Loving Learning:
Plato’s philosophical dogs and the education of the guardians

Word count: 4,912 (excluding notes and bibliography)

1. Introduction

In Book II of the Republic, Socrates makes an apparently ridiculous claim. He says that the well-bred dog is “truly philosophical” (ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφον, 376b2). Socrates’ remark is in the service of a serious point. It is part of his argument that the good guardian of the city must be philosophical (φιλόσοφος), in addition to being spirited (θυμοειδής), speedy (ταχύς), and strong (ἰσχυρός) (376c4). However, the main reaction to the funny philosophical dog (and so to Socrates’ broader conclusion about the nature of the guardian) has been to treat it as a light-hearted bit of foreshadowing, designed to set the stage for the later appearance of the real philosopher in Bks. V-VII. In at least two cases, the philosophical element and the behaviors for which it is responsible (in particular, the welcoming of the familiar or oikeiōn) have been assimilated to the spirited element.

One reason the philosophical element in Bk. II has been discounted so quickly is that it is remarkably different from the philosophical nature that appears in the middle books of the Republic. In Bk. II, as we shall see, to be philosophical is to welcome and love what one recognizes. In the middle books, to be philosophical is to be specially oriented toward truth, being, and the forms. The latter is a highly intellectualized account of what it takes to love wisdom; the former does not appear to involve any active thinking or reasoning at all, much less a special love of the forms. It seems clear to me that the philosophical element of Bk. II should not be identified with the philosophical nature of the middle books. Nevertheless, the philosophical element of Bk. II is doing real, philosophical work for Socrates. We should neither assimilate it to spirit nor relegate it to the category of a mere joke, one that is (as it were) all bark and no bite. My central claim is that the joke has teeth, and it uses them.

3 Cf. Gill (1985, 14).
Once we relieve ourselves of the task of comparing the first and second appearances of the philosophical nature, we are free to pay more attention to the details of the first appearance. As we shall see, the philosophical element is initially—and strikingly—introduced as the source of the guardians’ gentleness. The relation between gentleness and the philosophical element is important for two reasons. First, it shows that gentleness is the result of an *active* positive impulse towards the familiar. It follows that the guardian nature is not characterized merely by an aggressive impulse (spirit) plus the restraint of that impulse; the guardian nature is also characterized by its active embrace of what it knows and recognizes. Second, the active quality of the guardians’ gentleness enables us to appreciate how the early education of the guardians shapes the philosophical element. Although Socrates says that this education shapes the philosophical element (410b10-412a2; cf. 376e3), the educational program outlined in Bks. II-III is widely believed to target spirit. I believe that this view is at least partly the consequence of neglecting the first appearance of the philosophical element: once we de-emphasize the philosophical element what else, apart from spirit, requires educating? What I will show is that the guardians’ education capitalizes on their love of what they know by familiarizing them with instances of the fine (and other good properties). The result is that the educated guardians will actively welcome and embrace the fine wherever it appears, whether in their fellow citizens, the state, an educational curriculum, or, finally, in the Forms themselves.

2. Gentleness and the introduction of the philosophical element

At the beginning of the discussion of the guardian nature, Socrates and Glaucon identify several qualities that the guardians must have if they are to be well-suited to their job of guarding the city: they must be keen-eyed, nimble, and strong (375a5-7); they must also be brave (ἀνδρεῖος, 375a9-10). The identification of bravery as part of the guardian nature leads to the introduction of the quality of spiritedness (θυμοειδής, 375a11), which Socrates claims is the psychological source of bravery:

---

4 For references and discussion, see n.17 below.
And would a horse, dog, or any other sort of creature want to be brave unless it were spirited? Or haven’t you observed that spirit is uncontestable and unconquerable and that when it is present every soul is fearless and unconquerable in everything? (375a11-b3)

The introduction of spiritedness immediately gives rise to a problem. The guardians also need to be gentle (πράος, 375c1); otherwise, they will destroy themselves and the citizens for whom they are responsible (375a1-4). However, Socrates notes that “the gentle nature is opposed to [ἐναντία] the spirited one” (375c7-8). The fact that the guardian nature requires the combination of opposing qualities suggests that it is impossible (375c10-d1).

