

СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

PAIDEIA PLATONIKĒ: DOES THE LATER PLATONIST PROGRAMME OF EDUCATION RETAIN ANY VALIDITY TODAY?

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ABSTRACT. The question I wish to address on this occasion is whether the Platonic course of study retains any validity in the modern world. I shall argue that some version of it indeed might, though by no means for everybody. A course of education, after all, which begins with the rules for rational thought and argumentation, then turns to the question of the true nature of the self, followed by a consideration of the nature of ethics, politics, physics and metaphysics, should serve very well for developing well-rounded and rational persons. I believe that the true legacy of the Platonist model of education, on which modern civilisation is progressively turning its back, is that the properly structured study of quite abstract subjects is the best training for the mind, even when the mind is turned to the solution of entirely practical problems.

KEYWORDS: Platonic dialogues, the history of education, Plato, Iamblichus, Proclus.

My concern on this occasion is to enquire into the nature of education and its contribution to the formation of a well-rounded human being – an issue of vital importance in the present period, when, under the pressure of economic recession, governments are concerned to derive the maximum immediate return from their investment in this area, a concern which seems to lead inevitably to the prioritizing of grimly ‘practical’, vocational training, to the detriment of anything that could be understood as a humanistic education. In these circumstances, consideration of other possible models is certainly opportune. I want here to explore one that is familiar to me, and one that we are trying to promote in our Pla-

tonic Centre in Trinity College Dublin: that is, the educational programme that was developed in the later Platonic schools.

During the so-called Middle Platonic period (c. 80 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.), at least from the 2nd cent C.E. on, and in a more elaborately structured way, from the time of Iamblichus (early 4th cent C.E.) on, the Platonist schools of later antiquity seem to have taken their students through a fixed sequence of Platonic dialogues, beginning with the *Alcibiades I*, concerned as it was with the theme of self-knowledge, and ending – at least in the later period – with the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, representing the two ‘pinnacles’ of Platonic philosophy, concerned with the physical and intelligible realms respectively.¹ There seems also have been a preliminary period of study, in which one mastered the techniques of logic, with the help of Aristotle’s logical works, the so-called *Organon*, together with a work such as Epictetus’ *Encheiridion*, or *Handbook*, as a basic introduction to ethics. It may be also that, at least in Iamblichus’ school and later, some attention was paid to the life and teachings of Pythagoras, including Pythagorean mathematics and numerology, and perhaps a degree of observance of the Pythagorean way of life, e.g. periods of silence, meditation, and dietary restrictions.² There seems also to have been, at least in the Athenian School of Syrianus and Proclus at the end of antiquity (5th cent. C.E.), some provision for the study of those great poets, namely Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus and Musaeus, who were considered to have been divinely inspired to present cosmic truths in allegorical form; and this could be combined with a study of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, a set of responses from the gods themselves, which had been vouchsafed to a figure of the second century C.E. called Julian the Theurgist. It can be seen, then, that this was not literary study, but rather study of theology in a poetical mode.³

The question I wish to address on this occasion is whether such a course of study retains any validity in the modern world. I shall argue that some version of it indeed might, though by no means for everybody. A course of education, after all,

¹ The Iamblichean course of study of the dialogues is most clearly set out in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Westerink 1962), ch. 26, but even there a lacuna in the text omits the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* from the list. For their necessary inclusion, Westerink provides compelling arguments in his Introduction, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

² It would presumably have been the role of Iamblichus’ so-called ‘Pythagorean Sequence’ of works, beginning with the *Life of Pythagoras*, to provide a backdrop or underpinning to such a preliminary course.

³ There is some indication, also, that such figures as Iamblichus and Syrianus taught a philosophical rhetoric, in rivalry with the rhetorical schools of the time, but, if so, it is not clear how that fitted in.

which begins with the rules for rational thought and argumentation, then turns to the question of the true nature of the self, followed by a consideration of the nature of ethics, politics, physics and metaphysics, should serve very well for developing well-rounded and rational persons. It would work, best, though, perhaps, in conjunction with, rather than in lieu of, more traditional forms of education.

