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Email Address: **gk@virginia.edu**

george klosko

Department: Politics
Gibson, South Lawn

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'RACISM' IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC**

George Klosko

Among the criticisms commonly made of the *Republic* is that Plato's just city favours a certain biological human type over others, that Plato is, in short, a racist. The charge appears in its most celebrated form in Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, which has prompted detailed rebuttals from Plato's supporters.[1] In this paper I review the grounds of the controversy. I believe that there is some merit to the charge of 'racism', though most of its inflammatory connotations are unwarranted. The precise sense in which Plato is — and others in which he is not — a 'racist' can be clarified if we carefully examine the concept of 'racism', before turning to Plato. The concept of 'racism' is discussed in Section I, with special attention to the distinction between what I call 'empirical' and 'normative' aspects of racism or racist theories. Relevant features of the *Republic* are reviewed in Section II, and analysed in the light of our discussion of racism in Section III, before a brief conclusion in Section IV.

I

My starting point is the fact that, though 'racism' and related topics are often discussed, they are not always clearly understood. In particular, when people discuss 'racism' they tend not to distinguish two quite different notions: racism as prejudice (what I will call 'empirical racism'), the view that certain types of people are better than others in certain respects; and racism as discrimination (what I will call 'normative racism'), the view that certain types of people are entitled to receive preferential treatment in certain respects.

Because questions of racism are familiar, the term is frequently employed with little explanation of its precise sense. Occasionally, an author will present a brief definition, along the lines of the following, which is taken from a recent book by William Julius Wilson. According to Wilson, racism in the United States is the 'conscious refusal of whites to accept blacks as equal human beings and their willful, systematic effort to deny blacks equal opportunity'.[2] In their recent study of the Chicano political experience, F. Chris Garcia and Rudolph de la Garza present a

* I am grateful to Daniel Devereux, Robert Fatton and Charles A. Miller, for valuable discussions of issues treated in this paper, and to Ethan Fischman, for comments on an earlier draft.

The *Republic* is quoted from the edition of J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera* (5 vols., Oxford, 1900–7). I generally follow G.M.A. Grube's translation (*Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis, 1974)), with occasional slight modifications.

[1] K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. I: *The Spell of Plato* (Princeton, 5th edn., 1966); R. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (New York, 1953), esp. pp. 535–43.

[2] W.J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago, 1987), p. 11, quoting Charles Gershman.

more elaborate definition, in the course of discussing a theory of 'internal colonization':

> *Racism.* The conquered group is seen as distinctively different and inferior by nature. Negative stereotyping is employed to discredit the features of the conquered group. The conquered people are exploited; they are used by the society. They provide, for example, the labor for the colonizers and yet reap very little benefit from their own labor. They are controlled, limited in their activities, and oppressed both socially and psychologically. This racism is both individual and institutional. Not all or even a majority of individual members of the dominant elite may harbor prejudiced feelings, but certainly many members are racist in their thoughts and actions.[3]

I do not question the accuracy of these definitions, or their adequacy in many contexts. However, greater precision is required to assess complex moral situations. In both Wilson's and Garcia and de la Garza's accounts, the authors drift between different kinds of claims. They make empirical or factual claims about the relative merits of different groups and normative claims as to how members of different groups should be treated.[4] As we will see, empirical and normative aspects of racism can be related in different ways, and we get rather different kinds of racist views as we vary the relations. Garcia and de la Garza draw connections between phenomena of racism and exploitation. One advantage of attaining greater clarity about the concept of 'racism' is that this will help us to determine exactly what kinds of exploitation are racist.

Before proceeding, I should make clear exactly what I claim — and do not claim — about the concept of 'racism' developed here. It should be noted that (in this paper on Plato) I am not advocating an 'essentialist' view,[5] according to which there is some objective essence of 'racism' that proper analysis can uncover. Concepts are tools; the specific version of a concept that one employs should be adapted to one's purposes and be as precise as one requires. Because of the complexity of assessing Plato's 'racism', a fairly involved concept is necessary here.

