

## ABSTRACT

### Reconstructing the *Republic*: Dewey's Back to Plato Movement

Albert R. Spencer, Ph.D.

Committee Chairperson: Stuart E. Rosenbaum, Ph.D.

In his brief intellectual autobiography "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," John Dewey makes a perplexing statement. After an extended discussion of the teachers that directly shaped his view of philosophy, Dewey cites his two philosophical heroes. First, he mentions Hegel and comments on how his "astute critics" have noticed the "permanent deposit" of the German philosopher in Dewey's own philosophy (LW.5.154). Second, he states that only Plato surpasses the "richness" and "variety of insight" found in Hegel. He continues, saying "Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a "Back to Plato" movement" (LW.5.154). This proclamation is troublesome because of the factors that place Dewey and Plato in philosophical opposition. Metaphysically, Dewey investigates the live creature's transaction with its organic environment, whereas Plato searches for forms that lie beyond perception and opinion. Epistemologically, Dewey defines truth as "what works," whereas Plato sees truth as the forms that allow humans to distinguish knowledge from opinion. Finally and perhaps most significantly, the two appear to be politically opposed given Dewey's unconditional commitment to

Democracy, whereas Plato defines Democracy as a form of government “in need of a dictatorship” (*Republic VIII 562c*).

Yet, despite these differences, Dewey sees Plato as having something valuable, perhaps crucial, to offer the pragmatist tradition. This dissertation investigates Dewey’s reading of Plato for the purpose of establishing a more pragmatist-friendly interpretation of the dialogues. My hypothesis is that when we attend “to the dramatic, restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn” as advocated by Dewey, we see the character of Socrates and by extension Plato engaged in a pedagogical process with his interlocutors similar to the project of social reconstruction outlined by Dewey. This process of reconstruction is most evident in the *Republic*, where Plato dramatizes Socrates’ attempt to turn his young and aristocratic Athenian interlocutors’ world view away from the martial values of Homer and toward the reflective values of philosophy.

Reconstructing the *Republic*: Dewey's Back to Plato Movement

by

Albert R. Spencer, M.A.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Philosophy

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Robert B. Kruschwitz, Ph.D, Acting Chairperson

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

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Stuart E. Rosenbaum, Ph.D, Chairperson

---

Anne-Marie Bowery, Ph.D

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Robert M. Baird, Ph.D

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J. Wesley Null, Ph.D

Accepted by the Graduate School  
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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EW	<i>The Early Works of John Dewey</i>
MW	<i>The Middle Works of John Dewey</i>
LW	<i>The Late Works of John Dewey</i>

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DEDICATION

To Pa

and

To Dr. Vaught

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In his brief intellectual autobiography “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” John Dewey makes a perplexing statement. After an extended discussion of the teachers who directly shaped his view of philosophy, Dewey cites his two philosophical heroes. First, he mentions Hegel and comments on how his “astute critics” have noticed the “permanent deposit” of the German philosopher in Dewey’s own philosophy (LW.5.154). While historically interesting and vital to understanding the development of Dewey’s thought, this confession is not controversial. Given that Hegel was the major philosopher of the preceding century, philosophers of the twentieth century are naturally influenced by or at least responding to Hegel. Dewey’s second admission, however, demands reflection and investigation.

According to Dewey, only Plato surpasses the “richness” and “variety of insight” found in Hegel. He continues, saying “Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a “Back to Plato” movement” (LW.5.154). This proclamation is troublesome because of the factors that place Dewey and Plato in philosophical opposition. Metaphysically, Dewey investigates the live creature’s transaction with its organic environment, whereas Plato searches for forms that lie beyond perception and opinion. Epistemologically, Dewey defines truth as “what works,” whereas Plato sees truth as the forms that allow human beings to distinguish knowledge from opinion. Finally and perhaps most significantly, the two appear to be politically opposed given

Dewey's unconditional commitment to Democracy, whereas Plato defines Democracy as a form of government "in need of a dictatorship" (562c).

From this vantage point, the most charitable stance to take as a pragmatist would be to view Plato's contribution as a noble first step into philosophical inquiry, but ultimately an errant move towards the division between theory and practice and a move toward the "spectator theory of knowledge," that Dewey criticizes. Yet, despite these major differences, Dewey sees Plato as having something valuable, perhaps crucial, to offer the pragmatist tradition. The project of my dissertation is to investigate Dewey's reading of Plato for the purpose of establishing a more charitable, and pragmatist, interpretation of the dialogues. My hypothesis is that when we attend "to the dramatic, restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn" as advocated by Dewey, we see the character of Socrates and by extension Plato engaged in a pedagogical process with his interlocutors similar to the project of social reconstruction outlined by Dewey. This process of reconstruction is most evident in the *Republic*, where Plato dramatizes Socrates's attempt to shift his young aristocratic Athenian interlocutors' world view away from the martial values of Homer and towards the reflective values of philosophy.

Investigating Dewey's relation to Plato has several practical benefits. First, it reveals threads of continuity between Plato's philosophical project and pragmatism. Second, an explication of Dewey's complex interpretation of Plato fills a void in current Dewey scholarship. Although a few articles were published during the 1960s, Dewey's reading of Plato has fallen out of fashion in contemporary pragmatism scholarship.

Understanding Dewey's attitude toward Plato enhances an understanding of the various genealogical accounts of philosophy that Dewey develops throughout his work.

Furthermore, Dewey and Plato share a deep concern for the relation between pedagogy and politics, and I hope to illuminate the similarities and differences in their assessments of this relation. Most importantly, the explication of Dewey's response to Plato provides the framework necessary for constructing a new interpretation of the *Republic* that is more coherent with American pragmatism.

Before considering how to embark upon this pragmatism inspired return to Plato, one must attend to the type of return Dewey envisaged. Dewey was not advocating a return to the authority of Plato. A return of this type would be inimical to Dewey's demand that philosophy strive to address issues of significance in their contemporary context. Dewey would argue that Plato responds to the demands of his cultural context, and to assume that Plato's concepts and ideas are authoritative or directly applicable to current problems would be a mistake. We must be aware of differences between Plato's culture and our own and return to Plato in an attempt to reconstruct his insights to give them relevance and vitality to our context and problems. In fact, Dewey carefully phrases his advocacy for a "Back to Plato" movement along those lines:

Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a "Back to Plato" movement; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor. (LW.5.155)

Dewey asks that we resist the temptation to reduce Plato to a systematic thinker and approach the dialogues with a broad hermeneutical perspective. If a return to Plato is to

bear fruit for pragmatism, we must be open to three things: the dramatic nature of the dialogues, the experimental nature of Socratic dialectics, and the practical relevance of the dialogues to their social context.

We begin by becoming attuned to dramatic nuances of the dialogues, rather than scouring the text for Platonic arguments. Fortunately, Plato scholarship since Dewey has developed along these lines. One of the earliest and most famous examples of Plato scholars who have examined the dramatic character of the dialogues is Leo Strauss in *The City and Man*. Another scholar who did likewise and was also a colleague of Dewey's at Columbia University is John Herman Randall. In *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason*, Randall argues that the dialogues are Plato's dramatic renditions of philosophical discussion that "never even proves anything. But it can convert men's souls." Other more contemporary scholars in this vein whom I engage include Henry G. Wolz, Leon Harold Craig, David Roochnik, Thomas W. Smith and John R. Wallach. These scholars have laid the hermeneutical foundation for the pragmatist reconstruction of the *Republic* that I pursue.

Their insights also assist in depicting Socrates as engaging the other criteria Dewey feels should guide inquiry. I interpret the next part of the sentence quoted above, that we should return to the "restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield" as an appeal to attend to the experimental dimensions of Socrates' dialectical method. In *Revaluing Ethics*, Thomas W. Smith defends the view that Aristotle employs a type of dialectic wherein he chooses his arguments in view of his students' needs and their mutual pedagogical goals. Thus, Aristotle chooses arguments best suited for his audience based upon their values

and needs, rather than choosing the best argument possible. I believe Socrates uses a similar strategy with his interlocutors in the *Republic* and that rather than defending the best argument for justice he develops the most persuasive argument for his audience, for his young, privileged, aristocratic, Athenian interlocutors groomed to respect Homeric martial values.

Socrates' dialectical method coheres with Dewey's understanding of pedagogy and experimentation. Rather than presenting a "prefabricated" conception of justice, Socrates actively engages these young men and guides an exploration into justice that should mold their character<sup>1</sup> by convincing them to respect the values of philosophy (e.g. reflection, temperance, inquiry) more than the values of their Homeric culture (e.g. honor, prowess, luxury) which are more likely to result in injustice. This emphasis on the goals of their inquiry into justice leads to the third and final criterion that Dewey advocates— that we get "back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn." A focus on the dramatic structure of the dialogues and on Socrates' interaction with his interlocutors shows that the *Republic* is not an extended thought experiment about an abstract ideal city, but Plato's concrete attempt to reform Athenian society.

I believe that Socrates states the central insight of the *Republic* when he says that "Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide. . . cities will have no rest from evils,. . . nor, I think, will the human race" (473d). Socrates knows that if these youth truly want just cities then they must

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, Socrates' uses the metaphysical term "soul," whereas Dewey prefers to use psychological terms. I use the word character because it is neither metaphysical nor psychological, but represents the moral pedagogy that both philosophers are trying to develop.

become just citizens and leaders, and the entire dialogue seeks to persuade the young Athenians that this conversion cannot occur unless they incorporate philosophy into their lives.

My thesis is that the *Republic* should be interpreted as Socrates' attempt to reconstruct the values of his interlocutors for the purpose of creating better citizens. These young men must realize that if they truly seek justice and wish to create a better republic they must turn away from the aristocratic and martial values they prize and embrace the values of philosophy. Socrates accomplishes this task through a dialectical method similar to the pedagogy Dewey defends. Only by engaging the interests of his interlocutors can he reconstruct their experiences and lead them away from the martial values of Homer and towards the contemplative values of philosophy. Thus, the entire investigation is a pedagogical effort to educate these young men about the responsible use of power, not an attempt to formulate a philosophical theory of justice.<sup>2</sup> Establishing this interpretation serves as the first step in the "Back to Plato" movement advocated by Dewey and helps foster fruitful interchange between pragmatism and Plato scholarship.

Before I outline the structure of my dissertation, I must elaborate Dewey's understanding and my use of the term "reconstruction." Dewey uses the term reconstruction throughout his corpus and employs it in a variety of ways. Robert B. Talisse provides a general explanation of this term:

The effort to reconstruct philosophy therefore must begin by taking a *genetic* approach to traditional philosophy. That is, the *sources* of the traditional problems

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Harold Craig provides an excellent examination of the strange juxtaposition in the *Republic* between warfare and philosophy in his book *The War Lover*. While my conclusions about Socrates' ultimate pedagogical aim differ from Craig, he does a magnificent job of showing how this discussion about war and philosophy is a reflection of Homeric culture and a critique of Athenian values occasioned by Athens recent defeat by Sparta during the Peloponnesian Wars (411 BC) and the rise of the Thirty Tyrants (404 BCE). My conclusion is to suggest that Socrates is trying to reconstruct justice in light of these historical events.

arise *only if* we adopt a certain vocabulary and certain presuppositions which we have good reason to reject. As Dewey puts it, “we do not solve” the problems of traditional philosophy, “we get over them” (MW4:14). . .

A reconstructed philosophy does not pretend to somehow stand above the natural sciences; rather philosophy must *begin* with science. Again, the task of a reconstructed philosophy is to apply the methods of scientific investigation to social problems, “its aim is to become so far as is possible, an instrument for dealing with these conflicts” (MW 12:94). A reconstructed philosophy is *scientific*.<sup>3</sup>

According to Talisse, reconstruction occurs in several phases. When attempting to understand and overcome immediate conflicts, we must begin with a genetic return to the origin of dominant philosophical concepts that shape our current issues. By placing these concepts within their historical context, one sees how they might once have functioned as novel means of dealing with previous social and philosophical conflicts. Because they were contingent strategies for addressing historical problems, one can shelve if they create new problems in the present.

By contextualizing these concepts we can appreciate them as innovations and learn from their authors’ examples. We can adapt the lessons of the past to address the problems of the present. Throughout his corpus, Dewey applies the concept of reconstruction to nearly every area of human endeavor as a means of problem resolution. In this dissertation, I understand reconstruction as the process of adapting traditional sources of philosophical inspiration to address the problems of both private and public experiences. I intend a reconstruction both of Dewey’s reading of Plato for the purpose of obtaining a pragmatist interpretation of the *Republic* and of Plato’s *Republic* for the purpose of articulating and resolving private and public dilemmas.

This pragmatist reconstruction of the *Republic* unfolds in the following way. Chapter Two is an explication of Dewey’s reading of Plato. I begin by examining a pair

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<sup>3</sup> Robert B. Talisse. *On Dewey*. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth\Thomas Learning, 2000).

of articles by John P. Anton and Frederick M. Anderson. These articles were written during the 1960's and consider Dewey's complex reading of Plato. Their commentaries are occasions to investigate several essays from throughout Dewey's career that focus on his interpretation of Plato. In summary, I argue that Dewey thinks Plato has been misrepresented. Typically, Plato is viewed as "the first university professor," as a dogmatist with arguments for particular philosophical theories. Dewey reads Plato as engaged in his own attempts to reconstruct his social context. This distinction is explicit in "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," and an investigation of his corpus shows that Dewey held this view for some time. Awareness of Dewey's disposition towards Plato explains apparent areas of difference between the two philosophers—e.g. their views on democracy, knowledge, and metaphysics.

Chapter Three places Dewey's reading of Plato within the context of contemporary Plato scholarship by using secondary literature to reconstruct Dewey's understanding of drama, experiment, and practice within the dialogues. I turn my attention to Plato to uncover the three characteristics advocated by Dewey as most appropriate for a "Back to Plato" movement: drama, experimentation, and practice. Since a dialogue is an indirect genre of communication, a robust reading of Plato requires attending to the three criteria that Dewey sketches: drama, experimentation, and practice. Several scholars have examined these elements separately and commented on their hermeneutical significance. By bringing their ideas together, I develop a pragmatist reading of the *Republic* as Plato's rendering of Socrates' attempts to reconstruct the values of his young Athenian interlocutors.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of Plato scholarship during the last half of the twentieth century has focused on the dramatic elements of the dialogues. This chapter examines several commentaries, such as Leon Harold Craig's *The War Lover* and David Roochnik's *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, that offer dramatic interpretations of the *Republic*. In general, these authors consent to the idea that the *Republic* is a product of Athenian culture and that its dramatic structure reveals the values of that culture. These commentators also suggest that Socrates' use of dialectic should be understood not as a technical method of philosophical inquiry, but as a "living conversation," meaning that "it is informal and constituted by the interlocutors' responses to the particulars of their conversation, it is necessarily diverse and without a fixed structure."<sup>4</sup>

In *Revaluing Ethics*, Thomas Smith puts forward a similar interpretation of Aristotle's use of dialectic. Smith also argues that Aristotle tailors his arguments to suit the needs and values of his audience; thus for pedagogical purposes Aristotle uses the arguments most likely to convince his audience of the value of virtue, rather than the best arguments for virtue. I believe that Socrates is engaged in a similar use of dialectic for the pedagogical purpose of turning his interlocutors away from the martial values of Homer and towards the reflective values of philosophy. Furthermore, I contend that this pedagogical use of dialectic is the process of reconstruction that Dewey advocates and that his commitment to return to Plato reveals how reconstruction has always been an important part of the project of philosophy.

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<sup>4</sup> David Roochnik. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*. (London: Cornell University Press, 2003) 144.

Finally, Chapter Four is an interpretation of the *Republic* from the perspective established through the investigation of Dewey in previous chapters. My goal is not to provide a line-by-line commentary; rather, I examine key themes and passages to show Socrates attempts to reconstruct the values of his interlocutors and that the solutions he outlines are similar to ideas put forward by Dewey. The dialogue begins when Polemarchus (literally “War Ruler”) enlists Socrates to speak that evening at a feast he is hosting. Although he is jesting, Polemarchus encourages Socrates to participate through reference to force and the size of his party. The young men seem to want Socrates to discuss justice, but what they actually want is for Socrates to justify their lifestyle as privileged Athenian nobles. Socrates is aware of their desire, and although he attempts to tell them that justice requires restraint of the martial values they treasure, the young men are unwilling to listen.

Thus, the city Plato constructs is one in which the vicious passions of the youth are constrained and directed towards philosophy and reflection. The city constructed is the best possible city in which the young men can have the luxuries they desire while still directing their passions toward philosophy. When we understand the *Republic* from this vantage point, we see that Socrates and by extension Plato employ and advocate a pedagogical method similar to Dewey’s for the pragmatic purpose of creating reflective citizens who engage in public life, not for their own interests, but for the sake of the community. By reconstructing the *Republic* from this pragmatist perspective, we realize that philosophy functions as a response to historical circumstances and that reconstruction is a critical part of Plato’s problem solving methods.

I construe the *Republic* as Plato's attempt to reconstruct his private and public experiences of contemporary social issues, and I argue that the dialogue develops through the interplay of two major themes, love and war, and their relevance to the motif of intergenerational conflict. Plato evokes the themes of love and war in the opening scene and the motif of intergenerational conflict appear in the first pair of interlocutors, Cephalus and Polemarchus, father and son respectively. This opening scene foreshadows the entire dialogue and represents Socrates' first attempt within the dialogue at experimental pedagogy. He uses the powerful themes of love and war to tailor his philosophical arguments to convince his impressionable young interlocutors of the value of the philosophical life.

By extension, Plato dramatizes Socrates' experimental pedagogy to persuade his readers to value the philosophical life and to reconstruct his own private and public experiences. Plato uses the themes of love and war and the motif of intergenerational conflict to reconstruct his private need to reconcile his competing desires for a life of philosophical reflection as opposed to a life of political action; yet he also uses these devices to reconstruct his experiences as a citizen of Athens during a time of intense political change and disillusionment. By viewing the *Republic* as Plato's attempt to reconstruct his private and public experience, one becomes aware of Dewey's affinity for Plato as a source of philosophical inspiration. After this pragmatist reconstruction we can use the insight of the *Republic*, Socrates' pedagogical strategies, and Plato's example as a dramatic social reformer to reconstruct our own public and private problems.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Dewey's Back to Plato Movement

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate Dewey's reading of Plato. My inquiry begins with an analysis of a series of articles from the nineteen-sixties that present a general overview of Dewey's reading of ancient philosophy and specifically of Plato. These articles provide a hermeneutical framework for unraveling Dewey's complex reading of the Platonic dialogues and illuminate my examination of key essays that address his understanding of ancient philosophy. These essays are preferable to selections from Dewey's major works because they are more focused and offer sustained investigations of Greek thought, and because they exhibit the nuances in Dewey's appropriation of the ancients, rather than the more conventional comments expressed in his books. These essays appear throughout Dewey's career and chart the origin and development of several themes that culminate in Dewey's only direct commentary, "The 'Socratic Dialogues' of Plato." After witnessing the evolution of this complex philosophical relationship, the chapter concludes with a critical assessment of Dewey's reading of Plato.

#### *I. Dewey and Ancient Philosophy*

One of the first essays to provide a comprehensive look at Dewey's reading of Plato is John P. Anton's "John Dewey and Ancient Philosophy." Anton's objectives are to "assist in assessing Dewey's insights as a critic of the past as well as in establishing more firmly his place in philosophical traditions with which his work is continuous."

Throughout the article, Anton focuses on three aspects of Dewey's relation to Greek philosophy which he defines as follows:

(1) *The polemic aspect*, which refers to his unreserved rejection of the classical tradition in conjunction with what he suspected was pervasively dualistic in it. (2) *The historico-contextual aspect*, which points to his cultural relativism as the context within which broad movements in the history of philosophy may be critically assessed. (3) *The cumulative aspect*, which includes some of the features that Dewey not only shared with the classical world, such as the problems and concerns, ideals and practices, methods and solutions, but also extended significantly.<sup>1</sup>

Anton devotes the remainder of the essay to explicating these three aspects of Dewey's complex reconstruction of Greek thought, and his terminology provides a fruitful language for discussion.

Anton begins his examination of the *polemic aspect* of Dewey's relation to Greek philosophy by discussing general difficulties involved in understanding Dewey's position as a critic of ancient philosophy. Dewey's criticism is scattered throughout his corpus and as Anton notes, the "sustained historical analyses he presented in his *Quest for Certainty* and *Reconstruction in Philosophy* are so dominated by a central philosophical and ethical concern of his social pragmatism as to mislead the reader into concluding that this is all he had to offer by way of understanding and appreciating the classical heritage." Because Dewey's most explicit commentary on Greek philosophy attempts to overcome barriers to philosophical inquiry, specifically the misapplication of ancient theories to contemporary problems, one is tempted to reduce Dewey's criticism only to its polemic aspect. Anton argues that a more accurate treatment of Dewey's approach accepts his admonishment of specific ancient ideas that lead to the "Spectator Theory of Knowledge" (e.g. dualism and leisure class theory) without ignoring Dewey's commitment to

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<sup>1</sup> John P. Anton. "John Dewey and Ancient Philosophies." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Jun., 1965) 477.

reconstruction (which is similar to Aristotle's reconstruction of his tradition) and social reform (as expressed by Dewey's "avowed sympathy with Plato"). Following Anton's advice enables an appreciation of Dewey's desire to use ancient philosophy instrumentally without becoming ensnared by outdated philosophical concerns.<sup>2</sup>

While Anton's analysis of the polemic aspect of Dewey's relation to Greek philosophy is mostly apologetic he does believe that this application of instrumentalism prevents Dewey from some constructive insight about the ancients because of Dewey's "general dismissal of a large portion of the classic tradition which he found difficult to dissociate from the demerits of being prescientific and leisure-born." Anton also insists that Plato and Aristotle possessed a robust understanding of experience and did not emphasize cognition to such an extent that they deserve Dewey's thinking of them as the source of the Spectator Theory of Knowledge. He sees Dewey's preference for immediate experience as placing Dewey within the "romantic tradition" and concludes that the polemic aspect of Dewey's relation to Greek philosophy is an expression of Dewey's commitment to instrumentalism and romanticism.<sup>3</sup>

Next, Anton shifts his focus to the *historico-cultural aspect* of Dewey's relation to ancient philosophy. Anton argues in this section that Dewey's assessment of the Greeks' influence on the development of philosophical inquiry was hindered by Dewey's inability to see modern science as a possible source for the overemphasis on dualism. However, he carefully points out that this "propensity to indict Greek thought" lessened in Dewey's later years when he "gained better historical perspective of his actual target." According to Anton Dewey's view became more sophisticated when he became

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 477-479.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 480-482.

dissatisfied with his neo-Hegelian interpretation of the Greeks and began to see the experimental character of Aristotle thanks to the influence of his colleague Frederick Woodbridge at Columbia; Anton does not see Dewey as committing similar mistakes with regard to Plato. Instead Dewey shows his “preference to Plato who is ‘revolutionary,’ whereas Aristotle’s philosophy is ‘conserving.’” Anton also contends that Dewey’s view of the historico-cultural significance of Greek thought matured when he “learned how to enlist Darwin’s support for an ‘evolution of concepts.’”<sup>4</sup>

Anton chooses to focus directly on Dewey’s reading of Plato during the first half of his exploration of the *cumulative aspect*. Here Anton sees the greatest affinity between Dewey and classical thinkers. As Anton mentions, “Even the casual reader of Dewey’s major works cannot help but notice his appreciation and often eloquent admiration of what he considered to be the ‘funded’ experience and record of classical thought” and he suggests that there were elements of ancient philosophy that Dewey found “worthy of acceptance and cultivation.” Anton believes that Dewey’s affinity for Plato is readily apparent and describes it as follows:

Dewey’s writings bring to mind not only Plato’s immense scope of interest and richness of concern but also the latter’s unflagging spirit of dedication to the problems of men. In addition to this similarity of temperament there are, to be sure, other philosophical affinities which for a variety of reasons could pass unnoticed. The evidence here is of two sorts: (a) his statements of appreciation and acknowledgement of intellectual kinship, and (b) his critical analyses and discussion of specific aspects of Plato.

Anton cites the excerpt from “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” quoted at the beginning of this paper as an example of the first type of evidence for Dewey’s admiration of Plato. He is also careful to highlight that this “affection for Plato’s thought is not without certain qualifications that stem primarily from his dedication to cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 482-486.

reconstruction and social reform” which reinforces Dewey’s claim that any return to Plato should attend to the dramatic, experimental, and practical dimensions of the dialogue, but also underscores the complexity of Dewey’s affinity for Plato.

On one hand, Dewey was impressed by the degree of social awareness expressed in the dialogues and Plato’s commitment to and aptitude for social reform, what Anton refers to as the “Socratic Plato.” On the other hand, Dewey was cautious and skeptical of “the static features he read into Plato’s ideals,” what one might refer to as the Plato of Platonism. Anton describes in detail Dewey’s affinity for the Socratic Plato:

Dewey, like Plato, was a dedicated reformer. Dewey himself sought a comparable philosophy of experience which when combined with the pursuit of a broad theory of truth could justify and verify its validity in actual practice. To be just to humanity is to demand more meaningfulness in life, richer experience and insistence upon intelligent reconstruction of outmoded methods and habits. For both philosophers, change is not a mere fact of becoming but a process to be dealt with. Change becomes progressive when it takes added value and on the condition that it becomes conducive to an enhancement of plurality and coherent integration. Dewey admired the Socratic Plato precisely because the “reconstructive” Dialogues meant to him intelligence at work critical and uncompromising, determined to discover novel possibilities in humanity which Plato’s contemporaries would expediently overlook for immediate gains. He saw in Platonic dialectic not the road to coercive absolutes but the freshness of a reflective imagination exploring the hidden promises of existence. He found in Plato the constructive skepticism of Socrates at once confident in the powers of reflection and in the efficacy of *techne* as the best means to individual and social education. He did not read the *Republic* as a nightmare of despotism or a threat to the “open society.” Instead, he interpreted it as a great proposal for political experimentation and a search for better institutions where cooperative inquiry gropes for solutions commensurable to the broader functions and capabilities of mankind.<sup>5</sup>

Dewey admires the Socratic Plato most, but Anton also points out other areas of kinship between Dewey and Plato, specifically seeing “art as imitation,” seeing “intelligence as a method rather than a collection of finished outcomes,” and seeing “philosophy in a wider

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 487. In this quotation, Anton references *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in which Karl Popper condemns the *Republic* as a pro-totalitarian. Anton alludes to Popper to indicate that Dewey did not participate in the twentieth century debate of the *Republic* as advocating an open or closed society. In fact, Dewey argues in “The Ethics of Democracy” that Plato advocates an ideal ethical conception of Greek aristocracy, not a modern totalitarian state.

meaning of a critique of institutions and a fundamental way of life.” Anton admits that Plato is “more of a philosophical enthusiast than the instrumentalist Dewey,” but also that “neither lacked in diagnostic penetration into the social maladies interfering with the attainment of the noble goals of ameliorative statesmanship.” Thus, while key differences exist between “Plato’s Ideal Polity and Dewey’s Great Community” specifically “on issues of metaphysics, ethics, logic, or aesthetics” the two philosophers are united by their desire for social reform and similar temperament.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, Anton’s assessment of Dewey’s approach to Greek philosophy is unsympathetic. His claim is that while Dewey had the potential to offer a fruitful pragmatic analysis of ancient thought, his obsession with contemporary problems prevented him from developing an accurate picture of classical philosophy. His conclusion follows:

In concluding our examination of Dewey’s approach and evaluation of Greek philosophy, we would like to offer an explanation which attempts to locate the source of his basic difficulty in his hit-and-miss way of viewing the “funded” experience of the past. Mainly, the difficulty lies in the fact that he did not always practice what he stated in theory. In this case, he failed to carry over consistently into his historical accounts the situational and contextual analysis of problems which he asserted so emphatically as central to his pragmatic methodology...

But what is strange, very indeed, is the fact that unlike other doctrinaire interpretations of the past Dewey’s philosophy did not lack the necessary and fundamental conceptions that could have enabled him to avoid the mishandling of cultural situations. Though it is true that he learned a great deal from cultural anthropology for the reconstruction of his own theory of experience, he did not absorb enough of it to generalize his cultural contextualism to all historical and cultural situations. Instead, he proceeded to universalize a set of problems typical of a cultural situation, his own, and criticized the past either on the ground that it had its share in generalizing basic aspects of these problems or for failing to anticipate the necessary methods for reaching the desired solutions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 487-491.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 498.

