

PHILOSOPHY & HUMAN SCIENCE

Plato's Paideia: A Model of Formative Education

Thomas Marwa Monchena, ALCP/OSS

Department of Philosophy
Jordan University College

Introduction

This essay is a follow-up to a 2015 philosophy conference constituted largely by lecturers and doctoral students of philosophy from various universities in Rome. The faculty of philosophy of the Lateran Pontifical University organized the conference and entitled it, *La filosofia come formazione dell'uomo* (lit., *Philosophy as a Formation of the Man*). I myself was present as a participant.

In the course of this essay, I intend to offer a brief elaboration of some important elements of Plato's theory of education which came up during the conference. Plato's views on education appear in many of his dialogues; but in this paper, I limit myself to the educational system which Plato designed for the city as discussed in the *Republic*, with an emphasis on the formative and integral nature of the educational system found there. It is to be kept in mind that Plato's system of education makes a commitment to the formation of the whole human being, in all aspects: intellectual, spiritual, social and physical.

In the *Republic*, Plato illustrates his conviction that the nature of the good human life, i.e., true happiness, cannot be determined independently of the place that human beings occupy within society, and that the nature of a just society depends on the education of its citizens. Therefore, he sets forth *paideia* as an educational system that will educate, form, and train individuals

who can serve as a virtuous ruling class. In the *Republic*, Plato sets forth an ideal rather than a description of an existing academic curriculum or even the educational design that could be found operative in his Academy.¹

I will begin with an examination of Plato's concept of *paideia*. I will focus particularly on Plato's detailed descriptions of *paideia* as a formative education which aims to produce "truly" free individuals who can take the task of ruling the city. Other than the *Republic*, we will rely on the second volume of Werner Jaeger's work *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*.²

In order to achieve the above goal, we need to find out what is, according to Plato, the ultimate goal of educating the city. For Plato, the ultimate goal of education is the cultivation of justice in the state. I discuss this issue in Part II of this essay where the concept of *paideia* is analyzed. In Part III we show that for *paideia*

¹ W. JAEGER, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, II: *In Search of the Divine Centre*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1947, 199. "He [Plato] does not start with an actual historical nation like Athens or the Spartans. Although he deliberately confines himself to Greece, he is not bound to any particular region or city within it. The physical conditions of his city are never mentioned. They concern him neither geologically nor anthropologically. The training described in the *Republic* has nothing to do with the race which lives in the city—the entire population."

² Editor's Note: The educational enterprise involved in the composition of Jaeger's book in English is a good paradigm for researchers and writers. Writing from his academic saloon at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Jaeger engaged in a day-to-day collaborative relationship with his translator, Gilbert Highet, from his very renowned educational seat at Columbia University in New York. As a consequence of this exceptional plunge into the nooks and crannies of Greek culture with his translator, Jaeger happened upon two phrases from the great Greek poet Menander that locate the notion of *paideia* in its rightful position within Greek – and global – society: "The possession which no one can take away from man is *paideia*... *Paideia* is a haven for all mankind" (Menander, *Monost.* 2, 312 cited by Jaeger, ix). Jaeger gave to the academic world an irrefutably precious gem in his erstwhile attempt through two volumes to explain the social structure and function of Greek ideals of culture against their historical background. Jaeger humbly confesses that Plato himself rendered his task easy. Jaeger and Highet collaborated on the third volume of the *Paideia* as well even though it did not concentrate so exclusively on Plato.

to produce a just society, according to Plato, it must take into account the nature of the human soul, that is, it must be a kind of education which is in accordance with the nature of the soul. According to W. Jaeger, Plato's *paideia* is designed according to the patterns of a variety of spiritual attitudes and types of soul.³ The methodology of creating a just state is simply this: in order to reform the state, reform the soul. For Plato, it means just as importantly that our incarnate spirit cannot acquire its proper sense if it is not within a more just society.

In Part IV, I will examine what is new in Plato's *paideia*, that is, we shall highlight the difference between Plato's educational system and the "old", traditional Greek education. The role and the quality, moral and intellectual, of the educator are highlighted in Part V of this paper.

