Wisdom, Virtue and Education in Plato's Republic

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Introduction

Recent scholarship on Plato's moral and educational theory has emphasized the role that habit and practice play in the development of the virtues (Lane 2001, Vasiliou 2008, Sawatzky, 2013, Jonas 2016). These commentators argue that Plato believes that habits and practice are essential for the development of the virtues and therefore that strong intellectualist accounts of Plato's moral psychology are incorrect. There is one virtue, however, that Plato argues does not require habituation for its development—the virtue of wisdom. In the *Republic* Plato claims that "it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of [*phronesis*][1] seems to belong above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned" (*Republic* 518d-e). This provocative feature of Plato's moral theory has significant implications for his educational theory. In particular, it raises questions about the apparent elitism that undergirds Plato's pedagogy in the *Republic*. The standard interpretation of the *Republic* is that Plato believes that only certain individuals are capable of wisdom and the other virtues, while ordinary human beings can never achieve either. From this view, the elite alone are worthy of a curriculum in virtue. However, this interpretation cannot be maintained if one examines Plato's conception of the virtue of wisdom mentioned above. I argue that Plato believes all human beings have the capacity for wisdom (even if the vast majority of humans will never fulfill that capacity) and that, if educated correctly, all can become not only wise but also temperate, courageous, and just.

[1] Importantly, unlike Aristotle, Plato does not make a sharp distinction between practical wisdom (Aristotle's *phronesis*) and theoretical wisdom (Aristotle's *sophia*). Plato uses the terms interchangeably. Sometimes he uses *phronesis* to suggest something like practical intelligence; at other times, he uses the same word to suggest a more theoretical wisdom. It is the same with *sophia*—sometimes it connotes theoretical wisdom, and sometimes it connotes practical wisdom, and sometimes both. In the context above, the word *phronesis* connotes a kind of vision or sight that apprehends reality—thus suggesting a kind of theoretical knowledge—but also is responsible for guiding the individual in practical decisions.

To make my case, I first examine Plato's conception of the soul and explain why he believes that wisdom is the one virtue that innately exists in all persons. Second, I show how Plato believes wisdom is cultivated through an educational curriculum aimed at the creation of the other virtues—a curriculum based on habit and practice.

The Allegory of the Cave and the Virtue of Wisdom

My discussion of Plato's educational theory in the *Republic* begins with the Allegory of the Cave. In the allegory, Socrates describes three individuals who have been chained in the back of a cave their entire lives. They are unable to move their heads or bodies and are not aware of their own physical existence or the broader world. The prisoners spend their days watching shadows on a wall in front of them, which are cast by a fire from behind. Because they have been chained for their entire lives, Socrates claims that, for them, the truth is nothing but shadows.

Socrates relates what will happen if one of the prisoners is freed and "compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light" (515c). He claims that the prisoner will be pained and dazzled by the bright light of the fire, unable to see anything since he will shut his eyes to avoid the searing pain. As such, he will believe that what he used to see is truer than what he sees now, because what he sees now is obscured by the bright lights and his closed eyes. Socrates' point is that the prisoner is wrong and suffering only a temporary illusion. Eventually, the prisoner gets used to the light and comes to recognize that what he is now seeing is more real than what he formerly saw. However, before the prisoner can enjoy his new situation, he is "dragged…away from there by force, up the rough steep path, and…into the sunlight" (515e). At every turn the prisoner is led from pain to pain and is never allowed to enjoy himself until he finally grows accustomed to the light of the sun itself, at which point the prisoner is delighted with his new situation. Unfortunately, we are told that he begins to pity his former den mates and wishes to help them. Socrates then describes

what would happen if the freed prisoner went back into the cave to rescue his former friends. He would be blinded once again because of the dimly lit cave and, even worse, his former friends would not be impressed with his new-found "vision" and would threaten to kill him.

The Allegory of the Cave describes the human condition as one in which human beings live in metaphorical caves and interact with realities that are but shadows of a true reality, which supersedes the quasi-illusions of what humans normally take to be real. It is tempting to interpret the allegory narrowly as anticipating Plato's discussion of the Forms and the need for philosopher-kings to access them in order to genuinely "know" what virtue is, as Vasiliou does.[2] However, to interpret the allegory that narrowly is to miss the important educational ideas found therein—ideas that Socrates spells out immediately following the allegory.

