What kind of education is needed for democracy? How can schools respond to the challenges that current democracies face? This unprecedented Handbook offers a comprehensive overview of the most important ideas, issues, and thinkers within democratic education. Its 35 chapters are written by leading experts in the field in an accessible format. Its breadth of purpose and depth of analysis will appeal to both researchers and practitioners in education and politics. The Handbook not only addresses the historical roots and philosophical foundations of democratic education but also engages with contemporary political issues and key challenges to the project of democratic education.

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The Cambridge Handbook of Democratic Education

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Introduction
What Is Democratic Education and Why Should We Care?

Julian Culp, Johannes Drerup, and Douglas Yacek

Democratic education is central to the functioning and flourishing of modern multicultural democracies, and yet it is subject to increasing public controversy and political pressure. Waning public trust in government institutions (Miner, 2020; Stitzlein, 2020; Wilson, 2020; cf. MacDonald, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2022), sustained attacks on democratic values and customs from populist politicians and organizations (Brown, 2019; Müller, 2016, 2021; Runciman, 2019), political polarization and “sectarianism” (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019), and increasing trends toward privatization and chartering in the educational landscape (Abrams, 2016; Levin, 2001; Verger et al., 2016) have placed immense strain on the existing structures of public education and generally worked to undermine public confidence in democratic education. Practically speaking, this has meant that educators have been thrust into hazardous pedagogical terrain, in which students and parents are increasingly empowered to opt out of course content and evaluations on political grounds (Wilson, 2020), while teachers are expected to maintain scrupulous neutrality on politically and morally controversial issues, regardless of the intellectual merit of the opinions involved, or else face charges of indoctrination (Hand, 2008; Zimmermann & Robertson, 2017). This contentious educational atmosphere has made it increasingly difficult to foster cooperation, rational discussion and a sense of political community in students beyond partisan political divisions (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

At the same time, several movements in educational and political theory have called some of the basic concepts, premises, and normative justifications of democratic education into question. According to the most critical of these perspectives, we should seriously reconsider the status of democratic education as an educational ideal and recognize its intrinsically hegemonic, bourgeois, or oppressive character. While in some cases these thoroughgoing critiques have led to important advancements in our understanding of democratic theory – for example, in our growing awareness of how power, racism, xenophobia, nationalism, and sexism have historically influenced political and educational
theory-building – in other cases they have seemed to authorize anti-democratic or autocratic impulses under the auspices of academic scholarship.

In light of these developments, it seems to us to be of central importance to return to the basic concepts, theories, and values of democratic education, both as a social ideal and a political institution. Of course, “democratic education” has been defined in almost as many ways as its constituent terms, “democracy” and “education,” and we do not want to enter this particular debate in this introductory chapter (see, for instance, Brighouse, 1998; Brumlik, 2018; Callan, 1997; Gutmann, 1999; Kitcher, 2022; Merry, 2018; Reichenbach, 2022). Rather, we would like to make a brief case for democratic education as a core focus of educational theory and practice – that is, for caring about democratic education in a profound way.

In the first place, democratic education, in its broadest sense, expresses what we hope will result from our efforts to educate the next generation. Caring about democratic education means that, whatever curricular materials or pedagogical methods may be used in the process, we hope that our educational institutions are contributing to producing a happier and more flourishing society. At the individual level, this means that we hope students come out the other end of their education prepared to see themselves as worthy and able to participate in democratic decision-making, to uphold democratic ideals in their social and vocational lives, and to be prepared to protect the integrity and stability of democratic processes if they are threatened. Democratic education is, in other words, education for democracy (cf. Sant, 2019). It takes seriously the belief that human communities and individuals flourish most, or become the most just, when they commit to a basic principle of equality among all human beings and when they keep opportunities and social roles open to all those who strive to achieve them. To this end, education for democracy cultivates not only the will and ability to enact this basic principle in a comprehensive way, but also an active consciousness of historical injustices, so that the enduring effects of oppression, marginalization and demoralization can be counteracted and, ultimately, neutralized.

If caring about democratic education means enacting an education for democracy, then this implies something important about what democratic education looks like in practice. Democracy is not only a formal characteristic of political or educational institutions, but also an attitude toward our fellow human beings. Crucially, although this attitude may in some cases arise naturally in individuals, it is nonetheless in tension with other widespread and psychologically powerful human motivations and tendencies – for example, avarice, competitiveness, or the desire for power. Developing the ability to recognize our fundamental moral equality with other human beings, to make this recognition psychologically effective enough in our actions and decisions that it can overcome countervailing impulses, and to draw on this principle for strength when democratic ideals are challenged requires a rigorous and thoroughgoing educational program that creates democratically oriented habits, dispositions and virtues in students. In order to supply this comprehensive educational experience, democratic education will have to occur across the curriculum, in physical
education, mathematics, and biology just as much as in social studies or civics. This insight prevents us from outsourcing the demands of citizen formation to one disciplinary location. It makes the concept of democratic education importantly different from terms like “civic education” or “political education,” which focus more exclusively on the particular knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation in contemporary political processes.

Democratic education not only implies an education for democracy, but also that this education is conducted in a certain kind of way. Imagine a program designed to instill democratic habits and virtues that was taught in an authoritarian manner, allowing little to no room for students’ own experiences and personalities and with harsh punishment schemes in place. Clearly, such an approach to “democratic education” would be a performative contradiction. However, the same goes for educational programs that too starkly individualize students, making education centrally a matter of individuals earning grades, accolades, credentials, and other forms of social recognition for their own personal advancement. John Dewey pointed out at the turn of the twentieth century that we seriously undermine the potential to cultivate and achieve democracy through our schools if we make education so individual an affair. The example he uses is the quintessential exam experience. What happens during exams? Students sit in individual desks, call up objective, impersonal knowledge to answer the standardized questions posed, remain quiet and still while they do so, and turn in their work at the end for an individual grade. If they decide – in the spirit of democracy – to communicate with each other and work together, perhaps even to help the weakest students improve their academic abilities, they are punished, sometimes with expulsion. Dewey urged us to ask ourselves, What could be more devastating for cultivating democratic sentiments and habits?

If we care about democracy and a truly democratic education, then this will not do. What counts as a characteristically democracy-promoting pedagogy, then? Dewey famously thought it was provided by the intrinsic “social control” of rich practical activities like cooking, sewing, woodwork, and gardening, and this is why these occupations made up the bulk of the school day at his laboratory school. In contrast, A. S. Neill thought it meant the almost complete forfeiture of curricular and educational decision-making power to students, particularly in an assembly-style structure composed of them and their teachers. Harold Rugg, a colleague of Dewey’s and a fellow progressive, thought that “parliamentary discussion” of controversial social issues should form the core of the democratic educational experience. Freire thought, too, that only a thoroughly dialogical pedagogy would suffice, though it should be one in which students’ home lives become the topic of instruction, particularly, the manifold ways in which oppression colors their experience. Countless further proposals have been made since these classic positions were staked out. Recently, programs that bring in important global issues and cosmopolitan perspectives have gained in popularity.

This is not the place to take a stand on this question, though it does seem to us that some combination of each of these elements would likely be necessary for
providing a comprehensive democratic education. However, at a somewhat more general level, we can say that the two notions of democratic education – education for democracy and education as democracy (democratic pedagogy) – constitute two practical desiderata that limit and complement each other. For example, if we knew we could instill democratic qualities most efficiently by means of autonomy-denying methods, we would not want to do so because of our commitment to democratic pedagogy. On the other hand, if we allow democratic education to be too open-ended or student-centered in order to emulate the structures and procedures of democratic government in adulthood, then we fail to provide a compelling and effective education of sentiment and habit that furthers democratic flourishing (and personal flourishing, too). Indeed, not only would this prevent us from helping students develop democratic virtues; it inhibits us from counteracting anti-democratic influences in the larger culture – influences that shape students both outside and inside of schools every single day.

In light of this broad understanding of the importance and scope of democratic education, this handbook offers an expansive view of the formation of individuals for democratic life and includes theoretical traditions, topics, and thinkers that are not always immediately connected to this task when construed as civic, political, or citizenship education. More concretely, this volume provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the fundamental ideas, concepts, theories, aims and challenges of democratic education, both as a social ideal and as a contemporary institution. If educators are to provide students with a worthwhile and socially productive education within the current educational landscape, and if researchers are to understand the specific sociopolitical factors influencing the present educational moment, we believe that a broad engagement with the value and meaning of democratic education will be an indispensable resource to them. This volume will therefore not only introduce readers to the central contours of contemporary thinking about democratic education, but also function, as we hope, as a clear signal of the practical and scholarly significance of democratic education. Given the current challenges to democratic education, we believe it to be an opportune time to send such a signal.

However, we believe that the reasons for compiling this Cambridge Handbook of Democratic Education go beyond the particularities of the present moment. Democratic education is a perennial concern of societies committed to the value of justice and the well-being of children. Debates about the meaning, purpose and aims of democratic education had already begun in Ancient Athens, in which the proper content of the encyкліос пайдіі (general education) was vigorously disputed. On the one side, followers of Plato and Aristotle, though the two sages of Greek Antiquity expressed skepticism about democracy, defended the role of speculative and philosophically oriented studies for political formation, while followers of Isocrates and other sophists forcefully argued for public rhetoric and civic engagement as the prerequisite studies for democratic citizenship. This ancient debate has continued throughout Western history (Stasavage, 2020; Sen, 2005), with some educational thinkers taking the
speculative, philosophical side and others the rhetorical side (Kimball, 1986). These issues became particularly poignant in the aftermath of the democratic revolutions in eighteenth-century Europe and America, in which it became apparent – to such figures as Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann in the American context, for example – that access to a democracy-promoting education should be free and open to all citizens (though often excluding women, African-Americans and other groups). The discussion of what kinds of subjects and what kinds of pedagogy are appropriate for such an educational program are thus not only important in the present political situation. This discussion is a mainstay of open and free societies. The debates and deliberations over the content, methods, and aims of democratic education can be seen as so many indications of a healthy democratic community, so long as they are conducted in a humane and constructive manner.

