Ancient Philosophy 21 (2001)
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Philosopher-Rulers: How Contemplation Becomes Action

Kenneth Dorter

When Socrates announces that a just city can come about only if philosophers become rulers, he acknowledges that the proposal is paradoxical. Time has made it no less so. The very way in which he proposes it leaves us wondering not only whether a just society is possible at all, but also whether training in philosophy may not, on the contrary, be irrelevant to and even counterproductive for the practical activity of ruling. He says:

> Unless either the philosophers govern as rulers in the cities, or those who are now called kings and rulers practice philosophy genuinely and satisfactorily, and these two, political power and philosophy, coincide in the same one—while the many natures who at present pursue either one separately are prevented by compulsion (ἐξ ἀνάγκης) from doing so—there will be no rest from evils in the cities nor, I think, for the human race... But this is what made me shrink so long from saying so—that I saw how very paradoxical it would be. (473c-e)

If philosophy and ruling are so different that practitioners of one must be compelled to practise the other, then their unification in a single person may be infeasible. Philosophy is contemplation directed toward intelligible being, while ruling is practical activity directed toward visible becoming, so each pursuit appears to undermine the conditions necessary for the other. By compelling people to do what goes against their inclinations, we may ensure only that the city will have unhappy or incompetent rulers. So the proposal is problematic not only with regard to its possibility but even with regard to its desirability, and accordingly both Socrates and Glaucon expect it to provoke not only derision but even outrage (473c, 473e-474a).

The conflict between philosophy and ruling does not mean, however, that the concept of philosopher-ruler violates the just city's founding principle of 'one person one job' (370c), as some readers have concluded (Bloom 1968, 407; Annas 1981, 262, and 1986, 17–18; cf. Nichols 1984, 256). When Socrates defines justice in book 4 he refers back to that principle (433a-b), but reformulates it as 'having and doing one's own and what belongs to one', which means in context only that members of the productive, auxiliary, and guardian classes should not do one another's work, not that no one should combine two distinguishable functions within one of those groups (433e-434a). Hence, there would be nothing unjust about combining the work of philosophy and governing since they both belong to the 'rational' or ruling class. But if the concept of the philosopher-ruler does not violate the principle of 'one person one job' as reinterpreted in book 4, that reinterpretation will be convincing only if the ability to excel at philosophy and at ruling is a single ability whose exercise in these two activities can be complementary rather than antithetical.

The problem of reconciling the activities is especially striking in the Cave allegory's description of the culmination of philosophical education. Socrates says that our eyes may become confused in two ways, either when they move from darkness into light or from light into darkness (518a). The first happens when people in the darkness of their corporeal view of the world are forced to look at the light of intelligible truth. The second happens when 'enlightened' philosophers return to the cave to help others: their eyes, having grown accustomed to the light of intelligibility, find it hard to see anything in the darkness of corporeality and human opinions. Consequently, philosophers seem awkward and even ridiculous if they have to argue about the 'shadows' in front of a law court or other public forum.[1] If the Cave represents the corporeal world, and philosophers have difficulty seeing it clearly, how can they function effectively as rulers, and how can they love a city (412d) that they cannot really see? Socrates assures us that when their eyes are reaccustomed to the dark they will see immeasurably better than the cave dwellers (520c), but it is not clear how that is possible or how in that case they would still be able to see the light of truth.

Aristotle points out that since experience comprises many memories of individuals, while *episteme* knows only universals, 'with regard to practical matters...those with experience are more successful than those who have a rational understanding without experience...[for] practical matters and processes are concerned with individuals' (*Meta.* 980b28-981a17). What Aristotle means by experience (*empeiria*) is the kind of thinking exhibited by the prisoners in the cave, when Socrates describes them as competing for honors and prizes 'for him who most sharply discerns [the shadows] that go by, and best remembers which of them customarily pass by earlier, later, or together, and who is most able to prophesy from these things what is about to happen' (516c-d). But philosophers are weaned from this kind of thinking rather than nurtured in it. How can they govern a world of particulars when they aim for an intellectual skill that 'makes use of nothing perceived by the senses, but moving from forms themselves, through forms, to forms, concludes in forms' (511b-c)?

Plato is not blind to this problem, for it proves to be the eventual undoing of the just city. Socrates explains the inevitable decline of the city by saying that 'although they are wise, those who you have educated to be rulers in the city still won't, by using reasoning (λογισμῷ) *together with sense perception*, hit upon the [moments of] fertility and barrenness of your race' and so they will produce inferior rulers in the next generation (546a-b, emphasis added). This problem extends to all aspects of governing, for no matter how wise and rational the rulers are, they will always have to employ their reasoning 'together with sense perception'. Indeed, since moving from the light to the darkness produces blindness (518a), it might even seem that the bright light of their wisdom will have blinded them to the realm of sense perception more than anyone else in the city.

The difficulty arises not only for the philosophy of the *Republic*, but for the classical conception of philosophy generally. A similar tension can be found in Aristotle *Metaphysics* 981b13-25 and 982a14-19 when he insists that philosophy at its most distinctive is also the most useless kind of knowledge, but nevertheless the one that is most capable of governing—an echo of *Republic* 487e. Or when on the one hand he compares philosophy favorably with statesmanship precisely because it has no practical application, while on the other hand he claims that philosophy is what most enables us to become good legislators (*NE* 1177b1-25 and 1180b28-1181a23). The common source of these paradoxes in Plato and Aristotle is classical philosophy's belief that metaphysical philosophy can somehow make us more effective in concrete life.[2] Consequently the importance of our question is not limited to exegetical concerns, but it is ultimately the question of the relevance of philosophy to life.

The *Republic* offers us little explicit help in answering this question because its focus is primarily on the *attainment* of virtues such as wisdom and justice, rather than on their subsequent employment. Nevertheless the implications of what Socrates says in the dialogue point to an answer: *techne* (skill, craft) is what creates the bridge between the intelligible and practical realms that enables us, not only to move from the practical realm of visible entities to the contemplative realm of intelligible entities, but also to function subsequently within the practical realm without abandoning the intelligible one. The bridging character of *techne* is more evident in the transition from the practical to the intelligible—the education of the philosopher-rulers—so let us begin by examining that transition.

I. Escaping the Cave

The transition from the original warrior-guardians to the philosopher-rulers is effected by a series of mathematical studies designed to awaken the students to the intelligible foundation of visible reality. The mathematical character of these studies has both a purgative and a cognitive aspect. The purgative aspect is the ability of mathematical thinking to turn us away from the potentially corrupting world of appetite: whereas 'all other kinds of *techne* are directed to human opinion and appetites, or generation and composition, or to serving things that grow and things that are put together' (533b), mathematical studies are directed to knowledge rather than opinion, and to what is incomposite and eternal. Since appetite is directed toward composite changing things, it cannot be aroused by incomposite eternal entities.[3] Moreover, when we focus on mathematical reality

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[1] 517d. The point is put even more strongly at *Theaetetus* 174b-175b, which abounds in echoes of this passage.