Rather than moving to the education of the guardians and a description of the Forms that these guardians are meant to apprehend, Socrates follows the allegory by deriving some general educational principles applicable to all human beings.[3] His first principle is that the "power to learn is present in everyone's soul…and [education] isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul…but takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned in the right way or looking where it ought to look" (518c-d). Socrates claims that all human beings have the ability to "know the good," which he calls the virtue of wisdom, but that their souls must be properly turned to discover it. This is what initially happens to Socrates' cave dweller—someone unlocks his chains
and then "compels" him to turn around and walk toward the light. What is important is that Socrates claims this power to learn is present in "everyone's" soul.

[2] According to Vasiliou, Socrates cannot explain what virtue is because he is not himself a philosopher-king, who is the only type of person capable of truly knowing the virtues. Philosopher-kings are the only individuals capable of knowing the virtues because they are the only individuals capable of accessing the Realm of the Forms. From my point of view, while Vasiliou is correct in his assessment that the educational plan in the Republic is incomplete as a systematic plan, he misunderstands why it is incomplete. It is incomplete not because Plato thinks that philosopher-kings must establish true virtue; it is incomplete because he cannot explain the virtues in words, except in metaphor.
[3] For an in-depth and instructive treatment of the ways that the educational plan in the Republic is meant to educate all three parts of the soul, see Wilberding (2012).

The fact that Plato argues that every soul has the ability to exercise wisdom and to apprehend the truth comes as a surprise on first glance because in numerous places in the *Republic* (and throughout his corpus), Plato distinguishes between individuals who have the ability to attain full wisdom and those who cannot attain full wisdom. In places, it can seem that Plato is making an ontological distinction between those individuals who literally have no capacity for wisdom whatsoever and from those that do (Phaedo, 80d-84a; Republic, 474b-c). This is why interpreters like Bobonich (2002) interpret Plato as arguing that average human beings can have no wisdom, virtue, or happiness whatsoever.[4] Only philosophers are capable of achieving these things.[5] However, from what we see above, all people have the capacity for wisdom; they merely need a guide to "turn" them the right way and set them on the correct path. If they immoderately pursue bodily pleasures they will not be using their ability to think wisely; they will remain perpetually foolish, even though they are fundamentally capable of wisdom. The upshot of this is that if individuals lack wisdom it is not because they are ontologically deficient with respect to wisdom, but because they have not been educated sufficiently to take advantage of their innate capacity for wisdom.

While it is evident that Plato believes that all human beings have the innate capacity for wisdom, the degree to which they live according to that capacity varies. Plato considers his contemporaries to be almost totally devoid of wisdom and virtue because they have been raised in a vicious, Athenian society. "For there isn't now, hasn't been in the past, nor ever will be in the future anyone with a character so unusual that he has been educated to virtue in spite of the contrary education received from the mob" (492e). The question then becomes: how can individuals be freed

[4] Kraut (2010) argues this standard interpretation when he claims that in the Republic "Ordinary citizens who have been exposed to the rule of the philosophers acknowledge that it is the philosophers who truly understand what is valuable, and they defer to their greater wisdom" (58). While Kraut interprets the Republic along these standard lines, his interpretation of the potential of typical human beings to develop at least some level of virtue is sympathetic with my own and challenges Bobonich's more pessimistic interpretation.

[5] Several interpreters have argued that Bobonich is incorrect on this point. See for example, Kamtekar (2010), Jonas (2016).

from this influence? Or to put it in terms that Plato uses above: how can individuals be turned from a world of shadows to reality? The answer is that the souls of individuals must be "hammered" upon in order to be freed from the "encrustations" caused by a bad upbringing and the poor personal choices that follow. Even though the capacity for wisdom is innate, the education children are given and the personal choices they make when they are older serve either to improve their capacity for wisdom or to diminish it. In the case of Plato's contemporaries these upbringings and choices work against wisdom, but it need not be that way.