In this way, this volume aims to be an enduring resource for those interested in advancing the discussion of democratic education well into the future. Not only does the volume encompass several chapters on the history of democratic education, including analyses of some of the major historical figures who have contributed to the discussion; it also engages with some of the central concepts, ideas, and ideals that have wielded influence over the programs and theories of democratic education in history. We hope to encourage readers to return to these issues and thinkers as a part of their study of democratic education, since they continue to provide fresh insight for the project of understanding and realizing democratic education.

There are four main themes that organize the handbook into four parts: (i) Historical Perspectives, (ii) Philosophical and Normative Foundations, (iii) Key Topics and Concepts, and (iv) Challenges. In Historical Perspectives, we include chapters on significant figures in the history of political and educational thought who have contributed significantly to our understanding of democratic education and whose ideas warrant perennial reconsideration. In Philosophical and Normative Foundations, we provide chapters connecting democratic education to important foundational ideas in ethics, moral philosophy, as well as social and political philosophy broadly construed. This part is essential to the handbook, for it shows that the discussion of democratic education is connected in myriad ways to some of the central issues in contemporary political and educational thought, such as the emerging field of educational ethics, moral education, political liberalism, and critical theory. The part dedicated to Key Topics and Concepts takes up some of the central issues in the research on democratic education today. This part provides the reader with a broad and systematic overview of some of the most pressing theoretical and practical questions in democratic education, including classroom debate and dialogue, controversial issues, global justice, punishment, patriotism, and free speech. The final part of the handbook addresses Challenges to the project of democratic education today. This part looks not only at intellectual movements that have contested the basic principles and aims of democratic education, but also movements in the public realm, such as the rise of populist political organizations, the changing media terrain and climate change.
With this thematic and conceptual orientation, we thus hope to have provided a distinctive and comprehensive treatment of democratic education, one that can serve as an enduring resource for researchers and practitioners who care about democratic education.

References


Part One

Historical Perspectives
2 Plato on Democratic Education

Mark E. Jonas

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I turn to an unlikely source for democratic inspiration: Plato’s *Republic*. I argue that, understood correctly, Plato’s *Republic* provides insights into what a flourishing democracy looks like and how education can help produce such a democracy. At first glance, this claim will seem completely wrongheaded, as the *Republic* appears to advocate a form of totalitarianism founded on a rigid caste system that is entirely inconsistent with democracy. Furthermore, it might be argued that the educational principles laid out in the *Republic* are also anti-democratic and are meant only for an elite group of future philosopher-kings. Plato’s *Republic* seems to relegate nonphilosophical human beings to a narrow training in a craft and to submit them to a regimen of indoctrination intended to produce absolute obedience to the society’s rulers, who themselves have unchecked power.

While this interpretation of the *Republic* is certainly widespread, some interpreters have challenged this reading, suggesting instead that the *Republic* is not meant to be interpreted as a totalitarian political treatise. Some of these commentators have argued that the political treatise at the core of the *Republic* is not totalitarian and that it provides insights into the principles of a flourishing democracy.

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1 The claim of totalitarianism is impossible to deny, if we take the *kallipolis*, the imaginary city that stands at the center of the *Republic*, to represent Plato’s preferred political arrangement. As Taylor (1997) claims, “It is . . . uncontroversial that the ideal state of the *Republic* is a totalitarian state” (p. 32). However, if we deny the view that Plato meant the *kallipolis* to represent his preferred political doctrine – a view that there is ample reason to deny – then the *Republic* as a whole does not promote a totalitarian political theory. Commentators who have argued that the *Republic*, as a whole, may be more sympathetic to democracy than it is customarily assumed include Euben (1997), Jonas & Nakazawa (2021), Jonas, Nakazawa, & Braun (2012), Roochnik (2003), and Saxonhouse (1996).

2 It is widely agreed that Plato does not explicitly address the education of the producers, but there is some disagreement as to whether that means they receive no education whatsoever beyond a bare education in their craft and an education in obedience. Guthrie (1975) and Reeve (1988), for example, argue that they get no education beyond this, but Barrow (2008), Bobonich (2002), Curren (2000), Dorter (2006), Kamtekar (2010), Vasilou (2008), and Vlastos (1973), among others, argue that they must get at least some training in virtue. Others remain silent on the exact content of the producers’ education, while acknowledging that there must be some education (Annas, 1981; Pappas, 2013). In a different vein, Mintz (2016) argues that Plato is inconsistent with respect to the producers’ education as a way to intentionally encourage “readers to consider the conditions necessary for enabling all individuals in a society to flourish” (p. 13).

3 Annas (1999); Clay (2000); Frank (2018); Jonas & Nakazawa (2021); Smith (2019); Waterfield (1993).
ought to be interpreted metaphorically – as representing the soul of a human
being rather than a blueprint for civilization building. The foundational inter-
pretive rationale for this reading is spelled out early in the Republic, when
Socrates explicitly states that the point of identifying justice in the city is to
help him and his interlocutors identify justice in the individual soul, which is
the point of departure for the ensuing dialogue about the philosopher-kings and
the society they are to rule (368e–369a). If we take Socrates’ words at face value
and keep those words in mind while reading the Republic, the totalitarian
political doctrine largely recedes into the background and new vistas of inter-
pretation open before us.

In what follows, I will attempt to reveal these interpretive vistas by making a
case for an egalitarian reading of the Republic. While Plato does not provide an
explicit defense of democracy, his criticism of corrupt democracies in Book VIII
and his often-ignored advocacy of egalitarian communities in Books II, III, and IV
offer contemporary educators insights into a mode of education that could
strengthen contemporary democracies. Once this interpretation is in place,
I will discuss the ways contemporary democratic educators might use Plato’s
ideas to support students in their development as democratic citizens.

2.2 Moderation, Happiness, and Egalitarianism in the Republic

To understand the relevance of the Republic for democratic education, we need
first to briefly understand the relationship between virtue and happiness as
expressed by Socrates in the Republic. In three separate moments within the
Republic, Socrates offers us an image of contented and happy people. The way
Socrates describes these individuals, and particularly how their happiness
relates to the condition of their soul, contrasts starkly with the standard reading
of Plato as a theorist of totalitarianism.

The first description of happy and contented individuals in the Republic is
found in the first city he describes, the so-called city of pigs (371e–372e). The
first city is made up of individuals who have distinct roles and responsibilities
that are supposed to contribute to the happiness both of the individuals them-
selves and of the society as a whole. As Socrates maintains, these people have
their basic needs met and live in peace, moderation, and good health; they share
everything in common and there is no distinction between who is more or less
valuable. The city is surprisingly egalitarian in that every person has an essential
job to fulfill and no one’s job is considered more important than anyone else’s;
nor are people wealthier than others nor command more respect or deference.
From the most skilled craftspeople to the merchants and hirelings who support
the craftspeople, everyone has a vocation that is central to the thriving of the
community and that allows for everyone to participate fully in communal life.4
This applies to men and women, the intelligent and nonintelligent, children

4 It might be argued that the first city is not egalitarian because each person is expected to perform only those jobs for which
they are naturally gifted. Socrates claims that there is a “diversity of natures” among people and some are suited for farming,
and adults. Socrates describes the resultant communal health of this egalitarian community in the following:

First, then, let’s see what sort of life our citizens will lead when they’ve been provided for in the way we have been describing. They’ll produce bread, wine, clothes, and shoes, won’t they? They’ll build houses, work naked and barefoot in the summer, and wear adequate clothing and shoes in the winter. For food, they’ll knead and cook the flour and meal they’ve made from wheat and barley. They’ll put their honest cakes and loaves on reeds or clean leaves, and, reclining on beds strewn with yew and myrtle, they’ll feast with their children, drink their wine, and, crowned with wreaths, hymn the gods. They’ll enjoy sex with one another but bear no more children than their resources allow, lest they fall into either poverty or war ... [T]hey’ll obviously need salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots, and vegetables of the sort they cook in the country. We’ll give them desserts, too, of course, consisting of figs, chickpeas, and beans, and they’ll roast myrtle and acorns before the fire, drinking moderately. And so they’ll live in peace and good health, and when they die at a ripe old age, they’ll bequeath a similar life to their children. (372a–372d)\(^5\)

Not only is this description of the first city attractive in its depiction of its peace, harmony, happiness, and communal flourishing. Socrates claims that it is “healthy” and “true,” and he seems to consider it to be something worth striving for.\(^6\) If the Republic were to end at this point, there would be no question as to Plato’s (or at least Socrates’) credentials as a committed egalitarian, if by these terms we mean simply that each person is able to live in a society that promotes their individual flourishing equally and equitably.\(^7\) However, the Republic of

some are suited for cobblerly, and some are not particularly gifted at anything and become merchants or hirelings. Whatever a person is most gifted at is what they will do to provide for the community. Many people in democratic countries would be concerned that the people not getting to choose what their job is means that the community is not egalitarian. Their thought is that a community is egalitarian only if it allows people to choose whatever job they want, whether they have any talent for it or not. However, in contemporary democracies, the reality is that countless people are not able to do whatever job they want, because there are other more talented people who get those jobs. Moreover, many people in contemporary democracies who are more talented than other people do not get the jobs they want, because other people have “better networks,” or “know the right people,” or simply have more undeserved social capital. In Plato’s first city, this would never happen. The people who are actually the best at the jobs get the jobs. It is a genuine meritocracy. Although Plato does not spell out the mechanism that determines who is most naturally suited to which occupations, it is implied that every single person’s skills and abilities are evaluated by the community so as to find those who genuinely are the most suited for every job. This means that every person, no matter what their social standing or “who they know,” has the same opportunity to do any job, even if the reality is that only those with the most talent actually get the job. So, in a sense, the first city is far more egalitarian than modern democracies because it is the most pure form of meritocracy possible. But, importantly, it is a meritocracy that does not marginalize those with less “merit” but includes them in the flourishing communal life to the same degree as those with greater skills or talents for the vocations.

