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Plato's Utopianism: The Political Content of the Early Dialogues

George Klosko

One reason the political theory of Plato's *Republic* is widely misunderstood is that its precise relationship to the political content of the early dialogues is not generally recognized. That the political views of the *Republic* are frequently misconstrued seems apparent. In recent years many scholars have argued that the ideal state put forward in the work is completely "utopian." This word is used in different senses, but the sense I will concentrate on in this paper is its bearing upon questions of political reform. As I use the term, a "utopian" political theory contains proposals that are not intended to be taken seriously in terms of political reform. When I say that the ideal state discussed in the *Republic* is not as "utopian" as these scholars maintain, I mean that Plato designed it with political reform in mind, and that he thought seriously about how to bring it into existence. This does not, however, imply that the ideal state is likely to be realized, or that Plato ever thought it was, but only that Plato wished to bring it into existence and thought this was possible, should extraordinary good fortune bring the necessary conditions into existence.

Nevertheless, numerous scholars contest even these claims. According to them the ideal state was never seriously considered in connection with political reform. Certain scholars argue that Plato designed it to serve (and only to serve) in his examination of justice. Others hold that it was constructed for basically satirical reasons, in order to express obliquely the limits of what Plato believed to be politically possible.¹ The purpose of this paper is to contest these claims and others like them. By examining some important aspects of the early dialogues and their relationship to the *Republic*, I will attempt to show that political reform was an important consideration throughout all these works.² We will look

¹ For these views and arguments against them, see G. Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State," *Journal of Politics*, 43 (1981), 367-71.

² Plato's view of political reform in the *Republic* itself is discussed at length in the article cited in the last note.

first, in sections three and four, at the view of political reform espoused by the Socrates of the early dialogues and the network of psychological assumptions upon which it rests. Turning to the middle dialogues, in section five, we will then see that Plato's rejection of these psychological views forced a rejection of the accompanying Socratic view of political reform. We will also see here that an all but explicit rejection of the Socratic view of political reform is written into the central books of the *Republic*. Finally, in section six, we will explore and criticize the positions of several scholars who have written on these topics.

I

Since the bulk of this paper is given over to the political contents of the early dialogues, we must begin by discussing a number of complex difficulties associated with the interpretation of these works. These problems have been dealt with countless times in the voluminous classical literature, and so discussion here will be kept to a minimum. However, it should be noted that, because scholarly opinion on many of these issues is divided, the commentator cannot avoid taking sides in some heated debates. I wish to emphasize the fact that the positions I take on the two most important questions, namely, the Socratic problem and the development of Plato's thought, are widely held, and are probably the predominant ones in recent Plato scholarship. And so, even though I cannot defend my positions here in detail, they are eminently defensible. Many arguments in their favor will be cited, while I will also present various criticisms of proponents of opposing views.

The development of Plato's thought and the Socratic problem can be discussed together. The general consensus of scholars is that Plato's works can be divided into three groups, which were probably written at different periods in their author's career and are accordingly referred to as early, middle and late dialogues.³ Sophisticated stylometrical analysis allows the different dialogues to be located in these groups with some assurance. What is most important from our point of view are certain obvious differences between the early and middle works. The late works cannot be

³ For the chronology of the dialogues, see W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1962-81), 4:41-56; and the discussions of the individual dialogues in vols. 4-5; and W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), chap. 1, esp. p. 2.

discussed in this paper, though I believe that an analysis of them would strongly support my overall thesis.⁴

The early works are generally highly dramatic. The conversations they depict are often Socratic cross-examinations of various interlocutors, frequently culminating in irresolution or *aporia*. These features set the works apart from the less dramatic, more dogmatic cycle of middle dialogues—especially the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. The general consensus of scholars is that this is because one of Plato's purposes in writing the earlier works was to depict the character and teaching of Socrates,⁵ a concern which became less central in the middle works. This is confirmed by the fact that the literary genre "Socratic dialogue" apparently began as an outgrowth of attempts by students and associates of Socrates to capture something of his unique personal and philosophical style, by recording actual conversations in which he took part.⁶ These works are, accordingly, used by scholars as prime sources of evidence for the historical Socrates.

In order to avoid unnecessary controversy, I will base my discussion of the early works primarily on the following dialogues, in which the historical motive seems most apparent. For the purposes of this essay, then, these are the early dialogues: *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras* and *Hippias Minor*. I will also refer to aspects of other works—especially the *Gorgias* and *Symposium*—which directly discuss Socrates' character and activity, in clear reference to the unique character and activity of the Socrates Plato knew.⁷

Because Plato uses the early dialogues to present something of the Socrates he knew, the philosophical content of these works is distinct from that of the middle dialogues—in which he uses

⁴ J. Gould, *The Development of Plato's Ethics* (Cambridge, 1955), is especially effective in showing the tremendous differences between the moral views of the early dialogues and the *Laws*.

⁵ As Guthrie says, in the early dialogues, "it may be claimed that Plato is imaginatively recalling in form and substance the conversations of his master, without as yet adding to them any distinctive doctrines of his own" (*History*, 4:67). The position on the Socratic problem taken in this paper relies heavily on the evidence of Aristotle in order to identify the "historical" Socrates. This strategy is supported by Guthrie, *History*, vol. 3; W.D. Ross, "The Problem of Socrates," *Proceedings of the Classical Association* (1933); N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (London, 1968); and many others.

⁶ For evidence of this, see *Thi* 143a-c; *D.L.* 2., 122; *Athenaeus* 11., 505b; Aristotle *Poetics* 1447b9; see Guthrie, *History*, 3:343-44.

⁷ Cf. the evidence J. Burnet uses, in his attempt to avoid controversy, in his seminal article, "The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 7 (1915-16), 237-38.

Socrates to expound his own fully developed views. Thus the "Socrates" of the middle works must be distinguished from the "Socrates" of the early works. For ease of reference, I will generally refer to the views of the middle dialogues as "Plato's" and those of the early dialogues as "Socrates'" (see below, section five). This distinction is generally recognized in the case of metaphysical views. Aristotle provides powerful evidence that the main difference between (the historical) Socrates and Plato in terms of metaphysics lies in the latter's theory of Forms.⁸ Though there are occasional hints of the theory of Forms in the early dialogues,⁹ these are far removed from the fully developed theory of the middle works, in which it is closely bound up with other Platonic doctrines: for example, the immortality of the soul, the theory of *anamnēsis*, and a strong dose of Orphic-Pythagorean philosophizing. It is, thus, natural to take the metaphysical views of the Socrates of the early works as being in keeping with those Plato associated with the historical Socrates.

However, it is less frequently noted that other views held by the Socrates of the early works coincide with our other evidence concerning (the historical) Socrates. In the following pages, we will examine the close relationship between the ethical views of the Socrates of the early dialogues and those attributed to Socrates by Aristotle—and Xenophon as well.

II

Before examining the political content of the early works, we should say something about the kinds of matters we take *political* discussion to be concerned with. Though I do not believe that much is to be gained by insisting on some particular narrow construal, it should be helpful for us briefly to discuss the political, in light of the fact that the political content of the early dialogues will be seen to be political in a somewhat unusual way.