[2] Cf. Klosko 1986, 163: practical wisdom 'is not to be gained from studying metaphysics'. For a contrasting view see Cooke 1999, 37-44.

[3] The *Republic* mentions eros as another way that 'those who are now called kings and rulers'

we learn to recognize the insubstantiality of corporeal, composite, mutable things, and this limits our appetites for them.

The cognitive aspect of the mathematical studies is connected with the fact that mathematics makes possible every form of conceptual knowledge: 'this thing in common that is employed by every *techne*, *dianoia*, and *episteme*...[is] the humble matter of distinguishing the one and the two and the three. I mean, in short, number and calculation' (522c). At the conclusion of his discussion Socrates again refers to the mathematical studies in terms of *techne* and, now to a reduced extent, *dianoia*, and *episteme*:

> Dialectic gently draws the soul forth and leads it upward, using as assistants and helpers in this conversion the kinds of *techne* mentioned above. We often called them *episteme* out of habit, but they need a different name that is clearer than *doxa* but dimmer than *episteme*. *Dianoia* is how I think we designated them in the previous discussion, but we shouldn't dispute about names when matters of such magnitude lie before us to be investigated. (533d-e)

The terms *techne* and *episteme* are sometimes used interchangeably because both refer to thinking that is based on concepts or rational principles (cf. Aristotle, *Meta.* 981a3-b9), but *techne* is a variety of *episteme* which also includes practical utility.[4] Accordingly, the *Republic* now begins to limit '*episteme*' to knowledge that is primarily intellectual, as previously it has used '*techne*' especially for knowledge directed toward practical utility (332c-e).

Although what is now called *dianoia* is 'clearer than opinion but dimmer than *episteme*', *dianoia* cannot effect the transition between the visible and intelligible realms because it lies entirely on the intelligible side of the Divided Line (533e). The transition can be accomplished only by a kind of thinking that comprises both *episteme* (not yet distinguished from *dianoia*) and sense perception, and that is precisely what *techne* does. All five of the mathematical *technai* combine a practical employment in the visible world with a theoretical component in the intelligible realm, and one of the ways that they function transitionally is that in the course of advancing from each one to the next, the practical component is progressively disengaged while the intelligible component is increasingly emphasized.[5]

The first of the studies, arithmetic, is useful to the warriors since it enables them to count and marshal troops (522c-e), while at the same time, as the art of counting, it determines whether what we are looking at is one thing or two, and thus is the repository of the law of opposition.[6] If we look at three fingers—the smallest, the second, and the middle finger—we perceive the second finger to be both big (in relation to the smallest) and small (in relation to the middle, 523c-524c). Since it is impossible for something to be opposite to itself, the fact that the finger is both big and small requires the calculative faculty to distinguish its bigness and smallness as two even though the sense of sight regarded the finger as one (523c, 524c-e). Consequently, since the intellect (*noesis*) and sense perception are in opposition to each other, the visible and intelligible realms must be two rather than one (524c). Arithmetical calculation, then, both is useful to the warrior and also leads to truth: 'arithmetic is necessary for the warriors to learn because they have to order their troops, and necessary for the philosophers because they have to rise out of becoming and grasp being' (525b). As a *techne* it comprises both sense perception and *episteme*. Similar links between the sense-directed thinking of the warrior and *episteme*-directed thinking of the philosopher are found in the other four types of *techne*. Geometry on one hand helps the warrior plan maneuvres (526d) and on the other hand enables us to know what is eternally true, 'what always is, rather than what comes to be at one time and passes away' (527b). Astronomy helps the warriors by giving them a more precise awareness of the seasons (527d), and is conducive to philosophy because the heavenly movements are signs of the order underlying the cosmos (529c-530b). Finally, harmony helps the warrior by supplying music that instils courage (399a), and contributes to philosophy by providing an auditory sign of the same cosmic order of which the motions of heavenly bodies are visible signs (531c-d).

As the series progresses, and the student proceeds upward from the cave and along the Divided Line, the component that links each study to the visible realm is gradually discarded. Socrates had emphasized both the practical and theoretical aspects in his discussion of arithmetic and geometry, but in the discussion of astronomy, when Glaucon mentions the practical application of astronomy to

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become philosophers (499b-c), but even in the case of eros the ultimate objects are eternal and do not arouse the appetite (*Symposium* 199c–203b and 209a–212a).

[4] Roochnik 1996, 20-21, 26, 31, 41, 44, 50, 52, 70 summarizes eight pre-Platonic conceptions of *techne*, beginning with the Homeric poems and ending with the sophists. In each case the list of criteria includes both rational principles and a practical application.

[5] Another way that they function transitionally is by means of their sequential hierarchy, which is emphasized in the middle of the discussion of astronomy when Socrates says that he and Glaucon were mistaken to take up astronomy after plane geometry because astronomy deals with the motion of solid bodies, so solid geometry should be dealt with first (528a). This provides us with the principle of the sequence: each study includes the principles of its predecessor and adds something new. Geometry takes quantity and calculation from arithmetic and adds two-dimensional space, solid geometry adds depth, astronomy motion, and harmony the unity of parts and whole. Dialectic, the science to which all these were said to be preparatory (536c-d), incorporates them all in providing a synoptic overview of all the branches of study taken together ('Someone who can see synoptically is a dialectician, someone who cannot is not', 537c). Benardete 1989, 181 disagrees: 'The sequence that Socrates establishes for the mathematical sciences...is not a sequence of ascent. Harmonics is not closer to either being or the good than arithmetic'. But in fact harmonics *is* closer to the good than arithmetic in the required sense: it is more synoptic. Harmonics includes arithmetic but arithmetic does not include harmonics. Brumbaugh 1954, 104-106 similarly observes that 'the order of the curriculum is one in which each successive science presupposes the principles of the one preceding, but integrates them with new attributes peculiar to its own treatment'.

[6] In book 4 Socrates pointed out that 'the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So, if we ever find this happening in the soul, we'll know that we aren't dealing with one thing but with many' (436b). Here the same principle is applied not to the internal experience of the soul but to its external experience.

war, Socrates ridicules him for feeling that he has to justify the study of astronomy by showing that it is practically useful (527d)—even though Socrates himself had done just that in the case of the previous two, and as recently as the previous paragraph (527c). Next, when Socrates interrupts the discussion of astronomy to raise the issue of solid geometry, and Glaucon objects that a science of solid geometry has not yet been formulated, Socrates replies that one reason it has not been formulated is that no city thinks of solid geometry as useful, and therefore none of them honors it. The implication is that the justification for educating the rulers in a particular *techne* no longer needs to make reference to practical utility (528c). And in the case of the highest of the mathematical studies, harmony, the reader must go back to book 3 (399a) to find a reference to its practical use for warriors; no mention is made of it here.