The Virtue of Wisdom and the Encrusted Soul

In the Allegory of the Cave, the cave dwellers have grown accustomed to their lifestyle and even enjoy it to some degree. They are physically incapable of freeing themselves from their chains, but they also have no idea that they are in need of being freed. Even if they could free themselves and even if someone told them that what they were experiencing was not reality, Plato tells us that they would still prefer to stay in their benighted state because they have been conditioned to want it. The only way to free them from their condition is to "compel" them to stand up and turn around. In the allegory, this compulsion takes only a few seconds, but in reality Plato believes it will take much longer. A more realistic metaphor is the metaphor of the encrusted soul, which Plato uses twice in the *Republic*.[6]

In the very last pages of the *Republic*, Plato returns to the idea of the soul and its innate virtue of wisdom. Socrates explains that in spite of the conclusions that he and his interlocutors have drawn about the soul, they are still without knowledge of what the soul is in its nature. Socrates compares the soul to the sea god Glaucus,

[6] For a variety of perspectives on the various ways Plato describes the soul see Ferrari (2007, Chapter 7 in Ferrari Ed.); Woolf (2012, Chapter 7 in Barney Ed); Brown (2012, Chapter 3 in Barney); Santas (2010, 81-93), Bobonich (2002, 216-292).

> whose primary nature can't easily be made out by those who catch glimpses of him. Some of the original parts have been broken off, others have been crushed, and his whole body has been maimed by the waves and by the shells, seaweeds, and stones that have attached themselves to him, so that he looks more like a wild animal than his natural. The soul, too, is in a similar condition when we study it, beset by many evils. (611c-d)

Socrates goes on to say that although the soul is "akin to the divine and immortal" it would need to have its "many stones and shells (those which have grown all over it in a wild, earthy, and stone profusion because it feasts at those happy feastings on earth)…hammered off it" (611e-612a) in order for its love of wisdom to be seen. Socrates claims that all souls—because they are akin to the divine—have the capacity and the desire to know the good, but because of the "feasts" which the soul participates in on earth, it becomes encrusted and is no longer capable of desiring the good. Yet, this does not mean that the soul is ruined or corrupted—rather, it remains as pure as before and "longs to have intercourse with [wisdom]" (611e); it is just that these longings do not have the motivational impetus to lead to wisdom because the soul has become encrusted by its long pursuit of vice. Thus, even though the soul longs for the good deep down, the human being who is encrusted by the effects of vicious actions will continually pursue vice, increasing the encrustation, thus leading to a vicious cycle. Fortunately, Socrates claims that there is a way out of this vicious cycle—the soul must be "hammered" upon so that these encrustations can be broken off.

Plato uses the image of hammering twice in the republic; the first time is during the Allegory of the Cave and the subsequent discussion. Socrates describes people whose souls are "vicious but clever." Socrates argues that it is not inborn capacity for wisdom that is deficient in these people—for all people are capable of wisdom—but, rather, that their reason has been "pulled down" by "feasting, greed, and other such pleasures."

> However, the virtue of [*phronesis*] belongs above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned. Or have you never noticed this about people who are said to be vicious but clever, how keen the vision of their little souls is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned towards? This shows that its sight isn't inferior but rather forced to serve evil ends, so that the sharper it sees, the more evil it accomplishes….However, if a nature of this sort had been hammered at from childhood and freed from the bonds of kinship with becoming, which had been fastened to it by feasting, greed, and other such pleasures and which, like leaden weights, pull its vision downward—if being rid of these, it turned to look at true things, then I say that the same soul of the same person would see these most sharply, just as it now does the things it is presently turned towards. (518e-519b)

There are several points in this passage that require analysis. The first is that while the soul is affected by bad actions, its ability to "see" is not *permanently* impaired; every soul is capable of "apprehending the good," no matter how corrupt it seems. The second is that even a corrupted soul can be freed of its weights if it is "hammered at from childhood." This is important because the soul that Socrates describes seems to be especially wicked insofar as it has a keenness of vision, which makes it highly effective in "the evil it accomplishes." This means that it is more effective in its pursuit of feasting, greed and so on, and therefore becomes more encrusted due to the vicious circle in which it is caught. The upshot is that the more ordinary a soul is, the less thoroughly it is encrusted—since it accomplishes less vice—and thus requires less hammering to regain its ability to turn toward the good.

But this leads to the most important question: how can individuals be freed from their encrustation? What does Plato mean by his answer of "hammering at them"? In the case of young children, at least, the *Republic* offers us a sketch of how Plato expects to free human beings from

their leaden weights and encrustations, which will give them renewed access to their innate virtue of wisdom.