Anton asserts that while Dewey's attempt to examine the Greeks from the vantage point of "his naturalistic and biological setting of experience and his methodological contextualism constitute genuine gains and points of departure for further elaboration," Dewey miscarries this project because he unfairly imposes upon ancient thought contemporary concerns. Essentially, the polemic aspect of Dewey's approach hinders his attempts to produce a valid historico-cultural account of ancient thought. More consideration will be given to the adequacy of Anton's critique of Dewey's relation to Greek philosophy; however I reiterate that, while Dewey might have missed the historico-cultural aspects of ancient thought in general (or specifically as in the case of Aristotle), Anton's description of Dewey's affinity for the Socratic Plato makes clear that Dewey was well aware of Plato's historico-cultural orientation and that Dewey favors Plato because of the social awareness present in the dialogues.<sup>8</sup>

Frederick M. Anderson offers a contrasting perspective in his essay "Dewey's Experiment with Greek Philosophy" that is more sympathetic to Dewey's description of ancient thought. Anderson agrees with Anton's reading of Dewey as polemical when he mentions "Dewey's continuing attention to Athenian philosophy—extension and reinforcement of his critique of modern philosophy, and so of epistemology," but Anderson wants to suggest that Dewey takes this tone so that ancient philosophy might disclose itself in its original richness free of received, modern interpretations. Anderson argues that "while Dewey's attitude towards various phases and segments of Greek philosophy changed somewhat through the years, *there is a discernable and significant pattern to his scattered references to Greek philosophy.*" Anderson attempts to sketch four phases of Dewey's development with regard to classical thought: 1) his

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 498-499.

interpretation of the historical Socrates, 2) his account of Plato's division of experience and reason, 3) his view of Plato as indebted to his cultural institutions, and 4) his understanding of the relationship between Plato and Aristotle.<sup>9</sup>

While Anderson uses conventions similar to Anton to analyze Dewey and addresses Dewey's interpretation of similar issues, Anderson focuses more explicitly on Dewey's relation to Plato, and his commentary on Dewey's approach is more positive. Anderson begins his analysis by presenting a survey of ancient philosophy. He describes the scene as follows:

If the generic problem of Greek philosophy was the intellectual adjustment of the ideas of permanence and change, definite social and cultural conditions prepared the way for the special questions that emerged within the historic development of this problem, so that the initial Socratic interest in bringing some moral order into the lives of his contemporaries terminated in Aristotle's distinctively speculative preoccupation with the proper ordering of the practical and productive arts and sciences within a synthetic view of nature. The large picture, in short, is that of the transformation of questions called out by an active concern for the social and practical affairs of the time into extended definition and organization of the intellectual values of the conservative aristocracy.<sup>10</sup>

Anderson's genealogy of ancient thought is Deweyan because it presents problems of Greek philosophy as emerging from historico-cultural influences. The topics discussed by the ancients are not perennial; they are a reflection of specific human concerns (i.e. "ideas of permanence and change") embodied within the fabric of Athenian intellectual culture. With this picture sketched, Anderson begins to explore the four developmental stages in Dewey's relation to Greek philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick M. Anderson. "Dewey's Experiment with Greek Philosophy." *International Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 1967) 86.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

Anderson's first claim is that "Dewey's interpretation of the question ordinarily attributed to the historic Socrates leads directly to his conception of the central and definitive aim of Plato's mature philosophy."<sup>12</sup> This claim recalls Anton's earlier comments about Dewey's affinity for the Socratic Plato. However, Anderson points out that the Socratic Plato functions as a gestation period in Dewey's account of Plato's maturation, where Plato is cutting his teeth on contemporary philosophical rivals (e.g. "the Sophists, the Cynics and the Cyrenaics") by using Socrates as his mouth piece. This nuanced view is compatible with Anton's view of Dewey's admiration for the social awareness and commitment to reform of the Socratic Plato, but it emphasizes Dewey's awareness of Plato's philosophical development in response to his cultural context. Thus, "The ironic note of Socrates has become the perfectly natural and productive ignorance of the young Plato, groping his way toward the definitive articulation of the faith that knowledge of the good is to be found," i.e. the mature thought of Plato is the product of early philosophical experimentation through the character of Socrates in response to his contemporary critics.<sup>13</sup>

Dewey also sees these elements manifest in the "moral significance of Plato's own matured philosophy" and argues that critics should take seriously how un-Platonic are certain conclusions in the later dialogues. Dewey's analysis of the *Republic* illuminates one such un-Platonic conclusion when "courage is advanced, not as genuine knowledge, but as right opinion about what is to be feared, derived from the final

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 88-90.

knowledge of the wise ruler.”<sup>14</sup> Anderson believes that this example better represents Dewey’s understanding of the moral significance of Plato’s mature thought because “knowledge admits of degrees” and “the dominant social problem was to be solved only if recognition of these degrees could be so formulated and used as to benefit, through education, the entire body politic.” From this vantage point, Plato appears almost pragmatic because his conclusion has a fallible understanding of knowledge, is postulated for the practical purpose of solving an immediate social problem, and benefits the public through improved education.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, this characterization of Plato’s development and mature thought funds Anderson’s explanation of Dewey’s account of Plato’s division between experience and reason. Put differently, it colors how Anderson sees the polemic aspects of Dewey’s relation to Greek philosophy. Anderson explains the dissonance between Dewey’s simultaneous condemnation of the Spectator Theory of Knowledge and admiration for the Socratic Plato in the following quotation:

Thus, Dewey’s favorite Plato is a trapped Plato. For however “large and expansive” the basic vision, Plato’s own development of his search for a method of dealing with the moral problem of his day somehow entangled him in metaphysics—in theoretical questions concerned with the nature and significance of knowledge of the good *as such*. The original Socratic and Platonic concern to find a rational basis for moral conduct became the professional concern of classical philosophy to give a theoretical evaluation of the distinction, derived from culture, of experience and reason, with a final and unambiguous endorsement of the claims of reason. Plato’s affirmation that moral knowledge is to be derived from culture knowledge of reality in effect made reason divine, and so supplied the central assumption of what became the classical tradition in philosophy, the assumption that eventually shaped the basic discourse of what Dewey liked to call the intellectualist conception of the world: genuine knowledge consists of the intellectual grasp or apprehension of the basic structure of reality.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 90.

Plato has become a victim of his own genius; his experimental attempt at moral reform by searching for “a rational basis for moral conduct” has become enshrined as the “intellectualist conception of the world.” Dewey uses his polemic to attack the deification of Plato’s method so that the original motives of Plato’s inquiry (social reform) stand out. The failure of modernity is that it has overemphasized Plato’s method of inquiry as necessary and universal without appreciating the local and particular concerns that motivated Plato’s inquiry.<sup>17</sup>

However, Anderson is careful to point out that Dewey does not find Plato completely blameless for this insistence on the necessity of reason. Yet, the overall tone of this stage is apologetic for Plato’s shortcomings. Anderson quotes Dewey stating that “The crucial pronouncement is that Plato, for all his generosity, ‘could not far outrun the institutional practices of his people and his times.’”<sup>18</sup> The social demands of Plato’s context required that he assert his hypotheses as theoretical necessities. Anderson summarizes Dewey’s explanation of how this transformation occurred as follows:

Thus, Dewey seems to be arguing that something like a continuing process of initial awareness, subsequent imaginative appreciation, and final philosophical ordering of selected esthetic characters as “prerogative objects” was largely determined by the actual social prerogatives of the philosopher. Seen in this way, the intellect of the incipient intellectualist was driven by an antecedent bias to arrest change, as it were, by working out a coherent and, ideally, a complete theoretical form of a whole array of preexistent forms—things, natural kinds, purposes and value, order and rank—forms which the philosopher absorbed from the common sense culture of the time.<sup>19</sup>

Dewey’s understanding of Plato is ironic because “the initial search for knowledge of the good that would indicate a good for all, transformed Plato, the radical idealist and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 90-92.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 93.

moralist, into Plato the professional philosopher, and so became the distinctively philosophical quest for knowledge of the good as such.”<sup>20</sup> This assessment of Plato’s indebtedness to his cultural institutions further reinforces Dewey’s awareness of Plato’s connection to his historical context.

The final stage of Dewey’s developing view of ancient philosophy focuses on his understanding of the relationship between Plato and Aristotle. Anderson suggests that Dewey sees Aristotle as responsible for the move that solidifies Greek philosophy as the source of the Spectator Theory of Knowledge:

If then, Plato introduced and gave initial form to the central theme of classic Greek philosophy, it was Aristotle who supplied its decisive content and direction through his extended expression and carefully wrought enhancement of the high significance of the rational spectator.<sup>21</sup>

With this final phase of Dewey’s development, one can chart a progression from the Socratic Plato that Dewey admires for his social awareness to the mature Plato that he praises for being surprisingly un-Platonic, to the “trapped” Plato that Dewey laments for submitting to institutional pressures, or the bugbear of Aristotle whose emphasis on the real and universal creates the dualism between practice and theory. Anderson identifies Aristotle’s championing of the “life of thought” as “above the life of special craft and material occupation” and his “comprehensive intellectual consecration of established order in society and of eternal things in nature.”<sup>22</sup>

In summation, Dewey sees the authentic Plato as an expression of the cultural need for reform that culminates in the systematic philosophy of Aristotle. This

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 92-94.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

progression encapsulates Dewey's understanding of the development and contributions (both positive and negative) of Greek philosophy, which Anderson describes as "the reflective rationalization of the cultural life of the time." Anderson believes that this genealogical reconstruction of ancient thought has several advantages if one is comfortable with Dewey's paradoxical polemical-laudatory stance. He imparts the following cautionary words:

I would urge, though, that the important question here concerns the direction and the quality of Dewey's implicit condemnation. For even if one finds Dewey's eulogies of the Greeks to be stunted, or even slightly forced, he does not reproach them for having developed theories, whereas modern philosophers, if only by implication, are surely chided for the continuation of speculative theorizing within a different historic situation. Dewey's reconstruction of Greek philosophy should be seen, then, not as an incidental preoccupation but as an essential part of his continuing critique of epistemology.<sup>23</sup>

According to Anderson, Dewey's reconstruction of Greek philosophy is complex because he simultaneously praises and rebukes the ancients for similar reasons. Their attempts at solving their immediate social problems through philosophy are to be applauded for the ingenuity of the theories proposed. However, these solutions also contain within them the seeds of future social problems and barriers to inquiry. Anderson provides four comments that illustrate Dewey's complex appraisal of classical thought: 1) ultimately, Greek philosophy is an example of "arrested inquiry" 2) yet they should be lauded as examples of how philosophical inquiry arises out of "their awareness of the social problem" 3) that "the more adequate the intellectual *products* of Athenian philosophy were in their time, the less adequate they are for us today," and 4) that "the value of Athenian philosophy as a whole is so closely tied into Dewey's critique of modern philosophy, and particularly of epistemology." Anderson closes with the parting thought that "Dewey's view of Greek

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 97.

philosophy is internally related to his own instrumentalist theory of knowing, and is, accordingly, an organic part of the general theory of inquiry.”<sup>24</sup>

While Anderson’s analysis of Dewey’s relation to Greek philosophy is more charitable than Anton’s, both critics do an admirable job of assembling Dewey’s reconstruction of classical thought from comments scattered throughout Dewey’s writings. Furthermore, they provide an important hermeneutical schema for analysis of Dewey’s complex and often paradoxical relationship with ancient philosophy. Anton’s synopsis represents a more conservative, yet still reductionistic evaluation of Dewey’s reconstruction. There is truth to his claim that Dewey anachronistically imposes modern concerns upon the ancient Greeks, but as Anderson points out Dewey’s polemic is not as critical of Greek thought as it initially seems. Dewey appreciates Greek philosophy as a respectable attempt to address immediate cultural concerns. Dewey’s misappropriation of Aristotle might hamper his reconstruction of Greek thought, yet constructive insights do emerge. In fact, both Anton and Anderson agree about Dewey’s fondness for Plato and see something intriguing, if still obscure, in his assessment of the dialogues. Their commentary on his view of Plato as a social reformer is illuminating and must play a critical role in reconstructing Dewey’s reading of Plato.

## *II. Dewey’s Reading of Plato*

Dewey’s first extended discussion of Plato is found in ‘The Ethics of Democracy.’” The occasion for this examination is a response to Sir Henry Maine’s book *Popular Government* which presents a scathing critique of the merits of democracy. According to Dewey, Maine argues that democracy is a problematic form of government

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 97-100.

because democracies are usually the product of historical accidents, are fragile, and typically result in the rise of “monstrous and morbid forms of monarchy and aristocracy” (EW.1.227-228). Dewey’s response is interesting because Maine’s critique of democracy mirrors the received view of Plato’s critique of democracy, that the division of political power among the masses creates chaos and creates a form of government “in need of a dictatorship” (*Republic VIII* 562c). As a result, Dewey’s treatment of Maine and his discussion of Plato provide a contrast between Dewey’s reading of Plato and the received reading of Plato. Of greater consequence is the fact that Dewey deals directly with ideas presented in the *Republic* and shows how Plato’s thought relates to his own ideas about democracy.

Dewey contends that Maine’s argument is based upon three false premises about democracy: (1) that it is merely a form of government, (2) that governments are merely the relation between “subject” and “sovereign,” and (3) that democracy is a form of government in which sovereignty is divided among the multitude. Dewey refers to this conception of democracy as the “numerical aggregate” theory of democracy and admits that under this view democracy can result only in “anarchy” (EW.1.231). Therefore, Dewey attempts to redefine democracy by first responding to the third premise; that democracy is a form of government in which sovereignty is divided among the multitude. He proceeds from the “conception that society is an organism, and government an expression of its organic nature” and that “If this be so, it is no more adequately defined by any merely quantitative conception than a tree is defined by counting the number of cells which constitute it” (EW.1.230).

Each individual functions as a microcosm of society and is part of the entire social organism. Universal suffrage does not disperse sovereignty because each person votes as a “representative of the social organism” not as an isolated political unit. Democracy allows government to represent the process of the social organism more effectively than other types of government, even better than an enlightened and benevolent aristocracy where a superior class governs for the good of an inferior class. Therefore, it “approaches most nearly the ideal of all social organization; that in which the individual and society are organic to each other. For this reason democracy, so far as it is really democracy, is the most stable, not the most insecure, of governments” (EW.1.231-237).

This organic conception of society allows Dewey to view sovereignty as co-extensive among the populace, rather than merely diffused among the masses. Since the individual is the “localized manifestation of its [the social organism’s] life” the dualism between subject and sovereign is eliminated because under democracy “government is the organ of society, and is as comprehensive as society” (EW.1.237-240). Thus, Dewey undercuts the third and second premise of Maine’s critique by asserting that democracy allows the social organism to express itself through the suffrage of each individual who is an organic representation of the whole.

Dewey continues his critique of Maine by arguing that democracy is more than a form of government. While governments are official mechanisms for the administrations of the state, they are manifestations of a society’s “vast mass of sentiments, many vague, some defined, of instincts, of aspirations, of ideas, of hopes and fears, of purposes.” According to Dewey, democracy is an “ethical conception,” meaning that it is “a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association” (EW.1.239). At

this juncture, Dewey references Plato for his understanding of governments as expressions of ethical concepts. Dewey sees Plato's *Republic* as an expression of the Greek ethos in all of its glory:

If it had no value for philosophical reasons. . . the Republic would be immortal as the summary of all that was best and most permanent in Greek life, of its ways of thinking and feeling, and of its ideals. But the Republic is more; it seizes upon the heart of the ethical problem, the relation of the individual to the universal, and states a solution. The question of the Republic is as to the ideal of men's conduct; the answer is such a development of man's nature as brings him into complete harmony with the universe of spiritual relations, or, in Platonic language, the state. The universe, in turn, is man writ large; it is the manifestation, the realization of the capacities of the individual. (EW.1.240)

Dewey agrees with Plato's account of governments as ethical entities and he also agrees with Plato's ideal political end: that justice is achieved through the union and harmony of individual and society. However, Dewey disputes the means through which this ideal end can be achieved. Plato favors an aristocratic ideal because he believes that "the multitude is incapable of forming such an ideal and of attempting to reach it" therefore absolute control must reside in an enlightened and benevolent few. Dewey prefers democracy because history has shown that the "aristocratic ideal, in spite of all its attractions, is not equal to reality. . . It has failed because it is found that the practical consequences of giving the few wise and good power is that they cease to remain wise and good" (EW.1.243).

The remainder of Dewey's essay focuses on this conception of democracy as a moral relation and he continues his interaction with Plato as a foil. Dewey believes democracy and Platonic aristocracy share the same goal—self-fulfillment through the individual's integration with society—but that aristocracy imposes this harmony from without, whereas democracy allows it to emerge from within. Again Dewey faults the

“numerical aggregate” theory of democracy as the source of this disagreement between Plato and himself. He claims that “democracy means *personality* is the first and final reality,” thus democracy is the attempt to achieve an ethical ideal in which all individuals have the freedom and potential to direct the realization of their own personalities, or identities. Yet Dewey is quick to distinguish his own emphasis on personality from the numerical aggregate model that motivates Plato’s critique of democracy. The realization of personality does not entail the individual caprice that anti-democrats assume leads to anarchy; rather each individual’s fulfillment requires them to be responsible for their government (EW.1.244-245).

Finally, Dewey addresses the ramification of democracy as an ethical concept with regard to economic equality. Democracy, as Dewey conceives it, does not require the dramatic redistribution of wealth as a condition of economic equality. This idea is another expression of democracy as a “numerical aggregate.” Dewey believes that economic relations are a means towards the realization of personality as well, and that the economy is a means of realizing the ethical goals of society and its members. Again Dewey contrasts this conception with that of Plato who believes that industry opposes the ethical and mentions that “Plato’s attack upon the Sophists for receiving money for teaching were on the ground that they thus degraded a personal (that is, a moral) relation, that of teacher and pupil, to an industrial; as if the two were necessarily hostile” (EW.1.249). Dewey contrasts Plato’s account by explaining how economics can be used to achieve ethical ends:

We have, nominally at least, given up the idea that a certain body of men are to be set aside for the doing of this necessary work [industry]; but we still think of this work, and of the relations pertaining to it, as if they were outside of the ethical realm and wholly in the natural. We admit, nay, at times we claim, that ethical rules are to be

*applied* to this industrial sphere, but we think of it as an external application. That the economic and industrial life is *in itself* ethical, that it is to be made contributory to the realization of personality through the formation of a higher and more complete unity among men, this is what we do not recognize; but such is the meaning of the statement that democracy must become industrial. (EW.1.248)

Dewey is sympathetic to the claim that economic concerns often corrupt moral relations, but he believes this corruption is not inevitable. Dewey proposes that industry should work to achieve the aspirations of society, rather than behaving parasitically (as Plato believes) or obediently (as socialists think). Thus, even the economic foundations of democracy are part of the moral fabric of society and contribute to the realization of society's ethical ideas.

Dewey concludes his essay by restating his conception of democracy as an ethical ideal and from his summation the appropriate comparisons and contrasts between him and Plato become readily apparent:

I have used these illustrations simply for the sake of showing what I understand the conception of democracy to mean, and to show that the ordinary objections to democracy rest upon ideas which conceive of it after the type of an individualism of a numeric character; and have tried to suggest that democracy is an ethical character, the idea of a personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man. Democracy and the one, the ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonyms. The idea of democracy, the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, represent a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and secular has ceased, and as in Greek theory, as in the Christian theory of the Kingdom of God, the church and state, the divine and human organization of society are one... and add that the best test of any form of society is the ideal which it proposes for the forms of its life, and the degree in which it realizes this ideal. (EW.1.248-249)

Dewey hopes to dispel the theory of democracy as an "individualism of a numeric character," and opposes any thinker who develops a critique of democracy based on this errant conception. Clearly, this idea originates with Plato, yet the idealist tenor of Dewey's conception of democracy as an ethical ideal also bears a strong resemblance to Plato's philosophical project.

Another early essay, “Moral Philosophy,” also contains a discussion of Plato. Again, Dewey emphasizes that Plato’s project is moral, not metaphysical or epistemic. Furthermore, Dewey speaks about ethics with regard to moral relations saying that “the philosophical sciences—namely aesthetics, logic, and ethics—deal with the investigation of value. They reach their end, not in a description of a given experience, but in an estimate of its worth as a part of the whole system of experience” (EW.4.132). Dewey defends this conception of moral philosophy by providing a genealogy of its development and showing how its evolution is a product of historical influences. His discussion of Plato appears in his account of the progress of moral philosophy from its origins through the Roman era.

Dewey begins by saying that “in primitive societies morality is identified with the customs of the community: and these customs, receiving religious sanction, are thus binding religiously as well as morally.” Unfortunately, this sanctification by religion impedes the development of moral philosophy since inquiry implies “both lack of loyalty to the community and disrespect to the gods.” Slowly, different factors erode this religious and social conservatism by encouraging personal responsibility and moral reflection. Dewey cites as examples popular proverbs and maxims, e.g. “Know thyself,” the “development of democracy,” and also the exchange of culture between Greece and Asia, and the vast changes that occurred in the arts and sciences, as contributing to this shift in moral thought (EW.4.132-133)

However, this move away from conservatism does create an ethical response by two types of reactionary forces represented by the Greek dramatists and the Sophists. Dewey explains that “Amid the decay of older religious beliefs and customs, attending

the expansion of life, the dramatists tried to uphold a morality based upon a purification of the older mythology” by asserting that “the fundamental ethical relations are absolute, eternal, and controlling in all the affairs of life.” Conversely, the Sophists responded by instructing “ambitious citizens in the community in whatever was best calculated to make the latter capable of securing political influence” and claimed that “moral rules are simply expedients for securing personal advantage.” Dewey sees the work of Socrates as a middle ground between these two extremes, as “an effort to use the positive side of the Sophistic teaching [reason and rhetoric] against the negative side [morality as personal advantage], and in the interest of an intrinsic morality like that taught by the dramatists, but freed from its religious dependence” (EW.4.133-134).

Thus, moral philosophy begins with Socrates because he is the first to use reflection and inquiry to investigate the nature of moral relations with the intent of improving moral relations between the individual and the community. Yet Dewey carefully highlights the limitations of Socratic ethics before he considers Plato’s influence on moral philosophy. First, Socrates’ account of ethics is “decidedly ironical.” As Dewey points out, “Socrates himself does not claim to have himself any knowledge of what his supreme controlling good is; he represents simply a demand that men do not claim to be moral, much less teachers of morals, until they can base their conduct upon assured insight into the good.” In effect, Socrates does not satisfy his own criteria for a teacher of ethics. Second, while Socrates “urged, not only by precept, but still more by his own practice, loyalty to the spirit of the community of which one is a member” he never clearly explains how one can be loyal to the community while still loyally pursuing the good through free inquiry (EW.4.134-136).

These limitations are important because Plato inherits these problems and Dewey sees his contributions to the development of moral philosophy as a reaction to them. According to Dewey, Plato must complete two tasks begun by Socrates: “to work out more positively the content of the good, and to establish more in detail its connection with social organization.” Plato solves the first by uniting “the ethical analysis of the end of man with the philosophical analysis of the nature of reality,” i.e. by making the good the goal of ethical inquiry as well as part of the intrinsic structure of the universe. Dewey describes Plato’s second solution as follows:

The second problem he met by admitting that most men can never of themselves attain to insight into the good or true moral action. It is necessary, therefore, to reconstruct the whole social fabric so that the knowledge of the good obtained by the philosophers or the wise shall be mediated to the rest of the community through the very structure of the social organization. (EW.4.136)

This second solution is of greater significance to the present investigation because of its affinities with Dewey’s own philosophy. According to Dewey’s genealogy, Plato’s attempt at moral philosophy makes him the first thinker to become aware of the potential use of inquiry for social reconstruction. Not only are Plato and his teacher Socrates reacting to the immediate changes in the moral relations of their society, Plato realizes that philosophy can be used to reshape social organization for the purpose of providing stronger ethical relations within society. Dewey and Plato disagree upon what reconstruction should look like, but both see philosophy as a tool for assessing and overcoming immediate social problems.

These remarks conclude this account of Dewey’s direct assessment of Plato’s influence on the development of moral philosophy; however, comments on Aristotle and the Cynic and the Cyrenaic schools of Socratic thought may illuminate further how

Dewey locates Plato within the tradition of Greek philosophy. Dewey addresses Aristotle's contribution to moral thought primarily through his contrasts with Plato, thereby providing greater, though indirect, insight into Dewey's reading of Plato. First, Aristotle separates "ethics from its close [Platonic] connection with metaphysics and with political organization." Second, Aristotle details a concrete picture of the ethical life through his treatments of virtue, moral excellence, and the golden mean, whereas Plato defends but only sketches the ethical life. Third, Aristotle feels that ethical education should be handled privately, rather than publicly as in the *Republic*. Ultimately, Dewey sees Aristotle as providing a more embodied account of the ethical life than Plato imagined, one that emphasizes the greater responsibility of the individual than the society for moral conduct. Yet, Dewey's analysis does not suggest that either philosopher neglected the importance of the practical or the universal, the individual or society, but merely observes a difference in emphasis. Together they represent a more complete picture of Greek moral life.

Dewey concludes his analysis of Greek contributions to the genealogy of moral philosophy with an examination of the Cynics and the Cyrenaics and their Roman counterparts, the Stoics and the Epicureans, respectively. His assessment is that these two schools represent a more dramatic shift from social to personal responsibility for conduct due to the weakening of community as a result of imperial expansion: "Both are concerned with the question of how the individual, in an environment indifferent to him, can realize satisfaction" and "answer in terms of a personal detachment from all outward concern, and of an attainment of internal self-sufficiency" Thus, Dewey feels that they

“generalize the ethical analysis which Plato and Aristotle had made with reference to the Athenian community” (EW.4.138-139)

While these two schools do little more than make the ethical life envisaged by Plato and Aristotle available to the masses, their presence in Dewey’s genealogy is important for two reasons. First, they are another example of how moral philosophy is shaped by social needs. Second, they exhibit Dewey’s understanding of the rivalry between the Cynic and Cyrenaic schools over the interpretation of Socratic ethics as another competing influence on Plato’s interpretation of Socratic philosophy. This concern is not explicit in the “Moral Philosophy” essay, but it becomes prominent Dewey’s way of viewing the competition among Plato, the Cynics, and the Cyrenaics over the proper interpretation of Socratic philosophy as an important contextual factor in understanding the dialogues in “The Socratic Dialogues of Plato.”

In the Middle Works, Dewey continues to address Plato and the Greeks in a similar vein. Several themes that originate in the earlier essays are re-invoked and elaborated. In “Ethics,” Dewey presents a genealogical account similar to the one he presents in “Moral Philosophy,” but with more attention to meta-ethics. Again, Dewey is attempting to define ethics and to chart its development from the Greeks to the present. This time Dewey begins by mentioning how ethics has been viewed separately as philosophy, science, and art. He defines each of these three conceptions of ethics as follows:

1. “As a branch of philosophy, it is the business of ethics to investigate the nature of reality of certain conceptions in connection with fundamental theories of the universe. It is a theory of reality in its moral aspect.” (MW.3.40)
2. “ethics as a science is concerned with collecting, describing, explaining and classifying the facts of experience in which judgments of right and wrong are actually

embodied to which they apply. It is subdivided into social, or sociological, ethics, and individual, or psychological, ethics.” (MW.3.41)

3. “Ethics as an art [or practice] is concerned with discovering and formulating rules of acting in accordance with which men may attain their end. These rules may be considered as of the nature either of injunctions or commands, which prescribe as well as instruct; or as technical formulae which indicate to the individual the best way of proceeding towards a desired result. . .” (MW.3.42)

Dewey argues in this essay that “all three conceptions can exist harmoniously side by side” and he intends to show how it is possible to assign different ethical topics to each category. As expected, he uses his genealogy of the evolution of ethics to demonstrate how different historical cultures have employed different ethical strategies to solve different social problems. Dewey defends the thesis that “In each [historical] period, a certain practical interest is uppermost in social life, and this interest serves to concentrate and direct attention toward certain relevant theoretic problems” and to show how “the main problem of each epoch in its wider social tendencies will serve... to point out (*a*) the philosophic, (*b*) the scientific, (*c*) the practical centre of ethics in each period” (MW.3.43) To this end Dewey discusses four historical periods, the Graeco-Roman, the Patristic-Mediaeval, the Early Modern, and Dewey’s contemporary scene. The present analysis will focus on the first with some attention to Dewey’s contemporary recommendations.

Dewey’s account of the origin of ethical theory is nearly identical to the one he presents in “Moral Philosophy.” Ethical theory arises from the conflict between customary morality and ethical individualism produced by “the disintegration of the habits and modes of life which had previously defined the sphere of legitimate individual satisfaction, and which supplied the sanctions of the moral life” (MW.3.44). Dewey emphasizes that the discussion is framed by whether “morality exists by convention, by arbitrary enactment, . . . or in the nature of things.” This richer tripartite division of

general explanations for morality replaces the dualism Dewey employed in “Moral Philosophy” between the dramatists and the Sophists. Thus, the historical impetus for the genesis of ethical theory remains the same while Dewey’s picture of its origin has become more robust.

Dewey’s appropriation of Socrates has also become more favorable. Socrates is still the individual who attempts to negotiate competing explanatory accounts of morality; however Dewey has now become more forgiving of Socrates’ limitations. Although Socrates’ position as an ethical teacher is still ironic, Dewey expresses greater appreciation for Socratic ignorance by portraying the philosopher as clearly preferable to the sophist:

To be ignorant of the good is the one disgrace. If a man does not know it—and Socrates professed that he did not—he can at least devote himself seriously to inquiring, to the effort to learn. If not wise (a sophist) he can at least be a lover of wisdom (a philosopher). And until he attains knowledge, the individual will be loyal to the responsibilities of his own civic life. (MW.3.45-46)

Socratic ethical philosophy still has its limitations, but the irony of the philosopher is more constructive than the expertise of the sophist. Furthermore, Socrates makes two innovations to moral philosophy by suggesting that “All things must be considered according to their end, which constitutes their real “nature”. . . . Man must therefore have his own end, or good,” and that “To know is to grasp the essential, real being of a thing. . . . “know thyself” is the essence of morality; it means that man must base his activity upon comprehension of the true end of his own being” (MW.3.45) Thus, Socrates presents two theoretical standards apart from convention and caprice: that an ethical end exists for man and that the ethical life is achieved through knowledge of this end. From a contextual point of view, Socrates’ actions should be praised as an attempt to reconstruct moral inquiry, even if his two innovations conflict with Dewey’s comprehensive view.

From this new interpretation of Socrates' contribution to moral philosophy, Dewey views Plato as a competitor with the Cynics and the Cyrenaics over Socrates' philosophical legacy. Again the later two rivals promote extreme conceptions of what constitutes the good that is the "fulfillment of man's true nature," whereas Plato synthesizes the Cynics and Cyrenaics "with a constructive program of social, political and educational reform, and with a reinterpretation of earlier philosophic theories of the universe and of knowledge." Plato uses the dialogues to settle the sectarian disputes between the Cynics and the Cyrenaics over the nature of the Good, and he advances ethical thought by considering the individual's relationship not only to the Good, but also to society.

Plato's revision of the Socratic ethical project results in three contributions to moral philosophy. First Plato views an individual "as essentially a microcosm; as the universe in miniature." Man, nature, and society are all analogous and aim for the same ultimate Good. Second, because of this analogical relation between the individual and society, Plato regards "the state in its true or ideal form as the best embodiment or expression of the essential nature of the individual; as indeed more truly man than any one individual." This emphasis on individuals realizing their Good through their interaction with the community distinguishes Plato's appropriation of Socrates from the Cynics and Cyrenaics who see the ethical life as purely an individual project. Finally, Plato sees the Good not only as a balance between "pleasure" and "virtue" but as a harmonious relationship among individuals, nature, and the state in which "the fulfillment of all capacities, faculties or functions of human nature, the fulfillment of each

power being accompanied with its own appropriate pleasure” is achieved. Dewey refers to this ideal as the first “‘self-realization’ type” of ethical theory (MW.3.47-48).