Plato believed that through education people can be made "free" or "liberal" individuals. With this particular conviction of Plato in mind, as my conclusion I shall briefly examine and indicate what kind of freedom or liberality *paideia* aims to produce in individuals, and how this liberality forms an individual to become a virtuous citizen and ruler. This will constitute the last part of this paper, which intends to consider whether Plato's *paideia* fits into the concept of Liberal Education.

1. The Concept of *Paideia* in Plato

The term *paideia* is a Greek word that means education in the sense of integral, cultural formation. The notion of *paideia*, understood as a system of transmission of knowledge and values, is one of the central concepts through which, ideologically, the socio-cultural panorama of the Greek world was telescoped. The concept captures the gestalt of the cultural formation of the human being according to the truth that is derived from philosophical knowledge. For Plato, philosophical knowledge was seen as the most elevated and most convincing form of knowledge.

According to Werner Jaeger, none of the modern expressions like civilization, culture, tradition, literature, or education really

³ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 200.

and sufficiently denote what *paideia* meant for the Greeks.⁴ Each of these modern words is confined to one aspect of *paideia*. Hence to understand the notion, we have to combine or employ in an integrated fashion all these modern expressions.

In its original Greek meaning, *paideia* had to do with the formation and shaping of the Greek character. According to Richard Tarnas:

[*Paideia* is] the classical Greek system of education and training, which came to include gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, music, mathematics, geography, natural history, astronomy and the physical sciences, history of society and ethics, and philosophy—the complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well-rounded, fully educated citizen.⁵

The kind of formation and education that the concept *paideia* denoted aimed at the creation of a higher type of person. Higher in terms of moral virtue and intellectual wisdom. It meant the whole process of educating the human being into his true form, the real and genuine human nature. Plato and the Greeks before him believed that the laws of human nature are embodied in culture; and literature – i.e., written or oral poems, stories – traditions, religion, sciences, and arts are the depositories of culture. Cultural formation was like a process of “creation” into the spiritual life of a society. Werner Jaeger tells us that:

The ancients were persuaded that education and culture are not formal art or an abstract theory, distinct from the objective historical structure of a society’s spiritual life. They held them to be embodied in literature, which is the real expression of all higher culture.⁶

Plato emphasized the use of literature as a cultural motivating energy for the education of the youth. He also proposed to extend the educational system to include a series of mathematical studies: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, and finally logic, or the science of thinking and of final truth. He recognized the practical

⁴ W. JAEGER *Paideia*, v.

⁵ R. TARNAS, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped our World*, New York: Ballantine Books 1993, 29-30.

⁶ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, v.

values of such studies, but his main purpose was to teach the meaning and the method of attaining truth as distinct from unwitting collusion with mere opinion.⁷

2. Education and Nature of the Soul

Plato states unambiguously certain principles on which any real educational theory must be based. His first supposition is that in a democracy where all men are capable of ruling themselves, each citizen must be highly and properly educated. He thus introduced to the Athenian world a new thesis, a new principle of education. He introduced a kind of *paideia* that he hoped would be an "art of living"⁸ that had to do with the moulding of men's character rather than just training men to be artisans who make things. According to Alexander Nehamas, Plato's *paideia* was education to the art of living, and it involved the whole process that aimed to "produce" oneself as a newly formed person from an original imperfectly formed creature (one may so easily remain in that imperfection), the human being who is fully a human being, whose ideal proportions one can perceive: such is every human being's lifework, the one task worthy of a lifetime's devotion. Werner Jaeger says something similar:

For Plato, *paideia* was not merely a stage in a man's development, where he trained a certain number of his faculties; its meaning extended to connote the perfection of his character, in accordance with his nature.⁹

Technical training for vocational purposes, according to Plato, was not education. Why? Because vocational and technical training, does not lead to the cultivation and the nourishment of the true nature of the whole person. Education was for Plato, the cultural activity that nurtures a human being to be a better person, who knows the good and does the good. For this reason, Plato's

⁷ H.G. GOOD – J.D. TELLER, *A History of Western Education*, London: Macmillan 1969, 32.

⁸ On Plato's *paideia* as an art of living, see A. NEHAMAS, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1998.

⁹ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 133.

education theory is in accordance to his understanding of the nature of the soul.

