

PLATO ON CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

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Abstract:

In this paper, we present a compendium of excerpts of Plato's dialogues on childhood. We have collected the major references to children and childhood through Plato's opus, and divided them between those categorizations of children which can be as small as phrases which use "child" as an example of a certain kind of disposition or character; and those passages which deal with the education of children. Of course the two books in which Plato speaks most of children and childhood – *Laws* and *The Republic* – are both devoted in varying degrees to systematic education, and space does not permit us to include any but the most salient elements of his very broadly conceived scheme, which naturally extends backwards into the procreation of children, and before that, the management of union between the sexes, and the purposes of procreation. As for Plato's attitude towards children, we will leave the reader to evaluate that, but we offer several questions: 1) What does Plato's view of childhood imply about his view of adulthood? 2) Can Plato be understood to have held views of childhood any different from his contemporaries? 3) What are the political implications of Plato's views of childhood – especially given his frequent association of children with women, slaves, and the "ignorant multitude"? 4) What do Plato's views of childhood matter to his philosophy as a whole? 5) And finally, what do they matter to the understanding of children as philosophers themselves?

Key words: Plato, childhood, children, education

Platón, niños e infancia

Resumen:

En este trabajo se presenta un compendio de pasajes de *diálogos* de Platón sobre la infancia, o sea, hemos recogido algunas de las referencias principales a los niños y la infancia a través de obra de Platón. Comprendemos tanto textos que utilizan "niño" como un ejemplo de cierto tipo de disposición o carácter, cuanto pasajes que se refieren a la educación de los niños. Por supuesto, los dos libros en los que Platón más se refiere a los niños y la infancia son *Las Leyes* y *La República*, dedicados en mayor o menor grado a ofrecer una educación sistemática. Por razones de espacio, incluimos sólo los elementos más sobresalientes de su proyecto de manera amplia, un plan que se extiende hasta la procreación de los hijos, y antes de eso, a la gestión de la unión entre los sexos con fines de procreación. En cuanto a la actitud de Platón hacia los niños, dejamos que el lector piense sobre ella. Con todo, ofrecemos algunas preguntas que nos surgen de la lectura de estos pasajes: 1) La visión de Platón sobre la infancia, ¿qué implicaciones tiene sobre su visión de la vida adulta? 2) Esa visión de Platón sobre la infancia, ¿es diferente de la

de sus contemporáneos? 3) ¿Cuáles son las implicaciones políticas de las ideas de Platón sobre la infancia – en particular su frecuente asociación de niños con mujeres, esclavos y la "multitud ignorante"? 4) ¿En qué medida las ideas de Platón sobre la infancia afectan su filosofía como un todo? Y, finalmente, 5) ¿qué tanto importan esas ideas para pensar a los niños como filósofos?

Palabras clave: Platón, infancia, niños, educación

Platão, Crianças e Infância

Resumo:

Neste trabalho, nós apresentamos um compêndio de trechos dos *Diálogos* de Platão sobre a infância, ou seja, temos recordado algumas das referências principais a respeito das crianças e da infância através da obra de Platão. Incluímos tanto textos que utilizam “criança” como um exemplo de certo tipo de disposição de caráter, quanto passagens que se referem à educação das crianças. Claro, os dois livros em que Platão mais se refere às crianças e à infância são *As Leis* e *A República*, dedicados em grau maior ou menor a oferecer uma educação sistemática. Por razões de espaço, só incluímos os elementos mais sobressalientes de seu projeto extremamente amplo, um plano que se estende até a procriação das crianças e, antes disso, à gestão da união entre os sexos com fins de procriação. Quanto à atitude de Platão com as crianças, deixamos que o leitor pense sobre ela. Contudo, oferecemos algumas perguntas que surgem para nós da leitura desses trechos: 1) Que implicações tem a visão da infância de Platão sobre a sua visão da vida adulta? 2) Esta visão de Platão sobre a infância é diferente da de seus contemporâneos? 3) Quais são as implicações políticas das idéias de Platão sobre a infância — em particular sua frequente associação entre crianças e mulheres, escravos e a “multidão ignorante”? 4) Em que medida as ideias de Platão sobre a infância afetam sua filosofia como um todo? E, finalmente, 5) por que tanto importam essas ideias para pensar as criança como filósofos?