II. Returning to the Cave

Socrates explained in detail how a transition from the world of action to the intelligible world can be accomplished, but he says virtually nothing about the transition from the intelligible back to activity. However if it is *techne* that enables the citizens to make the transition from practical activity in the visible world to the intellectual activity of philosophers, as Socrates says (533d), then *techne* is also the most likely candidate to explain the philosophers' ability to return to the cave. The studies that made the upward transition possible were explicitly mathematical, and their mathematical character was the common denominator between their practical aspect and their theoretical aspect, but not only explicitly mathematical kinds of *techne* will serve the purpose, since 'every *techne*...[involves] number and calculation' (522c). Every *techne* is based on certain intelligible principles which in varying degrees make use of mathematical concepts; at the same time they operate in the visible world, and so they constitute a link between the visible and the intelligible.

Just as the *techne* of the warrior opened out into the mathematical studies that paved the way to the intelligible, the path from the intelligible back to the cave begins by requiring the guardians 'to hold command in war and other offices suitable for youth'.[7] This takes place at the age of thirty-five, after they complete the mathematical studies that they began as children, devoting the final five years to a study of dialectics. They spend the next fifteen years gaining experience in various arts related to ruling, and then are led to contemplate the Idea of the good until it is time for them to take their turn at governing the city. Ruling requires excellence 'both in actions and *episteme*' (540a) and accordingly, like the studies that drew the children upward, is taken to be a *techne* (341d-342e, 374e, 466e, 488d-489a, 493d; cf. *Statesman* 284a).

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[7] 539e. In the original account this final training might have been redundant since the philosophers began as warrior-rulers (412c-414b), but now that the students have been reconceived as children ('In the earlier part of our discussion we chose old men, but in this one we cannot accept that... All the preparatory studies for dialectic must be put before them when they are children', 536c-d) they must have additional training in the practice of ruling.

We saw that the study of mathematics purified the students by directing them away from the realm of appetite and opinion, and toward that of intelligibility. When they now return to the cave, what is to stop them from becoming corrupted again by these arts that 'are directed to human opinion and appetites'?[8] The corruptibility of the arts and their practitioners was alluded to at the beginning of the dialogue, when Socrates secured Polemarchus' agreement that the same capacity that enables us to do something valuable will also enable us to do its unjust counterpart. For example, 'Whoever is most skilful (δεινός) at guarding against disease will be most skilful at implanting it surreptitiously' and 'Whatever someone is skilful at guarding, he will be skilful at stealing' (333e-334a). In the case of justice, which was previously agreed to be a *techne* (332d), it follows that if justice is the ability to guard money (333c-d) then it is also the *techne* of stealing it (κλεπτική).[9] But this conclusion drawn from the argument with Polemarchus is shown to be only half true during the subsequent argument with Thrasymachus. The conception of *techne* that was compatible with injustice during the examination of Polemarchus was not rigorous enough. *Techne* in the strict sense (τῷ ἀκριβεῖ λόγῳ), Socrates now argues, is always just. In its pure state every *techne* seeks the advantage of the things to which it is directed, rather than what is advantageous to itself. Those who practice the *techne* of ruling, accordingly, seek the advantage of their subjects and not of themselves (341c-342e). In that case nothing could be more natural than for the philosophers, having come to under-

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[8] 533b. This does not mean that their virtue is compatible with corrupt behavior, but only that their virtue may become corrupted and cease to be virtue. Sachs 1971, 47-48 argues however that, 'On Plato's view, the fulfillment of the soul's parts constitutes wisdom or intelligence [*sophia*], courage, and self-control; and if these obtain justice...also obtains. Intelligence, courage, and self-control are, however, *prima facie* compatible with a variety of [conventionally understood] injustices and evil-doing'. But the *Republic*'s conception of virtue is not compatible with evildoing. We do wrong either because we lack *sophia* and do not know what is really good, or because we lack self-control and allow our appetites to override our knowledge of the good, or because we lack courage and allow our lower nature to override our knowledge of the good (442b-d). Therefore those virtues are not even *prima facie* compatible with wrongdoing. Nor is the general conception of justice in the *Republic*—'having and doing one's own and what belongs to one' (433e-434a)—compatible with 'to embezzle, thieve, betray, behave sacrilegiously, fail to keep oaths or agreements, commit adultery, neglect his parents or the sacrifice he owes to the gods' (Sachs 1971, 37). Also see Demos's 1964 refutation of Sachs.

[9] 334b. It is difficult to determine how serious the characterization of justice as a *techne* is. It appears at first to lead to a *reductio ad absurdum*, and thus stand refuted. However the absurdity results not from taking justice to be a *techne* (or even from the absurd definition of it as the *techne* of guarding money), but from a failure to distinguish the strict sense of *techne* from its entanglement with the *techne* of payment (346a-c). Nevertheless, if justice is a *techne* then it must seek not its own advantage but that of its object (342b), whereas the just soul benefits itself (443c-e), so justice is only a virtue and not also a *techne*. Yet, the actions of just people benefit others as well as themselves, so perhaps it is a *techne* as well as a virtue. Socrates may be ignoring the benefit to others (which Thrasymachus made so much of) only because he is responding to the challenge to show that a just person is happier than an unjust one, which requires him to concern himself with the effects of justice on the agent rather than the recipient. For our purposes it does not matter whether or not justice is a *techne* in the *Republic*.

stand the good, to apply it selflessly when they come to rule; the *techne* of ruling would complement rather than confuse the noetic understanding of the philosopher-rulers. But the possibility of corruption exists because *techne* is rarely practised in its pure state, its strict sense. Normally it is combined with what Socrates calls 'the *techne* of payment' (μισθοτική, 346a). In the case of the *techne* of ruling, Socrates mentions three types of payment—anticipating the three classes that are distinguished later—money, honor, or a penalty for refusal. 'The greatest penalty is to be ruled by someone worse if one is not willing oneself to rule' (347c).

Accordingly, the way to prevent corruption is to ensure that the philosophers practice ruling only as a *techne* in the strict sense, that is, one which is not combined with the positive forms of payment—money or personal power—but only with its privative form of not being ruled by one's inferiors, and the retroactive form of regarding their prior education as payment already received for work that they are now expected to perform.[10] In order to prevent the insidious kinds of payment from having any influence, the philosopher-rulers will be forbidden to possess any private property beyond what is absolutely necessary (416d) and will not be permitted to touch gold or silver, or even be under the same roof with it (416e-417a). Later, responding to a challenge by Polemarchus and Adeimantus to explain his proposals in more detail (449c), Socrates adds that the prohibition against private property extends also to spouses and children, so that the guardians will have no families, but will have the same relationship to all members of the opposite sex in common and to all children in common.