In order to analyse the concept of 'racism', we should begin with the concept of 'race'. In the broadest sense, 'races' are biological groupings of human types. Consider two representative definitions. According to Ruth Benedict: 'a race may be defined as a group of individuals possessing in common certain traits transmitted by

[3] F.C. Garcia and R.O. de la Garza, *The Chicano Political Experience* (North Scituate, Mass., 1977), p. 9. The claims made by Garcia and de la Garza are from the point of view of the oppressed group in society.

[4] It may seem strange to identify a claim of hereditary superiority as an 'empirical' claim. However, it should be noted that such a claim assumes some established standard and so would be identified by Ernest Nagel as a 'characterizing' value judgment, as opposed to an overtly normative 'appraising' value judgment (E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York, 1961), pp. 492–5). An example of a theorist who clearly distinguishes empirical and normative racist claims is Morroe Berger, *Racial Equality and the Law* (Paris, 1954), pp. 10–12.

[5] Cf. Popper, *Open Society*, pp. 31–2.

heredity, which are sufficiently clear to mark off one group from others'.[6] A more detailed definition is presented by W.A. Lessa:

> A *race* is a subdivision of a species, individual members of which display with some frequency a number of hereditary attributes that have become associated with one another in some measure through a considerable degree of inbreeding among the ancestors of the group during a substantial part of their recent evolution.[7]

As seen in these two definitions, in the concept of race we generally find two component claims: (a) that members of at least two human groups can be distinguished; and (b) that the distinguishing characteristics are transmitted by heredity. However, despite general agreement upon these two points, there is considerable disagreement about specific characteristics that distinguish races, and in regard to such questions as the degree of difference between members of different races, and the number and identity of races. Theorists also differ in their views of the strictness of hereditary transmission of the relevant characteristics.[8]

Because discussions of race generally emphasize hereditary transmission, the distinguishing characteristics tend to be physiological, e.g. colour of skin, shape of eyes, texture of hair. In practice, because of centuries of intermixture of racial groups, sharp distinctions are often difficult to draw; so races will often be distinguished solely on hereditary grounds, with differentiating characteristics said to follow, by decree. Thus the racial policies of Nazi Germany concentrated upon heredity. The Nuremburg laws, which were intended 'to maintain the purity of German blood',[9] gave careful definitions of what constituted a Jew. The first supplementary decree to the Reich Citizenship Law, one of the two Nuremburg laws, defined a Jew as someone with three full Jewish grandparents, or with two Jewish grandparents who was also a member of the Jewish religious community on a specified date — with a few additional complexities. An individual with one Jewish great-grandparent or great-great-grandparent was declared to be 'of Jewish blood'.[10]

Though theorists may differ as to exactly what constitutes a race, or the identities of the distinguishable races, they generally agree that, however this determination is made, racism centres upon claims of superiority on the part of certain racial groups over others.[11] What interests us is exactly how claims of racial superiority can be used to justify distributional inequalities, the fact that certain groups in a given

[6] R. Benedict, quoted by F. Neumann, *Behemoth* (1944; reprinted New York, 1963), p. 98.

[7] W.A. Lessa, 'Race', *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. J. Gould and W.L. Kolb (New York, 1964), p. 569.

[8] For discussion of these issues, see *The Concept of Race*, ed. A. Montagu (Glencoe, Ill., 1964).

[9] Neumann, *Behemoth*, p. 113; for a good brief discussion of the laws, see *ibid.*, pp. 111 ff.; and L. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* (New York, 1975), pp. 63–9.

[10] Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, p. 68.

[11] See H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, new edn., 1968), pp. 166–7.

society receive and/or are viewed as deserving to receive greater portions of wealth, political power, and other important goods than other groups.