In response to this problem, Socrates provides an example of an existent nature that combines gentleness and spirit. Well-bred dogs (to which guardians have already been compared, 375a2-7) are naturally gentle towards those with whom they are familiar and aggressive towards those who are unknown (375e1-3). The fact that such a nature exists shows that the guardian nature is in fact possible (375e5-6). Socrates then draws a puzzling inference. He claims, on the basis of his example of the gentle dog, that the guardian must be “philosophical in nature [φιλόσοφος τὴν φύσιν] in addition to being spirited” (375e8-10). Socrates reiterates the idea a few lines later, at the end of his discussion of the guardian nature: “if there is to be someone gentle [πράος] towards those who belong to him and are known by him, he must be a lover of wisdom [φιλόσοφον] and a lover of learning [φιλομαθῆ] by nature” (376b12-c2).

Some commentators have taken Socrates to task for drawing a connection between the philosophical element and gentleness. The main objection is that being gentle does not depend on being philosophical.6 This objection rests on the assumption that the love of wisdom introduced in this passage is identical with the love of wisdom that emerges in the middle books of the Republic and is specially oriented toward truth and being. It is true that there is no obvious connection between this highly intellectual conception of the love of wisdom and the gentleness of the guardians. However, I think we should resist the temptation to identify the love of wisdom that appears in this passage with the love of wisdom that appears in the middle books.7 The introduction

---

5 ἀνδρείος δὲ εἶναι ἄρα ἐθελήσει ὁ μὴ θημοειδὴς εἶτε ἵππος εἶτε κῦον ἢ ἄλλο ὅπως ἔχει αὐτός; ἢ ὅν ἐνδεικτικὰς ὡς ἀμαρχῇ τοῦ καὶ ἀνίκιτρον θυμὸς, οὐ παράνοιαν μηχανὴν πάσαν πρὸς ἄφθονον τέρατον καὶ ἀντίτηταν; Here and throughout, translations are my own, based on the Slings OCT.

6 See Cornford (1945, ad 375e) and Rosen (2005, 86).

7 The italics are important. I am not denying that the later love of wisdom might have its basis in the first. Indeed, I think this is the case, and I will argue for this view in Section 4.
of the philosophical element in this passage marks the first use of the word “φιλόσοφος” in the Republic. Thus, from the perspective of a first-time reader of the dialogue, the meaning of the term and its cognates is not yet settled; it certainly need not have the technical meaning it acquires in the middle books. If we want to understand why Socrates sources gentleness in the philosophical element in Bk. II, we should start by paying close attention to the discussion of the guardian nature itself, rather than looking ahead to the middle books.

The first thing we shall discover is that Socrates needs to introduce an additional element to the guardian soul in order to explain how a nature that combines gentleness and spirit is possible. As we have just seen, Socrates claims that gentleness and spiritedness are opposing qualities. This is not, in itself, a deep problem. In Bk. IV, we learn that a single thing can contain opposites, provided that they can be attributed to different parts of that thing. It follows that the guardian nature could contain opposing qualities, provided that it is suitably complex. This illuminates the more basic problem with the guardian nature as it is initially characterized. The problem is not merely that it contains opposing qualities but that it is also described as having only one fundamental element, that of spiritedness.

Just after the introduction of spiritedness as the source of bravery, Socrates summarizes the results of the investigation so far. He notes that they have identified the bodily qualities the guardians must have (presumably strength, nimbleness, and keenness of vision), and he says that they have also discovered the requisite qualities of the guardian soul, namely, the spirited ones (θυμοειδῆ, 375b5-9). This description of the guardian soul suggests that it has only one fundamental element (spiritedness), which is responsible for the guardian’s signature psychological qualities (e.g. bravery). Thus, we would expect that if any additional psychological qualities are identified in the guardian, they would likewise be sourced in the guardian’s fundamental element. However, the quality of gentleness confounds this expectation. Since spiritedness and gentleness are opposites, gentleness cannot be sourced in spiritedness. Moreover, since the guardian soul appears to have only one fundamental element, there is nothing else available to identify as the source of the guardian’s gentleness. Thus, gentleness and spiritedness cannot comprise a single nature unless we allow that the guardian nature has an additional

---

8 The interlocutors have made references to love of victory, love of honor, and love of money (336c3, 338a7, 347b2), but the love of wisdom does not appear on the stage until Socrates makes the claim about the guardian nature just cited.
fundamental element. Since the example of the well-bred dogs shows that a nature that combines spiritedness and gentleness is possible, it must be the case that the guardian soul has another fundamental element, besides spiritedness, to which the guardian’s gentleness can be attributed.

This explains why Socrates thinks an additional element is required. And notice that this already offers us a compelling reason to refrain from assimilating the philosophical element of Bk. II to spirit. We do so on pain of rendering the guardian nature impossible. But now a further question arises: what does it mean to say that the guardians are philosophical in nature? And how is this new aspect of their nature connected to gentleness?