In the *Republic* Plato clearly shows that education aims at political justice; but he also shows that there is parallel relation between the state and the soul, such that he discusses justice in the soul and justice in the state in the same breath. Werner Jaeger indicates the nature of this relationship in the following:

The soul of man is the prototype of Plato's state. The close relation of the state and the soul is hinted at in the remarkable way in which Plato comes to discuss the state. The title of the book makes us think that now at last the state will be announced as the true ultimate aim of the long discussion of justice. And yet Plato treats the state simply as a means to explain the aim, nature, and function of justice in the soul. Since there is justice both in the soul and in the state as a whole, we must be able to spell out its character in the state, that larger although more distant picture, in bigger and clearer letters than in the individual soul.¹⁰

On the relationship between the soul and the state, Jaeger argues that according to Plato, order and justice in the city are a reflection of order and justice in the souls of the citizens of that city-state. Jaeger points out that Plato's conception of justice transcended all human institutions and went back to the origin of justice, within the soul; for according to Plato, "justice is a soul's virtue and injustice its vice."¹¹ The ideal state and the soul, according to Plato, are exactly "similar in form". Actually, his description of justice and its function in the ideal state is not derived from the realities of what happens in the political life, but rather, a reflection of his own theory of the parts of the soul, projected in a larger entity, that of the state.¹²

¹⁰ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 207; on individual and social justice see PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 368e, translated from the New Standard Greek Text, with Introduction, by C.D.C. Reeve, Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett 2004.

¹¹ PLATO, *Republic*, Book I, 353e5-10.

¹² PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 369a; see also, R.L. NETTLESHIP, *La teoria dell'educazione nella "Repubblica" di Platone*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice 1970, 6: "Nella società noi vediamo gli stessi caratteri dell'uomo, ma rappresentati su più vasta scala."

According to Plato, the ideal state was to have three classes of citizens. This social class structure was thought to be parallel to Plato's own idea of three "kinds" of souls: the appetitive, the sensitive, and the rational.¹³ The lowest class of citizens consisted of the producers of food, shelter, and clothing; the craftsmen, the traders, the doctors and all those who provided the economic resources for the state.¹⁴ Plato thought that this class of people was mainly motivated by the appetitive soul; and they needed to be ruled and controlled by those wiser than themselves. The middle class would be a class of soldiers (warriors); who were to be motivated by the spirit of honour and courage, that is to say, by the noble emotions that bring equilibrium to human sensitivities.¹⁵ The highest class is the ruling class of guardians (philosophers) who are guided by reason and the search for wisdom.¹⁶

In this sense, the origin of what Plato calls justice must be based on the most inward nature of the human soul. The connection between Plato's education and the human soul is clearly spelt out by Socrates in the following passage:

Then, aren't these the reasons, Glaucon, that musical training is most important? First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the innermost element of the soul, affect it more powerfully than anything else, and bring it grace, such education makes one graceful if one is properly trained, and the opposite if one is not.¹⁷

In this view, a just person is one in whom reason rules the body, the sensitivities and the appetites; and a just state is one in which the philosopher—the wisest – rules, and the most courageous and the strongest fight, and the workers labour.

The problem of the *Republic* is the problem of justice or righteousness. Plato's justice, therefore, is a harmony in which all qualities and all individuals are in their proper places performing their proper functions. To repeat it in a more general form, that is a just state or society in which each individual is in the place for

¹³ PLATO, *Republic*, Book IV, 440b-442a.

¹⁴ Cf. PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 369d, 373b3-c5.

¹⁵ PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 374e, 375b4.

¹⁶ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 263-267.

¹⁷ PLATO, *Republic*, Book III, 401d5-402a5.

which his nature and capacity fit him, doing those things and only those that he can do best.¹⁸

For Plato, therefore, *paideia* is conceived as the ideal process and the ideal means to achieve justice, both for the individual and the state.¹⁹ Justice for the individual can be obtained only when each individual develops his or her potentiality to the fullest. In this sense, justice means excellence, and education is necessary to achieve that excellence.²⁰

Thus, the ideal of education is conceived not as the perfection of the body but essentially as the perfection of the spiritual part of the human being, the soul. This is why Plato declares that the education of children must begin with the education of their souls. The education of the soul is to be done with “musical” training. In the comprehensive Greek sense, “music” is not simply a matter of sound and rhythm, but also of the spoken word, the expressed thought, the logos.²¹ Plato insists again and again, that man has a higher nature, an immortal soul. Therefore, the first object of any education is to subject the lower nature, i.e., the body and its natural appetites, to the higher or spiritual nature. In the discourse between Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Republic*, Socrates makes the following comment:

And surely once our constitution is well started, it will, as it were, go on growing in a circle. For good education and upbringing, if they are kept up, produce good natures; and sound natures, which in turn receive such an education, grow up even better than their predecessors in every respect—but particularly

¹⁸ H.G. GOOD – J.D. TELLER, *A History of Western Education*, , 33.