Palavras-chave: Platão, infância, crianças, educação



PLATO ON CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

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In this section, the editors intend to present with each issue a compendium of sources which helps us to think about the attitudes and beliefs of philosophers, past and present about children, childhood, and children's relation to philosophy and to philosophizing. As we shall see in our scan of Plato, many such claims are embedded in other arguments, but each use of the term "childhood" and "child" and "children" implies a fundamental attitude, whether commonsense or reflective. If we accept the notion that anything we say about "child" is equally to say something about "adult", we can form a sort of negative or shadow picture of each philosopher's view of that side of the contrastive pair.

We have collected the major references to children and childhood through Plato's opus, and divided them between those categorizations of children which can be as small as phrases which use "child" as an example of a certain kind of disposition or character; and those passages which deal with the education of children. Of course the two books in which Plato speaks most of children and childhood—*Laws* and *The Republic*—are both devoted in varying degrees to systematic education, and space does not permit us to include any but the most salient elements of his very broadly conceived scheme, which naturally extends backwards into the procreation of children, and before that, the management of union between the sexes purposes of procreation.

As for Plato's attitude towards children, we will leave the reader to think about them, but we offer several questions which have occurred to us: 1) What does Plato's view of childhood imply about his view of adulthood? 2) Can Plato be understood to have held views of childhood any different from his contemporaries? 3) What are the political implications of Plato's views of childhood—especially given his frequent association of children with women, slaves, and the "ignorant multitude"? 4) What do Plato's views of childhood

matter to his philosophy as a whole? 5) And finally, what do they matter to the thinking children as philosophers?

Timeus 26b.

Truly, as is often said, the lessons of our childhood make a wonderful impression on our memories, for I am not sure that I could remember all the discourse of yesterday, but I should be much surprised if I forgot any of these things which I have heard very long ago. I listened at the time with childlike interest to the old man's narrative; he was very ready to teach me, and I asked him again and again to repeat his words, so that, like an indelible picture, they were branded in my mind.

Symposium 207d-e

Well, she said, it's simple enough, so long as you bear in mind what we agreed was the object of Love. For here, too, the principle holds good that the mortal does all it can to put on immortality. And how can it do that except by breeding, and thus ensuring that there will always be a younger generation to take the place of the old?

Now, although we speak of an individual as being the same so long as he continues to exist in the same form, and therefore assume that a man is the same person in his dotage as in his infancy, yet, for all we call him the same, every bit of him is different, and every day he is becoming a new man, while the old man is ceasing to exist, as you can see from his hair, his flesh, his bones, his blood, and all the rest of his body. And not only his body, for the same thing happens to his soul. And neither his manners, nor his disposition, nor his thoughts, nor his desires, nor his pleasures, nor his sufferings, nor his fears are the same throughout his life, for some of them grow, while others disappear.



Theaetetus 171e

Whereas, if there is any case in which the theory would concede that one man is superior to another, it might consent to admit that, in the matter of good or bad health, not any woman or child – or animal for that matter--knows what is wholesome for it and is capable of curing itself, but that there, if anywhere, one person is superior to another.

Theaetetus 197e

Once more then, just as a while ago we imagined a sort of waxen block in our minds, so now let us suppose that every mind contains a kind of aviary stocked with birds of every sort, some of blocks apart from the rest, some in small groups, and some solitary, flying in any direction among them all.

Be it so. What follows?

When we are babies we must suppose this receptacle empty, and take the birds to stand for pieces of knowledge. Whenever a person acquires any piece of knowledge and shuts it up in his enclosure, we must say he has learned or discovered the thing of which this is the knowledge, and that is what “knowing” means.

