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## ***Plato's Paragon of Human Excellence: Socratic Philosopher and Civic Guardian***

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Literary and analytical approaches to the study of Plato have seldom converged in anything resembling a consensus. But recent proponents of these divergent modes of interpretation do concur in finding a number of anomalies in the *Republic's* portrait of the philosopher king. These anomalies, if authentic, would suffice to discredit the dialogue's paragon of human excellence, leaving readers to wonder whether Plato himself could have believed in the existence of any nonarbitrary standard of righteousness. Reexamining the textual evidence, I resolve these supposed anomalies and show that Socrates' account of the model ruler is both logically coherent and perfectly compatible with his own practice of philosophy. The philosopher king is a civic guardian in the most elevated or precise sense and also a genuine Socratic. But even this exalted harmonization of political and philosophical virtue does not constitute the "greatest lesson" of *The Republic*. That designation is reserved for a still loftier and more desirable good, in relation to which the philosopher king himself stands as a mere stepping-stone.

Socrates' "philosopher king" is perhaps our civilization's most venerable symbol for the resolution of opposing claims of policy and principle, convention and nature, the world and the divine. The prospect of such a resolution cannot fail to strike a chord of sympathetic interest in any human being concerned with the question of how best to live. Yet that chord is not easily sustained. Not knowing precisely whom Socrates means when he cites "philosophers" as fit leaders for our political communities, one might suppose that he means men and women who exhibit a peculiar interest in abstractions. And who today would not balk at the domination of abstract theorizing over political practice? Of course, one might reply that any untoward influence exerted by abstract thinking is rooted in the very imbalance that Socrates' philosopher king is postulated to resolve. But then one must show that this postulation is credible. To be credible, Socrates' account of the philosopher king must at least be internally consistent. In the past, this consistency seems to have been taken for granted. But many readers of Plato's *Republic* today point to the existence of important anomalies in the dialogue's account of the philosopher king. If authentic, these anomalies would suffice to discredit *The Republic's* paragon of human excellence, leaving us to wonder whether Plato himself possessed adequate grounds to believe in the existence of any nonarbitrary standard of righteousness.

Some readers even suggest that Plato deliberately planted evidence discrediting *The Republic's* philosopher king. Nichols (1984; 1987, 109–22), for example, maintains that Plato introduces the philosopher king into *The Republic*, not as a guide and touchstone for the reformation of human affairs, but precisely as a *dramatic foil* to Socrates.<sup>1</sup> She makes her case by arguing that it is “spiritedness,” rather than an erotic desire for better understanding, that predominates in the soul of *The Republic's* philosopher. Spiritedness, in this conception, represents a relentless impulse toward mastery over anything that threatens one's sense of one's own completeness, especially threats stemming from the due claims of heterogeneity or diversity (1987, 92–5). The “spirited philosopher” of *The Republic* is to be understood, then, as a symbol of despotic repression rather than as an agent or model for political amelioration. The communistic regime of Socrates' model city turns out to be only the most obvious policy implication of the despotic tendency of spiritedness. Nichols detects spiritedness more insidiously at work in the city's mathematical curriculum, which provides the cornerstone of its philosopher king's higher education. For Nichols, mathematics is especially problematic. The formality of mathematics, she says, “depreciates the complex objects available to experience,” so that the mathematically educated philosopher king will be “concerned primarily with abstractions” (1984, 259). Socrates himself, of course, is motivated not so much by the impulse of spiritedness as by the desire for better understanding. He warmly embraces the heterogeneity and diversity upon which spiritedness pronounces its mathematical anathema. Hence, Nichols concludes that Socrates' account of the philosopher king is fundamentally incompatible with his own practice of philosophy. “Socrates himself,” she says, “is the antithesis of the spirited philosopher of the *Republic*” (1984, 268).

Though he is more concerned with the logical than with the literary elements of Plato's dialogue, Steinberger (1989) also notes difficulties in Socrates' depiction of the philosopher king. He identifies certain discontinuities in *The Republic's* account of ruling, which indicate that the very concept of a philosopher king is internally inconsistent. Steinberger holds that philosophy cannot be construed as a *technê* or craft, yet he finds that it is precisely as a craft that Socrates understands ruling (1989, 1208, 1212–13). As a consequence, he maintains that the model city's curriculum of music and gymnastics, insofar as it is designed to

<sup>1</sup>Nichols follows Strauss (1964, 111–13, 127) and Bloom (1968, 408, 411) in finding dramatic irony in Socrates' depiction of the philosopher king and in the model city as a whole. She does not join them, however, in seeing in Socrates' city a reflection of the genuine superiority of the philosopher's way of life (cf. Bloom 1968, 371, 385–86; Strauss 1964, 115). So while Strauss and Bloom hold that Socrates unnaturally adapts his model city to the standards of philosophy, distorting—but thereby revealing the limits of—politics, Nichols maintains that Socrates unnaturally adapts the philosopher's education to the demands of politics, thereby distorting philosophy and producing a monster, the philosopher king. In either case, of course, Socrates' putative reconciliation of philosophical and political excellence is rejected.

produce such craftsman-like rulers, stands at odds with the genuine practice of philosophy (1989, 1219–22).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, because the craftsman-like rulers of the civic model that Glaucon wants to bring into existence must be distinguished from the philosophers whom Socrates subsequently acknowledges as “the most precise guardians” of the “beautiful city” or *kallipolis*, Steinberger concludes that these genuine philosophers have been “imported into the *kallipolis* from the outside” (1989, 1216).<sup>3</sup> Now, if genuine philosophers truly are exogenous to Socrates’ model city, the reader certainly confronts a paradox. Although Socrates first calls for philosophers to be made kings in order to bring existing political communities into closer compliance with his model city, he later conceives these philosophers to be an element of the model city itself. Because this alteration represents an amendment of the civic model, it implies that the pattern that Socrates’ philosopher kings were originally to consult in reforming existing cities is flawed, inasmuch as it does not itself include philosophers as rulers. But “if the original model was not sound,” Steinberger asks, “why should we believe that the reform is sound? And if the reform is not sound, why should it inspire a redrawing of the model?” (1989, 1217). Steinberger finds that “our most plausible reading, that the concept of the philosopher-king is simply read back into the *kallipolis* after the fact, in no way addresses this paradox” (1989, 1217). “Plato’s clear assertion, that the guardians of the *kallipolis* should also be philosophers, is in fact a logical impossibility” (1989, 1222).

It is remarkable when careful scholars employing two very different approaches to interpretation concur in calling into question so important an element of Plato’s presentation.<sup>4</sup> There are differences in the details of their renderings, to be sure. Nevertheless, each interpretation poses difficulties that cut to the heart of Plato’s intention in composing *The Republic*. And each interpretation

<sup>2</sup> Steinberger may be said to corroborate Annas’s (1981, 261–67) distinction between *The Republic*’s practical and contemplative conceptions of the philosopher, but he radicalizes the tension between these conceptions by assigning them to what he takes to be two entirely different entities, the city’s first rulers and the philosopher king of the *kallipolis*. So, in contrast to Irwin (1977, 183–85), who resolves this tension by arguing that Socrates in fact repudiates the craft-analogy in *The Republic*, or to Sprague (1976, xiii), who simply ignores it by portraying the philosopher king “as a man of art and science rather than as head of state,” Steinberger elaborates it to formulate a thought-provoking paradox.