¹⁹ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 202.

²⁰ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 202.

²¹ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 211. For the Greeks, “music” meant all of the cultural literature including letters, songs, and poetry. Through letters, musical songs, and poetry, the students were taught all the values of life. That way they cultivated and nourished their mind and soul. The educators talked to the students about the virtue, the bravery, the deeds and the glory of the past heroes, so that the youths tried to imitate them and follow in their footsteps.

with respect to their offspring, as in the case of all the other animals.²²

For this reason, Plato says that anything that would disrupt this harmonious subjection of body to soul has no place in any school.²³ This explains why Plato insisted on censorship of literature for students and generally all the young men. For example he says:

Shall we carelessly allow our children to hear any old stories made up by just anyone, then, and to take beliefs into their souls that are, for the most part, the opposite of the ones we think they should hold when they are grown up?²⁴

He continues:

So our first task, it seems, is to supervise the storytellers: if they make up a good story, we must accept it; if not, we must reject it. We will persuade nurses and mothers to tell the acceptable ones to their children, and to spend far more time shaping their souls with these stories than they do shaping their bodies by handling them. Many of the stories they tell now, however, must be thrown out.²⁵

Plato believed that the human being has a rational soul and that he has a lofty end in life. He realized that the human being's end was not a purely natural one and that to attain this higher end the human being must preserve a proper harmony between the body and the soul. But how does one get to know how to preserve this harmony? According to Plato, the only way a person can know and preserve a balanced relation between body and soul is by learning true values. The young must learn so as not to confuse lead and gold, glass and diamond. Only a vital link between morality and religion, on the one hand, and the educational system, on the other,

²² PLATO, *Republic*, Book IV, 424a5.

²³ The idea and the emphasis of the soul as the higher nature, is important for our times, for many writers in our own day display too vividly the supremacy of the body over the soul. We therefore, must insist that philosophy, or any form of education that works to develop and transform the human being should take seriously the proper position and the harmony between the material and the spiritual aspects of the human being. This means that our educational aim must be more elevated, must be more spiritual.

²⁴ PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 377b5-10.

²⁵ PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 377b9-c5.

will teach and cultivate this in the young. This is well summarized by Jaeger as follows:

Paideia for Plato is the soul's lifelong struggle to free itself from ignorance of the greatest goods which bars its way to its true welfare. These words point backwards, to the conclusion of Protagoras, where this same ignorance, 'false belief and error about things of the highest value', was described as the source of all evil.²⁶

From the above, it can be said that there is no confusion in Plato's mind concerning the real aim of *paideia*. Plato's primary directive for philosophy focused on the strenuous development of the intellect, the will, and the body, motivated by a ceaseless desire to regain the lost union with the eternal, for the recollection of the Ideas (Forms) is both the means and the goal of true knowledge. Education, therefore, for Plato is in the service of the soul and the divine. As Jaeger says, the purpose of *paideia*, exercised through the media of athletic and 'musical' training, "is to create right harmony and right rhythm in the soul."²⁷

Despite the correlation between the soul and the state, Werner Jaeger warns that there always existed a certain conflict between the spirit of the state and the 'ethos' of the human being which houses his soul in a perfect state even as he struggles to live according to its purity. He may lose himself in the struggle: "Tyranny comes into being in the soul of a young man when he himself becomes the plaything of his own lusts."

3. The Reform of the Greek "Old" Paideia

How does Plato's *paideia* differ from the traditional Greek educational system? What is new in his idea of education? The idea here is that in the *Republic* Plato accepted some of the main views about education and its exercise in Athens but rejected or offered criticism about other Athenian viewpoints. Many scholars of Plato's theory of education believe that under Plato, the classical *paideia* assumed a deeper and more metaphysical dimension,

²⁶ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 152-153.