Gorgias 521e-522a

My trial will be like that of a doctor prosecuted by a cook before a jury of children. Just consider what kind of defense such a man could offer in such a predicament, if the plaintiff should accuse him in these terms: “Children of the jury, this fellow has done all of you abundant harm, and the youngest among you he is ruining by surgery and cauterization, and he bewilders you by starving and choking you, giving you bitter draughts and compelling you to hunger and thirst, whereas I used to feast you with plenty of sweetmeats of every kind.”

What do you think a doctor could find to say in such a desperate situation? If he spoke the truth and said, “All this I did, children, in the interests

of health," what a noise should do you think such a jury would utter? Would it not be a loud one?

Lysis 213a

The lover then, it appears, Menexenus, is a friend to the object of his love, whether the object love, or even hate him. Just as to quite young children, who are either not yet old enough to love, or who are old enough to feel hatred when punished by father and mother, their parents, all the time even that they are being hated, are friends in the very highest degree.

Philebus 65d

. . . pleasures being presumably, like children, completely destitute of reason. Reason, on the other hand, if not identical with truth, is of all things the most like it, the truest thing in the world.

Phaedo 77e

You are afraid, as children are, that when the soul emerges from the body the wind may really puff it away and scatter it, especially when a person does not die on a calm day but with a gale blowing . . . Probably even in us there is a little boy who has these childish terrors.

Laws II 664e.

You may recall that we said, at the opening of our discussion, that all young creatures are naturally full of fire, and can keep neither their limbs nor their voices quiet. They are perpetually breaking into disorderly cries and jumps, but whereas no other animal develops a sense of order of either kind, mankind forms a solitary exception.



Gorgias 502e

. . . the orators . . . treat the people like children, attempting only to please them, with no concern whatever whether such conduct makes them better or worse.

Republic IV 441a-b

. . . what we now think about the spirited element is just the opposite from our recent surmise. For then we supposed it to be a part of the appetitive, but now, far from that, we say that, in the factions of the soul, it much rather marshals itself on the side of reason.

By all means, he said.

Is it then distinct from this too, or is it a form of the rational, so that there are not three but two kinds in the soul, the rational and the appetitive? Or just as within the city there were three existing kinds that composed its structure, the money makers, the helpers, the counsellors, so also in the soul does there exist a third kind, this principle of high spirit, which is the helper of reason by nature unless it is corrupted by evil nurture?

We have to assume it as a third, he said.

Yes, said I, provided it shall have been shown to be other than the appetitive.

That is not hard to be shown, he said, for that much one can see in children, that they are from their very birth chock-full of rage and high spirit, but as for reason, some of them, to my thinking, never participate in it, and the majority quite late.

Yes, by heaven, excellently said, I replied, and further, one could see in animals that what you say is true.

Laws I 645e

Athenian: And what of our perceptions, memories, beliefs, knowledge?

Are they likewise intensified? Or do they desert a man altogether if he is thoroughly soaked with drinking?

Clinias: Why, utterly.

Athenian: And so the man is brought back to the mental condition of his remote infancy?

Clinias: To be sure.

Athenian: Now that is the condition in which his self-command is at its lowest.

Clinias: It is.

Athenian: Such a man, we may say, is at his worst?

Clinias: Decidedly.

Athenian: Thus the phrase "second childhood" would seem to be as applicable to inebriation as to old age.

Republic IV 431c

And again, the mob of motley appetites and pleasures and pains one would find chiefly in children and women and slaves and in the base rabble of those who are free men in name. . . . But the simple and moderate appetites which with the aid of reason and right opinion are guided by consideration you will find in few and those the best born and of the best education.

Laws 666a

Might we not make a law to the following effect? In the first place, we shall absolutely prohibit the taste of wine to boys under eighteen. We shall tell them they must have too much concern for the passionate temperament of youth to feed the fire of body or soul with a further current of fire before they address themselves to the labours of life.