<sup>3</sup> Note that Aristotle would support Steinberger’s objection; for he too suggests that Socrates introduces philosophers into his model city “from outside” (ἐξῶθεν, *Politics* 1264b28–1265a1, see Dobbs 1985a, 31–34).

<sup>4</sup> Remarkable, but not altogether surprising. Both approaches, after all, respect the discipline of *logos*. And both are scrupulous in the detection of textual inconsistency. Yet differences arise because the perception of inconsistency leads those sharing Steinberger’s more analytical approach to infer the presence of outright logical incoherence, while it allows others—who share Nichols’ more literary approach and uphold the logographic necessity of whatever occurs in a Platonic dialogue—to infer the presence of irony and multiple layers of exoteric and esoteric meaning. For my own part, I find the *postulate* of logographic necessity to be perfectly congenial. But I regard the precise determination of textual inconsistency to be an empirical question. It does not follow that passages are inconsistent merely because a given reader cannot reconcile them. As will soon be evident, I find much less inconsistency in *The Republic* than either Nichols or Steinberger claims to exist.

complements the other: while Steinberger holds that the elementary education of Socrates' best city is incompatible with genuine philosophy, Nichols calls the city's higher, mathematical education to task for the very same reason. Any student who desires to plumb the depths of Plato's intention with respect to education and politics must confront these difficulties, for they are by no means baseless.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, I agree with Nichols that a *bestial* spiritedness is incompatible with Socratic philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Yet I hope to show that the qualities of soul that Socrates ascribes to his philosopher king are perfectly compatible with his own practice of philosophy and with the mathematical curriculum he establishes for his civic guardians. I also agree with Steinberger that genuine philosophers must somehow be differentiated from the model city's original set of senior guardians.<sup>7</sup> Yet I hope to show that a philosophical element is present in the model city from the time of the initial recruitment of its guardians; that Socrates anticipates a place for these philosophers at the helm of this city as "rulers of the highest eminence"; and that this anticipation is expressly brought to fruition once he is able to declare openly what he was previously bound, by reasons of pedagogy, to leave unsaid: namely, that the model city's "most precise guardians" can be none other than Socratic philosophers.

### The Presence of Philosophy in the Model City

It is my contention, then, that the original model city of Books 2–5 and the subsequently identified *kallipolis*—the "beautiful city," which is ruled by mathematically educated philosopher kings—represent distinct, though coherent, stages in the development of Socrates' political paradigm.<sup>8</sup> From the outset,

<sup>5</sup>Hence it is not open to us to ignore these challenges and to rest secure in the bosom of an older consensus view that took the coherence of Socrates' philosopher king for granted. The best recent scholarship, both literary and analytical, has shown that consensus to be naive. One must either answer the objections raised by these scholars or dispense with the inspiration and guidance provided by Socrates' philosopher king.

<sup>6</sup>The text at 467e2–8, especially the phrase ἐφ' ἵππων . . . μὴ θυμοειδῶν, indicates the difficulty in supposing that a bestial spiritedness has any place amongst those engaged in theoretical pursuits (θεωροῦς, 467c5; θεάσονται, 467e5; see Dobbs 2000, 503–6).

<sup>7</sup>The necessity of this differentiation is implicit in Socrates' acknowledgment, at 434e4–435a3, that a genuine insight into human excellence waits upon one's discovery of "something different" (τι ἄλλο) in the soul from the qualities shared in common by the city's proto-rulers.

<sup>8</sup>Although this paradigmatic polity is described with increasing precision and refinement, it remains throughout—as Socrates testifies—one and the same (αὐτή, 497c5–d2; n.b. also the singular πόλει in 592a10–b1). Nevertheless, it is frequently held that the city whose institutional arrangements Socrates works out in Book 5 is in fact a different city from the so-called warrior city of Books 2–4. This view, it seems to me, is predicated upon a misconception of a remark, made later by Glaucon in Book 8, concerning Socrates' ability to speak *either* of a still finer city and man *or* about the city and man in a still finer manner (543d1–544a1). Its proponents, in other words, seem not to have noticed that Glaucon's word "finer" (καλλίω, in 543d1) can be construed not only as an adjective modifying "city and man" but also as an adverb modifying "being able to speak." Considering that

Socrates takes pains to recruit guardians for this model city who are both philosophical and spirited in nature (376b11–c7).<sup>9</sup> But it is certainly reasonable to wonder what becomes of the philosophical nature within these guardians. Could it be that the best city corrupts philosophy? Does its musical and gymnastic education develop martial spirit at the expense of the gentle love of wisdom? Do Socrates' "philosophical and spirited" guardians turn out to be nothing more than angry dogmatists by the time they are elevated, late in Book 3, to leadership positions? Socrates himself acknowledges that the merely habitual exercise of music and gymnastic does not of its own accord turn the soul toward being (521d13–522b2). He also admits that his initial selection of rulers is designed to recruit men who can be counted on to preserve a particular *dogma* or opinion (412d9–414a7; 502d4–503b5). Whence, then, come the philosophers of *kallipolis*? If it should turn out that the endogenous source for philosophers has been foreclosed by Socrates' civic institutions, we shall be compelled to agree that the philosophers of *kallipolis* are brought in from outside, and that the political paradigm of *The Republic* is, indeed, logically incoherent.

As we take up these questions, it will be necessary to pay very close attention to the philosophical element that has been incorporated within the city's guardian class at the time of its inception (375e9–376c6). Socrates' account of the destiny of this element is understated, but it becomes more explicit as his elaboration of the model city unfolds. We note with special interest that a deliberate culling out of rulers from among the city's guardian class is indicated on several different occasions in the course of the dialogue, each of which serves as something of landmark in the city's evolution (412b8–414a7, 458b9–460d11, 502d4–503b5). The interlocutors revisit the selection of rulers because their initial screening procedures, by design, are not terribly discriminating. Although Socrates recognizes an obligation to provide a proper, dialectically grounded division (*διαιρετέον*, 412b8–9) of rulers and ruled, he finds in the first selection that he must presuppose (*δεῖ ὑπάρχειν*) the good judgment of his most senior guards. Accordingly, it is the seniors who are chosen as the city's rulers (412c12; cf. 536c7–d1). This, of course, proves to be a merely provisional settlement. But it is necessary all the same, for by postponing the cross-examining of his own presupposition, Socrates provides a more compelling example of good judgment than is provided by his proto-rulers. By putting off a more incisive argument concerning the rulers' qualifications he avoids the danger, both to the civic community and to the best human nature, that accompanies the untimely practice of dialectic (497e5–498c4; 537e1–539a7). By taking dialectical examination off the table, however, Socrates leaves the interlocutors nothing more than a battery of practical trials to employ

Socrates responds to Glaucon's remark by saying that the youth has recalled what transpired "most correctly" (*ὀρθότατα*), it seems best to take *καλλίω* adverbially and understand Glaucon in a sense consistent with Socrates' own emphasis on the integrity of his civic model.