²⁷ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 279.

holding forth the ideal of inner perfection realized through disciplined education.²⁸

The kind of education that Plato outlines in books II-III of the *Republic* is in many ways in keeping with traditional Greek educational practices.²⁹ In this first stage of education, Plato makes use of the traditional content of the *paideia* of the aristocratic Athenian: music and athletics. It also resembles the old Greek education which was primarily concerned with moral formation and character shaping rather than the development of intellect or the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge.

However, Plato showed dissatisfaction concerning what was the aim of traditional education. Should education aim only at making people physically strong and courageous? Plato, therefore felt a need for a "better" education for the class of guardians:

What, then, will the education be? Or is it difficult to find a *better* one than the one that has been discovered over a long period of time—physical training for bodies and musical training for the soul?³⁰

Plato's second stage of education set forth in books VI-VII of the *Republic*, contains a different kind of education which introduced profound changes to the traditional educational system in crucial ways. The aim of his new *paideia* was to train pupils to look down on practical and specialized learning, training, and erudition for the extrinsic benefits.

²⁸ Cf. R. TARNAS, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 43.

²⁹ H.I. MARROU, *Storia dell'educazione nell'antichità*, traduzione di Umberto Massi, Roma: Edizioni Studium 1994, 105:

Che Platone abbia posto così alla base del suo Sistema pedagogico l'educazione greca tradizionale, è un fatto che ha avuto un'importanza considerevole per lo sviluppo della tradizione classica, di cui ha rinforzato la continuità e la omogeneità; da una parte, la cultura filosofica, invece di romperla con l'educazione anteriore, ne apparve come un prolungamento, un arricchimento; dall'altra, quest'educazione di primo grado venne a costituire un denominatore comune tra quella cultura filosofica e la cultura rivale contrapostale da Isocrate; l'una e l'altra si presentano come due varietà della stessa specie, come due rami divergenti usciti da un tronco comune.

³⁰ PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 376e.

The traditional Greek educational system was more a matter of private individuals. Any training that Athenian children received in reading, writing, literature, music, or in another discipline was up to their parents to arrange and pay for. Sophists, for example, were considered as educators who moved from one town to another to teach the children of elite parents. Education was offered for a price: poor families could not manage to pay.³¹ This attitude of sophist teachers did not please Plato. He proposed the state to be responsible for education rather than to leave it to the private or semi-private individuals, as had always been the case.

According to Plato, education should be the highest function of the state. The ideal state should be responsible for providing and supervising the educators, and supervise the style and the content of teaching.³² Plato believed that the root cause of evils in the city of Athens was the inadequate old Athenian manner of educating; and he blamed this state of affairs on the freedom that was left to the parents to direct the education of the children as they wished. Parents failed to inculcate the virtues and true moral/intellectual training. To remedy this inadequacy, Plato proposed a compulsory education for all children. For the public common good, the state should direct and control breeding, nursing and the education and training of children.³³

Another important reform that Plato introduced to the Greek culture was the ideal of the equal opportunity for education. According to Jaeger, Plato was influenced on this point by the Spartan system of education where both women and men were trained for state functions, especially for the military.³⁴ Plato made a powerful argument that in the ideal state, men and women must be available to perform the same functions in society. In Plato's view there are no valid reasons why a woman *per se* should be discriminated against in respect of a social role; if men are chosen to rule on the criteria of intelligence and moral integrity, then it is quite illogical to say that a woman ought not to be chosen if she

³¹ Cf. W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 108-110.

³² Cf. PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 376.

³³ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 246-251.

³⁴ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 243.

has the same qualities. Therefore, for optimal performance of their roles and pursuits, women must be educated.

Plato maintained that, if men are educated both physically and intellectually, the same should be done for women. Just like men, women, as well as children must be educated. Everyone in the city—men and women, as Plato insists—is exposed to the same educational system. Students were to be promoted on account of their merits. According to Jaeger:

Plato himself thought that no one could claim a leading position in the state unless he had ability far above the average of mankind. But he did not expect to take an aristocracy of blood and train it for virtue; he wanted to choose those who represented the highest *arête*, and with them to create a new elite.³⁵

That means that the better someone does, the higher one rises in the city's hierarchy.³⁶ Plato believed that women are "capable of making a creative contribution to building up the community."³⁷ Therefore, the first stage of education, i.e., education at the primary level, was to be for all, without gender discrimination. The secondary level of education for guardians, which aimed at producing philosophers and rulers was only for those males and females who had developed morally, physically, culturally, spiritually, and intellectually; those who had the capability for such education, for the service of the state, and could live a harmonious life, because they knew what was good for the people and for humankind, and could make choices grounded on that knowledge.³⁸

This educational system manifests Plato's rejection of the then prevailing view that women are meant by nature only to bear children, bring them up, and look after the household. He believed that women are equal to men. However, he admitted that generally, women are not as strong as men. But he says, being less strong physically is not enough reason to keep women from accepting

³⁵ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 248.