Laws VI 765e

For in all growing creatures alike—trees, beasts gentle or savage, humankind—the first sprouts and shootings, if but fair, are most potent to effect the happy consummation of goodness according to kind. Now man we call a gentle creature, but in truth, though he is wont to prove more godlike and gentle than any if he have the right native endowments and right schooling, let him be trained insufficiently or amiss, and he will show himself more savage than anything on the face of the earth. Wherefore the legislator must make the training of children no secondary or subordinate task; since 'tis a first and primary need that their director shall be well chosen, he must do all that in him lies to appoint to the charge of their direction him who is in all points best of all the citizens. Accordingly, all officials, with the exception of the council and its committees, shall repair to the temple of Apollo, where each of them shall give his vote by secret ballot for one of the curators of the laws, whomsoever he judges fittest to control education.

Republic V 458-461e

Obviously, then, we must arrange marriages, sacramental so far as may be. And the most sacred marriages would be those that were most beneficial.

.....

... the best men must cohabit with the best women in as many cases as possible and the worst with the worst in the fewest, and the offspring of the one must be reared and that of the other not, if the block is to be as perfect as possible. And the way in which all this is brought to pass must be unknown to any but the rulers, if, again, the herd of guardians is to be as free as possible from dissension.

Most true, he said.

We shall, then, have to ordain certain festivals and sacrifices, in which we shall bring together the brides and the bridegrooms, and our poets must

compose hymns suitable to the marriages that then take place. But the number of marriages we will leave to the discretion of the rulers, that they may keep the number of citizens as nearly as may be the same, taking into account wars and diseases and all such considerations, and that, so far as possible, our city may not grow too great or too small.

Right, he said.

Certain ingenious lots, then, I suppose, must be devised so that the inferior man at each conjugation may blame chance and not the rulers.

Yes, indeed, he said.

And on the young men, surely, who excel in war and other pursuits we must bestow honors and prizes, and, in particular, the opportunity of more frequent intercourse with the women, which will at the same time be a plausible pretext for having them beget as many of the children as possible.

Right.

And the children thus born will be taken over by the officials appointed for this, men or women or both, since, I take it, the official posts too are common to women and men.

Yes.

The offspring of the good, I suppose, they will take to the pen or crèche, to certain nurses who live apart in a quarter of the city, but the offspring of the inferior, and any of those of the other sort who are born defective, they will properly dispose of in secret, so that no one will know what has become of them.

That is the condition, he said, of preserving the purity of the guardian's breed.

They will also supervise the nursing of the children, conducting the mothers to the pen when their breasts are full, but employing every device to prevent anyone from recognizing her own infant. And they will provide others who have milk if the mothers are insufficient. But they will take care that the mothers themselves shall not suckle so long, and the trouble of wakeful nights



and similar burdens they will devolve upon the nurses, wet and dry.

.....

The women, I said, beginning at the age of twenty, shall bear for the state to the age of forty, and the man shall beget for the state from the time he passes his prime in swiftness in running to the age of fifty-five.

.....

Then, if anyone older or younger than the prescribed age meddles with procreation for the state, we shall say that his error is an impiety and an injustice, since he is begetting for the city a child whose birth, if it escapes discovery, will not be attended by the sacrifices and the prayers which the priests and priestesses and the entire city prefer at the ceremonial marriages, that every better offspring may spring from good sires and from father helpful to the state sons more helpful still. But this child will be born in darkness and conceived in foul incontinence.

Right, he said.

And the same rule will apply, I said, if any of those still within the age of procreation goes in to a woman of that age with whom the ruler has not paired him. We shall say that he is imposing on the state a baseborn, uncertified and unhallowed child.

Most rightly, he said.

But when, I take it, the men and the women have passed the age of lawful procreation, we shall leave the men free to form such relations with whomsoever they please, except daughter and mother and their direct descendants and ascendants, and likewise the women, save with son and father, and so on, first admonishing them preferably not even to bring to light anything whatever thus conceived, but if they are unable to prevent a birth to dispose of it on the understanding that we cannot rear such an offspring.