<sup>9</sup>Plato's works are cited here using the common Stephanus pagination. Translations are my own, rendering Burnet's edition of the Greek text (Oxford, 1900–07). Unless otherwise indicated, references are to *The Republic*.

in testing the city's guardians (ἔργα, 413c5–d2, cf. λόγος, 413b4–7; see Dobbs 1994a, 269). These practical tests are not without value, of course. They enable examiners to identify candidates who are especially good at upholding a certain, politically hygienic opinion—namely, that “one must do what is best for the political community” (412d9–412e8; 413c5–7; 502d4–503b5)—even when they are tempted or challenged by pleasures, pains, fears, and toils. Only these men show themselves to be “lovers of their country” (φιλοπόλιδάς, 503a1). But does it follow that this attenuated battery of tests poses an obstacle to the political recruitment of genuinely philosophical souls? How might we expect such souls to fare in these trials? Indeed, what kind or kinds of human being can be expected to survive this scrutiny? And how does this set of survivors compare with the set of rulers Socrates would have chosen if only he had been able to conduct a truly dialectical examination at the outset?

Although Socrates takes care to postpone the dialectical examination of his guardians, he does provide an indication of the kind of human being a more discerning examination would succeed in identifying. Such an examination, he suggests, would single out the “supervisor the city will need internally at all times, if its constitution is to be preserved” (412a9–10). In going on to describe this person, Socrates employs an astonishing array of superlatives. The person thus selected to rule would be one, he says, whom “we would most rightly deem most musical and most well-harmonized in the most complete sense of the words, for he or she [n.b. τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, 411e5] mixes gymnastic with music most beautifully, and applies them to the soul in the most measured way—far more so than someone who merely tunes strings to one another” (412a4–7). This truly superlative “soul-tuner” makes the finest use of the tandem arts of music and gymnastic to bring about the most fitting harmonization of the soul's twofold, spirited and philosophical, nature. Socrates recalls that it was for the sake of this harmonization of spiritedness and philosophy—and not for the cultivation of mere technical expertise—that the tandem arts of music and gymnastic were provided in the first place (410e5–412a2; 521d13–522b2). Of course, not everyone instructed in this pair of arts will receive the city's education in the best possible manner. Some, whom we may join Socrates in designating mere “string-tuners,” will receive this education purely as a technical accomplishment. Presumably, they will not remain among the guardians for long. Others, superior to the string-tuners, make a proper use of music and gymnastics—for soul tuning. But not all of these will do so in quite the superlative fashion Socrates has taken pains to describe. Even these somewhat less than superlative specimens, however, may be expected to develop into genuine noblemen, becoming literally beautiful and good (τὸν καλὸν τε καὶ ἀθὼν, 489e3–490a3) as a consequence of their education. But the *kaloi k'agathoi* are evidently not on a par with the superlative soul-tuners, who prove to be not merely beautiful and good but, indeed, the “most beautiful” and “best measured” of human beings. When Socrates makes his final selection of rulers, he will identify these superlative soul-tuners—the internal supervisors necessary to the preservation of the

constitution—as genuine philosophers (476a9–b2; 497c5–d2; 503a4–5). For now, though, he prescribes for the entire guardian class a much less exacting battery of examinations, which leave these philosophers, as they pass, undistinguished from other noble and good men.

Just what, then, does it take to survive the trials that Socrates prescribes here? Is there anything adverse to philosophy in the qualities necessary for success in such a venture? Well, evidently not. Socrates' preliminary trials are intended to disqualify any candidate who, when faced with pleasures, pains, fears, and toils, becomes persuaded that the same things are no longer “advantageous to the city and to himself” (ἐαυτῶ, 412d2–8). In other words, these trials are effective insofar as they force a choice *between* self-love and love of country. So, from the perspective of these trials, love of country actually constitutes a force *countervailing* the self-centered love of one's own. Moreover, because the examiners' scrutiny is conducted exclusively with reference to works (ἔργα) rather than to argumentation (λόγος), their trials introduce no temptation connected with the practice of dialectic. By deliberate design, then, Socrates withholds from the best of his guardians the one temptation that might lure even their generous spirits from a love of country. In the absence of this temptation, the philosophical nature will come to light precisely as a lover of country, thanks simply to its magnanimous contempt for the entire assortment of pleasures, pains, fears, and toils upon which the preliminary trials rely (see 485d6–486b9). The philosophical nature will remain impassive in the face of these carrots and sticks, not because it cares more for its own city than for anything else, but rather because it cares more for *something else*—something which can never be simply privately appropriated—than it cares for grasping the things specifically promised or threatened in the city's trials.

Not only is it the case that Socrates' most philosophical youths will come to light as lovers of their country, there is also nothing objectionable, for the time being anyway, in comparing them to noble puppies.<sup>10</sup> Socrates' notorious canine analogy, like the city's own screening procedures, is of course imperfect and ultimately inadequate. The analogy clearly fails to discriminate between lovers of learning (those drawn toward an intelligible but unfamiliar good) and mere lovers of knowledge (those attached in a more canine manner to that which is already known and so is familiar to them). But, although this shortcoming is important, it would be unwise to attempt to correct it prematurely. Such an attempt would be unwise because the canine analogy, like the city's preliminary screening procedures, is a ramification of the protective cocoon Socrates constructs to preserve the philosophical chrysalis from corruption. At this early stage of development, the attempt to employ dialectic to ferret out the true philosopher stands to damage the very nature it is meant to bring to light. As Socrates explains later, premature dialectic threatens not only to tear philosophical youngsters away from love of country; it also threatens to tear them away from genuine philoso-

<sup>10</sup> See Dobbs 2000, 496–508, for a detailed discussion of the scope and limits of Socrates' canine analogy.



phy. To engage in dialectic with youngsters before they have become “in any way measured” (*ὀπθοῦν μετρίους*, 538d3) is, accordingly, no less adverse to the interests of philosophy than it is to the interests of the city. Everything (*πάντα*), Socrates says, is designed in the model city as a safeguard against this risk (539d3–7).

But what, then, does it mean that Socrates himself makes a regular practice of cross-examining the youngsters with whom he comes into contact? Are the prescriptions laid down in the model city of *The Republic* somehow at odds with his own practice of philosophy? Well, surely not. Socrates lives in Athens, not in the model city. So he cannot count on the latter's institutional support for philosophical preservation and cultivation. The exigency of his situation—the tender age at which philosophical natures are forever corrupted by private and public sophists in an inferior regime (491a6–495b2)—is such that he must move more swiftly, and assume greater risks, than would be appropriate in the model city. But Socrates is not without safeguards of his own devising. Even in Athens, he can rely on his own rhetorical resources to guard his young interlocutors from lawlessness even as he draws them, by means of his *logoi*, toward philosophy. So, when he does employ cross-examination, he does so in a fashion diametrically opposed to the flattery he warns against in 538d1–3.<sup>11</sup> That is, he typically conducts his examinations not by “criticizing ancestral notions of right and wrong” but instead by deflating the windiness of his bloated interlocutors (*Theaetetus* 210b11–c5). This kind of scrutiny helps his interlocutors to become “in some way measured,” for it fosters in them a more measured estimate of themselves.<sup>12</sup> Such, as Socrates' own practice reveals, is the resourcefulness commanded by a kingly philosopher *outside* the best regime.