As in “Moral Philosophy,” Dewey’s last comments about Plato contrast Plato’s views with Aristotle. Again Dewey sees Aristotle as stating “in detail psychological and social aspects [of ethical theory], merely sketched by Plato.” With regard to society Dewey sees Aristotle as realizing that “the comprehensive scheme of reform entertained by Plato was impossible” and preferring “a more empirical description and analysis of various forms of government and organization in their moral bases and bearings” (MW.3.48). Thus, he sees the primary difference between Plato and Aristotle as their respective emphasis on theory and practice. With the exception of a brief discussion of the Stoics and “Roman jurisprudence” Dewey’s comments on Aristotle conclude his examination of the historical concerns that shape the Graeco-Roman contribution to ethical theory.

Dewey’s genealogy conceives ethical theories as responses to human problems. His discussion of the Graeco-Roman era shows how Socrates first used ethics philosophically to compensate for the erosion of customary ethics. Socrates solves this historical problem by grounding ethics through inquiry into man’s ideal end, as opposed to tradition (as advocated by the dramatists) or political power (as advocated by the sophists). Plato elaborates on this philosophical construal of ethics by considering how an individual’s realization of the Good manifests itself within society. Thus, Plato makes the move from ethics as philosophy to ethics as art. Finally, Aristotle begins to use ethics scientifically, by focusing less on theoretical ethics and more on practical ethics. But while each of these three philosophers prefers one mode of ethics over another, one must

agree with Dewey's initial contention that these three modes of ethical thought can function simultaneously, even cooperatively. By recognizing that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are reacting to immediate historical problems one sees how they are using inquiry to experiment with new strategies for improving existing moral relations.

Dewey's comments about the ancient Greeks are not polemical; he believes their strategies are novel and appropriate means for addressing the ethical problems of their own time. Unfortunately, ethical theorists since the Greek era, particularly during Modernity, have incorrectly assumed that the models presented by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, specifically their mutual emphasis on ethics as philosophy, are necessary for dealing with their contemporary, unique ethical conundrums. Dewey explains this imposition in the final section of his essay:

Every period of ethical theory has been associated, as we have seen, with some corresponding epoch of human development, having its own characteristic problem. Upon the whole, however, ethics has not as yet adequately outgrown the conditions of its origin, and the supposed necessity they imposed of finding something as fixed and unchanging as custom. Consequently, philosophic inquiry has been devoted to finding *the good, the law of duty, etc.* [Dewey's emphasis]; that is something unchanging, all inclusive. . . . But as ethical writers become more habituated to evolutionary ideas, they will cease setting up ideals of a Utopian millennium, with only one end and law; and will devote themselves to studying the conditions and effects of the changing situations in which men actually live, and to enabling men to use their best intelligence to find out just what the specific ends and specific duties are which characterize just those situations. (MW.3.57)

According to Dewey, contemporary ethical theory errs when it mistakes the Graeco-Roman problem (i.e. the erosion of custom) as the problem of the current era. An undue and counterproductive emphasis thereby falls on ethics as philosophy without regard for the understandings of ethics as practice or science. Strategies that were effective for Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in meeting their immediate needs (i.e. the grounding of ethics in the knowledge of the good to avoid the ethics of unreflective traditionalism or

unchecked political advantage) are not applicable, and are potentially detrimental to the resolution of our own ethical problems. The value of the Greek contributions to ethical theory is their creative responses to their own moral dilemmas; they are inspiration for solutions to other problems, but they cannot solve our own problems.

Dewey's only sustained reading of Plato is found in the later essay "The 'Socratic Dialogues' of Plato." From the title and the introductory paragraph of this essay, one sees that Dewey accepts some form of the conventional account of gradation between the early dialogues, where the ideas represented are more Socratic, and the middle and late dialogues, where Plato begins to develop his own philosophical theories. Yet Dewey does not intend to support a conventional reading of Plato. Throughout the genealogies discussed in the previous section, Dewey alludes to his suspicion that the dialogues are in part an attempt by Plato to defend against competing interpreters of Socrates, specifically the Cynics and Cyrenaics. In this essay, Dewey contends that Plato begins his response to these rivals in the earlier dialogues. He describes Plato's method and project as follows:

The purpose of the dialogues, however, is not just to ridicule Plato's rivals in philosophy. It is all to bring out the nature of certain problems and to define them in such a way as to prepare for a constructive treatment. It goes without saying that Plato was intensely sensitive to the ideas and problems of other thinkers. He advanced in his own development by mastering and absorbing the thoughts of others. It was almost inevitable that there should be an early period in which he was chewing upon the systems of rival schools, when he felt that he had a grasp on their problems, on the elements of truth in them, and on the points where they went wrong, and when he was more concerned to confute them as systems and elicit their problematic factors than to offer his independent solutions. My hypothesis is that this phase of his development constitutes the so-called Socratic period. (LW.2.125)

Dewey divides the early, middle, and late dialogues according to the contemporary issues Plato was addressing, rather than employing the customary division between Socratic and Platonic ideas. The early dialogues are experiments in which Plato uses dramatic

renditions of his rivals to test the validity of their philosophical hypotheses. Thus, from the outset of this essay, Dewey attempts to construct an interpretation of the early dialogues that emphasizes Plato's use of drama and experiment for specific practical purposes.

Furthermore, we see Dewey connecting several themes that have been present since his treatments of Plato in his earliest essays, specifically how the dialogues are a product of Plato's historical context. Before examining the dialogues of Plato's Socratic period, Dewey begins by discussing how certain significant antecedent conditions influenced Plato's handling of particular themes. First, Dewey mentions that it was common for rival groups to attack one another by invoking Socrates to justify their direct and veiled rhetorical assaults. Despite the fact that he is the most successful of these rhetoricians, Plato was one among many competitors for Socrates' legacy. Secondly, this "philosophical rivalry was also bound up with political factionalism." Plato's "aristocratic connection" put him at odds not only with the democratic faction, like the Cynics, but also with "Socrates' own abstention from political life." This contention about Socrates complicates Plato's use of Socrates as a character within the dialogues and requires that he "devise a plausible reason to account for Socrates' practical deviation from the theories he attributed to him." Finally, Dewey recommends that "we can adopt the hypothesis that when somebody in a dialogue seriously presents a view which is criticized by Socrates we have an echo of some teaching of some contemporary school." Plato chooses the topics of the dialogues in an attempt to reconstruct the ideas of contemporary thinkers (LW.2.125-126).

Dewey feels that these three antecedent conditions explain why Plato's depiction of Socrates in the early dialogues often appears complex and contradictory. He summarizes his hermeneutical approach as follows:

It surely would be much simpler to hold that the "Socratic" views and methods which are criticized are those of men pretending to speak in Socrates' name, which Plato then ridicules in the name of Socrates himself, involving them in obscurity. (LW.2.127)

Whether or not Dewey's hermeneutical approach simplifies the difficulties of the early dialogues is debatable, but it does reveal Dewey's vision for the "back to Plato movement." Dewey uses this hermeneutical key as a means of showing Platonic reconstruction in action. By addressing several dialogues in turn, Dewey illustrates how Plato demonstrates the limitations of certain contemporary concepts in the earlier dialogues and then modifies them in later dialogues.

In this essay, Dewey focuses on four dialogues: *Lesser Hippias*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, and *Charmides*. He contends that the arguments proposed in each one correspond to specific philosophical rivals. For example, the *Lesser Hippias* ends with Socrates admitting to a "*reductio ad absurdum*" of his own concept. According to Dewey, Plato uses this *reductio* as a means of undermining Antisthenes' (one of the original Cynics) interpretation of Socratic doctrine. Antisthenes believed that Socrates favored a life in which the individual seeks happiness through the pursuit of self-sufficiency apart from social institutions. While Dewey feels that this interpretation "appears as a genuinely Socratic element" it contrasts with Plato's appropriation of Socrates due to Antisthenes' "exaltation of practice over logical and theoretical science as a means of attaining virtue, and the attack not merely on existing institutions but on the political state as such" (LW.2.128).

Dewey interprets the other dialogues along similar lines. Nicias also presents a Cynical view in *Laches*. Nicias is Socratic enough to realize that virtue requires knowledge, but he “does, not, as Plato does, see that knowledge, even in the form of right opinion as to things which change such as pleasures and pains, depends upon insight into Being—that which does not change” (LW.2.130-131). Meanwhile, *Protagoras* represents the views of the Cyreniacs. In *Protagoras*, Socrates accepts Protagoras’ Cyreniac hypothesis that the good can be identified with pleasure. Yet, the Platonic concept of the good as immutable conflicts with this relativistic hypothesis that pleasure is the good. Furthermore, Protagoras and Plato agree that the “social order is the great teacher of virtues. The doctrine is precisely that of the *Republic*,” but Protagoras’ sophistic teachings are corrupt because they teach vice rather than virtue. Thus, society and its members need Plato’s benevolent Philosopher-Kings who can properly guide the state and moral education (LW.2.133-135).

Finally, the *Charmides* contains elements of both Cynic and Cyreniac thought—with a twist. Again Plato criticizes the Cynic conception of knowledge that appeared earlier in the *Laches* by saying that the knowledge of the good possessed by the philosopher is greater than the knowledge of knowledge possessed by the artisan. Conversely, Socrates’ interlocutor, Critias, also re-invokes the Cyreniac conception of pleasure as the good (LW.2.135-137). But, Dewey also argues that Plato attempts to reconstruct the ideas of Democritus in the *Charmides*:

The importance attached to the ability to distinguish between real knowledge and false and conventional belief is as Democritean as it is Platonic. Plato here criticizes the notion that this ability can be had by means of knowledge of knowledge. It can be had only by knowledge of ends or goods in themselves. Self-knowledge is indeed fundamentally important. It constitutes sophrosyne; it is manifested in ability to discriminate and measure among pleasures and pains; it is a condition of self-control.

So far there is agreement. But Democritus held that self-knowledge in the form of knowledge of knowledge can be attained by knowledge of natural causes. Plato holds that knowledge of physical causes, being in the realm of generation, is useful, but only when there is first a knowledge of ends which are final. Here is touched upon, at least by indirection, the difference between the two great systems of antiquity. (LW.2.138)

Dewey sees the *Charmides* as the most complex of Plato's Socratic dialogues. In that dialogue, Plato uses the conversation between Socrates and his interlocutors to address, refute, and incorporate the ideas of Plato's philosophical rivals. The primary rivals are the Cynics and Cyreniacs, but Dewey also believes that we see Plato's maturation through his attempt to merge Socratic and Democritean ideas in this early dialogue.

Dewey argues that these dialogues are experimental; they are attempts by the young Plato to find and establish his voice among the cacophony of Socrates' heirs, and while Dewey clearly describes the emerging Platonic doctrines in terms that contrast with his own philosophy, he never resorts to polemics. In fact, he praises both Plato and the Sophists in his concluding remarks:

We are struggling today with the ethical problems of Plato's time. We assert rival views more vehemently. But perhaps we consider them less urbanely and with less of lucid intellectual method. The claims of discipline, culture, of natural science and of an alleged more ultimate knowledge of ends, are still opposed to one another. Past discussion seems to have choked us with its debris rather than enlightened us. We project our mental muddiness and one-sidedness upon the Sophists, and laying our sins upon them fail to recognize that, comparatively speaking, the Sophists were direct and honest and that it is we who are sophisticated. If we cannot get instruction by recurring to the Platonic scene, we may at least discover the charm of free and direct mental play directed to the fundamental themes of life. (LW.2.140)

Plato and Dewey differ on some major points, but Dewey clearly admires Plato's project and his methodology. Dewey's tone resembles that found in his advocacy for a "back to Plato movement." Given that "The 'Socratic Dialogues' of Plato" and "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" are both among Dewey's later works, we may infer that Dewey

prefers to approach the dialogues in the spirit of admiration expressed above. Dewey sees Plato as motivated by an ethical struggle with his contemporary scene and while Dewey does not advocate the imposition of Platonic solutions (i.e. Platonic doctrine) to our current philosophical and social problems, he does believe that Plato's attempts to reconstruct the ethical dialogue of his time to be worthy of imitation. The dialogues exemplify how philosophy can reconstruct our social context for practical purposes; they are not repositories of philosophical truths or mere collections of arguments and propositions.

### *III. Critical Comments*

As can be seen, Dewey enjoyed a complex and often confusing understanding of Plato's contributions to philosophy. However, threads of continuity appear among the secondary articles and primary essays presented above. Both John Anton and Frederick Anderson provide useful tools that illuminate these strands, and by examining their strengths and weakness and comparing the two, a blended and richer appraisal of Dewey's reading of Plato and the Greeks results. The outcome is a more robust account of this intriguing connection between pragmatism and Platonic thought.

Anton's explication of the polemic, historico-contextual, and cumulative aspect of Dewey's reading of ancient thought successfully describes the major divisions of his commentary and the following remarks address these divisions in turn. Furthermore, Anton's conservative assessment of the success of Dewey's commentary highlights some incongruities between Dewey's views and ancient thought that should not be neglected. He concludes that while Dewey's attempts to comment on historic-contextual aspects of ancient thought are interesting, they are hindered by Dewey's polemics, and he cites

Dewey's inappropriate imposition of contemporary issues upon the ancient scene as the cause. Simply put, he thinks Dewey fails to see modern philosophers, rather than ancient thinkers, as the primary source of the dualisms he wants to eradicate. While Anton's assessment might be partially correct about the genealogies that Dewey presents in his major works, Dewey rarely resorts to polemics against the ancients in any of the previous essays. In fact, it would be more accurate to suggest that while the ancients (Plato chief among them) made the first moves towards a Spectator Theory of Knowledge, Dewey directs his polemics against the caricatures of Plato that originate during modernity rather than against Plato or the ancients themselves.

An example of this difference occurs in "The Ethics of Democracy" when Dewey confronts Maine's advocacy of aristocracy while simultaneously praising Plato's advocacy of aristocracy as an ideal expression of the Greek ethos. According to Dewey, Plato errs in suggesting that aristocracy is the ideal state, but his attempt at social reform represents a worthy model of reconstruction that accurately assesses its contemporary context and presents a fruitful solution to ethical issues in society. Therefore, it would be prudent to side with Anderson's assessment and argue that Dewey uses polemics only as a means of dismissing simulacra of Plato that obscure the funded experiences and insights of Greek philosophy. The polemical aspect of Dewey's appropriation of Greek thought allows his historico-contextual commentary to move to the fore, and his attempt succeeds if one recalls Dewey's admiration of Plato and the ancients and the resonances between their thought and his own.

The continuity between Dewey and the ancients should not be understated. As demonstrated by "The Ethics of Democracy" and the "Moral Philosophy" essay, Dewey

believes that governments are more than political systems, and that they represent a web of moral relationship and concepts. He cites Plato as the first philosopher to notice this connection between ethics and government. Furthermore, he sees all ancient philosophy as an attempt to overcome immediate social problems and identifies Plato as the most socially aware reformer among them. Finally, as Anderson suggests, Dewey reads the mature Plato as ironically un-Platonic but trapped by his own genius. Plato's pragmatic attempt at social reform transforms him into the first "professional philosopher" because of his context and institutions. Anderson's division between the Socratic, the Mature, and the Trapped Plato assist in understanding the historico-cultural and the cumulative aspect of Dewey's relation with the Greek.

But, while Dewey's concern with the differences between Socrates and Plato are significant, we need not accept wholesale his thesis that the earlier dialogues are Plato's attempt to criticize his competitors in order to construct a Deweyan reading of the dialogues because of the diminished importance of the "Socratic Problem" in contemporary Plato scholarship. While a strong interest remains in discerning the philosophical differences between Socrates and Plato, an equally strong trend of criticism favors the dramatic value of the dialogues over their historical value. However, Dewey's contemporary conversation was dominated by these historical concerns, making it necessary for Dewey to incorporate them into his pragmatic appropriation of Plato. But, Dewey's hermeneutical problems are not our hermeneutical problems and our contemporary pragmatic reconstruction of Plato need not focus on the separation of Socrates and Plato's philosophical thought. A strong tradition now exists that attempts to read Plato dramatically. Dewey's back to Plato movement has already begun in the

conversation of Plato scholarship that has steered towards the dramatic dimensions of the dialogues.

Dewey makes a compelling case for the early dialogues as a critical phase in Plato's development and as attempts to address the Cynics and Cyrenaics. But, to use Anderson's terminology, Dewey still adheres to a separation between the Socratic Plato and the Mature Plato that would burden an effort to produce a contemporary pragmatic reading of the dialogues. A more fruitful, and potentially more Deweyan, description would suggest that Plato uses the dialogues to present Socrates dramatically as a philosophical hero engaged in dialectic for the purpose of social reconstruction. Conflicting theories or views presented by Socrates in various dialogues need not be part of Plato's failed or youthful attempts to construct a philosophical system. Inconsistencies might be part of Plato's attempts to depict the experimental nature of the dialectic in an attempt to encourage his readers to cultivate a love of wisdom and to promote the practical benefits of critical reflection. Critical reflection is the tool that Plato hopes his readers will use to enhance the quality of their individual lives and the quality of society as a whole. No goal is more Deweyan than using philosophical reflection to benefit the individual and society; in a way, no goal is more Socratic or Platonic.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Drama, Experiment, and Practice in the Dialogues

In “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” Dewey recommends a turn back to Plato: “Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a “Back to Plato” movement; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor.” Dewey intimates that three criteria can be distilled that should guide a “Back to Plato” movement. First, the movement should attend to the *dramatic* character of the dialogues. Second, the movement should discover the *experimental* character of the dialogues by understanding the “restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield.” Finally, the movement should demonstrate the *practical* character of the dialogues by showing that they are a reconstruction of Plato’s immediate historical context and that they can be useful in reconstructing our situation.

This inquiry into the dramatic, experimental, and practical character of the dialogues addresses each of these characteristics in turn. However, these characteristics interact, and examining one characteristic, specifically the dramatic, reveals how Plato’s uses it to reinforce and articulate the other two characteristics of the dialogues. A purely thematic examination of each characteristic in isolation would be counterproductive. The

chapter begins with a sketch of the major themes of contemporary scholarship. This introductory section orients my hermeneutical approach within the current conversation and provides the justification of the sources that will be used to construct a reading of Plato that attends to drama, experiment, and practice within the dialogues. The construction of a pragmatist reading of Plato begins with an analysis of John Herman Randall's *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* and ends with an extended examination of John R. Wallach's *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy*. These two critics offer comprehensive treatments of the dialogues that elaborate the three characteristics Dewey outlines. Randall focuses on drama, making him a good starting point, and Wallach's emphasis on Plato's political art favors practice. David Roochnik and Thomas W. Smith construct an understanding of dialectic as experiment, thereby linking our examination of drama and practice. We finally see Plato dramatically presenting Socrates engaged in an experimental form of dialectic that stimulates his interlocutors and by extension Plato's readers to think critically about the practical dilemmas they face in their every day experiences.

### *I. Investigative Pragmatism*

The recent book *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern & Ancient*, by editors Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe serves as the source for my sketch of the major themes of contemporary Plato scholarship, specifically C.C.W. Taylor's chapter on "The Origins of Our Present Paradigms." This chapter focuses on the history of hermeneutical paradigms of contemporary Plato scholarship. After the current positions on these issues have been presented, I attempt to place Dewey's reading of Plato within the context of these contemporary debates. This section links the analysis of Dewey's reading of Plato

presented in chapter two with the Plato scholarship presented in this chapter that addresses Dewey's themes of drama, experiment, and practice.

In "The Origins of Our Present Paradigms," Taylor considers the paradigms of contemporary Plato scholarship and attempts to define the major hermeneutical approaches as they relate to these paradigms. Brad Inwood provides an excellent summary of these approaches in his commentary on Taylor's article, also presented in the chapter:

- A developmental paradigm, which holds that Plato's works constitute a corpus with a history which needs to be understood if one is to comprehend those works.
- An anti-developmental paradigm, associated with one aspect of the work of George Grote, which holds that the individual dialogues need to be understood first and foremost as separate and free-standing works of philosophical literature which do not necessarily need to be understood in an historical context before they can be properly comprehended.<sup>1</sup>

According to Inwood, Taylor differentiates between a developmental paradigm and an anti-developmental paradigm. According to Taylor, the developmental paradigm begins with late nineteenth century Hegelian scholars, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, who wanted to read the Platonic corpus as developing systematically and chronology according to historical events. Karl Friedrich Herman modifies the developmental paradigm by introducing the possibility of maturation throughout the corpus from early to late works as guided by various external and internal events in Plato's biography, specifically Socrates' death and influence on the development of Plato's philosophy. The

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<sup>1</sup> Brad Inwood, "Comments on Taylor." *New Perspective on Plato, Modern and Ancient*. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 85.

conventional tripartite division of the Platonic corpus into early, middle, and late dialogues arises from the developmental paradigm of the late nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Taylor argues that George Grote first moves toward an anti-developmental paradigm due to the “his insistence on the *unsystematic* character of the Platonic dialogues.” Taylor summarizes Grote’s approach as a “radical rejection of the whole conception of a Platonic philosophy” and describes it in the following quotation:

Each dialogue constitutes its own dramatic world, totally independent of any other. Plato does not inhabit any world, much less all. He creates each world, within which characters explore each other’s philosophical views and activities, none of which can be identified as Plato’s. Since we cannot find Platonic doctrine within the individual dialogue, it is fruitless to look for common Platonic doctrines linking different dialogues.<sup>3</sup>

According to Taylor, scholarship since Schleiermacher, Hermann, and Grote have either accepted or rejected the developmental paradigm. Debate among those who accept the developmental focus on general topics, essentially whether the development of Plato’s corpus should be understood relative to external (Schleiermacher) or internal (Hermann) events in Plato’s biography, or to specific topics, e.g. the chronology of Plato’s dialogues. Conversely, scholarship that rejects the developmental paradigm attends to the literary and dramatic character of individual dialogues.<sup>4</sup>

Orienting Dewey along the developmental-anti-developmental axis poses an interesting challenge that requires a return to his statements in “From Absolutism to Experimentalism.” Dewey precedes his commission for a “Back to Plato Movement” by acknowledging his debt to Hegel, but he also notes some interesting contrasts with Plato:

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<sup>2</sup> C.C.W. Taylor, “The Origins of Our Present Paradigms.” *New Perspective on Plato, Modern and Ancient*. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 73-78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.

I drifted away from Hegelianism in the next fifteen years; the word "drifting" expresses the slow and, for a long time, imperceptible character of the movement, though it does not convey the impression that there was an adequate cause for the change. Nevertheless I should never think of ignoring, much less denying, what an astute critic occasionally refers to as a novel discovery--that acquaintance with Hegel has left a permanent deposit in my thinking. The form, the schematism, of his system now seems to me artificial to the last degree. But in the content of his ideas there is often an extraordinary depth; in many of his analyses, taken out of their mechanical dialectical setting, an extraordinary acuteness. Were it possible for me to be a devotee of any system, I still should believe that there is greater richness and greater variety of insight in Hegel than in any other single systematic philosopher--though when I say this I exclude Plato, who still provides my favorite philosophic reading. For I am unable to find in him that all-comprehensive and overriding system which later interpretation has, as it seems to me, conferred upon him as a dubious boon. (LW.5.154)

Given this "permanent deposit" in Dewey's thinking and the reading of Plato discussed in the previous chapter, Dewey appears to accept the developmental paradigm. Yet, this quotation expresses Dewey's frustration with the artificiality of Hegel's schema and his skepticism towards the "dubious boon" of labeling Plato as a "systematic philosopher" (LW.5.154)

A tension emerges between "The 'Socratic' Dialogues of Plato," which is an attempt to explain the development of Plato's corpus, and this quotation from "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," where Dewey explicitly rejects the developmental paradigm. I think this tension expresses Dewey's own inability to escape completely the constraints of his own intellectual scene, but it also expresses Dewey's desire to move beyond any paradigm that inhibits our ability to engage constructively in inquiry. Dewey's broader philosophy is an attempt to move beyond other divisive modern paradigms in traditional fields such as epistemology and metaphysics; why should Dewey's reading of Plato be an exception? Inwood provides some help toward easing this tension in his commentary on Grote:

Grote clearly was of two minds about how to approach Plato. He knew that the primary evidence was atomistic and, being literary, in need of the sort of analysis appropriate to the integrity of literary work. Hence the appeal of seeing Grote in the light of the “literary” paradigm. But Grote also knew that there was a certain amount of external evidence which was bound to constrain any attempt to understand Plato. He was of two minds for a very good reason, because it simply makes sense to follow the problems and evidence we have, flexibly applying the good judgment of an investigator rather than taking direction from the sort of ambitious concept we are pleased to call a paradigm. . . A sort of *investigative pragmatism* [my emphasis], respect for the constraints of evidence. . .<sup>5</sup>

Inwood’s mediated assessment of Grote’s approach falling between the developmental and anti-developmental paradigms applies to Dewey’s reading as well and while Inwood is not referring to American philosophy, his classification of this approach as “a sort of investigative pragmatism” has an aesthetic appeal as a label for Dewey’s reading of Plato.

Like Grote, Dewey wants to work with the best available evidence to solve the most pressing problems at hand. In “The ‘Socratic’ Dialogues of Plato,” Dewey struggles to work within the developmental paradigm by explaining the early or Socratic dialogues as Plato’s attempts to criticize his philosophical rivals. He works within the paradigm to demonstrate how the dialogues are the product of Plato’s historical context and are designed to address specific historical problems. Put differently, Dewey works within the paradigm to introduce a pragmatist voice into the conversation about Plato. However, Dewey knows that there are limitations to the developmental paradigm and that Plato (like epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, i.e. philosophy in general) has become trapped under these restrictive paradigms inherited from modernity. In “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” he confesses that there is not enough evidence to construct a complete systematic philosophy from within Plato’s corpus and that the only

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<sup>5</sup> Inwood, 91.

way to approach Plato authentically is to attend to the drama of the dialogues, i.e. to embrace an anti-developmental or literary paradigm.

Thus, Dewey's approach to the dialogues can best be described as a form of investigative pragmatism. Dewey willingly works within the developmental paradigms because elements of his pragmatism are steeped in Hegelian historicism. He wants to understand how the dialogues arise from the social fabric of ancient Greece and how they are attempts to solve pressing social problems. However, Dewey knows that the only way to free the dialogues from artificial modern interpretations is to step outside of the dominant paradigms. Attending to the drama of the dialogues frees us from attempting to systematize Plato by intentionally shifting the focus of investigation of the text from a search for philosophical argument to an appreciation of the literary elements of the dialogues.

When this shift occurs one sees that incongruous arguments throughout the dialogue do not represent a linear chronological development of Plato's philosophy, but are a product of Socrates' experimental pedagogy. Each dialogue represents a different dramatic event, and one sees Socrates experimenting with different pedagogical and investigative techniques, e.g. dialectic, in response to the personalities of his interlocutors, the time and location of the conversation, and the topic under discussion. As a reader one learns how to live the philosophical life and how to engage in philosophical conversation from Plato's depiction of Socrates in action. One does not learn how to practice philosophy in a systematic and professional method of argument and counterargument. By learning how to participate in philosophical reflection and

conversation we become more proficient at negotiating the problems of our own societies and cultures.

This investigative pragmatism begins by reading the dialogues as philosophical drama, which enables one to see Socrates' experimental pedagogy in action. Socrates tailors his investigative strategies to the practical demands of each dramatic setting, and the dialogues themselves are part of Plato's larger project of social reform. Observing how Plato uses the drama of the dialogues to represent the philosophical life and to address social problems produces better philosophers and citizens. The following critics approach the dialogues in a spirit similar to Dewey's investigative pragmatism. John Herman Randall and his student Henry G. Wolz construct a literary approach to the dialogues within the developmental paradigm, by focusing on Plato's relation and contributions to the genre of Greek drama. David Roochnik and Thomas W. Smith present an understanding of dialectic that focuses on its experimental nature and on the way skillful teachers tailor their conversations according to the needs of their students. Finally, with the help of John Wallach, I reconstruct the historical setting that influenced Plato's authorship of the dialogues.

## *II. Drama in the Dialogues*

John Herman Randall begins *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* with the distinction between the historical Plato and Plato the author of the dialogues. The historical Plato has been obscured by the passage of time, and we have access only to the author of the dialogues. Randall's thesis is that Plato is not a historical philosopher, but "a poet and a dramatist" which he explains as follows: "Plato is a philosopher *because* he is a poet. True philosophy is poetry—poetic insight and vision, the imaginative

enhancement of life.” According to Randall, Plato dramatically depicts the “qualities of man’s thinking, the play and conflict of his ideas, the spectacle of his mind” as embodied in the “discourse of men” or “the drama of the Life of Reason.” His characterization of Plato’s method is radical, because he sees the dialectic not as an argument for a conclusion or an analysis of philosophical ideas, but as a means of converting individuals to the philosophical life, i.e. “It does not make you any wiser, but somehow it does succeed in making you fall in love with wisdom.”<sup>6</sup>

This turn towards Plato as dramatist moves away from an attempt to establish an authoritative interpretation and towards a hermeneutical framework that manifests the richness of the philosophical. Randall wants to move beyond discussion of the historical Plato and the historical Socrates because he feels that this hermeneutical style cannot be substantiated and is inevitably inconclusive. At best it can provide only a mythic account of Plato.<sup>7</sup> However, Randall does believe that attending to the historical context of the dialogues can deepen our understanding of them. The dialogues are not meant to be an accurate historical snapshot of ancient Greece, but a presentation of “Greece in Plato’s own perspective, Greece as he understood it, how Greece and Greek culture looked to him.” Historical context is important because:

Greek tools of reflection formed the central core of Plato’s thinking. They provided him with certain intellectual attitudes, certain controlling intellectual aims and values, that the Greeks sought to attain, and with certain basic concepts that grew out of these intellectual attitudes and aims.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Herman Randall, *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) 3-4

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-35

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-40

Therefore, Randall prefers to speak in terms of “The Greek Heritage of Plato,” i.e. the patterns of thoughts and values that he inherited from Greek culture, early Greek philosophers, the Sophists, Socrates, and Plato’s audience. Chapters IV through VIII address the various sub-categories of these intellectual artifacts and their impact on the dialogues.