If we turn first, however, to the Platonic curriculum, in its developed form, we may derive a reasonably clear idea of the rationale behind its arrangement. The course began, as I say, with the study of the *Alcibiades*.⁴ Now it happens that, as with a number of the other components of the Platonist curriculum,⁵ we have a commentary – indeed two commentaries – on this dialogue, so we can see in some detail how instruction proceeded, at least in the late period. Specifically, in the case of the commentary of Olympiodorus, there is the advantage that the commentary is divided into individual lectures, or *praxeis*, each representing a lecture of an hour or so, so we can get some idea of how much time it was intended to spend on a given dialogue. It is of course difficult to calculate what sort of time-scale was envisaged for the completion of the course, though we may safely assume that there was no great hurry. We ourselves, in our reading sessions in the Platonic Centre, tend to take three months or more to work our way through a dialogue of the size of the *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, or *Theaetetus*, all dialogues dealt with in recent years, but we only meet once a week, for about 2 ½ hours. We may assume that the Platonic school met daily, except for feast days. On the other hand, they seem to have paid rather closer attention to details of the text than we generally would. I would tentatively suggest that the first course of ten dialogues might have covered a period of two years, with the second course, comprising the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, a further year.⁶

⁴ That is to say, the *First Alcibiades*, or *Alcibiades Major*, there being a *Second Alcibiades* also in the Corpus, which is undoubtedly spurious. There have in fact been considerable doubts expressed, over the last two hundred years, as to the genuineness of the *First Alcibiades* as well (doubts which I must say that I share) but for our purposes this does not matter – except to reflect on the intriguing possibility that this dialogue was created, in the later Old Academy, precisely to fill this position in an educational curriculum.

⁵ Specifically, of those still surviving, the *Alcibiades* (commentaries by Proclus and Olympiodorus), *Gorgias* (commentary by Olympiodorus), *Phaedo* (commentaries by Damascius and Olympiodorus), *Cratylus* (Proclus), *Theaetetus* (anonymous, Middle Platonic), *Phaedrus* (Hermeias), *Philebus* (Damascius), *Timaeus* (Proclus), *Parmenides* (Proclus, Damascius).

⁶ Of course, they might have moved much faster. Marinus, the biographer (or hagiographer) of Proclus, tells us (*Vit. Procl.* Ch. 13) that Proclus worked through the whole of Aristotle, followed by the works of Plato, his master Syrianus, in two years, but this achievement is meant to impress us, so the speed was presumably unusual.

To begin, then, with the *Alcibiades*, we are presented with the first topic to be addressed by the aspirant to knowledge, that of self-knowledge: “Who or what am I?” Proclus begins his commentary on the dialogue as follows:

The most valid and surest starting-point for the dialogues of Plato, and, one might say, for philosophical study as a whole, is, in our opinion, the discerning of our own being. If this is correctly posited, we shall in every way, I think, be able more accurately to understand both the good that is appropriate to us and the evil that opposes it. (1, 3-8, trans. W. O’Neill, slightly emended)

and a little later (11, 3-11), on the role of the *Alcibiades* in particular:

This dialogue is the beginning of all philosophy, as indeed is the knowledge of ourselves; and for this reason scattered throughout it is the exposition of many logical theorems, the elucidation of many points of ethics and such matters as contribute to our general investigation concerning happiness (*eudaimonia*), and the outline of many doctrines leading us to the study of natural phenomena or even to the truth concerning divine matters themselves, in order that as it were in outline in this dialogue the one, common and complete plan of all philosophy may be comprised, being revealed through our actual first turning towards ourselves.

In this dialogue, the young, rich, beautiful, and exceedingly self-satisfied Alcibiades, the golden boy of late fifth-century Athenian society, is approached, with devious diffidence, by the philosopher Socrates, who professes to be an admirer of his, and questioned, with ever-increasing acuteness, as to his competence to be a leader of men, such as he aspires to be. Socrates brings him to the realisation that first he must come to know his own true nature, which is that of a soul temporarily ensconced in a body, over which it *should* preside (rather than be dominated by).