For the present, however, as Socrates admits, the city's screening procedures are simply not refined enough to sift out precisely the most musical and best harmonized souls among his guardians. A more refined (*καλλίω*) test will be needed for that purpose. But, in the meantime, even in the course of the city's preliminary trials, these superlative natures can be expected to hold their own.

<sup>11</sup> Socrates' ingenuity in this regard is displayed in his conversation with Polemarchus earlier in the dialogue. Bypassing Polemarchus' putative authority, Simonides, Socrates undertakes instead a searching examination of what Polemarchus *thinks* Simonides means when he says that justice is “giving to each what is owed.” Though Polemarchus is soundly refuted in the sequel, Simonides is not. (In fact, Simonides' definition survived well into the Middle Ages as the schoolmen's accepted definition of justice). Socrates thus manages to preserve ancestral authority at the same time that he directs his interlocutor toward genuine philosophy (see Dobbs 1994b, 673–80).

<sup>12</sup> Socratic inquiry is not at all at odds, then, with an interest in the welfare of other human beings. As Socrates himself divines, an understanding of the *eidē* of the just and noble themselves (*ἀντὰ*) requires careful attention not only to the good “itself by itself” but also to the good's presence among the many just and beautiful things (*δικαία τε καὶ καλά*, 506a4–7). Now among these many just and beautiful things, the finest and most beautiful of all to see—according to Socrates—is the harmonization of virtue in the human soul (402d1–4). We may infer, then, that philosophers must occasionally redirect their gaze back toward human affairs if they are to pursue even their own best interest (see Dobbs 1985b, 816–21).

They coexist and, from the perspective of the city's tests, remain undistinguished from the other city-lovers among the guardians. They remain, at the same time, completely uncontaminated by their surroundings, *like crystal immersed in water*. Yet, as we have seen, Socrates is perfectly aware both of the limitations of his screening procedures and the distinctiveness of the genuinely superlative nature of the philosopher. Because his initial recruitment of rulers does not single out exactly those human beings who are "the most musical and most well harmonized in the most complete sense of the words," he offers it, as he says, as a work "in outline, lacking in precision" (414a6–7). In consideration of Socrates' ultimate pedagogical goals—and thus the need to insulate youthful philosophers from premature exposure to argumentation—a more *precise* selection cannot yet be made. But, as we shall see, that selection will yet be made, and it will be made on the basis of an appropriately dialectical identification of the genuine philosopher.

### The Immanence of Eminent Rulers

It would appear that the model city must itself undergo further refinement before its need for more precise guardians can even be appreciated. Only then will the interlocutors be moved to refine their imprecise selection process and begin to glean rulers of a higher degree of eminence than those guardians of greatest seniority who are thus far taken to be wisest in the art of guardianship. The impetus for this further elaboration of the model city comes from Polemarchus and Adeimantus, who call on Socrates to elaborate an earlier suggestion that in the best polity civic guardians will have their women and children in common (449b1–451b8; 423e4–424a2). Socrates had already determined that private households are inconsistent with the guardians' civic charge, so an exclusivity of the marital partnership can hardly be recommended now (415a7–8, 458c8–d1, 416d3–420a7, 464b8–c4). Moreover, the good order of the city can hardly tolerate promiscuity, and a policy of celibacy would deprive the city of its most likely source of high-quality rejuvenation (458d8–e1, 415a7–b3). Socrates accordingly decrees that the guardians are not to engage in sexual intercourse for merely private pleasure but are to be bred eugenically, to provide the city with a steady supply of the best possible offspring (460b1–5). To this end, "all the women belong to all the men in common, and none is to cohabit with any privately. The children must also be common, and no parent is to know which offspring is his own, nor is any child to know his parent" (457c10–d3).

Once he has laid down this law, Socrates immediately stipulates a *new selection* of rulers, rulers, as he now says, who are "worthy of the name." This phrase may be taken as meaning that the rulers Socrates now has in mind are no longer rulers in the merely nominal sense resting upon the untested presumption of their superiority in judgment, but are in fact distinguished by an excellence relevant to the government of the extraordinary partnership he now envisions. "If there are going to be rulers worthy of the name," Socrates says, "and likewise auxiliaries

for them, the latter will be willing to do what is ordered and the former will do the ordering—obeying the laws themselves in some cases and imitating them in as many others as we shall turn over to them” (458b9–c4).<sup>13</sup> Here, for the first time Socrates recognizes a class of rulers *within the city* to whom the interlocutors will turn over their own responsibilities as civic founders. It is one thing, of course, to stipulate such a selection and yet another to carry it out and specify the identity of the rulers themselves. Who, after all, is equipped to act as eugenic shepherd over human beings? Where we are given a more limited government, we might contentedly embrace a lower standard in selecting political leaders. But when we are given Socrates' endorsement of communism, the need to search for the most extraordinary rulers is irresistible. *Even Socrates marvels*. “Wow! How fierce, then, is our need for rulers of the topmost eminence!” (459b10–11).

The explicit identification and institution of these rulers is again postponed (458a5–b4, 502d4–503b5), and yet Socrates once again provides some revealing indications of their character. Most importantly, Socrates speaks of the rulers' use of deception in governing the auxiliaries. For example, the rulers will have to rig lotteries to conceal their hand in matchmaking so disappointed lovers will blame bad luck instead of them. They will also need to employ deception in caring for the newborns. They will remove the offspring of good parentage to a separate part of the city, where, disguised from their mothers and fathers, they may be cared for. There will be need of further deception to conceal the fate of the offspring of inferior parents, as well as any infants suffering serious defects (460c1–5). To keep all these matters hidden, Socrates says, the rulers will have to employ a throng of *medicinal* lies—lies told not for the convenience of the deceiver but rather for the benefit of the deceived. It is clear, then, that Socrates' new rulers must constitute a different class from the city's original cohort of senior guardians. The original cohort, among whom the truly superlative passed undistinguished, certainly shared a firmness of conviction that one must do what seems best for the political community despite private experiences of “pain, pleasure, fear, and toil.” But the prudence of this class as a whole, as we have noted, is a quality presupposed rather than tested. For this reason, the original cohort of senior guardians remained dependent on direction provided “from outside,” specifically, from the city's founders. Socrates formulated a noble lie to provide this needful direction, as he said, “especially for the rulers themselves” (*μάλιστα μὲν καὶ αὐτοῖς τοὺς ἄρχοντας*, 414c1–2; see Dobbs 1994a, 269–72). We learn in the present passage, however, that the city's new rulers, its rulers “of topmost eminence,” require no such external direction. The founders,

<sup>13</sup>Note that Socrates says that the new rulers “will do the ordering,” not that they will be *willing* to do the ordering. By not expressly saying, at the very moment the syntax of his sentence leads one to expect him to say, that his new rulers, like his obedient auxiliaries, *will be willing* (*ἔθελήσειν*) to do what is expected of them, Socrates suggests that the persons in question, though indeed worthy rulers, need not be eager to rule. So, in his very first mention of these new rulers, Socrates intimates the kinship between them and the philosophers of *kallipolis*, who are of all human beings the least eager to rule (520d2–521b2).

in fact, turn over their supervisory tasks to these new rulers, internalizing the directing intelligence that has thus far supervised the city. The contrast between Socrates' original cohort of senior guardians and this new class of preeminent rulers could not be portrayed more distinctly: whereas the former were depicted as the targets of deception, the latter are presented as its agents.