Randall concludes chapter four by outlining the cultural themes that shape Plato’s use of drama within the dialogues:

1. There is first an openness of mind, an intellectual receptivity to the wealth of cultural materials that the Greeks had at their disposal.
2. There is, secondly, the sense of Greek life and culture as a human achievement.
3. . . . all activity must aim at something definite and intelligible.
4. This power of man [*nous*]. . . aimed, not at dominion over the forces of nature, but at controlling human nature—at the Good Life.
5. . . . the highest value of *nous* was to achieve insight, to see life as a dramatic spectacle, in all its shades and colors, with all its complexities and paradoxes; to see it as it *is*, to hold it up, to contemplate it, to see through it.<sup>9</sup>

Randall believes that Plato’s use of drama attempts to capture this combination of curiosity and humanism in the attempt to recruit *nous* as a means of orienting human nature towards the Good Life. Drama allows Plato to express how these themes shape the life of reason. Randall describes this representation as follows:

And Plato, too, is torn by the same disharmony. Within his soul there contended the prophet-statesman, aflame with the moving vision of what the life of man might be, and the artist-observer, with the cool perception of what it inescapably is. There follow naturally the recurrent quarrels about the dialogues, from the *Republic* down. However much Plato may have wanted to shadow forth the path along which men might travel toward perfection, the poet and the dramatist in the end got the better of him. The dialogues emerge, not as programs of action, but as dramatic portrayals of the life of the mind—of the follies, contradictions, enthusiasms, and greatness of human thinking, as beheld by a detached and ironic intelligence—by *nous*, Dramatic Reason.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 40, 41, 42, 46, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 54.

According to Randall, Plato's seeks to recreate dramatically through the medium of the dialogues the life of reason (or *nous*). Plato hopes to impart the value of the philosophical life and to inspire his audience to participate in it so that they might improve themselves in the hope of finding fulfillment. Thus, the dialogues are not presentations of philosophical theories; they are invitations to engage in the betterment of humanity through a life of inquiry and conversation.

Randall continues by explaining how Plato uses drama to respond to concerns within his cultural context, and he sees three major strands of discussion: *religious*, *political*, and *language*. Randall explores the religious strand of discussion in Chapter V, "Plato's Heritage from the Early Greek Philosophers," by examining the influence of the Olympian deities, Greek mystery religions, and the pre-Socratic philosophers on the dialogues. Randall sees the stories of Olympian deities as the raw materials of Greek culture and, although they formed the "official and political religion," they were symbolic, rather than literal, explanations of natural phenomena. Like Greek philosophy, mystery religions were critical of the Olympic world view and "these cults impressed Plato with the ideas of "a sharp dualism between Good and Evil, with the necessity for purification," and "the whole relationship between the soul of man and the Realm of Ideas."<sup>11</sup> Randall also examines major Pre-Socratic philosophers and their influence on Plato's dialogues. Pythagoras contributes to Plato's understanding of the soul, and to his ideas about mathematics, and cosmology.<sup>12</sup> Heraclitus' "ceaseless flux becomes Plato's world of Becoming" and his *logos* becomes "the factor of the Ideas and Forms accessible

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 58-65.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 65-67.

to *nous*.” Finally, Parmenides challenged Plato to think critically about Being and Intelligibility.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Pre-Socratics were a source of philosophical ideas, Randall believes that Plato “employed their distinctions, but in a quite different context, to illuminate different problems, Athenian problems” which were primarily a result of the rise of the Sophists. Thus, Randall turns to Plato’s immediate background and considers the influence of the Sophists on the dialogues. Randall begins by describing Plato’s contemporary scene:

Athens was a different world. It enjoyed a political life, a life belonging to the *polis*, the city, a life of intense but narrow concerns, which engaged the practical-minded. Athenian interests were broadened and deepened, to be sure, after the failure of the Periclean commercial prosperity; and it is essential to remember that Plato wrote after the Peloponnesian War. He then viewed, and has made his readers view, the problems and the chief figures of the period of Athenian prosperity and uncritical self-confidence. . .<sup>14</sup>

Randall also describes the historical events that funded Plato’s intellectual context:

The Athenians talked, that is, about the surface of human conflicts and relations, as intelligent governing classes do, in a time of assurance, of expanding social life, of untroubled confidence in fundamentals. It was a time of rapid commercial growth; the old hold of the clannish landlords had been broken. Cleisthenes had given Athens a democratic constitution, which seems to have meant what democracy usually means in a prosperous, commercially minded society. The older traditions, the stable mores of an agricultural society, based on an economy of scarcity, were going by the board. Men now had freedom—the freedom to talk.

Then came the Persian Wars, and the great victory. There was a new outburst of the feeling of pride and patriotism, a new enthusiasm for wealth, power, and empire. There ensued the rapid building of a richly varied life. It took all men’s energies; and it was new. . . It is clear that with the wisdom of hindsight Plato saw, and saw through, this complacency.

In this new and rapidly changing social situation, the old traditional Greek education broke down. There arose the demand for more instruction, in the practical and professional sense. How were the young aristocrats to hold their own, how were the new rich to succeed, with the arena now open to all comers? It was something

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 74-79.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 81.

like the interval between the two world wars in England. A comparison with pre-Labor England is inevitable: for Athens exhibited much the same combination of political democracy with a strong aristocratic governing-class intellectual tradition, the same plutocracy in combination with older feudal landlords and with empire. A young fellow, it was clear, now needed to have training. It paid.<sup>15</sup>

The Athenian century preceding Plato's career experienced optimism in the form of imperial expansion and hegemony as well as the social changes that accompanied this rapid change. Expansion enabled social mobility and the Sophists met the needs of the established aristocracy that wanted to maintain power and the new rich that wanted access to previously unavailable political privileges.

Plato sees through this optimism and careerism and begins writing the dialogues as a response to the Sophists, just as the consequences of this rapid social change come to fruition.<sup>16</sup> According to Randall, the Sophists fill the educational vacuum and meet the needs of wealthy and would-be wealthy by teaching *aretē* or success. While some of the original Sophists advocated "high ideals" like high "professional standards" or the improvement of "social conditions" they quickly became "commercialized" and began to teach methods of gaining political advantage. Randall muses ironically that while "Athenian parents complained, the Sophists were corrupting their sons," in fact "the sons were corrupting the Sophists."<sup>17</sup>

The Sophists came to represent two things: to the "conservatives" they "stood for a novel kind of education, which seemed a subversive and clearly un-Athenian activity" and to the "people" they "were clever foreigners who taught the rich young anti-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the Peloponnesian War and the Sicilian Expedition, which John Wallach will discuss in detail at the end of this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 84.

democratic conspirators.” Sophistic *aretē* becomes a means of escaping consequences; it teaches “how to get off in the law courts when you get caught—that knowledge so useful to politicians,” and both the conservatives and the public began to fear individuals like Socrates who “went around raising questions and starting issues.” As Randall points out, “political inquiry is a dangerous thing” and his insights seems to suggest that the Sophist served a paradoxical role in Athens.<sup>18</sup> The Sophists were necessary for stabilizing society, yet they also threatened social stability. Randall divides the Sophists into two general categories: “liberal reformers, who had learned that laws are human instruments, and should be revised and adapted to new social needs,” and “radicals” who held that “all laws are bad; they are weapons of the ruling class, and should be broken and destroyed.” Randall then addresses each of the major Sophists found in the dialogues to demonstrate the variety of teachings encompassed by these two categories, from “pessimists” like Prodicus to fascists like Thrasymachus.<sup>19</sup>

After this discussion of the Sophists, Randall contrasts them with Socrates in Chapter VII. Randall begins by considering the difference between the historical and the Platonic Socrates. Given his earlier skepticism in Chapter II about the necessity of a historically accurate account of Plato’s life, Randall prefers to view Socrates as a dramatic character with minimum historical support. Randall proclaims that we know only one certainty about Socrates, that he “died a martyr to the Truth.” Our characterization of Socrates comes from the dialogues, but Randall believes several claims about his personality:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 86-92.

The personality of Socrates, as revealed in the *Apology*, is probably correct enough; it would at least explain why he had so many different disciples founding so many different philosophical sects. He appears as a self-confident, independent, egotistical figure, a man of strong passions and even stronger self control. He is a glorified common Athenian, prosaic, unimaginative, homely—yet obviously inspired. He loved questioning and discussion better than anything else in the world. He was very politically minded; he fitted into the Age of the Sophists, and till he died he was clearly Athens' prized Sophist. And he asked no fee—you could not hire him to stop performing.

He was passionately eager to find knowledge, real knowledge, though he scorned natural science. He was impatient of pretense, something of a skeptic, more of a mystic. He was convinced he was the wisest of men, for he knew his own ignorance. But everybody else was worse off—they did not even know that. So he went about, playing the part of the gadfly, or the torpedo fish, showing up the pretensions of others. This profession of ignorance is what we call the Socratic “irony.” He was looking for some truth; if he could only find it, then he would possess the secret of a satisfying life. He was an interesting personality, but terribly annoying.<sup>20</sup>

Though they are over-general and low on historical facts, Randall provides a rich character sketch. We may not know much about Socrates the man, but as Randall demonstrates we have a thick concept of Socrates as the central dramatic character of the dialogues.

By viewing Socrates as a dramatic character rather than as a historical figure, Randall provides a compelling description of Socrates' project, methodology, teaching, and purpose. Again, Randall gives a lush description beginning with Socrates' project and methodology:

[Socrates' project:] Socrates was always surrounded by a band of clever, brilliant, bad young men. They applauded his attacks on the respectable citizens, the Babbits of Athens. Socrates shook their adolescent faith, punctured the moral pretensions of the older generation, and held their beliefs up to ridicule, to the immense delight of the clever young fellows. They, of course, did not share his own faith in the Good Life—they knew too much. We can say, Socrates was trying to substitute self-discipline for the rigid discipline of tradition. Tradition is easy enough to topple over, when changed conditions conflict with it; but it is none too easy a task to offer a viable substitute. So Socrates was undoubtedly a subversive moral influence; but at the same time he was intellectually a magnificent teacher...

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 96.

[Socrates' methodology:] The Socrates who figures as a dramatic character in the Platonic dialogues does, of course, have a very precise method and a definite teaching, for which Plato is clearly responsible. The method of the Platonic Socrates is to discuss and argue and browbeat his victims interminably, till they are willing to agree to anything to get rid of him. He says much about a so-called dialectical method, so much that classical scholars have been apt to take him at his word, and argue solemnly about "the logical structure of the Socratic dialectic." But, as Plato actually—and maliciously, and perhaps ironically—portrays him, the only method he is really made to use is dialectic in the very literal sense of talking to everybody and every subject to death—to *dialegesthai*.

Plato makes his character employ every trick of logic and rhetoric: "Flattery, cajolery, insinuation, innuendo, sarcasm, feigned humility, personal idiosyncrasies, browbeating, insolence, anger, changing the subject when in difficulty, distracting attention, faulty analogies, the torturing of words, making adjectives do the work of nouns and nouns of adjectives, tacking verbs to qualities which could never use them, glad of an interruption or a previous engagement, telling stories which make one forget what the subject of discussion was, hinting that he could say more and would if his hearers were up to it, promising more tomorrow if they are really interested and want to go on—an accomplished sophist if ever there was one."<sup>21</sup>

In contrast with the Sophists described earlier, there are few contrasts between Socrates and the Sophists with regard to project and methodology. Both Socrates and the Sophists interacted with the same audience, young Athenian nobles, both were subversive of the established social order, and both used a variety of rhetorical techniques. As Randall labels him in his general comments, Socrates "was clearly Athens' prized Sophist," with one key exception: "he asked no fee—you could not hire him to stop performing."<sup>22</sup> This fact suggests that ultimately there was something more altruistic and genuine about Socrates; he taught out of a love for wisdom and a desire to instill that love in others.

Typically, the received view holds that Socrates differs from the Sophists because of his teachings. Socrates teaches that an ultimate and unchanging Good exists and that we have access to it through dialectic, whereas the Sophists are moral relativists and teach that dialectic is artful manipulation. Randall does not accept this received view; he

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 96-97, 98-99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 96.

suggests that Socrates' actual teachings were broader and vaguer than merely a set of dogmatic doctrines and that his purpose for engaging in philosophy was not to know the Good in a systematic way.<sup>23</sup> In the following passage, Randall addresses Socrates' teachings and purpose:

[Socrates teachings:] The teaching of this dramatic character of Plato, as revealed in the dialogues, is very simple: "Know thyself." Socrates uses all the tricks of the trade developed by a community of talkers, not to defend opinions, but to bring to light what they are. He claims, he can himself teach nothing. The dialogues convince us he is right. He upsets the confident opinions of others without putting another confident opinion—least of all his own—in their place. The constant outcome of the discussion in the Socratic dialogues is inconclusiveness. This is obviously deliberate on the part of the skillful author, Plato, who knew just what he was doing. The effect is to reveal men to themselves, to make them see just what their opinions really amount to. To make such self-knowledge emerge is far more important than any determination of the question discussed, than any certified conclusion about the theme chosen for discussion, could possibly be. Since this is the effect the dialogues produce it is clearly intended by the author.

[Socrates purpose:] It is necessary, therefore, for such a dramatic character as the Platonic Socrates to possess no knowledge of his own, no personal bias, so that he can reveal the bias of the other characters. He must show to what human opinions actually lead. If he himself held opinions of his own, they would be like the others. Plato uses Socrates as a mirror in which to reflect man thinking. Such a mirror must reflect without distortion. The story runs that his friends consulted the oracle at Delphi about him, and received the truly Delphic answer, "He is wisest who knows he knows nothing." Plato makes us believe this is true of his Socrates: its truth is the very essence of the dramatic character of Socrates—it is illustrated in every Socratic dialogue.<sup>24</sup>

Socrates teaches his students *how to philosophize*; he does not teach *a philosophy*.

Randall's description of Socrates as a dramatic character moves away from a conception of Plato and Socrates as (to use Dewey's words) the first philosophy professors and reveals the true teaching and purpose of Socrates and by extension Plato's philosophical and pedagogical project.

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<sup>23</sup> John R. Wallach refers to this received view of Plato as a dogmatist as the Platonist interpretation of Plato and it will be addressed in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

Socrates and Plato differ from the Sophists because they teach their students and readers how to think reflectively, i.e. philosophically, about their opinions and experiences. Socrates does not teach a new secular doctrine of the Good because he admits that he has no real knowledge. He postulates the Forms and the Good for the purpose of revealing to his students the bias and prejudices that prevent them from thinking better about the practical challenges they face, not just to ground moral inquiry in the face of the Sophists' relativism. Students gain excellence, *aretē*, not through skillful rhetoric or seeking personal advantage, but through a love of wisdom and the practice of critical reflection—through imitating the life that Socrates leads, loving wisdom for its own sake—rather than teaching it for profit.

Plato uses the character of Socrates dramatically not only to demonstrate how his readers can benefit from philosophical reflection, but also to initiate critical reflection within the reader. Randall's student Henry G. Wolz elaborates Randall's conception of the dialogues as philosophical drama. Like Randall, Wolz views the dialogues as drama rather than doctrine, and he sees two phases at work: the destructive phase in which the interlocutor becomes aware of his ignorance, initiates the constructive phase of inquiry, and gives birth to a new insight. In both phases, Socrates avoids presenting his own views because doing so would undermine his student's attempts at philosophy. Thus, the goal of the Socratic Method is to empower the student to engage in philosophy. By extension, the dialogue is Plato's attempt to empower his readers to engage in philosophy. This task is accomplished through the use of drama which he describes as follows:

To teach by indirection is the way of the dramatist. If he intends to teach at all he must set thought process in motion without appearing to do so. He must simply

present his audience with a spectacle of men in conflict and at the end of the play send them home wondering—and wonder is said to be the beginning of philosophy. The poets, and among them the tragedians, were in fact the acknowledged moral teachers of the Greeks. Plato it is true, denied that this was their proper function and severely criticized them in this respect, especially in the *Republic*. But this need not have prevented him from imitating their method. And so an insight into the ways of the dramatist may lead to a better understanding of Plato’s dramatic approach to philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Wolz continues by investigating how Sophocles uses drama philosophically and then compares and contrasts it to Plato’s use of drama. He begins with an examination of *Antigone*. He argues that Sophocles uses the characters of Creon, Antigone, et al. as representations of different ethical views in conflict metaphorically and dramatically. The characters must decide how to act on their principles and how to deal with the consequences of their decisions. Tragedy places more emphasis on “the negative aspects of human behavior,” which encourages the audience to reflect about what a positive outcome might have been.<sup>26</sup>

Wolz argues that the reader of a dialogue resembles the spectator of a play and that “all Plato has to do is to transform the clash of characters on the stage into a conflict of ideas in the philosophic dialogues.” However, Plato must be cautious because he might inadvertently “seduce the reader to take sides and simply choose the one best suited to his temper or reject only the one containing the most obvious excesses, without taking the trouble of thinking the matter through by himself.”<sup>27</sup> Wolz refers to the *Crito* to demonstrate how Plato stimulates thought rather than indoctrination. He reads this dialogue as Socrates’ well reasoned account of citizenship in the face of death. It

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<sup>25</sup> Henry G. Wolz, “Philosophy as Drama: An Approach to the Dialogues of Plato.” *International Philosophical Quarterly*. (MY 63) 3, 236-270 (New York: Fordham University Press) 238.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-245.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

presents the philosophical conflict between “radical freedom and unconditional submission” which are not presented as “two ready made views between which he [Socrates] can choose,” not as two different positions that are “held by two different persons but [two positions] that reside in the same mind [Socrates].”<sup>28</sup>

Good citizenship requires the ability to negotiate these two demands and by depicting their conflict within the character of Socrates; rather than in separate characters, Socrates exemplifies critical thought about the problems. By extension, the drama of the situation inspires the reader to think critically about the place of citizenship between radical freedom and submission. Wolz summarizes the dramatic use of philosophy as follows:

Accentuating the extremes and underplaying the mean makes for dramatic effectiveness. But it is also demanded by the human condition. In a continuously changing world, the “just right” is a fleeting thing: it grows out of and passes away with the concrete situation. Hence no teacher, be he playwright or philosopher, can promulgate a rule which is valid for all time. The best he can do is to warn against the extremes between which free men must find their way. To do so successfully, their critical intelligence must be developed, and this development, in turn, is furthered by stimulation rather than indoctrination.<sup>29</sup>

The dialogues allow Plato to stimulate critical reflection by representing a philosophical dilemma dramatically within a practical context. Plato teaches how to philosophize indirectly, rather than teaching directly a set of defined philosophical doctrines. The moral and philosophical dilemmas that students and readers face are unique, and the strength of Plato and Socrates’ method, is that it teaches students how to reflect on their situations and how to construct solutions that effectively address the demands of their

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 269-270.

situations. Teaching ready made solutions for a multiplicity of problems would be a gross error as is often evidenced by the consequences of dogmatic remedies.

Plato presents the character of Socrates dramatically engaged in dialectic as a means of stimulating his interlocutors, and by extension Plato's readers must think critically about the dialogues and their relevance. Randall and Wolz have clarified our understanding of Plato's use of drama within the dialogues, but further clarification of the experimental and practical dimensions of the dialogues is required. Before turning to Plato's use of experimentation, I provide a quick examination of how Randall reads the *Republic* dramatically. Randall believes that the *Republic* contains all of Plato's philosophy of the "Good Life" which Randall defined earlier as learning "to see life as a dramatic spectacle, in all its shades and colors, with all its complexities and paradoxes; to see it as it *is*, to hold it up, to contemplate it, to see through it;" this is the life of reason, the life of philosophy.<sup>30</sup> The dialogue functions as an exploration of "'Justice'—the principle of organization, or coordinating the separate excellences of men and in cities—the fundamental problem of Plato's conception of the Good Life as a harmonizing of possibilities."<sup>31</sup>

Read dramatically, the *Republic* does not propose a "practical political program." Readers who adopt this view are interpreting Plato Platonically and failing to see "layer upon layer of dramatic irony." Randall describes a dramatic reading of the *Republic* as follows:

No, Plato is not offering a new constitution for Athens—or for Syracuse—or for any human, earthly city. He is trying, dramatically, to make us "see" where men get when they allow their imagination to carry them away as they talk about a perfect

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<sup>30</sup> Randall, 49.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

constitution. Plato is offering, not any political program, but a picture—the Idea of Justice. “Idea” is a sight word, and means “something seen”—the picture of perfect organization, taken as an end-in-itself. Plato is offering an imaginative vision, with all imagination’s ruthless disregard of any other value than that on which it is for the moment focused. . .

Plato is conventionally taken as the first utopian. In reality, while he has certainly served as a prime stimulus to utopian social idealism, he is actually offering an antidote to the utopian spirit. The *Republic* is really a dramatic commentary on the nature and function of ideals, an experiment in pursuing an ideal radically to the bitter end. It displays what social ideals can be and do, and what they cannot. It is a dramatic exploration of the conditions of any realistic social idealism.<sup>32</sup>

Randall contends that a dramatic reading of the *Republic* reveals the practical difficulty of creating a utopian society. Clearly, the Good Life requires a healthy, well organized, just city, but the real philosophical dilemma is how much organization and justice are required to sustain the Good Life. Perfect Justice might require the sacrifice of the Good Life.<sup>33</sup> The drama of the *Republic* stimulates readers to consider the proper balance between the demands of Justice and those of the Good Life.

Furthermore, Randall provides an interesting historical explanation for how Plato dramatically presents this tension between Justice and the Good Life. Randall suggests in the following quotation that the drama of the *Republic* is shaped by the historical rivalry between the political models of Sparta and Athens:

But it is impossible not to believe that Plato had a very particular application in mind. To the audience for which the *Republic* was first written, the perfect city of Socrates’ ironic criticism could have had but one meaning: it was the Spartan ideal. Spartan institutions form the ground work of the perfect city: they are perfected and elaborated by Socrates into a super-Sparta. We must remember that Sparta had defeated the Athenians in the long Peloponnesian War; and many Athenians were naturally fascinated by its harmonious and efficient military organization—it might well be the salvation of Athens to copy Sparta’s successful military machine. In

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 165-166.

<sup>33</sup> Roochnik proposes a similar argument in his chapters on *Eros*. Philosophy, the *love* of wisdom, requires *Eros* and the ideal city requires the leadership of philosopher-kings, yet the design of the ideal city requires the submission of *Eros*. Thus, the ideal city is practically impossible because the ideal city does not possess enough *Eros* to sustain the philosopher-kings who are needed to rule.

modern terms, many Athenians were tempted to adopt the enemy's authoritarian social organization and ideal of efficiency at all costs. The *Republic* may even have begun to take form under the Spartan occupation of Athens (404/3 B.C., when Plato was 23, and Socrates still alive); we do not know, of course, its exact date. But the situation is analogous to a Frenchman defending the ideal of French civilization against Prussian military bureaucracy under the German occupation of France during World War II.

We can imagine Plato saying to his collaborators, All right! Let us take the Spartan ideal, and let us take it at its best, as Athenians would work it: of course, nothing so unenlightened and stupid as Sparta actually is could ever happen here. Let us take the Spartan ideal as a genuine ideal, proceed to develop its implications, and see where that ideal leads us. Of course, there would be no individual happiness, no moral responsibility; it could be made to work only by propaganda and "royal lies." There would be no art, and no poetry; scholars and scientists would all be coordinated with the Régime. Wisdom would be chained to a military machine. There would be a full eugenic program of mating, to prevent racial defilement and to improve Athenian blood. We should be left with businessmen, soldiers and bureaucrats, and Party members. Is that what you collaborators really want? Of course, we Athenians could stand a lot more sense of order and discipline and disinterested devotion to our city than we have got. But—do you really want to go Spartan? Or Nazi? The modern will add.

To the audience for whom the *Republic* was originally written, it must have been a sustained piece of Plato's dramatic irony, a magnificent defense of the Athenian ideal against the Spartan. Plato saw the genuine values of Spartan efficiency and military organization—especially for a war state, such as the perfect city definitely is. But he was hardly rooting for Sparta—not even for super-Sparta.

There, organization takes precedent even over the life of *theōria*, of imaginative insight. The philosopher is there forced back into the cave, and is lucky if he can ever escape again. There, philosophers are good rulers because they hate the whole business, and are doing it only from a sense of duty, of "justice." There are much better philosophers in imperfect states, in actual human cities. There will be in them better art, better poetry, better life, better men—better everything but Justice or efficient organization.<sup>34</sup>

Plato uses the *Republic* to reconstruct an important debate within his own context— which system is better, Sparta or Athens; which value is more important, Justice or the Good Life? Furthermore, Randall reconstructs Plato's philosophical and historical dilemma by using a recent historical example. If read dramatically, Plato's *Republic* can inform our present debate about Justice, but if we continue to read the *Republic* literally we must either accept or reject an authoritarian and aristocratic utopia or make a

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

democratic apology for the content of Plato's political program. The benefits of a dramatic reading outweigh the advantages of a literal, dogmatic interpretation of the dialogues. These practical benefits become apparent in a more thorough examination of Wallach's understanding of Plato's political art, but for now consider Plato's use of the dialectic as a means of experimentation.

### *III. Dialectic as Experimental Pedagogy*

In the prologue *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, David Roochnik attempts to understand the *Republic* as a work of philosophical dialectic. He contends that by attending to the dialectical character of the dialogue we gain a better understanding of the controversial topics presented by Plato, specifically his views on democracy and diversity. He argues that the dialogue can be divided into three distinct stages or, to use Socrates's metaphor, "waves." Each wave entails a swelling of content presented in the earlier stages, rather than merely a revision or a change of topic. Roochnik uses the term dialectic to mean that these different stages demonstrate the "living conversation" of the dialogue. Thus, the *Republic* is not a systematic progression from static premises to final conclusion; instead it is a conversation in which each stage contains the same subject-matter, though re-presented in a richer, thicker form due to the interactions of the interlocutors.<sup>35</sup>

While more of Roochnik's commentary appears in the next chapter in service of reconstruction of the *Republic*, his appendix, "The Meaning of 'Dialectical,'" offers more insight into the experimental character of Plato's dialogues. In this appendix, Roochnik considers the technical meaning of "dialectic," the non-technical meaning of "dialectic,"

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<sup>35</sup> David Roochnik. *The Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) 1-9.

and the meaning of “dialectic” in the *Republic*. Several scholars have suggested that Plato uses “dialectic” to mean a technical method of conversation and philosophical inquiry. According to Roochnik, the primary difficulty of this interpretation is that “it is impossible to determine exactly what this technical aspect is, for Plato’s explicit descriptions of it are scattered throughout the corpus and vary considerably.”<sup>36</sup> He then examines four technical definitions of “dialectic” presented in the dialogues that demonstrate this difficulty.

Roochnik prefers a non-technical understanding of dialectic within the dialogues and agrees with J. Gordon who suggests that “Dialectic is the Socratic existential stance.” Dialectic is “living conversation,” meaning that “it is informal and constituted by the interlocutors’ responses to the particulars of their conversation, it is necessarily diverse and without a fixed structure.”<sup>37</sup> He highlights six characteristics of Plato’s use of dialectic that depict it as a type of living conversation: it requires more than one person, it is “site-specific,” interruptions are possible, digressions occur, significant revisions often occur during digressions, and Plato’s views on the subject under discussion are exhibited by the dialogue as a whole, not by a single part of it.<sup>38</sup> This depiction of the dialectic resembles and compliments the earlier description of Socrates’ methodology in Randall.

Before he considers how dialectic functions in the *Republic* Roochnik addresses the Hegelian connotations of dialectic. The initial and most significant difference between Plato’s and Hegel’s use of the term is that the former uses it informally whereas the latter sees it as a technical art. However, Plato and Hegel agree that it proceeds

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 144-146.

through negation, and that part of the content of previous stages of the dialectic is preserved throughout the process. But the two part company because Hegel sees the whole as an unfolding of the dialectic whereas Plato sees the whole as represented in each particular stage. Thus, “the *Republic* does not present a complete account of the truth as a whole. Instead. . . it articulates the human longing for such truth. In this sense it is a psychology, a *logos* of the soul.”<sup>39</sup>

Finally, Roochnik considers the use of dialectic in the *Republic*. The nature of dialectic is specifically mentioned three times by Socrates, and Roochnik describes them as “stunningly spares and therefore incapable of definitively yielding a precise account, and they are somehow dependent on mathematics.”<sup>40</sup> Yet from these quotations Roochnik develops the following definition of dialectic in the *Republic*:

Dialectic as sketched is a deliberately exaggerated projection of an impossibly purified form of philosophical thought. As such, it is in keeping with the “moment” of which it is a part: namely, the construction of the Kallipolis [beautiful city], in which genuine philosophy—which “probably” requires the freedom of a democracy in order to take place—is not possible. By the lights of the *Republic* as a whole, philosophy itself is not a technical, metamathematical discipline. Instead, as this entire book (following the suggestion of Stanley Rosen) is meant to argue, it is a curious and precarious blend of mathematics and poetry. Consequently, those few passages in which dialectic is sketched in books 6 and 7 are embraced within the more comprehensive understanding of dialectic as philosophical conversation.<sup>41</sup>

Roochnik sees dialectic as philosophical conversation, rather than technical argumentative or rhetorical strategy; it does function somewhat systematically because it exhibits a pattern of thesis and antithesis, but it proceeds organically and is vulnerable to interactions between Socrates and his interlocutors. Dialectic functions similarly to the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 151.

scientific method. The conversation begins with a hypothesis that Socrates and his interlocutors test; it proceeds but changes as interlocutors acquire new data that arise from their experimental discussion. They reflect on their observations and reconstruct their experiment, their conversation, to account for anomalies. Furthermore, Roochnik believes that dialectic composes the fundamental character of the *Republic*. Each wave represents a reconstruction of the dialectic and by extension we can infer that the entire dialogue functions as a thought experiment on the nature of justice.

Thomas W. Smith presents another way of understanding the experimental nature of dialectic. In *Revaluating Ethics: Aristotle's Dialectical Pedagogy*, Smith examines Aristotle's use of dialectic. Although Smith focuses on Aristotle, Socrates also uses dialectic pedagogically. In fact, Plato scholarship informs Smith's re-examination of Aristotle's pedagogy. Smith begins by arguing that post-modern readings of Aristotle have fractured Aristotelian scholarship into camps that simultaneously uphold Aristotle as a champion of contradictory positions. In contrast, Plato scholarship has avoided schism by following Leo Strauss and others who demand that the dramatic form of the dialogue informs their philosophical content. Smith feels that a similar re-discovery needs to occur with Aristotle that sees his work not as a series of "didactic treatises," but as "a pedagogy. . . a course or teaching that means to explore the question of the best life as it appears from the perspective of one particular horizon—that inhabited by ambitious young men of the ancient Greek city state."<sup>42</sup> According to Smith we must read Aristotle with his "pedagogical strategies and intent in mind" and this can be achieved by examining the practical aims of his work.

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas W. Smith, *Revaluating Ethics: Aristotle's Dialectical Pedagogy*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 5-6.

