "best" (connoted by the name *Aristōn*) culminates in the rule of the best, aristocracy, Plato's own term for the ideal form of government to establish in his polis (4.445d6). Designating Glaukon's verbal activity as courage reflects a consistent goal of fusing a new, purely intellectual conception of such traditional *aretai* ("virtues") as courage with the most traditional military and therefore, in a Greek context, political senses. Plato thus seeks to reestablish on a philosophically more respectable foundation the traditional grounds of heroism, both its extraordinary prestige (*kleinou*) and more specifically its blurring of the line between human and divine (*theion*). All these suggest the key terms in the discourse of *phusis* throughout the *Republic*. But most extraordinary is the eminently personal vehicle Plato has chosen to display these themes. By implication he himself is the ideal pupil

⁴⁹The case for Plato's self-praise would be far stronger if we could establish that the battle of Megara alluded to is the one in 409 at which he could have participated.

of the ideal master, the flower of an aristocratic family, bearing the attributes of both hero and god and inspiring homoerotic admiration in virtually the only good kind of poetry—praise of the *kaloi k' agathoi* (10.607a3–8). This line of elegy thus anticipates the even more radical self-praise in the pun with which Plato introduces his own “noble lie”—the capstone to his eugenics—namely, “the god Plato” (*ho theos plattōn*, “the god in the process of fashioning/molding,” 3.415a4).⁵⁰

This paradigmatic validation and transformation of aristocratic *phusis* is combined with a detailed, analytic, radical program to solve the ideological crisis provoked jointly by the realities of fifth- and fourth-century history and by the Sophists’ ideological assault on the foundations of aristocratic hegemony.

Eugenics

Plato meets head-on the Sophists’ critique of the aberrations of the transmission of alleged inherited excellence, excellent fathers who have mediocre sons, by establishing the most rigorous eugenics.⁵¹ The fundamental assumption of his eugenics, supported by the naturalistic analogy of breeding animals (e.g., 5.451c7–8, 459a2–5), is that excellent qualities, both moral and physical, observable in parents are normally transmitted to offspring by the process of sexual reproduction.⁵² At the same time, the most elaborate precautions are taken against the breakdown of this inheritance principle. The guardians are repeatedly exhorted to the most careful surveillance (3.413c7–414a4, 415b3–c6, 4.423c8) of offspring to prevent an inferior progeny from remaining in the ruling elite and to discover accidentally superior offspring produced by inferior parents.

⁵⁰I find no indications of this pun in any commentary, but I do find it in Clay’s essay (1988: 19).

⁵¹See, e. g., the mild jibes in the *Protagoras* about Perikles’ sons (319e3–320a3, 328c5–d2). It is possible that the presence of Kleinias (320a4), the younger brother of Alcibiades, described at *Alcibiades* I 118e5 as mad (*mainetai*), is itself a standing indictment of inherited excellence. The same passage in *Alcibiades* I (118d10–e2) also cites Perikles’ failure to teach his sons anything of value. The *Laches*, in which the mediocre descendants of Aristides and Thucydides, son of Melesias, are prominent, focuses on the same issue of the general neglect of education by fathers as a potential explanation of the failure of sons. The reverse phenomenon, exceptional sons born from nondescript fathers, is not something an aristocrat would celebrate, but it is the assumption of Protagoras in his analysis of the city of flute players, as noted earlier.

⁵²Note the initial, enabling analogy of the noble puppy (*gennaïou skulakos*, 2.375a2) with the well-born youth (*neaniskou eugenous*). The immediate allusion here to the *phusis* of a well-born puppy implies an early choice; it also initiates the running analogy of the guardians/auxiliaries to dogs (2.375e1–4, 3.404a10, 3.416a4, 4.422d4–7, 4.440d2–3), which prepares us to accept the explicitly eugenic analogies.

There is here a revealing disparity between the elaborateness of the provisions spelled out for testing the offspring of the elite and the extreme vagueness about the rest of the population of the polis. The provision of wives and children in common and the supervised marriages apply only to the guardian class (see 5.459e2–3, 461e5–6). Only they are exhorted to be pitiless in demoting to lower classes any of their children who prove inferior (415b6–c2). Only for them is the destruction of deformed or inferior newborns specified (460c1–6). Finally, only those presumed fit for the guardian class are educated and tested throughout their youth.⁵³ It is therefore hard to figure out how there could be any effective upward mobility for the vast majority of the population,⁵⁴ most of whom are not in any real political sense even citizens.⁵⁵

Everyone in the city (414d2–4) is to be indoctrinated from youth with the notorious noble lie (*gennaion ti hen pseudomenous*, 414b9–c1)—not simply as many commentators and translators have it a “generous-sized” lie or even milder Guthrie’s “grand fiction,” but one integral to a program of controlled generation (see *gennaō*, “beget” used at 415a8 and b1) to produce rulers who are noble or well-born (i.e., *gennaioi*, *eugeneis*).⁵⁶ An essential function of the myth of five races is to insist on an ontological basis for an absolute separation of social classes.⁵⁷

The lengths to which Plato is ready to go in pursuit of and for the maintenance of this rigidly aristocratic hierarchy would probably

⁵³See Guthrie *HGP* 4.455–57 on the question, is the education meant for the guardians alone?