For as long as the task of managing family communism and contriving medicinal lies lay exclusively with the founders themselves, the city was indeed supervised from *outside*. Once these tasks are entrusted to the new rulers, however, the city begins to be supervised from *within*. By entrusting new rulers with the responsibility for contriving medicinal lies, the city's founders bring about the very internalization of supervision that Socrates had anticipated when he first described the character of truly superlative rulers (412a4–10). These new, preeminent rulers are none other than the internal supervisors anticipated back in Book 3.<sup>14</sup> Socrates will later identify these rulers, civic guardians "in the most exalted or precise sense," as genuine philosophers, and he will provide a more complete account of their genesis (503b4–5, 521c1–4). But this much is sufficiently clear even now: the civic responsibilities borne by these new rulers are such as to require for their faithful execution nothing less than a superlatively musical and well-harmonized soul. We may infer, then, that Socrates has no need to alter anything in the original plan of the model city to create a place for philosopher kings. While still in its formative stages, the founders have reserved in it a place for such superlative rulers. So, in response to Steinberger's contention that Socrates' political paradigm is incoherent owing to the absence of a source for the philosophers of *kallipolis* within the model city itself, we may reply that even before the model city is put forward by Socrates as a pattern for the reform of existing cities, it implicitly has philosophers at the helm.

### Socrates' Dialectical Identification of Genuine Philosophers

It remains to consider the express characterization of the philosopher that Socrates subsequently offers. Nichols (1984), as we have noted, holds that the philosopher of *The Republic* is tainted with spiritedness and, moreover, that the mathematical curriculum provided for this philosopher by the model city is detrimental to genuine, Socratic philosophy. A review of the textual evidence will show, on the contrary, that Socrates distinguishes his philosopher in diametric opposition to the angry man of spiritedness and that the model city's mathematical curriculum is perfectly congenial to genuine philosophy.

Introducing his own account of the philosopher or "lover of wisdom," Socrates notes that any lover rightly so-called will love not merely a part of the beloved

<sup>14</sup> Soul tuning (which, as we have seen, requires the formulation and use of medicinal deceptions) and pedagogic leadership, both in war and in peace, provide an exhaustive account of the ruling functions of Socrates' internalized civic supervisors. The specific enumeration of these functions would appear to recapitulate activities that Socrates himself undertakes in his own conduct of philosophy (see, e.g., 467d5–8, 540b5–6; 459b10–d2 with 476d8–e2; see also Brann 1967, 22–23).

but will love the beloved in its entirety (474c9–11). He cites objects of the appetites (boys and wine), of the spirit (honor), and of reason (learning), and so would seem to refer to the soul's capacity for *erôs* in its entirety—at least as that soul is currently understood (474d3–475c8; cf. 439a9–b4 and 434e4–435a3). But, as the interlocutors quickly perceive, even the most rational of these loves cannot suffice to distinguish the genuinely philosophical soul, because a gusto for learning might also be said to characterize a throng of others whom it would be absurd to confuse with genuine philosophers (475d1–e2).<sup>15</sup> So a further distinction must be made. Noting that it is merely the prospect of unaccustomed sense-experience that excites this “throng of others,” Socrates suggests that their desire is called a love of learning only in the sense that it is a love of what is novel. This throng is better described, then, as lovers of sights and sounds rather than as lovers of wisdom. To complete his distinction, though, Socrates must identify another learning-matter, the true learning-matter, which is not merely a matter of novel sense-experience and with which the philosophical soul alone is in love. Socrates describes this *mathêma* as the sight of the truth (475e2–4).

But what can this mean? Making an exception for his interlocutor, Glaucon, Socrates supposes that it will not be easy for others to join in his reasoning.<sup>16</sup> Yet his reasoning appears to be nothing more than a rather elementary arithmetical reckoning. Socrates finds that “because fair is opposite (*ἐναντίον*) to foul, the pair must be two . . . and because the pair is two, each must be one” (475e9–476a2). It is *this one* that Socrates has in mind when he speaks of the sight of the truth in respect to what is fair and foul. Moreover, the same may be said with respect to “the just and unjust, good and bad, and all the forms (*eidê*): each is itself one, even though each appears a multitude visible everywhere in community with actions, bodies and with one another” (476a3–7). Socrates' elaboration of this point is quite important, for it helps us to see why it is not easy, despite the simplicity of his arithmetic, for people to join him in his reasoning. The difficulty consists in the fact that opposite *eidê*, each of which Socrates reckons to be one, are in fact found *mingled together* always and everywhere in our experience of the world (*πανταχοῦ*, 476a7; *ἀεί*, 479b8).

What, then, do most people make of this ubiquitous presentation of the composite fair-and-foul? Discovery of the fundamental contradiction inherent in our paragons of justice, virtue, and morality might serve to chasten our attachments and to liberate us for higher pursuits. But in his conversations with others Socrates finds that most people just get angry when this contradictoriness is brought to

<sup>15</sup> In other words, this manifestation of *eros* does not represent the “different something” (*ἄλλο τι*) which Socrates anticipates finding in a distinctively human soul (see footnote 7, *supra*). In the distinction he is about to make between the philosopher and the sights-lover, Socrates will bring this “different something” to light as a love for the true object of knowledge in its integral wholeness. Only on the basis of this differentiation can Socrates single out “the genuine *erôs* which is genuine philosophy” (499c1–2).

<sup>16</sup> One wonders why Socrates supposes Glaucon will be an exception to the general rule in this matter. For a possible explanation, see Dobbs (2000, 507–8).

light. People tend to be wholeheartedly in love with the persons and deeds that are nearest and dearest, not least of all on grounds of some perceived goodness. So many come to despise the Socratic *eidos* as a figment of a world-hating imagination, and, in their defensiveness, go so far as to *deny* the existence of the very contradictoriness of “fair-and-foul,” which is present in each of their own loved ones. In so doing, they believe they are protecting all things just and good from the philosopher’s assault. Yet, paradoxically, as such persons attempt to uphold their own exemplars of morality and goodness, they lose contact with reality. They construe the contradictions genuinely inherent in these exemplars, not as contradictions, but instead as charming ambiguities—rather like the double-entendres of urbane toastmasters and the equivocations of children’s riddles (479b11–c5; cf. *τᾶναντία*, 479b7).

Socrates, on the other hand, demands that we face the implications of such contrariness squarely. It is this opposition and nothing else, he says, that awakens the intellect and draws it naturally (*φύσει*) toward a distinct knowledge of being itself (523a1–525a5). By retreating from the contradictoriness present in the objects of his experience, the sights-lover unwittingly sacrifices all access to the *fundamental* difference between fair and foul, noble and base, or honorable and disgraceful. As a consequence of his equivocation, he comes to accept the entire multitude of examples of nobility and virtue, but neither accepts nor is at all receptive to the fair or noble itself (476b4–c3). Not believing in fairness itself, the sights-lover is likely to accept—and even to fight for—the putative fairness of just about anything. Such a person becomes so distempered by his attachment to particular instances or paragons of righteousness that he *will in no way tolerate* another’s so much as saying that the fair is one, or that there is something righteous or fair itself (*οὐδαμῆ ἀνεχόμενος*, 479a3–5; *οὐδ’ ἀνέχεσθαι*, 480a1–4). In this way, Socrates reveals the tyrant lurking within the heart of the sights-lover. But the tyrant, as Socrates consistently holds, damages himself most of all. Closing himself from all access to a truly foundational righteousness, the sights-lover clings to images as if they were what they image, supposing “like is not merely like but is indeed the very thing it is like.” This, Socrates notes, is to mistake a dream for reality (476c4–8).