The answer to these questions requires us to look more closely at the argument that follows Socrates’ introduction of the philosophical element. The argument unfolds in three stages. In Stage 1, Socrates returns to the analogy with dogs and eliminates one explanation for the dog’s behavior towards others (376a2-10). In Stage 2, Socrates argues for an alternative explanation of this behavior and concludes that, given this explanation, the dog is “truly philosophical” (ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφον, 376b2; Stage 2 runs from 376b1-8). Finally, in Stage 3, Socrates concludes that anyone who is gentle towards those they know, including the guardian, must have a philosophical nature (376b9-c6). The key moves happen in Stages 1 and 2.

Socrates’ first step (Stage 1) is to remind Glaucon of the dog’s distinctive behavior:

...[I]f a dog sees someone unknown, he grows angry with him, even when he hasn’t been badly treated [by him] beforehand. But if he sees someone he knows, he welcomes him, even if he has never experienced anything good from him. Or have you not yet wondered at this? (376a5-8)

The observations Socrates makes here build on an observation he made only a few lines earlier. At 375d10-e3, Socrates noted that dogs are “as gentle as possible” (ὡς οίόν τε πραοτάτους) towards those whom they know (γνωρίμους) and are accustomed to (συνήθεις). This was the evidence that a nature that combines spiritedness and gentleness is in fact possible. Now Socrates repeats the point, substituting the verb ἀσπάζεσθαι for the adjective πρᾶος: the dog welcomes those

---

9 I take it that Socrates does not think that gentleness itself is that additional fundamental element, since otherwise the opposition of spiritedness and gentleness would not have challenged the possibility of the guardian nature. Socrates thinks that gentleness, like bravery, must be sourced in some more fundamental quality of the guardian soul. The problem is that the only fundamental quality so far available is opposed to gentleness.

10 ὃν μὲν ἐν οἷόν ἄγνωτα, χαλεπάινει, οὐδὲ ἐν κακόν προπεποθῶς: ὃν δ’ ἐν γνώριμον, ἀσπάζεται, κἂν μηδὲν πόσοτε ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἄγαθον πεπόνθη, ἢ οὕτω τοῦτο ἐθαύμασας;
it knows. Socrates also provides additional details about the circumstances of the dog’s behavior. He notes that the dog still barks at a stranger, even if he has never been mistreated by that person. Similarly, the dog welcomes a regular to the house even if that person has never slipped the dog scraps during dinner. These details rule out one intuitive explanation of the dog’s behavior. One might have thought that the dog’s reactions are ultimately due to whether his previous experience with a person has been positive or negative. Socrates’ point is that the dog still reacts in the relevant ways even when he has not been conditioned by good or bad treatment.

In Stage 2, Socrates draws out the implications of the dog’s behavior for our understanding of its nature:

—And indeed it appears that the condition of his nature is refined, and that he is truly philosophical. —In what way? —In that it determines a face to be friendly or hostile in no other way than on the basis of the fact that it knows the former and is unfamiliar with the latter. Indeed how could defining what is one’s own and what is foreign in terms of knowledge and ignorance not be love of learning? —It really couldn’t be any other way, he said. —But in fact aren’t the love of learning and the love of wisdom the same? —They are. (376b1-10)

Having eliminated the most obvious explanation for the dog’s behavior, Socrates concludes that the dog’s behavior towards a person is determined by whether the dog knows (καταμαθεῖν) or is ignorant of (ἀγνοῆσαι) that person. For the dog to know a person in this context is simply for the dog to recognize them on the basis of past acquaintance. The dog’s ignorance consists in a lack of recognition. This recognition, or lack thereof, determines whether the dogs welcomes or rejects the person. If the dog recognizes a person, they are deemed a friend and thus welcomed; otherwise, the person is classified as an enemy and rejected. The fact that the dog welcomes what he recognizes is what makes him “truly philosophical.” Socrates’ line of thought appears to be that to welcome something, to treat it as a friend or as one’s own (οἰκεῖον), is to love it. To love what one recognizes is—in this context at least—to love what one knows (or has learned). Moreover,