⁵⁴Guthrie (*HGP* 4.464) is at pains to stress that Plato does allude more than once to such mobility (4.423c–d, 5.468a), but his apologetics ignore the disparity to which I allude in the text.

⁵⁵It is clear from 3.416b2–d1, 4.423d3, and 5.463a10 that Plato describes the demos as *politai*. On the other hand, his discussion of the advantages of wives in common creating a citizenry who all mean the same thing by “mine” (5.464a4) clearly refers only to the guardians and auxiliaries. At 2.371e1–7 he speaks of various wage-earning menials (*diakonoi*) who are not worthy of full sharing in the community (*mē panu aksiokoinōnētoi*) but fill out the population. He does not even mention slaves here, but their existence is assumed; see Vlastos 1968: 291–95; 1981: 140–47. Vlastos’s argument about slavery still begs the question whether there is any truly political function for the demos in the ideal state. See the debate between Leys and Sparshott, “Was Plato Non-Political/Anti-Political,” in Vlastos 1983: 144–86.

⁵⁶Translators: Jowett, “one royal lie”; Grube, “noble fiction”; Cornford, “something in the way of those convenient fictions we spoke of earlier, a single bold flight of invention” (see his long note ad loc. in which he glosses *gennaion* as “on a generous scale”); Lindsay, “one noble falsehood”; Richards, “one spirited false statement”; Bloom, “some one noble lie” (see his note); Sterling and Scott, “a noble lie.” Adam 1963 on 414B offers “a heroic falsehood.” Cf. Guthrie *HGP* 4.462.

⁵⁷This interpretation is vigorously denied by Guthrie (*HGP* 4.464–66). There is the interesting problem, which he ignores, that Sokrates offers a myth of five metals for a three-tiered state. The simplest explanation is that Plato is so anxious to absorb the Hesiodic myth into his own that he ignores the problem. But his ignoring it is also symptomatic of his indifference to those below the auxiliary class.

appall most surviving members of Plato's own class, if by that we mean both those who have traditionally belonged to Davies's liturgical class and those who take great pride in tracing their ancestry back several generations. If Plato's commitment to the discourse of *phusis* suggests his political predisposition in traditional class terms, it is nonetheless essential to keep in mind the severe limitations of any such label in dealing with so radical a thinker. If Plato's project may be said to aim at saving essential features of a political and social ideal traditionally espoused by a recognizable Athenian class, it is nonetheless true that central features of his program would prove quite shocking to members of that class. Indeed, one of the subsidiary functions of Plato's brothers in the dialogue is to signal the points that would, initially at least, most obviously strike his intended audience as quite unacceptable. Thus, as we noted earlier, the puritanism of the vegetarian idyll first proposed by Sokrates is quite unacceptable to Glaukon, who called it a "city of pigs" (2.373d4).

More fundamental objections are raised by Adeimantos to the absence of private property for the guardians, a key element in Plato's solution to the destructive greed his ancestor Solon had so vigorously chided in the aristocracy of his day. Inherited wealth is the economic reality underlying ideological claims of inherited excellence. This is as true of Homer's Agamemnon as of Aeschylus' haughty king. But Plato is ready to sweep away the economic foundations of the great aristocratic *oikoi* precisely because of the social disruptions arising from great inequities in the distribution of social surplus. In the process, he also precludes the only claim to prominence of the nouveau riches and eliminates a key factor in the indictment of Spartan ideological leadership of the Greek aristocracy. Plato's reduction of the ontological claims of his ruling elite to pure genetics, as then understood, thus entails both a backward-looking gesture and a radical negation of the status quo.⁵⁸

Feminism

An even more troubling innovation, if we judge by the intervention of Plato's brothers, is the most logical and daring aspect of Plato's eu-

⁵⁸Wood and Wood (1978) are at pains to minimize the radicalism of the abolition of private property in the *Republic* by stressing Plato's return to a rigid insistence on inherited property in the *Laws*. They do in this connection make a valid, if ahistorical, point: "Both the propertylessness of the *Republic*'s ruling class and the hereditary landed property of the *Laws* are opposed to private property in a narrower sense: what we might call bourgeois property, the . . . more freely disposable property that is the basis of a commercial society" (142-43). It is worth noting, in view of their earlier comments, that the abolition of private property would also entail the irrelevance of the elaborate provisions about legitimacy and heiresses which are central in the institutional oppression of women in Athens (see 1978: 50).

genics—his declaration that women must be presumed equals and the family as known in Greece be abolished. The rationale for this departure is again the naturalistic analogy to the breeding of hunting dogs, a line of argument in which the sophistic anthropological demystification of the human species ironically coincides with the bitterest of aristocratic polemics in Theognis.⁵⁹ Plato is thus able to cut the ground from under his shadow opponents, the Sophists, and appeal to the snobbery of his perhaps equally shadowy elite audience, for whom breeding well-bred animals is a favorite pastime (cf. 5.459a1).

There is a less explicit sense in which the proposal for wives in common and the abolition of the family follows logically from proposals already adopted for the ideal, the *stasis*-free state. Okin has stressed the deep linkage in the Greek male mind between women and private property (1979: 31–33).⁶⁰ If the private wealth of the aristocratic *oikos* is a major source of discord within the state, as Solon and Aeschylus among others had argued, why not get rid of that traditionally most troublesome “property,” wives? From Homer through Aeschylus to Herodotus, it would be easy to trace the sentiments that attribute the worst domestic and interstate frictions to wife stealing.