All that sounds reasonable, he said, but how are they to distinguish one another's father and daughters, and the other degrees of kin that you have just

mentioned?

They won't, I said, except that a man will call all male offspring born in the tenth and in the seventh month after he became a bridegroom his sons, and all female, daughters, and they will call him father. And similarly, he will call their offspring his grandchildren and they will call his group grandfathers and grandmothers. And all children born in the period in which their fathers and mothers were procreating will regard one another as brothers and sisters. This will suffice for the prohibitions of intercourse of which we just now spoke. But the law will allow brothers and sisters to cohabit if the lot so falls out and the Delphic oracle approves.

Quite right, he said.

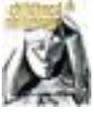
This, then, Glaucon, is the manner of the community of wives and children among the guardians.

Republic VII 541a

All inhabitants above the age of ten, I said, they will send out into the fields, and they will take over the children, remove them from the manners and habits of their parents, and bring them up in their own customs and laws which will be such as we have described. This is the speediest and easiest way in which such a city and constitution as we have portrayed could be established and prosper and bring most benefit to the people among whom it arises.

Laws VII 788 ff

Athenian: Now that we have boys and girls born, the proper course will naturally be to deal with their nurture and education; this subject cannot possibly be passed over in silence, but our treatment will wear the guise rather of instruction and admonition than of legal enactment. The privacy of home life screens from the general observation many little incidents, too readily occasioned by a child's pains, pleasures, and passions, which are not in keeping with a



legislator's recommendations, and tend to bring a medley of incongruities into the characters of our citizens. Now this is an evil for the public as a whole, for while the frequency and triviality of such faults make it both improper and undignified to penalize them by law, they are a real danger to such law as we do impose, since the habit of transgression is learned from repetition of these petty misdeeds. Hence, though we are at a loss to legislate on such points, silence about them is also impossible. But I must try to illuminate my meaning by the production of what I may call samples; at present my remarks must seem something of a riddle.

Clinias: You are quite right there.

Athenian: Well, now, I suppose we may take this much as truly said. The right system of nurture must be that which can be shown to produce the highest possible perfection and excellence of body and soul.

Clinias: Certainly.

Athenian: And perfection of the children's bodies, I conceive, means – to put it at the simplest – that they must grow straight from their earliest days.

Clinias: Why, of course.

Athenian: And further, is it not a fact of observation that in all living things growth is most conspicuous and rapid in its initial sproutings – so much so, indeed, that many have contended that the stature reached by a human being in its first five years is not doubled by the increment due to the following twenty?

Clinias: Surely.

Athenian: Well, then, when a body is subjected to vast augmentation of bulk without a counterbalancing abundance of appropriate forms of exercise, the consequences are disastrous in all sorts of ways. That, I think, is a known fact.

Clinias: Indeed it is.

Athenian: And so the period when the body is receiving its principal increment from nutrition is also the period when it demands the maximum of

exercise.

Clinias: What, sir? Are we actually to impose the maximum of exercise on infants and newborn babies?

Athenian: Not precisely that. We must impose it at a still earlier stage while the child is being nursed in its mother's womb.