\(^5\) All quotations from Plato are from Plato: Complete Works, edited by J. Cooper and D. Hutchinson (1997).

\(^6\) Most commentators reject the viability of the first city: Annas (1981); Barney (2001); Blitz (2010); Cooper (2000); Crombie (1962); Devereux (1979); Howland (2004); McDavid (2019); McKeen (2004); Nettleship (1901); Pappas (2013); Reeve (1988). However, a few commentators have claimed that Plato genuinely believes the first city is a healthy and viable community (Jonas & Nakazawa, 2021; Morrison, 2007; Rowe, 2007a, 2007b).

\(^7\) The first city and, as we shall see, the communities of auxiliaries and philosopher-kings found in Books III and IV are egalitarian insofar as each member of the community performs a vital function to the community and there are no members of the community that are given more political power than the others within that community to shape policy. Of course, that
course does not end here. Glaucon – one of the main interlocutors in the
*Republic* – objects that Socrates’ community is far too simple and insists that
“if [the citizens] aren’t to suffer hardship” they must have luxuries and conveniences “that people have nowadays.” This riposte leads Socrates to abandon the first city and begin conceptualizing the famous *kallipolis*. Before he begins a new city, he makes it clear that the city Glaucon wants and the luxuries and conveniences upon which it must be built will make it an inferior and less desirable city. Socrates says:

All right, I understand. It isn’t merely the origin of a city that we’re considering, it seems, but the origin of a luxurious city. And that may not be a bad idea, for by examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities. Yet the true city, in my opinion, is the one we’ve described, the healthy one, as it were. But let’s study a city with a fever, if that’s what you want. There’s nothing to stop us. The things I mentioned earlier and the way of life I described won’t satisfy some people, it seems. (372e–373a)

As we will discuss in Section 2.3, the fact that Glaucon insists on having luxuries means that the peace, health, harmony, and equality of the above city will be replaced by a much less attractive community, especially to people who value harmony and equality.

The second instance in which Socrates depicts happy and contented people occurs in his description of the guardians of the *kallipolis*. Like the inhabitants of the first city, the guardians do not have any unnecessary luxuries, and they share everything in common and no one is left wanting (416d–e). Like the first city, while there are natural differences of intelligence or strength relative to each other, they all make important contributions to the group (455a–456a). He claims that by living in this manner the guardians “live a life more blessedly happy than that of the victors in the Olympian games” (465d) because they avoid the perils of those who want luxuries and conveniences. They avoid the false happiness of those who “build fine big houses, acquire furnishings to go along with them . . . and . . . possess what you were talking about just now, gold and silver and all the things that are [falsely] thought to belong to people who are blessedly happy.” Although they occupy a caste of the radically inegalitarian society of the *kallipolis* – which is the necessary outgrowth of the feverish city Glaucon desires – the guardians live like the citizens of the first city in that they find happiness in a simple, moderate lifestyle that avoids the vice associated with the “endless acquisition of money” and the pursuit of luxury and convenience (373d).

The third time Socrates describes human happiness is at the end of the *Republic*, when he depicts the various forms of human beings that are characterized by different psychological constitutions. He claims the happiest human beings are

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is not to say that each person is equal in terms or talent, intelligence, strength, etc. – something that is not possible among human beings who have natural differences from other human beings. There will always be differences of this kind. Nevertheless, while Plato does not call these communities democratic, it is clear that there is a kind of equality among citizens that makes the communities egalitarian in a way that exceeds what we would minimally expect for contemporary democratic communities.
the ones who pursue moderation and virtue and who avoid wealth and honor and the luxuries and pleasures they provide. The happiest human beings have “aristocratic” souls that are “rightly said to be good and just” (544e). Unfortunately, if people of this sort are not careful to follow moderation and virtue completely, they can be subtly persuaded by their appetites to begin pursuing things like wealth and honor that inevitably corrupt their souls. Socrates claims that it is “clear that there is a dangerous, wild, and lawless form of desire in everyone, even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate or measured” (572b). That is, all human beings have appetites that continually urge them to forgo moderation and pursue luxury and licentiousness. If the “aristocratic” soul is not on guard, it can slowly be perverted to pursue luxury and vice. Socrates uses an analogy of “iron” and “bronze” parts of the soul, which represent the acquisitive desires, in contrast to the “gold” and “silver” parts of the soul, which represent moderation and virtue. In a careless person who is overly influenced by the wrong type of people, these two parts can battle each other: “Once civil war breaks out, both the iron and bronze types pull the constitution towards money-making and the acquisition of land, houses, gold, and silver, while both the gold and silver types – not being poor, but by nature rich or rich in their souls – lead the constitution towards virtue and the old order” (547b).

As the iron and bronze parts of the soul gain in strength, eventually the person gives themselves over to the desire for wealth, luxury, and vice. A few lines later Socrates describes their transformation: “Such people will desire money just as those in oligarchies do, passionately adoring gold and silver in secret. They will possess private treasuries and storehouses, where they can keep it hidden, and have houses to enclose them, like private nests, where they spend lavishly either on women or on anyone else they wish” (548a). Eventually, the person described above gives themselves completely over to their desires and becomes a tyrannical person who is “the most wretched” sort of human being (580c).

In summary, we see a consistent claim throughout the Republic that the best and happiest life for the individual is one of moderation and virtue and that the pursuit of excessive wealth and luxury leads away from happiness, not toward it. The same is true for the inhabitants of the first city in Book II, the guardians of the kallipolis in Books IV and V, and the souls of all human beings in Books VIII and IX. For Plato, happiness is found in a simple, moderate life in which people have their basic needs met and eschew wealth, luxury, and power. This latter point is essential, as Plato believes these things to have a corrosive effect both on the souls of people who acquire them and on the community in which they live. People who live in this moderate fashion are not ascetic and discontent but, on the contrary, are satisfied and happy, because they take true pleasure in virtue and community and do not crave the false pleasure of wealth and luxury.

2.3 Socrates’ Critique of Immoderation and Elitism in the Republic

The result of the discussion in Section 2.2 is the following: Plato’s vision of individual happiness requires that moderation and virtue be in place within the
soul. However, this conception of happiness has a crucial further aspect. If we focus our attention on Socrates’ three descriptions of human happiness in the *Republic*, it becomes clear that, for Plato, the happiest individuals live within a community that is defined by diversity of skill and vocation, mutual support, and social equality. Plato says this explicitly in his account of the egalitarian first city and implies it strongly in his description of the community of auxiliaries and philosopher-kings in the *kallipolis* (who are supposed to be the best intellectually and morally endowed individuals of the society). But the point also follows from his critique of immoderation and his asseverations that luxury and power corrupt the individual soul. If the highest good of a human life is moderation and virtue, and if societies undermine the pursuit of this good when they become competitive and stratified, then the individual needs an egalitarian community to support their growth toward human flourishing. It is this latter point that will concern me in this section.

Of course, there may likely be many who demur at my claim that Plato prefers an egalitarian community in which people live in harmony, where everyone values a happy life characterized by moderation and simplicity, and where everyone has equal standing with everyone else, even if there are natural distinctions between the community members’ intellectual and physical strengths and weaknesses. People might claim that, in fact, the (in)famous tripartite structure of the *kallipolis* at the center of the *Republic* is radically inequalitarian with respect to lifestyles and privileges – where producers are relegated to lives of total obeisance, with the only “advantage” being that they get to pursue wealth and the luxuries that the city affords. At first glance, this criticism seems justified. In the *kallipolis*, Socrates famously divides the city into the three classes of people – the producers, the auxiliaries, and the philosopher-kings, the latter of which have unchecked power. What commentators fail to acknowledge, however, is that the only reason Socrates creates these three classes is because Glaucon rejects the egalitarian first city as highlighted as not suitable to “people nowadays” who have grown accustomed to luxury and convenience. Glaucon insists that they should be allowed to pursue wealth and all the pleasures it affords. Socrates expresses some surprise and claims that apparently it is not a “true” and “healthy” city that Glaucon wants but a city with a “fever” and one that has “surrendered [itself] to the endless acquisition of money” (272e–273d). Despite Socrates’ surprise, he is willing to create the city that Glaucon wants, which is confusing considering what we see in Socrates’ universal condemnation of the pursuit of wealth and luxury (something he condemns not just in the *Republic* but throughout Plato’s whole corpus). However, Glaucan clearly has not appreciated the central point of the first city – that individual and communal happiness depend on the avoidance of unnecessary wealth, luxuries, and conveniences. Hence, Socrates quickly realizes that if he is going to persuade Glaucan (and Adeimantus, another main interlocutor) that the just life is better than the unjust life, he will need to extend the metaphor of the city so that they can see justice more clearly. Socrates says this explicitly when, after hearing Glaucan’s request to create a city with a fever, he claims that creating a city with a fever may “not be a bad
idea, for by examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities.” This suggests that the city they will go on to create (the *kallipolis*) will contain injustice, which is exactly what we see. When Socrates begins to create this city, he introduces a whole series of injustices that are necessary if the city is going to have wealth and luxury. He says that if the city is going to have “delicacies, perfumed oils, incense, prostitutes, and pastries . . . [and] paintings and embroidery . . . and gold [and] ivory . . . Then we must enlarge our city, for the healthy one is no longer adequate. We must increase it in size and fill it with a multitude of things that go beyond what is necessary for a city” (373a–b). He goes on to say that “we didn’t need any of these things in our earlier city, but we’ll need them in this one . . . And if we live like that, we’ll have far greater need for doctors than we did before” (373c). So far, this city sounds like a far cry from the community he affirms in the first city, from the community he affirms in the community of guardians, and from the simple life he affirms at the end of the *Republic*, all of which eschew these kinds of unnecessary desires. But it gets worse. He argues that if the citizens want these things,