But it would be an error to see Plato's “feminist” discourse as simply a logical outgrowth of his prior discourse without recognizing that it too constitutes a response to a crisis—even if we are far less informed about the dimensions of this crisis. Our earliest Greek sources, Homer and Hesiod, are in their different ways both haunted by women, not just wives, as a problem. The *Oresteia* is perhaps the first text to pose the problem in a context in which at least the concept if not the realization of radical change is envisioned. To historicize, even tentatively as Aeschylus does, the relation between the dominant economic and political structures of society and the behavior of women is to open a

⁵⁹We have already seen that, in Plato's *Protagoras*, the Sophist insists that human beings are animals (*zôia*, 321c4) like other animals. Democritus, who perhaps furthest elaborates anthropological speculation about the origins and early existence of the human animal (Cole 1967), nonetheless repudiates the animal breeding analogy in favor of a factor more susceptible to education: “In the case of cattle good breeding/nobility [*eugeneia*] amounts to the good strength [*eulstheneia*] of the body; but in the case of human beings it is a matter of the good turning [*eutropiē*, usually translated “versatility”] of the character [*ētheos*]” (*D-K* B 57). For Theognis, see Chapter 4.

⁶⁰Okin cites Morrow 1960 for the “peculiarly close relation thought to hold between a family and its landed property” (33). Guthrie (*HGP* 4.480 n. 1) comments, “Interestingly enough, P [Plato] the advocate of equality speaks twice of the ‘possession’ of women (*ktēsis* 423e and 451c).” It is interesting to compare Marx's early, heavily Hegelian critique of earlier theories of communism: “This movement of counterposing universal private property to private property finds expression in the brutish form of opposing to marriage (certainly a form of exclusive private property) the community of women, in which a woman becomes a piece of communal and common property. It may be said that this idea of the community of women gives away the secret of this as yet completely crude and thoughtless communism” (*MECW* 3.294).

fissure in the seamless ideology of a fated woman's lot in life. Toward the latter part of the fifth century and into the early fourth we are confronted with a great deal of highly contradictory evidence, all from male sources, that the woman question was not going away but on the contrary was becoming a male obsession and provoking "hysterical" male responses.

It has been plausibly suggested that the heavy casualties of the latter half of the Peloponnesian War together with the long absences from home necessitated by the war substantially threatened the traditional seclusion and repression of Athenian women.⁶¹ We can infer from Euripides and Aristophanes, with the wild fluctuations in their texts between deeply moving sympathy for women and savage misogyny, that this period witnessed a great deal of serious debate about the status of women. Though we lack positive evidence, I would agree with those who infer from Euripides' articulate heroines and Aristophanes' parodies that there existed serious appeals for the equality of women and for their full participation in political life.⁶² In light of the relentless polemics over female sexuality, it is hard to imagine that part of such a positive feminist discourse did not challenge the lack of freedom of choice of sexual partners for women.⁶³ Certainly Aristophanes' most ferocious assaults are reserved for this most threatening of notions, and his bitterest jibes at Euripides are focused on those of his characters who dared to exercise such freedom.

If there did exist such a positive feminist discourse, then Plato's proposals, for all their radicalism compared to actual Greek practice, may nonetheless also involve a gesture of containment of far more serious threats—again presumably in the public discourse of the Sophists,

⁶¹See Pomeroy 1975: 119 and Keuls 1985: chap. 16. B. Strauss, writing primarily of the fourth century, notes that "citizen women sometimes had to take jobs usually reserved for slaves or men: nursing, working at the loom or working in the vineyards" (1987: 56).

⁶²See, e. g., Adam's appendix (1963: 1.345–55) to Bk. 5, "On the relation of the fifth book of the *Republic* to Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*." Zeitlin's brilliant analysis (1981) of Euripides as reflected in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae* eschews any reference to actual politics but has rich implications for the last quarter of the fifth century.

⁶³See Pomeroy 1975: 115. Havelock (1957: 292–94) speculates on admittedly slim evidence that Antiphon conceived of "mating as a union of natural spontaneous affection" and attacked "the institution of the Greek family as understood in his day." Knox (1979: 311–12) also looks to Antiphon, citing J. H. Finley's (1967: 92–94) comparison of Medea's speech with Antiphon's attack on marriage. He concludes, "One cannot help suspecting that much later, Plato, when he says in the *Republic* that to divide male and female for the purposes of public life or education or anything, except the begetting and bearing of children, is just as absurd as to divide it into the long-haired and the bald, may well be adapting to his own purpose, as he does so often, ideas that were first put into circulation by the sophistic radicals of the fifth century." See also Winnington-Ingram 1983b: 234–36.

though some have suggested Sokrates himself as a key figure.⁶⁴ On the one hand, women receive the same tests as men, and to the extent that they succeed, the same education and training as men. Those women who are potentially members of the ruling class are completely removed from any direct influence qua mothers over children; both men and women will do childcare, but no aristocrats (5.460b9). Like the males of the ruling elite, guardian-class women's sexuality is completely controlled by the state. There is the implicit reward system that grants more frequent sexual activity to those presumed to be breeding the best offspring, but this is only a relatively greater frequency in elaborately controlled state breeding festivals. Presumed good breeders will win the rigged lottery more often, but this is far from either free choice of partners or the potential frequency of cohabitation, which is nonexistent except perhaps for older men and post-menopausal women (5.461b9–c1). It is also true that the emphasis on sex as a reward is expressed primarily in terms of the males.⁶⁵