Racist views justify distributive inequalities in two different ways. The first is by upholding the employment of racial criteria in place of the grounds upon which distributional decisions should rightfully be made. Complex problems are associated with the idea of proper distributional criteria. On a general level, the difficulties can be dealt with by introducing a concept, 'appropriate criteria'. As the appellation indicates, appropriate criteria are those upon the basis of which different goods *should* be distributed. In certain cases, appropriate criteria are readily identifiable. For example, if a number of musicians audition for spots in an orchestra, the positions should go to those who most clearly demonstrate the qualities one looks for in a good musician. Or in the case of a football league, the limited number of available positions should go to the individuals who best demonstrate the relevant skills. Though there can be problems in identifying the best musicians or football players, the criteria in these fields and others like them are relatively clear. In practice, the most serious difficulties will probably occur when different individuals have roughly similar abilities or are better in certain aspects of their fields than in others. But difficulties of this sort concern the application of criteria rather than criteria themselves.

In other cases appropriate criteria are less easily identified, becoming themselves objects of controversy. For instance, it is generally agreed that intellectual aptitude should be a primary consideration in university admissions decisions. But there is considerable disagreement about how aptitude is identified or measured. Fortunately, in this paper we need not become embroiled in complex issues associated with appropriate criteria. In the case that interests us the appropriate criteria are clearcut.

The identification of appropriate criteria in some distributive situation allows us to see exactly how they are supplanted in certain cases of racism. This would be seen if musicians of particular racial groups were forbidden to play in various musical organizations, i.e. if positions were distributed according to race rather than musical ability. In the football example, the supplanting of appropriate criteria would occur if opportunities went to members of specific racial groups rather than to the best players. The racism of Nazi Germany was seen in countless cases along these lines. During the early years of the Reich, Jews were barred from profession after profession — as a prelude to their later physical liquidation. For example, in Frankfurt, in April 1933, German Jewish teachers were forbidden to teach in universities; German Jewish actors were barred from the stage; German Jewish musicians were forbidden to play in orchestras.[12] In regard to the distribution of more general social goods, such as the rights of citizenship, or protection under the rule of law, non-controversially appropriate criteria are less easily identified. But it is our well-established belief that these goods should be distributed to all alike because of their fundamental human equality, or human rights. Thus we look with horror at the Nazi view that differences in rights and obligations should derive from racial differences.[13]

[12] M. Gilbert, *The Holocaust* (New York, 1985), p. 36.

[13] Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, p. 67.

If we collect the results of our discussion to this point, we can sketch our two different kinds of racism. Racist views are comprised of assertions of the following kinds:

A1. The existence of characteristics distinguishing members of different groups.

A2. The fact that the distinguishing characteristics are transmitted through heredity.

A3. The fact that the distinguishing characteristics justify a claim of superiority; i.e. members of group X, who possess the characteristics, are superior (in some important respect) to members of group Y, who do not.

A4. The fact that in questions concerning the distribution of some good, g, possessors of the distinguishing characteristics should be favoured over possessors of what would ordinarily be viewed as the appropriate criteria for the distribution of g's.

As theorists subscribe to different combinations of these assertions, they will hold different kinds of racist theories. Belief in A1, A2 and A3 constitutes 'empirical racism'. This is in opposition to 'normative racism', which centres upon A4 (along with A1 and A2, but not A3). Both variants of racism present claims of hereditary superiority. Empirical racists believe that different human groups differ in significant ways. When empirical racism is used to justify distributional inequalities, it assumes the following (somewhat schematic) form:

> *Empirical Racism*: (1) Characteristics a, b, c, . . . n, are acquired by and only by heredity. (2) By virtue of possessing a, b, c, . . . n, which are the appropriate criteria for the distribution of goods, g, h, i, individuals P, Q, R, have superior entitlements to g, h, i.

What distinguishes this view from normative racism is the basis of its claim to superior entitlements. As seen in (2), this is based on *characteristics*, which are the appropriate criteria for distribution of the goods in question, with the core of the doctrine being the claim that the characteristics are transmitted hereditarily. An individual who subscribes to empirical racism believes that certain individuals are better than others, on the basis of hereditarily transmitted characteristics. But the imputed superiority stems from superior qualities. There is a certain justice to such views, in that the characteristics in question are appropriate criteria; and so an essential moral component of such views is the claim that the social goods in question should be distributed to those individuals who would ordinarily be said to deserve them. It seems that empirical racism is actually 'racism' only if the empirical claims are false. 'Racism' is a pejorative notion, and it is not clear that treating people according to their deserts is wrong. However, empirical racism generally posits exaggerated differences between groups, to justify significant distributional inequities. Claims along these lines are generally clearly false, meriting strong condemnation of their proponents (with the degree of condemnation reflecting degree of