What Socrates does for Alcibiades here came to be viewed, in the Platonist tradition, as what every good teacher should do for his pupils. In the fully elaborated system devised by Iamblichus, relayed here by Proclus, the *Alcibiades*, as the introductory dialogue, should present a sort of adumbration, or preliminary sketch, of the whole range of Platonist education, proceeding through ethics, etymology and epistemology,⁷ to an understanding of the structure of the physical cosmos, and ultimately of the nature of spiritual reality, culminating in a conception, if not even a vision, of the Good.

⁷ Logic as such is not provided for in this course, as students are expected to have worked through Aristotle’s logical works (the so-called *Organon*) prior to this – and there was in any case a school of thought in the Platonic tradition that saw logic as rather a preparation for philosophy than a proper part of it.

This adumbration is then reflected in a fuller form, in the *Philebus*, at the culmination of this course of ten dialogues. Between these two, we have a sequence of eight dialogues, in which Iamblichus saw all the chief aspects of philosophy set out. First, we have two dialogues concerned with ethics, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*. The *Gorgias* is chosen, slightly curiously, to impart an understanding of what, in Neoplatonic terms, is termed the civic, or *political*, level of virtues, that is to say, the four virtues of (practical) wisdom, self-control, courage and justice, as exhibited in the practical life of the human being, which involve the *control* and *limitation* of the irrational and passionate elements of the soul, rather than their purification and extirpation at the level of the theoretical life, which is in turn the subject-matter of the *Phaedo*. Now, for us, the most obvious exposition of the virtues in the context of the good ordering of the tripartite soul would occur in Book IV of the *Republic*, and in that dialogue generally, but the *Republic* is excluded from the Iamblichean canon of dialogues, presumably (as in the case of the *Laws* also) simply by reason of being too long. So the *Gorgias* will have to do service instead.

In fact, it can be put to fairly good use. The context is, once again, the ironic questioning by Socrates of a figure confident of his own excellence, in this case the distinguished sophist and teacher of rhetoric, Gorgias of Leontini, who is on one of his visits to Athens. Characteristically, Socrates proposes to begin (447c) by asking Gorgias *who he is* – which is then interpreted as an enquiry into what skill or craft (*tekhnê*) he professes. After some prevarication, Gorgias defines his art, but Socrates sticks in the knife (459c ff.), by enquiring whether, along with rhetorical skills, he is also concerned to teach justice. Gorgias is unwilling to concede that he will not, and begins to waffle somewhat, whereat he is rescued by his more forthright pupil Polus. Polus puts up a bit of a fight, but is eventually got to admit that committing injustice, irrespective of the degree to which he admires those who get away with doing this, is more *disgraceful* than suffering it.

At this stage (481b), in turn, the host of the whole gathering, the Athenian aristocrat Callicles, chips in, and reveals himself as the most shameless advocate of the ‘might is right’ principle, and the desirability of indulging one’s passions to the limit. This gives Socrates the opportunity, in reply, to develop his theory of the moderation of the passions, and the advocacy of a life of rational self-control – his arguments being ultimately reinforced by an eschatological myth.

It can be seen, then, that the *Gorgias* in fact provides a very good introduction to practical ethics, in much more succinct form than would be the case with the *Republic*. The *Phaedo*, in turn, was seen, by all Platonists after Plotinus, as introducing a higher level of virtue, termed ‘purificatory’ (by contrast with the ‘civic’ level). Plotinus (if it is he who is actually the author of this idea) seems to have

been stimulated to this conclusion in particular by a passage, 67e-69e, in which Socrates makes a distinction between a higher form of the four canonical virtues, wisdom, self-control, courage and justice, which would be proper to the philosophical soul which is concerned with freeing itself from the body, and a 'vulgar' version of these, which involves a sort of 'trade-off' against something worse. Here, for instance, is his characterisation of the 'vulgar' version of self-control (*sôphrosynê*):