In spite of this containment, in spite of scattered stereotypical sexist remarks let slip here and there throughout the *Republic*, and in spite of the substantial retreat in the *Laws*, the philosophical rigor of Plato's response here to the putative woman crisis remains dazzling.⁶⁶ Perhaps its most striking feature—particularly in light of the essentialism that

⁶⁴Wender (1973: 75–90) notes the lack of evidence for views sympathetic toward women in the Sophists (Democritus is “distinctly hostile”) and endorses with some qualifications Taylor's view of a feminist Sokrates. It is perhaps safest to say (following Laclau and Mouffe 1985) that doctrines of natural equality or equality of rights for all tend to appeal to those human beings, whether slaves, women, or racial minorities, who may well have been bracketed out by the original proponents of the doctrines. It is striking, considering the grim view most contemporary students take of the status of women in Athenian democracy, that Plato cites as a mark of the excessive license under a democracy “how much equality before the law [*isonomia*] and freedom [*eleutheria*] arises among women with respect to men and among men with respect to women” (8.563b7–9). Aristotle associates democracies with tyrannies because of the “power given to women in their families.” “Women,” he asserts, “are of course friendly to tyrannies and also to democracies, since under them they have a good time” (*Pol.* 1313b34–38 Barnes (1984: 2085–86), cited in Vidal-Naquet 1970a: 65). In looking for male sources for these doctrines, I have in mind only the realm of public discourse, from which women were, as far as we know, excluded. It seems to me evident that the initial impulse for rethinking the status of women came from women themselves.

⁶⁵See Pomeroy 1975: 116, a bit unfairly stated. See 5.468c3, where those best in battle may kiss anyone they desire, male or female, and 5.468e1–2, where honors are for “both heroic men and women (*tous agathous andras te kai gunaikas*).”

⁶⁶Cf. Wender 1973. Irigaray 1985: 152–59 is a convenient listing of passages on woman in Plato's works apart from *Republic* Bk. 5 and the *Laws*. Okin (1979: 42–50) shows some of the ways in which, despite its formal retreats, the *Laws* contains some philosophically more radical defenses of feminism, especially the analogy of ambidexterity. Bluestone (1987) is perhaps the strongest modern feminist defender of “the continuing importance of Plato's questions”—the title of her final chapter. She ignores the objections raised by French feminism.

normally seems, as it were, Plato's middle name—is his rigorous critique of an essentialist discourse of women. He grants only that women are generally weaker than men (5.451e1, 455c4) but adds that many women are unquestionably superior to some men (5.455d3). If one takes seriously Plato's usual logic that even a single exception philosophically invalidates any generalization, this addition implies a categorical refutation of his own generalization about female weakness; no philosophically valid conclusion can be drawn from the phenomenon that many women are weaker than men. Beyond that, Plato argues with a telling analogy that the presumed differences between men and women are as inessential as the putative differences between bald and nonbald men (5.454c2). As far as guardianship is concerned—that is, the capacity for total control of the military and political power in society—men and women have the same *phusis* (*hē autē phusis*, 5.456a).

To many contemporary feminists the solution implicit in effacing all differences between male and female is not acceptable.⁶⁷ The long debate, better conceived of as a dialectic, between equally legitimate demands for equality and for recognition of difference has not infrequently focused on the *Republic*.⁶⁸ But in the face of a long specifically Greek tradition of intense misogyny based on a frightening and repellent otherness of the female, Plato's daring remains awesome. He does not go into details, but even this silence is powerful. He feels no need to refute or endorse the array of misogynist Greek discourses elaborated over centuries. He is not shocked, as his brothers clearly are, at the prospect of nude gymnastics with women (457a6). With a certain self-righteous eloquence he concludes, "The female guardians must indeed strip inasmuch as they shall clothe themselves with excellence (*aretē*) instead of garments" (5.457a6–7). And even if, as some scholars have pointed out, he seems to have forgotten about women during much of the rest of the dialogue, he never shrinks from the implication that women will participate in the severest rigors of advanced dialectics, that women as such are fully qualified physically and mentally for the highest tasks of the ideal society. These more progressive features of his

⁶⁷I can only agree with Okin's focus on the critique of essentialism (1979: 39–40) as the most original and radical feature of Plato's discourse of women; cf. Bluestone 1987: 95–96. For an attack on Plato's treating women as indistinguishable from men, see Irigaray 1985, e. g., "Apart from the fact that she will perform her duties less well, as a result of her inferior nature, she will also participate only insofar as she is the same as a man" (157); "In order to take full possession of himself, man will need to take over not only the potentiality and potency, but also the place, and all the little chinks (re)produced in his ceaseless drive to transform anything different and still self-defining into his own likeness" (165–66).

⁶⁸I am indebted to Michèle Barrett for a stimulating overview of the equality–difference debate in feminism at the 1989 meeting of the Modern Language Association in Washington, D.C. See also Joan Scott 1988: 167–98.

utopia lay dormant like a mute indictment of Western society during the long centuries in which so many repressive features of his vision were eagerly endorsed and grimly implemented (Bluestone 1987: esp. 4–19).