departure from the truth). Representative claims centre upon the intellectual superiority of group X, or its natural (hereditary) possession of desirable psychological traits, e.g. greater willingness to work, or ability to control certain objectionable appetites. Empirical racist views can be referred to as prejudice, as opposed to advocacy of discrimination, because they turn upon incorrect factual beliefs about different human groups — based on, for example, the stereotyping noted above by Garcia and de la Garza.

The difficulties empirical racists have with their factual claims are compounded by central aspects of our moral beliefs.[14] In modern Western societies, distributional entitlements are generally believed to be held by individuals rather than by groups. We hold that individuals should receive shares of social goods according to their own deserts. Assume that some empirical racist theory is true and so *most* members of group X actually are superior to most members of group Y in some important respect, e.g. intelligence. This fact alone would not justify giving A, who belongs to group Y, less of some social good (e.g. education), unless it can be shown that *she* is inferior to other members of society in the relevant respect. Because empirical racists generally make claims about groups as wholes, as opposed to all the particular members of groups, their claims of superior distributional entitlements for specific individuals are especially unlikely to bear scrutiny.

The move to normative racism is taken with A4. An individual who holds A1, A2 and A4 will argue that hereditary characteristics should take precedence over what would otherwise be recognized as appropriate criteria in questions of distribution. For example, adherents of Nazi ideology, as discussed above, believed that considerations of heredity should outweigh possession or non-possession of the appropriate criteria in certain distributional situations. Normative racism can be schematized as follows:

> *Normative Racism*: By virtue of heredity, individuals P, Q, R, have superior entitlements to goods g, h, i.

Though empirical and normative racism are not often distinguished, as is seen in the quotations from Wilson and Garcia and de la Garza given above, they are actually inconsistent with one another. Though both theories justify distributional inequalities on the basis of race — the reason, I take it, that they are often lumped together — they justify these inequalities in different ways, on the basis of contradictory factual premises. Empirical racists believe that members of group X deserve more social goods, because they are superior: they possess in higher degree the characteristics that are generally viewed as appropriate to the distribution of the goods in question. Normative racism begins where empirical racism leaves off. The main weakness of empirical racism is that its factual premises are generally false. Normative racism responds to this situation by advocating distributional inequalities *even though* members of group X *are not* superior in the appropriate respect. Normative racists do not base their distributional claims upon hereditary superiority, but uphold them

[14] I owe this point to Charles A. Miller.

in spite of the absence of the superior qualities in question. The reader will note that appropriate criteria are not mentioned in the above statement of normative racism.

II

The charge that Plato is a racist centres upon the distinctive institutions he builds into his just city. The major institutions that concern us are the system of classes around which the city is structured and the communal family arrangements under which the Guardians live.

As readers of the *Republic* of course know, the work's ideal city is constructed upon a three-class system. Plato believes that there are three different kinds of people, whose souls are 'ruled' by different passions, by the love of wisdom, honour and money, respectively. The passion that rules a given soul determines the individual's value orientation and beliefs. Thus individuals ruled by reason prefer the pursuit of knowledge and truth to other values, and believe that the pleasures associated with these activities are best. Something similar is seen in the other types of men.[15] Plato's political theory in the *Republic* is constructed upon the idea that the three types of individuals should be placed in different classes and perform the different functions for which they are naturally suited. Plato argues for this principle, to which we can refer as the 'principle of specialization', in Book II.[16] Though it is commonly taken to apply to individuals, there can be no doubt that Plato means for it to apply rather to classes.[17] Thus lovers of wisdom are to rule, lovers of honour to provide military service in the role of Auxiliaries, and lovers of money to perform economic functions as Farmers or Craftsmen, growing the city's food, and making whatever it requires in the way of arts and crafts.