> And this agrees with what we said earlier, for we said somewhere that they must not have private houses, or land, or any other possession... Then isn't it the case, as I said, that what we said earlier and what we are saying now make them still more truly guardians, and prevent them from tearing the city apart by applying the word 'mine' not to the same things, but each to something different? (457b-c)

If such strictures ensure that ruling will be practised as a *techne* in the strict sense rather than in the impure self-interested version, then the nature of *techne* can provide a downward bridge from *noesis* to practical activity—as previously it provided an upward bridge—while protecting its practitioners from the possibilities for corruption offered by the kind of *techne* that concerns itself with 'human opinion and appetites'.[11]

A way of thinking that by nature seeks the good of its object seems made to order for philosophers who are going to apply their knowledge of the good to their charges. But precisely how does it enable the philosophers to bring their knowledge of the good to bear on particular situations? Since 'every *techne*...[involves] number and calculation' (522c), we can best answer this by identifying the kind of calculation that the *techne* of ruling makes use of. When Socrates speaks of the soul's rational element in its ruling capacity rather than its contemplative capacity, instead of the more usual terms *nous* or *noesis* he calls it *logistikon* or 'calculation' (439c-441e, cf. 546b), the term he used to describe the initial training in mathematics that leads from the cave (525a-526b). But this does not mean that Plato thought the philosopher-rulers' *techne* of ruling could be precisely quantified like arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmony. The one passage where Socrates does devise a precise formula of measurement for ruling is the 'nuptial number' by which the guardians' procreation is arranged:

> it is the first number in which are found root and square increases, comprehending three lengths and four terms, of elements that make things like and unlike, that cause them to increase and decrease, and that render all things mutually agreeable and rational in their relations to one another. Of these elements, four and three, married with five, give two harmonies when thrice increased. One of them is a square, so many times a hundred. The other is of equal length one way but oblong. One of its sides is one hundred squares of the rational diameter of five diminished by one each or one hundred squares of the irrational diameter diminished by two each. The other side is a hundred cubes of three. This whole geometrical number controls better and worse births. (546b-c, Reeve tran.)

There are two reasons why this cannot be considered a step in the development of a rigorously mathematical *techne* of ruling—a theoretical reason and a practical one. The theoretical reason is that the passage is irredeemably obscure both in its

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[10] 'We will say, "You have received a better and more complete education than the others, and are more able to participate in both realms. You must take your turn at going down then to the common dwelling place of the others and accustom yourselves to see the things in the dark..." Do you think that those whom we have nurtured will disobey us and refuse to share in the labors of the city?' 'Impossible', he said, 'for we shall be imposing just behavior onto just people' (520b–e). This is one instance when Cephalus' definition of justice (331b-c) does apply: it is just to repay one's debts. Cf. the argument in *Crito* 50a–52d that Socrates' debt to the city that nurtured him compels him to accept its punishment.

[11] In all five of the ways that philosophers develop without the intervention of the city, an insulating factor protects them from the conditions that foster our appetites: '[1] Maybe someone of noble and well brought up character who is held down by exile, in the absence of corrupting influences remains with philosophy in accordance with his nature. Or [2] when in a small city a great soul is born and has contempt for the city's affairs and looks down on them. And [3] maybe a few who have good natures might come to it from other crafts for which they justly have contempt. And [4] the bridle that holds back our friend Theages may act as a restraint; for in the case of Theages all the other preconditions were present for dropping out of philosophy, but his sickly physical constitution restrains him from taking part in politics. [5] My own case is not worth mentioning, the divine sign, for it must have happened to only a few or none before me' (496a-c). In the first case the solitude of exile removes people from corrupting influences; in the second and third it is a solitude created by contempt for their peers; in the fourth it is the limitations of physical capacity resulting from sickliness; and in the fifth it is the restraint provided by the warning voice.

meaning and application,[12] so if it is meant to show us how to make the transition from *noesis* to the practical world it fails. The practical problem is that Socrates introduces the calculus by saying:

> since for everything that comes into being there is a destruction, not even a constitution like this will remain intact for all time, but it will be dissolved. And this is the way it will be dissolved… Even though they are wise, those who were educated to be rulers of the city will not hit upon the fertility and barrenness of our race through calculation together with sense perception. (546a-b)

Even if we are able to achieve the calculation, our ability to combine it with sense perception cannot be relied on. The calculus of the nuptial number, then, does not form a bridge between the realm of *noesis* and the realm of action; it is wholly within the noetic realm and sense perception must be combined with it extrinsically and with no guarantee of success. We should not be surprised by this result if we remember that when Socrates described the downward path of *noesis* he said, in a passage quoted earlier, 'it thus descends again to a conclusion, making use of nothing perceived by the senses, but moving from forms themselves, through forms, to them, it concludes in forms' (511b-c). *Noesis* alone does not enable us to cross over into the realm of sense perception and action. That is why the philosophers' noetic contemplation of the good does not show them their duty to govern, and they must be compelled to see it by an external argument.[13] Noetic contemplation that stays within the realm of forms cannot translate automatically into an ability to promote the good in practical action.

The problem of applying the nuptial number extends beyond that one case, for as Socrates asks rhetorically in book 5, 'Is it possible for something to be put into practice just as it is in theory (ὡς λέγεται), or is it the nature of practice to attain to truth less than theory does?' (472e-473a). The difficulty in translating the intelligible back to the visible realm is that, as Socrates says in the *Phaedo*, 'we never see or hear anything accurately' (65b)—a view that is reflected in the *Republic*'s doctrine that knowledge is possible only of intelligible forms, and in the case of sensible objects only opinion is possible (478a-479e). Accordingly, no rigorous calculations like the nuptial number can ever be applied infallibly. The problem for the philosopher-rulers (and for Plato) is to find some way of applying a knowledge of the good that is based on and concludes in the precision of the forms, to the imprecision of the sensible world.

Ruling is conceived as a *techne* rather than an *episteme* because it must apply its precise unchanging principles to an arena characterized by ceaseless modulation and imprecision. Every *techne* brings a universal conceptual foundation to bear in relation to the unique demands of the moment. As Socrates said earlier, if someone who is working at a *techne* 'lets the right moment (*kairos*) go by, the work is ruined' (370b). That is why the nuptial number could not be relied on: the projected city will eventually fail because sooner or later the rulers will apply the number contrary to *kairos* (παρὰ καιρόν, 546d) and their work will be ruined. The ability to recognize the *kairos* is not contained within the conceptual apparatus of the *techne* itself because it cannot be conceptualized at all; it depends on a sensitivity to the flow of particularity. That sensitivity is what the philosopher-rulers achieve when they re-accustom themselves to the darkness of the cave (cf. 51c-d); it is what transforms the *episteme* of the philosopher into the *techne* of the ruler.