Justice and *Phusis*

Plato's feminism is one dimension of his discourse of *phusis*, namely, his program of eugenics, which most obviously situates him in the "camp" of aristocratic ideology vis-à-vis the threats of sophistic teaching, even as the radicalism of his solution carries him beyond his class base. But eugenics is only a revealing subsidiary of Plato's primary discourse of *phusis* which emerges as the solution to the most explicitly posed and most comprehensive crisis envisioned in the *Republic*, namely, the question of justice. Justice, the central goal relentlessly sought through the long dialectic of the *Oresteia* and figured there in the utopian image of democratic Athens, is in the *Republic* the vehicle—at times one is tempted to say the pretext—for the utopian leap to the ideal city. This leap, in turn, for Plato implies the negation of the whole cultural heritage of Greece, the analysis of the psyche, the elaboration of a new epistemology, the critique of all existing forms of government, the sustained repudiation of all forms of *mimēsis*, and finally the eschatology of the myth with which he concludes. But like Plato's eugenics, the essence of justice turns out to be firmly rooted in the traditional aristocratic ideology of inherited excellence and aims most immediately at the repudiation of Athenian democracy and the sophistic ideology that sustains it.

The most concise definition of the principle of justice is *ta hautou prattein* (433a8), "doing what is one's own." But what is one's own turns out to be that one thing for which each of us is best suited by birth (*phusei*). Lurking behind the sophistic apparatus of a social contract (Havelock 1957: 94–101) in which this principle is first articulated, we can hear something nearer the blatant declaration of Pindar, "What is by birth is most powerful in every case" (*phuai to kratiston hapan*, *Ol.* 9.100). Rather coyly Plato introduces his fundamental principle in the context of envisioning a society at its simplest, conceived initially in terms of the Greek anthropologists' materialist criterion of *khreia* ("need," 2.369c2, 10) which dictates food production, manufacture of clothing, and building of shelter. The sophistic valorization of *koinōnia* ("sharing," "communality") is then invoked against individual efforts to achieve individual *autarkia* ("self-sufficiency," "economic independence," 2.369b6), which is described with disparaging redundancy as *auton di' hauton to hautou prattein* ("doing oneself one's own [tasks] though one's own [efforts]," 2.370a4). Plato would be well aware from

Homer and especially Hesiod's *Works and Days* that this was the earliest known pattern in Greece, but he also knows that it was accompanied by minimal social bonding in a polis. It is precisely the lack of individual *autarkia* which is given as the initial impulse for founding cities (2.369b5). Sokrates then proceeds with apparent casualness to invoke the discourse of *phusis* to confirm the communal mode of production based in the most rigid division of labor: "It occurs to me too now that you've spoken, that in the first place each of us is born [*phuetai*] not quite the same as each, but since each differs with respect to innate character [*tēn phusin*], one will perform one task [or function, *ergon*] and another another" (2.370a7–b2).

What is most striking here is the pseudo-casualness with which this concept is introduced and the blatancy with which it is justified by a totally unphilosophical, commonsense appeal to empirical observation. It is when he resorts to empirical commonsense that Plato reveals most openly the ideological direction of the argument.⁶⁹ The experience of humble craftspeople is first invoked as the proof of the thesis that each of us is born fit to do only one thing (2.370a6–b6). It would be hard to guess from this seemingly inoffensive, practical-sounding line of argument that this principle entails the most fundamental repudiation of the alternative democratic and sophistic discourse of human nature.

Central to sophistic anthropological speculations—which are also reflected in the *Prometheus Bound* and the famous chorus of Sophokles' *Antigone* which meditates on the achievements and dangers of the human species (*Ant.* 332–83)—is the celebration of human craft inventiveness as the achievement of the whole species, as characteristic of the innate capacities, the tremendous potential versatility of human beings qua human beings, not as a principle of hierarchy distinguishing some from others. The specifically democratic corollary of this view of human nature is the assertion that political freedom releases human potential, enables the full development of the capacity for a thoroughly admirable versatility. The thought is expressed with a certain dour power by Herodotus as he comments on the Athenians' success in repulsing all the reactionary powers who banded together to crush the new democratic revolution:

⁶⁹Another obvious instance of the appeal to empirical commonsense is the enabling analogy of the philosophical dog, which combines the apparent contraries of ferocity and knowledge (375a2–376c5). Sokrates has himself raised the objection to his own principle of specialization of labor in the case of the full-time professional army, which he presents as essential to the state (the rationale for this militarization of society is another ideological detour). The parallel of the dogs establishes only that versatility is not necessarily against nature, but Plato is not about to abandon his principle of specialization as a result. On the contrary, this point simply becomes a basis for defending the paucity of those with access to rule.