The upshot of Plato's belief in three distinct human types with different moral and intellectual potential is expressed in the 'myth of the metals', presented in Book III.[18] The Rulers are described as having gold in their souls, the Auxiliaries silver, and the Farmers only bronze, though Plato takes pains to emphasize that members of the three classes are 'brothers'.[19] The thrust of these evaluations is later compounded by Plato's view that members of the lowest class should be 'enslaved' to members of the highest. Because they do not have the capacity to control the appetitive aspects of their souls, they should be enslaved to the Rulers who will carefully train them from earliest childhood in order to allow them to achieve a condition of mastery of their appetites analogous to that of the Rulers.[20] Though Plato says that the purpose of this subordination is to benefit the lowest class, members of which would not be

[15] *Republic* 580d–81c; for how different parts of the soul 'rule' in different people, see G. Klosko, 'The "Rule" of Reason in Plato's *Republic*', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 4 (1988), pp. 341–56.

[16] Esp. *Republic* 370a–c.

[17] *Ibid.*, 434a–b.

[18] *Ibid.*, 414b–15c.

[19] *Ibid.*, 415a2–3.

[20] *Ibid.*, 590c–d.

able to lead fully human lives without this assistance, because Plato's Greece was a society that practised human slavery, the claim that one class of citizens should be enslaved to another had powerful connotations.

The distinction between natural human types is essential to the maintenance of the just city. The reason for the emphasis upon justice, that members of each class stay in their places and do their own jobs, is Plato's belief that only individuals with souls of gold are qualified to rule. Because of their superior natures, the rulers can be trusted with unchecked political power. The details of Plato's argument need not be discussed here.[21] Let it suffice to say that Plato believes in an inverse proportion: only if a city is blessed with rulers who have no interest in ruling, who do not believe that they can derive personal benefits from ruling, can it have a good government. The more eagerly individuals pursue political office — because they view ruling as a path to individual gain — the less they will be inclined to rule justly, putting their cities' interest before their own.[22] Because of their love of knowledge and truth — which Plato believes will be associated with disdain for the values of the phenomenal world — philosophic rulers can be trusted to rule justly. So Plato places no institutional or other checks upon their power. He advocates instead a careful process of lifelong screening and testing, to make sure that the rulers have the necessary moral and intellectual qualities. The importance of insuring that the right people — and only the right people — rule is the major reason for the rigid class system. As Plato says in Book III: 'the first and most important (*kai prōton kai malista*) command of the god to the rulers is that there is nothing they must guard better or watch over more carefully than the mixture of the souls in the next generation'.[23] Plato adds that 'the city will be ruined if ever it has an iron or bronze guardian'.[24]

The possibility of racism arises in connection with Plato's belief that an individual's moral and intellectual potential (with these two aspects of the psyche closely connected) is largely determined by birth. In most cases the child's potential will strongly reflect the qualities of his or her parents, and so there is a strong presumption that the child of parents of a certain class will also end up in that class,[25] though there will be exceptions to this rule.

Accordingly, one of Plato's arguments for his notorious system of community of the family turns on eugenics.[26] In raising various kinds of animals, breeders are careful to use the best stock, in the prime of life. Because similar reasoning applies to human beings, steps must be taken to insure that the best men breed with the best women, and the less worthy are restrained from reproducing. Therefore the traditional family structure must be replaced for the Guardians with community of the family.

[21] See G. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (New York, 1986), pp. 138–9.

[22] *Republic*, 520c–21a

[23] *Ibid.*, 415b.

[24] *Ibid.*, 415c.

[25] *Ibid.*, 415a7–8.

[26] *Ibid.*, 459a–61e.