When Socrates uses the image of hammering in Book VII and Book X, the context is similar but not identical. In Book X the connotation of "hammering" is a literal hammering where the "stones and shells" need to be broken off the soul *of an adult*. But in Book VII, the connotation is "forging" which implies molding and shaping. When he recommends hammering on a child to free it from becoming, he means forging and shaping in youth through intentional pedagogy. The child, unfortunately, has a predisposed tendency to want pleasure and will naturally pursue that pleasure immoderately and without regard to what it *ought* to be pursuing. Because of its young age, though, the child will not have had much opportunity to participate in feasting, greed, and so on, and therefore will not need to be 'hammered on' to the same degree as the encrusted adult soul found in Book X; young children simply have not had as much time to develop encrustations as adults. Nevertheless, they need forging because their inborn desire for pleasure needs to be redirected so as to avoid vice—because of its mortal frame, the child will necessarily focus its reason in the wrong direction and will not 'apprehend the good', being content to focus its attention on earthly goods.

This is, of course, what we see in all children. From the earliest age, they crave certain bodily experiences, like the desire to eat, and will wail if they are not allowed to gorge themselves. As a bodily organism which is continually threatened with death if it does not eat sufficiently, it is entirely appropriate, even necessary, for a parent to let the child gorge itself on mother's milk and other food when the child's stomach is ready for it. The more fat the child has on its body, the greater chance it has for survival and overall physical health. Thus, in a sense, from its first days outside of the womb the child is developing shells and stones through its inborn bodily desires. As the child develops, it will have been habituated to prefer feasting and greed because that is what it has been allowed to do since its birth. Its nascent ability to reason will naturally be focused on further securing its objects of

desire, to which it had become accustomed. The child's burgeoning reason will therefore need to be redirected if it is to avoid immoderation and vice—the child will need to be freed from the back of the cave and led up to the light. This is done through hammering as forging, which Plato argues is achieved through a rigorous curriculum aimed at habituating children in the good.

Hammering at the Soul through Habituation and Practice

While Aristotle is famous for his belief that reason and virtue can only be achieved through habit and practice, Plato shares his belief. Indeed, Aristotle acknowledges his debt to Plato in this regard when he writes: "moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and be pained by the things that we ought" (NE, 1104b9-13). That this is Plato's position is readily seen as we read the text immediately following the last cited passage in Plato concerning the need to redirect "sight…to where it ought to look." Socrates says:

> Now, it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of [*phronesis*] seems to belong above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned" (Republic, 518d-e).

The "other" virtues that Plato is referring to are temperance (*sophrosune*), courage (*andreia*) and justice (*dikaiosune*), which together with wisdom make up the cardinal virtues. Like Aristotle, Plato believes that the only way to achieve these virtues is to practice virtuous actions and imitate virtuous people repeatedly. Plato also believes that in order to be properly habituated, an individual must have virtuous role-models after whom he or she can pattern his or her life; through this process they will

begin to desire to live this way.[7] In the case of Plato, this patterning is based, not only on living examples, but also on the literal imitation found in acting the part of virtuous heroes from epic poetry and tragedies. As an individual models his or her life after another by habitually performing the acts the exemplar dictates, he or she begins to develop a taste for these virtuous actions and desires to perform them even when not directed to do so by the exemplar (395b-396e; 401d-e; Lear, 1997, p. 63-64). However, the question of the virtue of wisdom arises. According to Plato, it does not need habit, practice and imitation for its existence. However, as I will now show, in order for the virtue of wisdom to be exercised, the soul must be prevented from acting on its impulses towards greed, consumption, and all other vices, which is exactly what is necessary in the habituation process of the other virtues.

To begin, the virtue of temperance comes into being through a lengthy education featuring habituation and imitation. Socrates argues that a childhood education in music, poetry, and stories is essential to the development of temperance because it produces "the love of order and beauty that has been moderated by education in music and poetry" (403c, see also 410a). At first glance it would seem that listening to music and poetry is a passive activity that does not require habit and practice, but for Socrates when one repeatedly listens to the harmonies and rhythms of music, one's soul is conformed to the music which then produces actions consonant with that music. Similarly, when a student habitually recites poetry, he or she must "act out" the virtuous parts, which, according to Plato, is a form of imitation that produces certain psychic states, which also leads to further actions that are consonant with the poetry. It is the same for hearing stories; by being made to habitually hear them, students will develop a taste for the actions described in them. Thus, by repeatedly listening and performing music, poetry and stories that depict temperate acts, Socrates argues that

[7] Lear, Jonathan. "Inside and Outside the Republic." Plato's Republic: Critical Essays. Ed. Richard Kraut. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. 61-94.

students will become temperate and will gradually learn to prefer temperance to licentiousness (393a-396e).