Then we’ll have to seize some of our neighbors’ land if we’re to have enough pasture and ploughland. And won’t our neighbors want to seize part of ours as well, if they too have surrendered themselves to the endless acquisition of money and have overstepped the limit of their necessities? . . . Then our next step will be war, Glaucón, won’t it . . . [which] comes from those same desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happen to cities and the individuals in them. (373d–e)

The unpleasant nature of these passages is entirely in keeping with what we saw in Section 2.2. The city that Glaucón insists they create is not a happy or virtuous city – certainly not throughout; it is instead a city that is morally depraved and full of immoderation, ill-health, and rapacity. This is what we should expect because it is the opposite of the communities that Socrates recommends in his praise of the first city, the guardians, and happy and just human beings. But what is typically ignored is that it also necessitates the introduction of a guardian class of people who will guarantee the continued ability for the city’s citizens to indulge in their immoderation and license. Socrates says that “the city must be enlarged . . . by a whole army, which will do battle with the invaders and defense of the city’s substantial wealth and all the other things we mentioned” (373e). He claims that this class of guardians must not come from within the citizens themselves but must be selected and trained to do nothing else than manage the city to protect the citizens’ ability to imbibe in their unhealthy and immoderate lifestyle. It is here that we see the introduction of

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8 Reeve (1988) claims that the guardians are “introduced to defend the polis, not simply against other hostile poleis, but also against unnecessary appetites, which are the root cause of such conflict” (p. 178). This interpretation that guardians protect against unnecessary desires is highly confusing, however; as we have just seen, the guardians’ first responsibility is to go on to “seize some of [their] neighbors’ land.” The reason their neighbors’ land needs to be seized is to allow citizens to satisfy unnecessary desires. The guardians need to defend their polis because their polis is full of tremendous wealth and luxuries generated by these desires.
hierarchy in the city. As we have seen, before the introduction of wealth and luxury, the citizens lived happily in an egalitarian community, where everyone contributed in ways that equally contributed to everyone else’s happiness. The craftspeople and farmers made things, retailers sold things, and hirelings supported the craftspeople in their trades. No one had any more power or money than anybody else; every person was essential, and they lived “in peace and good health.” Not so with Glaucon’s city with a fever, where its citizens live not with peace, but war; and not with good health but an increased need for doctors. In Glaucon’s city, hierarchy was the only way to allow the fever to continue; there would need to be people in power who could protect the wealth that the citizens enjoyed, which Socrates explicitly claims creates the need for a guardian class (373e–374b).

The problem is that, for these guardians to be clear-thinking enough to know how to protect the wealth, they must themselves not be tempted by it. If they were similarly addicted to a life of immoderation and luxury, they would not make wise decisions about how to protect the wealth that Glaucon insists on. Thus, Socrates provides an education and communal rules for them that protects them from the desires that characterize the immoderate citizens. He also insists that they must have unchecked power so that the citizens who are given to poor judgment and vice associated with wealth and luxury cannot threaten the wealth of the city. In this way, the egalitarian nature of the first city that Socrates praises is utterly lost thanks to Glaucon’s insistence on luxury and convenience. There is now a class of people who have totalitarian power.

Fortunately, Socrates finds a way to reaffirm his commitment to the benefits of a simple, egalitarian society when he creates the egalitarianism found with the auxiliary community and the philosopher-king community. Even though the city itself becomes inegalitarian and addicted to money, he thereby continues to affirm his egalitarianism and moderation. Like the first city, both these groups have within their own group, natural differences in ability, strength, and intelligence, but they remain fundamentally egalitarian insofar as they share a common purpose and work together in their differences as a unified team. None of the auxiliaries rule over other auxiliaries, and none of the philosopher-kings rule over other philosopher-kings, just like no one in the first city ruled over their fellow citizens. Thus, while in the kallipolis egalitarianism and moderation has been lost, it remains alive and well in the guardians’ communities. It is as if Socrates is saying:

Glaucon, you can try to promote wealth and luxury as the ideal for human beings by insisting that the first city be ruined by it, but I am still going to promote my ideal of a healthy, simple community, by founding the guardian communities which have the same virtues and values of the first city. My ideal of what constitutes a “true” and “healthy” community still exists amongst the guardians’ egalitarian communities in the unhealthy, totalitarian kallipolis which you have forced me to create.

Socrates sums up this view much later when he claims, “So isn’t it clear by now that it is impossible for a city to honor wealth and at the same time for its
citizens to acquire moderation, but one or the other is inevitably neglected?” (555c).

It has been customary to assume that Plato created the *kallipolis* to express his favored political ideal. From what we have seen, the opposite is the case. He created the *kallipolis* to show how injustice, greed, war, and the like grow up in cities and how, if they are allowed to grow up in cities, equality must forever vanish and totalitarianism must ensue.

To sum up, Plato is a committed egalitarian in the *Republic*, but because he is trying to help Glaucon see the dangers of wealth and luxury for individuals and for communities, he creates the *kallipolis* as a heuristic device to illuminate those dangers. Although this result undermines the all-too-common belief that Plato relishes political totalitarianism, there is still one more barrier in the way of reading Plato as a promoter of egalitarianism. In Book VIII, Plato’s *Republic* contains a scathing critique of democracy as a part of his account of the decay of the individual soul when it turns to luxury and wealth. At first glance it is tempting to assume that there is no way Plato could be a committed egalitarian because he rejects democracy, calling it a corrupt political system. Since, at its most basic level, democracy promotes political equality among its citizens, it seems plausible that Socrates’ rejection of democracy is an implicit rejection of egalitarianism and an affirmation of political hierarchy. What are we to make of this critique? And to add to the impression that Plato could not possibly be in favor of giving all citizens in a community the right to participate in their own governance, there is the fact that the Athenian citizens in Plato’s time were allowed to participate in their own governance and as a result Plato’s beloved teacher was condemned to death.

### 2.4 Socrates’ Critique of Democracy in Book VIII of the *Republic*

As I have indicated in Section 2.3, it could be argued that my claim that Plato advocates egalitarian communities in the *Republic* cannot be true because of his criticism of democracy in Book VIII. At first glance, there seems to be merit to this criticism insofar as Socrates characterizes democracies as societies that are founded on citizens’ freedom to pursue any desire they like. However, the kind of democracy he criticizes in Book VIII is radically libertine, where all people are free to follow every whim and fancy, and chafe at any restriction on their liberty whatsoever. He goes so far to say that “there is no requirement to rule . . . or again to be ruled if you don’t want to be” (557d), and that even criminals stroll around in public without any restrictions on their activities (558a). His criticism of democracy therefore seems to be directed at the radical liberty – really, anarchy – that comes from a completely laissez-faire approach to communal life. To my knowledge, there has never been, nor will there ever likely be, a democracy that matches his description. Thus, his criticism is not really of democracy per se (as the rule of the people and equality before the law), but of an extreme version of community-wide licentiousness that justifies itself by claiming to be “democratic.” By the end of his critique it is clear that the
problem he identifies with democracy is not really its theory of governance, but the effects that radical libertinism has on citizens – namely, that they develop an addiction to the unnecessary desires that characterize Glaucon’s feverish city. He describes what happens to the soul of a person raised in a democracy founded on the principle of extreme libertinism:

These desires draw him back into the same bad company and in secret intercourse breed a multitude of others . . . won’t they call reverence foolishness and moderation cowardice . . . and won’t they persuade the young man that measured and orderly expenditure is boorish and mean . . . and give [other vices] fine names, calling insolence good breeding, anarchy freedom, extravagance magnificence, and shamelessness courage? Isn’t it in some such way as this that someone who is young changes, after being brought up with necessary desires, to the liberation and release of useless and unnecessary pleasures? (560b–e)

Thus, we see that Plato’s critique of democracy in Book VIII is not that it is egalitarian, but that it promotes the kind of unnecessary desires that are harmful to the mental and physical health of the individual and society, and – ironically – ultimately lead to anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian political circumstances. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, egalitarianism is desirable when it helps people live in ways that promote individual and social health, but when, in the name of egalitarianism, a corrupt “democracy” promotes pleasures that undermine individual and social flourishing, then it is to be condemned – again, not because it is egalitarian, but because it damages individuals and society.

2.5 An Education for Healthy Egalitarianism in the Republic

Now that we have seen that Plato’s criticism of democracy in Book VIII is not that he is opposed to egalitarianism, or even opposed to the rule of the people or equality before the law, but is only opposed to forms of democracy that encourage the kind of unfettered freedom that leads to the form of licentiousness found in democracies, we are now in a position to consider his beliefs about how people might be offered an education that promotes individual and social health. His beliefs on this are found in the education of the guardians of the kallipolis. These guardians are given an education that promotes moderation, courage, and egalitarianism within its members. Of course, because they are the guardians of a group of citizens that Glaucon insisted should be allowed to pursue wealth and luxury, they must necessarily have authoritarian control of those citizens, but that is not because Plato prefers authoritarian control. It is a necessary evil to protect the wealth and comfort that Glaucon insists his citizens should have. Plato thinks this wealth and the authoritarian control it makes necessary are an evil that should be avoided, but Glaucon will not hear of it. As we shall see, had Glaucon not insisted on the luxuries and conveniences, Socrates would still have recommended the same education to the guardians,
except that they would not be guardians who go to war to steal other people’s land or who rule unopposed over others; they would just be typical human beings who live in peace, harmony, and moderation, in the same way as the members of the first city did before they were introduced to the endless acquisition of wealth.