The way to achieve this sensitivity in the practical application of the concepts of a *techne* is through practice and experience. As Socrates says in *Phaedrus* 269d about the *techne* of rhetoric, it requires not only *episteme* but also practice to enable the rhetorician 'to discern these things in practical affairs…with his

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[12] Grube 1974, 197n6 calls this passage 'perhaps the most obscure and controversial passage in the whole of Plato's works. Scholars are not even agreed was to whether there is one Platonic number or two'. Brumbaugh 1954, 107-150 gives a good sense of the difficulties of interpreting it. Even if we were to agree on an interpretation of the passage, it is still far from clear what the components of the number(s) refer to and how it is to be applied. Suppose, for example, that we accept Reeve 1992, 216-217 n10: 'The human geometrical number is the product of 3, 4, and 5 "thrice increased", multiplied by itself three times, i.e. $(3x4x5)^4$ or 12,960,000. This can be represented geometrically as a square whose sides are 3600 or as an oblong or rectangle whose sides are 4800 and 2700. The first is "so many times a hundred", viz. 36 times. The latter is obtained as follows. The "rational diameter" of 5 is the nearest rational number to the real diagonal of a square whose sides are 5, i.e. to $\sqrt{50}$. This number is 7. Since the square of 7 is 49, we get the longer side of the rectangle by diminishing 49 by 1 and multiplying the result by 100. This gives 4800. The "irrational diameter" of 5 is $\sqrt{50}$. When squared, diminished by 2, and multiplied by 100 this, too, is 4800. The short side, "a hundred cubes of three", is 2700'. Even if Reeve has sorted out the mathematics correctly, we still do not know what the numbers refer to and how to apply them.

[13] Strauss 1964, 124 argues that 'the philosophers cannot be persuaded, they can only be compelled to rule the cities [and] the just city is not possible because of the philosophers' unwillingness to rule' (cf. Bloom 1968, 410). But the passages he cites say only that the philosophers must be compelled, not that they cannot be persuaded; they do not contradict the claim at 520b-c that the compulsion means a compelling argument. (Howland 1998, 656 who in most respects shares Strauss's view of the *Republic* acknowledges that the compulsion only takes the form of an argument.) Kraut 1991, 43-44 more cautiously takes Socrates' reference to the philosophers' scorn for political rule (521b) to mean 'that although the philosophers will recognize the justice of the requirement and abide by it, they will do so with appropriate reluctance, for they rightly regard purely philosophical activity as better for them than the activity of ruling the city… So, Plato is apparently saying that in this particular case it is contrary to one's interest to act justly'. But even this more cautious conclusion goes too far. A recognition that we are acting altruistically rather than out of self-interest does not automatically imply that we are acting reluctantly. That is especially true in this case: as Denyer 1986, 29 observes, since 'the whole upbringing of philosophers in the ideal city has right from birth been calculated to rid them of any concern with particulars in their particularity and to focus them rather upon the general… I am incapable of any longer desiring that I…as opposed to someone else, should continue to enjoy the intellectual life… And so I can have no self-interest which would urge me not to play my proper role in the continuance of that city'. Readers have often seen in the *Republic's* opening words, 'I went down', a reference to the philosopher's descent into the cave, and some have seen a reference to the compelled nature of that descent in the physical force that Polemarchus threatens in order to prevent Socrates from ascending to Athens (327c). But, as it turns out, what keeps Socrates there is not Polemarchus's threats or force but Adeimantus's persuasion (328a). For recent discussions of the need to compel the philosophers to rule, see Brown 2000 and Yu 2000.

senses' (271d-e). Practice gives the rhetorician an understanding of when it is timely (*kairos*) to speak and when to stop, and which of the various techniques of speaking to employ—'when they are timely (*eukairian*) and when they are untimely (*akairian*)' (272a). The same thing is true of the philosophers' *techne* of ruling in the *Republic*. Their fifteen year apprenticeship is necessary not in order to teach new precepts but 'so that they won't lag behind the others in experience'.[14] Their ability to discern the good in sensible things is developed in terms of the sense experience itself rather than in terms of a concept that tells them what to look for. They have come to understand the good itself through years of contemplation, but only through an additional lengthy contact with practical experience can a kind of thinking which concludes in forms be applied effectively to things. The kind of experience gained through apprenticeship is indispensable to the practical side of *techne*. What the *Statesman* adds to this, or at least presents more explicitly, is that what is gained by that experience is the ability to discern the good as a mean between excess and deficiency in the realm of the greater and lesser.[15]

III. Recognizing goodness

The *Republic* never makes explicit the precise nature of the thinking by which *techne* is able to achieve its downward mediation from the intelligible to the practical, i.e., to recognize the *kairos*, but there is such an account in the *Statesman*, again related to *kairos*. Examining it will help us bring into focus some of the implications of what is said in the *Republic*. I am not suggesting that the *Statesman*'s account was already in Plato's mind when he wrote the *Republic*, but only that it can be regarded as a kind of fulfillment of an element of the *Republic*'s project, from which, retrospectively, the implications of the *Republic*'s account become clearer—whether or not Plato was aware of them at the time. Even if, as some believe, the *Statesman*—together with the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*—rejects and revises the metaphysics of the *Republic*,[16] there is no reason why the *Statesman* should not continue the *Republic*'s meditation on the relation between theory and practice.

The *Republic* had maintained that every *techne* makes use of number and calculation, i.e., measurement (322c). The *Statesman* adds that the *techne* of measurement has two components:

> One is with respect to the shared largeness or smallness of things toward one another. The other is with respect to the necessary essence of coming into being. Doesn't it seem to you that, in the nature of it, we must say that the greater is greater than nothing other than the less, and, again, the less is less than the greater and nothing else? But what about this? With regard to what exceeds or what is exceeded by the nature of the mean, whether in words or actions, must we not also say that it really exists? And that in this lies the chief difference between those of us who are bad and those who are good?... If someone does not allow that the nature of the greater stands in relation to anything other than the less, it will never stand in relation to the mean. Isn't that so? Would we not destroy the kinds of *techne* themselves and all their works with this doctrine, including indeed the *techne* of statesmanship that we have been seeking? For all these presumably are on guard against anything that is in excess of or deficient to the mean, which they do not regard as nonexistent but as something difficult that exists in relation to their activity. And when they preserve the mean in this way, all of their works are good and beautiful... For if this [mean] exists those [*technai*] exist, and if those exist this exists also; but neither one of them can ever exist if the other doesn't. (283d-284d interjections omitted)

The first of these two components of measurement—'the shared largeness or smallness of things toward one another'—is the kind that enabled the ascent out of the cave. The ascent began with comparison of three fingers which were large or small in relation to one another, and all the other studies as well involved the measurement of things relatively to one another rather than to an absolute standard. Geometry aims at knowledge of the equal, the double, and other ratios (529e-530a). Pure astronomy too deals with quickness and slowness in relation to each other (529d), and harmony with what relations are harmonious with each other (531c). The term 'relative' here is not opposed to 'precise' but to 'absolute'. Even when we give a precise measurement, such as that an object is so many cubits in size, the measurement is in relation to an arbitrarily chosen unit of measure rather than to anything absolute such as the mean.