Connected to music, poetry and stories, Socrates further recommends a rigorous training of the body that includes a special diet devoid of delicacies, which are not "compatible with moderation," and which produce licentiousness (402e). Therefore, individuals are repeatedly required to practice the virtue of temperance by only eating enough to satisfy themselves. At first they will not enjoy such restriction of their desires, but Plato argues that eventually they will develop the habit of eating moderately and in so doing will develop the desire to be temperate (395b-396e; 401d-e)—together this means that they will have acquired, insofar as it deals with food, the virtue of temperance. In addition to becoming temperate through music, poetry, stories, and a proper diet, students will also be compelled to moderate their desires with respect to sex (389d, 403c), alcohol (389d, 403e), money (408c-d), and other pleasures. As this education unfolds, students become temperate—but simultaneously their innate wisdom is allowed to develop by avoiding feasts and other immoderate acts—those things that create the encrustations that interfere with the virtue of wisdom (410a).

Importantly, courage is also cultivated through an education in habituation through music, poetry and physical training.[8]

> Then, Glaucon, did those who established education in music and poetry and in physical training do so with the aim that people attribute to them, which is to take care of the body with the latter and the soul with the former, or with some other aim?...It looks as though

[8] It should be stated that the music and poetry used to form courage has a different content from the music and poetry used to form temperance.

> Just leave me that mode [of music] that would suitably imitate the tone and rhythm of a courageous person….[and] leave me another mode, that of someone engaged in a peaceful unforced, voluntary action, persuading someone or asking a favor of a good in prayer or a human being through teaching and exhortation, or, on the other hand, of someone submitting to the supplications of another who is teaching him and trying to get him to change his mind, and who, in all these circumstances, is acting with moderation and self-control (399a-b)

> they are established both chiefly for the soul….It seems, then, that a god has given music and physical training to human beings not, except incidentally, for the body and the soul but for the spirited and wisdom-loving parts of the soul itself, in order that these might be in harmony with each other. (410b-411e)

A proper education in music and physical training—while seemingly focused on the body—is actually meant to cultivate the virtues in the soul, namely courage and wisdom. Concerning the former, the spirited part of the soul—just like the appetitive part—is tamed through the use of poetry and music and by placing appropriate restrictions on the quality and quantity of food and exercise. The physical regimen is prescribed "in order to arouse the spirited part (courage) of his nature" (410a) and is meant to increase the spiritedness of the individual, which helps to make him or her courageous. Unfortunately, if the spirited part is aroused to excess in the individual then he will become "like a wild animal" who "bulls his way through every situation by force and savagery" (411d). To prevent this, the students must be prevented from working too "hard at physical training…and do[ing] nothing else" (411c-d). Even though physical training is good for the soul, in excess it becomes dangerous. Thus any appetite can become bad for the soul if indulged without moderation. This moderation comes from music, poetry, and physical training, and through law-abiding games that help the virtues seep into the students like dye into wool. "Their beliefs about what they should fear and all the rest would become so fast that even such extremely effective detergents as pleasure, pain, fear, and desire wouldn't wash it out….And this power to preserve through everything the correct and law-inculcated belief about what is to be feared and what isn't is what I call courage" (430b-c).

What this all amounts to is that temperance, courage and wisdom are part of the same habituation process that requires music, poetry, stories, diet and physical training.[9] The only difference is that with respect to temperance and courage, habituation and imitation actually *create* these virtues, whereas the virtue of wisdom is merely *freed* to maximize its innate capabilities. But what about justice, the fourth cardinal virtue? Does it also require habituation for its development? The answer is yes, but in a counterintuitive sense.

According to the *Republic*, justice is not actually a distinct virtue that can be conceptually separated from the others—rather it unifies and harmonizes all of the other virtues.

> One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low and middle. He binds together these parts….and from having been many he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. Only then does he act. And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of the body, engaging in politics, or private contracts—in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it. (443d)

Justice, therefore, does not have its own sphere of external action. In fact, one cannot actually perform just acts but can only make sure that the three parts of himself—reason, spirit, and appetite—are performing the acts they should. This conception of justice leads to some radical implications. If a person's desire to eat too much food overcomes his or her reason which demands that he or she should not eat that much, the person will be committing intemperance. This view of intemperance is straightforward enough, but what follows from Plato's conception of justice is that since it is justice's job to make sure that appetite does not usurp reason in this way, the individual

[9] Nathan Sawatzky (2013) points out the mathematics is also a form of habituation (2013). "Timaeus' Indifference to Education." *Ancient Philosophy,* 33(2), 358-360. On habituation and correct education "turning" the soul.

will also be committing the vice of injustice if this occurs. Thus, when a person acts intemperately they are simultaneously acting unjustly; and even more surprisingly, they are acting cowardly and unwise as well.