In order to avoid undue controversy, I begin with a straightforward definition, taken from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. "Political" here is defined as "of the state or its government." Thus what is political concerns certain institutions, those which, according to Weber's classic account,¹⁰ successfully

⁸ Aristotle *Metaph*, 1078b17-32, 987b1-6; on this, see esp. G.C. Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries*, 3rd ed. (London, 1967), 202-213.

⁹ See R.E. Allen, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (London, 1970).

¹⁰ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (Oxford, 1946), p. 78.

claim "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." As Weber notes, however, the state is also frequently defined in reference to its end or function—a view of which he does not approve.¹¹ But for our purposes this side of the political must be stressed because of the particular end or function the most influential Greek political philosophers attributed to the *polis*. For the Greeks the dividing line between ethics and politics was less definite than according to our general point of view.¹² This is largely because, according to both Plato and Aristotle, the state is primarily a moral association. As Aristotle says, though the *polis* came into existence only for the sake of life, it exists for the sake of the good life (*Pol* 1252b29-30). In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he declares that the end and object of politics is human good (ἄνθρωπινον ἀθάσθον *EN* 1093b26-1094a7). The *polis*, then, for Aristotle is more than a set of institutions; it is a moral association, dedicated to the betterment of its citizens.¹³ Plato, of course, agrees. In the *Gorgias* (464bc) he describes politics as the art "which has to do with the soul." Its aim is the inculcation and maintenance in the soul of a state of health analogous to that which gymnastic training and medicine induce in the body.

Thus for Plato as well as Aristotle political questions are largely questions of moral improvement and moral reform. This should be emphasized because the Socrates of the early dialogues devotes his life to the moral reform of his fellow citizens. Socrates is, however, unusual in that he resolutely pursues this object (which we are justified in calling a *political object*) without recourse to political *means*. The primary political content of the early dialogues centers upon Socrates' conviction that the moral reform of his fellow citizens can be accomplished without having to utilize traditional political institutions.

III

Before we examine Socrates' views on political reform, we must discuss one additional matter. Socrates' view of political reform has as its theoretical underpinning a distinctive psychological view. It is especially important that we examine this

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Note especially Aristotle's smooth transition between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* in *EN*, bk. 10, chap. 9 (discussed below, in section 5).

¹³ As Aristotle says, a constitution (*politeia*) is the way of life (*bios*) of a citizen body (*Pol* 1295a40-1295b1), in addition to being an arrangement of the state's offices (1278a8-10, 1289a15-16, etc.).

in detail because it is widely distorted and misconstrued in recent analyses of the ethical content of the early dialogues.¹⁴ We will look first at Aristotle's evidence, which is closely mirrored in the views of Socrates in the early dialogues.

To put matters as simply as possible, the gist of Aristotle's evidence is that Socrates had an extremely one-sided, intellectualistic conception of human nature. This is stated especially forcefully in the (probably pseudo-Aristotelian) *Magna Moralia*:¹⁵

According to Socrates, all the virtues arise in the reasoning part of the soul, from which it follows that in making the various virtues branches of knowledge, he ignores the irrational part of the soul, and thus ignores passion and the moral character (1182a18-23).

The main thrust of this passage is the central theme of Aristotle's overall account of Socratic ethics. Aristotle repeatedly notes Socrates' belief that virtue was knowledge, with a special emphasis on his belief that courage was knowledge.¹⁶

The logical conclusion of Socrates' view is the denial of the existence of moral weakness (incontinence or *akrasia*). Aristotle discusses Socrates' view in book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as a preliminary to his own discussion of moral weakness. It is

¹⁴ Even the best scholars seem reluctant to realize the extent of Socrates' intellectualism in the early dialogues. For example, T.M. Robinson discusses the psychological views (or, more exactly, the view of the *psyche*) of the early dialogues, and almost completely ignores the intellectualism (*Plato's Psychology* [Toronto, 1970]). Gould is well aware of the gap between the Socratic ethics of the early dialogues and the Platonic of the middle, and later, dialogues, but attributes the earlier view to the Rylean notion of "knowing how," rather than to Socrates' intellectualism (*Development of Plato's Ethics*; criticized by G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* [Princeton, 1973], esp. pp. 205-210). T. Irwin also sees a break between the views of the early and middle dialogues, but though Irwin is aware of Socrates' intellectualism, he rests his account of the early works much more on the "technical conception of virtue" (*Plato's Moral Theory* [Oxford, 1977], pp. 78-82; criticized by Klosko, "The Technical Conception of Virtue," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 19 [1981]). In regard to the final argument of the *Protagoras*, the intellectualist interpretation is rejected by C.C.W. Taylor (*Plato: Protagoras* [Oxford, 1976], pp. 182, 189-90; criticized by Klosko, "On the Analysis of *Protagoras* 351B-360E," *Phoenix*, 34 [1980], 307-322; see below, section four and n. 31), and virtually ignored in the analysis of the argument by G. Santas (*Socrates: Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues* [London, 1979], esp. pp. 208 ff.) and in the discussion by Guthrie (*History*, 4:231-35). See also, n. 45, below.

¹⁵ My translation (following Armstrong). On the value of the evidence in this passage, see Guthrie, *History*, 3:451; T. Deman, *Le témoignage d'Aristote sur Socrate* (Paris, 1942), pp. 94, 122.

¹⁶ All of Aristotle's evidence is collected, translated into French and discussed with commendable judiciousness by Deman, *Témoignage*, pp. 82-116.

especially useful for us to look at this passage because it contains an unmistakable allusion to Plato's *Protagoras*,¹⁷ and as we shall see, Socrates' position there is extremely similar to the view ascribed to Socrates by Aristotle.¹⁸

Aristotle's most important passage is as follows:

. . . Socrates was entirely opposed to the view in question [that a man may judge rightly but behave incontinently] holding that there is no such thing as *akrasia*; no one, he said, when he judges, acts against what he judges best—people act so only by reason of ignorance (*EN* 1145b25-27).¹⁹

These lines are compressed. In order to understand what Aristotle is saying, we must give a specific content to the words, "when he judges"; that is, we must say *what* a man judges that prevents him from doing wrong. In the continuation of the passage (1145b33), we see that Socrates' view is that "*no one acts contrary to what has seemed to him the better course.*"²⁰ And so the full sense of the crucial lines is: "no one, he said, when he judges (that what he does goes against what is best) does what goes against what is best—people act so only by reason of ignorance." According to Aristotle, then, Socrates' theory is that people never do *x* while believing it is bad for them; they do *x* only if they are ignorant of the fact that it is bad for them.²¹

Thus Aristotle believes that Socrates' moral view is extreme in its intellectualism. Aristotle goes on to say that Socrates' view contradicts the "observed facts" of human experience.²² In addition,

¹⁷ Compare *EN* 1145b23-24; *Pr* 352b8-c2.