The details of the system Plato devises are of course familiar. Sexual activity and reproduction are state-controlled.[27] Temporary marriages for the sake of reproduction are arranged and consecrated at public marriage festivals. The Rulers are to devise a cleverly rigged lottery system, to lead all Guardians to believe that their marriage prospects are determined by chance, though the Rulers actually arrange things in accordance with their eugenic priorities. Plato also says that Guardians who perform especially meritorious service should be given extra mating privileges, to ensure more offspring from the best stock and as a further inducement to valour.[28] Children are raised in public nurseries, with steps taken to hide the identities of parents and children. People are allowed to reproduce only during their prime: women between the ages of twenty and forty, men between thirty and fifty-five. It appears that individuals are to have no sexual outlets until they reach the prescribed ages, though once they are past childbearing age, they are allowed to copulate freely, within the constraints of the incest taboos. Children that result from such unions are not permitted to live.[29]

Plato's eugenic mechanisms are reinforced with the proviso that children of inferior parents, or children born defective, shall be disposed of[30] — probably through infanticide.[31] Proof that Plato is concerned more with eugenics than with controlling sexual activity for its own sake is the fact that sexual restrictions are withdrawn once individuals have passed their reproductive years.

In addition to helping to improve the stock of Guardians, the system of family relations benefits the state by fostering unity. The community of the family will cause the Guardians to regard one another as kin.[32] Though this consideration is clearly important to Plato, it bears only indirectly upon the question of racism and so need not be discussed here.

III

We can now assess Plato's 'racism' in the *Republic*. At one point in the work Plato presents some common national stereotypes, about Thracians, Scythians, Phoenicians and Egyptians.[33] It is also clear that he believes that Greeks and non-Greeks occupy different moral statuses,[34] though there is no indication that this is because of physical differences. But in regard to the members of the three classes, referring to differential treatment as 'racism' may seem unusual, because they are all Greeks, and so presumably similar in physical characteristics. However, though these individuals have similar physical qualities, Plato believes that they differ in identifiable intellectual and moral respects. As his espousal of eugenic measures indicates, Plato

[27] *Ibid.*, 459c–61e.

[28] *Ibid.*, 460b.

[29] *Ibid.*, 461c.

[30] *Ibid.*, 460c.

[31] Cf. *Timaeus*, 19a.

[32] *Republic*, 462a–64d.

[33] *Ibid.*, 435e–36a.

[34] *Ibid.*, 469b–71c.

believes that these qualities are generally inherited and so the charge of racism cannot be dismissed out of hand.

The charge is put most forcefully by Popper. What sets his account apart from those of other scholars is its tone. Popper takes quite literally Plato's repeated comparison of the art of ruling to the shepherd's art. In his terms, the primary task of the philosopher-kings is 'managing and keeping down the human cattle'.[35] Though Popper believes that Plato's racism is subordinated to the political end of ensuring the stability of the just city, he says that Plato's proposals centre upon 'breeding the master race'.[36] Plato's philosopher-king 'turns out to be a philosopher breeder',[37] whose task is to realize on earth a Platonic Idea of the pure race.[38] It is for this reason that the philosophers require exhaustive mathematical training, to understand the secrets of mathematical eugenics, expressed in the notorious 'Platonic Number', presented in the beginning of Book VIII.[39] Popper believes that Plato's crucial teaching is epitomized in the myth of the metals, to which he refers as the 'Myth of Blood and Soil'.[40]

Popper's inflated language is obviously meant to evoke the spectre of Nazism. But Plato's Nazism can be dismissed out of hand. There is no textual justification for 'master race', 'human cattle', 'Myth of Blood and Soil', and many other Popperisms. Popper's belief in Plato's Hitlerian obsession with racial purity can also be dismissed out of hand.[41] Powerful evidence against Popper's view is Plato's repeated insistence that the moral and intellectual characteristics upon which class positions are determined are not always passed on from parents to children. Popper cannot avoid this problem entirely, but he does the next best thing.

As we have seen, *the first and most important* command of the god to the rulers is to insure that individuals be placed in the classes appropriate to their natures. For convenience, we can refer to this injunction as the 'placement rule'. To put the rule into effect, Plato's philosopher-kings would probably have to set up some competitive system of education for all children, though Plato does not discuss such measures in the *Republic*.[42] Popper's response to the placement rule is as follows:

> [I]t must be admitted that [Plato] here announces the following rule: 'if in one of the lower classes children are born with an admixture of gold and silver, they shall . . . be appointed guardians, and . . . auxiliaries'. But this concession is rescinded in a later passage of the *Republic*.[43]

[35] Popper, *Open Society*, p. 51.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Republic*, 546a–e; Popper, *Open Society*, pp. 151–3.