In Book IV, Socrates fully lays out his metaphor of the tripartite soul, which includes reason, spirit, and appetite. Previously, he had discussed each part individually, but it is at the end of Book IV that he summarizes his metaphor explaining how each of the parts relate to the others and how the virtues associated with each are related to one another. He claims that the virtue of wisdom resides in the rational part of the soul, the virtue of courage resides in the spirited part, and the virtue of temperance resides in the appetitive part. However, each of these virtues and parts of the soul do not operate in isolation from one another—they are inextricably linked. Socrates argues that temperance can only be achieved if courage follows the edicts of reason and that the rational part of the soul must enlist the help of the spirited part of the soul to teach moderation to the appetitive part of the soul.

> Therefore, isn't it appropriate for the rational part to rule, since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul, and for the spirited part to obey it and be its ally?...And these two, having been nurtured [through education in music and poetry] in this way, and having truly learned their own roles and been educated in them, will govern the appetitive part (441e-442d).

The result of the teamwork between the rational part of the soul and the spirited part of the soul is not merely that they control the unwilling appetitive part, but that the appetitive part learns to appreciate the importance of moderation and genuinely desires to be in harmony with reason and spirit. When all of these parts cooperate the person embodies wisdom, courage, and moderation, three of the four cardinal virtues.

> And it is because of the spirited part, I suppose, that we call a single individual courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declaration of reason about what is to be feared and what isn't….And we we'll call him wise because of that small part of himself that rules in him and makes those declarations and has within it the knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul, which is the community of the three parts….And isn't he moderate because of the friendly and harmonious relations between these same parts, namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe in common that the rational part should rule and don't engage in civil war. (442b-d)

In this passage we see that a temperate person is such because they are wise and courageous. Thus, a temperate and self-controlled person is necessarily a brave and wise person.

Returning to the subject of justice, we now see that there is also a necessary connection between each of the three cardinal virtues and justice. If a person fails to exercise temperance, not only is he or she necessarily failing to exercise justice, but he or she is also necessarily failing to exercise courage and wisdom, because the rational part of the soul should have enlisted the spirited part in order to control the appetitive part. If the appetitive part acted intemperately, the spirited part and the rational part must not have been acting with courage and wisdom. Thus a person who is intemperate cannot, by necessity, be just, wise, or courageous. And the inverse is true, a person who does not exercise one of the virtues necessarily cannot exercise any of the virtues.

Ordinary Human Beings and their Potential for Virtue

Now that we have examined the relationship between the virtue of wisdom and the other virtues, and the centrality of habit and practice in the development of all of the virtues, we are in a position to consider whether the cardinal virtues are only possible for an elite group of individuals. The standard interpretation of Plato's middle works is that typical individuals are not capable of

exercising the virtues—only philosophers have that capacity. Bobonich (2011) for example claims that "only philosophers possess real virtue, while nonphilosophers have only a 'shadow-painting of virtue that is really slavish and contains nothing healthy or true'….There seems to be very little that a city can do to improve significantly the lives of the vast majority of its citizens; no nonphilosopher can have a life that is really worth living for a human being" (322).[10] Obviously, concerning the virtue of wisdom at least, Bobonich's claim must be too strong since every individual has the virtue of wisdom—and that wisdom can never be taken away but only misdirected. But what about the other cardinal virtues: moderation, courage, and justice? Are typical human beings capable of possessing these virtues as well? The answer is, yes—the *Republic* gives clear indication that ordinary people are capable (in theory) of achieving all the cardinal virtues.