³⁶ PLATO, *Republic*, Book V, 451c, 451d, 451e5, 452a5.

³⁷ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 244.

³⁸ R. TARNAS, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 42-43.

their share in the guards' duties.³⁹ Now, if they were to do the same work as men, they should have the same upbringing and education.⁴⁰ Therefore the women of the ruling class must be schooled in 'music' and gymnastics just like men, and also trained for war.

Then if we employ women for the same tasks as men, they must also be taught the same things. Now, we give the latter musical and physical training. So, we must also give these two crafts, as well as military training, to the women, and employ them in the same way.⁴¹

Plato's criticized the "musical" education of his day, and more particularly, poetry. He placed a special emphasis on the use poetry as an educational force. Good poetry, according to Plato, is the one that celebrates noble people who can be imitated by the students.⁴² Good poetry prepares students to perform virtue and wisdom in private and public life as adults. Plato was concerned that some models of poetry were being used by poets to excite the multitude and stir up their sensitivities, with no concern whether they make people better or worse.⁴³

But Plato's radical criticism of use of poetry in Greek education had another, ulterior, motive: the reformation of the Greek representation of gods. In fact, Werner Jaeger thinks that Plato intended not just the reformation of the representation of the idea of gods but also wanted to outline a reformed theology. Jaeger says:

Plato's pupils believed that when he proclaimed the Good to be the ultimate cause of everything in the universe, he was founding a new religion. This is made quite certain by Aristotle's laudatory poem on the altar of Philia. They thought also that Plato's belief that being good was the same as being happy was made manifestly true at least once in this world, in the person of their master. [...] That revolutionary concept never appears in history before Plato's

³⁹ PLATO, *Republic*, Book V, 451d.

⁴⁰ PLATO, *Republic*, Book V, 455c-d.

⁴¹ PLATO, *Republic*, Book V, 452a.

⁴² PLATO, *Republic*, Book III, 390a4-5, 394c4-5.

⁴³ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 144.

Republic, where 'outlines of theology' are sketched out to help in employing the knowledge of God (= the Good) in education.⁴⁴

In order to reform the representation of the gods, Plato suggested that a number of famous poems must be modified, or else, should not be used for education, on account of their misrepresentation of the truth about gods. Some poets, according to Plato, had misrepresented the gods as constantly changing their minds, competing and quarreling among themselves, and as personages who often deceive people and do evil deeds. For Plato:

[Good poems must represent gods as] altogether simple, true in both word and deed. God does not change himself or deceive others by means of images, by words, or by sending signs, whether they are awake or dreaming.⁴⁵

The poems of Homer fall in the category of those that Plato thought must be edited before being used for education.⁴⁶

4. The Competence and the Role of the Educator

In the seminar *La filosofia come formazione dell'oumo* the question about the role of the educator in the process of cultivating *paideia*, that is, in the whole process of formation and transformation of the human being and society was repeatedly raised. Prof. Cambiano indicated that an answer to the issue of the educator-learner relationship was already highlighted in Plato's *paideia*.

According to Plato, the whole activity of *paideia* requires a healthy relationship between the educator and the student. First and foremost, the educator must not only know his subject well, but as a true lover of wisdom (philosopher) must also know the limits of his knowledge. The educator, or the mentor of the youth, is expected to have a deep care for the intellectual, spiritual well-being and the future of those he works with. The role of the educator implies that one must abandon himself to the ministry – the vocation – of educating. This means that the role of the educator should not be understood as a profession or wage-earning activity.

⁴⁴ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 297.

⁴⁵ PLATO, *Republic*, Book II, 382e7-10.

⁴⁶ Cf. PLATO, *Republic*, Book III, 390e-392a; 396e.