Laws 793e-794d

Athenian: Then until the age of three has been reached by boy or girl, scrupulous and unperfunctory obedience to the instructions just given will be of the first advantage to our infantile charges. At the stage reached by the age of three, and after the ages of four, five, six, play will be necessary, and we must relax our coddling and inflict punishments – though not such as are degrading – as we were saying in the case of slaves that we should neither inflame the culprit by brutal punishments nor spoil a servant by leaving him uncorrected, so we must adopt the same course with the freeborn. And for their play, there are games which nature herself suggests at that age; children readily invent these for themselves when left in one another's company. All children of the specified age, that of three to six, should first be collected at the local sanctuary – all the children of each village being thus assembled at the same place. Further, the nurses are to have an idea to the decorum or indecorum of their behaviour; as for that of the nurses themselves and the whole group, it must be subjected, in each case, for the year to the control of one of the already-mentioned matrons to be assigned by the curators of the laws. These matrons are to be elected, one for each tribe, by the ladies charged with the supervision of marriages, and must be of the same age with them. It will be the official duty of a person so appointed to pay a daily visit to the sanctuary, and to chastise any offender – if a slave or alien of either sex, by the hand of some public menial, if a citizen who dispute the justice of the correction, she shall bring him before the court of the urban commissioners, but where there is no dispute, she shall punish even a citizen on



her own authority. When the age of six has been passed by either sex, there shall henceforth be a separation of the sexes—boys not being made to associate with boys, and girls with girls—and it shall be time for both to turn to their lessons, the boys being sent to instructors in riding, archery, the management of the dart and sling—the girls may share in the instruction if they please—but above all, in the use of spear and shield.

Laws VII 808d

Athenian: With the return of day and dawn, the boys should betake themselves to school. And just as sheep, or any other creatures, cannot be allowed to live unsheperded, so neither must boys be left without the care of attendants, nor slaves without that of a master. Now of all wild things a boy is the most difficult to handle. Just because he more than any other has a fount of intelligence in him which has not yet “run clear,” he is the craftiest, most mischievous, and unruliest of brutes. So the creature must be held in check, as we say, by more than one bridle—in the first place, when once he is out of the mother’s and nurse’s hand, by attendants to care for his childish helplessness, and then, further, by all the masters who teach him anything, and, as befits a freeborn man, by the teaching he gets. But further chastisement, as befits a slave, shall be inflicted on the boy and his attendant and teacher as well, by any free person in whose presence he commits any of these faults. If such a person omits to inflict the due correction, he shall, in the first place, be held to have disgraced himself most deeply. Also, the curator of law appointed to take control of boys shall take cognisance of the party who is present at an offence of the sort we are dealing with without imposing the necessary correction; this magistrate must be a man of keen vision, thoroughly devoted to his work of supervising the training of the boys, who will guide their native dispositions into right ways, always directing them to the good and lawful.

Republic II 377b

Do you not know, then, that the beginning in every task is the chief thing, especially for any creature that is young and tender? For it is then that it is best moulded and takes the impression that one wishes to stamp upon it.

Quite so.

Shall we, then, thus lightly suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by any chance teachers and so to take into their minds opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think it desirable for them to hold when they are grown up?

By no manner of means will we allow it.

We must begin then, it seems, by a censorship over our storymakers, and what they do well we must pass and what not, reject. And the stories on the accepted list we will induce nurses and mothers to tell to the children and so shape their souls by these stories far rather than their bodies by their hands. But most of the stories they now tell we must reject.

. For the young are not able to distinguish what is and what is not allegory, but whatever opinions are taken into the mind at that age are wont to prove indelible and unalterable. For which reason, maybe, we should do our utmost that the first stories that they hear should be so composed as to bring the fairest lessons of virtue to their ears.

Laws VII 803c-804b

Athenian: . . . we should keep our seriousness for serious things, and not waste it on trifles, and that, while God is the real goal of all beneficent serious endeavor, man, as we said before, has been constructed as a toy for God, and this is, in fact, the finest thing about him. All of us, then, men and women alike, must fall in with our role and spend life in making our play as perfect as possible – to the complete inversion of current theory.

Clinias: Inversion? In what way?