The Athenians now flourished [*ēuksēnto*]. It makes clear, and not just from this one instance but in all respects, that the right to equal speech in the assembly [*hē isēgoriē*] is an excellent thing [*khērēma spoudaion*], if the Athenians, who, when they had tyrants were—where wars were concerned—no better than any of their neighbors, but when they got free of their tyrants, became by far the best [*prōtoi*]. These things then make clear that when they were held back, they willingly played the coward because they were working for a master, but when they were liberated, each one was eager to work on behalf of himself [*autos hekastos heōutōi*]. (5.78)

Herodotus' celebration of individualism may misleadingly suggest nineteenth-century liberalism; but, unlike Plato, Herodotus assumes a perfect harmony of self-motivated, self-interested labor and the keenest commitment to the defense of the polis-community as a whole. The same perspective is clear in Thucydides' account of Perikles' funeral oration:

In sum, I say that the whole city is the education [*paideusis*] of Greece and with respect to the individual citizen, he seems to me to present himself [lit. "his body"] from among us as self-sufficient [*autarkes*] in the face of the most varied situations and with the greatest grace and versatility [*eutrapelōs*]. (2.41.1–2)

For Plato, however great his own versatility, this democratically celebrated versatility is the ultimate nightmare.⁷⁰ The worst consequence for the individual of *mimēsis*, in the sense of acting or emotionally associating with literary characters, is that it leads to moral and emotional versatility (3.395d). In Plato's vocabulary versatility is synonymous with meddling, being a troublesome busybody (*polupragmonein*, lit. "doing many things"), and the very antithesis of justice:⁷¹ "Each individual ought to pursue the one thing in the business of the city for which his nature was born and has grown most suited [*eis ho autou hē phusis epitēdeiotatē pephukua eīē*]. . . . And indeed the doing of what is one's own and not being a busybody [*mē polupragmonein*] is justice" (4.433a5–9). The negation is fully as integral to the definition as the affirmation. Half a page later Plato again describes justice as the principle "that each person, being one person, perform that which is his/hers and not meddle [*kai ouk epolupragmonei*]" (4.433d4–5). Moreover, the allegedly

⁷⁰"Of all men who ever lived Plato must have been one of the most versatile" (Raven 1965: 9).

⁷¹Ehrenberg 1947: 46–67 is a masterful survey of the history of the term, which is overwhelmingly negative in our predominantly anti-democratic sources but completely bound up with the Athenian democracy's positive self-image. For the term's interaction with its apposite, *apragmosunē*, see Carter 1986: esp. 117–18.

self-evident empirical data of the specialization of practical crafts which initially validated this principal of innate differentiation turns out to be a matter of relative indifference for Plato:

If a carpenter undertakes the function of a shoemaker or vice versa . . . or if the same person undertakes doing both jobs, do you think that does any damage to the city? Not at all. . . . But I believe that if a worker or someone who is a moneymaker by nature [*phusei*] undertakes to enter the military class, or if someone in the military undertakes to enter the class of deliberation and guardianship without being worthy of it, *then* I believe it seems to you as well that *this* change and meddling [*polupragmosunē*] means destruction for the city. (4.434a2–b7)

Thus it emerges that the only critical capacity determined by one's inherited nature is the capacity to rule—just the issue in the ideological debate over birth which is central to Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, and Sophokles (to pick some nonrandom examples). In Plato's utopia, then, justice turns out to be a willing adherence to the hierarchical division of classes achieved by Plato's eugenics (Cross and Woosley 1979 [1964]: 109–10; contra Guthrie *HGP* 4.473 n.2).

This discourse of *phusis* as a principle dividing rulers from ruled by birth is recapitulated in the analysis of the individual psyche, in which justice is also the principle of subordination of the naturally inferior parts to the naturally superior part. Here, however, the discourse of nature is ontologically linked not to human procreation or aristocratic ancestry but to the structure of reality and ultimately the Form of the Good, which in turn is associated with divinity. The calculating element in the soul is the only part that sees reality as it truly is—the reality of the Forms, which are divine. It is only by contemplating these that a human being can approach the condition of divinity: “Indeed, by consorting with what is divine and orderly the philosopher at least becomes both orderly and divine to the extent possible for a human being” (6.500c9–d1).

The gap between the discourse of human *phusis*, encompassing both eugenics and the organizational principle of the just polis, and *phusis* as the organizational principle of ultimate reality is the point at which the specifically political project founders on the rock of platonic ontology. The realm of the good, knowledge of which is fundamental to the success of rulers, is by definition totally separate from the realm of human generation. To be sure, Plato constantly suggests a clear connection by his elaborate description of the philosophical *phusis* (6.485a4–8)—where the term *phusis* ought to mean simply natural endowment without reference to specific parentage—in terms that constantly re-

call the *phusis* of the guardian which is presented as in some sense a product of the eugenic arrangements. The philosophical *phusis* is hypothetically presumed to come from a rich and noble family (*plousios te kai gennaïos*, 494c6), and the catalogue of its virtues corresponds to those of the guardian as genetically engineered in the earlier books.

Yet finally Plato himself explicitly insists on the relevance to the political project of this separation of the realm of generation from the realm of the Forms by his recourse to the heavenly number (8.546a7–547a5). I, at least, deduce from this endlessly debated passage that (1) the cosmos is presumed to be mathematically ordered, (2) that there is potentially a connection between this order and the process of human procreation, but (3) that even to the most perfectly trained philosopher-rulers this order is ultimately inaccessible.⁷² On this catch-22 the ideal city meets its inevitable doom.