To see that the education of the guardians is one that could be available to all people, we need to return to the first city. To recall, everyone in the first city had an important role to play in the flourishing of the society. While some were more intelligent, stronger, or better craftspeople than others, they each had an essential role to play in the society and all were able to participate equally in the peace, harmony, and good health of the city. All of their physical needs were met and they enjoyed the arts, good conversation, simple delicacies, sex in moderation, and so on. They wanted for nothing and they did not consider themselves to be deprived of happiness. Let us suppose that after describing this society, Glaucon did not insist on giving these peaceful and content citizens wealth, luxuries, and conveniences, but instead asked Socrates how he (Socrates) would educate such people to be content with what they had. This would be a legitimate question, because as we saw in Section 2.2, Socrates claims that all people have appetitive desires in them (572b). Thus, each person has the capacity to be overcome by desires for wealth and luxuries. As such, there would need to be some sort of education in place that would help them not give into those desires, which would undermine the health of the individual and society.

What would have Socrates’ answer been? His answer is made very clear when he describes the education of the guardians. While on the face of it, the education of the guardians seemed to be specifically meant for them to be rulers, its primary function was to teach them to be moderate and embody the rest of the virtues. Their early education was an education in virtue, and it was only their later education that was meant to provide them with knowledge of the “Forms” that they would need to rule others. In a healthy society, these people would not be guardians because there is nothing to guard and no need to steal land from other communities. The education of the guardians did more than teach them how to steal land. It taught them how to be moderate and just, living a life, as we saw above of egalitarianism and simplicity – the same life the citizens of the first city lived.

A standard objection to this point might go like this: Plato’s depiction of the guardians is supposed to portray his elitist pessimism toward the educational potential of the masses. Plato thinks that most people simply do not have the cognitive and moral capacity for philosophical virtue. What makes you think that all human beings could be so educated?

Objections of this nature – which are quite common in the secondary literature – completely miss the educational meaning of the arguably most important scene in the Republic: The Allegory of the Cave. Plato is actually an optimist, or at least an egalitarian, with respect to the pursuit of virtue. He claims that the power to learn and be habituated into the virtues is found in everyone:

And surely, once our city gets a good start, it will go on growing in a cycle. Good education and upbringing, when they are preserved, produce good
natures, and useful natures, who are in turn well educated, grow up even better than their predecessors, both in their offspring and in other respects, just like other animals. (424a)

The important thing to notice here is Plato’s claim that what “produce[s] good natures” is education and upbringing. In other places in the Republic he talks as if humans are born good or bad, but in fact over and over again in the Republic and across the dialogues, he lays far more stress on the role upbringing and education plays in creating the right kind of natures. He says, for instance, in Book VII that:

If that’s true, then here’s what we must think about these matters: Education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes …

But our present discussion, on the other hand, shows that the power to learn is present in everyone’s soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good. Isn’t that right? …

Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn’t the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn’t turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately …

Now, it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren’t there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of reason seems to belong above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned.

The fact that Socrates claims that the ability to learn is present in “everyone’s” soul, but that those souls need to be redirected if they develop the capacity to “see” properly reinforces the view that individuals’ natures are shaped by education. They develop a second nature, as it were, by how they are educated. It is the same with the virtues of the soul, which are “added later by habit and practice.” This habituation creates natures that are virtuous. When this process is applied to all people the above “cycle” begins to happen – as their natures are developed, they pursue more education, and as they pursue more education, their natures are further improved. This leads to an increase in virtue and a decrease in the need for the endless acquisition of wealth that harms people and their communities.

The above does not mean that everyone receives the same education, however. In Socrates’ egalitarian city, everyone is capable of developing the virtues through habituation, and everyone is capable of intellectual learning through
having their sight redirected; however certain people have capacities for certain vocations that make their learning easier. Thus, according to Plato, people who have an innate predisposition that makes them good at farming will learn farming more quickly than someone who has an innate predisposition toward cobblerly. Because each person has a soul that can be redirected, each person could eventually learn the other person’s craft to a significant degree, but they will never learn as quickly as the one innately suited to it. It is the same with the habituated moral virtues. Plato believes that some people develop habits of virtue more quickly than others – he uses a variety of stories across the dialogues to explain the mythological origins of these differences – but he believes that all people are, ultimately, capable of virtue even if it takes some longer than others to develop them.

2.6 What Contemporary Democratic Educators Can Learn from the Republic

Having explored Plato’s affirmation of egalitarian communities that are committed to moderation and virtue, we are now in a position to consider whether contemporary democratic educators have anything to learn from him. The answer to that question will depend largely on what each individual educator believes the point is of a democratic education. If educators believe that the point of democratic education is to make the given democracy stronger by encouraging a realistic moral egalitarianism as well as psychologically healthy individuals, then Plato has a great deal to offer. If, on the other hand, educators believe that the point of democratic education is to help students access all of the economic and material advantages the democracy has to offer, then Plato has little to offer.

I am writing this chapter to speak to the first group. The reader who believes that democracy should be equated with the maximization of wealth and capital need read no further. However, if an educator wants to think about the ways they might invite their students to help contribute to the flourishing of democracy by supporting the social and political equality of all citizens and by promoting values and virtues that increase the individual’s ability to flourish, then here are some initial thoughts based on Plato’s insights.

The first thing Plato teaches us is that we ought to help students question the dominant paradigm in many Western schools that the point of an education is to maximize their earning potential. Through discussions like the kind Socrates has with his interlocutors, we can help students think through the messages they are bombarded with over the internet, on television, through social media, and in the school ethos. These messages often aggressively communicate that a happy life is one characterized by wealth, luxury, and consumption in general. Using Socratic dialogues, teachers could help students discuss different visions of the good life and help them learn to distinguish propaganda from reality.

The second thing Plato teaches us is that there are certain vices that undermine the kind of democracy that seems most worth striving for: that is, a
democracy in which individuals feel equal to one another in their ability to contribute to and enjoy the benefits of their social group. When students single-mindedly pursue wealth and the luxuries and conveniences it allows, they not only have potentially bought into a view of a happy life that is less happy than they think, but they also help set the conditions for radical material inequality. Teachers can help students realize that their attachment to goods and commodities often result in the diminishment of the quality of life of the underpaid employees of the companies who produce them. When students purchase the most up-to-date commodities they help make the owners and executives of those companies millions or billions of dollars, but often they do not increase the flourishing of the factory floor workers who perform the actual labor. Of course, there are some companies who treat their employees better than other companies, but the employees are rarely treated as equals in the company and rarely receive the kind of paid time off, flexibility of work schedule, and quality of job experiences that help lead to a flourishing life. While it may be true that some of these workers (if they are employed in democratic countries) have a right to vote and have the freedom to work or not work, they are also only minimally efficacious in lobbying to improve their own and others’ working and living conditions. Voting choices afforded to the working class are often dictated by powerful lobbying groups who serve those already in power. Distributive schemes might be put into place to counteract some of these effects, but Plato’s point is that the more we are wedded to luxury, the more we will need such schemes, and the more they will tend to create strife, dissatisfaction, and – if things go really south – tyranny.

The third thing Plato teaches us is the importance of cultivating democratic virtues in our students. If democracy is going to flourish by remaining committed to a thoroughgoing egalitarianism, our students will need to cultivate virtues consistent with such a democracy. Virtues like generosity, justice, courage, moderation, civility, and honesty (to name a few) are the bedrock of a society committed to the flourishing of all people. We need our students to be generous and just enough to seek the good of others and not merely themselves; we need them to be courageous and moderate enough to resist the temptation to acquire material wealth and comforts that require the relegation of others to lives of drudgery; we need them to be civil and honest enough to interact with others in ways that dignify them without flattery or deceit.

2.7 Conclusion

In spite of the standard interpretation that the Republic is a dialogue that promotes totalitarianism, we have seen that it actually promotes egalitarianism. However, this does not mean that Plato thereby endorses all democratic communities. Plato unequivocally rejects democracies that promote unrestrained materialism, not because they fail to allow communal decision-making (which is the foundation of democracy) but because they lead members to live viciously. Educators can learn from the Republic insofar as it depicts the political and social
dangers that arise in democracies that are founded on implicit and explicit messages that claim the happy life is one characterized by materialism and consumption. Plato reminds democratic educators that there are other forms of democracy that may be more desirable and teachers can go some way in promoting those forms of democracies in their students.

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3

Aristotle on Education, Democracy, and Civic Friendship

Randall Curren

3.1 Introduction

There are a variety of interpretive, historical, and practical questions one might pose concerning the intersection of Aristotle’s ideas about education and democracy, including: What civic purposes did Aristotle have in mind in framing his educational proposals? How did he envision those purposes being served by the education he proposed? Was he a proponent of democracy? Did he propose a form of democratic education? Would the adoption of his educational proposals be favorable to establishing, preserving, or strengthening a democratic society and system of government?

These are the questions this chapter will answer. Doing so will require a broad sketch of the respective roles of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) and *Politics* in Aristotle’s philosophy of human affairs (ta anthropina philosophia; *NE* X.9 1181b15), which he presents as a science of politics (ton epistémon en tais politi; *NE* I.2 1094b1). It is only within this framework that we can understand his views regarding the proper ends of constitutional systems and legislation, the status of democracy, and the civic purposes of education. The questions at stake will be primarily, but not exclusively, interpretive. There are various standards by which one could judge whether Aristotle proposes a form of democratic education, including his intentions, the compatibility of his educational proposals with contemporary democratic principles, and whether enacting them would be conducive to preserving or strengthening democracy. The question of conduciveness to preserving or strengthening democracy is largely empirical, and of no small importance.

There has been an immense outpouring of scholarship on Aristotle’s *Politics* in recent years, much of it grappling with the status of democracy in Aristotle’s thought but little of it engaging his educational ideas in any detail.¹ There have been several new English translations of the *Politics* (Lord, 1984; Jowett [in

¹ Scholarship on Aristotle’s educational ideas has been overwhelmingly focused on character education and makes little or no reference to the *Politics*, but see Lord (1982), Reeve (1998b, 2012, pp. 250–77), Curren (2000), Nightingale (2001), Nagle
Barnes, 1984; Robinson, 1995; Saunders, 1995; Kraut, 1997; Simpson, 1997; Reeve, 1998a; Keyt, 1999), many books and collections of articles on it (e.g., Patzig, 1990; Keyt & Miller, 1991; Miller, 1995; Curren, 2000; Kraut, 2002; Frank 2005; Kraut & Skultety, 2005; Roberts, 2009a; Garver, 2011; Deslauriers & Destrée, 2013; Pangle, 2013; Lockwood & Samaras, 2015; Riesbeck, 2016), and hundreds of journal articles. While the effect of this voluminous scholarship has been to promote a unified reading of Aristotle's philosophy of human affairs and clarify important aspects of his political philosophy, there are aspects of his stance toward democracy that are sharply contested.