Athenian: It is the current fancy that our serious work should be done for the sake of our play; thus it is held that war is serious work which ought to be well discharged for the sake of peace. But the truth is that in war we do not find, and we never shall find, either any real play or any real education worth the name, and these are the things I count supremely serious for such creatures as ourselves. Hence it is peace in which each of us should spend most of his life and spend it best. What, then, is our right course? We should pass our lives in the playing of games – certain games, that is, sacrifice, song, and dance – with the result of ability to gain heaven’s grace, and to repel and vanquish an enemy when we have to fight him. What sort of song and dance will effect both results has partly been state in outline. The path has, so to say, been cut for us, and we should walk in it, in assurance that the poet was right when he said,

Search, for some thoughts, thine own suggesting mind,
And others, dictated by heavenly power,
Shall rise spontaneous in the needful hour.
For nought unprosperous shall thy ways attend,
Born with good omens and with heaven they friend.

Our nurslings, too, must be of the poet’s mind. They must believe that what we have said has been sufficient for its purpose, and that, for the rest, they will be visited by promptings, superhuman and divine, as to their sacrifices and dances, suggestions as to the several gods in whose honour, and the several times at which, they are to play their play, win heaven’s favour for it, and so live out their lives as what they really are – puppets in the main, though with some touch of reality about them, too.

Laws 797a-798e

Athenian: Why, as to this matter of children’s games I maintain that our communities are sunk in a universal ignorance; it is not seen that they have a decisive influence on the permanence or impermanence of a legislation once

enacted. Where there is prescription on this point, where it is ensured that the same children shall always play the same games in one and the same way, and get their pleasure from the same playthings, the regulations in more serious matters too are free to remain undisturbed, but where there is change and innovation in the former, incessant variation of all sorts and perpetual fluctuation in the children's tastes; where they have no fixed and settled standards of what is pretty or the reverse in their own bearing and movements, or in the pattern of their toys, where the inventor and introducer of an innovation in pattern, color, or the like is always held in particular esteem – how truly may we say society can suffer from no worse pest. Such a man is constantly changing the young folds' character behind your back; he teaches them to despise the old-fashioned and worship novelty. Once more I say, there can be no graver danger to society than such language and such notions. Pray let me explain how serious this evil is.

Clinias: You mean the evil of public dissatisfaction with the ancient fashions?

Athenian: That and nothing else.

Clinias: Why, we of all men are least likely to turn a deaf ear to that plea. We shall listen in the most friendly spirit.

Athenian: So I should anticipate.

Clinias: Speak on, then.

Athenian: Come then, let us rise above ourselves, as listeners or speakers, as we plead the case thus. Change--except when it is change from what is bad – is always, we shall find, highly perilous, whether it be change of the seasons, of prevailing winds, of bodily regimen, of mental habit, or, in a word, change of anything whatever without exception, except in the case I have just mentioned, change from bad. Thus, if we consider our body and the way it can familiarize itself with any kind of food or drink or exertion – how, though they may upset it at first, in time their very use leads to the formation of flesh akin to themselves,



and so the body is reconciled to its scheme of regimen, grows familiar and at home with it, and enjoys a life of pleasure and health; how, if it should be compelled to change again to some approved regimen, the man is at first upset by disorders and only recovers slowly as he once more becomes familiarized with his diet—why, we can but suppose the same thing takes place with men's understandings and souls. When men have been brought up under any system of laws and that system has, by some happy providence, persisted unchanged for long ages, so that no one remembers or has ever heard of a time when things were otherwise than as they are, the whole soul is filled with reverence and afraid to make any innovation on what was once established. A lawgiver, then, must contrive one device or another to secure this advantage for his community, and here is my own suggestion toward the discovery. They all suppose, as we were saying, that innovation in children's play is itself a piece of play and nothing more, not, as it is in fact, a source of most serious and grievous harm; hence they make no attempt to avert such changes, but compliantly fall in with them. They never reflect that these boys who introduce innovations into their games must inevitably grow to be men of a different stamp from the boys of an earlier time, that the change in themselves leads to the quest for a different manner of life, and this to a craving for different institutions and laws, and thus none of them is apprehensive of the imminent consequence, of which we just spoke as the worst misfortune for a community. A change in other respects, in mere external forms, would, of course, do less mischief, but frequent modifications of moral approbation and disapprobation are of all changes the gravest and need to be most anxiously guarded against. . . . Every means, then, shall we say, must be employed to keep our children from the desire to reproduce different models in dance or song, as well as to prevent a possible tempter from offering them the inducement of a variety of delights?