Phusis and *Didachē*: The Collapse of an Opposition

The disjunction between, on the one hand, human *phusis* with its fatal baggage of mortality and, on the other, the pure realm of the good is not the only basis on which Plato's discourse of *phusis* is deconstructed within the text of the *Republic*. The sophistic alternative to aristocratic *phusis* is *paideia*, education and socialization in the broadest sense as the far more relevant determining factors of character. Here Plato is far more a Sophist himself than a conservative aristocrat. For all his attachment to the connotations of *phusis* and in spite of his otherworldly distrust of education as itself inherently contingent, he accepts the core of the sophistic analysis. Yet his constant harking back to aristocratic *phusis* mystifies his acknowledgment of the overwhelming power of *didachē*.

In earlier dialogues Socrates is represented as opposing the view that *aretē* can be taught. His initial, ironic proof of this proposition in the *Protagoras* is that the Athenian assembly lets all comers speak on issues of general policy for which *aretē* is relevant (*Prot.* 319a10–d7). On the one hand, this argument seems to anticipate the quest for government by highly educated experts rather than constituting a serious repudiation of teaching. It was just such experts that the Academy, itself adumbrated in the account of the advanced curriculum in the *Republic*,

⁷² Adam 1963: 2.264–312 is a long appendix on interpretations of the magical number. Guthrie *HGP* 4.529 n. 1 brings the vast bibliography up to 1975. I agree with Guthrie that "Plato amuses himself with a pedantic theory" (528), but I think the philosophical point is in deadly earnest.

would produce to serve (and on occasion to murder) various kinglets and tyrants (Davies 1978: 235–36; Field 1967: 43–45). On the other hand, the *Meno*, with its doctrine of *anamnēsis* (recollection), suggests how desperately Plato sought some alternative to a sophistic view of education as adding to and transforming an essentially indifferent raw material. This doctrine of *anamnēsis* is presumed to be operative in the parable of the cave and the myth of Er (Guthrie *HGP* 4.559 n. 1; Raven 1965: 176), but these passages show traces of a fundamental ideological suture (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 88 n. 1), a stitching over a hole in the argument made by an ideologically unacceptable implication of Plato's own argument. The doctrine of *anamnēsis*, first illustrated with a slave in the *Meno*, is a general statement about the educability and capacity for knowledge of human beings qua human beings. It is an unalienable potentiality. In the parable of the cave, Sokrates spells out the potentially democratic thrust of his theory of education:

We must, if these things are true, believe some such thing as this about them: education is not the sort of thing some people announce that it is. They say, I infer [*pou*], that they put knowledge into a soul that does not have it—as if they had put sight into blind eyes. . . . But our present argument . . . indicates that this faculty [*dunamin*] is in the psyche of each person as well as the organ with which each person learns. (7.518b6–c6)

The logical possibility that everyone qua human being is capable of being turned toward the light is explicit. Despite the radically different *telos* of platonic education, this account of human beings corresponds closely to the position taken by Protagoras in the *Protagoras*. Everyone who actually lives in society is by definition capable of learning what the society wants its members to learn, and the entire analysis of the socialization process Protagoras offers insists on the effectiveness of this mass education. Yet, despite the fact that the rationale for educating everyone in the polis is present in the text, the idea as such is scrupulously avoided. How?

The entire discourse of *phusis* in the *Republic* seems on this level designed to give some ontological support to a view of education that would *not* be available to all comers. In this context, a glance at the hostility of those who are uneducated and the indifference of the overeducated (7.519b7–c6) leads to this rigidly elitist non sequitur: “Our task as founders is to compel the best natures [*tas beltistas phuseis*] to arrive at the study which before we declared was the greatest, to see the Good, to make that ascent” (7.519c8–d1). Throughout the *Republic* Socrates again and again emphasizes all the factors that determine the extreme rarity of the appropriate *phusis* for the ruler's education, and

this rarity is from the outset associated with noble birth. We have already noted the exceptional weight placed on the well-born puppy analogy for separating guardians from ordinary brutal soldiers, and there is no particular point in going over the other natural aptitude tests invoked in the first-round choice of the guardian class. It is when the paradox of the philosopher-ruler is enunciated that the second round of arguments from *phusis* is invoked to keep the pool of potential leaders as small as possible. The rarity of the right *phusis* is first invoked as a defense against those who would immediately attack Sokrates for his paradox: "It is fitting for some by nature [*phusei*] to embrace philosophy and rule in the city, but for others not to embrace it, but to follow the leader" (5.474b4–c3).

After a long detour detailing all those unfit for philosophy, we come back to the definition of those who have this capacity, "the nature [*phusin*] that one who is to become *kalos k' agathos* must be born with [*phunai*]" (6.489e4–490a1). Again a traditional term for an aristocratic gentleman is equated with the true philosopher. This "true [in contradistinction to all those who have just been decisively excluded] lover of learning would have a birth-given capacity [*pephukōs eiē*] to strive toward reality [*to on*]" (6.490a8–9). Sokrates continues with a sexual metaphor to elaborate on this striving toward reality:

He would not remain among those things which are believed in opinion to be many particulars, but rather he would go on and would not blunt the edge of his desire [*erōtos*] or give it up before he has seized the essence [*phuseōs*] itself of each thing with that part of the soul with which it is fitting to seize on such an object—fitting because akin to it [*sungenei*]. With this part he approaches closely and truly has intercourse [*migeis*] with reality [*tōi onti*], engendering [*gennēsas*] understanding and truth, and he will gain knowledge and truly live and thrive and in this way leave off his birth pang [*ōdinos*] and not before that. (6.490b1–b7)⁷³

This extraordinary passage, a metaphorical cross between a Spartan-style marriage, incest, and male parthenogenesis, insists in terms diametrically opposed to the species-wide capacity for learning articulated in the cave passage that only the true philosopher has the innate capacity and the organ for this union with the real.