---

11 The substitution is significant, and I discuss its significance below.
12 ἀλλὰ μὴν κοιμηθοῦν γε φαίνεται τὸ πάθος αὐτοῦ τῆς φύσεως καὶ ὥς ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφον. —πή δή; —ἡ ἢ δ’ ἐγώ, ὅριν οὐδὲν ἄλλο φίλην καὶ ἐχθρᾶν διακρίνει ἢ τῷ τὴν μὲν καταμαθεῖν, τὴν δὲ ἄγνοησαι. καίτω ποις ὡκ ἄν φιλομαθῆς εἰς συνέσει τε καὶ ἁγνοία ὑπερζημονν τὸ τε οἰκεῖον καὶ τὸ ἄλλοτριον; —οὐδαμῶς, ἢ δ’ ὅς, ὅπως οὕ. —ἀλλὰ μέντοι, ἐπὶν ἐγώ, τὸ γε φιλομαθῆς καὶ φιλόσοφον ταύτων; —ταύτων γάρ, ἔρη.
14 Socrates begins by arguing that the dog is a lover of learning. Given the examples, “learning” must refer to that with which the dog has become acquainted (in this case, a person). At the end of the passage, Socrates claims that
the dog does not merely love what he knows; Socrates has argued that the dog also loves it because it is known to him. Thus, the dog is a lover of wisdom because (a) he loves what he knows (b) for no other reason than that it is known to him.

On my interpretations, there is a clear connection between the dogs’ love of wisdom and their gentleness. The contrast between spirit and gentleness suggests that gentleness consists in the restraint of spirit. Since spirit is an aggressive impulse characterized by fearlessness and anger, gentleness consists in not growing angry with or reacting harshly to something. The connection between this restraint and the love of wisdom is signaled for us in Stage 1. As I noted above, when Socrates redescribes the behavior of the dog towards those it knows, he substitutes the verb ἀσπάζεσθαι for the adjective πρᾶος. This redescription highlights a new facet of the dog’s behavior. It does not merely restrain its aggressive impulses when it sees someone familiar; it actively *welcomes* the familiar person. As we have seen, this embrace of the familiar is what makes the dog philosophical, a lover of wisdom. But we can now also see that this positive impulse towards the known will result in the restraint of spirit with respect to what is known. If the dog is eagerly greeting someone it knows, it is also, *ipso facto*, not behaving aggressively towards that person.

A careful reading of the discussion of the guardian nature shows that the introduction of the love of wisdom is philosophical motivated. It is introduced to explain how a quality like gentleness can be present in a nature that is—at least initially—wholly characterized by the aggressive impulses of spirit. We have also seen that there is a plausible connection between the philosophical element and gentleness. The fact that gentleness is the result of an active impulse toward the known and familiar also has broader implications. Recognizing the precise nature of the connection

---

15 The idea that gentleness consists in restraint is borne out by other uses of πρᾶος in the Republic as well. Cf. 387e7: the man who has led a good life bears misfortune extremely gently (ὡς πρᾶος), by exercising restraint in his expressions of grief; 562d3: the citizens of a democracy react harshly to their leaders if their leaders are not “very gentle”, i.e. if they do not refrain from imposing laws that the citizens find objectionable; 566e3: the tyrant is initially gentle (πρᾶος) towards citizens, a gentleness that consists in refraining from waging wars (cf. 566e6-567a8).

16 Symp. 192a offers further evidence of the active connotations of ἀσπάζεσθαι. In this passage, the word is used to describe the behavior of men who were once attached to other men. These male halves “welcome what is like them” (τὸ ὄμοιον ὀντὸς ἀσπαζόμενον), as evidenced by the fact that they pursue the masculine (τὰ ἀρρενα διώκουσι), make friends with men (φιλοῦσι τοὺς ἄνδρας), and rejoice (χαίρουσι) in having sex with them.
between the love of wisdom and gentleness allows us to appreciate the ways in which the ensuing education targets the philosophical element.

3. Educating the philosophical element

Following the discussion of the guardian nature, Socrates turns to an account of how that nature will be developed through education. This account takes up the rest of Bk. II and all of Bk. III. Socrates identifies two fields in which the young guardians need training: music and poetry (μουσική) and physical education (γυμναστική) (376e3). The overall aim of the training in music and poetry is to help harmonize the spirited and philosophical elements in the guardian nature; as such, it targets both the spirited and philosophical elements (410b10-412a2; cf. 376e3).

Despite Socrates’ claim that the musical education trains the philosophical element, many scholars have concluded that the target of this education is actually spirit. The main reason cited for this conclusion is that the attributes of the guardian that are cultivated through the musical education more plausibly belong to spirit than to reason. It has also been argued that the philosophical element that Socrates identifies in Bk. II is ultimately assimilated to spirit and thus was never a distinct subject of education. This way of deciding the issue has three unfortunate results. The first and most obvious result is that we lose the distinction between the philosophical element and spirit that Socrates went to such pains to articulate in 376. As we have seen, this was a crucial distinction because it enabled Socrates to explain how a nature can contain both gentleness and spirit. Thus, I think we have good reason to hold on to it. Second, this conflation of spirit and the philosophical element results in an illegitimate inflation of the notion of spirit to include features that are properly ascribed to the philosophical element. For example, love of the familiar and love of the fine have both been identified as the characteristic impulses of spirit.