¹⁸ This could be because Aristotle's discussion is in reference to the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, as is argued by various scholars, e.g., J. Ferguson, *Socrates: A Source Book* (London, 1970), p. 179. Most scholars, however, believe that Aristotle refers to the historical Socrates; see, e.g., R. Gauthier and J. Jolif, *Aristote, Éthique à Nicomaque*, 3 vols. (Louvain, 1958-59), *ad loc.*; Deman, *Témoignage*, pp. 111-16; H. Joachim, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 1951), *ad loc.* (Neither view would substantially affect the conclusions of this paper, which rely far more heavily on the argument in the *Protagoras*.)

¹⁹ *ton logon* in 1145b25 refers back to 1145b21-22, which is what appears in the brackets. Translation by J.L. Ackrill, *Aristotle's Ethics* (London, 1973); unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Aristotle are from this source.

²⁰ *το δε Ηθηνα παττειν παρα το δοξαν Βελτιον.*

²¹ Burnet, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London, 1900); M. Ostwald, trans., *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis, 1962); Gauthier and Jolif, *Éthique à Nicomaque*; all read the passage in this way (all *ad loc.*). Cf. the reading of Ackrill (*Aristotle's Ethics, ad loc.*), who seems to follow the view of Rasso, which is criticized by Gauthier and Jolif.

²² 1145b27-28. For an alternative (though, I believe, unconvincing) translation of *phainomena*, see G.E.L. Owen, "Tithenai ta Phainomena," in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J. Moravcsik (London, 1967), pp. 169-71.

because Socrates did not present an adequate account of human motivation, Aristotle believes that he could not adequately respond to the all-important question of how people can be made virtuous. Commenting upon Socrates' inquiry into the nature of the different virtues, Aristotle writes in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

. . . Socrates the senior thought that the End is to get to know virtue, and he pursued an inquiry into the nature of justice and courage and each of the divisions of virtue. And this was a reasonable procedure, since he thought that all the virtues are forms of knowledge, so that knowing justice and being just must go together, for as soon as we have learnt geometry and architecture, we are architects and geometricians; owing to which he used to inquire what virtue is, but not how and from what sources it is produced (1216b5-11; Rackham translation).

Thus according to Aristotle, because Socrates relied on a conception of virtue that laid exclusive emphasis on its intellectual side, he did indeed, as the *Magna Moralia* states, ignore passion and the moral character. He never considered the role these sides of man's nature play in virtuous conduct and so never addressed himself to the question of how they could be made conformable with virtue.

It seems clear that a philosopher with views on moral psychology such as those Aristotle ascribes to Socrates would not fare well as a moral reformer. In the following pages we will see that the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues held similar views and, accordingly, did not fare well. We will also see that this had considerable influence upon the development of Plato's political thought.

IV

A number of political ideas are associated with Socrates and are often presented as his contribution to political thought.²³ I think it can be shown, however, that his real interest as a political figure, if not exactly a political thinker, lay in another direction. It is a well-attested fact, and one frequently discussed in the early dialogues, that Socrates largely exempted himself from the Athenian political process that was so much a part of his fellow citizens' lives. Though he fulfilled the duties of his citizenship and

²³ For Socrates' critique of the lottery system of the Athenian democracy, see, e.g., *Prt* 319a-20b; *Grp* 455a ff.; *Lach* 184d ff.; *Alc* I (which I take to be genuine) 105a ff.; also in the *Meno* (a middle work) 92b-94e. See also *Xen Mem* I, ii, 9; III, viii, 10-12; Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1393b4-9. For Socrates' "social contract" theory, see *Crito* 50a-54d; cf. *Xen Mem* IV, iv, 12-15.

performed military service in the Peloponnesian Wars,²⁴ and though on one occasion he secured a place on the *Boulē* (Council) and fought to defend the laws of Athens against abuse,²⁵ his general attitude to Athenian politics is exemplified by his conduct during one incident discussed in the *Apology*. Here Socrates recounts that when the Thirty seized control of Athens and “wished to implicate as many in their crimes as they could,” he and four other men were ordered illegally to arrest one Leon of Salamis. Socrates’ reaction was typical: “the other four . . . arrested Leon, but I simply went home” (*Ap* 32d).

In general Socrates had as little as possible to do with Athenian government. This is one thing for which, in the *Apology*, he actually apologizes: “perhaps it may seem strange that I go about and interfere in other people’s affairs to give . . . advice in private, but do not venture to come before you and advise the state” (*Ap* 31c). His explanation for this is basically that he believes the existing political system to be hopelessly corrupt, and that to participate in it would be a fruitless endeavor (*Ap* 31d-32e).

The key to Socrates’ alternative political activity—and to his most central teaching—is also contained in the *Apology*. If we penetrate beyond Socrates’ familiar account of the origin of his mission, intended to unveil the ignorance of his fellow citizens, we can detect the gist of his moral message. Socrates expresses this as follows (addressing the jury of his fellow citizens):

I shall never give up philosophy or stop exhorting you and pointing out the truth to any one of you whom I may meet, saying in my accustomed way: “Most excellent man, are you who are a citizen of Athens, the greatest of cities and the most famous for wisdom and power, not ashamed to care for the acquisition of wealth and for reputation and honor, when you neither care nor take thought for wisdom and truth and the perfection of your soul?” (29e).

And again:

For I go about doing nothing else than urging you, young and old alike, not to care for your persons or your property more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much (30ab).

²⁴ See *Ap* 28de, *Symp* 220d-221c, *Lach* 181b.

²⁵ See *Ap* 32a-c; cf. *Xen Mem* IV, iv, 2; I, i, 18.

Thus we see that Socrates' message to his fellow citizens is that they should "care for their souls (*psuchai*)," which for Socrates is synonymous with caring for virtue and moral knowledge.²⁶

If we pause and reflect upon this brief account of Socrates' conduct, the nature of his political activity becomes clear. There are two crucial points to keep in mind. In section two of this essay we identified the question of moral reform as the key political concern for Plato and Aristotle. Thus our first point is that the mission Socrates describes in the *Apology* must be judged a *political* undertaking, designed to reform the lives of his fellow citizens. Socrates describes the political character of his mission in something like this sense in the *Gorgias*:

I think I am one of few, not to say the only one, in Athens who attempts the true art of statesmanship (Τη ως αληθως πολιτικη Τεχνη), and the only man of the present time who manages affairs of state: hence, as the speeches that I make from time to time are not aimed at gratification, but at what is best instead of what is most pleasant . . . (521d).²⁷

Our second point is that Socrates' mission is undertaken in a private capacity. As we have seen, Socrates had little to do with ordinary political affairs or political institutions. Believing that the existing political system was hopelessly corrupt, he pursued his mission in a private capacity. We must realize that one reason Socrates was able to avoid the world of traditional politics is that, as he conceived his mission, it did not *require* recourse to traditional political means. The means he pursued, also described in the *Apology*, consisted of reasoning with people, of exhorting and urging them. At one point in the *Apology* he describes himself as taking his fellow citizens aside "individually like a father or an elder brother" (*Ap* 31b), urging each to care for virtue. It was in this private, exhortative capacity that Socrates pursued his life's work of awakening his fellow citizens to the need to care for their souls.