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Athenian: I maintain that all our choirs, of which there will be three, must enchant the souls of our children, while they are still young and tender, by reciting all the noble doctrines we have so far rehearsed or may hereafter rehearse, the sum and substance whereof may be worded thus. If we say that the gods account the pleasantest and the best life one and the same, our statement will be at once perfectly true, and more convincing to those whom we have to convince than if we spoke in any other tones. . .

In the first place, then, it will be proper that the choir of boys, which will be sacred to the Muses, should make its entry first to sing publicly to this effect with all its might before the whole city. Next the choir of men under thirty should make its appearance, invoking the god of healing to bear witness to the truth of the doctrine uttered, and praying him of his grace to convince the young of it. And there must, of course, be still a third song from those who are between the ages of thirty and sixty. Men of more advanced age, who are naturally no longer equal to singing, will be left to tell stories about the same types of character in inspired accents.

Clinias: And pray, sir, whom may you mean by this third choir? My friend and I do not understand what you would say of them any too clearly.

Athenian: And yet they are the very parties we have had in view in the greater part of our previous conversation.

Clinias: We are as much in the dark as ever. Would you kindly make your explanation rather clearer?

Athenian: You may recall that we said, at the opening of our discussion, that all young creatures are naturally full of fire, and can keep neither their limbs nor their voices quiet. They are perpetually breaking into disorderly cries and jumps, but whereas no other animal develops a sense of order of either kind, mankind forms a solitary exception. Order in movement is called rhythm, order in articulation—the blending of acute with grave—pitch, and the name for the



combination of the two is choric art. We further said that, in their pity for us, the gods have granted us companions and leaders of our choirs in Apollo and the Muses, to whom, you may remember, we added Dionysius as a third.

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. . . . To the young belong all heavy and frequent labours.

Necessarily, he said.

Now, all this study of reckoning and geometry and all the preliminary studies that are indispensable preparation for dialectic must be presented to them while still young, not in the form of compulsory instruction.

Why so?

Because, as I said, a free soul ought not to pursue any study slavishly, for while bodily labours performed under constraints do not harm the body, nothing that is learned under compulsion stays with the mind.

True, he said.

Do not, then, my friend, keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play. That will also better enable you to discern the natural capacities of each.

There is reason in that, he said.

And do you not remember, I said, that we also declared that we must conduct the children to war on horseback to be spectators, and wherever it may be safe, bring them to the front and give them a taste of blood as we do with whelps?

I do remember.

And those who as time goes on show the most facility in all these toils and studies and alarms are to be selected and enrolled on a list.

At what age? He said.

When they are released from their prescribed gymnastics. For that period, whether it be two or three years, incapacitates them for other occupations. For great fatigue and much sleep are the foes of study, and moreover one of our tests

of them, and not the least, will be their behaviour in their physical exercises.

Surely it is, he said.

After this period, I said, those who are given preference from the twenty-year class will receive greater honors than the others, and they will be required to gather the studies which they disconnectedly pursued as children in their former education into a comprehensive survey of their affinities with one another and with the nature of things.

That, at any rate, he said, is the only instruction that abides with those who receive it.

And it is also, said I, the chief test of the dialectic nature and its opposite. For he who can view things in their connection is a dialectician; he who cannot, is not.

I concur, he said.

With these qualities in mind, I said, it will be your task to make a selection of those who manifest them best from the group who are steadfast in their studies and in war and in all lawful requirements, and when they have passed the thirtieth year to promote them, by a second selection from those preferred in the first, to still greater honours, and to prove and test them by the power of dialectic to see which of them is able to disregard the eyes and other senses and go on to being itself in company with truth. And at this point, my friend, the greatest care is requisite.