---

17 See Gill (1985, 13-14); Kamtekar (1998, 334); Richardson Lear (2006, 116-117). Cf. Brennan (2012, 116-117). My use of “reason” here is deliberate. For in deciding what the target of the musical education is, scholars appeal, not to the characterization of the philosophical element in 376, but to Socrates’ later characterization of the rational part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν) in Bk. IV as the part that looks to the good of the whole soul (441e4).

18 Gill (1985, 14). I suspect others implicitly assume a similar analysis of the relationship between the philosophical element and spirit. For example, Brennan (2012, 116) reads the 376 passage about the behavior of well-bred dogs as characterizing spirit. He fails to notice that the dog’s welcoming of the known and familiar is explicitly attributed to the philosophic element rather than spirit.

19 See Brennan (2012, 116) for the former and Kamtekar (1998, 334-335), Moss (2005), and Richardson Lear (2006, 116) for the latter.
even though love of the familiar is clearly attributed to the philosophical element at 376 and love of the fine is (I shall argue) a refinement of the basic impulse of the philosophical element. Finally, by making the choice one between spirit and the rational part of the soul, we prematurely foreclose one promising way of coming to understand why Socrates says (as he does in the discussion of tripartition in Bk. IV, 441e-442c) that the musical education has trained the rational part of the soul.\footnote{Many of the scholars I have been discussing think that Socrates here exaggerates the effects of the musical education. See Gill (1985, 14); Richardson Lear (2006, 117). Cf. Irwin (1977, 330).} If the musical education can lay any claim to training the rational part of the soul, it will be via its impact on the philosophical element, an element that Socrates has already implicitly linked to reason through his choice of name. Thus, when Socrates says at 411e6 that the musical education is for the spirited element \textit{and} the philosophical element (ἐπὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς καὶ τὸ φιλόσοφον), we should take him seriously.

The musical education trains the guardian’s philosophical element by targeting their recognitional capacity. It ensures that the love of what is known is activated only in relation to certain features and qualities (namely, the fine and other related positive qualities), and it accomplishes this goal by familiarizing the guardian \textit{only} with the relevant features.

The major accomplishment of the musical education is the creation of a carefully curated environment for the guardians (401b1-d2). The guardians are to be surrounded only by things (words, musical rhythm and mode, paintings, architecture, etc.) that are fine (καλὸν) and graceful (εὔσχημον). One effect of this educational environment is that the person who is raised in it will come to exhibit the properties that it instantiates. Thus, having been exposed to gracefulness, the guardian will become graceful (401d5-e1). The second, and for our purposes more important, result is that over the course of the education the guardian develops a love of what is fine and a corresponding hatred of what is not:

Since the one who has been reared there will keenly perceive that there is a lack when things are deficient and not well-made or don’t have a fine nature, he will (having the right dislikes) praise and rejoice in fine things, and admitting them into his soul he will be nourished by them and become fine and good. Although he is still young, he will correctly blame and hate shameful things before he is capable of grasping the reason, and the one who is reared in this way most of all will welcome reason when it comes, recognizing it on account of its kinship. (401e1-402a4)\footnote{καὶ ὅτι αὕτων παραλειπομένων καὶ μὴ καλὸς δημιουργηθέντων ἢ μὴ καλὸς φύντων ἐξύρατον ᾧ ἀισθάνουτο ὁ ἕκα τραφεῖς ὡς ἐδει, καὶ ὅρθως δὴ δυσχεραίνον τὰ μὲν καλὰ ἐπαυνότα καὶ χαίροντα καὶ καταδεχόμενος εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν}
Socrates describes the guardian as *praising* (ἐπανεῖν), *rejoicing in* (χαίρειν), and *admitting* (καταδέχεσθαι) fine things, and the guardian’s *welcoming* (ἀσπαζόμεθα) of reason offers a vivid example of how the guardian reacts to seeing a specific fine thing. The use of the verb “ἀσπαζόμεθα” to describe the guardian’s response to reason parallels the earlier description of the well-bred dog’s response to what it knows. Moreover, the same mechanism appears to underly both the dog’s reaction to others and the reaction of the guardians to reason and the fine. Just as the dog welcomes certain things because they are known (γνώριμον) to him, so too the guardian welcomes reason because he recognizes (γνωρίζειν) it. The guardian’s recognition of reason is made possible by the fact that reason resembles (i.e. has kinship, οἰκείοτητα, with) the guardian’s environment and, indeed, the guardian himself. Like the environment and the guardian, reason is fine, graceful, and harmonious (cf. 401d1-2). Although the passage describes the guardian’s first meeting with reason, reason will nevertheless be familiar to the guardian because it has features with which the guardian is already well-acquainted.