If, as this paper contests, this was in fact the means through which Socrates pursued his mission of moral reform, that mission

²⁶ The classic analysis of Socrates' role in the development of the "soul" is Burnet, "The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul"; on "caring for the soul," see esp. *Ap* 38a, 30b.

²⁷ The *Gorgias* is analyzed at length in connection with the main themes of this paper in Klosko, "The Insufficiency of Reason in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Western Political Quarterly* (forthcoming).

was political in a somewhat unusual sense. Socrates pursued a political *objective*, the moral reform of his fellow citizens, without recourse to political *means*. And so it is understandable that this aspect of the political content of the early dialogues is seldom recognized.

At first sight it would appear that Socrates' practice of taking people aside and urging them to care for virtue was not an especially promising political strategy. But the pessimistic assessment that most people would doubtless render was, for Socrates, tempered by his intellectualistic conception of human nature. The Socrates of Plato's early dialogues shares the views concerning moral psychology that are attributed to Socrates by Aristotle.

Though a point-by-point comparison between Plato's Socrates and Aristotle's could be presented, this is not necessary here. A good deal of evidence concerning the intellectualism of the early dialogues is presented in the next section (*see below, section five*).²⁸ For our present purposes it is enough to examine one specific argument, the long and elaborate final argument of the *Protagoras*.²⁹ This argument is especially useful for our purposes because it contains the fullest single statement of Socrates' moral psychology found in the early dialogues. In addition, as we have noted, it is explicitly referred to by Aristotle in his discussion of moral weakness in book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The subject of the argument in the *Protagoras* too is moral weakness, and it can be seen that the view expressed here corresponds to that attributed to Socrates by Aristotle.³⁰

The final argument of the *Protagoras* is lengthy and complex. For reasons of space it cannot be analyzed here in depth, though certain of its basic features must be looked at.³¹ Socrates' intention in the argument is to prove the dominance of knowledge in

²⁸ See also *Euthyphro* 7b-d; and on this, J. Xenakis, "Plato on Ethical Disagreement," *Phronesis*, 1 (1955).

²⁹ Note also Socrates' argument at *Grg* 460b, which was undoubtedly used by the historical Socrates, since it is cited by Aristotle (*EE* 1216b6) and Xenophon (*Mem* IV, ii, 20); the point of view represented here is roundly criticized by Aristotle at *EN* 1129a5-16, 1140b22-25; *Metaph* 1025a6-13.

³⁰ According to the surmise of Deman (*Témoignage*, p. 113), both Aristotle and Plato refer to the historical Socrates, though Plato's argument here is not one advanced by Socrates, but was rather developed by Plato to support Socrates' position.

³¹ The discussion here is supported by the analysis of Klosko, "On the Analysis of *Protagoras* 351B-360E," *Phoenix*, 34 (1980), which contains numerous additional references.

human behavior, to demonstrate that “knowledge is something noble and able to govern man” and that “whoever learns what is good and what is bad will never be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as knowledge bids” (*Prt* 352c). The view Socrates argues against is the common one that there are cases of moral weakness, cases in which a person with knowledge “is not governed by it, but by something else,” that in fact knowledge is often dragged about like a slave by such things as passion, pleasure, pain, love and fear (352bc). Socrates attempts to prove the common view wrong. He argues that cases in which a person appears to be overpowered by these opponents of reason and to do wrong knowingly are actually cases of intellectual error—and intellectual error of a rarified type, such as that made by a craftsman in his attempt to measure some object of his craft.

It is clear that Socrates’ proof works through a gradual process of transforming an ostensible situation of moral weakness, in which the subject is *overcome* by pleasure, into one in which the subject *chooses* what he perceives to be the greater of two pleasures. The series of moves that Socrates makes in order to carry out this proof allows a glimpse at his most basic psychological assumptions. His fundamental assumption appears to be that all human actions are *intentional* actions, actions based on choices.³² Even actions committed under the influence of intense desire, passion, pleasure or pain are declared by Socrates to be based on choices—and, again, the choices he has in mind are paradigmatically rational calculations.³³

On the basis of this psychological view, Socrates declares the ordinary account of being overcome by pleasure to be untenable. What really happens, Socrates asserts, is that the subject is deceived by the nearness of a lesser pleasure and incorrectly takes it to be larger than another though more distant pleasure, which is actually larger. There can be no other reason why the subject would *choose* the lesser good. Thus Socrates roots his proof in the *Protagoras* unshakably in the laws of human nature as he sees them. These laws are stressed repeatedly (esp. 356b, 358cd, 358bc), and, accordingly, Socrates argues that all that is needed to put an end to all cases of being overcome by pleasure is an art of measurement capable of eliminating the distortion caused by

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 315 ff.

³³ Cf. the view of Xenophon’s Socrates, who reduces madness (*mania*) to ignorance; “What is the difference between ignorance and madness?” he asks (*Mem* I, ii, 50; Benjamin, trans.).

the nearness and remoteness of pleasures (esp. 357a-e).³⁴

This view of human psychology is a basic assumption behind Socrates' mission. Because he believes that man is rational and is misled only by intellectual errors, Socrates is able to leap to the conclusion that people can be reformed through the use of logical persuasion, rational arguments alone. Those factors in human nature which, if adequately recognized, would prevent him from holding this view are overlooked.³⁵ What is more, Socrates is convinced that this kind of rationality is common to *all* his fellow citizens; it is not the exclusive preserve of the few. Socrates repeatedly states in the *Apology* that his message is directed at *all* of his fellows.³⁶

Socrates' political practice, then, amounts to a new kind of politics. Every individual has a rational soul, and so every individual can be awakened to become morally autonomous and to rule himself. Socrates devotes his life to a sustained attempt to waken his fellow citizens to his conception of the virtues of the soul, to a life devoted to reason and moral autonomy. To get his fellow citizens to pursue this greatest good for man is the goal of his mission.

It seems, then, that though the belief that rational argument alone is a suitable instrument of political reform is a peculiar one, Socrates' psychological views allow him to hold it. There can be no doubt that Socrates believes in the efficacy of rational persuasion. Not only does this shine through his description of his mission in the *Apology*, but he devotes his life to putting it into practice. As Burnet says, the fact that Aristophanes utilizes Socrates as the arch-Sophist in the *Clouds* is a strong indication that, at the time the *Clouds* was first produced, in 423, (the historical) Socrates was already a familiar figure in Athens, and hence, that Socrates' mission most probably started some years before.³⁷ Thus for some *thirty-or-so* years Socrates pursued his mission of reforming the Athenians through arguments. This is the mission through which

³⁴ See note 28, above. According to Xenophon's Socrates, knowing the definition of justice will have the following result: "Juries will cease to split their vote; citizens will stop wrangling, going to court, and raising revolts in the cause of justice. States will cease to differ about what is just, and cease to make war" (*Mem IV*, iv, 8; Benjamin, trans.).

³⁵ For the kind of factors that Socrates overlooks, see the criticism of Aristotle, below, section 5.

³⁶ *Ap* 29d, 30a, 30e-31a, 36c, 33ab.

³⁷ Burnet, "The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul," pp. 238-40. This is taken for granted in the *Apology*, where Socrates alludes to the *Clouds* (19c).