What the *Statesman* account adds to that of the *Republic* is the description of the other (downward) component of measure. It 'comprises whatever measures things in relation to the mean, the fitting, the *kairos*, the needful, and anything else that dwells in the middle away from the extremes' (284e). That is the kind of measurement which enables *techne* to accomplish its beneficent work ('when they preserve the mean in this way, all of their works are good and beautiful'), and which accounts even for our ability to implement the good in our conduct ('in this lies the chief difference between those of us who are bad and those who are good'). This second kind of measure explains how the philosophers can apply their formal contemplative knowledge to practical action and thereby become

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[14] Cf. Shorey 1963, 229: 'Critics of Plato frequently overlook the fact that he insisted on practical experience in the training of his rulers. Newman, Aristot. *Pol.* i. p. 5, points out that this experience takes the place of special training in political science'.

[15] Cf. Aristotle *Meta.* 988a26-27. Perhaps in this way also we can resolve, at least in part, the notorious difficulty of reconciling Aristotle's treatment of intellectual virtue (contemplation) in *NE* x with his treatment of moral virtue (the mean) in books 2-7. Contemplation gives us an intuition of the nature of goodness which is at the basis of the power of *phronesis* to recognize the mean in moral situations.

[16] I have given my reasons for not sharing that view in Dorter 1994.

wise rulers or at least philosophically adept ones ('the *techne* of statesmanship that we have been seeking'). The *Laws* reiterates the necessity of the mean for the practice of ruling:

> If one gives a greater degree of power to what is lesser, neglecting the mean...then everything is upset... There does not exist, my friends, a mortal soul whose nature will ever be able to wield the greatest human ruling power when young and irresponsible, without becoming filled in its mind with the greatest disease, unreason, which makes it become hated by its closest friends. When this comes about it quickly destroys it and obliterates all its power. Guarding against this, then, by knowing the mean, is the task of great lawgivers. (691c)

It is not the concept of a mean in itself that distinguishes the kind of measurement essential to the *techne* of ruling from the kind that is essential to the theoretical studies, for the theoretical studies often make use of their own kind of mean. The *Timaeus* tells us for example that plane and solid geometry are concerned in an essential way with the single and double mean respectively (32a-b, 36a), and according to *Symposium* 187b the *Republic*'s the final study, harmony, is a mean between the high and low.[17] The difference between these kinds of mean and the kind that the *Statesman* and *Laws* connect with ruling is that in the mathematical studies the mean is defined by the extremes—it articulates the relationship between integers in arithmetic, shapes or solids in geometry, motions in astronomy, and pitches in harmony—so it is still a kind of relative measure. The mean that is an absolute measure, however, is itself the defining term, and the extremes are such only in relation to it. What enables the mean to provide the *techne* of ruling with the power to translate goodness into practical action is not that it furnishes us *a priori* with a precise *prescription* which then must be applied to an imprecise world (as with the nuptial number) but rather that it furnishes us with a power to *perceive* when success has been achieved. We can recognize when something goes too far or not far enough even when we cannot say in advance precisely what we are looking for.[18]

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[17] Robins 1995, 387-388 concludes that a concept of the mean is central to all the mathematical studies of book 7: 'Ratios and proportion...are the basis of the community and kinship of the sciences [and are what make mathematicians] able to embark on dialectic.... Central to the significance of ratios and proportions within plane and solid geometry is the geometric mean... Plato would have such applications of ratios and proportions extended to what he calls astronomy... What in the geometrical sciences and astronomy were studied in their applications are in harmonics studied in themselves. The ratios are now related not only to mean proportionals, the geometric mean, but also to arithmetic and harmonic means'.

[18] Aristotle will resolve the same difficulty in the same way. At *NE* 1094b11-25 he too points out the problem of applying precise concepts to the world of action: 'Our discussion will be adequate if it achieves as much clarity as the subject matter allows, for precision ought not to be sought for equally in all discussions, any more than in all the products of craftsmanship. Noble and just actions, which political philosophy investigates, contain much discrepancy and irregularity... And good actions too involve a similar irregularity... We must be content, then, when dealing with such subjects, and drawing inferences from such material, to indicate the truth in a general way and in outline...for it is the mark of an educated person to seek the degree of precision in each class of things which the nature of the subject admits'. Like Plato, he responds to the lack of precision in practical affairs by developing the concept of an imprecise 'mean'. Also like Plato he connects the doctrine of the mean with *techne*: see Welton and Polansky 1996, 84. Their defense of the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean against certain ways that it has been misunderstood would apply as well to Plato's formulation.

The *Republic*, too, speaks of good actions as those that are in accord with the mean,[19] but it does not develop the connection between the mean and *techne* the way the *Statesman* does. The *Statesman* makes explicit an explanation that the *Republic* points toward, and in that sense the *Statesman* functions as the completion of the *Republic*—although that is not to say that Plato had it in mind when he wrote the *Republic*. What I am suggesting is that the *Statesman* further characterizes certain implications of *Republic*'s concepts of *techne* and the mean, and clarifies how the philosopher-rulers are able to apply their knowledge of intelligible being to the requirements of corporeal becoming. We can see how in retrospect from the *Statesman* the *Republic* appears to be aiming in that direction, even if Plato did not yet have the end in sight. To get a clear view of the matter, we need to understand precisely what the *Statesman*'s doctrine entails.

The doctrine of the mean comprises two primary components:

(1) Practical goodness is to be conceived as the correct degree between too much and too little, rather than as an extreme that is pursued to the greatest extent possible (we can still of course speak of trying to be as good as possible).

(2) This mean is inseparable from the attainment of excellence in *techne*: 'when the [*technai*] preserve the mean in this way, all of their works are good and beautiful... For if this [mean] exists those exist, and if those exist this exists also; but neither one of them can ever exist if the other doesn't' (*Statesman* 284b-d). It follows that the mean can only be perceived in relation to practical activity, for otherwise the mean could exist independently of *techne*. In other words, the mean, unlike the Good, does not exist as a form or Idea in itself, divorced from our activity in the corporeal world. It exists only in the context of that activity, as the mark that we aim at it in our efforts to achieve excellence, rather than going too far or not far enough.

To what extent are these views present in the *Republic*?

(1) The view that justice is a mean between extremes appears several times in the dialogue. (a) The most explicit passage is at the very end of the dialogue where goodness and justice are explicitly described as a mean. At the end of the myth of Er Socrates emphasizes the importance of the study of the good life and says, 'each of us must take special care and, being indifferent to the other studies, seek out and learn this study...[that provides] the ability and *episteme* of distinguishing the good from the bad life' (618c). This means knowing how to combine things with one another or separate them, for example,

> knowing how beauty, combined with poverty or wealth and

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[19] 619a-b. The term used is τὸ μέσον (Aristotle uses both μέσον and μεσότης) whereas the *Statesman* and *Laws* use τὸ μέτριον.