The educator must be conscious of the teacher-student relationship and must know that he deals with the soul of the student. Indeed character formation results from educating the soul in matters emotional, moral, intellectual, and spiritual.

Contrary to the Sophists, Plato proposed a system of education by which the youth could be taught to think for themselves – to discuss, debate, argue, and criticize – and not just repeat mindlessly the views of their teacher. The allegory of the Cave is presented as an image of *paideia* but it may also serve as a model of the role of an academic mentor, such as Socrates.⁴⁷ In the allegory of the cave, Plato likens the importance of the educator to the torchbearer who leads a man who has been lying in the dark cave out of the darkness into the bright light of the outside world.⁴⁸ The teacher is thus the constant guide of the students. The teacher must be a person of high integrity and must possess high self-worth.

In the entire dialogue of the *Republic*, Plato portrays Socrates as the model for educators, as one who is able to guide the student to achieve the life of excellence, by living a just life, while constantly striving for wisdom and the appropriation of virtues—temperance, courage, wisdom and justice. “Plato intends ... to make Socrates appear as the image of true frankness, true kindness, and true *paideia*.”⁴⁹ As a teacher of *paideia*, Socrates shows himself as a kind of mid-wife of ideas, one who leads potential learners to discover the truth for themselves, by liberating them of false opinions and encouraging them to pursue the truth and the knowledge of the Idea of the Good with the aid of their philosophical mentor. We can compare Socrates to the free, philosophical wise man who re-enters the dark cave – the world of everyday affairs in which people live and move and have their being – in order to attempt to rescue those who live in this shadowy world, while facing the danger of having his life threatened by the violent reaction of the “prisoners” inside the cave who find their world disturbed by a Socratic rescuer.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ PLATO, *Republic*, Book VII, 514a.

⁴⁸ PLATO, *Republic*, Book VII, 516a-e.

⁴⁹ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 140.

⁵⁰ PLATO, *Republic*, Book VII, 517a.

Lastly, just like Socrates, the educator must expect and be ready for the pedagogical struggle between *paideia* as represented by the sophists—those teachers whose aim is success and mastery over their students – and *paideia* as represented by Socratic philosophers – those who seek to nurture their students through a liberating and transforming philosophical quest for wisdom.⁵¹

5. Plato's Paideia as a Liberal Form of Education

Plato's *paideia* as we have seen, refers to a particular sort of education which is basically concerned with the kind of training that develops the mind, emotions, physique and interpersonal relationships. It is a training in values, in virtues. Plato's concept of *paideia* is distinguished from specialized training and learning for the extrinsic benefits. Plato's *paideia* is contained in the traditional notion of Liberal Education which holds that such an education is the development of the mind through the achievement of worthwhile knowledge and understanding. What is worthwhile is meant to be valuable, morally upright.

In Books Six and Seven of the Republic, Plato sets forth a kind of education that focuses on the development of human excellence, both private and public. For Plato, the kind of education designed for guardians should aim at developing the intellect and bringing freedom to bloom according to the parameters of truth and goodness. Its object is the excellence of the human being as a human being and as a citizen. The kind of education at issue covers not just the content of what is learnt, but the forms by which what is learnt is presented – the kind of music you listen to, the sort of exercise you take, the type of objects that surround you. Education cannot be reduced to the acquisition of information and skills. For Plato, *paideia* covers the whole of human development. The passage 401b-402a indicates the extensive scope of education according to Plato:

⁵¹ W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 149: "Therefore if Socrates is to choose between the two methods of treating men—serving the Athenian people by flattery, or fighting them to make them better—he can choose only the second, and that although he knows the mortal danger he is running."

Is it only poets we have to supervise, then, compelling them either to embody the image of a good character in their poems or else not to practice their craft among us? Or mustn't we also supervise all the other craftsmen, and forbid them to represent a character that is bad, intemperate, illiberal, and graceless, in their images of living beings, in their buildings, or in any of the other products of their craft? And mustn't the one who finds this impossible be prevented from practicing in our city, so that our guardians will not be brought up on images of evil as in a meadow of bad grass, where they crop and graze every day from all that surrounds them until, little by little, they unwittingly accumulate a large amount of evil in their souls? Instead, mustn't we look for craftsmen who are naturally capable of pursuing what is fine and graceful in their work, so that our young people will live in a healthy place and be benefited on all sides as the influence exerted by those fine works affects their eyes and ears like a healthy breeze from wholesome regions, and imperceptibly guides them from earliest childhood into being similar to, friendly toward, and concordant with the beauty of reason?⁵²