Reason is not the only thing that will occasion this reaction from the well-educated guardian. Anything that instantiates the properties the guardian has been trained to recognize will receive a similar welcome. This comes out in the passage immediately following Socrates’ summary of the main effects of the musical education. In the follow-up Socrates compares the guardian who has completed his musical education and is thus μουσικός to someone who is fully literate, i.e. γραμματικός.22 In his description of the fully literate person, Socrates emphasizes two key points.

---

22 I disagree with Thaler’s (2015, 422, n.15) claim that the passage is “forward-looking and refers to the later philosophical stage of civic education.” Thaler’s main evidence for this is that the analogy between μουσικός and γραμματικός is intended to show that μουσικός “denotes a similarly perfected epistemological state [i.e. a state comparable to that of full literacy].” I agree that μουσικός denotes a perfected state. However, the context of the passage shows that it is intended to be a further elucidation of the capabilities of a person who has completed the course (of early) education that Socrates has just described. Thus, the perfected state in question is not the state of the person who has completed the philosophical education but the state of the person who has completed the early musical education. Moreover, even if it were true that the analogy between μουσικός and γραμματικός required a more demanding conception of the μουσικός, the features of the μουσικός person that Socrates discusses in this passage are presented as necessary rather than sufficient conditions of being μουσικός and γραμματικός: “we won’t be γραμματικοί until we are capable of this [πρὶν οὖν ἔχοιμεν]” (402b3); “we won’t be μουσικοὶ. . . until we recognize [πρὶν οὖν . . . γνωρίζομεν] the forms. . .” (402b9-c5). Thus, Socrates would then be pointing out that the early education is necessary though not sufficient for becoming fully or completely musical (an achievement that requires the philosophical education of the later books). Either way, the comparison between μουσικός and γραμματικός serves to draw out the consequences of having undergone the early musical education. Cf. Burnyeat (1999, 283, n.51) for a similar conclusion about the stage at which letter-learning is completed.
First, Socrates claims that the fully literate person will be able to notice (μὴ λανθάνειν, 402a8) and distinguish (διαγιγνώσκειν, 402b2) the various letters (τὰ στοιχεῖα) (402a7-b3). Second, Socrates claims that the fully literate person will “eagerly discern [the letters] everywhere” (πανταχῷ προθυμοῦμεθα διαγιγνώσκειν, 402b2), regardless of whether they are written small or large (καὶ οὖτ’ ἐν σμικρῷ οὖτ’ ἐν μεγάλῳ ἡτμιάζομεν, 402a9-b1), and regardless of whether the literate person sees the letters themselves or images of letters (e.g. reflections of letters in water or mirrors, 402b5-8).

The second claim is the most significant for our purposes. It implies that the guardian who has completed his musical education will also be able to recognize (will indeed eagerly recognize) the properties to which he has been familiarized wherever they occur. This is in fact what Socrates goes on to say, though he now expands the list of the relevant properties:

Isn’t it right that we will not be well-educated in music—neither us nor those whom we say must be educated to be guardians—until (a) we recognize moving around everywhere the forms of temperance, courage, liberality, magnificence, whatever is akin to these and, again, whatever is opposed to them and (b) we perceive [these forms] in the things in which they are present, both themselves and their images, and (c) we do not dishonor them whether they are in small or large things, but rather deem [both the large and small instantiations] to belong to the same craft and practice? (402b9-c8, emphases mine)

Socrates’ repeated references to the large and small instantiations of properties (and letters) harks back to the remarks that inaugurated the discussion of the city as a proxy for the soul. At 368d2-5, Socrates noted that one who is trying to read small letters at a distance (γράμματα σμικρά) will find it useful to first read the same letters written larger and on a larger surface (μείζω τε καὶ μείζονι). He offers the city and the soul as examples of larger and smaller surfaces (respectively), and he argues that since the city is larger than the soul, any qualities instantiated in the city will be written larger in the city than they would be in the soul, and thus will be easier to

---

23 The contrast between the letters themselves and their reflections (and, later, between the forms of temperance and their images) appears to be a back-reference to Socrates’ claim that gracefulness is an imitation [μίμημα] of a “temperate and good character” (401a5-8; cf. the reference to the “images” [εἰκόνες] of evil at 401b8). I agree with Burnyeat (1999, 283, n.51) that we should not understand the contrast to imply that the young guardians make cognitive contact with the Forms themselves.