Thus, the *Ethics* is a “protreptic work aimed at inviting and initiating a particular audience into this new way of life.” Smith identifies six characteristics of this genre: it is directed to a particular audience; it proceeds dialectically; it intends to transform the moral character of the pupil rather than providing a true account of the topic; it must simultaneously invite and initiate the pupil into a new way of life; it begins with a “an introduction exhorting the reader to recognize the importance of the inquiry;” and finally it “proceeds from the audience’s initial loyalties” and also “works to undermine the audience’s notion of the alternative way of life that will eventually be presented,” specifically “the superiority of the philosophic life to the political life.”<sup>43</sup>

Smith concludes his introduction by discussing his understanding of “dialectic.” He does so by looking at “three interrelated components: audience, method, and goal.”<sup>44</sup> According to Smith, Aristotle distinguishes between dialectic and demonstration by saying that the latter demonstrates a variety of conclusions for a disinterested observer, whereas the former engages a “particular group with particular commitments” starting with *endoxa* or “reputable opinions.” Thus, the “dialectician must begin the inquiry with an audience’s views of the best beliefs available about the subject matter at hand and proceed using the arguments they can accept.”<sup>45</sup>

The method of dialectic employed must also be tailored to suit the audience and occasion. With regard to the *Ethics*, Aristotle “engages in dialectic for the sake of teaching, not in order to win contentious arguments. Thus the dialectical argument he chooses to use must be understood as chosen for the good of his students. They must not

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 11.

be interpreted as the best arguments available to achieve philosophic truth for an indeterminate audience.”<sup>46</sup> He must use “reputable arguments” that arise from *endoxa* to gain the assent of his audience. Consequently, “sometimes the best argument available is not necessarily as persuasive as a commonplace argument because of the views, prejudices, or limits of a particular audience.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the arguments presented in the *Ethics* are not the best possible arguments for the moral life, they are those arguments that are best suited to convince and lead Aristotle’s audience to the philosophical and moral life.

In this respect dialectic is similar to rhetoric and could be viewed cynically as merely an attempt to persuade an audience. However, dialectic does not reduce to rhetoric because its goal is to aid the students. Furthermore, the needs and goals of students affect the direction of the dialectical process:

. . . the dialectical discussion must be understood as motivated by a concern for the good of the student. The inquiry is a cooperative endeavor in which the point is not to gain mastery. The discussion is directed to helping the student acquire what they need to acquire in order to become happy. The goal of inquiry is not to achieve a victory for philosophy or for the philosopher over the city, and the procedure is not reducible to rhetoric, which aims at convincing people to follow someone else’s proposed course of action. The goal is not imposed from the outside, but from the desires of the students themselves: “Let me see if I can help you achieve what you already want.” If Aristotle’s inquiry is successful, at its completion students will be presented with an account of a way of life that they desired all along.<sup>48</sup>

Dialectic does not collapse into rhetoric because it is a mutual attempt between teacher and student to realize the goals of the student, but Smith also suggests that dialectic has a more radical goal because it attempts “to uncover the contradictions hidden in reputable

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 16.

beliefs in order to move to better accounts.”<sup>49</sup> This goal is a moral goal because “his method seeks a richer vision of human experience by taking our own commitments seriously, and inquiring into what they imply about the human condition... By understanding the ways in which we fail to achieve happiness through conventional ways of perceiving and acting, we may come to taste new modes of action that will make us happier.”<sup>50</sup> This dynamic between dependence on and critique of reputable beliefs and opinions demands that dialectic arise from within the social context in the hopes of revising it.

In a synthesis of Roochnik’s and Smith’s understandings of dialectic, a picture of the experimental character of dialectic comes into view. Roochnik enables the idea that dialectic naturally functions as an experimental mode of conversation. Interlocutors propose concepts that are tested and then revised according to new insights attained during the conversation, and the experiment is then reconstructed. But the experimental character of dialectic is present also in the pedagogical use of dialectic. By applying Smith’s commentary on Aristotle to the dramatic presentation of Socrates’ pedagogy, one sees how Socrates uses dialectic experimentally. If one accepts Randall’s observation that Socrates intends to persuade his interlocutors of the value of the philosophical life, then Socrates’ pedagogical use of dialectic can be classified as protreptic, since he is attempting to turn them from one way of life toward another. For this process of initiation to succeed, Socrates must conduct an experiment of his own. Presenting a stock invitation to the philosophical life would less than ideal; he must understand his interlocutors and present arguments that can persuade them. As Polemarchus says to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 19.

Socrates at the beginning of the *Republic*, “could you persuade us, if we won’t listen?”  
(327c)

Dialectic can occur only if interlocutors are willing to participate. Aware of this fact, Socrates tailors his arguments to suit the demands of his audience. He selects arguments that are convincing and uses them (as Randall suggests) to reveal the prejudices and opinions of his interlocutors. For example, his comments about justice silence Thrasymachus in Book I, but do not convince Glaucon. Therefore, Socrates and his interlocutors must reconstruct the conversation to meet the new demands that Glaucon has introduced. Socrates tailors the thought experiment to meet the needs of his interlocutors and the conversation continues. Thus, Socrates’ application of dialectic and Plato’s dramatization of dialectic through the character of Socrates work experimentally. The dialectic arises from a practical context, is tailored to meet the demands of the interlocutors involved, and functions through an organic process of hypothesis, testing, and reconstruction. The experimental character of the dialectic draws on the practical context of the dialogues. Consider now the practical dimension of the dialogue.

#### *IV. The Practical Aims of the Dialogues*

In *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy*, John Wallach begins his analysis of Plato by considering what it means to practice the political art. He contends that “The skillful practice of the political art by citizens and political leaders would actualize the potential for harmony among reason, ethics, and power, assuring the transformation of words of counsel into deeds of justice.” The successful practice of the political art becomes crucial in a democracy where political power is distributed among the citizens. Wallach intends to elucidate Plato’s conception of the

political art and to discuss its relation to democracy. His thesis is that “Plato’s political theory and criticisms of democracy develop primarily out of his criticism of conventional ethics and politics and that, as a result, they can be used to invigorate contemporary political theory and benefit democracy.” Wallach believes that ideally the political art should be an ethical way of life and that Plato faced social and ethical dilemmas that “resemble some of those we face in our efforts to accommodate democracy and justice at the dawn of the twenty-first century.”<sup>51</sup>

After this sketch of his project, Wallach provides a genealogy of Plato’s political and social scene. He begins by stating that the “dissonance between words and deeds, ethics and power” originates, along with the invention of “politics, democracy, and political theory,” from the context of fifth and fourth century Athens. Democracy required the military service of voting males, thus Athenian citizens understood that “If politics was practiced well, it could promote the well-being of the social order; yet often, it was not and so did not.”<sup>52</sup> The political art could be used for manipulation as well as to achieve justice. The imperial expansions and defeats of the ensuing century reinforced this dynamic and lead the Athenians to theorize about the proper nature of the political art. Plato attempts to clarify these political problems by suggesting that the political art is an ethical way of life designed to foster harmony within the state and the soul.

According to Wallach, the Platonic political art springs from two historical events, “Plato’s experience of the Athenians’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War” and “the trial and death of Socrates.” These two events manifest in the conflict between the

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<sup>51</sup> John R. Wallach, *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) 1-3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

“critical discourse (*logos*) or Socratic virtue and the actual conduct or practice (*ergon*) of the political art” that Plato attempts to resolve in the dialogues. Wallach refers to this tension as “Plato’s Socratic Problem” and defines it as follows:

Plato’s attempt at resolution took place in many of his dialogues, where he grappled with the issue of how to formulate in words a political art that reduces this dissonance—one that is, at the same time, philosophically valid, ethically virtuous, and practically beneficial.

The issue Plato faced was radically problematic, for if the words of “Socratic virtue” and the deeds of Athenian political life were to unite, if justice were to be realized, the words of virtue could not be entirely Socratic, and the conventional ethics and politics of Athenian democracy could not be relied on automatically to produce justice.<sup>53</sup>

The Socratic Problem shapes Plato’s discussion of politics throughout the dialogues and Wallach believes that by learning how Plato dealt with the tension between *logos* and *ergon*, inquiry and practice, one finds strategies to deal with contemporary dilemmas about the relation of reason and democracy.

Wallach recommends that it is “best to understand the Platonic political art as an art of virtue.” Plato’s treatment of the political art responds to the actual and often incoherent practice of Athenian and Greek politics that is shaped by Wallach’s understanding of the Socratic Problem. When viewed this way Plato’s criticisms of democracy become part of his indictment of all Greek forms of government as actually practiced. Wallach insists that this understanding of Plato’s Socratic Problem and the political art yields the following benefits:

This study of the Platonic political art produces new interpretive results. When Platonic dialogues that involve the political art are read as distinct facets of a project concerned with resolving Plato’s Socratic Problem, each becomes an individually valuable contribution to a complex, differentiated understanding of the relation of critical discourse to the various aspects of political life. One no longer has to worry about question-begging interpretations about a linear development of Plato’s thought, the relations between “Socratic” and “Platonic” thought, the essential propositions of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 7.

Plato's philosophy or doctrines, or the nature of Platonism. For in this light Plato can become what I believe he intended to be: not a dogmatist advocating a new metaphysics of reason or systematic form of discourse as self-sufficient truth but, rather, a critical interpreter of a multidimensional world of words and deeds. In this perspective, Plato is not a Platonist.<sup>54</sup>

Plato uses the dialogues as a means of negotiating the Socratic tension between *logos* and *ergon* for the purpose of reforming the Greek practice of political art. Wallach describes a humble Plato who has the modest objective of clarifying the dynamic practices of his own political context, rather than the more ambitious establishment of a new philosophical school or quasi-religious tradition of metaphysics. Socrates becomes an innovator and mystic concerned with epistemology and metaphysics, whereas Plato uses the dialogues to apply the method of critical reason as developed by Socrates to politics as usual.

Thus, the "basic opposition between theory and democracy in Plato's work is more complex than most interpreters recognize" and the Plato that "contemporary writers either lament or praise" is a "fictional caricature."<sup>55</sup> According to Wallach, Plato's criticism of democracy via the political art is ironically democratic:

Although the Platonic political art was certainly conducive to searing criticisms of democracy, it also reflected aspects of democratic discourse and practice. Moreover, it forged a new kind of discourse of justice that, I argue, could be useful for contemporary democracies. For if (as I believe), the political practices of Athenian democracy during the first half of the fourth century did not constitute a sufficient paradigm for a just society and if the existing non-Platonic forms of ethical and political discourse do not provide adequate tools for understanding justice, then Plato's project of constructing a new understanding of the political art may attract anyone interested in theoretically or practically coordinating justice and democracy.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 12.

The Platonic political art might not be democratic in theory, but it is democratic in practice. Furthermore, Plato's use of critical reason functions as political triage; it is an attempt to make the most significant political improvement given the circumstances. Plato might refer to ideal theoretical conceptions of politics, but these references respond to the practical demands of Greek politics.

After his sketch of Plato's political art, Wallach next explains his hermeneutical approach to the dialogues, which he refers to as "critical historicism."<sup>57</sup> Wallach's first chapter, "Interpreting Plato Politically," describes his application of critical historicism and attempts to depict in detail the social and political factors that shaped Plato's political art. He begins by stating five obstacles dividing contemporary democracies from Athenian democracy: 1) "legally unequal statuses for its major social groups," 2) Greek polytheism that consisted of "sanctioned social customs," but not "circumscribed sets of beliefs or doctrines," 3) a "precapitalist" economy, 4) the preservation of education and culture primarily through "oral practices and traditions," and 5) direct democracy.<sup>58</sup> While contemporary readers must reckon with these obstacles, Wallach believes that "the prevailing recent interpretive perspectives on Plato and his dialogues" represent the greater challenge to authentically engaging and applying Plato's political art.<sup>59</sup>

Wallach scales these interpretive obstacles by examining three hermeneutical dualisms within contemporary Plato scholarship. First, he mentions the debate between those who read the dialogues analytically as a source of philosophical arguments and those who read them as works of literature. Second, he references the post-World War II

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 18.

debate about whether Plato's political philosophy advocates an open or a closed society. These dualities exist because of the general acceptance of two critical points, that "Western metaphysics, as well as systematic and critical political theorizing, chiefly began with Plato; we know Plato by way of Platonism; and Platonism is essentially, incorrigibly, and diametrically opposed to democracy."<sup>60</sup> The insistence upon these two points has limited fruitful discussion of the Platonic political art because they "have not made the historically and theoretically dissonant relation of, or gap between, *logos* and *ergon* a primary feature of their readings." The majority of Plato scholars reduce this dramatic tension in favor of either *logos* or *ergon*, thus taking away from "the historical accuracy and theoretical clarity of our understanding of the political art in general as well as of the Platonic political art."<sup>61</sup>

The final dualism that Wallach addresses follows from this misunderstanding of the Platonic political art and results in either textualism (both "analytic and deconstructive" ahistorical interpretations of the dialogues) and contextualism (strictly historical interpretations of the dialogues). Textually discursive interpretations are perhaps the more common and either reject or accept of Plato's political theory due to the contemporary politics of their author:

Interest in the politics and history of Athens are minimal, and disagreements between, say, the Sophists and Plato or Plato and Aristotle figure as case studies of current philosophical debates. Thus, around the time of World War II, Karl Popper supported democracy and opposed fascism by favoring Socrates against Plato; Leo Strauss opposed historicism and popular democracy by championing Aristotle and Plato against the Sophists and democrats of ancient Athens; Hannah Arendt fought scientism in political theory and the practices of totalitarianism by praising Pericles and Aristotle while blaming Plato; and most recently Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty—still arguably a reaction to the trauma of World War II—have respectively set

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 21.

deconstruction against logocentrism and pragmatism against analytic philosophy by favoring the Sophist over Plato.<sup>62</sup>

Wallach's history of textualism is impressive, and one must engage the issue of whether Dewey's reading of Plato (especially with his emphasis on the "Socratic dialogues" as Plato's attempts to respond to the Cynics and Cyreniacs), as well as the reading offered in the next chapter of this dissertation, successfully avoids textualism. Furthermore, Wallach's comments about Rorty's attempt at a pragmatic reading of Plato are interesting and warrant further discussion in Chapter Five. I engage some of these issues before the end of this chapter and the rest before the end of this dissertation, but for now I return to Wallach's understanding of how these hermeneutical obstacles inhibit an understanding of the Platonic political art as interaction between *logos* and *ergon*.

Wallach sees contextualism as referring to readings that focus only on the historical significance of the dialogues and cites the views "typically held by classicists and ancient historians." Those readings provide evidence about their understanding of the ancient Greek political landscape and take "Plato's analysis of the political art to express a class interest, elitist bias, or linguistic convention, and its theoretical character is read in such a way as to prevent any consideration of Plato as seriously responding in his dialogues to the troubles of Athenian democracy."<sup>63</sup> While contextual treatments certainly have historical value, they are reductionistic and fail to represent the full significance of the dialogues considered as Plato's commentary on the concrete problems of Athenian politics. Thus, Wallach believes that the ideal approach to the dialogue is as follows:

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23.

If one is willing to recognize both the historically dependent and transcending (not transcendent) feature of political argument and justification of particularly original political theorists, then one can no more easily engage in the crucial activity of translating an author's statement in the past into the languages of contemporary political issues and discourses. Then one can directly—not covertly—ask the following questions: Does the author's solution to his or her problems relate to his or hers? Indeed, the work of the first systematic political theorist arise out of acute dissatisfaction with the prevailing discourses and practices of his *polis* as sufficient guideposts for ethical, political, and epistemological justification. Plato's project stems largely from his radical dissatisfaction with existing social practices as sufficient grounds for understanding virtue for the individual or justice for society.<sup>64</sup>

Political thought does not occur in an ahistorical vacuum; it articulates and addresses the problems of its immediate context. Plato's political philosophy is no exception and by understanding the practical dimensions of thought, by focusing on the relationship between *logos* and *ergon*, he is able to offer a novel and valuable reading of the Platonic political art.

Before he describes the historical context that Plato attempted to reconstruct, Wallach addresses one more hurdle for Plato scholarship, the influence of Aristotle's reading of Plato, and an explication of his own hermeneutical method, critical historicism. Wallach argues that both the textualists and contextualists read Plato as a Platonist meaning they believe that "Plato presents arguments in his dialogues through his characters that postulate an immediately effective reality for true belief that fully transcends our experience and practical preferences." Reading Plato as a Platonist prevents fruitful discussion of the political art and reinforces the notion of Plato as "illiberal and antidemocratic."<sup>65</sup> Aristotle first read Plato from this perspective and Wallach believes it to be inauthentic for three reasons: first, "it was Aristotle, not Plato, who established a discipline of theoretical knowledge that could discursively identify and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

solve its own problems without regard to their practical relations to the political world;” second, “in Plato’s dialogues, there is no separate category of inquiry called ‘ethics,’ or even less, ‘morality;”” and third “it was Aristotle, not Plato, who conceptually differentiated theoretical and practical knowledge and categorized human activities as modes of *techne* or *praxis*.”<sup>66</sup> Wallach concludes that while “Plato surely emphasized oppositions between reality and appearance as well as *logos* and *ergon*, but he never stabilized them. . . because their truth-value involved their capacity to respond to and resolve the persistent, unjust conflicts of extant political life.”<sup>67</sup> Again this conclusion reinforces the wisdom of Dewey’s return to the dramatic, experimental, and practical Plato.

Now that he has removed the common hermeneutical roadblocks that prevent a fruitful examination of the Platonic political art, Wallach describes his own hermeneutical approach, critical historicism. First, Wallach hopes to interpret Plato politically “according to the primary dynamic of ancient Greek politics” an approach that has been “hidden from view for the past fifty years because of the legacy of World War II.”<sup>68</sup> Second, Wallach wants to interpret Plato politically without Platonism by avoiding conventional concerns (such as Plato’s maturation away from Socratic thought or the search for a “unified set of Platonic doctrines) and by focusing on “Plato’s primary motivation in writing the dialogues as an effort to solve the problem of justice in the wake of the Athenians’ political turmoil of 411-403; the Athenian defeat by the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War; the trial and death of Socrates; and the subsequent need to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 31.

create and defend a mode of critical discourse that could be philosophically viable and politically relevant.”<sup>69</sup>

By focusing on the two previous concerns, Wallach believes that he can approach Plato’s political thought via “critical historicism” which he defines as follows:

Its approach may be called “critical historicism,” insofar as its interpretive path occupies terrain between the poles of textual discursivism and historicist contextualism, accepting historical constraints on and conditions of Plato’s formulation of his philosophical problem but recognizing the potential of his “solutions” to those problems to apply to more than their own practical origins.<sup>70</sup>

Of critical significance to our present inquiry, Wallach cites John Dewey as an intellectual ancestor of critical historicism and explains his contribution in an explanatory footnote:

John Dewey, whose favorite historical philosopher was probably Plato, succinctly illustrated his view of historical inquiry as “problematic” in a noteworthy passage echoed in the works of Collingwood and Foucault. “[K]nowledge of the past is the key to understanding the present. History deal with the past, but this past is the history of the present. The true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems” (*Democracy and Education*, 251). Given his philosophical disposition toward an optimistic pragmatism, his belief that philosophy is born of historical conflict is particularly interesting. Thus, “the distinctive office, problems, and subject matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and that, accordingly, its specific problems vary with changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history” (*Reconstruction in Philosophy* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1948 (1920)], intro., v-vi).<sup>71</sup>

Dewey’s pragmatism informs Wallach’s critical historicism at a fundamental level and, as is demonstrated by the previous examination of Wallach’s conception of the political, this hermeneutical approach incorporates elements of the dramatic, the experimental, and the practical into its reading of Plato. With this comprehensive view of Wallach’s critical

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 35.

historicism established I now examine how he feels the dialogues are a reconstruction of the practical problems of Athenian politics.

As mentioned earlier, Wallach sees Plato's Socratic Problem as an attempt to reconcile the philosophical life of Socrates (*logos*) with the demands of Athenian political life (*ergon*). The concept of the political art is problematic because it constitutes a nexus of three domains that have distinct demands: the political (the "exercise of power"), the ethical (the "social existence of moral standards), and the rational (the "authoritative display of reason").<sup>72</sup> According to Wallach, "Plato's treatment of the political art in his dialogues *reconstructs* [my emphasis] the relation of *logos* and *ergon* in response to the problematic intersections of reason, ethics, and power in Greek political life, and that of his Athenian society in particular." Furthermore, Wallach insists that "Plato could understand it [the political art] only by placing it in various dramatic contexts that presupposed different relations of *logos* to *ergon*." Drama enables Plato to represent and contextualize the political art and this passage echoes Randal and Wolz's conception of Plato's use of drama. Socrates trial and death represent the most significant historical and dramatic context because it is a clear example of the tension between *logos* and *ergon* and Wallach believes that this event is always implicit during Plato's dramatizations of the political art.<sup>73</sup>

Even though Plato was primarily affected by the trial and death of Socrates, Wallach also cites four other elements that affected Plato's conception of the political art: the "practical context," the "discursive context," the "textual context," and the "relation

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 45-46

of Plato’s arguments about the political art to the historical Socrates.”<sup>74</sup> While all of these elements are important, the practical context, i.e. “the characteristics of Athenian power and ethics in Plato’s lifetime as well as Plato’s biography,” is central interest to my analysis of the practical dimension of the dialogues and the only one of the four I discuss in detail. As Wallach notes, “Athens and its environs underwent major changes during Plato’s lifetime (427-347)” and he surveys Plato’s historical context in the following passage:

A principal cause of the relative decline of Athenian power during Plato’s lifetime was the radical reduction of the Athenians’ material resources. The initial insistence of this (relative to Plato’s politically cognizant years) was the defeat (in 413) resulting from the Sicilian expedition and the subsequent Spartan occupation of Decelea. The first oligarchic coup took place in 411, and, in 404, the Spartans decisively defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War—depriving Athens of its allies and initially fostering another oligarchic coup that established the short-lived brutal regime of The Thirty. After it had reigned for nine months, democratic partisans managed to overthrow this regime and return constitutional democracy to Athens. The reestablished political order lasted until the Macedonian army conquered Athens in 323 B.C. Despite this return to political stability, 403 marked the beginning of a new era of Athenian political life, one that evidenced (1) sharply diminished capacity to exercise political power and (2) an increased differentiation of political discourse and practice.<sup>75</sup>

Wallach identifies three post-war trends that would have been on Plato’s mind: first, the loss of one fourth to one half of the Athenian population especially among the lower classes; second, the severe depletion of financial resources due to the loss of Athens’ imperial status; and third the lack of security as evidenced by the loss of the Athenian fleet, the destruction of the Long Wall, and routine Spartan raids.<sup>76</sup> The dialogues

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

originate from Plato's attempt to reconstruct the political art in the wake of these crises and upheavals, which Wallach describes as follows:

In this context, the practical dimensions of Plato's Socratic Problem may be interpreted as practical problems in the reconstitution of an ethically virtuous political realm, and Plato's conceptualization of the political art becomes more comprehensible as a political as well as theoretical construction. These two major developments in the character of ethics and power in Plato's Athens—the relatively sharp decrease in the wake of the Athenians military defeat of their political capacity to exercise power, along with the increasingly apparent social conflict between economic classes; and the differentiation and specialization of Athenian political and intellectual discourse—fostered ripe conditions for a creative theorization of a critically articulated, ethical practical art that addresses the maladies of Athenian society. The Platonic political art thus appears to be less an intellectual aberration, familiar type of political dissent, or splenetic reaction of a disappointed aristocrat deprived of a political career by the limited opportunities to democracy than a radically creative, critical response to disturbing trends in Athenian political life.<sup>77</sup>

The dialogues arise out of the fabric of Athenian life, but they are also enriched by the nuances of Plato's biography.

Plato's family had a strong political pedigree. He descended from "Codrus, the last king of Athens" through his father and was a descendant of Solon through his mother. Critias, the leader of The Thirty, was his uncle and his stepfather was "a close friend and supporter of Pericles." Citing the *Seventh Letter*, Wallach recounts how Plato's original political aspirations, fostered by his political upbringing, changed as a result of Plato's experiences during the decline of Athens:

In the war's aftermath, Plato had observed members of his family, individuals whom he thought had intended to bring salutary reform to their shaken society, commit brutal acts against democrats. Later, he watched the restored democracy indict and condemn to death Socrates his intellectual mentor and moral exemplar.<sup>78</sup>

Plato became disillusioned due to his first hand experience of politics in action, and "these historical events led him to concentrate his energies in the realm of political

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

thought rather than political action and to make the requirements of philosophy, rather than the arena of politics, the lodestone for his pursuit of justice.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, Plato’s concept of the political art originates from his personal need to reconstruct the tension between his family (as representatives of the state) and his mentor (who represents philosophy) as well as the public need to reconstruct the tension between *logos* and *ergon* via the political art.

#### *V. Critical Comments*

Before concluding, I must summarize this exploration of drama, experiment, and practice within the dialogues and examine how it relates to Dewey’s reading of Plato as presented in the previous chapter. As described by Randall and Wolz, Plato uses the dramatic character of Socrates and the drama of the dialogues to stimulate Socrates’ interlocutors and the reader of the dialogue, respectively, to engage in critical reflection. Plato and Socrates indirectly demonstrate how to practice philosophy; they do not directly teach the value of a set philosophical doctrine. Given that Randall was a colleague at Columbia when Dewey wrote “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” and also the centrality of drama to Randall’s interpretation of Plato, one may safely assume that Randall’s explication of drama is likely what Dewey had in mind. However, Randall uses drama to understand Plato not as the “original college professor,” but as engaged in a more imaginative form of philosophical discourse, and his use corresponds to what Anton and Anderson describe as Dewey’s desire to return to the “Trapped-Plato.” Therefore, Randall and Wolz are natural surrogates for Dewey’s understanding of the dialogues as fundamentally dramatic presentations.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 60.

Roochnik's understanding of dialectic also comports well with Dewey's understanding of experiment. When viewed as living conversation, dialectic becomes an experimental interaction between Socrates and his interlocutors. Since this account is more organic and less technical, dialectic conversation models an organism's transaction with its environment. The interlocutors introduce hypotheses, Socrates tests these hypotheses, and together they reconstruct the conversation. Smith's understanding of dialectic shares even more with Dewey, especially with regard to pedagogy. Dewey constructs his pedagogy around the idea that learning should be guided by the interests of students. Smith's suggestion that under a dialectical pedagogy, instructors should tailor their arguments to persuade their students according to the interest of students neatly corresponds to Dewey's pedagogy.

Finally, Randall and Wallach demonstrate how the dialogues are a response to Plato's immediate context and its practical demands. Randall believes that the dialogues are a product of Plato's Greek heritage, specifically of the Pre-Socratics and the Sophists. More specifically, he views the *Republic* as a response to tensions between Sparta and Athens in the wake of the Peloponnesian War. The drama of the dialogues represents a contemporary debate: which Greek polis is a better model, Sparta or Athens? Wallach's view of Plato's political art compliments Randall's ideas. Wallach also believes that Plato uses the dialogues to respond to specific cultural issues, but he deepens Plato's project by suggesting that Plato's dramatization of the tension between *ergon* and *logos* expresses attempts to reconstruct his own biography—to reconcile his family's political aspirations with the philosophical life of his mentor Socrates. Furthermore, both

accounts are clearly Deweyan, especially Wallach's critical historicism which explicitly cites Dewey as an influence.

With these understandings of drama, experiment, and practice in place, I can now begin to reconstruct a pragmatic reading of the *Republic* that adheres to parameters presented by Dewey in "From Absolutism to Experimentalism." Randall and Wolz demonstrate how Plato uses dramatic tension to stimulate philosophical reflection in his readers. Plato avoids precise argumentative conclusions by creating aporia and ambiguity within the dialogues, thus forcing readers to think critically about the topics under discussion. Roochnik explains that Plato's use of dialectic is significantly less systematic than is Hegel's, and that it attempts to mimic the nuances of actual conversation. Arguments do not develop systematically or linearly in Platonic dialectic; rather the topics and ideas under discussion are continually reconstructed as the conversation unfolds. Combined with Smith's understanding of pedagogy, Platonic dialectic functions as an experimental pedagogy where one sees Socrates trying to develop the best arguments to exhibit the advantages of the philosophical life. Finally, Wallach argues that the dialogues are Plato's attempt to combine the demands of *ergon* and *logos* through the political art of writing. This project stems from his own personal experiences, and as Randall pointed out earlier it is also a response to the major political debates of contemporary Athens. These understandings of drama, experiment, and practice constitute the investigative pragmatism I use to reconstruct a Deweyan reading of the *Republic* in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Philosophical Quest for Manhood

With a clearer account of Dewey's reading of Plato from the previous chapter, and an outline of Plato's use of drama, experiment, and practice within the dialogues, I now use these to reconstruct a pragmatist reading of the *Republic*. This chapter does not provide a line-by-line commentary on the *Republic*; rather, it examines key passages to show how Socrates attempts to reconstruct the experiences of his interlocutors. Nor will this chapter address every agreement and disagreement between Plato and Dewey. Although there are philosophical difficulties about Plato's and Dewey's metaphysics and epistemology, an approach to the dialogues that is dramatic rather than discursive minimizes these difficulties. Utilizing the dramatic approach, I contend that the *Republic* presents a philosophical reconstruction of the Greek motif of intergenerational conflict.

While justice is the object of philosophical inquiry in the *Republic*, the dialogue reenacts the drama of manhood. Plato presents his philosophical father-figure, Socrates, as engaged in an attempt to reconstruct the experiences of his interlocutors so that they might turn toward philosophical reflection. Plato shapes the dialogue through the themes of love and war, and Socrates uses the manly interests of his young interlocutors (put bluntly, sex and violence) to demonstrate the value and necessity of philosophy. The motif of intergenerational conflict symbolized by the relationship between Cephalus and Polemarchus binds the inquiry into justice to the quest for manhood and echoes throughout the key analogies of the *Republic*, specifically the City-Soul Analogy, the Allegory of the Cave, the

Natural History of Regimes, and even the Myth of Er. As potential leaders of Athens, what Socrates' interlocutors choose to pursue in their lives will have political consequences. Their coming of age determines the future of the polis. If they cannot learn to practice philosophy, then there will be no end to the city's problems. This reconstruction of the *Republic* begins with an analysis of the themes of love and war from their evocation in the opening scene of the dialogue and through their shaping of the dramatic presentation of the conversation. An examination of the intergeneration relationship between Cephalus and Polemarchus illuminates Socrates' experimental pedagogy.