At the beginning of book II, Socrates, after offering a definition of justice and before beginning his lengthy exposition on the metaphorical city of Kallipolis, describes a "true" and "healthy" city where all the inhabitants live in peace, harmony and good health and who bequeath these qualities to their children (372a-e). Socrates praises this city for its moderation and justice and yet Glaucon demurs claiming that it is a city fit for pigs since the citizens cannot "recline on proper couches, dine at a table, and have the delicacies and desserts that people have nowadays." To which Socrates replies that he understands that Glaucon will not be satisfied with such a city but needs one that is "luxurious" and has a "fever" and requires "all sorts of delicacies, perfumed oils, incense, prostitutes." Socrates summarizes the state of this luxurious city by saying that the citizens of such a city "have surrendered themselves to the endless acquisition of money [and the luxuries that it can buy] and have overstepped the limit of their necessity" (373a-d). Plato's point in contrasting the First City and the luxurious city has not been sufficiently understood by most commentators.[11] What

[10] For similar interpretations, see also Kraut (2010, 58) and Vasiliou (2008, 214).
[11] Some have argued that the citizens of the First City are not fully human and do not have appetitive desires, which accounts for their ability to moderate themselves (Cooper 'Two Theories of Justice', pp. 13-14; Crombie, *An*

Plato is doing here is contrasting a virtuous city made up of citizens who embody temperance, courage, wisdom and justice, with a luxurious city made up of citizens who do not embody those virtues.[12] We know that the first city embodies all of these virtues because its citizens embody moderation, peace, and good health, all of which cannot be exercised unless, as we have seen, all of the virtues are being exercised. But this means that the ordinary human being must be capable of embodying the virtues, because Plato clearly states that the First City is made of typical human beings—not an elite group of philosophers.

Conclusion

Even though Plato has often been interpreted as a radical elitist who regards the vast majority of human beings as morally deficient at an ontological level, he is, in fact, much more egalitarian, at least at the ontological level. All human beings—*qua* human beings—are fundamentally capable of becoming virtuous. Unfortunately, he believes that the vast majority of

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Examination of Plato's Doctrines, pp 89-90; Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, p. 72). On their interpretation, these the citizens of the First City do not have the virtue of moderation but are not fully human in the relevant sense—since they do not have appetitive desires. Unfortunately, Socrates gives absolutely no reason to assume that these citizens lack appetitive desires or are not fully human. Indeed, during the construction of the First City, Socrates repeatedly identifies himself and his interlocutors with the inhabitants of the First City (369c, 369d, 370a), and when Glaucon suggests that modern people would not be content in the First City, Socrates retorts only that *some* people would not be satisfied—which means that some *other* people would be satisfied. He does not say "some *fully human* people" would not satisfied but just some people. The obvious implication is that the people in the First City are *people*. For a more detailed discussion of the inhabitants of the First City and the egalitarian interpretations they imply, See Jonas, Nakazawa, and Braun (2012).

[12] Commentators who reject the First City altogether include: C.D.C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 170-179; Rachel Barney, 'Platonism, Moral Nostalgia, and the "City of Pigs"', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (2001), vol. 17, pp. 207-227; John Cooper, 'Two Theories of Justice', *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* (2000), vol. 74, pp. 5-27; R.L. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London, 1901), pp. 69- 76; Daniel Devereux, 'Socrates' First City in the Republic', *Apeiron* (1979) vol. 13, pp. 36-40; Julia Annas, *An Introductions to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), pp.76-79; I.M., *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London, 1964), vol. I, pp. 89-90; Catherine McKeen, 'Swillsburg City Limits (The "City of Pigs": *Republic* 370c-372d)', *Polis* (2004), vol. 21, no. 1-2, pp. 71-92). There are three exceptions: The first is Rowe, who argues in numerous places that Socrates is in earnest regarding his praise of the First City, in spite of the fact that commentators ignore or dismiss Socrates' praise. (C. J. Rowe, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 43-45; *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge, 2007), Chapter 5; and *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. Santos, (Oxford, 2006), p. 15). The second is Donald Morrison who claims that the First City is a 'realizable utopia if it is possible to have a city whose citizens are like Socrates' (Donald Morrison, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, (ed.) Ferrari (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 253).

human beings will never achieve virtue because they are raised in vicious societies. He believes that the only way to reverse this trend is first to cultivate virtue in a few individuals who have a special capacity for leadership. If these natural leaders are trained for virtue and then provided opportunities to lead at the political level, they would eventually be able to create education systems that might provide all human beings an education in virtue. Thus, although Plato is an egalitarian at the ontological level, he does believe that leaders ought to be the first to be given an education in virtue. But this is not because he thinks non-leaders deserve to be relegated to lives of vice, but because if ordinary human beings are ever to become virtuous society must first be reformed by virtuous leaders. Plato's distinction between leaders and non-leaders is elitist, but it is not the radical elitism that he is usually interpreted as advocating. Moreover, it is an elitism that aims to encourage the moral development of masses, and not to deprive them of it.

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