After detailing the other virtues of this *phusis* and announcing that he will explain how it is corrupted so that only a few (*smikron ti*) escape,

⁷³See duBois' analysis (1988: 169–83) of the general tendency, well illustrated in this passage, of Plato's sexualization of philosophy to appropriate both female and male imagery of procreation. Thus the initially purely phallic intercourse of the philosophical *phusis* with reality culminates in a kind of self-impregnation entailing a normally female birth pang.

Sokrates, the philosophical enemy par excellence of the opinions of the many, makes another of his rare and ideologically symptomatic appeals to a *consensus gentium*: "On this point then I imagine everyone will agree with us, that such a nature [*phusin*], having all the attributes which we just now catalogued, if it is to become perfectly [*teleōs*] philosophical, is rarely [*oligakis*] born [*phuesthai*] among human kind and few in number [*oligas*]" (6.491a8–b2). This triumphant conclusion precedes the parable of the cave, so the audience has already been heavily pressured to accept this narrow conception of human educability before being exposed to a view with markedly different implications.

Plato's solemn silence on the issue of educating the many is as clear an evidence of his horror of democracy as his explicit glossing of *ta hautou prattein* (doing one's own) by *kai mē polupragmonein* (and not being a meddler) (4.433a8). For, as we have seen, the democratic celebration of the human capacity for versatility goes hand in hand with the sophistic celebration of all that can be added to the *phusis* of the pupil by education. To this extent, the combination in the *Republic* of absolute state control of breeding and of every phase of socialization seems to meet the sophistic threat irrefutably. In so absolutist a thinker, however, the compound proves quite unstable. The elaboration of the impact of the wrong sort of socialization beside the detailed presentation of all that the correct socialization would entail ends in confirming the sophistic downgrading of the relative importance of *phusis*. Plato concedes indeed that, the better the *phusis*, the more vulnerable it is to corruption by the wrong socialization; he even confirms it by the naturalistic analogy of a plant in the wrong soil (6.491d1–5). This analogy represents a revealingly pessimistic and characteristically aristocratic reversal of Antiphon's use of the same analogy:

The first thing, I believe, among human beings is education [*paideusis*]. For whenever one makes the beginning correctly of anything whatsoever, it is likely as well that the end will turn out correctly. And whatever seed one plants in the ground, such are the fruits one must expect. And whenever one plants a noble [*gennaian*] education in a young body, it lives and thrives through his whole life, and neither downpour nor drought will tear it away. (*D-K B 60*)

Antiphon presents nobility as an attribute of education itself. The body of the pupil is the soil, the character of which appears in his wording to be a matter of indifference, while the seed is daringly equated with education. The consequences of the process have the very stability and permanence that the medical writers attribute to the individual *phusis*. For Plato, as for Pindar (*Ne.* 8.40–43), the plant is associated with in-

nate virtues that require the right soil. But more pessimistic than Pindar, Plato seems obsessed with the unavailability of such an educational environment in his world.

Plato's anxiety over the necessity of the correct socialization repeatedly brings him to the verge of echoing Democritos' devastating assault on the exclusive claims of *phusis*. For Plato too education "makes *phusis*" (*phusiopoiei*). Plato's own analogies of education to molding or setting a stamp in clay (2.377b1–2) or to dyeing cloth (429d4–e5) imply as much, but always in the negative sense of the threat of the wrong education. To sum up his horror of the wrong sorts of *mimēseis*, he states explicitly: "Don't you realize that imitations, if they are carried on through from youth become established with respect to one's behavior and nature [*eis ethē te kai phusin kathistantai*; Grube translates 'become part of one's nature']" (3.395d1–3).

To put it most accurately, Plato does not seem to acknowledge explicitly that education "makes" *phusis*; more poignantly, in the real world of democratic Athens, it breaks *phusis*. Still, as Okin acutely points out (1979: 57), the deeper reason that the noble lie is a lie is that it implicitly acknowledges that the precious *phuseis* of the guardians are in fact socially, *educationally* constructed—not consequences of their genetic endowments.

Conclusion

The *Republic* gives us at once both the most powerfully articulated defense of aristocratic inherited excellence and the fullest demonstration of its fragility and inadequacy before the ideological apparatuses of the state. The Pindaric *phusis* Plato seeks to save is doubly trapped: it partakes of the vagaries of mere generation and it is ultimately defenseless against the power of poeticized public discourses promulgated by state power. Nonetheless, the radicalism of his attempted solution—his utopian negation of the whole range of democratic discourses as he posits an ideally rational state in which both birth and education are perfectly harmonized with the dictates of reason—represents an at least provisional ancient closure on the still hotly contested terrain of nature versus nurture. We may justly feel a certain horror at what this particular utopian model has inspired through the centuries, but any serious attempt to find better alternatives must lie on the far side of confronting Plato's attempted solutions.