24 ἀρ’ οὖν, δ λέγω, πρὸς θεόν, οὗτος οὐδὲ μουσικὸι πρὸτερον ἔσομεθα, οὗτοι οὕτως οἷς φαμεν ἤμων παιδευτέον εἶναι τοὺς φύλακας, πρὶν ἀν τὰς σωφροσύνης εἶδη καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ ἀλεθερότητος καὶ μεγαλοπρεπείας καὶ ὅσα τούτων ἀδελφά καὶ τὰ τούτων αὐ ἐναντία πανταχῷ περιφερόμενα γνωρίζομεν καὶ ἐνόντα ἐν οἷς ἕνεκεν αἰσθανόμεθα καὶ αὐτὰ καὶ εἰκόνας αὐτῶν, καὶ μὴ ἐν σμικροῖς μήτε ἐν μεγάλοις ἀτιμίαζομεν, ἀλλὰ τῆς αὐτῆς σῶματα τέχνης εἶναι καὶ μελέτης.
discern (368e2-369a1). Read in light of this earlier discussion, Socrates’ remarks about the guardians imply that the large and small things referenced in the passage above include at least persons and cities. It follows that the guardian who has complete his musical education will be able to recognize the properties to which he has been familiarized in persons and cities (among other things). Moreover, he will be eager to discern those properties wherever they appear, and he will welcome those properties because he recognizes them—because he has already seen them in other aspects of his environment and even in his own soul. In the conclusion of the passage, we get a clear example of this. Immediately after describing the capabilities of the fully-educated guardian, Socrates turns to an account of how the well-educated guardian will react to seeing a beautiful body and soul. He claims that the guardian will love people whose souls and bodies are in harmony with one another, because both possess “fine characters” (καλὰ ἡθη), while he will not love anyone who lacks harmony (402d1-9). Socrates offers the responsiveness of the guardian to fine persons and bodies as evidence that their account of the musical education “has ended where it should end [δὲι τελευτᾶν, τετελεύτηκεν],” in “the love of the fine [εἰς τὰ τοῦ καλοῦ ἔρωτικά]” (403c5-6).

4. Conclusion

My account of the musical education explains how it prepares guardians to develop the more rigorous love of wisdom that is attributed to the philosopher king in the middle books; how it prepares the rational part of the soul to do its job of governing the whole soul; and how it helps guardians fulfill their function of guarding and caring for their fellow citizens.

25 One might object that in the passage just cited, Socrates says that the μουσικός will also be able to recognize the opposites of positive properties (i.e. bad properties). In that case, doesn’t it follow that he will also welcome and seek out these bad properties? It does not. Socrates has already admitted that the musically-educated guardian will recognize bad properties, but the recognition of bad properties is different from the recognition of the good properties. Strictly speaking, what the guardian notices in the former case is the absence of the properties with which he is familiar: “the one who has been reared there will keenly perceive that there is a lack [οἷς έδει] when things are deficient and not well-made or don’t have a fine nature” (401e3-4). The indirect way in which the guardian cottons on to bad properties will lead to less precise identifications of those properties, and this is in fact what Socrates tells us we should expect from young guardians. In his later discussion of judges and doctors, Socrates reminds us that the young guardians will have no experience of evil. As a result, they will “seem simple and easy to deceive [οἱ ἐπικτῆς ψυχῶν καὶ εὐεξαπάτητοι]” (409a7-8). One cause of this apparent simpleness is that when confronted with an act of injustice, for example, the young guardian won’t be able to directly identify it as being unjust but will only be able to object that it’s not nice or that something is off.
We have already seen that the musically-educated guardian is prepared to love reason when he encounters it. But his general eagerness to identify the fine will also dispose him to welcome what is fine and good in the curriculum that has been laid out for him, should he be selected to undergo philosophical training, and he will recognize and embrace the Forms when he is finally able to see them.