The scope of the educational system designed by Plato is well covered in the modern concept of liberal education. Liberal education is a kind of education that seeks, not to produce professional technicians and scientists, but to develop free human beings who know how to use their minds and are able to think freely for themselves. For Plato, the kind of education that is capable of producing citizens who can exercise their liberty as cultivated persons must be compatible with that quality in a soul that is always reaching out to grasp all things as a whole, whether divine or human.⁵³

⁵² PLATO, *Republic*, Book III, 401b-d.

⁵³ PLATO, *Republic*, Book VI, 486a-b10. The editor notes that the type of liberal education that the author has in mind is one that has been compromised in those cultures that have either wittingly or unwittingly followed the masters of suspicion. The schools of suspicion explained by Paul Ricoeur and revisited by Pope St. John Paul II in his exposition on the challenges to purity of heart posed by today's consumer cultures embed students within educational systems that exalt the mentalities driven by the drive for profit (Marx), the impulse to psycho-social and sexual gratification (Freud), and the unbridled desire for power and influence (Nietzsche) at the expense of the

In Plato's conception of education as a training of character and development of human faculties, there is a total absence of any reference to academic achievement, exams or grading; the students were assessed for their strength of character:

Well then, as I was just saying, we must discover which of them are best at safeguarding within themselves the conviction that they must always do what they believe to be best for the city. We must watch them right from childhood, and set them tasks in which a person would be most likely to forget such a conviction or be deceived out of it. And we must select the ones who remember and are difficult to deceive, and reject the others.⁵⁴

According to this viewpoint, the criterion of successful education is a morally mature and enlightened outlook on the world.

Conclusion

In Kenya, where I come from, and in Tanzania, where I live and work, there has been an effort to reform the educational systems, and redefine the educational processes and structures. That in itself indicates that we have an educational crisis – but I believe the educational crisis is global in the sense that everywhere in the world the human being has never ceased to question the appropriateness and the purpose of their national systems of education and their methods for implementing them. Our educational systems are deeply immersed in training people for office employment and for the technological market. Ours is more of a system that prepares students to pass exams and to achieve academic qualifications leading to formal professions.

A critical study of Plato's *paideia* can be an eye-opener to our reflections on the nature and the aim of education. We need to be challenged to re-think the aim of our education. We could borrow from Plato the idea of an integral personal and community education. We need a kind of educational system which promotes the person, particularly amid the challenges of our technological

heart's true freedom according to the parameters of truth and goodness. See the Editorial in *Africa Tomorrow*, 17/2, 2015.

⁵⁴ PLATO, *Republic*, Book III, 413c-d.

and fast-changing society. True cultural education should be able to transmit the cultural wealth from one generation to the next, because culture is the medium to develop a relationship between the present and the values and virtues of the past.

I think the other aspect of the crisis facing our systems of education is that in some way we are taught and prepared to know what is useful for us. Less and less, students are prepared to know and to love what is good, what is true, what is beautiful, what is natural. I believe that education should teach us how to be “in love” and what we should fall in love with. The questions of what and how “to be” are metaphysical and moral questions, respectively. To know the nature of what is there, to know the good, to know the true, the beautiful and the natural, would require some training in philosophy. My recommendation would be to our education systems to create some space for philosophical courses at the primary and intermediary levels of education. These would be courses that are appropriate for forming and developing critical thinkers.

In a forthright philosophy of education we find many theories put forward to explicate the purpose or goal of education. For example, Julius K. Nyerere and Ralph Waldo Emerson, both in different settings, propagated the idea according to which the primary purpose of education is to promote self-reliance. I think they are right in this, that any system of education that does not seek to liberate people in the society in all aspects of their lives is defective. However, though self-reliance is truly one of the goals, it cannot be the primary goal of education. In my view, the capacity for people’s self-reliance is dependent on the maturity of their character and personality. Therefore, our educational systems and practices should be geared toward forming young people to recognize and adopt a life that incorporate values, ideas, virtues and practices they need to become decent, “educated” and fulfilled. Only to this extent will they be truly human persons.

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