[40] Popper, *Open Society*, p. 141.

[41] See Levinson, *In Defense of Plato*, pp. 535–43.

[42] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1262a14–24; 1262b24–29.

[43] Popper, *Open Society*, p. 141.

Popper conveniently forgets to mention that this 'concession' is the Rulers' first and greatest duty. He also neglects to mention that the rule is repeated in Book IV: 'if an offspring of the guardians is inferior, he must be sent off to join the other citizens, and if the others have an able offspring, he must be taken into the guardian group'.[44]

Popper's position on the placement rule centres upon the claims (a) that it is not put forth sincerely, and (b) that it means only that 'nobly born but degenerate children may be pushed down, but not that any of the baseborn may be lifted up'.[45] Because (b) stands in clear defiance of Plato's text, Popper's only ground for holding it is (a). But it is not true that Plato later 'rescinds' the placement rule. (It is also not to Popper's credit that this crucial point is relegated to the notes, and there Popper only cites but does not discuss the passages in which the rescission supposedly takes place.) In his notes, Popper cites two passages:[46] *Rep.* 546 a ff.; 434c. The passages are straightforward, so Popper's interpretation of them is a mystery. The former, in which the 'Platonic Number' is introduced, concerns the importance of maintaining the placement rule, though only in regard to making sure that Rulers have the proper qualities. *Rep.* 434c reaffirms the principle of specialization and so, again, by implication, the placement rule. On the whole, one must conclude that Popper's treatment of the placement rule is not only inaccurate but deceptive.[47]

Proper interpretation of the placement rule is crucial to an assessment of Plato's racism. We can distinguish two separate policy areas in regard to which Plato's 'racism' can be assessed: as it bears on the maintenance of racial purity and distributive entitlements, respectively. The situation in regard to the former, with which Popper is mainly concerned, is clearcut. The placement rule tells strongly against Popper's view that Plato is seriously concerned with maintaining the blood purity of the Guardian classes, or with promoting their propagation at the expense of the lower classes. The fact that the Rulers' first priority is to make sure that hereditary considerations give way to considerations of merit proves that hereditary purity is not the primary goal of his policies, regardless of how infrequently the exceptional cases occur.[48]

[44] *Republic*, 423c–d.

[45] Popper, *Open Society*, p. 141.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 272, n. 12.

[47] In response to severe criticism, esp. by Levinson (*In Defense of Plato*), Popper concedes some error (*Open Society*, p. 338), but still evades the crucial point.

[48] Cf. Popper, *Open Society*, p. 338. Examination of Plato's position reveals the surprising — and perhaps inadvertant — fact that his institutions will, if anything, tell against the Guardians' hereditary dominance of the state. We have seen that Plato is interested in eugenics and so contrives means to have the best breed with the best among the Guardians. The lesser Guardians are constrained from reproducing, and we can assume that the offspring to be disposed of would generally be theirs. However, regardless of exactly who produces these children, Plato is left in the curious position of proposing infanticide for the offspring of Guardians, while apparently granting far more leeway to children of the lower classes — whose conception is unsupervised and who are raised by their individual families. This is surprising because the children of the lowest Guardians will presumably be superior to those of even the best Farmers, and so should be allowed to live.

Assessment of Plato's position in regard to distributive equity is complicated enormously by the fact that he does not believe in perfect hereditary transmission. This is seen, once again, in the placement rule. Though Popper argues that Plato must rescind the placement rule or confront a 'mingling of the races', in Plato's eyes 'class purity' requires movement between the classes. Adherence to the placement rule will not cause mingling of the classes, because membership of the three classes is determined by moral and intellectual qualities rather than birth. Indeed, to leave an individual with 'gold' in his soul in the third class would be to mix the metals. Though Plato believes that children will for the most part reflect the qualities of their parents, the placement rule is necessary because this will not always be the case. There can be little doubt that the qualities used to assign Guardian status are appropriate to the political system, and that Plato's recommended programme of lifelong, intensive testing represents a sincere effort to identify individuals who possess them. Thus in Plato's eyes, considerations of birth are to give way to considerations of merit.