### *I. Love and War:*

Plato introduces the themes of love and war in the opening scene of the dialogue and Cephalus, Socrates first interlocutor, represents both themes. David Roochnik and Leon Harold Craig each provide excellent treatments of the themes of love and war, respectively, and of their influence on the dramatic structure of the *Republic*. Bringing their explications of love and war together and examining their interaction informs my understanding of the structure of the dialogue, the character of Cephalus, his role as a representative of intergenerational conflict, and Socrates' application of an experimental pedagogy. I begin by examining their analysis of the opening scene of the dialogues; then I examine separately the themes of love and war.

In *The War Lover*, Craig presents an exhaustive treatment of the theme of war in the *Republic*. His first chapter is a summary that emphasizes the ubiquity of war in the dialogue and provides an excellent synopsis of the opening scene of the *Republic*:

The story is a familiar one. Having satisfied his curiosity about an innovation in the local religion, a notoriously combative philosopher named Sure Strength (*Sō-krates*) and his blooded squire Gleaming (*Glaukōn*) are retiring towards their acropolis when

overtaken by a numerically stronger party of men who threaten their capture. Along with some who remain anonymous, its ranks include another battle tested young man named Dauntless (*Adeimantos*) and the taciturn son of a famous general, named like his father in honor of Victory (*Nikeratos*, son of *Nikias*). The apparent leader of the group is named War Ruler (*Polem-archos*). Negotiations ensue, and through a mixture of compulsion and persuasion, the opposing forces are melded into one, which thereupon resolves to return to the lower city in pursuit of rations, recreation, and new recruits. Night action is contemplated.<sup>1</sup>

As Craig points out, Plato evokes the theme of war at the very beginning of the *Republic*.

Socrates and Glaucon are accosted, albeit jovially, by Polemarchus and his gang who coerce Socrates to attend their gathering through an appeal to force. All the interlocutors who appear in this scene either have names that have martial connotations or have battlefield experience, like Glaucon. Furthermore, they retire to “the home of a wealthy arms merchant named Head (*Kephalos*) – a pious old patriarch whose favorite authorities are renowned generals and martial poets (329b, 329e-a, 331a).”<sup>2</sup>

However, the theme of love also appears during the first scene. Roochnik references a previous study by K. Dover that suggests the initial image of a “torch race” has sexual connotations. Eros appears most explicitly when Cephalus claims that he is open to the pleasure of conversation because his physical desires are now withering away.<sup>3</sup> The first scene of the dialogue significantly introduces the themes of love and war.

Although I first take up Roochnik’s account of the theme of love, my ultimate conclusion in the section is that love and war are equally important. Roochnik continues his analysis of Cephalus. Roochnik believes that Cephalus, who wants to suppress his Eros, and Glaucon, who seems unable to restrain it, represent two contrasting dispositions towards love

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, Leon Harold. *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*. (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Roochnik, 54.

and that their initial depictions in the *Republic* foreshadow the development of the dialogue.

As mentioned earlier, Cephalus welcomes the freedom from Eros that old age represents. His labeling of Eros as a “savage master” anticipates Socrates’ comment later in Book IX when he refers to Eros as a “tyrant.” Roochnik exclaims that “Eros can drive us crazy” and draws attention to the first myth that Socrates wants to remove from Kallipolis:

Recall the first story Socrates censors: Uranus and Cronos as told in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Socrates focuses on only one aspect of the tale, the intergenerational conflict it expresses, but the story is located in a much wider and thoroughly erotic context. Uranus (sky) couples with Gaia (earth) but does not let their offspring “come up to the light” (*Theogony* 156); he keeps them submerged in the earth, causing their mother great pain. Cronos, an earlier son, allies with Gaia. He castrates his father, and the drops of blood that fall into the sea give foamy rise to Aphrodite, the goddess of beautiful love (195). For Hesiod, then, sex and violence, blood and beauty, love and hate, interpenetrate. Eros is, as he says, the “limb-loosener, who conquers the mind and sensible thought in the breasts of all gods and all men” (121-22).<sup>4</sup>

Roochnik’s explication of the myth of Uranus and Cronos demonstrates the interrelation of love and war and its role as a source of intergenerational conflict. I consider again his ideas when I later examine the motif of intergenerational conflict, but the tyranny of Eros, the desire to suppress it, and its role in intergenerational conflict are captured in Plato’s initial depiction of Cephalus, the patriarch who hosts the dialogue about justice.

Roochnik argues that Socrates’ recommendation to censor this myth and Cephalus’ desire to repress his Eros foreshadow the political necessity to suppress Eros to establish “stability and unity” in Kallipolis. But, while Cephalus represents the legitimate need to suppress Eros, he does not appreciate the benefits of Eros and instead values “ease.” As Roochnik points out, Cephalus exhibits certain patterns of behavior and thought: “He is glad to be done with erotic madness, happy to be free from the anxiety of debt and the need to lie. He wants to be among the *eukoloi* (329d4), the easygoing (but literally, “those who have good

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 52.

digestion”); he wants to sleep well at night.” Cephalus quickly exits soon after Socrates solicits from him a definition of justice, which symbolizes his lack of Eros, the necessary passion, the love of wisdom required, to engage in a philosophical discussion about justice. Cephalus’ suppression of Eros anticipates the “basic pattern of the legislation offered in books 2-4,” and without the Eros of his son, Polemarchus, the dialogue could not continue. A paradox emerges, for “without Eros there would be no Kallipolis,” yet “Eros is counted as a disruptive, subversive force, a potential tyrant, and therefore is systematically suppressed” in Kallipolis.<sup>5</sup>

Roochnik has more to say about the significance of this paradox, but he turns directly to Glaucon, the other erotic figure in the dialogue. Unlike, Cephalus and even Socrates, Glaucon enjoys and overflows with Eros. As the “principal interlocutor throughout the dialogue,” Glaucon and his Eros drive the dialogue and Roochnik provides an excellent summary of his contributions:

For example, it is he [Glaucon] (and pointedly not Socrates) who agrees to stay in the Piraeus to talk with Polemarchus and company (328b3). He “antes up” for Socrates (337d) and “restores” Thrasymachus’s argument, thereby forcing Socrates to continue the discussion after book I (357a). Glaucon pushes Socrates toward uttering the noble lie (414d). He does not permit Socrates to delay the task of identifying justice in book 4 (427d). He becomes a “partner in the vote” (450a) and at the outset of book 5 demands that Socrates return to the issue of women and children. He proposes that those guardians who are on campaign be permitted to kiss anyone they happen to love, “either male or female” (468c). He insists that Socrates not duck the question of whether the just city is possible or not: that is, whether Eros can in fact be communalized (471c). He draws a critical distinction between erotic and geometric necessity (458d), and with this demand he forces the conversation to ascend to its philosophical heights. Glaucon insists that the philosopher be distinguished from the lover of sights (475d) and, after forcefully taking over for Adeimantus at a critical juncture in book 6, prohibits Socrates from evading the discussion of the idea of the good (506d4). Glaucon experiences the philosophical feeling of wonder (608d5), and so raises what may be *the* decisive objection against Kallipolis: namely, the injustice of forcing the philosopher back to the cave in order to govern the prisoners (5159d).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 53.

Roochnik also points out that when Socrates as narrator describes Glaucon he uses adjectives and verbs that emphasize his animated and erotic nature. Furthermore, Glaucon exhibits a pattern of objecting to suggestions that require sexual restraint, and Roochnik connects this tendency to the natural history of regimes in Book VIII by saying that “the failure to control sexual relations is precisely what ruins the putatively just city and brings into being the timocracy.” Like Cephalus, Glaucon represents a paradox and limitation of Kallipolis. He “would not be allowed to be one of its citizens” due to the threat of his Eros, yet “he is primarily responsible for its coming into being.”<sup>7</sup>

The characters of Cephalus and Glaucon, the primary and major interlocutors of the dialogue respectively, symbolize the necessity and danger of Eros to Kallipolis. Cephalus values suppression, but consequently is dramatically and philosophically impotent. Glaucon’s virility enables the conception of Kallipolis, but threatens the structures that hold it together. The two interlocutors represent the extremes of Eros that Kallipolis paradoxically requires and prohibits. These paradoxes inform the discussion of justice and influence the structure of the dialogue. Roochnik divides the *Republic* according to the “three waves” convention and demonstrates how Eros contributes to the development of the dialogue in each section. Glaucon’s Eros initiates the first wave in Book II when he presses Socrates to show why it is one’s interest to be just, and this first wave continues through Book IV. The first wave describes “their systematic reform of education” that establishes the political foundation of Kallipolis. Roochnik points out that the wave ends when Socrates refers to Kallipolis as “your city” not “our city,” signifying that it arises from the creative efforts of his interlocutors. He proposes a definition of justice and attempts to apply it to the city-soul

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

analogy, i.e. “to move to the subsequent stage of the argument: the four regimes and corresponding soul types representing the various forms of vice” that occurs in Book VIII. However, “Adeimantus, Polemarchus, and Glaucon arrest Socrates and force him to discuss further the community of women and children” an erotic topic which forces Socrates to reconstruct the arguments of the previous wave (57-58).<sup>8</sup>

This reconstruction initiates the second wave in Books VI-VII where “private sexual alliances are abolished and replaced by politically controlled tightly regulated relationships. The family disappears and the city takes responsibility for raising the children.” Socrates appeals to a eugenics program because it will benefit Kallipolis by directing human sexuality towards better citizens (specifically guardians) and will eliminate a major source of conflict, interfamily rivalries. As mentioned earlier, Glaucon quickly points out the practical difficulties of this program which again underscores the difficulty of successfully suppressing human Eros. Seeing the difficulty of this project, Socrates changes the subject and “dives directly into the third wave” when he asserts that “Unless philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place. . . there is no rest from ills for the cities.”<sup>9</sup> (58-62)

In response, Roochnik muses on the fact that the “the third wave of the dialogue takes the place of an argument on behalf of the possibility of the second,” thus the most famous sections of the *Republic* “famed for their excursions into metaphysics and epistemology, are generated as a result of Socrates’ need to explicate the political regulation of sex.”<sup>10</sup> The practical purpose of these theoretical books cannot be underestimated and should color our

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 58-62.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 62.

apprehension of their content. According to Roochnik, Socrates reconstructs his tripartite division of the soul to account for the interpenetration of philosophy and Eros in the third wave:

These passages (cf. 499c1-2) are critical. First, they powerfully revise and enrich the tripartite psychology of book 4. There reason was reduced to calculation and radically separated from desire. There the “love of learning” (435e7) was mentioned but could not be fully accounted for. Here reason has expanded and has itself become animated by Eros. A lover of learning strives for being not with a part of the soul but with “the soul as a whole.” Second, with their bold use of erotic language, these passages form the prelude to the topic typically thought to be quintessentially Platonic, the “theory of ideas.” Even if book 6, with its Idea of the Good and the divided line, seems to disclose the heart of Platonic metaphysics, these famous images are embedded in Socrates’ *psychological* portrait of the philosopher. The Idea of the Good and the divided line do not continue the project of articulating being as being. Instead, they help Socrates delineate (“for them”) the philosopher’s erotic soul.<sup>11</sup>

These books construct a portrait of the philosopher rather than a theory of metaphysics or epistemology. Plato uses the metaphor of the Divided Line and the Analogy of the Cave to distinguish philosophers from the non-philosophers they might resemble, specifically from the “lovers of sights.” Roochnik argues that “Socrates’ discussion of philosophy has two sides, the subjective and objective,” but notice that these are not epistemological terms for him. Roochnik uses the terms to describe the intimate relation between the “erotic nature of the philosophical soul” and the “ultimate object of his or her desire.” The lovers of sights cannot see the good or the beautiful because they allow a variety of particular sights to distract their Eros. Thus, in the third wave “Socrates seems to be reporting the results of some sort of empirical research” that describes the erotic nature of the philosophical life, rather than making metaphysical or epistemological claims.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 63-66.

According to Roochnik, Eros initiates and frustrates the three waves of the *Republic* and this paradoxical relationship, symbolized at the outset in the characters of Cephalus and Glaucon, also applies to the philosophical life and the ideal city that Socrates and his interlocutors construct. Roochnik proclaims that “the Good is thus the ultimate Kallipoleian fantasy: it represents the subordination of Eros to *arithmos*.” The dynamic power of Eros cannot be contained in the beautiful city, as is evidenced by the impossibility of its eugenic program. Roochnik explains this tension between Kallipolis and the *Republic* as follows:

I want to bring into sharper focus the crucial distinction between Kallipolis, understood as a moment (i.e., the city Socrates constructs in books 2-7), and the *Republic* in its entirety. With the failure of the marriage number, Kallipolis falls apart. It does so because it stands at odds with the very conditions that gave rise to it. The dialogue as a whole, principally composed of the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon, is erotically charged. Kallipolis, by stark contrast, suppresses Eros at every turn. There is thus a basic tension between the city generated by the speakers and the speakers themselves. Simply put, if Kallipolis were to come into being, then the *Republic* could not. But since Kallipolis requires the *Republic* in order to come into being, it contains in itself the seeds of its dissolution.

To put this argument into abstract form, let K stand for “Kallipolis comes into being,” and R for “the *Republic* is allowed to take place.” My thesis is this: if  $K \rightarrow \sim R$ ; if  $\sim R \rightarrow \sim K$ ; therefore if  $K \rightarrow \sim K$ ; therefore  $\sim K$ . In other words, Kallipolis undermines itself. As I explain more fully in chapter 3, however, when comprehended via a dialectical reading of the *Republic*, the undermining—this essential tension between the abstract ideal of Kallipolis and the human urges giving birth to it—is itself enormously instructive.<sup>13</sup>

Roochnik also explains that Kallipolis requires philosopher-kings, yet the restrictive education of the guardians lacks the Eros necessary for the growth of a philosopher.

Roochnik also points out eight examples that show the impossibility of the *Republic* within Kallipolis: 1) K [Kallipolis] bans private homes for the guardians, yet R [*Republic*] occurs in a private home; 2) K bans stories that present the value of injustice, yet the Ring of Gyges story, where injustice is rewarded, initiates the construction of K; 3) In K, students are not allowed to study philosophy until they are thirty, yet Glaucon and Adeimantus are likely

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 69.

younger than thirty; 4) K allows only the “unmixed imitation of the decent man” in poetry, yet R clearly imitates characters who are indecent such as Thrasymachus; 5) K “the most rigid and monocultural of regimes, sharply curtails “musical” innovation,” yet R is “born from Socrates’ desire to go down to the Piraeus, the cosmopolitan seaport, in order to see *new* music: specifically, a religious festival;” 6) K prohibits religious innovation, yet the festival honors Bendis “who is new to Athens;” 7) K outlaws “assaults on the dishonoring of elders,” yet several important transitions in the *Republic* are “generated by what can be construed (at least metaphorically) as just such assaults; and 8) K exists to “end factionalism” as demonstrated by the noble lie, yet the nature of the dialectic, i.e. different interlocutors proposing different positions, is inherently factional (70-73).<sup>14</sup>

These paradoxes force readers of the *Republic* to acknowledge its dialectical character as defined in chapter three of this inquiry. Neither Socrates nor Plato asserts a coherent political philosophy in the *Republic*; the *Republic* embodies living conversation on the nature of justice. Roochnik uses the dialectical nature of the dialogue to suggest how Socrates’ comments about political regimes should be understood:

To conclude: K is thoroughly repressive and antidemocratic and thus runs no risk of breeding a tyrant who subsequently would conquer the city. At the same time, however, it would render mute the very philosophical activity of the *Republic*. Since the *Republic* is a requirement for the coming-into-being of Kallipolis, the later would silence not only the speakers and context from which it is generated but itself as well. In this sense, the *Republic*, understood in its entirety as a dialectical development, is a complex and qualified defense of democracy, “multiculturalism,” and erotic “diversity.” It must also be understood as superior to Kallipolis. Simply put, the *Republic* is a work of philosophy, and it is precisely philosophy that would starve, wither, and die in Kallipolis. (91)

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 70-73

Roochnik argues that this dialectical reading is not ironic; rather it expresses the “dialectical stress, the frustration, intrinsic to democracy.”<sup>15</sup> It dramatically represents the tensions, like Eros, that shape the discussion and use of (to use Wallach’s term) the political art. Because of Eros, humans beings strive to imagine better political systems, yet because of Eros, because we are human, we can never successfully realize our utopian vision. Democracy, despite its flaws and frustrations, enables philosophy. Socrates himself coyly admits this fact (557d) and that while ideal justice might be possible only in Kallipolis, actual justice would flourish in a society where philosophy can flourish, a society where rulers can practice philosophical reflection even if the regime is not structured around the philosopher-kings. Roochnik’s analysis of Eros shows how the *Republic* functions as a dialectical defense of democracy and it demonstrates how the conflict generated by Eros explains the dialogue’s development, but Craig contends that war functions as an equally important theme in the *Republic*.

I consider now how war contributes to the dialectical tensions present in the dialogue. Craig muses that “one of the stranger things about Plato’s *Politeia* is its subtle preoccupation with war. As mentioned earlier, war and conflict present themselves in the opening scene and the members of Polemarchus party imply various martial connections. But war continues as a theme throughout the dialogue. Craig points out that “the term ‘war’ (*polemos*) and its cognates... occur nearly ten dozen times,” and that other martial references to battle, courage, strength, strife, etc. appear with great frequency, thus it is “fair to say that this most celebrated portrayal of politics and philosophy, of justice and the rational soul is painted primarily in the colours of war.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>16</sup> Craig, *The War Lover*. 14-15.

Conversely, “peace (*eirēnē*) enjoys no comparable prominence, being mentioned less than a dozen times” and rarely in a positive light, specifically its first utterance by Cephalus.

Craig’s exquisitely describes its significance:

Kephalos, the man who grew old and wealthy manufacturing armaments for other men’s use (cf. 601d-e) is responding to the philosopher’s initial question to him about what it is like being old. He attests that a majority of his contemporaries lament the lost pleasures of youth – especially those which attend most men’s most urgent desire: sex (cf. 390bc, 403a, 458d). Whereas, *he* agrees with the great tragedian Sophocles, that “in every way, old age brings peace and freedom from such things. When the desires cease to strain and finally relax, then. . . we are rid once for all of masters full many and mad” (329cd; cf. 573b-c). So here, at the beginning of a discussion that occupies the philosopher from “yesterday” until “tomorrow,” Kephalos reminds everyone that not all struggle and strife, not all faction and war, are among or within polities. A human being can be at odds with *himself*, internally discordant. Perhaps *most* people are. A person might even be his own worst enemy, and consistently act contrary to his own good, the animosity within him more than a match for his self-love. Perhaps the human soul is but another battleground, and life itself but one long war, on the inside as well as out (cf. 603cd).<sup>17</sup>

According to Craig, *eirēnē* possesses a negative connotation in the *Republic* because it represents the cessation of Eros. However, Craig also highlights how *eirēnē* unveils another important concept of the *Republic*, the presence of internal conflict and the individual’s need for justice. Furthermore, Craig’s pensive treatment of Cephalus informs my forthcoming analysis of his role within the dialogue.

Returning to Craig’s exploration of war, one sees that he emphasizes Cephalus and the opening scenes of the dialogue because they reveal two things: “war must be regarded as the fundamental fact of political life, indeed all life” and that “the concerns of war and peace . . . have their analogues in the realm of the soul as well.” Plato introduces the city-soul analogy when he introduces the character of Cephalus and Craig’s analysis of war continues to reinforce the connection between political and spiritual conflict. Craig advances to Book VIII

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16.

and demonstrates how the natural history of regimes can be understood in terms of inner conflicts faced by the different types of men:

The unjust man is described as one “powerless to act, because he is at faction and not of one mind with himself, . . . an enemy [*echthros*] to himself as well as to just men” (352a), whereas a just man is one who has “become his own friend” (443d; cf. 589b, 621c).<sup>18</sup>

Socrates even distinguishes the different types of men discussed in the natural history of regimes according to their respective inner conflict. Craig ends his discussion by emphasizing that the “reigning analogy of this inquiry into justice matches cities with men,” and therefore “one must bear in mind that everything said about conflict among or within cities might have its analogue at the level of the individual human being.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to Craig’s emphasis, Socrates introduces the city-soul analogy for the purpose of finding justice on the level of the individual, thus the exploration of political justice occurs for the sake of uncovering why it is in one’s interest to be just.

Finally, Craig turns to the relationship between war and philosophy. Craig admits the difficulty of this topic, saying “Could any two things be *less* akin, *less* compatible, more *alien* – more downright cacophonous – than the taste of war and the love of wisdom?” Craig considers how a person could “combine, *harmoniously*, in one soul, the qualities of a hardened warrior . . . with the kindly, gentle, modest, retiring philosopher.” He muses that the philosopher-king is paradoxical in this regard and that “we scholars have something to learn, not only about the warrior, but about the genuine philosopher.” Craig discusses the alliance between war and philosophy:

There are grounds for suspecting, however, that the relationship between the love of wisdom and a talent for war is more intimate than would be implied by this convenient marriage of the requirements of politics with those of philosophy. Simple fidelity to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 18.

dialogue obliges one to consider within the search for truth – be it something about the searching, or something about the truth itself – does not require the same toughness and tenacity, the same alertness and quickness of response, the steady courage, strength, and stamina for the most strenuous labours, the same absence of sentimentality, the greatness of spirit, indeed all the distinguishing qualities and powers of the “warlike man”, most especially his drive to be victorious. For this is no more than what the philosopher seems to teach to those who would inherit his way of life (485a, 503c-d).<sup>20</sup>

Craig admits that “it is tempting to regard the philosopher’s assimilation of philosophy and war as no more than a tactic of pedagogy, a singularly effective way of capturing the attention and respect of high-spirited young men who are naturally attracted by the excitement and glamour of war.” However, Craig points out that the *Republic*’s preoccupation with war continues even after the “pedagogical revolution has been accomplished (518d, 519d).”<sup>21</sup>

Craig concludes that the connection between war and philosophy is fundamental, but when the themes of love and war are compared, and when one attends to the dialectical nature of the dialogues, one sees that the pedagogical use of the theme of war also shapes the dialogue. (I discuss how Socrates uses war and love pedagogically when I examine his experimental pedagogy.) Both Roochnik and Craig see the *Republic* as dramatic dialectic. Rather than viewing the *Republic* as a sustained and direct treatise on political philosophy, they illuminate the dynamic tensions that influence the conversation about justice. They demonstrate how areas of tension between pragmatism and Plato’s dialogues, specifically those that focus on metaphysics and epistemology, can be alleviated if one reads the dialogue as emerging from the dramatic themes of love and war. Finally, Craig’s articulation of the theme of war enables a transition to the topic of intergenerational conflict. By showing how Cephalus represents conflict both martially and spiritually, Craig shows how the connection

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 20.

between the dialogues' inquiry into public and private justice is connected to the quest for manhood.

## *II. Intergenerational Conflict*

My exploration of the *Republic* continues with an analysis of the dramatic importance of Socrates' first interlocutors, Cephalus and Polemarchus, as representatives of the motif of intergenerational conflict. The *Republic* begins when, after witnessing a new religious festival, Socrates and Glaucon encounter a gang of young Athenians led by Polemarchus. Polemarchus compels Socrates to attend the party at his father, Cephalus' (a wealthy shield manufacturer), house. Socrates resists, but reluctantly accepts the invitation due to a combination of playful coercion, persuasion, and insistence by his companion. Upon arriving at Cephalus' house, Socrates asks the aged patriarch about the advantages of old age and wealth from which he elicits the dialogue's first definition of justice. Cephalus briefly indulges Socrates' desire for dialogue, but soon leaves to continue his participation in the city's religious festivities. His son inherits his role both as interlocutor and as representative of his father's definition of justice and continues the conversation with Socrates. Although Socrates refutes most of Polemarchus' contributions, the conversation ends with Polemarchus and Socrates agreeing to "fight as partners" (335e). Although brief, this encounter with Cephalus and Polemarchus thickens the inquiry about justice that follows.

Plato's dramatic presentation of Socrates' abduction and his conversation with Cephalus and Polemarchus introduces the major themes of the *Republic* that shape their inquiry into justice: violence, sex, and death. Furthermore, Plato's depiction of these opening scenes and interlocutors are richly ambiguous. He stimulates his readers by carefully revealing and obscuring the possible motivations behind the actions and beliefs of these

interlocutors. Plato allows for both charitable and uncharitable readings of these characters in order to demonstrate the complexity of father-son relationships. Plato uses this obfuscation to stimulate the readers to think about intergenerational dynamics and their philosophical implications. These dynamics introduce and enable the inquiry into the nature of justice and inform the themes and structure of the dialogue. But they also reveal Plato's attempt to reconstruct his own experiences through the relationship between Cephalus and Polemarchus and their interaction with Socrates.

Peter Steinberger constructs an ““overdetermined” account of *Republic* 328b-331e” that provides a holistic look at the relationship between Cephalus and Polemarchus. His approach resonates with the drama, experiment, and practice outlined in the last chapter, and his account serves as a framework for the current exploration. Ultimately, Steinberger sees Cephalus as antithetical to Socrates because Cephalus lives a life in opposition to the philosophical life. While Steinberger's position is warranted, other scholars read Cephalus more charitably and I also examine their character sketches. By resisting the temptation to reduce Cephalus to either a completely negative or positive interpretation, I portray him as a complex and authentic character. Fathers (as well as sons) possess virtues and vices, and by seeing the good and the bad in Cephalus (and Polemarchus as well), I represent them as human, and this humanization should force one to think more critically about their roles in the dialogue.<sup>22</sup>

Steinberger begins by suggesting that the treatment of Cephalus may be understood in terms of three distinct though not incompatible perspectives of a psychological, political, and ethical nature. Steinberger also contends that this exploration reveals a “diversity of

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<sup>22</sup> Steinberger, Peter J. “Who Is Cephalus?” *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy*. (MY 96) 24 (2), 173.

important themes” and reflects “certain important ideas and events external to the work itself” that “characterize some of the relevant circumstances in which the *Republic* was composed.”<sup>23</sup> First, he examines the psychological nature of Cephalus’ depiction on the grounds that he “reflects a familial and generational motif that recurs throughout the *Republic*.” The participants of the *Republic* reinforce the significance of this generational motif, given that both of Cephalus’ sons are present, as well as Plato’s brother (Glaucon and Adeimantus), Niceratus (whose name means “Son of Nicias”), and Cleitophon who is introduced as the “Son of Aristonymus.” Steinberger also notes that the theme of intergenerational conflict permeates Greek myth (e.g. Ouranos and Kronos, the first myth that Socrates abolishes in the *Republic* 378) and literature (e.g. Oedipus, the House of Atreus, etc.). Greek cultural practices, like pederasty and exposure, complicate the theme of intergenerational conflict and some scholars have defined the cultural context of the *Republic* as a time of significant upheaval due to “the rapid development of rational philosophy, which rendered traditional, paternal sources of authority vulnerable to serious criticism and disregard.”<sup>24</sup>

Given this last cultural point, intergenerational conflict precedes and perhaps enables philosophy. Steinberger supports this contention and argues that Cephalus’ departure “is nothing less than the disappearance of the *Republic*’s patriarch” and that the conversation that ensues is a “pointed if inexplicit act of generational conflict reflecting, however unconsciously, filial rebellion and celebrating thereby the son’s newfound dominion.” He uses this event to construct a “psychobiographical” analysis of Plato and suggests that “it may indeed reflect deep and important social/psychological facts about Plato himself, and about

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 173

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 175-176.

the world out of which he emerged.” Steinberger admits that this analysis is necessarily interpretive and speculative, but that it is still possible to tell a “plausible story” about how Plato may have used the character to represent his own inner conflicts and life experiences. He examines two types of evidence to support his psychobiographical interpretation, Plato’s biography and themes presented “elsewhere in the text.”<sup>25</sup>

Of the former type of evidence, Steinberger cites Plato’s political upbringing and the *Seventh Letter*. He contends that Plato’s “lifelong pursuit of philosophy was, virtually by definition, a decisive rejection of politics” due to his “disgust with the venality and corruption of the day, whether by the oligarchs or the democrats, both of whom abused Socrates.” Therefore, his “vigorous embrace of the philosophical life. . . almost certainly involved a deep intellectual and existential departure and rejection of the ruling ethos of his paternal elders, biological or otherwise.”<sup>26</sup> Steinberger also considers the “psychological implications for Plato of Ariston’s [his father’s] death” and speculates that Plato might have endured a troubled relationship with his step-father. He even implies that this relationship might have been complicated by the fact that “there seems to have been nothing in Athenian law that would have prevented Pyrilampes from attempting to seduce his stepson.” While plausible (especially given Plato’s attack on the institution of pederasty in the *Laws*), even without this final sensational claim Steinberger successfully makes the case that “Plato may have possessed a certain predisposition to rebel against paternal authority, to reject values

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 176-178.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

associated with such authority. . . thereby an emotional and intellectual distance sufficient to allow for a comparatively unrestrained and uninhibited pursuit of philosophical truth.”<sup>27</sup>

Steinberger returns to the text and infers that Cephalus represents “paternal values” and that his quick exit can be “reconstructed as an act of generational rebellion, the goal of which is to establish for a new generation a certain distinct legitimacy regarding the question of justice.” Steinberger then examines the thematic evidence in the *Republic* that supports his psychobiographical interpretation of Cephalus. First, the ““second wave” of Book 5 (457d), is an attack on the traditional family, hence on the very idea of paternal authority and filial obedience.” Second, he suggests that “filial rebellion is an ineluctable consequence of philosophical endeavor” because Socrates points out that “dialectic necessarily undermines traditional, ancestral values taught by parents (538b-c)” and should be taught only when students have reached sufficient maturity. Steinberger also points out an analogy between Plato’s dramatic banishment of Cephalus from the dialogue and Socrates’ banishment of “everyone over the age of ten, except for philosophers” from the city (541a). Thus, Plato creates in the dialogue and Socrates creates in the Kallipolis “a world in which paternal authority has disintegrated and in which children of philosophical inclination such as Plato can be free to pursue without guilt or disapprobation the truth of the world under the guidance of an accomplished dialectician.”<sup>28</sup>

With this examination of Cephalus’ psychological significance established, Steinberger turns to Cephalus’ political role in the *Republic*. As historical characters, Cephalus and his sons Polemarchus and Lysis have certain political associations. First, Socrates’ arrest by Polemarchus (A democrat and his mob) reenacts Socrates’ actual arrest by

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 179-182.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 182-183.

the Athenian democracy. Steinberger admits that Polemarchus banter with Socrates during this encounter, but “given the historical context... it is hard to believe that the opening repartee, however lighthearted, is entirely innocent.” Steinberger describes this scene as an example of “retrospective irony”:

The *Republic* is narrated not by its author (Plato) but by one of his characters (Socrates). The dialogue is profoundly and complexly mimetic; its author is imitating a character who, in turn, is a temporal displacement. Socrates the “narrator” does not yet know the fate of the characters he is describing; nor, of course, does he know his own fate. But the author of the dialogue knows all of these things, and he knows that his audience knows them as well.<sup>29</sup>

Because of this retrospective irony, readers should realize that Piraeus is a “hostile environment.” Steinberger argues that “the *Republic* forces Socrates to descend into the very heart of the democratic camp and to practice philosophy in an environment heavy with what might be called the spirit of democracy.”<sup>30</sup>

Steinberger then considers Socrates relationship with Cephalus and his family, noting that while Socrates “certainly interacts in a civil and friendly manner with both Cephalus and Polemarchus,” Lysias was a known student of Socrates’ rival Protagoras. He also infers that because both Polemarchus and Lysias appear to be loyal sons in the dialogue and become “future leaders of the democratic party” that Cephalus is a democratic figurehead.<sup>31</sup>

Steinberger strengthens the connection between democracy and Cephalus, by comparing Cephalus with the “democratic man” that Socrates describes in Book VIII. He interprets Socrates as asserting that “the fundamental feature of the democratic man is that he is unable to distinguish necessary desires from unnecessary ones (558d-561c).” While more moderate

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 185.

than the tyrant, the democratic man “gratifies both kinds of desires indiscriminately.” This lack of awareness enslaves them to their desires and “deprives their life of meaning and direction.” Cephalus values moderation, but he possesses it by virtue of the withering of his *eros* for unnecessary, distracting, and potentially destructive desires. Time and age have taken away his need to discriminate between desires; therefore he has no reflective moral insight into moderation. Steinberger admits Cephalus also demonstrates timocratic and oligarchic tendencies, but that the “emergent spirit is democratic” because Cephalus lives a “largely unreflective life. . . extreme neither in its depravity nor its virtue.” His inability to discriminate between desires eclipses other traits that would qualify him for either timocracy or oligarchy.<sup>32</sup>

Steinberger ends his examination of Cephalus’ political role by noting that “despite his sharp criticisms of democratic ideas, Plato must also have been aware of the peculiar relationship between democracy and philosophy.” As mentioned earlier, philosophy requires the freedoms of a democracy, even though the democratic temperament can be antithetical to philosophy. Cephalus’ role in the dialogue symbolizes this paradox:

The very democracy that put an end to Socrates’ life also helped to make his philosophizing feasible, a fact acknowledged by Socrates in the *Apology*. It is, moreover, much the same with the city of philosopher/kings [Roochnik also explores this point]. There, the nonphilosophical classes in some sense provide the infrastructure that makes philosophy at once necessary and possible. In this respect, Cephalus performs a quite analogous function. His household provides the material setting—the house, the food, possibly the recompense—that underwrites and helps sustain the practice of philosophy.<sup>33</sup>

Cephalus enables philosophy, but he must leave before it can begin in earnest. However, Polemarchus inherits his father’s argument and Steinberger argues that the task of the dialogue is “to exorcise once and for all the specter of democracy, in words as well as in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 185-188.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 189.

fact.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Plato uses the character of Cephalus to represent the democratic man and his complex relation with the philosopher.