In Bk. IV, Socrates claims that the musical education prepares the one who undergoes it to place the parts of his soul in the right relation to one another (441b-443e). In this passage, he singles out the rational part of the soul as a primary subject of the musical education, and he argues that this education has made the rational part capable of fulfilling its job of guarding and governing the whole soul (441e3-442b8). Socrates has been criticized for this claim on the grounds that the musical education has only cultivated a passive and uncritical disposition in the guardian and not an active critical capacity. However, my analysis of the guardian nature and the musical education shows that this criticism is misguided. The musical education accomplishes more than the inculcation of a passive disposition. Since the student learns to recognize and welcome fineness and goodness wherever it occurs, he will also recognize and welcome them in the parts of his soul (and in their relationship to one another), and he will recognize and welcome these properties in his plans and actions. The musically-educated person’s capacity for self-governance is necessarily limited because the musical education does not provide the student with logos. Nevertheless, it is capable of performing the central functions of the rational part of the soul. It can govern the soul by embracing what is already fine in it while rejecting and excising anything that is shameful. It can also exercise some “foresight on behalf of the whole soul [τὴν ὑπὲρ ἀπάσης τῆς ψυχῆς προμήθειαν]” by seeking out and welcoming good plans and actions.

Finally, recall that the philosophical element is initially introduced to explain why the guardian is gentle towards fellow citizens. But by the end of the musical education the active

---

26 This will be an important source of motivation for him in the face of demanding intellectual tasks. The love of all kinds of (intellectual) learning is listed as a necessary feature of the philosophical nature in Bk. V (475d11-c8).
28 I grant that Socrates overstates his case here insofar as he attributes wisdom to the person who has completed the musical education (see 441e3). We know from Socrates’ remarks in Bk. III that a person can complete the musical education without yet possessing logos, which is surely a condition of wisdom. Properly speaking, wisdom is the result of the philosophical education that only a select few undergo in the city.
29 There is no guarantee of course that the musically educated person will always be able to find such a plan (it seems likely that only the philosopher will have such a guarantee).
impulse towards the familiar in which it consists appears to be wholly directed towards the fine. How does this shaping of the guardian nature intersect with goal of ensuring that the guardian is gentle towards other people? A central outcome of the musical education is that the guardian’s fellow citizens will become familiar to him insofar as they possess the features or properties that the guardian has been trained to recognize. Moreover, the guardian will actively pursue and welcome any citizens who possess these recognizable and familiar features, and consequently he will restrain his aggressive (spirited) impulses with respect to them. That is to say, the guardian who has completed his musical education will exhibit towards certain citizens the very behaviors we were earlier told were essential to the performance of his guardianship.\textsuperscript{30}

I conclude that the philosophical dog (and nature) of Republic Bk. II is no mere joke. Socrates introduces the philosophical element in order to explain the presence of gentleness in a spirited nature, and his subsequent account of the guardian education shows that the philosophical element receives special training and refinement over the course of the musical education. This training prepares the guardian not only to restrain his spirit in his relations with citizens but also to actively welcome them by promoting what is fine and good in them. The same training will prepare the student/guardian (or the philosophical element in him) to govern and care for his own soul, and it will prepare the guardian who undertakes the education of the philosopher-king to soldier through that program and to love what he finds at the end of it.

\textsuperscript{30} I say “towards certain citizens” because, in the course of showing how the guardian can be trained to respond positively towards citizens, Socrates has subtly circumscribed the group of people towards whom the guardian has this response. In the Bk. II discussion, there was no indication that the guardian’s concern would only be directed towards those who possess certain features. By contrast, Socrates’ overview of the guardian education clearly implies that the guardian will only welcome, and behave gently towards, persons who instantiate the fine (and related properties). Although this marks an apparent change from the earlier discussion, it fits with Socrates’ general attitude towards citizens whose bodies or souls do not instantiate the fine. In the passage discussed above, Socrates notes that the μουσικός guardian will not love anyone whose body and soul are defective because they lack harmony (402d8-9). Later, he asserts that the city should kill any citizens whose bodies are not naturally healthy (μη εὔφυες), as well as any citizens whose souls are naturally bad (κακοφυεῖς) and incurable (ἀνιάτους) (410a1-4). According to Socrates, this approach is best both for the city and for those whose souls and bodies are defective (4105-6). The recommended treatment of defective citizens requires that the guardians see them as other and unfamiliar. Given their defects and the corresponding threat they pose to themselves and the city, the guardian will need to react aggressively and harshly towards them. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the musical education has precisely this result. Only citizens who instantiate what is fine and good are familiar to the guardian; all others are unrecognizable to him, and as such are rejected by him.

The idea that the true city will have only virtuous citizens was picked up by Zeno in his Republic and also hotly contested (see Diogenes Laertius 7.32-33 and discussion in Long and Sedley, p. 423).
Works Cited