Plato most probably met Socrates. It is the mission that Plato depicts in many dialogues, and the philosophical groundwork for which he presents in the *Apology*. The inescapable reason for attributing to Socrates the theory of moral reform discussed in this essay is the fact that he spent several decades of his life attempting to implement it.

Various objections could be raised against this account of Socrates' political theory. For instance, it could be argued that Socrates would have had no reason to rely *solely* on argument; that is, it could be argued that, though Socrates did not use coercive means, he would have had no reason not to approve of their use. But, aside from the fact that there is no evidence that the Socrates of the early dialogues—or the historical Socrates for that matter—ever considered the use of coercion to achieve moral reform,³⁸ a good case could be made that various doctrines he does hold strongly suggest that he is in principle opposed to such means. First, the fact that in the *Crito* (51bc) Socrates argues that it is never right to resist the commands of one's state through violence, and that one is limited to attempting to show the state what is really right through persuasion, creates at least a presumption that, in attempting to show the individual citizens of the state what is really right, one is also limited to persuasive means.³⁹ Second, the Socratic conception of what it is to care for one's soul and the weight Socrates places on moral autonomy, that each person must examine his own life (esp. *Ap* 38a), do not rest well with advocating coercive means to achieve this end. In light of the paucity of our information concerning *exactly* what Socrates means by "caring for the soul,"⁴⁰ it is not possible to demonstrate that this is logically incompatible with all coercive means. But, still, in light of the lack of evidence to the contrary, this again creates a presumption that Socrates would have opposed the use of coercion to attain his ends.

Though in light of the character of the evidence it is difficult to ascertain the kind of political organization Socrates was ultimately aiming at, the *Apology* clearly indicates that he was attempting

³⁸ It should be noted that *Lys* 207e-210c could, perhaps, be construed as such evidence.

³⁹ This is true of Xenophon's Socrates also (*Mem* I, ii, 10-11). For Plato's view in the middle and late dialogues, see Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State," pp. 383-85.

⁴⁰ This is the theme of the pseudo-Platonic (?) *Clitophon*.

to reform his city as a whole.⁴¹ In assessing the kind of ideal to which Socrates aspired, the important point, it seems to me, is the kind of political tactics he pursued. Socrates attempted to reform his city indirectly by reforming the individuals who composed it. And I believe that Cornford is right when he says that Socrates' ideal was a collectivity of free, autonomous souls.⁴² At least implicitly Socrates was what we would now call an "anarchist." As Cornford also notes, it was left to Antisthenes, the Cynics, and the Stoics to follow up the implications of Socrates' political thought. Though they limited their ideal state to the wise alone, for the wise, it was to be a state without institutions. Because the wise are perfect, the state they are fated to inhabit is the City of Zeus.⁴³

V

At the conclusion of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle criticizes and rejects Socrates' position on moral reform. In this context Aristotle discusses the question of how people can be made virtuous. As is his custom in approaching a new question, Aristotle begins by considering the views of previous thinkers. The first view discussed is the one we have attributed to Socrates. Though Socrates is not mentioned by name here, the fact that Aristotle uses language similar to that found in *Eudemian Ethics* 1216b, where Socrates is criticized directly (*see above, section three*), makes it plausible that he is alluding to and criticizing Socrates.⁴⁴

Aristotle thinks very little of the view that people can be made virtuous through reason and reasoned arguments alone. He rejects it for the same reasons that led him to question the Socratic

⁴¹ In *Ap* 30e3, 30e6, Socrates declares that the god has fastened him to the city as a gadfly to a horse—and so he goes about “arousing and urging and reproaching each one of you, constantly alighting upon you everywhere the whole day long” (30e-31a).

⁴² F.M. Cornford, *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 58-61. Cornford's views are found in an expanded form in his unpublished “Lectures: Socrates and Plato” (in the Third and Sixth Lectures). I am grateful to Professor Guthrie, for allowing me access to Cornford's papers.

⁴³ Cornford, *Unwritten Philosophy*, p. 60; “Lectures,” 6.5-7. See J. Von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1903), Fragments 259-71. Most of these fragments appear in English translation in E. Barker, *From Alexander to Constantine* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 25-27. See also H.C. Baldry, “Zeno's Ideal State,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 79 (1959).

⁴⁴ As Gulley points out, *Philosophy of Socrates*, pp. 135-38; the similarities in Aristotle's language are discussed by Gulley.

view of *akrasia*; it conflicts with the observed facts:

Now if arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly, as Theognis says, have won very great rewards, and such rewards should have been provided; but as things are, while they seem to have power to encourage and stimulate the generous-minded among our youth, and to make a character which is gently born, and a true lover of what is noble, ready to be possessed by virtue, they are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness (*EN* 1179b4-10).

Aristotle believes that additional factors must be taken into consideration. The lives of the many are governed by passion and the pursuit of pleasure, and so they are not psychologically suited to logical persuasion:

What arguments would remold such people? It is hard, if not impossible, to remove by argument the traits that have long since been incorporated in the character (1179b16-18).

According to Aristotle, people are not made good through arguments or teaching alone, but through a combination of arguments and habituation (*ἔθελ*). Reason works only on certain people, those who have been made susceptible through proper upbringing. Upon those who have not been raised properly, reason is not effective, and such people must be reformed through other means (1179b23 ff.).

Aristotle's own position is that good habits and good character take hold best when they are inculcated from a very early age. This, practically speaking, requires that the young be brought up according to good laws in a properly governed state (1179b31 ff.). Accordingly, Aristotle argues that the inculcation of virtue is a job best left to the state (1180a5 ff.). And so Aristotle's view is, in a nutshell, if people are to be receptive to moral reasoning, they must be made receptive. This requires habituation, which requires compulsion, which requires laws, and hence, the state. If such matters are neglected by the state, it is up to the individual to do whatever he can to help whomever he can (1180a24-31), but given the foregoing, it is argued that the individual will be most effective if he makes himself skilled in legislation (*see* 1180a32-34). Arguments alone have been shown not to work, and so the individual requires an alternative strategy. It is in order to provide the necessary knowledge of legislation that Aristotle discusses the

assorted topics covered in the *Politics*.

It is my contention that Plato was well aware of this criticism of the Socratic position on moral reform, that in fact, his own criticism of the Socrates of the early dialogues is similar to Aristotle's view of Socrates. Moreover, as we shall see, Plato's rejection of the Socratic position is written into his discussion of the means of bringing the ideal state into existence in the central books of the *Republic*.

As can be gathered from the foregoing discussion, I believe that Plato's rejection of the view of moral reform presented in the early dialogues is closely bound up with the new conception of moral psychology presented in the middle works, which differs sharply from the Socratic view.⁴⁵ Plato's position here is founded upon the tripartite view of the soul, discussed in its various aspects in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic*. Much of this material is, of course, familiar and need not be discussed here.⁴⁶ Only a few points must be emphasized.