What about temperate people? Is it not, in just the same way (sc. as 'vulgar' courage), a sort of self-indulgence that makes them self-controlled? We may say that this is impossible, but all the same those who practise this simple form of self-control are in much the same case as that which I have just described. They are afraid of losing other pleasures which they desire, so they refrain from one kind because they cannot resist the other. (68e, trans. Tredennick)

It may be readily observed that this 'vulgar' *sôphrosynê* is not the *sôphrosynê* advocated in the *Republic*, but yet this passage was in later times taken as setting up a contrast between a cathartic and a political level of virtue, and this is what forms the basis for Plotinus' tractate *On Virtues* (I 2), and subsequently for Iamblichus' teaching order of the dialogues. The message of the *Phaedo* is that true philosophy is a 'practice for death' (67d), and that the higher and truer sort of virtue is concerned, not with the management of the body and its desires, but essentially with freeing the soul from any concern with the body.

This, then, provides us with the completion of our training in ethics, at least until the topic is returned to in the summation of the whole primary level course, which is the *Philebus*. We turn now to the topic of etymology and epistemology (rather than of formal logic, for reasons that I have explained above), and that brings up the *Cratylus*. This must surely seem to us a rather difficult work to accept as a component of any modern system of education, especially by reason of the series of very fanciful etymologies which occupy the bulk of the work, but in fact I think a case can be made that it is raising an issue which should be of interest to us, and that is the origin and nature of language. The dialogue begins from a dispute between the 'Neo-Heraclitean' philosopher Cratylus (asserted by Aristotle to have been one of Plato's early teachers) and the young Athenian aristocrat Hermogenes (younger brother of Callias, son of Hipponicus, and a follower of sophists) as to whether names (of people and things) are natural or conventional, Cratylus taking up the former position and Hermogenes the latter, with Socrates being called in to adjudicate the dispute.

If we focus in particular on the beginning (383a-391c) and the end (427d-440e) of the dialogue, we can learn a good deal about the Platonic theory of naming and the correctness of names, and can begin to see how the *Cratylus* could be viewed

as a suitable antecedent to the *Theaetetus*, viewed in its turn as an exposition of the true basis of knowledge, and of the nature of a correct proposition.⁸ Socrates advances an interesting theory as to the role of names as ‘instruments’ (*organa*) of knowledge and communication, on the analogy of, say, an awl in the hands of a carpenter, or a plectrum in the hands of a lyre-player. At the end of the dialogue, on the other hand, he turns to chivvying Cratylus as to how the process of conferring names on things could ever have got going, since, if things can only be known through their names, what could be the source of the first name-giver’s knowledge. Cratylus is forced to conjecture (438c) that the original name-giver must have been a divinity. Socrates raises difficulties about that in turn, in view of Cratylus’ belief in Heraclitean flux, and we are left in suspense – though in fact what Plato is pointing forward to is the necessity of accepting the existence of a system of Forms.

The same could be said of the *Theaetetus*, a wide-ranging and penetrating enquiry into the nature of knowledge. Young Theaetetus, in response to Socrates’ challenge, declares it to be nothing other than perception (151e). This begins a long and tortuous inquisition, which first of all disposes of the theory that knowledge is perception, but then also undermines the proposal that it is true belief (187b ff.), or even true belief supported by an ‘account’ (*logos*) – that is, an analysis of the ‘why’ of any state of affairs, as well as the ‘that’ – since the basic components of any proposition are not amenable to having a *logos* given of them, and therefore are unknowable. Once again, we are left in a state of bafflement (*aporia*); but once again, the solution, lying in the background, is knowledge of the Forms.

The sequence of these two dialogues, at any rate, is designed to give us a sound appreciation of the nature of language and of knowledge. We are now in a condition to take on the study of the universe, and to learn the nature of things. Quite remarkably, the two dialogues chosen for this purpose in the first sequence (the chosen dialogue for this purpose in the second, higher sequence will of course be the *Timaeus*) are the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.