> with what kind of character of the soul, produces good or evil, good birth and bad birth, private life and governing, strength and weakness, ease of learning and difficulty of learning, and all such things regarding the soul, both natural and acquired, so that from all these things—and looking at the nature of the soul—he will be able to choose rationally between the better and worse life, calling a life worse which leads him to become more unjust, better if it leads him to become more just, and disregarding all other considerations... *He would know how to always choose the mean among such lives, and avoid each of the extremes*, both in this life and also, as far as possible, in all that come after. For in this way a human being becomes happiest. (618b–619b emphasis added)

(b) The source for that conclusion was, not surprisingly, Socrates' earlier definition of justice. Justice is a harmony among the three parts of the soul, he argues, so that a just action is one which preserves this harmony, while an unjust action is one which destroys it (443d-444a). Since a harmony is destroyed when one of the elements is taken too far or not far enough, Socrates' later conclusion follows, that a life of justice requires us to avoid the extremes and pursue the mean.[20]

(c) At the beginning of book 2 Socrates identifies justice as an intermediate kind of good: neither the one extreme of a good that is only good for its consequences, nor the other extreme of a good that is intrinsically good but without good consequences, but the middle kind that is good in both ways.[21] It follows that if what we are doing seems good in principle but leads to bad consequences, or that it leads to good consequences but does not seem good in principle, then we have gone too far in the direction of either a one-sided deontology or a one-sided consequentialism, as we would now call them, and have missed true justice which lies in between them. Justice is not here conceived on the models that Socrates will later develop—at this point in the dialogue the models of justice under consideration are still the conventional ones—but we are already being prepared for a conception of justice as some sort of mean. The same consideration applies to the rest of the examples.

(d) Speaking as a devil's advocate of Thrasymachus's position, Glaucon suggests that justice is a different kind of mean: people say that justice amounts to neither doing nor suffering injustice and it is 'in between the best, which is to do injustice without paying the penalty, and the worst, which is to be treated unjustly and be unable to take revenge. Justice is a mean (ἐν μέσῳ) between these two' (359a). Although Socrates would dispute the claim that goodness is injustice and lies at one of the extremes rather than with the mean, he would agree that justice is a mean between the extremes: the intention of a just person is neither to do nor suffer injustice, that is, to be neither completely selfish nor completely self-sacrificing, but to take a middle course between these extremes.

(e) The view of justice as a mean was implicit even in the polemics of book 1. The elenctic character of that book makes it impossible to extract any doctrines with assurance, and Socrates himself concludes that it has not led to an understanding of justice (353e-354a), but nevertheless there are already foreshadowings of the fact that justice will turn out to be some kind of mean that is contrasted with one-sided extremes. In the case of the first two interlocutors, Cephalus's definition of justice works in peaceful situations but not necessarily in violent ones,[22] while Polemarchus' definition works in war but not in peacetime.[23] Taken together the two arguments show that it is possible for a model of justice to be conceived either too little or too much in terms of conflict, and that consequently a proper understanding of justice must be a kind of mean between these two extremes.

(f) If the first two arguments give indirect support to the conception of justice as a mean, by showing that justice cannot be one extreme or the other, the subsequent argument with Thrasymachus gives direct support to it by establishing that justice must be conceived as the right degree instead of as an extreme. Whereas an unjust person wants to overreach both just and unjust people in order to obtain as much as possible of everything, a just person wants to overreach unjust people but not other just people (349b-c). In other words, injustice aims at an extreme—as much as possible of everything—while justice aims at a limit, a correct degree between not going far enough and going too far. In aiming to overreach the unjust but not the just, justice is a mean between the excess of aiming to overreach everyone (i.e., Thrasymachus's view of injustice, 343e-344a), and the deficiency of not aiming to overreach anyone (i.e., Thrasymachus's view of justice, 343c).

(g) Earlier in the discussion Socrates told Thrasymachus that,

> no *techne* or rule provides what is beneficial to itself but, as we said long ago, it provides and orders what is beneficial for its subject... It was because of that, my dear Thrasymachus, that I just said no one would willingly choose to rule and take other people's troubles in hand to straighten them out, but everyone asks for payment because the person who is going to practise the *techne* well never does what is best for himself nor orders it

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[20] The Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, apparently written around the time of Plato (legend ascribes it to Confucius' grandson), draws an analogous connection between harmony and the mean: 'Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused the way is called the mean. When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony' (Chan 1963, 98).

[21] 357b-358a. Its median nature is emphasized by the fact that Glaucon lists the intermediate type in between his description of the extremes, even though it is more natural to describe each pure type first and then the mixture.

[22] When someone who is out of his mind wants us to return a weapon that he lent us, it would not be just to apply the principle, 'Tell the truth and repay what you owe' (331c).

[23] 'Help your friends and harm your enemies' (332a-b) applies to war, as Polemarchus and Glaucon agree (332e, 375b-c), but in peacetime a just person should not harm anyone (333a, 335d).

> when he orders according to the *techne*, but only what is best for the subject. (346e-347a)

There was the one exception to this, however: 'the *techne* of payment' by which we are compensated, and which we practice together with the primary *techne* (346a-c). It sounds strange to call payment a *techne*, as if job applicants who are asked whether they possess any skills, could reasonably reply that yes, they possess the skill of getting paid. But calling it a *techne* means that *techne* combines self-sacrifice with self-interest, and so is not an extreme of self-sacrifice, but a mean between selflessness and selfishness. On Thrasymachus' view, there are only two alternatives, the extreme selflessness of justice and the extreme selfishness of injustice (343c). The practitioners of justice are fools or weaklings who sacrifice their own advantage in order to serve the advantage of others. Consummate practitioners of injustice, however, use the *techne* of ruling to exploit their subjects and to compel them to serve the ruler's advantage. Socrates' insistence that *techne* includes a *techne* of payment shows that there is a middle ground between these two alternatives; it locates the justice of *techne* in contradistinction to both extremes. On the one hand those who practice altruistic *techne*, especially the *techne* of ruling, insist on being recipients of the benefits of the counter-*techne* of payment, and so are not self-sacrificing. And on the other hand any rulers who behave as Thrasymachus describes, and do not aim at the benefit of their subjects, are not practicing a *techne* in the strict sense at all (345b-347a). By taking normal *techne* to be inseparable from the *techne* of payment, Socrates portrays *techne* as a whole as being neither self-serving (as Thrasymachus regards the *techne* of ruling) nor self-sacrificing (as Thrasymachus regards the *techne* of justice) but as a mean between those extremes. Even when we practise what Socrates calls the *techne* of justice (332d) we receive a kind of payment (578b-591b).

(2) Justice is, then, presented as a kind of mean throughout the *Republic*, and well before we are told precisely what kind of mean it is. But there is no evidence that the mean was identified with *techne*, as it is in the *Statesman*. In the case of the rulers the two coincide, since ruling is a *techne* and also aims at a mean in pursuing justice, but it does not follow that it is the nature of *techne* in general to pursue a mean, or that the very concept of a mean implies *techne*. The *Statesman* claimed that the mean is what enables *techne* to make its products good and beautiful[24]—not as a precise abstract rule, conceived prior to the work and then enforced upon the materials, but rather as a perception of something as neither too much nor too little. The ability to make a table requires only concepts that can

then be applied, but to apply the concepts most effectively—to make the table good or beautiful—requires something more. Otherwise all the products of every skilled practitioner who learned the appropriate concepts would be good and beautiful, and in the case of any product that lacked goodness or beauty, we should be able to point to precisely which rules or concepts were not applied. The reason we cannot do so is that a kind of sensitivity or taste is involved—analogous to Aristotelian *phronesis* in the realm of ethics—by which the skilled practitioner can recognize when some aspect of the product or its production needs to be increased or diminished.