To begin with, it is important to note that the tripartite soul is introduced in the *Republic* through an argument that only such a view can account for the common experience of psychological conflict (*Rep* 435e-441c). The analyses presented in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* also explain the phenomenon of conflict, whether competition between the soul and the desires of the body, as in the *Phaedo* (65a-69c, 80e-84b), or, more graphically, between the charioteer (reason) and the unruly horse of desire, in the *Phaedrus* (253c-254c). The doctrine, as presented in all these works, represents a coherent body of thought that completely supersedes the Socratic account of moral weakness in the *Protagoras*. As we have seen, Socrates is able to argue that knowledge alone is sufficient for virtue. Plato, on the other hand, realizes that other factors must be taken into consideration, and the nonrational factors of the *psuchē* receive their due in the middle dialogues. Though Plato remains forever conscious of the importance of

⁴⁵ This is denied especially by P. Shorey; for the classic account of "the unity of Plato's thought," see his book by that title (Chicago, 1903). For the two ways of reading Plato, see Guthrie, *History*, 4:46, 152-53. M. O'Brien (*The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* [Chapel Hill, 1967]) for one, upholds the unity of Plato's thought, by reading the views of the middle works back into the early ones — rather implausibly, I believe; he is criticized by Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, p. 328 n. 21, and see p. 302 n. 59.

⁴⁶ A fair account of the entire theory, with bibliography up to 1970, is Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*.

knowledge—or correct opinion⁴⁷—in the middle dialogues he argues that virtue also requires a certain balance or harmony between the potentially conflicting parts of the soul. The characteristic Platonic view is that, in the properly ordered soul, *logistikon* (the reasoning part) rules over *epithumētikon* (the appetites) with the help of *thumos* (or *thumoeidēs*, the spirited part)—the good horse of the *Phaedrus* (253d, 254bc), or the lion of the elaborate simile in book 9 of the *Republic* (588b-589b).

It is, of course, a central tenet of the *Republic* that the virtues exist as aspects of this psychical relationship (esp. *Rep* 441d-444a, 423a-434c). And so in the middle dialogues the Socratic account of the virtues is left far behind. Whereas the Socratic definition of courage is *knowledge* of what is and is not to be feared,⁴⁸ in the *Republic* courage is defined as a kind of “preservation” (*sōtērian*, 429c5): “The preservation of the belief which has been inculcated by the law . . . as to what things and what kind of things are to be feared, and . . . to preserve this belief and not to lose it when one is in pain, beset by pleasures and desires, and by fears” (429cd). Whereas, in the *Charmides*, Socrates attempts a number of definitions of temperance, none of which depends on a relationship between reason and desire,⁴⁹ in the *Phaedo* temperance consists of “not being excited by the passions and in being superior to them and acting in a seemly way” (68c). In the *Republic* temperance is “a certain orderliness . . . and mastery over certain pleasures and appetites” (430e). It is safe to say that, in light of this account of temperance, Plato would have found the analysis of moral weakness in the *Protagoras* to be wrongheaded at best.⁵⁰ As for justice, Plato of course describes it in the *Republic* as that condition in which each part of the soul stays in its proper place and does its own job. In the soul of the just man, reason dictates to the two lower parts, keeping appetite in place with the aid of *thumos* (442ab), and on the whole the essence of Plato’s account of justice is psychological harmony (443c-e). According to Plato’s middle works, some semblance of this psychological order is a necessary condition for virtue. Knowledge or correct opinion alone is not

⁴⁷ The distinction between knowledge and correct opinion is introduced in the *Meno* (97a ff.).

⁴⁸ See *Lach* 194d-95a; *Prt* 357b-60e; cf. Aristotle *EN* 1116b3-5; *EE* 1229a14-16, 1230a7-10; *MM* 1190b27-29; and also *Xen Mem* IV, vi, 11.

⁴⁹ Cf. Santas, “Socrates at Work on Virtue and Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*,” in *Exegesis and Argument*, E.N. Lee et al., eds. (Assen, The Netherlands, 1973), pp. 105-6.

⁵⁰ See Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory*, p. 328 n. 21; and cf. *Timaeus* (86bc).

enough, and so we have here, at least in germ, the doctrine of the later dialogues—the *Sophist* and *Timaeus*—according to which Plato distinguishes between two kinds of vice, one rooted in ignorance, while the other is due to an improper balance in the soul.⁵¹

Because Plato believes that virtue requires a proper order of the three parts of the soul in addition to knowledge (or correct opinion), he advocates a program of education in the *Republic* far removed from anything seen in the early dialogues.⁵² According to Plato, this necessary psychic order—which constitutes the virtue of the lower classes in the state, and the necessary prerequisite for the higher virtue of the third class—must be given to the individual through the effects of his environment, before he is capable of grasping moral truths through reason (*see esp. Rep* 401a-402a). It is clear that, in the *Republic*, Plato is well along the road to his position in the *Laws*, according to which the process of educating the individual must begin before birth.⁵³

In keeping with these developments in his moral psychology, Plato rejects the Socratic political position. The ordinary individual, as depicted in the *Republic*, is far from being entirely rational. It is clear that his moral beliefs are not the result of conscious decision, but are somehow rooted in the order of his soul. The precise connections between one's psychic order and the contents of his beliefs are never explicitly discussed by Plato, and the details need not concern us. What is important is Plato's insistence that the soul of the individual is decisively influenced by his society. As books 8 and 9 of the *Republic* graphically depict, the order of the individual's soul comes to mirror the moral makeup of his city.⁵⁴ And in keeping with this we have Plato's view that the ordinary individual's opinions and beliefs are also the product of his environment.

Because Plato holds these basic psychological views—regardless of how one would work them out in detail—he must reject the Socratic position on political reform. And of

⁵¹ See *Sph* 227d-228e; *Tim* 86b-87b. A good brief discussion of this doctrine is found in G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (1935; rpt. Boston, 1958), pp. 226-30.

⁵² This basic contrast is strikingly illustrated—though between the early and late dialogues, especially the *Laws*—by Gould's presentation in *Development of Plato's Ethics* (see above, n. 4).

⁵³ See *Laws* 789a-92e.

⁵⁴ In the timarchic city and the timarchic soul, for example, we have analogous configurations (547a-c, 550ab), while the analogy holds for other cities and souls; see *esp. Rep* 441cd, 544de.

course a radically different view dominates the *Republic*. Plato's new political theory is explicitly political in regard to means; moral reform is conducted by the philosophically run state. Gone is the Socratic faith in the power of rational argument. The lone philosopher on his mission of reform is explicitly replaced by a new conception of philosophical politics, the philosopher backed up by the might of the state. In fact, Plato's new political theory, embodied in the philosopher-king, can be seen as the all but explicit rejection of Socratic political tactics. This is seen especially clearly in book 6 of the *Republic*, in Plato's discussion of the possibility of implementing the ideal state, in his analysis of the parable of the ship of state (488a ff.; 488a-502). In particular, in explaining one main moral of the parable, the fact that those individuals with philosophic natures generally end up completely corrupted in existing society, Plato presents a strong argument why the Socratic theory of political reform cannot possibly succeed. Because it is necessary to distinguish the "Socrates" of the *Republic* (and the other middle works) from the "Socrates" of the early dialogues, throughout the remainder of this paper we will use the convention, *Socrates*, to refer to the former.