Finally, Steinberger explores the ethical significance of Cephalus within the dialogue. Even if Cephalus “does not have a well-elaborated moral standpoint, his life is nonetheless representative of one.” In fact, Steinberger contends that it is the opposite of the philosophical life represented by Socrates, and Cephalus’ definition of justice is possibly more dangerous than the definition offered by Thrasymachus:

Whereas Thrasymachus acts like a “wild beast” (336b) who offers a thesis that ridicules and undermines ordinary notions of justice, Cephalus seems to be the very soul of reasonableness and sound judgement. Yet I believe that Cephalus is at least as dangerous. The very plausibility of his argument, and the benign sincerity with which he presents it, is apt to blind us to the fact that he is the embodiment of all that Socrates opposes. If much of Book 1 of the *Republic* is devoted to a critical examination of Thrasymachus’s views, the remaining nine books stand, in part, as a systematic refutation of precisely the kind of life that Cephalus has lived. Cephalus may not be the incarnation of perfect injustice; but his is the kind of injustice with which virtuous people should be most concerned.<sup>35</sup>

Steinberger continues by showing how Cephalus and Socrates are polar opposites on key issues, specifically the importance of money, sexual desire, the benefits of old age, the value of philosophical conversation, and death. Cephalus enjoys his wealth and now uses it to atone for past mistakes, whereas Socrates lives a life of poverty. Cephalus appreciates his freedom from sexual passions because of his age, but Socrates controls his desires through the cultivation of virtue. By extension, Cephalus sees the cooling of his passions as the only benefit of old age, unlike the philosopher who values the experience, wisdom, and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 190.

opportunities for inquiry that age provides. Cephalus claims that he enjoys philosophical conversation more, yet he quickly leaves when the discussion becomes serious.<sup>36</sup>

However, Steinberger feels that “above all, Cephalus is virtually obsessed with, and terrified by, the prospect of death,” whereas “a morbid fear of death is utterly alien to the philosopher.”<sup>37</sup> While Cephalus appears content, Steinberger believes that his complacency is a facade:

His hasty departure from the company that he professes to enjoy so much, and from the alleged delights of philosophical dialogue, occurs so that he may perform religious rituals, hoping against hope to propitiate the gods. His true state of mind is revealed, I think, in this striking and vivid account [the “life review” passage (330d-331a) that will be examined in depth when we turn to Patrick McKee]. . .

He does proclaim that the man who hasn’t been unjust and who has enough money to pay his debts can be free from such torment, and he seems to have some hope that he himself is among the lucky in this respect. But when, just moments later, he scurries off to his sacrifices, we can well imagine that the cruel twisting and turning of his soul, the suspicion and terror of his psyche, are more than enough to overcome the enticements of philosophy, such as they may be. Given the structure of Book 1, Cephalus’s preoccupation with his sacrifices is a dead giveaway. Beneath his mild and generous veneer, he is preoccupied, perhaps even obsessed, with the implication of his own mortality.<sup>38</sup>

This hidden preoccupation with, and possible terror of, death reveals the shortcomings of the life that Cephalus has lived. He has not lived the examined life of the philosopher; he has not cultivated moderation; he has been a victim of his desires; and now he fears that his life may have been wasted or that there may be eternal consequences for the life he has led. By Steinberger’s reckoning, we should lament Cephalus and imitate Socrates who uses his understanding of justice “to pursue, in a self-conscious and principled manner, a life of virtue—of moderation, self-restraint, and devotion to the intellectual purity of the truth,” who

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 191-192.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 191-192.

can “face his mortality with a kind of confidence that Cephalus, the very opposite of the philosopher, cannot hope to muster.”<sup>39</sup>

With an explication of the psychological, political, and ethical significance of Cephalus in hand, Steinberger concludes his character analysis by returning to Cephalus’ relation to Thrasymachus. Cephalus puts forward an account of justice that is both conventional and widely accessible to the public, whereas Thrasymachus’ version represents “political nihilism.” Thrasymachus believes that “justice is merely a synonym for, is entirely reducible to, raw power” which according to Steinberger does not even qualify as a possible definition for justice. Thus, Thrasymachus represents “a very grave threat and no threat at all” because although his ideas are scary and repugnant “no one truly interested in justice would be inclined to adopt his views or emulate his way of life.” By contrast, Cephalus does present a definition of justice that many people do accept and he appears to be virtuous. Cephalus endangers those who genuinely see justice because his veneer of virtue hides the ethical corruption mentioned above. According to Steinberger, those who follow his example might share what he believes to be “Cephalus’s final destiny” in the Myth of Er. They might choose a life of tyranny if given the opportunity because they do not possess philosophical reflection nor do they cultivate virtue. Thus, the “moral trajectory of his soul—from democracy to tyranny—is mirrored both in the natural history of political regimes and in the very architecture of the first book of the *Republic*.” Steinberger summarizes his argument saying that “the disappearance of Cephalus is, at once, the psychological sublimation of patriarchal authority, the political exile of the spirit of democracy, and the rejection on ethical

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 192.

grounds of the ordinary, unreflective, unphilosophical view of justice”<sup>40</sup> Cephalus must leave so that true justice can emerge.

How does Steinberger’s account of Cephalus affect the goal of my inquiry? Given that the theme of this dissertation is reconstruction, Steinberger’s psychobiographical examination of Cephalus places the *Republic* within the fabric of Plato’s public and personal experiences. The motif of intergenerational conflict echoes throughout Greek culture, Plato’s biography, and the drama of the *Republic*. Steinberger rightly contends that it enables philosophy, and the dialogue cannot begin in earnest until Cephalus leaves, but perhaps intergenerational conflict allows for authenticity. Polemarchus dutifully inherits his father’s argument, but he does introduce several innovations to the argument. However, Steinberger’s account of the political and ethical role of Cephalus presents a greater barrier to my pragmatic reconstruction of the *Republic*. Steinberger obviously views Plato and Socrates as anti-democratic and while his treatment of Cephalus is illuminating, he ultimately sees Cephalus as representing democracy and as the antithesis of the philosophical life. Roochnik’s account of the paradox between Kallipolis and the *Republic* undermines Steinberger’s account of Plato and Socrates as anti-democratic, yet Cephalus does exhibit the negative qualities that, from Steinberger’s perspective, condemn him politically and ethically.

While Steinberger provides a rich treatment of Cephalus, he reduces the dramatic significance of Cephalus by turning him into a foil for Socrates’. Socrates and Cephalus are antagonists, but if one reads Cephalus charitably additional dramatic nuances emerge that shape the richness of the intergenerational conflict Plato exhibits through these characters. Cephalus functions as a role-model and each interlocutor must choose whether they desire the life and fate that he represents or the life and fate that Socrates represents. By presenting

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 192-195.

Cephalus in an ambiguous light, Plato dramatizes the difficulty of this decision, but he also forces the reader to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the lives that Cephalus and Socrates represent as role-models and father figures.

Patrick McKee provides a more charitable reading of Cephalus by providing interdisciplinary insight from gerontology. McKee argues that “Cephalus’ passage expresses Plato’s belief that reminiscence in old age is a source of moral insight.” Cephalus conducts a “life review” which McKee describes as follows:

The theory postulates a distinct developmental stage of late life in which the aging person experiences a compelling urge to make a final, retrospective judgment of the important decisions, actions, relationships, and other major dimensions of his or her life.<sup>41</sup>

Although McKee proposes this application as a classroom strategy, he also provides some interesting suggestions for understanding Cephalus’ role in the dialogue. Cephalus explains to Socrates, his guest, and to Plato’s readers the “useful knowledge” that “our actions may appear very differently to us in the retrospect of old age than they did at the time we performed them: what seemed laughable then may seem a serious matter now.” McKee also speculates about the significance of Cephalus in the *Republic*:

Socrates’ conversation with Cephalus is admittedly brief, and this may prompt teachers to pass over it with little notice. But we should not conclude from its brevity that Plato did not attach importance to its topic of late life retrospective on earlier actions. Note the passage, though brief, is longer than that of the sun metaphor in Book VI, and nearly as long as the presentation of the sun and divided line metaphors together (328c-331e vs. 507e-511c). Also, Plato gives the topic of late life retrospective special rhetorical force in the *Republic* by introducing it in Book I and then revisiting it in the story of Er, at the end of the entire work. An artful writer gives these rhetorically powerful “bookend” positions only to a deserving topic.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> McKee, Patrick. “A Lesson from Cephalus.” *Teaching Philosophy* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, December 2003) 26 (4), 361.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

Furthermore, McKee cites the “Apology” as Socrates’ life review and mentions a strong tradition of life review throughout ancient Greek literature to defend the idea that Plato understood the power of a life review and that he wanted Socrates’ conversation with Cephalus to have “significant weight.”<sup>43</sup>

Next, McKee considers the implications of this reading of Cephalus. Again, most of the implications he addresses are of benefit within the classroom, but some of them deepen our understanding of this interlocutor. McKee believes that most commentators have overlooked the significance of this scene and treat Cephalus negatively, possibly out of an ageist bias:

Many negative statements about Cephalus are unjustified by the text. To suppose that Plato laced his descriptions of Cephalus with “malicious touches” as [Julia] Annas states, has no basis in the text. Some writers, including [Allan] Bloom. . ., A.E. Taylor and Nicholas P. White, describe Cephalus as the complacent carrier of conventional culture, including a conventional idea of justice. This is not justified by the text, which treats Cephalus as perfectly capable of thinking beyond convention. For example, he states that “few will believe” his view of what is most beneficial about wealth. And he thoughtfully critiques the widespread, commonly held notion that the pains and indignities of the elderly result inevitably from age alone, arguing instead that character makes a contribution to quality of life in old age. Some commentators have taken Cephalus’s comments on money as evidence of a too exclusive interest in money making. This interpretation is unconvincing, since Socrates explicitly says that Cephalus seems “not to care much for money” (330c). Furthermore, knowledge of how “poverty or riches in union with what state of the soul” will work evil or good is explicitly included in Book X (618c) in the most important knowledge we can have. Knowledge of this very commingling of states of souls and outer circumstance is one of the things most pointedly conveyed in Cephalus’s conversation with Socrates. It is this knowledge, not greed, that is conveyed by Cephalus’s comments about money. Many commentators seem to share Schleiermacher’s ageist view that Cephalus is “too far advanced in years for such dialogue,” whatever that may be taken to mean.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 364-365.

McKee's summary of Cephalus scholarship demonstrates that few commentators have seen the character in a positive light and that attending to the importance of Plato's dramatic use of life reviews should provide more insight into the character, his role, and the dialogue.

When viewed from McKee's perspective, Cephalus becomes more human. He is still Socrates' foil, but not as an indictment of democracy or as the antithesis of the philosophical. Clearly, Cephalus has not lived an examined life, but Plato dramatically presents him as embodying some positive qualities. Cephalus functions as a rival father figure in the *Republic*. As the oldest participants in the dialogue, he and Socrates represent two different role models, two different life-paths between which young Athenians must choose: a life of ease and a life of philosophy. Both have advantages and disadvantages, even though Plato clearly prefers the life of philosophy. Brian Donohue even argues that Cephalus can illuminate the sometimes obscure relationship between Socrates and Plato. Donohue modifies the conventional tripartite division of the dialogues to chart Plato's development as a dramatist. He classifies the early dialogues as more Socratic because they depict Socrates engaged in dialectical conversation about specific ethical terms and end unresolved, whereas "in the middle dialogues, Socrates increasingly appears as a 'literary' figure" presenting more Platonic ideas. Finally, the late dialogues focus on the "more esoteric domains of epistemology, logic, cosmology, ontology, etc," that are far removed from Socrates' project as an instructor of virtue. Donohue argues that "Cephalus is given a role which enables Plato to pay homage to his mentor while simultaneously signaling a clear break with the philosophical outlook of Socrates."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Donohue, Brian. "The Dramatic Significance of Cephalus in Plato's *Republic*." *Teaching Philosophy* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, September 1997) S 9, 20(3), 240.

Donohue begins by highlighting the continuity between the last third of Plato's *Meno* and Book I of the *Republic*. Meno asks Socrates "can virtue be taught? Or is it teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?" (70a) Donohue notes that while Socrates concludes at the end of the *Meno* (an early dialogue) that virtue cannot be taught, one of the conclusions of the *Republic* (a middle dialogue) is that virtue can be taught. Donohue also mentions that Socrates initially responds to Meno's question by citing "four instances where prominent Athenian citizens who were universally recognized to be virtuous had sons who failed to emulate their fathers (94c-95e)." Although this counterexample is not perfect, Socrates uses it to conclude that virtue cannot be taught. Donohue points out that in fact virtue could be taught because Socrates "does not take into consideration the possibility that the sons of these prominent Athenians might have been bad students," and that this virtue might be taught to others, thus making the conclusion of the *Republic* possible. However, the argument does demonstrate that "Virtue cannot simply be a matter of genetic endowment passed down from father to son," i.e. that virtue is not possessed by nature.<sup>46</sup>

With this brief sketch of the *Meno* in hand, Donohue transitions to the *Republic* and his analysis of Cephalus' role. Although Cephalus' role in the dialogue is short, Donohue argues that "there is a subtlety in Plato's dramatic use of Cephalus that is both charming and instructive." Donohue uses the terms charming and instructive in a technical sense. The charm of Cephalus' role springs from Plato's use of Cephalus to represent dramatically Plato's own inheritance from Socrates and his move beyond Socrates. Socrates solicits from Cephalus a definition of justice that resembles the definition of virtue he proposes at the end of the *Meno*. Virtue and justice cannot be taught; they are the gift of the gods. Mortals can

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 241.

only pay homage to the gods as Cephalus has done before his appearance in the *Republic* and leaves to do again. Being wealthy allows one to make more sacrifices and being old cools the desires that lead to vice. Cephalus designates Polemarchus as heir to his argument and Donohue contends that this designation parallels Plato's own transition:

I find this to be a charming passage because we have here the symbolic philosophic transition from Socrates to Plato. Cephalus represents belief espoused in the *Meno* that virtue cannot be known and Polemarchus represents the confidence of Plato in his own original theory. Thus, the remark that Polemarchus inherits the responsibility for the argument constitutes a Platonic homage to Socrates. Plato serves notice that he is building on the foundation laid by his mentor, Socrates. Hereafter, in Plato's dialogues, the philosophic position expressed by Socrates unquestionably is that of Plato.<sup>47</sup>

Donohue finds this occasion to be symbolic and charming, but he astutely cautions that while it represents a turning point in Plato's thought and in the dramatic presentation of Socrates, a precise, "surgical separation" between Socratic and Platonic philosophy would be impossible and unwise.

However, Cephalus also performs an instructive role in the dialogue by dramatically representing "justice in terms of religion" and "justice in terms of social role." As a representative of justice in terms of religion, Cephalus anticipates Socrates' conclusion that the virtuous life is the good life because "The very success of his life, coupled with his aversion to vice, at least proves that one need not be immoral to be happy." However, he also represents "the limitations of the religious role in the pursuit of justice." Cephalus' lack of knowledge about the nature of justice "impairs the effective moral instruction of the next generation." He can only recommend that his son imitate his behavior by engaging in similar religious practices. Because of its fragility, "the religious role may not be able to sustain itself through time in the absence of a knowledge of justice. Indeed, this may be how Plato viewed the moral decay of Athens, a decay that climaxed in the trial and execution of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 244.

Socrates.”<sup>48</sup> As a representative of justice in terms of social role, Donohue contends that the definition of justice presented by Cephalus and the versions of justice teased out of it by Polemarchus anticipate the different conceptions of justice as understood by the artisan, guardian, and philosopher classes.<sup>49</sup>

Cephalus symbolizes intergenerational conflict, and Donohue argues that Plato uses Cephalus dramatically to commemorate his own break with Socrates. Donohue describes Cephalus’ role more charitably than does Steinberger, yet less charitably than does McKee. This mean position depicts Cephalus in a more human and philosophically engaging light, because it forces one to consider how Plato might be using Cephalus dramatically. If Cephalus represents the conventional political life and Socrates represents the philosophical life, then McKee suggests that Plato makes a break from both of these options. This conception of Cephalus’ exit opposes Steinberger’s view that Cephalus is the antithesis of the philosophical life by suggesting that even Plato departs from the pure philosophical life represented by Socrates. In the previous chapter I took note of Wallach’s suggestion that the Platonic political art seeks to balance the demands of *ergon* and *logos*; thus this scene can be read as Plato’s attempt to strike a balance between the options represented by his political father, Ariston, and his philosophical father, Socrates. Plato chooses a project that is political and philosophical. He chooses to write a philosophical dialogue about a political topic and he chooses to found an Academy. Writing and teaching represent philosophical action, but they are also political actions that shape the *polis*. Viewing Cephalus from Donohue’s perspective helps us to see the character dramatically as conceived by Wolz; he expresses a dynamic tension, rather than a single theme. Because he inherits his father’s argument we should also

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 246-247.

recast our reading of Polemarchus in terms of the motif of intergenerational conflict and in terms of Plato's attempt to reconstruct his own experience of the tension between *ergon* and *logos*.

Carl Page constructs a pensive and thorough portrait of Polemarchus. He titles his article "The Unjust Treatment of Polemarchus" to underscore his dissatisfaction with the conventional two-dimensional sketches of Polemarchus as intellectually incompetent and potentially authoritarian. Page realizes that some evidence supports this negative assessment of Polemarchus, but he takes seriously Socrates' endorsement that he and Polemarchus "shall do battle, then, as partners, you and I" (335e). Page contends that "the injustice Polemarchus has suffered, is not so much at the hands of Socrates, but at the hands of those readers of the *Republic* who have been mesmerized by the charm of Socratic elenchus and the lofty construction of Book II and beyond."<sup>50</sup> Page views Polemarchus as a representation of the typical political gentleman who would occupy most leadership roles in a well functioning government. While his concepts of justice lack substantial philosophical reflection, Polemarchus' commitment to friendship constitutes the form of loyalty necessary for the guardian class. However, a philosophical transformation of Polemarchian friendship must occur if the philosopher and the political gentlemen are to become allies. Both the philosopher and the politician love the *polis*, but the philosopher must help the political gentleman overcome his fear of the unfamiliar for this transformation to occur. Page describes six phases in this process of transformation.

First, Page addresses Polemarchus's initial appearances in the dialogue. He begins by pointing out the "extra-dialogical circumstances with which Plato's readers would have been

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<sup>50</sup> Page, Carl. "The Unjust Treatment of Polemarchus." *History of Philosophy Quarterly*. (North American Philosophical Publishers) J1 90, 243.

intensely familiar.”<sup>51</sup> Socrates and Polemarchus share the same fate, in that both interlocutors were sentenced by different political regimes to drink hemlock, and Socrates mentions

Polemarchus prior to his death scene in the *Phaedrus*:

The dramatic date of the *Republic* has not been definitively agreed upon, but on the basis of 368a, where it is mentioned that Glaucon and Adeimantus have, prior to their conversation recorded in the *Republic*, distinguished themselves in battle at Megara, scholars give either 411 or 421. Both dates put the conversation several years before Polemarchus’s execution at the hand of the Thirty Tyrants in 405. He was executed for his part in attempting to re-establish democracy. Thanks to the eloquence of his younger brother, Lysias [who is also present in the *Republic*], the public significance of Polemarchus’s death would have been well known to any contemporary reader of the *Republic*. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the very appearance of Polemarchus throws the shadow of his death over the whole opening of the *Republic*. And of course, Polemarchus’s death would not have been the only one on the mind of Plato’s readers, for Socrates was to be executed by the restored democracy only a few years after the execution of Polemarchus. The political irony is almost perfect, but the point to which I would draw attention is that in sharing the fate of unjust death at the hands of a deranged regime, a special link is to be discerned between Socrates and Polemarchus... but there is such a link also reinforced by Socrates’ apparent stray remark in the *Phaedrus*, to the effect that “Polemarchus is turned toward philosophy” (257b3-4). Evidently Polemarchus has a more positive relation toward philosophy than his reputation as conventional and simple-minded would suggest.<sup>52</sup>

Page uses the similar aspects of Socrates’ and Polemarchus’ death to reinforce his conclusion, whereas he uses Socrates’ reference to Polemarchus in the *Phaedrus* only to dispel the conventional assessment of Polemarchus as naive and unreflective. But the comments also color his examination of Polemarchus’ depiction at the beginning of the dialogue.

Page suggests that one must attend to the ambiguity of the invitation that Polemarchus extends to Socrates. Polemarchus coerces Socrates by referring to the size of his gang, an implication of violence, yet he delivers this threat in jest and quickly supports Adeimantus’s attempts to persuade Socrates. Page believes there are “several layers of meaning to be discerned in the episode of Polemarchus’s counterfeit tyranny.” First, this confrontation

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 244-245.

where different desires are in conflict among a group of primarily congenial acquaintances is “a concrete illustration of the sort of situation to which justice is precisely relevant.” The scene also discloses Polemarchus’ “authoritarian attitude” as “the scion of a wealthy household” who is accustomed to getting his way and commanding others. But most importantly, the scene demonstrates his potential to be either tyrannical or philosophical. Page contends that as a “bearer of political power” Polemarchus’ “genuine power is the power of conventional politics, a power that cannot fail to acknowledge the necessity for persuasion, compromise, and accommodation.” Polemarchus, the political gentleman, has the potential to become an ally of Socrates, the philosopher, because he has this power at his disposal, and Page emphasizes that there is no fundamental reason that would make politics “irremediably hostile to philosophy.” As Page suggests earlier, Polemarchus’ abduction of Socrates could be warranted by the legitimate desire to learn something from Socrates or from the fact that Socrates has socially slighted Polemarchus by trying to leave Piraeus without saying hello.<sup>53</sup> I suggest that Polemarchus’ reasons for abducting Socrates might be less altruistic, such as a desire for Athens’ prized sophist to perform at his high profile social event. But Page wants to avoid reading Polemarchus as motivated only by selfish desire, and his emphasis on ambiguity gives more credence to Plato’s talent for dramatically presenting Polemarchus as a complex character.

In the next phase of his essay, Page describes Polemarchus as politically decent and argues that while Socrates must “confound” his definition of justice, because of “certain political inadequacies” he does not refute it. Instead, Socrates transforms his definition “to persuade Polemarchus that philosophy itself does not need to be held in suspicion by the city, construed as a decent association directed towards the common good.” Readers should

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 245-249.

admire Polemarchus because he willingly inherits his father's argument; in fact Page suggests that his act is "dutifully and perhaps honourably self-sacrificial." This filial loyalty reveals Polemarchus' decency, and Page notes also that his "views on justice will turn out to be richer than his father's," because his concept is based on the deeper virtue of friendship, whereas his father is content to view justice in terms of impersonal "legalistic and commercial" relationships. This loyalty is evident in Polemarchus' uses of poetry to support his accounts of justice. Page argues that "Polemarchus defends tradition, not simply because it is tradition, but because tradition does, to some extent, encode valuable wisdom that should not lightly be set aside." This awareness of the value, rather than the authority of tradition, accompanied by his willingness to defend, yet depart from, his father's view of justice demonstrates that while Polemarchus is a gentleman and product of the *polis*, he possesses an awareness and a reflective capacity that is potentially philosophical.<sup>54</sup>

Page explicates Polemarchus' understanding of justice in terms of "friendship and belligerence." He feels that this conception is interesting because Polemarchus' "political world is not first and foremost a world of nation states, but a world that is primarily defined in terms of personal relations and the circles of inclusion and exclusion they create."

Polemarchus views justice as the willingness to defend family, friends, and countrymen whenever they are attacked, which Page sees as "both loyal and patriotic and lends a certain dignity to the justice he pursues."<sup>55</sup> Page also presents an interesting contrast between the type of belligerence Polemarchus represents as opposed to other types of belligerence that occur in the dialogue:

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 249-252.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 252.

The circles of our original and natural commitment are not the most comprehensive ones and so to the extent to which they become entrenched as truly one's own, to that extent the circle of one's own must become exclusive. In general, the willingness to talk to a circle of friends is already determined by a perception of otherness, and when otherness is perceived as a threat, then belligerence is the natural response. This does not make Polemarchus, thought, a war-monger. The latter stance, in fact, depends on the principle of what Hobbes called "glory," but this is not a principle that is clearly represented in Polemarchus's character. It belongs far more to the preserve of Thrasymachus and Glaucon, whose spiritedness, in both cases, is more intense and tends in much more selfish directions. There is a distinction to be made between what may be called defensive and imperialistic aggression, and Polemarchus represents the former. That is, his belligerence is expressed primarily in the *defense* of what he values, not its imposition... [justice's] virtue is primarily in the defense of goods already possessed, whether they be material goods or the goods of human association.<sup>56</sup>

Polemarchus values defensive belligerence as opposed to Glaucon and Thrasymachus who are willing to act aggressively to acquire advantages. Although Page does not mention it, the fact that Cephalus and Polemarchus manufacture shields symbolically supports defensive belligerence, and it might be helpful to distinguish the forms of belligerence that Thrasymachus and Glaucon represent. Given his desire to be paid before engaging Socrates and his participation in the overthrow of democracy at Cyme, Thrasymachus represents mercenary or revolutionary belligerence, whereas Glaucon's desire for luxuries in Book II alludes to his imperialistic belligerence.

Returning to Page's article, I note his contention that "expressed as friendship, there is something about the Polemarchian impulse that Socrates cannot simply or unqualifiedly criticize." Socrates realizes that ideally political gentlemen like Polemarchus fill the majority of leadership roles in well functioning governments, and since both the philosopher and the politician desire the good of the city, Socrates must "preserve the most cordial relations possible between Polemarchus and philosophy, between war as defensive aggression and

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 253.

wisdom.”<sup>57</sup> Socrates must philosophically educate Polemarchus to reveal the limitations of justice as friendship. He must learn that philosophy and politics are allies, not enemies—a lesson parallel to the education of the Guardians:

The natural vigor of Polemarchus’s original distinction, and the belligerence that is its inevitable concomitant, is reflected precisely in the nature of those dogs that become, later in the *Republic* a model for the nature of the Guardians. They are intensely loyal and become angry at those whom they happen not to know, even if they have suffered no ill-treatment by those same people (376a). . . The profoundest problem with Polemarchian friendship is not so much that it deals unjustly with enemies or non-friends, but that it deals unjustly with *what it does not understand*. In convincing Polemarchus that a truly just man could never harm anyone, Socrates has persuaded him to be more circumspect about what is not, literally, familiar. In particular, Polemarchus will be more well disposed to the outlandishness of philosophers. To appreciate the relevance of this lesson, it need only be recalled that Socrates himself will soon be executed by his fellow citizens. There needs to be more spiritual generosity in the political community than is allowed by the exclusivity of Polemarchian friendship; in other words, there needs to be less barking at what one does not know.<sup>58</sup>

Once Polemarchus learns that the eccentricities of the philosopher are beneficial to the city, not threatening, the politician and the philosopher can become allies in the defense of the city. By allying with Polemarchus, Socrates acknowledges the reality and importance of love of ones own. As Page points out, “Socrates himself participates to a certain degree in this love of one’s own, for we see him intensely interested in the educative affairs, if not the overtly political ones, of Athens, and almost never leaving its immediate vicinity (unlike the cosmopolitan sophists).” Yet, Socrates the philosopher transcends these familial loyalties and appreciates the unfamiliar as demonstrated by his reason for being in Piraeus, to witness a new religious festival. Polemarchus learns this lesson, and if we take seriously Socrates’ comment in the *Phaedrus*, he eventually turns towards philosophy. Page concludes by saying that the mutual enemy of Socrates and Polemarchus is “in a single, but multifaceted word. . .