It is expressly in diametric opposition (*ὁ τᾶναντία*, 476c9) to this sights-lover that Socrates introduces his philosopher. The philosopher, Socrates says, “believes (*ἠγνούμενος*) there is something fair in itself, and so has the potential to see both the thing itself and the things that partake of it, for he never believes that they are it or it is they” (476d1–3). In other words, the philosopher does not mistake a likeness for that which it is like. Even before “that which it is like” is itself seen, this guarantees the potency—literally, the capacity—of seeing both the “things that partake of it” and “the thing itself,” for on no other basis can one avoid confusing the two. Avoiding such confusion is what it means, then, to live wakefully. By virtue of pointing out the *oppositeness* of living wakefully and dreaming life away, Socrates separates and distinguishes the true philosophers from sights-lovers. Nevertheless, we must not fail to note that in the course of

this self-proclaimed dialectical analysis (*διαίρω*, 476a9) Socrates identifies philosophical wakefulness as itself a condition informed by belief. Philosophical wakefulness is not at all the same thing as being free of all belief. As Socrates presents it, philosophical wakefulness is in fact rooted in the “guiding conviction” (*ἡγούμενος*) that there is something fair, fine, and noble in itself. Not only is this guiding conviction a characteristic of the philosopher whom Socrates portrays in speech, it is also manifested in the deeds of Socrates himself. Socrates reveals himself to be a man of conviction in this sense, of all places, at the very apex of his discussion of the ascent of dialectic in Book 7, when he says that “even now it is not worth insisting, with respect to that which does appear to me to be the truth itself (*αὐτὸ τὸ ἀληθές*), that it really is so or not; but what is imperative is to maintain with utmost firmness that there is such a thing for one to see” (533a3–5; see also *Meno* 86b6–c2, 98b1–5).<sup>17</sup> We find, then, that Socrates’ dialectical account of the genuine philosopher not only illuminates the character of *The Republic*’s philosopher, it also describes Socrates’ own stance with respect to the pursuit of wisdom. Contrary to Nichols’ suggestion that Socrates is himself antithetical to the portrait of the philosopher presented in the *Republic*, we have here a clear indication that this portrait applies perfectly well to Socrates himself.

Although the philosopher and the sights-lover are both, in some sense, “believers,” it would be mistaken to suppose that they are “epistemically” equivalent.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Socrates underscores his sense of their utter opposition by using words to designate their respective modes of believing that possess strikingly different connotations. Thus, he distinguishes the philosopher’s dynamic, guiding conviction (*ἡγούμενος*) from the sights-lover’s rigid, customary acceptance (*νομίζων*). The philosopher’s guiding conviction arises, as Socrates explains, from an openness or *receptivity* to the oppositeness of the fair-and-foul, an opposition perfectly available in everyone’s experience always and everywhere. The sights-lover’s customary acceptance may be said to settle in, by contrast, as a result of his characteristic denial of this opposition. Surprisingly, it is the sights-lover’s very defensiveness with respect to “empirical reality” that blinds him to the true nature of all the things we experience. As a result of refusing to acknowledge experience’s inherent contradictoriness, the sights-lover cannot follow the

<sup>17</sup> Does this make a dogmatist of Socrates’ philosopher? Surely not. The philosopher whom Socrates identifies here will welcome the claim that “there is no truth” with the same hospitable spirit that he welcomes any other claim concerning the truth itself. But Socrates’ philosopher would examine this claim in the same manner that he examines any other claim: that is, at minimum, for internal coherence. Should the claim not survive this elementary philosophical elenchus, it would no more be retained by the philosopher than would any other discredited opinion. Clearly, there is nothing dogmatic in this. Compare Strauss’s (1953, 25) treatment of historicism.

<sup>18</sup> In terms of Socrates’ “divided line,” *eikasia* remains the basic experience or *pathēma* of all human souls (511d6–e4). Yet one can distinguish between the sights-lover and the philosopher in a manner analogous to the difference between ordinary *eikasia* and what Klein (1965, 118–25) identifies as the dianoetic extension of *eikasia*. The differentiation of these two remains perfectly consistent with the fundamental role of *eikasia* in each.

train of evidence that leads right up to the oneness of the object of knowledge (*μήτε, ἄν τις ἡγήται ἐπὶ τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτοῦ, δυνάμενος ἔπεσθαι*, 476c3–4; see also 479e1–2). His belief places him in a dead end. This sights-lover stands opposite, then, to the philosopher, whose characteristic belief or hypothesis (511b5–6) can really lead to something. Socrates accordingly speaks of the sights-lover's belief as mere "customary acceptance" (*nomizôn*) and reserves for the philosopher the more enterprising verb, *hégoumenos*, which derives from a root meaning "to lead" or "to guide." Socrates' receptive philosopher is indeed the polar opposite of the prejudiced sights-lover, whom we finally see revealed as an irate dogmatist (*χαλεπαίνῃ οὔτος, ὃν φαμεν δοξάζειν*, 476d8). So, in response to Nichols' contention that the philosopher of *The Republic* is tainted by thymotic anger, we may reply that Socrates in fact distinguishes his philosopher in express and diametric opposition to a man suffering from precisely this distemper.

### The Philosopher's Mathematical Education

This, then, is the philosopher whom Socrates deems "fit by nature not only to partake of philosophy but also to exercise leadership in the city" (474c1–2). Socrates is perfectly aware that the customs of every *existing* city militate against the rule of genuine philosophers. In even the few cities that tolerate philosophy as a private activity, the philosopher develops in a manner foreign to his own nature, just as a seed sown in alien soil gradually assimilates itself to the congenial character of that soil (496a10–497c3). Rarely, a philosophical nature may remain serendipitously uncorrupted. And if chance may thus save the philosophical nature, so may chance crown her. Of course, the odds involved in such a coronation are infinitesimal. The philosopher, after all, is not eager to rule. Some manner of compulsion will be required, and such compulsion "will not be forthcoming if the philosophers do not in the first place persuade the nonphilosophers to compel the philosophers to rule over them" (Strauss 1964, 124). Given the philosophers' own disinclination to rule, then, there is but little hope that the call for philosopher kings will be answered. Nevertheless, Socrates' discussion of the philosopher king has proven to be a remarkable success, for it has convinced Glaucon of the merit of philosophy, and so the desirability of its development. As a result, Socrates has won a willing partner for his inquiry concerning the education of philosophers in its own right and the political conditions that best support it.