Now we would naturally think of these two dialogues as primarily dialectical, with the *Sophist* having a strong polemical element, and the *Statesman* as having something to say also about the nature of governance and the ideal ruler. But if so, from the Neoplatonic perspective, we would have thoroughly missed the point.

⁸ The fact that the *Cratylus* actually heads up the second tetralogy into which Thrasyllus ordered Plato’s works, followed by the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*, indicates that this sequence of topics was already in his mind, and doubtless in those of other Platonists, in the 1st. cent. CE; but of course Thrasyllus regarded the *Sophist* and *Statesman* as also concerned with logic, which Iamblichus does not!

In fact, in the view of Iamblichus, as I like to remind my colleagues from the modern, 'analytic' tradition, the true subject of the *Sophist* is the Sublunary Demiurge, and his devious administration of this world of illusion. We have, in a scholion on the dialogue (Greene, *Scholia Platonica*. p. 40 = Dillon, Iambl. *In Soph.* Fr. 1) a record of Iamblichus' views, and some of his reasoning. Basically, he sees the dialogue as portraying the activities of a trickster figure, who has woven a web of illusion in this realm, analogous to the Hindu concept of *maya*. He is "a sorcerer, inasmuch as he charms the souls (on their descent into embodiment) with natural reason-principles (*physikoi logoi*), so that it may be difficult for them to separate themselves from the realm of generation." The Sophist is not, however, an evil being, as I understand the situation, but merely an entity set to test us, enabling those who can see through his blandishments to attain a higher state of consciousness, and realise the illusory nature of the physical world; he is thus an *educational force*.

If the *Sophist* concerns the sublunary realm, then its sequel, the *Statesman*, in Iamblichus' view, concerns the heavenly demiurge, the ruler of the astral regions. Since we do not have the benefit of a corresponding scholion for this dialogue, however, we can only guess that the account of the ideal ruler, together with the central myth concerning the rule of Kronos, prompted Iamblichus to assume that the *Statesman* portrayed this higher divinity, towards whose benign rule we must all strive.

At any rate, the correct study of these two dialogues is intended to endow us with an accurate understanding of the structure of the world we live in, and a means of transcending it for a higher one. We are intended to move on from these to a pair of dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, which once again are being viewed from an angle unfamiliar to the modern reader, although in either case a sympathetic eye can discern some justification for this. In Iamblichus' view, they are each *theological*; that is, they each lead the soul up to a vision of the intelligible world, and even of its principle, the Good or the One.

Once again, the modern student of Plato will be somewhat baffled. Both would seem to us, I suppose, to concern primarily the nature and power of love, though the *Phaedrus* may also be seen as concerned with rhetoric, true and false. However, both, we can concede, do involve, in at least some part of them, an ascent -- in the case of the *Phaedrus*, the heavenly ride of the soul (246-8), and the re-ascent of the soul (the 're-growth of its wings') through association with the correct type of beloved (254a – 256e); in the case of the *Symposium*, Diotima's account of the ascent of the soul to a vision of the Beautiful Itself, at 209-11. This is inevitably based on a pretty selective reading of these dialogues, but no doubt

suitably edifying lessons were derived from both the later part of the *Phaedrus* and the earlier speeches of the *Symposium*.