Do we find this doctrine in the *Republic* as well? Although there is no suggestion here, as there is in the *Statesman*, that every *techne* achieves its purpose through the mean, nevertheless the passage cited under (a) took the good life to be a mean between extremes, which we can achieve if we engage in a study that produces 'the ability and *episteme* of distinguishing the good from the bad life'. Not only was our life as a whole conceived in terms of the mean, but so also were the individual elements that make it what it is: beauty, wealth, character, birth, participation in public life, strength, quickness of mind (618b-619b). Since the combination of *episteme* and ability is equivalent to *techne*, and since the ability to distinguish between the good and bad life in all their particulars is intrinsic to ruling, the *techne* of ruling, at least, includes the *techne* of finding the mean, even if the *Republic* does not extend this to every other *techne*.

The *Republic*, in any case, gives us something that the *Statesman* does not, namely, a concrete image of how this kind of thinking may operate. In explaining the importance of proper musical education Socrates said,

> Isn't it for this reason that nurture in music is most sovereign, namely that rhythm and harmony most of all permeate the soul and most vigorously take hold of it, bringing grace with them, and making it graceful if one is rightly nurtured, and if not, the opposite? And again it is sovereign because the one who was properly nurtured in that way would most sharply perceive when something is left out, or when something was not made beautifully or didn't grow beautifully. And, rightly feeling distaste, he would praise what is beautiful and welcome it and receive it into his soul and, being nurtured by them, become beautiful and good. (401d-e)

This is not an example of the mean, because only one the two extremes—the deficiency ('when something is left out')—is clearly specified, and it is paired not with its opposite, excess, but with a more general reference to not growing or being made beautifully.[25] Moreover, Socrates later points out that although this training made the guardians harmonious and graceful (εὐρυθμίαν), it did so on

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[24] 284b. Cf. *Republic* 505a-b: 'If we do not know [the good], then without this, even if we know everything else as well as possible, you realize that it would be no advantage to us, just as if we possessed anything without the good.' This passage is puzzling when it is taken to mean that nothing is to be gained from cooking, e.g., if we have not studied metaphysics. But it becomes understandable when we remember that although dialectic is the only science that can give us *understanding* of the good, all of our practical efforts presuppose, like ruling, some knowledge of goodness, and aim to bring about something good in the practical world. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* i 1.1094a1-2.

[25] Perhaps this is because the mean applies primarily to activity (*techne*) rather than perception. A perceiver may notice that there is something missing or something wrong with certain things, without being able to say it is because the producers worked either too quickly and carelessly or too slowly and indecisively, or because they aimed at a standard that was either too high or too low.

the basis of habit rather than *episteme* (522a), which rules out *techne* as well. Nevertheless, as with the mean, the children recognize when something is left out and when the object is not beautiful, without having a prescriptive rational concept of beauty that they can use to identify what is beautiful or not—in fact they are explicitly said to be at a pre-rational age (402a). They do not know what something should contain in order to be beautiful, but they are sensitive to the presence of beauty and its absence because of the gracefulness that their training has instilled in their soul. Even if the training is only in rhythm and harmony, the result is a sensitivity to every kind of beauty and goodness generally. They perceive the beautiful and good not directly and positively in accordance with a pre-given concept or description, but the way we perceive a note as in tune because it does not sound sharp or flat.

Musical training was only the first step in the education of the philosophers. When they have not only been trained in harmony but have also studied it as the last of the five mathematical disciplines preparatory to dialectic, and when they have finally had a vision of the good itself that converts their entire soul to a commitment to goodness, they will be in a situation that parallels at a higher level that of the children trained in harmony and rhythm. The graceful state of their soul, rather than any specific precepts, was what enabled the children to recognize what is beautiful and good. The philosophers' vision of the good has a parallel effect. Their entire soul—not only their faculty of reason—is turned away from becoming to being (518c-d, 519b), with the result that when they look at those who are still in the cave they would 'go through any sufferings, rather than share their opinions and live as they do' (516d). As we have seen, the rulers, like the children, must apply this on the basis of experience rather than precepts.

The perception of justice as a mean, aspires to the condition of Socrates' 'divine sign', which 'always turns me away from what I was about to do but never urges me forward' (*Apology* 31d), and whose absence tells him that what he is about to do is right.[26] Of the five ways that Socrates mentions by which someone may become a philosopher *without* the active support of the city, his divine sign is the only one that produces practical wisdom.[27] By warning him both of his errors of commission (*Apology* 40a) and his errors of omission (*Phaedrus* 242b-c)—that is, when he goes too far or not far enough—it steers him to the mean in every situation.

The city is not capable of bestowing Socrates' divine sign on its future rulers, but it can give them a *techne* of ruling that approximates Socrates' gift as far as possible. The numerical and calculative character of *techne* enables the philosophers to cross from the realm of becoming to that of being, where they gain an intuition of goodness itself, while the practical aspect of *techne*, refined by a fifteen year apprenticeship, enables them to locate the good life as in every instance a mean between too much and too little. The rulers are able to recognize goodness within the indefiniteness of particularity not explicitly, by means of a determinate formula, but implicitly by the indefinable concordance between their perception of a situation and their intuition of the ideal.[28]

Department of Philosophy
University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1

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[26] 'The usual prophetic voice of the divinity in previous times always spoke to me very frequently and opposed me even in very trivial matters, if I was about to do something that was not right… It could not be the case that the usual sign would not have opposed me, if I was not about to do something good' (*Apology* 40a-c; cf. *Euthydemus* 272e, *Phaedrus* 242b). This infallibility is not achieved by the philosopher-rulers, as the unreliability of the nuptial number showed.

[27] See above, n11. Benardete 1989, 149 argues that 'since in fact the *daimonion* kept Socrates out of politics, the *daimonion* could not be what it was for Socrates and bring about the coincidence of philosophy and power'. However it was not politics as such that the divine sign kept Socrates out of, but only the Athenian politics of his day: 'It is this [divine sign] that opposes my engaging in politics…for there is no human being who will survive if he nobly opposes you or any other crowd, and prevents many unjust and illegal things from happening in the city' (*Apol.* 31d–e). The populace of the *good* city is not a 'crowd' (πλήθει) that will kill its just rulers, so Benardete's conclusion does not apply to the *Republic*.

[28] I would like to thank Ronald Polansky and an anonymous referee for *Ancient Philosophy* for their helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this article.

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