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 260.

selfishness or, what amounts to the same thing, all degenerate forms of individual autonomy.”<sup>59</sup>

### *III. Reconstructing the Republic*

With the help provided by these scholars, a reconstruction of the *Republic* is now possible. Through the drama of the opening scene, Plato introduces two themes and an important motif: love, war, and intergenerational conflict. These three elements shape the development and the content of the dialogue. Cephalus, the first interlocutor and sponsor of the dialogue, represents each of these elements. In the twilight of his life, he confronts his own mortality and the life he has lived. He embodies the city-soul analogy and foreshadows both the natural history of regimes and the Myth of Er. Plato presents an ambiguous dramatization of Cephalus. There are reasons to suspect that he represents a conventional form of justice and reflection that should be respected even though it is inadequate in comparison with the reflective life of the philosopher. There are equal reasons to objectify him as the antithesis of the philosophical life and the greatest threat to justice. Given the account of drama distilled from Randall and Wolz, I prefer to leave this tension unresolved. Like most fathers, Cephalus possess virtues and vices; confronted by his mortality, he is reviewing his life. He asks the questions that all men must eventually ask, have I lived a life worth living and what will be the consequences of my life? Only Cephalus can answer this question; the dramatic devices of the Natural History of Regimes and the Myth of Er stimulate speculation about Cephalus’ fate, but also about the fate of the other interlocutors and our own.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 261-263.

As a wealthy patriarch, Cephalus might appear to be an example of the good life. Cephalus and Socrates function as role models for the young interlocutors. They must choose between the life of ease and the examined life. Polemarchus represents the other side of this intergenerational dynamic. Carl Page illustrates how Polemarchus has the capacity for either life. He does in fact inherit his father's wealth, the means of Cephalus' life of ease, yet Socrates declares in the *Phaedo* that he has turned toward philosophy. He has the passion to begin the dialogue in earnest, yet his coercion of Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue may reveal him as an entitled youth capable of backing up his light hearted threat. Again, this ambiguous characterization allows Plato to use Polemarchus as a dramatic representative of intergenerational conflict; he has the potential for either way of life, meaning that Socrates might turn him toward the philosophical life. Like Cephalus, he inspires reflection about the other interlocutors: are they capable of the philosophical life and what will be the political consequences of the lives they choose to live?

Polemarchus reinforces the fact that while the interlocutors might be privileged, headstrong, or overzealous, they are still impressionable and Socrates uses the themes of love and war pedagogically and experimentally to demonstrate the value of the philosophical life to each interlocutor. As Page points out, Polemarchus represents the loyalty of the guardians and is a prime candidate for the philosophical life. He and Socrates become allies when Socrates teaches this guardian not to fear the eccentricities of philosophy. With Thrasymachus, Socrates becomes more combative. He holds his ground in the face of Thrasymachus' outbursts and calmly refutes his arguments until the young man perspires and blushes (350d). Glaucon proves more difficult, and Socrates' requires several waves of

conversation to satisfy his Eros and timocratic longings (see Book II 372d). With each interlocutor Socrates must modify his pedagogical strategy according to their interests.

These modifications constitute his experimental pedagogy; however, the construction of Kallipolis serves as the best example of how Socrates constructs a protreptic argument (to use Smith's term) for the philosophical life. Socrates' interlocutors are all privileged young Athenian men; they would be the guardians of Kallipolis. Like most youth, they are obsessed and fascinated with the two themes outlined in this chapter: sex and violence. The rigidity, censorship, and control that offend contemporary readers serve the purpose of educating and disciplining these young men so that they might direct their urges towards something constructive: either the defense of the city or philosophy. If these young men want justice they must cultivate philosophical reflection or else they will become slaves to their desires. As Roochnik illustrates, Glaucon's lust for luxuries motivates the construction of Kallipolis, and his interlocutors balk when Socrates makes suggestions that curtail the privileged life to which they are accustomed. Given the paradox between Kallipolis and the *Republic* and the subsequent implication that the *Republic* celebrates democracy, it follows that a direct advocacy of democracy would not interest Socrates' interlocutors.

As Smith suggests about Aristotle, Socrates presents the arguments that have the best chance of convincing his interlocutors. He must assess his students' interests and direct them toward the life of philosophy. Naturally, young aristocrats fear the rule of the masses and would be reluctant to surrender their social privileges for the sake of justice and philosophy. Socrates must construct an argument that has the potential to convince his interlocutors. If he began with a defense of democracy and an explicit critique of his audience's lifestyle, Socrates' chances of success would plunge dramatically. Furthermore, the themes of war and

the motif of intergenerational conflict in the opening scene underscore the fact that Socrates addresses a hostile, if superficially congenial and jovial, audience. Polemarchus' arrest of Socrates emphasizes the fact that Socrates methods must be subtle if he wants to instill the value of philosophy and democracy in the souls of his interlocutors. As Polemarchus says "could you persuade us, if we won't listen?" (973c) Socrates knows that he must adapt his argument to his audience. He uses an experimental pedagogy to make his interlocutors listen. He reconstructs their Eros and their competitive nature to demonstrate their urgent need for philosophical reflection. Plato uses the dialogue to dramatize this experimental pedagogy by depicting the "restless, cooperatively inquiring" Socrates "trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield" (LW.5.154).

Furthermore, Plato's dramatic depiction of Socrates symbolizes Plato's attempt to reconstruct his public and private experiences. As Donohue point out, Socrates' interchange with Cephalus represents Plato's declaration of his intellectual independence from Socrates, but this interpretation only scratches the surface of the scene's significance. The motif of intergenerational conflict allows Plato to dramatize the tension between *ergon* and *logos* addressed in the previous chapter. Cephalus represents the conventionally practical man of *ergon*, whereas Socrates represents the eccentric and subversive man of *logos*. While Plato prefers the life of the philosopher, this assertion of intellectual independence also demonstrates authenticity and attempts to merge *ergon* and *logos* into the Platonic political art. Steinberger demonstrates the shortcomings of Cephalus' lifestyle, but the retrospective irony of Socrates and Polemarchus exhibits the consequences of the philosophical life. Both men represent an affinity for democracy and philosophy and suffer unjust executions at the hands of corrupt regimes. They are executed by a democracy and a tyranny that refuse to

listen to their arguments. Plato adores *logos*, but he respects the demands of *ergon*. As the author of the dialogues and the founder of the academy, he embodies both the philosophical and the political life. In a just society, those in authority must incorporate philosophical reflection into the fabric of their political lives. They must rule for the benefit of the governed, not themselves, because the exploitation of power destroys the city and their souls. Governments function as expressions of moral relations; acts of injustice have personal and public consequences.

Plato also uses the motif of intergenerational conflict and the themes of love and war to reconstruct his contemporary public debate about the value of the Athenian and Spartan ideals. Steinberger astutely comments on how intergenerational conflict defined the years of cultural upheaval endured during fifth century Greece. He also contends that this conflict undermines conventional values that enable philosophical reflection. Randall and Wallach point out the identity crisis engendered by the Athenian defeat by Sparta during the Peloponnesian War that undermined Athenian faith in democracy. The Thirty Tyrants rise out of this democratic malaise, and if we understand democracy as only a numerical aggregate, the practical benefits of authoritarian, unified, and militant Sparta look irresistibly appealing. Plato dramatizes the themes of love and war to reconstruct the Athens-Sparta defense. Kallipolis appears to be a synthesis of the two: a disciplined militant society lead by a philosophical aristocracy, the union of *ergon* and *logos*. Yet, the love and war that enables Kallipolis also threatens it.

The political project fails because Kallipolis is untenable, but the ethical message of the dialogue about the benefits for a just soul through the practice of philosophy can be achieved. Through moral betterment and the responsible use of power more perfect societies

can exist, even if utopias cannot be constructed in practice. Sparta looks appealing and there are practical advantages of the Spartan ideal that might be incorporated into the city, but not at the cost of the benefits of Athenian democracy. Furthermore, we must remember that Athens won the first Peloponnesian War. The Athenian defeat came after the failure of the Sicilian expedition. Given that the education of the guardians attempts to control Glaucon's thirst for luxuries through the restriction of personal property, Plato suggests that democracy is sustainable if the imperial impulses, the political Eros, of the city can be controlled. Thus, Plato uses the dialogue to reconstruct his public and private experience through the dramatic representation of Socrates' experimental pedagogy. The *Republic* symbolizes Plato's attempt to synthesize the demands of the political and the philosophical life and to show how justice can be achieved only through personal integrity and the practice of philosophical reflection.

This pragmatic reconstruction of the *Republic* according to Plato's use of drama, experiment, and practice complies with the criterion and spirit of Dewey's "Back to Plato Movement." The reconstruction releases Dewey's Plato from the prison of Platonism and from received interpretations. When read from this perspective, the *Republic* shows Plato engaged in a pragmatic style reconstruction of his own experiences that resonates with Dewey's own understanding of democracy. Some caution should be exercised to avoid anachronistic readings of Plato, but by attending to the function of drama, one sees democratic and pragmatic currents emerge within Plato's philosophy that exhibits significant continuity between Ancient thought, especially between Plato and American pragmatism.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

#### *I. Summary*

I conclude this dissertation by returning to the theme of reconstruction. In the introduction I cited Robert B. Talisse's account of Dewey's understanding of reconstruction.

I here cite it again:

The effort to reconstruct philosophy therefore must begin by taking a *genetic* approach to traditional philosophy. That is, the *sources* of the traditional problems arise *only if* we adopt a certain vocabulary and certain presuppositions which we have good reason to reject. As Dewey puts it, "we do not solve" the problems of traditional philosophy, "we get over them" (MW4:14). . .

A reconstructed philosophy does not pretend to somehow stand above the natural sciences; rather philosophy must *begin* with science. Again, the task of a reconstructed philosophy is to apply the methods of scientific investigation to social problems, "its aim is to become so far as is possible, an instrument for dealing with these conflicts" (MW12:94). A reconstructed philosophy is *scientific*.<sup>1</sup>

Reconstruction occurs in several phases. When attempting to understand and overcome immediate conflicts, one must begin, as Talisse argues, with a genetic return to the origin of the dominant philosophical concepts that shape current disputes. By understanding these concepts within their historical context, one sees how they once functioned as means of overcoming social and philosophical conflicts. Because those concepts were strategies designed to address historical problems, they may not be useful in addressing current problems.

Contextualizing these concepts enables appreciation of them as innovations from which we might learn. We might be able to adapt the lessons of the past to address problems

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<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Talisse, *On Dewey*. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth\Thomas Learning, 2000).

of the present. Throughout his corpus, Dewey applies the concept of reconstruction, as a means of problem resolution, to nearly every area of human endeavor. My dissertation focuses on reconstruction as the process of adapting traditional sources of philosophical inspiration to address the problems of my private and public experiences. The dissertation reconstructs both Dewey's reading of Plato for the purpose of obtaining a pragmatist interpretation of the *Republic* and a pragmatic reconstruction of Plato's *Republic* for the purpose of articulating and resolving my private and public dilemmas. Here I summarize the conclusions of the previous chapters by presenting them as examples of reconstruction.

In chapter two, I reconstructed Dewey's reading of Plato by attempting to overcome the received pragmatist view of Plato as the source of the Spectator Theory. At first blush, Dewey and Plato appear to differ on major philosophical issues, specifically issues of epistemology, metaphysics, and politics. Yet, the quotation from "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" shows that, despite these differences, Dewey believes that the dialogues are relevant to contemporary philosophy. Anton and Anderson contend that while Dewey frequently writes polemically about Plato, there is an undeniable affinity between the two. By returning to several essays by Dewey where he is less polemical toward Plato, I sought to make those affinities apparent.

For instance, Dewey agrees with Plato's suggestion that governments are more than political institutions, that they represent an understanding of moral relations. Dewey does not criticize Plato's praise of aristocracy because Dewey views it as Plato's expression of the Greek moral ideal. Instead, Dewey criticizes contemporary proponents of aristocracy, specifically Sir Henry Maine, who exploit Plato's authority to justify their low assessments of modern democracy. These contemporaries fail to see how democracy has become a robust

moral institution during the centuries since Plato. By championing Plato's critique of ancient democracy they miss Plato's more significant innovation: that governments are an expression of the values of their citizens. Dewey, in contrast, takes this insight from Plato and uses it to demonstrate how the ethics of democracy are more desirable for individuals and the state than the ethics of aristocracy. Dewey reconstructs Plato's political insight in light of his own contemporary context.

While Dewey may disagree with some of Plato's conclusions, his polemics are directed at modern interpretations that anachronistically impose contemporary philosophical baggage on the dialogues. The dialogues will only reinforce the problems we have inherited from modernity, if critics continue to assert the necessity of these inherited modern interpretations. However, if scholars focus on the dialogues as Plato's ingenious and innovative attempts to reconstruct his public and private experiences of a *specific historical context*, the dialogues can inspire the creation of new innovations to present problems. As Dewey's essays demonstrate, the dialogues are a product of Plato's desire to reform Athenian society. The dialogues were written for a specific practical purpose: to force his readers to think critically about philosophical concepts and their practical effects upon society.

The dialogues can continue to fulfill this purpose if they are read dramatically, rather than systematically; they are invitations to reflect on our own social and philosophical problems, not collections of arguments, theories, and dogmas. In chapter three I reconstructed Dewey's understanding of drama, experiment, and practice to create a pragmatist hermeneutical approach to the dialogues. The chapter began with an attempt to orient Dewey's reading of Plato within the context of current paradigms of Plato scholarship. A tension emerged between "The 'Socratic' Dialogues of Plato" and "From Absolutism to

Experimentalism.” The former essay’s attempt to explain Socrates’ influence on Plato adheres to the developmental paradigm, whereas the latter’s emphasis on drama favors the literary paradigm. I contended that these two essays demonstrate what Brad Inwood referred to as “investigative pragmatism,” a mediated hermeneutical approach that attempts to remain faithful to the historical evidence, but is willing to embrace literary interpretations that increase insight into the text. Because it attends to the genetic context of the text for the purpose of grounding innovative interpretations that stimulate the current literary conversation about the dialogues, investigative pragmatism is a hermeneutical version of reconstruction.

The remainder of chapter three attempted to elaborate Dewey’s understanding of drama, experiment, and practice by taking up contemporary Plato scholars who adhere to their own forms of investigative pragmatism. John Herman Randall and his student Henry Wolz construct a literary approach to the dialogues within the developmental paradigm by focusing on Plato’s relation and contributions to Greek drama. David Roochnik and Thomas Smith present understandings of dialectic that focus on its experimental nature and the way skillful teachers tailor their conversations according to the needs of their students. Finally, John Wallach sees the dialogues as a product of Plato’s biography. Plato uses the dialogues to reconcile the desire to live a life of public political action and private philosophical reflection; put philosophically, they are an attempt to reconcile *ergon* and *logos*. Wallach also sees the dialogues as a product of the political and social upheaval that Plato was struggling to ameliorate.

From this investigation of drama, experiment, and practice a coherent picture emerges that depicts the dialogues as Plato’s dramatization of the philosophical life for the purpose of

social reform. Plato dramatizes his mentor Socrates as engaged in an experimental form of pedagogy that uses his interlocutors' interests to empower them to seek the benefits of philosophical reflection. The opening scene introduces the themes of love and war and Socrates' first pair of interlocutors, Cephalus and Polemarchus, represent the Greek motif of intergenerational conflict. Socrates uses the themes of love and war to empower his students to incorporate philosophical reflection into their lives. He uses the major metaphors and analogies of the *Republic* (The City-Soul Analogy, The Allegory of the Cave, The Natural History of Regimes, and the Myth of Ur) to teach his interlocutors that governments represent moral relationships between the City and the Soul, and that justice is the product of philosophical reflection and the responsible use of power rather than the result of a specific regime. Furthermore, Socrates adopts different pedagogical strategies with each of his interlocutors according to their interests and temperament. The continuity between individual and society and the emphasis on pedagogy guided by student interest cohere with Dewey's understanding of the relationship between pedagogy and politics. Dewey and Plato appear to disagree about the ideal form of this relationship, democracy or aristocracy, but scholars such as Roochnik make a compelling case that Plato and Socrates are supportive of democracy and that philosophy flourishes best in a democratic society. If one accepts Roochnik's democratic interpretation of Plato and the *Republic*, then Dewey and Plato share compatible conceptions of pedagogy and politics.

When one considers the motif of intergenerational conflict, other affinities between Dewey and Plato become apparent. Plato dramatically depicts Socrates and Cephalus as father figures and uses them to stimulate his readers to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the lifestyles they represent, specifically the life of ease and the life of

philosophy. Would we rather be martyrs for the truth and drink hemlock or suffer from the guilt of living a life in pursuit of fleeting pleasures? Plato clearly favors Socrates, yet his use of drama and his ambiguous presentation of Cephalus as a foil forces his readers to reflect on the balance between the philosophical and the practical life. Plato's biography shows that he did not follow either path exclusively; rather he created a life that balanced *logos* and *ergon*. By placing the *Republic* within the context of Plato's biography and historical setting, one realizes that Plato chose to become a writer in order to reconstruct his own experiences of the philosophical and the political life so that he can reform Athenian society. This historical contextualization coupled with a dramatic interpretation of the *Republic* opens up the possibility that Plato's "highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn," that even the Divided Line and the Theory of the Forms might have been postulated for the pragmatic purpose of social reform or philosophical reflection, rather than asserted dogmatically as philosophical truth (LW.5.155).

When one considers the significance of the affinity between Dewey and Plato with regard to pedagogy, politics, and perhaps even metaphysics, the benefits are profound. First, it creates an alliance between Plato and American pragmatism. Both philosophies attempt to reconstruct the conflicts of their contemporary scene in order to achieve social reform. The two philosophies are not identical because each is a product of its specific historical context. Yet, affinities exist between these different traditions, and by focusing on areas of continuity, particularly those of pedagogy and politics, one sees their connection to Plato's historical context and they can serve as examples of successful problem solving strategies that might inspire new strategies or become adapted to our present situation. By acknowledging the pragmatist elements in Plato's philosophy, the source of the Western

philosophical tradition, one acknowledges also that Plato's philosophy is not antagonistic to American pragmatism; it is rather a rich source of funded experience and philosophical inspiration. Pragmatists should read and teach Plato from this perspective, and perhaps even Plato scholars can benefit by appreciating pragmatist interpretations of the dialogue.

## *II. Afterword*

This dissertation represents my own attempt to reconstruct my private and public experiences. Dewey's essay "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" coheres with my reading of the *Republic* as Plato's dramatization of the philosophical quest for manhood. Written near the end of Dewey's career, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" can be read as his philosophical life review. In the essay, he reconstructs formative events of his career and attempts to clarify important influences on his philosophy. He recommends a "Back to Plato Movement" as an invitation to his students to examine *the* formative figure of philosophy and to reconstruct the Platonic dialogues in light of contemporary public and private experiences. Although I am at the beginning of my career rather than the end, and more akin to the young interlocutors of the dialogue than its patriarchal figures Socrates and Cephalus, I feel comfortable using this chapter to reflect on the beginning of my philosophical career. A dissertation represents a professional coming of age for a philosopher, and this project is the culmination of my own attempt to reconstruct my public and private experiences.

The Allegory of the Cave is significant for me. My personal cave is a small Appalachian town in Eastern Kentucky. My family and I were members of the local Methodist church, but my grandfather (the most significant figure in my early intellectual development) was a closet Baptist who favored a dispensationalist interpretation of the Bible.

He was something like a religious guerilla. He felt called to challenge the complacency of the average person and to question the tenets of our denomination at every opportunity. I inherited two things from him. On one hand, I inherited a deep respect for a set of dogmatic principles (e.g. “God is not the author of confusion, there are simple answers to every question and a correct interpretation of the Bible.”) and on the other hand, an even deeper commitment to think critically and to be critical of my social context. A favorite scripture of his was 2 Timothy 2:15 “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” This verse would come to be dear to me also, but for different reasons.

Leaving the cave is a painful experience. The lessons that I inherited from my grandfather contained a paradox and when I went to college I began to feel this tension. My critical side was drawn to philosophy and my dogmatic side was able to co-exist with it for a few semesters while I read ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy. From Plato to Kant, philosophers all believed that absolute truth existed and could be discovered if we just thought hard enough. But I was also studying literature and history and I soon began to realize the cost of rigid dogmatic thinking. I found the poetry of T.S. Elliot and Wilfred Owen especially compelling. Their accounts of alienation and the horrors of WWI connected with an inner dread that when taken to their ultimate conclusion demonstrated that this search for foundational meaning might be bankrupt. Then my first existentialism course confirmed my dread. We began with Hegel and dissected his idealism while reading Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka and Dostoyevsky. I could not deny the validity of the existential critiques and furthermore I didn't want to deny them. I knew that clinging to a set of dogmatic principles and struggling to maintain their justification would be at best a comforting illusion.

Although I still gave lip-service to my inherited beliefs, I had lost my faith. But I had not lost my hope. I still believed that meaning existed, even if Truth did not.

My first brush with pragmatism was Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*; Rorty convinced me that pragmatism was the only viable philosophical position I could adopt in light of the existential critiques. So with my last few semesters at college I enrolled in Roger Ward's American philosophy seminar and shifted my focus to American pragmatism. At the time, Peirce and James did not work for me; I felt that they had a metaphysical-epistemological axe to grind. Only Dewey and Rorty offered something substantive. I identified with their criticism of capitalism and how it undermines the values of democratic society. I also read Marx and other social critics. Eventually, I developed a post-modern attitude, but subconsciously I was slipping into a nihilistic phase. I graduated from college and decided to take a year off to figure out what I want to do to with my life. I had a lot of fun indulging in the type of activities that a hip post-modern attitude condones, but I felt adrift.

After a year of this lifestyle, I had what I believe to be a genuine religious experience in the full Jamesian sense; a beautiful moment in which the inner tensions of my divided self were resolved in a moment of clarity and grace. It enabled me authentically to accept some of the beliefs of my childhood in a way that was compatible with my intellectual beliefs. Furthermore, this experience was noetic, and I realized that I wanted and needed to spend the rest of my life trying to communicate its content. But, religious experiences are also ineffable. My old conflict between belief and criticism has been replaced by a conflict between knowledge and communication. With the encouragement and assistance of Roger Ward, I enrolled in the graduate program at Baylor University. On the day I was scheduled

to leave for Waco, my grandfather died from renal failure. My Cephalus had left the mortal stage and, while it was tragic, this personal loss enabled and demanded the development of greater intellectual autonomy. The beginning of my graduate studies also coincided with the more public trauma of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the beginning of the Second Gulf War. Under the influence of my grandfather I also inherited a politically conservative world view. However, that world view had been eroding for some time, thanks to Rorty's liberal ironism, and without my political patriarch I became personally aware of contemporary issues, though I now viewed them through the lens of my emerging pragmatist perspective.

At Baylor, I struggled to find my philosophical voice and angle of vision. Several friends, colleagues, and professors provided the encouragement and guidance necessary for success, but I soon discovered that mainstream philosophy does not share my love for American pragmatism. My earliest projects defended the validity of pragmatism rather than exploring issues within American pragmatism, and searched for any sources that might validate my experiences. During this difficult time, the greatest source of personal and philosophical strength for me as well as others was the late Carl Vaught. Not only was Dr. Vaught willing to give of his time and resources, he also emphasized the continuity between existential life and philosophical research. He argued that there are four modes of philosophical discourse (narrative, analysis, systematic construction, and concrete reflection) and that each mode is philosophically significant.

Although I have not addressed Vaught's concepts of philosophical discourse explicitly, his ideas inform my treatment and inquiry. I began with a narrative account of Dewey's complex reading of Plato. Next, I analyzed the concepts of drama, experiment, and practice to construct a hermeneutical framework for reading the dialogues pragmatically. I

systematically applied this framework to the *Republic* to uncover Plato's use of the themes of love and war and the motif of intergenerational conflict to reconstruct his own public and private experiences. Finally, I here reflect on the source and significance of this pragmatic reconstruction. The source of this dissertation has been my own need to reconstruct my private and public experiences. My philosophical and professional coming of age has been shaped by the need to pay homage to my intellectual progenitors (My grandfather, Vaught, Dewey, and Plato) by bringing their thoughts together in a novel and authentic way.

As implied by my brief intellectual biography, the motif of intergenerational conflict characterizes my intellectual development and the present reconstruction of my private experiences. I sympathize with Steinberger's suggestion that the drama of the *Republic* might spring from the absence of Plato's father. Like Plato's Ariston, my father's contribution to my intellectual development is characterized primarily by absence and estrangement. My father is a man at war with himself and tyrannized by his desires; he is now working on his fourth marriage and I am not the only abandoned product of his Eros. He has survived by being a grifter, and the only "words of wisdom" I recall him imparting to me—"Son, once you learn how to fake sincerity, everything else is easy"—echo the Ring of Gyges passage. Ironically, after not speaking to him for several years I have begun to write this chapter on learning that he has recently survived extensive heart surgery. No doubt my personal reconstruction of intergenerational conflict will continue as a recurring motif in the wake of this event; perhaps a life review in the face of my father's mortality will enable amelioration. My completion of this present reflection is a therapeutic articulation of this personal struggle.

In *The Quest for Wholeness*, Vaught refers to the perpetual adolescence of the philosopher, and I believe this reference expresses my need for philosophy. In the absence of a father, the love of wisdom may provide a refuge for young men who need direction. Every young man and woman requires philosophical reflection to become an adult, but for the orphaned the necessity of philosophy is more apparent. Plato correctly asserted that everyone desires the good life, but without a sufficient role model one finds oneself desperately seeking for an adequate substitute. Philosophy provides a necessary means of distinguishing between the lives represented by Cephalus and Socrates; the troubled life of the unreflective democratic man dedicated to ease and the difficult yet rewarding life of the philosopher dedicated to the good. More importantly, philosophy helps impressionable youth avoid the pernicious forms of individualism Dewey condemns and the predatory causes that Josiah Royce warns against.<sup>2</sup> Inevitably, this testing and imitation of role models cause one to consider one's own significance as a role model. This self-reflection initiates one's pragmatic return to the cave and influences one's actions as a parent, advisor, and teacher.

The simplicity and stability of dogma and convention tempt us out of concern for the well being of others to codify our experiences and to insist upon their necessity. As Dewey points out, the world shifts from the stable to the precarious without warning, and pedagogy that indoctrinates fails to prepare youth for the challenges of their generation; they inherit the sins of their fathers. Pedagogy must inspire and empower the youth so they can reconstruct the wisdom of the past to negotiate the problems of the future. Therefore, we must remain skeptical of any academic, religious, or political regime willing to sacrifice innovation and diversity for specialization and conformity. I believe that the pedagogy I describe in this

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<sup>2</sup> I am referring to ideas found in John Dewey's *Individualism Old and New* and Josiah Royce's *The Philosophy of Loyalty*.

dissertation comports with ideas put forward by current pragmatist scholars, specifically Thomas Alexander, Kerry Burch, and Jim Garrison, who also argue that we must take seriously areas of continuity between Plato and Dewey, specifically the role of eros within democratic education.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation seeks to show how Socrates uses eros pedagogically towards democratic ends in the dialogue that has been cited historically as a defense of aristocracy and even totalitarianism.

These reflections intimate the public significance of this reconstruction. During the tenure of my graduate studies, America has endured major cultural upheaval not unlike fourth century Athens. Our president is the son of a former president and has inherited his father's political challenges. The motif of intergenerational conflict and its political significance within the *Republic* are directly applicable to our current political situation. As the primary superpower after the end of the Cold War, America resembles the Athenian hegemony after the defeat of Persia. On the pretext of spreading democracy and the noble lie of weapons of mass destruction, America invaded the resource rich country of Iraq, an action parallel to the Athenian attempt to expand its empire by coming to the defense of its democratic allies in Syracuse via the Sicilian expedition. Our contemporary connections to the *Republic* strengthen when we consider its influence on the dominant political ideologies of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. As Shadia B. Drury points out, the current administration and its think tank, the Project for a New American Century, adhere to a militant and imperialistic Straussian interpretation of politics.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, Richard Rorty, a self

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Alexander, "Educating the Democratic Heart: Pluralism, Traditions, and the Humanities." *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. (1994-95) 13 (3-4), 243-259. Kerry T. Burch, *Eros as the Educational Principle of Democracy*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2000). Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros*. (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

proclaimed neo-pragmatist and liberal ironist, studied under Strauss while at the university of Chicago. In his intellectual autobiography “Trotsky and Wild Orchids,” he confesses that he tried to become a Platonist and failed to unite his public and private needs.<sup>5</sup> Strauss and Rorty, neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, are contemporary reconstructions of the Greek political debate between Sparta and Athens and are partly products of an inability to see Plato’s affinity for democracy.

A Deweyan reconstruction of the *Republic* addresses this current debate. Rorty views Dewey as one of his intellectual heroes, yet he boldly states at the beginning of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that the Platonic project to unite private needs and the public good in a single vision has failed.<sup>6</sup> Dewey never abandoned the attempt to unite private needs and the public good; the public good is part of the environment that sustains our private needs. As discussed in chapter two, Dewey sees Plato as the first philosopher to realize that forms of government represent webs of moral relations and that each individual citizen is continuous with the state as a social organism. When one reads the *Republic* in this way, one sees the search for the unity of public good and private need as part of the project of democracy. Furthermore, adopting this democratic reading of the *Republic* defends against Straussian interpretations which trade on the belief that only certain private needs, those of the aristocracy, can be separated from the pursuit of the public good. Plato need not suffer distortion at the hands of their interpretation. Democracy is a never ending, cooperative project to pursue the common good through private empowerment, not the division of political power among the masses. By reconstructing the *Republic*, Plato becomes an ally of

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Rorty, “Trotsky and Wild Orchids,” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) 9.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) xiii-xiv.

democracy and the dialogues become a source of inspiration for our personal and public, and our philosophical and political, strivings for a more perfect union.

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