As Socrates indicates, the fullness of philosophical development will only be achieved if the philosophical nature meets with a suitable regime; only then will the philosopher "grow more himself and save the common things with his own" (497a3–5). The "suitable regime," which is one best equipped to cultivate philosophy, turns out to be the same one Socrates has been describing to his interlocutors all along (497c5–d6). But this model must be further elaborated; above all, its opposition to the educational practices of all existing cities must be described more precisely (497d4–498b3). As he works out this opposition,



Socrates considers how the city might serve the philosopher rather than how the philosopher might serve the city.<sup>19</sup>

The opposition between the model city and all existing cities in the matter of argumentation is especially worth noting. In this matter, every existing city has the matter backwards. Mere adolescents are allowed to handle arguments, while older men escape the responsibility of giving a rational account of themselves (497e9–498b1). Such customs foster contentiousness in youth and a hidebound dogmatism in old age. But in Socrates' city this pattern is reversed: elders are subjected to rational scrutiny while dialectic is opportunely postponed among the youth. To be sure, this deliberate postponement of dialectic diminishes the strain on received opinion. But its ultimate purpose, of course, is to preserve philosophical natures from corruption, not to shore up political dogma for its own sake (497b1–498b3; 537c9–539d7). There can be no doubt about this, for the postponement of dialectic supplies no more than a provisional safeguard in the career of the philosopher. If they are to mature, philosophers must eventually become accustomed to argumentation. Sooner or later the promising youth of Socrates' city must be exposed to argument, and so to the collateral danger of eristic. Of course, it would be foolish to meet such a peril haphazardly. Some kind of test for dialectic-readiness would be most welcome. With this need in mind, Socrates announces that he is prepared to revisit the selection of civic rulers. He notes that in his earlier ranking of the guardians he had eschewed any testing that involved argumentation; but he finds that he can no longer postpone such a trial (503e1–504a1). The new test he proposes is designed to determine a youngster's ability to bear the strain of the greatest studies. These studies are dialectical—progress in them is measured by argument with as little reliance upon the senses as possible—and they converge in the single greatest study of all, the *idea* of the good (503e3–505a3). Dialectical undertakings are inherently dangerous, but

<sup>19</sup> Hence, at this point, the question of the reform of existing cities is dropped altogether, not to be taken up again except in the last few lines of Book 7. Socrates notes there that because his civic model is "entirely opposite" to all existing cities (497e6, 498b3), any changes undertaken on its pattern must proceed uncontaminated by the status quo. Those young enough to be nurtured successfully in the new *politeia* will have to be physically separated from those who, being steeped in a very different culture, are not (540e5–541b2). To prevent any misunderstanding of Socrates' intention, let us note that Cephalus' *voluntary* departure from the dialogue's community of discourse back in Book 1—and Socrates' subsequent exercise of leadership in its affairs—provides an example of such a societal regrouping in microcosm (see Dobbs 1994b, 668–73). An analogous "slate cleaning" can of course be accomplished within an individual, so to speak, by virtue of a philosopher's soul-stripping power of cross-examination (501a5–7). But this individual slate cleaning is also entirely noncoercive; the willing participation of the individual suffering it is a prerequisite, and social exclusion or rustication is in no way involved. It would appear that any social regrouping sufficiently extensive to implement a full-scale approximation to the model city simply lies beyond the *philosopher's* capacity or desire to force into existence (501a4–5; see also Letter VII, 331d3–5). Socrates' model city is not outlined to provide marching orders for political activists but rather to precipitate a mimetic disclosure of a good that transcends politics and constitutes the goal and proper criterion of all human activity (517c1–5).

Socrates suggests that a youngster's readiness for carrying on such studies profitably might be accurately indicated by the manner in which he or she receives a prescribed course of mathematics. This, then, is how the higher, mathematical education of the guardians is introduced. The guardians' mathematical curriculum, comprising a disciplined consideration of number, line, depth, and motion, commences with learning about the one (*ἡ περὶ τὸ ἐν μάθησις*, 524d9–525a2).

Socrates' explication of this curriculum, with all its fits and starts, remains the seminal presentation of the classical quadrivium. Although it is tempting to comment in detail on Socrates' formulation of each of these studies, particularly with a view to recovering as much as possible of the original spirit of classical education, we must limit ourselves here to identifying the one, overarching consideration he offers for the purpose of assessing students who receive this education. Socrates indicates that students will tend to receive the mathematical curriculum in one of two ways: either cleverly or intelligently. Though many prove themselves to be clever with respect to number, he says, none uses it correctly (523a2). The correct and truly intelligent use of number is not found in service to commerce or the arts—even though commerce and the arts are hardly conceivable apart from number—but rather in war, and especially in turning the soul itself from genesis toward truth and being (525c3–6).<sup>20</sup> Clever students are not altogether misguided, though, for they do comprehend that the “one” is separable from any and all bodies (525d7–e4). Yet they err in supposing that they understand this “one” adequately. Their supposition, as Socrates observes, takes the form of an axiom (*ὅμεις ἀξιούτε*, 526a3); they axiomatize the one as a homogeneous monad. That is, they take it for granted that each one is in every way like every other, possessing neither parts nor complexity.<sup>21</sup> But the monadic one, as Socrates notes, is merely a figment of conceptualization (*διανοηθῆναι μόνον*, 526a1–7; cf. 507b9–10). The clever take a decisive step *away* from reality when they suppose that the problem of the whole and its parts can be so simply evaded. The mathematical concept that results from this simplification is useful to the technical arts, to be sure, but it is utterly useless to the higher intellectual activity of intelligence or *noēsis*, which, according to Socrates, is precisely what the one—when correctly received, not merely conceptualized—necessarily awakens (524b3–525a2; 511c4–d5).

The same criticism Socrates lodges against the axiomatized monad applies to any dogmatic conception of the intelligible forms of things or *eidē*. As Socrates

<sup>20</sup> An indication of how “learning about the one” applies to war has already been offered at 422e3–424b3; for a discussion of the guardians' conduct of warfare as a mode of transcendence, see Dobbs 2000, 503–7.

<sup>21</sup> In his dialectical differentiation of the philosopher, Socrates has already shown that the integers with which the dialectician reckons are not homogeneous monads at all, but profoundly heterogeneous forms or *eidē*—as in his arithmetical formulation, “both are two, each is one.” The beautiful, the just, the philosopher, the big, the hard, and the light each in just this way proves to be one (475e9–476a7, 524b3–c8). Every one of these *eidē* transcends sense experience, yet none can be adequately described as a monad.

observes, these *eidê* first come to light in our perfectly natural attempts to understand the opposition we confront in experience (523a1–525a5). But the *eidê* are not themselves adequate first principles. Questions begged by this conceptualization are simply obscured when the *eidos* is treated as an axiom. Such questions *could* give rise to a more fruitful inquiry. When correctly used, the *eidê* provoke such questions; then they serve as hypotheses, in the special sense of “stepping-stones and rungs,” in an intelligent ascent toward the ultimate source of all (511b3–c2). Evidently, the intelligible forms are important not only for what they teach us but even more so for what they can help us to learn. Thus, Socrates points out that the genuine study of the one—which takes the difficulties of splitting and composing an integer seriously—compels the soul to use *nous* itself in search of the truth itself (526a8–b3). But the clever students of mathematics merely scoff at such problems. As a result, they only dream of being (533b8–c3).