These disputed matters notwithstanding, the answers defended in what follows are that Aristotle's educational proposals are intended to serve the singular civic purpose of facilitating a partnership of all citizens in living the best kind of life. Living the best kind of life inherently involves exercises of intellectual virtues, and being a partner with one's fellow citizens in living such a life inherently involves exercises of moral virtues and bonds of civic friendship. Aristotle's educational proposals are thus focused on cultivating moral and intellectual virtues and educating diverse children together, with a view to nurturing civic friendship. Regarding democracy, Aristotle classifies it as a corrupt form of constitution, but he defends forms of shared governance in the common interest – “mixed” and “middle” constitutions and an ideal form of aristocracy – that would qualify by today's standards as limited forms of democracy. Setting aside the narrowness of his conception of the best kind of life that education should facilitate, and his restrictions on who can qualify as a citizen and receive this education, the education he proposes is recognizably democratic. It is, within limits, egalitarian and intended to foster shared governance.2 This is not to deny the disconcerting fact that Aristotle proposed limiting full citizenship to landowning males, thereby excluding women, slaves, farmers, and other manual and paid workers, but rather to hold that his thought nevertheless offers significant resources for understanding democracy and democratic education. Regarding its potential efficacy in advancing democracy, Aristotle's understanding of the role of common schools in promoting civic friendship and shared governance should qualify as an important contribution to the theory and practice of democratic education.

3.2 What Civic Purposes Did Aristotle Have in Mind in Framing His Educational Proposals?

Aristotle identifies the defining purpose of a polis (i.e., city-state or politically autonomous city and environs) as partnership (koinonia) in living the best kind of

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2 Citizen girls and women were excluded from governing and were consequently less than full citizens, but it is unclear whether Aristotle thought their education should be different from that of boys and men (Pol. I.3 1266b13–20, VII.16 1335b11–12; Reeve, 2012, p. 253).
life, so the fundamental civic purpose of education would be facilitating such
partnership by nurturing the required personal attributes and social bonds.
A subsidiary civic purpose of education would be to improve imperfect regimes
or enable societies to make progress toward partnership in living the best kind
of life.

The opening claim of Aristotle’s NE is that political science is the master art
concerned with the highest good or best kind of life for human beings (NE I.2
1094a18–28, 1095a14–19), and his Politics opens similarly with the axiom that a
polis is properly a partnership of citizens in living the best kind of life. Every
community “is established for the sake of some good,” he says, and “the com-

munity that has the most authority of all and encompasses all the others aims
highest, that is to say, at the good that has the most authority of all. This
community is the one called a polis, the community that is political” (Pol. I.1
1252a4–6). The NE is foundational to the Politics (see Adkins, 1991; Cooper, 2010;
Frede, 2013; Ober, 2015), as it defines both the proper function of a self-
governing society – facilitating a partnership of citizens in living well – and
the virtues that must be cultivated in all citizens in order to fulfill that function.
It closes with a rationale for the Politics, announcing the latter as providing
the knowledge of legislation essential to cultivating virtue widely. These works are
presented as together comprising political science (hê politikê epistêmê), and the
Rhetoric (Rh.) can be seen as addressing the subsidiary art of persuasion (Garver,
1994; Rorty, 1996; Frank, 2005). While the Politics itself can be read as displaying
strategies of persuasion (e.g., for convincing leaders to engage in constitutional
reforms), or as engaging its audience rhetorically (Pangle, 2013; Frank, 2015),
Aristotle presents law and education as the primary instruments of statecraft,
giving priority to education (NE X.9 1180b24–30; Pol. I.2 1253a30–35, V.9
1310a13–20) and following Greek precedent in framing law as itself an instruc-
tional enterprise (NE V.1 1129b19–26).

The civic purposes of education are identified in Politics VIII.1, where Aristotle
says, “No one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all
to the education of youth” (1337a10–11). This is a remarkable thing for him to
claim in a world in which only Sparta and Crete provided public education of
any kind and theirs was limited to military training. The brevity of the support-
ing arguments that follow would also be remarkable, were they not summaries
of arguments that run through both the NE and Politics (Curren, 2000).

Aristotle first explains that the better character produced by education yields a
better politeia, meaning better citizenship, a better citizen-body, or a better
regime (politeuma or members of the governing body) (1137a14–18). He defines
citizens as those who share in making political decisions and in holding offices,
which in Athens would have included serving on juries, membership in the
assembly, and eligibility for administrative roles filled by lottery (Pol. III.1

3 Translations are those in Barnes (1984), except where noted.
4 It is only recently that scholars have taken Aristotle at his word in presenting these works as comprising a science (Henry &
Nielsen, 2015), but there is little dissent regarding the importance of reading the two works together.
5 For a detailed account of the distinct meanings of politeia, see Mulhern (2015).
1275a22–3, 1275b17–21), so the education that makes a citizen-body better with respect to citizenship would necessarily make for a better governing body or regime. The translations of Lord (1984) and Simpson (1997) are thus on target in rendering politeia as “regime” in this context (1137a10–18). Another meaning of politeia is “arrangement of offices,” so it is frequently translated as “constitution,” as it is in this passage by Jowett (Barnes, 1984) and Reeve (1998a). This has Aristotle saying that better character makes for a better constitution, which is intelligible if one reads “constitution” as referring to the way a society is constituted with respect to governance, a constitution being in this sense a hylomorphic composite of form (i.e., arrangement of offices) and matter (the character of those who fill those offices or civic decision-making roles). I will use “constitution” in this hylomorphic sense in what follows (as in Curren, 2000).

Aristotle’s second reason for legislative concern about education is that the practice of aretê (virtue, goodness, or excellence) requires prior education (Pol. 1337a19–21). This is presented without elaboration and followed immediately by the claim that because a polis has one end or purpose, “it is manifest that education should be one and the same for all, and that it should be public and not private” (1337a21–24). This is essentially a theorem of “political science” resting on the foundations laid down in the openings of the NE and Politics, and it concerns the fundamental civic purpose of education for Aristotle – equipping all citizens with the same virtues that are essential to them all living well together. It is best to begin there, and then circle back to the argument that education yields better constitutions or regimes.

In the NE and Posterior Analytics, Aristotle defines a science as pertaining to unchanging objects of knowledge (NE VI.3 1139b20–25) and having an axiomatic structure consisting of theorems derived from first principles by means of demonstrative deductions (PoA. 1.2.71b9–16, 1.13, 1.33.8830–34). The first principles define the nature and affirm the existence of the object of study. Ethics takes the best life for human beings as its object, but it pertains more broadly to the nature, function, and varieties of the human psyche, relying on psychology to identify the function that is said to determine the nature of the best life (eudaimonia, flourishing, or living well). It addresses the varieties of psyche or states of character that do and do not permit the fulfillment of that function in a flourishing life. Politics pertains similarly to the nature, function, and varieties of polises – the varieties of constitutions that do or do not fulfill a polis’s natural function of enabling people to live as partners in the best kind of life for human beings (Pol. I.1 1252a4–6). The nature of a properly functioning constitution or political system is thus defined in a way that builds on the nature of a properly functioning psyche.

What, then, is the best form of life that a properly functioning political system should enable all of its citizens to share in? The axiom at the heart of the NE is (roughly) that the best life for a human being is one that is devoted to activity in conformity with the “best and most complete” virtue, by which Aristotle evidently means philosophical or “scientific” activity (theôria) manifesting theoretical wisdom (sophia) (NE I.7 1098a16–18; Kraut, 1989; Reeve, 2012). This presupposes the possession of moral virtues, given Aristotle’s understanding of
the foundational role of moral virtues in developing intellectual virtues (Pol. VII.151334b12–28; cf. Plato, Laws 631b–d). The habituation that shapes moral character forms an integrated cluster of behavioral, affective, perceptual, and doxastic dispositions. People who are well habituated and thus acquire the moral virtues grasp the moral facts (to hoti) that are the starting points of ethical and legislative science (NE I.7 1098b2–4), while others who lack this habituation do not. So, at least within the sphere of human affairs, one could no more contemplate what is knowable without possessing moral virtues than deliberate and choose well without them. There are many passages in the Politics that confirm Aristotle has in mind a life devoted to excellence in theôria when he identifies a polis’s natural function as enabling people to live in partnership in the best kind of life for human beings (Pol. I.1 1252a4–7; cf. VII.2 1324a23–35, VII.8 1328a36–37; NE I.1 1094a1–18).