At any rate, as the culmination of our first cycle of dialogues, we finally attain the *Philebus*. As I understand the plan, the *Philebus* is to be seen as a summation or recapitulation of all of the previous dialogues since the *Alcibiades*. It must therefore be seen to contain ethical, epistemological, physical and theological elements of doctrine, blended together to form a coherent whole. Of course, the modern view of the *Philebus* is that it is a discussion of the nature of pleasure and its proper place in the life of man; but that, from the Neoplatonist perspective, would be a very superficial view. It was Iamblichus' judgement, endorsed by his successors in the Athenian School, that its true subject-matter is 'the Good that permeates everything' – that is to say, "the Good as manifested in the realm of existence, to which all things aspire and which they actually attain." As he saw it, what Socrates is really concerned to do is to identify a type of life, which engages intellection to develop a life-style that recognises the primacy of Limit and moderation in the world, and subordinates the Unlimited of every sort to that, thus generating a life characterized by rational activity, accompanied by pleasures of a 'pure' variety. The Good itself, which assumes the role of an impersonal divinity, is revealed at the end of the dialogue as being characterized by the three features of Beauty, Symmetry and Truth (*kallos, symmetria, alêtheia*, 65a). One thus revisits, first the ethical teachings of the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*, then – with the help of the method of division 'sent down from heaven' (as set out in *Phlb.* 16c ff) – the epistemological lessons of the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*, then the structure of the universe, now revealed as the result of the interaction between Limit and Unlimitedness (23c ff), and lastly, a vision of the Good itself (65a ff).

So a well-rounded educational programme is thus brought to its conclusion. But that is not in fact the end. After the pupil has slogged through these ten dialogues – perhaps passing lightly over some parts of them, but giving close attention, certainly, to others – he or she has to face into the two pillars of the higher level of the programme, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. The former of these fairly plainly deals, in considerable detail, with the formation and structure of the physical world and of man, as microcosm, but the true subject of the *Parmenides* has long posed a vexatious problem for modern scholars. The first part, admittedly, up to 137c, can fairly uncontroversially be seen as a critical examination of the theory of Forms in what might be termed its 'classical' stage of development, showing up various difficulties and incoherencies involved in the connection between a Form and its particular instantiations, and questioning what sort of 'likeness' can exist between a Form and its dependent particulars; but the latter part of the dialogue, while overtly presented as an effort by the aged Parmenides to

demonstrate to the young Socrates how the analysis of a concept should proceed, continues to baffle modern scholars as to its true purport, with the majority favouring a (deeply pedantic and variously flawed) exercise in logical method.

But once again, the deeper meaning has entirely escaped them! For later Platonists, what we have here is in fact an elaborate blueprint of the intelligible world, from the One on down, through the realm of Intellect (involving many subdivisions), to Soul, and then sundry levels of daemonic being. In a word, the subject of the *Parmenides* is ontological, not logical, and it provides the proper complement to the *Timaeus* as part of a 'higher' course on the nature of reality.

To quote Proclus, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Parmenides* (641), transmitting the views of his master, Syrianus:

Our master denied that the dialogue was about Being, or about real beings alone; he granted that it was about all things, but insisted on adding 'in so far as all things are offspring of one cause and are dependent on this universal cause'. And indeed, if we may express our own opinion, in so far as all things are *deified*; for each thing, even the lowest grade of being you could mention, becomes god by participating in unity according to its rank. For if God and One are the same because there is nothing greater than God and nothing greater than the One, then to be unified is the same as to be deified. Just as, if the sun and God were the same, to be illumined would be the same as to be deified; for the One gives unity, the sun light. So, as *Timaeus* does not simply enquire about nature in the usual manner of the natural scientist, but in so far as all things get their cosmic ordering from the one Demiurge, so also *Parmenides*, we may say, in conducting an enquiry about beings, is himself examining these beings in so far as they are derived from the One" (trans. Morrow-Dillon).

So what are we to derive from all this, concerned as we are with the proper nature of education in the modern world? First of all, we may note something of a paradox, from the Platonic perspective. Plato himself, as we may learn not least from his account of the educational curriculum of the prospective Guardians in Book VII of the *Republic*, would favour a curriculum based, not on the exegesis of philosophical texts (even his own!), but rather one exclusively based on mathematical, or mathematics-based, sciences, that is to say, arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy (of a strictly mathematical nature), and musicology (again, strictly mathematical); these to be followed by a five-year course in 'dialectic' – a term superficially familiar to us, but, to me at least, a subject of profound obscurity, when one seeks to ascertain what Plato really had in mind by it. Of course, dialectic on what one might call the 'vulgar' level, is simply Socratic elenchus, as practised, no doubt, by the members of the school in their day-to-day interaction with each other. But the course that the prospective Guardians are to be put through, concerning, as it seems to have done, the critical examination of the first principles of all the other sciences, is one of which, even though it