The attainment of a waking insight into being is beyond the capacity of the clever, as Socrates suggests, because the clever regard contradiction not as an opportunity to build upon but as a disgrace to be ridiculed (*καταγελωσί*, 525e1). Clever mathematicians seem more sophisticated than the students whom Socrates deems truly intelligent, owing simply to the adroitness they cultivate in avoiding contradiction. But perplexity is more valuable than the clever realize. It is the mark of the intelligent student to be aware that contradiction is not only ridiculous but also thought provoking. Intelligent students are characteristically too generous-hearted to pursue seriously the artful dodging of contradiction that is the defining characteristic of the clever. Because their way of experiencing contradiction moves them to perplexity and to inquiry (*ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν*), they are able to set their noetic intelligence to work to ask just what the one itself is (524e2–525a2). While the intelligent are well positioned to carry on this thinking, the clever are “ever wary lest the one should appear to be not one but many,” and so remain chary of all such occasions for thought (525e3–4).

Moreover, let us carefully note that the intelligent student’s ascent from hypothesis toward “the ultimate source of all” is itself an *extension*, and thus a continuation, of the natural impulse that first quickens our intellect in response to the opposition confronted in experience (523a1–525a5; see Klein 1965, 124). Thus, just as the clever mathematician treats as an image the physical phenomenon that nonmathematical human beings trust as real, so too the intelligent student treats as a problematic image the conceptual hypothesis that the clever posit as axiomatic. Owing to his failure to sustain this extension of the very thrust that gives rise to mathematics in the first place, the merely clever student *betrays* the impulse without which he would not have achieved his own preliminary glimpse of the intelligible. In view of this betrayal, we can infer that the shortcomings of the clever do not typify but rather oppose the native spirit of mathematical studies.

As Socrates indicates, the proper use of mathematics is to further understanding, not to *make* anything—unless it be “to make the soul turn around” (533d3–4). Nevertheless, it is always possible that mathematics will be exploited by those willing to subvert its inherent theoretical spirit in order to enhance their own

technical power (see Lachterman 1989, 29–35; also Klein 1968, 43–45, 67–68, 173–78). But Socrates, in his selection of rulers for the model city, intends above all to distinguish the “most musical and best harmonized” soul-tuner from the merely technically competent tuner of strings. Like everything (*πάντα*, 539d3–7) in the constitution of the model political community, the guardians’ mathematical curriculum is proposed for the preservation and development of this most musical of natures. So, when Nichols contends that Socrates’ mathematical curriculum thwarts genuine philosophy because its students “do not question the abstractions on which they are educated” (1987, 119), we detect an unexpressed assumption. Her contention makes sense only on the premise that the clever manner of receiving mathematics is the only way of receiving mathematics, or that Socrates’ intention in regard to mathematical studies can be identified with the intention of certain modern mathematicians. But we have seen that Socrates takes pains to distinguish the merely clever from the truly intelligent reception of mathematics. Socrates expects that only intelligent students of mathematics will reach full maturity as philosophers. They alone are to be selected as philosopher kings.

And what of those who are not crowned? Are we to suppose that their presumably inferior reception of mathematics burdens the city with diversity-fearing auxiliaries? Not at all, for even this scaled-down charge against the mathematical curriculum is simply untenable. Even a moment’s reflection will confirm the importance of formal mathematical study to our appreciation of heterogeneity and diversity. After all, no experience with visible squares and circles will ever suffice to reveal the *incommensurability*—and so the fundamental heterogeneity—of square and circle, or even of a square’s side and its own diagonal. Nothing less than a formal mathematical demonstration can bring this heterogeneity to light. On the basis of such a demonstration, however, even the merely clever student of mathematics will be in a position to infer that number (*arithmos*) alone cannot account for all the intelligible magnitudes present in a square. From this it follows that number *cannot* be taken to be the single, homogenizing measure or essence of all things. It was just such a mathematical demonstration—and not any practical experience of diversity—that first disclosed this unsettling truth to the ancient Pythagoreans and thus discredited forever what might otherwise be considered the most tempting form of reductionism ever conceived by man. So, in response to Nichols’ contention that the study of mathematics undermines the appreciation of heterogeneity among the philosophers of *The Republic*, we may reply that formal mathematical study actually fosters a unique attentiveness to the intelligible foundations prerequisite to any genuine appreciation of heterogeneity.

## Conclusion

In this essay I have called attention to the adumbration, the precise identification, and the education of true philosophers in Socrates’ model city. In so doing, I have had the opportunity to respond to certain objections—heretofore unan-

swered—that have been leveled against the logical coherence and the Socratic character of *The Republic's* philosopher king. In response to those who maintain that this philosopher is a foreign import into Socrates' model city, I have offered evidence of the persistence of a philosophical element among the city's guardians throughout all stages of its development. Socrates' steady unfolding of the philosophical nature connects these phases and establishes their consistency. So the clue to the integrity of Socrates' civic model is not to be found in the distemper of spiritedness, as some contend, but rather in that city's own contribution to the preservation, identification, and education of the philosopher.

Any attempt to govern human affairs inevitably takes its bearings from—and so, in this sense at least, must be led by—a notion of the human soul. But the human soul is notoriously difficult to understand. In the thought experiment that Socrates and his interlocutors undertake in Plato's *Republic*, we are afforded a glimpse of this soul in the person of the philosopher king. What is perhaps most striking about Socrates' portrait of the philosopher king is his integration of political and philosophical excellence, and so his rectification of contradictions that are present, more or less, in our experience of every existing statesman or philosopher. We must remember, however, that this rectification occurs in the realm of thought. So it would be a mistake, as Socrates' account of the intelligent reception of mathematics reminds us, if we were to treat the philosopher king as a self-sufficient axiom for purposes of deducing public policy or even private conduct. Such entities of thought are not meant to be taken axiomatically but are to be understood as landmarks punctuating an ascent leading beyond themselves. Nevertheless, because Socrates' hypothetical philosopher kings approach the truths of mathematics in an intelligent rather than in a merely clever manner, there is good reason to believe that they, above others, will avoid the mind-smashing dogmatism that results from ignoring such pointers. For this reason, such men and women are indeed fit to exercise leadership in our cities. Yet they too are fallible. Socrates, after all, traces the eventual decline of his *kallipolis* to the philosopher kings' inability to discern an admittedly obscure, but fundamentally intelligible, marriage number. Evidently, the philosopher king is not perfectly good. It is clear, therefore, that he is not to be axiomatized as the truly self-sufficient good, the fount of all goodness.

Aware of this lack of self-sufficiency, the genuine philosopher remains mindful of the need to perpetuate the upward thrust of his quest for understanding. By following *this* lead, we too will remain mindful of the need to perpetuate the upward thrust of our own quest for the greatest good. In this quest, Socrates' philosopher king ranks as a lofty plateau, not as the absolute summit. Yet we must acknowledge this loftiness and thus gain a foothold on such a plateau, or further ascent will be impossible. The *Republic's* philosopher king may be said to supply an indispensable middle term for the mediation of our own quest for the highest good. Furnished with this middle term, we may ask: "What great good is it that stands in the same relation to the philosopher king as the philosopher king stands to even mankind's best examples of statesmen and philosophers?" As the very

formulation of this question brings us into some preliminary contact with this good, we can see that Socrates' philosopher king was not meant to satisfy but rather to energize and to direct our ongoing search for the "true source and ruling principle of all." So it is that the philosopher king remains a paragon of human virtue while at the same time being, in Socrates' strict sense of the word, a *hypothesis*—that is, a stepping stone.

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