Given this natural, defining, or proper function of a polis, there will be true (just) and deviant (unjust) varieties of constitutions. As partnerships in living the best life, the former will aim at the common good (i.e., good of all citizens) and be consensual or governed through consent rather than force (Pol. III.3 1276a8–16, III.4 1277b8–30, III.6 1279a17–22, III.7 1279a25–39, III.9 1280b30–40, etc.). A political form of governance, transacted through discussion of what is good and bad, right and wrong (I.2 1253a7–18; Mayhew, 2013; Frank, 2015) would characteristically involve mutual advantage and consent to arrangements that promote it, and Aristotle repeatedly endorses governing through consent as a defining aspect of true, just, or legitimate forms of governance (I.13 1259b37–60a, III.10 1281a22–25, IV.9 1294b35–39, V.9 1310a15–17, VII.2 1324b23–31, etc.). Regarding mutual advantage or the common good, he holds that correct (i.e., true or just) constitutions impartially promote the good of all citizens (III.13 1283b36–42), explaining that the wish of political societies with correct constitutions is “to be composed of those who are equal and alike” (IV.11 1295b24–26; Kraut, 2002, pp. 385–91). It is also clear throughout the middle books of the Politics that Aristotle’s understanding of justice makes degrees of justice relevant across the spectrum of less than ideal constitutions (Curren, 2000, pp. 70–79, 100–9; Kraut, 2002, pp. 173–74; Destrée, 2015).6

3.2.1 Nurturing Virtues and Civic Friendship
Living the best kind of life is a matter of engaging in activities that are at the same time both admirable (kalon) and personally satisfying. These are necessarily enactments of virtues, which Aristotle regards as interdependent, so education in both moral and intellectual virtues will be essential. Books VII and VIII of the Politics describe the best possible constitution or “polis of our dreams,” and what we come to in the closing chapters of VII are public oversight of childbirth, childcare, and training of habits, and in Book VIII public schooling and theater.

6 For other views on justice in Aristotle’s works, see Miller (1995), Roberts (2005a), and Schütrumpf (2015).
All of this should build toward the development of the intellectual virtues that are foundational to living well, we are told.

Because the natural and proper end (telos) of a polis is partnership in such flourishing, a further task of education is to nurture the civic bonds or relationships that would constitute a partnership in living well. Aristotle conceives of this in terms of civic friendship (politikë philia), which he describes as “the greatest good of states and what best preserves them against revolutions” (Pol. II.4 1262b7–10; cf. NE VIII.1 1155a23–28, VIII.2 1155b31–34, VIII.4 1157a21–25, 1169b9–10; Rh. II.4 1380b36–1381a2). “Unanimity seems ... to be civic friendship,” he explains, “and such unanimity is found among good men; for they ... wish for what is just and what is advantageous, and these are the objects of their common endeavor as well. Bad men . . . aim at getting more than their share of advantages, . . . [and soon] they are in a state of faction” (NE IX.6 1167b2–14).

Aristotle followed Plato in regarding factional conflict as a common defect of polises, but in Book II of the Politics he rejected the solution to this proposed in Plato’s Republic – a scheme for common rearing of children in which parents would not know whose children were whose (Mayhew, 1997). Plato may have imagined that rivalries between families could be limited and greater civic unity achieved in this way. Aristotle’s alternative proposal is to create common civic institutions that nurture friendships bridging all social groups, the most important of these being public day schools in which a city’s diverse children are educated and “grow up together” at least a few hours a day (i.e., common schools) (Pol. V.9 1310a12–25). It is through such education that societies can be unified and made into a community, he contends (II.5 1263b37–38), while also referring to common meals and religious observances.

Aristotle’s account of civic friendship is not fully explained, but what he seems to have in mind is, first, that common schools and other institutions should nurture virtues of goodwill, which when they are manifested and recognized reciprocally would constitute friendship (VIII.2 1155b33–35), and second, that they should nurture friendships of more intimate kinds that bridge different social groups and facilitate wider liking, trust, goodwill, and cooperation (Curren, 2000, pp. 131–39; Curren & Elenbaas, 2020). A much-discussed passage in Politics III.9 has been read as implying that Aristotle thought spontaneously occurring “family connections, brotherhoods, common sacrifices, amusements which draw men together” are typically sufficient to make a society a “partnership... in well-being, for the sake of a perfect and self-sufficient life” (1280b32–1281a2). However, the schools Aristotle describes did not yet exist, the common meals he refers to (Pol. II.9 and 10) were created in Sparta as an egalitarian and unifying replacement for private dining clubs segregated by class, and his attention to publicly subsidizing the costs of participation in common meals and religious observances in Politics VII.10 suggests he saw a need for public intervention to prevent the segregation of citizens into groups that do not intermingle in friendly ways.

7 For the classic debate on which this interpretation builds, see Annas (1990); Cooper (1990).
3.2.2 Improving Imperfect Regimes

The second dominating idea at the opening of *Politics* VIII, is that citizens should be molded “to suit the form of government” or constitution (1337a11–19). We learn in this passage only that better character yields a better regime, but in II.4 that, “A good citizen must have the knowledge and ability both to be ruled and to rule, and this is the virtue of a citizen to know the rule of free people from both sides” (1277b13–15). This is qualified as pertaining to *political* rule involving citizens, and it emerges that a *politeia*, in the sense of a system of citizenship or sharing in rule, is the form of constitution to which defective political systems should aspire. Aristotle says explicitly in *Politics* V.9 that, while education should suit the character of the constitution, whatever form it takes, the education that suits a constitution is not the kind of education preferred by the rulers of an unjust system (1310a12–25), but instead the kind of education that would preserve it.8 Neither oligarchy nor democracy can survive “unless both rich and poor” share in ruling and being ruled (1309b37–40). So, the education that suits different constitutions will in each case turn out to be education in knowing how to rule and be ruled, and nowhere does Aristotle suggest that the common schooling that is the same for all would prepare children of different social classes for different roles in ruling and being ruled. The reforms associated with education that makes for a better constitution would move an oligarchic constitution that denies the poor a share in governing and unjustly favors the wealthy, or a democratic constitution that similarly dominates the rich and unjustly favors the poor, closer to the constitution that Aristotle regards as the best that is possible for most societies.

Aristotle calls this best constitution that most societies are capable of achieving a *politeia* (rendered in this use as “polity”) or a constitution that is “mixed” in the sense of providing institutional roles for different social classes and “middle” in the sense of being limited to or moderated by a large middle class.9 To preserve a defective political system one must reform it, aiming at the mean between oligarchy and democracy (Pol. V.9 1309b18–22) or a constitution that provides citizens, both rich and poor, with institutional platforms for protecting their interests and that favors a large middle class – a politically moderating mean between poverty and opulence. Political systems that exclude one or another class from governing would thus come to approximate a *politeia* or

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8 A matter that would require too much space to address here is Aristotle’s stance on education in the spirit of defective constitutions and compliance with law. He regards such compliance as primarily owing to habit, or more accurately a state of character, and as important to the political stability essential to the common interest. Yet, he also surely recognized that a blind or undiscerning habit of obedience to law as such would be counterproductive to the extent that existing laws are bad and do not communicate moral truths about how members of societies can live well together. See Curren [2000, 2013].

9 The established view (see Balot, 2015; Ober, 2015; Samaras, 2015) is that a “middle” constitution and *politeia* are ruled strictly by hoplite soldiers or the class of citizens who have enough wealth to equip themselves as heavily armed infantry (Pol. II.6 1265b27–29; III.7 1279a40–1279b4). I would argue that, while Aristotle may consider it ideal to favor moderate wealth (in the interest of virtue and living well) and limit citizenship to people of moderate wealth (and virtue), his guidance on improving imperfect regimes in the middle books envisions scenarios in which other classes retain shares in rule, and progress would occur by making a constitution more mixed and middle. The effect of making democracies and oligarchies more like polities or *politeia* (i.e., systems of citizenship or political rule) will be to make them more just as well as more stable.
A partnership of all citizens in ruling, being ruled, and living the best life would evidently require universal possession of the virtues that are manifested in living the best kind of life and a distribution of good judgment sufficient for collective practical wisdom (phronēsis) in sustaining a civic partnership in such a life. If the best kind of life necessarily involves exercises of theoretical wisdom (sophia) in philosophical or “scientific” activity (theôria), then Aristotle must have envisioned an education in theoretical and practical philosophy, the former of which he took to include mathematics, natural philosophy (i.e., sciences of nature), and theology (Met. VI.1 1026a18–19). So, would all citizens learn mathematics, natural and political science, and theology? Or did Aristotle think that most citizens would participate in the best kind of life through less demanding forms of intellectual activity? With regard to practical wisdom, it might be enough for many citizens to have adequate judgment concerning whom to trust, when listening to speeches in the assembly for instance, and for a few to have practical wisdom grounded in the ethical and legislative science that Aristotle provided in his lectures. Phronēsis brings together “particulars” of cases, discerned in perception, with “universals” or general truths about the human good and how human beings can live well together (NE VI.8 1142a13–15), and there can be no doubt that Aristotle regarded his own lectures in ethics and politics as an education in these universals.
Much of Politics VIII appears to have been lost, leaving us with little more than a discussion of education in musical performance as a paradigm of, or maybe a first step in elaborating, the “branches of learning and education which we must study merely with a view to leisure spent in intellectual activity” (1338a10–12). Music is not useful, so it is taught precisely “for intellectual enjoyment in leisure,” Aristotle argues (1338a13–24), and while drawing is useful, it can nevertheless be taught in order to make children “judges (or contemplators [Nightingale, 2001], theorêtikon) of the beauty of the human form” (1138b1–2). Nightingale (2001, pp. 168–71) argues that Aristotle focuses on music and drawing in this way because he thought that the closest most people could ever come to philosophical theorêa is the contemplation of human affairs experienced by a spectator (theôros) at the publicly sponsored theater festivals of Athens. Destrée (2013) adopts a similar view, noting Aristotle’s insistence that “there is clearly nothing which we are so much concerned to acquire and cultivate as the power of forming right judgment, and of taking delight in good dispositions and noble actions” (VIII.5 1340a16–19). Children are to engage in musical performance so they can learn to be good judges of it and “appreciate what is good and delight in it, thanks to the knowledge they acquired” (VIII.6 1340b37–38). Destrée agrees that Aristotle must have regarded such aesthetic theorêa as an approximation of philosophical theorêa, citing Kraut (2002, p. 200), who notes that “Aristotle is not referring to unaccompanied music, but to poetic or dramatic words that tell a story. . . that may embody a kind of truth” (p. 201). “Stories conveyed in song [may] express a form of wisdom” and stimulate “something like philosophical activity,” Kraut writes (pp. 201–02), and one could add that in the context of public theater this would constitute a form of collective contemplation of the good and the just that may facilitate a partnership in living well. Kraut finds it “plausible” that Aristotle’s curriculum also included mathematical studies, including astronomy, for children ages 14–17 (2002, pp. 199–200), while Reeve finds stronger grounds for thinking Aristotle envisioned higher learning beyond these studies.