Socrates' analysis here is based on a fundamental Platonic principle: the great effects of the environment upon the development of every living thing. A given nature — and in this case the concern is with human nature — will be able to realize its potential only if it is brought up in a healthful environment, while in a corrupt environment it will be ruined. Since, as *Socrates* has argued, the nature of the true philosopher is outstanding in every way, when it is corrupted by the conditions in actual societies, it generally ends up prodigiously bad (*Rep* 492a). According to *Socrates*, the force that is mainly responsible for this is public opinion. The Demos irresistibly shapes the inhabitants of a city in its own image: "There is not, has never been, and will never be produced a character different (from the many) in respect of virtue by having been educated on principles opposed to theirs" (492e).

It follows from this principle and its implications that Plato must believe a mission such as *Socrates'* to be foredoomed to failure. The irresistible force of the mob cannot be opposed by a single individual. Indeed, the mob must win the battle for the soul of even the potential philosopher, whose natural qualities make him particularly suited to the pull of reason. These very qualities lead to his undoing. Because of his natural superiority, those

around him would seek to utilize him for their own ends. They would flatter and pander to him, and they would win him over. Such a man is not easily saved. If someone were to come to him and tell him the truth about the wretchedness of his condition and how he could acquire true virtue, there is no chance that he would listen (494d). Even if he could be influenced initially, that would not be the end of the matter. Those people wishing to use him, infuriated at the thought of losing him, would go to great lengths to make sure the persuader would not succeed. They would go so far as to bring the persuader to court to prevent him from winning the youth over (494de). For all readers of the *Republic*, the fate of the historical Socrates is there to remind them how vulnerable the philosophic reformer is.

As the philosopher is unable to convince his individual subject in book 6, he fares no better in confronting society as a whole, in a well-known passage in book 7. Describing what would happen if the prisoner, who had been freed from the cave and seen the light,⁵⁵ were to return in order to aid his former fellows, Plato writes: "As for the man who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow lay their hands on him and kill him, they would do so" (517a).

Returning to the exegesis of the parable of the ship of state, we have Plato's recommendation for those philosophers who do survive in corrupt societies. Their role is not to be a public one; they are to avoid politics altogether. For Plato, the true philosopher "keeps quiet and minds his own business": "Like a man who takes refuge under a small wall from a storm of dust and hail driven by the wind, and seeing other men filled with lawlessness, the philosopher is satisfied if he can somehow live his present life free from injustice and impious deeds and depart from it with a beautiful hope, blameless and content" (496de).

Thus Plato realizes that the philosopher is powerless to persuade the corrupted individuals of a corrupt society to care for virtue. He is aware of the full complexity of human nature and believes that the philosopher cannot hope to achieve his ends without recourse to political power. And so the philosopher must seek to control the state, while the unity of political power and philosophical wisdom in the person of the philosopher-king marks the decisive rejection of the political view expressed in the early

⁵⁵ Note that the prisoner is "forced to be free"; Plato repeatedly uses the language of coercion to describe his rescue, in 515c-16a.

dialogues. The broad outlines of the political theory of the *Republic* are of course familiar, and I will not discuss them here. What must be seen is that, though in certain respects representing the growth and development of themes raised in the early dialogues — for example, in its emphasis on moral reform and caring for the soul⁵⁶ — the political theory of the *Republic* is in other respects radically different. In the briefest possible terms, according to Plato, the philosopher is forced to ally himself with political power because of the need to impose upon his subjects' souls that psychic order which is a necessary component of virtue. Believing, like Aristotle, that virtue requires the conditioning and habituation of the citizens' souls while they are young and most malleable, Plato believes that the philosopher must control the state and shape it to his educational purposes. In addition, because of the strong effects of the social environment upon the souls of the inhabitants, the would-be moral reformer must have complete control over his society, if he is to have any chance of succeeding. And so the philosopher must somehow control his state. Moral reform must wait upon the union of philosophy and political power, though where this power is to come from Plato cannot say.⁵⁷ In the meantime, the philosopher must refrain from action; most important from our point of view, he must not embark upon a Socratic-type mission of reform.

VI

At the present time, the account of the political contents of the early dialogues presented above is widely disputed. Many scholars overlook the fact that the Socrates of the early dialogues is engaged in a mission of moral reform altogether, while others, who are aware of the general character of Socrates' activity, misconstrue its nature. What is especially important from our point of view is the fact that many scholars who present non-political interpretations of the *Republic* present similarly non-political accounts of the early dialogues as well.

As construed in this paper, the political content of the early dialogues is sharply different from that of the middle works, while the nature of this difference has been explored at length. This dif-

⁵⁶ On aspects of continuity between the early and middle dialogues, see Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago, 1933), esp. pp. 67-73. I believe that Shorey overstates these aspects of Plato's thought (see above, note 45).

⁵⁷ For the philosophers' prospects in regard to ever establishing the ideal state, see Klosko "Implementing the Ideal State."

ference is not, however, always noted by scholars. In some cases this seems to be a result of a general failure to appreciate the development of Plato's thought.⁵⁸ Barker, for one, is influenced by the Burnet-Taylor thesis, that throughout his entire corpus Plato uses "Socrates" to represent the historical Socrates. This view was widely discussed in 1918, when Barker's work first appeared,⁵⁹ and though Barker does not go to Burnet's extremes, he holds that there is a basic continuity between the political philosophy of the early and middle dialogues.⁶⁰

Other scholars note fundamental disparities between the Socratic political theory of the early works, especially the *Apology*, and the Platonic views found in the *Republic*. Perhaps the most familiar of these is Popper, who is very much concerned with placing Socrates in opposition to Plato, whom he sees as advocating a totalitarian "closed society" in the *Republic*. But though Popper does note the political character of Socrates' mission of moral reform,⁶¹ one main thrust of his argument is to make Socrates a proponent of democracy, and so of the existing political system.⁶² Accordingly, though Popper is aware of the importance of Socratic intellectualism, especially his confidence in the mental abilities of all human beings—in which sense he contrasts him sharply with Plato⁶³—Popper is led to construe Socrates' mission as inherently *limited*, directed only at the young⁶⁴—presumably because of his desire not to see Socrates, whom he admires, associated with any program for *radical* reform, which he detests.

Of scholars I have consulted, only Cornford and Jaeger seem generally cognizant of the true nature of Socrates' mission, as depicted in the early dialogues, and of the extent to which Plato's *Republic* represents a departure from this.⁶⁵ I believe that the ma-

⁵⁸ See above, nn. 45, 56.

⁵⁹ For discussion of this, see, e.g., Ross, "The Problem of Socrates"; and Guthrie, *History*, 3:351 ff.

⁶⁰ Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors* (London, 1918; rpt. 1947), pp. 112-13.

⁶¹ K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed., 2 vols. (Princeton, 1966), esp. 1:129-30, 191.