may have been practised in the higher reaches of the Academy, we have few clues as to the nature. As its successful conclusion (following a further protracted period of practical public service) is meant to produce a vision of what is called 'the Good', an achievement which in turn is guaranteed to generate within the recipient a comprehensive understanding of reality, enabling him or her, among other things, to administer the state with great prudence at a practical level, 'the Good' begins to sound rather like the modern Holy Grail of scientific understanding, the 'Theory of Everything', such as was allegedly being sought after by, amongst others, Albert Einstein, particularly during his stay at the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton – though I don't think that Einstein expected that the grasping of this would qualify him for the wise administration of the state, or even of the Institute! (See, for instance, Greene 1999).

At any rate, such seems to be envisaged as the ultimate result of the Platonic system of education, albeit at its most rarefied level. At a less high-powered level, however, as outlined in Book VII of Plato's *Laws*, rather than in Book VII of the *Republic*, we can see, I think, a more practical blueprint for universal education.⁹ This emphasizes a programme of gymnastics for the body, as well as music and mathematics for the soul, all to inculcate moderation and self-control, a formula for good citizenship rather than rulership, designed not just for an intellectual elite, but for the whole citizen body, such as would have more relevance to our concerns today. Plato is much concerned with proper moral training for the very young – edifying nursery stories and folktales, and even pre-natal harmonious exercises for pregnant mothers (788-9)! – in order to inculcate a properly receptive attitude to later, more rational, instruction. But once again, there is little or no sign in this programme of any place for literary appreciation, or the study of texts, ancient or contemporary. How did the later Platonists reconcile their sequence of selected dialogues with these prescriptions of Plato himself?

I think that answer might be in the way that these texts may have been approached, of which we can derive some idea from the surviving commentaries on them.¹⁰ The ideal will have been to apply Socratic elenchus to the texts, training

⁹ A good discussion of Plato's more inclusive educational curriculum in the *Laws* may be found in Cleary (2007).

¹⁰ It occurs to me that they might have taken some inspiration – though there is no evidence that they actually did – from a rather whimsical, if not surreal, utterance of the Athenian Visitor in Book VII of the *Laws* (811-12), to the effect that the model work that all young people in Magnesia should study, by way of literature, is none other than what he is now discoursing on, in conversation with Megillus and Cleinias, *if it were put into book form!* They do not seem in fact to have read the *Laws* as part of their basic curriculum

the minds of the students by analysing the logical form and validity of the arguments, and drawing out the core doctrines from beneath the surface elements of the dialogues concerned: think of the unveiling of the ‘true’ subject-matters of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, for example! And we must always bear in mind, in any case, that the study of mathematics and the other mathematics-based sciences will have preceded this study of the dialogues, as did, of course, the whole of Aristotelian logic.

What we can see here, I would say in conclusion, both in the Platonic course of study outlined in the *Republic* and *Laws*, and in the later Platonist course of study that I outlined earlier, is the ancestor of the ideal of humanist education that I and many of my generation were brought up with, but which is now fast fading from the educational scene in the face of the pressure for purely vocational training: that is, the idea that the study of purely abstract subjects, whether pure mathematics, or Latin and Greek languages and literature, or whatever, is in fact the best mental training for success in a whole range of practical activities, particularly such vocations as politics, public administration, law, or the upper echelons of business, for proficiency in which nowadays specific schools and institutes have been set up, largely to the detriment of true competence in those areas. That is the true legacy of the Platonist model of education, on which modern civilisation is progressively turning its back: that the properly structured study of quite abstract subjects is the best training for the mind, even when the mind is turned to the solution of entirely practical problems.

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(though it was certainly read), but they could have adopted the idea as justification for reading the sequence of dialogues that they did read.