Despite his belief in imperfect hereditary transmission, I believe that Plato's position should be viewed as empirical racism. Like empirical racists, Plato believes (A1) that there are observable differences between the members of different human groups, and (A2) that these are (almost always) based on heredity. He subscribes to (A3), the view that the characteristics in question constitute a claim to superiority, and so to superior distributional entitlements. The question of distributive entitlement in the just city is complicated by the fact that members of the highest classes do not receive more of all desirable social goods. However, the details need not be discussed here,[49] as it is clear that Plato recommends a political hierarchy based on hereditary characteristics. Though the factual claims on the basis of which social goods are distributed are well established in Plato's thought, we are likely to view them as obviously false and so should view Plato as an empirical racist.

What is most striking in Plato's view is the magnitude of the differences he draws between classes. A case can be made that Plato is not an empirical racist, because he does not believe in perfect hereditary transmission, and stresses the importance of dealing with exceptional cases. But he does believe in *almost* perfect transmission, while the exaggerated differences he draws between the classes are without foundation and outweigh the force of any exceptions. On balance it is the fact that Plato

It seems clear that if Plato had been strongly committed to the ideal of blood purity or Guardian blood domination the relevant institutions of his just city would probably have been set up differently. A preferable arrangement would have the Guardians reproducing at an accelerated rate, with the reproduction of the lowest class limited, and with infanticide reserved for their children. A set up of this sort is so clearly consistent with the ideal of Guardian blood dominance that the fact that Plato does not recommend it is strong evidence of his lack of interest in such concerns.

[49] See G. Vlastos, 'The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's *Republic*', in *Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Helen North (Leiden, 1977).

draws the hereditary differences between groups so starkly that calls for describing his view as empirical racism.[50]

However, there can be no doubt that Plato is not a normative racist. The placement rule proves that when there is a clash between birth and appropriate criteria, he comes down squarely on the side of appropriate criteria. Were Plato's system normative racism, he would subscribe to A4, and hold that, regardless of mental and moral characteristics, individuals should be assigned to classes according to birth — if, for example, three of one's grandparents were from a given class, then an individual belongs there as well. The situation would be more difficult to diagnose if Plato believed in perfect hereditary transmission of the relevant characteristics. But because this is not the case, his position is straightforward.

IV

It is clear, then, that once we have sorted out different kinds of racist views, we are able readily to respond to alternative accounts of Plato's position. For instance, Richard Mohr has recently argued that Plato is a racist, on the following grounds:

> While it is true that privileges are not doled out in the *Republic based on who one's parents* are (Plato admits golden parents may have brazen children) privileges are doled out based on *one's congenital characteristics* (the brazen are to be treated as brazen). Such doling is not . . . a system of merit.[51]

Though what Mohr says about the importance of hereditary characteristics is true — and supports a charge of empirical racism — he is incorrect about the role of merit. Because Plato does not believe in foolproof hereditary transmission and does not subscribe to A4, he believes that class placement should be based on appropriate criteria rather than birth, when the two come into conflict. Such a system is a pure meritocracy and not normative racism. We see here, as is frequently the case, the importance of attaining clarity about the complex concepts we employ.

George Klosko UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

[50] Plato could, perhaps, be defended from the charge of empirical racism on either the grounds (a) that his view is well founded, or (b) that he would be willing to consider evidence against his view and revise it accordingly. Very briefly, there is no evidence for (a). As for (b), though this might be true, as is attested to by Plato's apparent loss of faith in the possibility of philosophical rulers in the late dialogues and consequent changes in his political theory (see Klosko, *Development*, Part IV), the view is so central to the political theory of the *Republic* that altering it would necessitate fundamental revision of the work as a whole.

[51] R.D. Mohr, Review of Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, *Canadian Philosophical Review*, 6 (1986), p. 495 (his emphasis).

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