⁶² This of course is questionable; for references to some views different scholars have held, see Guthrie, *History*, 3:414-16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, esp., 1:131-32, 139-40, 194-95; see also Popper's surprisingly moderate and sensible essay on the Socratic problem, chap. 10, n. 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁶⁵ See esp. Cornford, *Unwritten Philosophy*, pp. 59-60; "Lectures," 3.67; 6.5-7. W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, 3 vols., trans. G. Highet (Oxford, 1939-45), comes close to Cornford's degree of understanding; see 2:38-41, 73; but cf. 63, 49.

jority of recent scholars severely downplay the political character of Socrates' activity,⁶⁶ as many philosophical studies of the *Republic* largely overlook the extent to which Plato is actually concerned with political reform in that work.⁶⁷ It seems to me that if scholars were more fully attuned to the political content of the early works, they would be led more easily to appreciate the extent to which political reform is one of Plato's major concerns in the *Republic*. I do not think it is a coincidence that many scholars who underemphasize the political character of the *Republic* do not fully realize the political character of Socrates' mission as well.⁶⁸

One final nonpolitical interpretation we will consider here is that of Strauss, and, following him, Bloom. The views of Strauss and Bloom have been the subject of much discussion and controversy in recent years. For obvious reasons of space, we can discuss only a few of their central points.⁶⁹ Strauss and Bloom are frequently discussed in connection with their unusual interpretation of the *Republic*, according to which the ideal state is constructed in order to communicate the impossibility of political reform.⁷⁰ What interests us is the fact that their view of the *Republic* is closely connected with their account of the political content of the early dialogues, which is discussed much less frequently.

According to the view of Strauss, which is set forth in his essay, "On Classical Political Philosophy," classical political philosophers in general are necessarily led (for reasons we cannot discuss here) to discover the limitations of what is politically possible, "to realize that the ultimate aim of political life cannot be reached by political life, but only by a life devoted to contemplation, to philosophy."⁷¹ Strauss holds, then, that the political

⁶⁶ In *Plato's Moral Theory*, Irwin does not even discuss Socrates' mission as described in the *Apology*; Santas, *Socrates*, too, has almost nothing to say about this side of Socrates.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), esp. p. 186; R. Cross and A. Wooldrey, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (London, 1964), p. 199; cf. N. White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis, 1979), p. 204.

⁶⁸ For instance, Guthrie, who puts off a full assessment of Socrates' mission in his treatment of Socrates (*History*, 3:413), never to return to it, interprets the *Republic* as not concerned with political reform (4:483-86).

⁶⁹ For discussion of some additional points, with numerous references, see Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State," pp. 368-73.

⁷⁰ L. Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 124-27; A. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (New York, 1968), pp. 407-412.

⁷¹ Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy," in *What Is Political Philosophy?* (New York, 1959), p. 91.

philosopher is led to desert politics for a life devoted to contemplation. His analysis of the *Republic* is in keeping with this line of thought. What most concerns us here is that Strauss applies the same line of interpretation to the Socrates of the early dialogues, thereby denying the political character of his mission.⁷²

If what we have argued throughout this paper is true, Strauss's position is incorrect. To a certain extent this can be demonstrated, even in this brief space. To support his position, Strauss cites Socrates' remark at *Gorgias* 521d (see above, section four) as follows:

Socrates called his inquiries a *quest* for the "true political skill."⁷³

Strauss's rendering of this line is unfortunate, for two reasons. First, *ἐπιχειρεῖν*, the Greek word he translates as "quest," actually connotes "to attempt" much more than "to search for."⁷⁴ Thus, more properly translated, in this line Socrates describes his mission as *practice* of the true political skill. This is confirmed in the continuation of the line, which Strauss does not cite. For Socrates explicitly says of this political skill that he *prattein ta politika*, "puts it into practice" (as Helmbold and Hamilton translate this).⁷⁵ *Prattein* (to do) is the verb from which comes the word *praxis*, which, of course, is generally placed in opposition to *theory*, contemplation, alone. And so it seems that this line, which Strauss cites as evidence of Socrates' abstention from political participation, actually provides strong evidence of quite the opposite.

It seems to me that Strauss assimilates the Socrates of the *Apology* and the other early dialogues to the philosopher in the corrupt city described in *Republic*, book 6, who flees from all political activity. This, of course, strikes me as wrongheaded, for as we have seen, the latter view is the all but explicit rejection of the former. I believe that only some misunderstanding of this kind

⁷² Strauss says almost nothing about Socrates' mission of reform in his essay, "On Plato's *Apology of Socrates and Crito*," in *Essays in Honor of Jacob Klein* (Annapolis, 1976); cf. the (extremely unusual) account of Socrates' mission, heavily influenced by Strauss, in T. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates* (Ithaca, 1979), pp. 166-80.

⁷³ Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy," p. 91 (I italicize "quest" and remove the italics from "true").

⁷⁴ See Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon*, q.v. Translators I have checked generally agree. Lamb, Helmbold, Woodhead and Irwin support my reading; only Hamilton supports Strauss. (Full references to all translators are found in the bibliography of Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias* [Oxford, 1979].)

⁷⁵ Lamb, Irwin, and Woodhead also give similar translations; see all, *ad loc.*

could lead Strauss to misconstrue Socrates' mission in the way we have seen, or could lead Bloom to remark upon "the obscure but happy life of Socrates."⁷⁶ The Socrates of the early dialogues is anything but obscure (*see esp. Ap 34e-35a*); his life is a never-ending process of reminding his city of his gadfly's sting.

To avoid the erroneous interpretation of the *Republic* presented by Strauss and Bloom — and the views of other scholars discussed in the section as well — it is necessary to avoid the errors they make in interpreting the political content of the early dialogues. For — as has been traditionally maintained, and as I have argued elsewhere⁷⁷ — the ideal state presented in the *Republic* is designed to be brought into existence. Though the ideal state is undoubtedly "utopian" in the sense that Plato believes it will probably never be realized, it is not simply an "[employment of] the imaginary to project the ideal."⁷⁸ The ideal state is *not* utopian in two other senses: (1) Plato is interested in realizing it, and (2) he is fully aware of many of the obstacles that stand in its way.

In regard to the latter, as we have seen, Plato's view in the *Republic* is far superior to that of Socrates. Deserting Socrates' extreme intellectualism and his accompanying reliance on arguments alone as a means of reform, Plato faces up to the grim truth that political reform requires political means. In fact, it can be seen that Plato's rejection of the Socratic view is notably similar to the criticism of the views of their predecessors rendered by two much more notorious apostles of radical reform. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels describe the view of the "utopian socialists" as follows:

. . . they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel.

And again:

Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Bloom, *Republic*, p. 436.

⁷⁷ Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State."

⁷⁸ To use the phrase of G. Kateb, in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards, 8 vols. (New York, 1967), 8:212.

⁷⁹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pt. 3, sec. 3.

But as Marx and Engels knew, propaganda alone does not revolutionize states. Accordingly, one main purpose of this essay is to locate Plato in the great tradition of would-be reformers who have seen that political reformers must resort to political means.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Cf. Klosko, "Implementing the Ideal State," pp. 384-89.*

*Note on texts and translations used. Plato and Aristotle are quoted from Oxford Classical texts. This means that for Plato I use the edition of Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1900-1907). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are from Loeb Classics Library editions, occasionally modified slightly. For the *Republic*, I use the translation of Grube (Indianapolis, 1974).

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