Reeve is an outlier in holding, “That there must be public education in philosophy generally, and not just in ethics or political science, is certain, since philosophy is required for leisure and education in it is needed to make a city good (Pol. II.5 1263b37–40, 7 1267a10–12)” (Reeve, 2012, p. 255; italics added). The passage in Politics II.5 that Reeve cites invites the question of how a society governed by all its citizens could succeed without providing them all with an education in philosophy similar to what the philosopher kings and queens of the Republic receive, and Aristotle surely knew that the philosophical curriculum proposed for schools in Plato’s Laws – the text of the Laws itself (VII 811b–812a; Bobonich, 2002) – included not just ethics and political philosophy but also theology (X 887c–907a). Is it really so implausible to think that Aristotle’s ideal aristocracy – a system of shared governance by citizens who are fully virtuous, a condition requiring the possession of phronêsis, hence ethical knowledge (epistême) – would provide education in at least ethical and political philosophy, if not other forms of philosophy? Reeve notes Aristotle’s reference in Politics VIII.2 to the existence of “liberal (eleutherios) arts quite proper for a freeman to
acquire” to a suitable degree (1337b13–14): he infers quite reasonably that these arts would include all those requisite to being a “well-educated person” or *pepaideumenos*, a person who falls short of acquiring specialist or scientific knowledge but learns enough to be a good judge of diverse matters, just as the liberal study of music will fall short of producing virtuosity but enable the student to be a good judge of the performances of others:

In every study and investigation . . . there appear to be two kinds of competence. One can properly be called scientific knowledge of the subject, the other as it were a sort of educatedness. For it is the mark of an educated person to be able to reach a judgment based on a sound estimate of what is properly expounded and what isn’t. For this is in fact what we take to be characteristic of a generally educated person. And we expect such a person to be able to judge in practically all subjects. (PA. 639a1–6; Reeve, 1998b, p. 58, trans.)

The extant manuscripts do not reveal when Aristotle may have thought that comprehensive “liberal” education of this kind should occur or how much of it should be compulsory, but the constitution he envisions would require at least a moderate level of collective possession of its benefits, and he is insistent on the fact that all (full) citizens will receive the same education. How would this come about other than through an attempt to provide all (full) citizens with a general education – an education in knowledge and judgment that enables them to engage in the most rewarding and admirable kinds of human endeavors and in collective self-governance?

3.3.1 Common schooling and Civic Friendship

In addition to defending a common curriculum for all full citizens, Aristotle follows Plato’s *Laws* in proposing public day schools in which children would all be educated together in the interest of civic friendship. These institutions must be egalitarian, in the sense of being open to all citizen members of the society and treating all those who participate as equals. They must also be part of a wider experience of justice and the relative equality that is essential to friendship and shared governance. Aristotle addresses this with particular force in *Politics* IV.11:

Those who have too much of the goods of fortune, strength, wealth, friends, and the like are neither willing nor able to submit to authority. The evil begins at home; for when they are boys, by reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience. On the other hand, the very poor, who are in the opposite extreme, are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves. Thus arises a city, not of freemen, but of masters and slaves, the one despising, the other envying; and nothing can be more fatal to friendship and good fellowship in cities than this. (1295b14–24)
Aristotle says more than once that participants in every community of any kind are friends “to the extent to which justice exists between them” (NE VIII.9 1159b25–31). The minimal condition for φιλία is mutual recognition of mutual goodwill (Pol. VIII.2 1155b33–35), so the implication of this is that people enact forms of mutual goodwill to the extent that they deal with each other in ways that are just. Such “friendships” or episodes of mutually recognized mutual goodwill could be as fleeting as a brief commercial transaction, but Aristotle regards good laws or norms of justice as providing a kind of habituation that promotes the formation of virtue. Justice and common institutions would thus establish a context in which dispositions of civic friendship could take root.

Aristotle’s view of the origins of the wide civic friendliness that can unify a society is that it begins in a small number of substantial friendships that are civically important. His conception of how these initial “civic friendships” with “kinsmen, comrades, [and] partners” can lead to a generalized disposition of friendliness toward all fellow citizens is that it would involve forming some of these relationships in settings such as schools that bring different kinds of people together (Eudemian Ethics II.10 1242a6–9). In these settings, people with different group identities may become friends with one another, and those relationships would put a friendly face on kinds of people who might otherwise seem alien, untrustworthy, or threatening. This kind of transmission of friendliness was predictable from Aristotle’s perspective, because we tend to like our friends’ friends, “those who are like ourselves in character” and “those who desire the same things as we desire” (Rh. II.4 1381a15–20, b15, and b17–18). If these are psychological facts, then the more venues there are in which different kinds of people interact in ways favorable to friendship, the more the society will tend to be unified by civic friendliness and the less likely political polarization will be.

3.4 Was Aristotle a Proponent of Democracy?

Aristotle’s typology of politeia classifies democracy as a corrupt (parekbasis) form of constitution that does not allow a polis to fulfill its natural (phusin) or just function. He considers it a system of lawless domination of the wealthy few by the numerous poor (dēmos), rather than a rule of law aiming at the common good and transacted through reasoned persuasion and consent (Pol. III.6–8). Lawless rule by many in their own interest is better than lawless self-interested rule by the wealthy few or by one tyrant, Aristotle acknowledged. Yet, his view of democracy is consistent with his view of the working poor as precluded by their labor from acquiring the virtue or judgment needed to participate in governance and with his identification of a polity, or “mixed” and “middle” constitution, as one in which those of moderate wealth – the hoplite class – govern.

The underlying principle of entitlement to share in governing seems to be that the possession of normal deliberative capacities and good judgment entitles a member of the society to be self-governing and is a pro tanto or prima facie basis for entitlement to a share in governing proportional to their good judgment or virtue. In the absence of a god-like king whose wisdom is incommensurably
greater than the combined wisdom of everyone else in the society, this will require
a form of shared political governance with some differentiation of institutional
roles in governing by merit – a “mixed” constitution – but Aristotle treats the
qualifications for citizenship as legitimately influenced by a variety of practical
considerations (VI.4 1319b6–14, VI.6 1320b25–37). There will be no human right to
citizenship, but all citizens will have a share in governing through a system that
(in one way or another) seeks to fill offices that require individuals with especially
good judgment on the basis of possession of such judgment (Pol. III.9 1280a9–b7; NE
V.3 1131a24–28). Any such system will provide institutionalized roles through
which the interests and judgments of people of ordinary capacities and judgment
will be aggregated, and Aristotle offers some analogies to explain how this can
yield a better judgment than that of a single person of greater wisdom (III.10–18).
There are unresolved debates concerning the interpretation of these analogies and
how little or much they illuminate the merits of democratic decision making
(Waldron, 1992; Lane, 2013; Ober, 2013, 2015; Bobonich, 2015), but Frank (2015)
offers a promising account of reasoned persuasion and acceptance of reasons as
what mediates collective ruling and being ruled.

Setting aside the important questions of global justice and democracy that
have reshaped political philosophy in recent years, Aristotle’s preferred constitu-
tions sound a lot like democracy (Frank, 2005, 2015; Balot, 2015; Ober, 2005,
2015). A “mixed” and “middle” constitution in which no one is above the law is
arguably the very model of what democracy has meant since the nineteenth
century. It is democratic in being a system of collective self-governance, and
(interpreting “middle” generously) a system dominated by a large middle class is
democratic because it is conducive to broad participation in living well, favors
democratic solidarity or civic friendship, and is a bulwark against partisanship
that undermines the very idea of impartial justice and a common good. The
ideal aristocracy of Politics Books VII and VIII is also arguably a polity and, by
modern standards, a democracy. To be sure, the artisans, traders, and farmers,
who are necessary to this aristocracy of all citizens are not citizens. Yet, so far as
citizens are concerned this “polis of our prayers” is a democracy of sharing in
rule and being ruled and a model of egalitarian cooperation in living well, apart
from the perfectionistic exclusivity of the (supposed) singular best kind of life to
which it is devoted. So, in both his vision of the best possible constitution
(a legitimate kingship being theoretically ideal but not possible) and in his
target for the best constitution that is feasible for most societies, Aristotle is
an advocate of a form of democracy (Ober, 2005, 2015).

3.5 Is Aristotelian Education Democratic?

Did Aristotle propose a form of democratic education? Would the adoption of
his educational proposals be favorable to establishing, preserving, or
strengthening a democratic society and system of government? There are
reasons to affirm that Aristotle did indeed propose a form of democratic educa-
tion, but any such reasons must appeal to an account of what defines democratic
education, and there is no contemporary consensus regarding any such account. Democratic education might be defined substantively (e.g., as education in virtues of democratic citizenship), as inclusive and pluralistic (i.e., as nondiscriminatory in who receives it, nonrepressive in respecting a reasonable diversity of conceptions of the good, and possibly common in the sense of educating diverse students together), or as democratically governed (i.e., collectively by the society or by the stakeholders in individual schools, or through a sharing of educational authority by governments, parents, and professional educators) (Gutmann, 1987). Education might be democratic in one or more of these respects and not others, and these different ways in which it could be democratic may be mutually reinforcing in some circumstances but not others.

If what constitutes democratic education is parents being at liberty to educate their children as they please, then Aristotelian education is, of course, very far from democratic. The grounds on which it can be regarded as democratic are that it is, first of all, substantively a general education designed to promote individual flourishing, intellectual self-determination, and competent judgment in collective self-governance, especially in being able to judge who to trust. Second, it is a form of common education inclusive of all citizens that is intended to nurture bonds of civic friendship favorable to democratic cooperation and solidarity. Finally, it is publicly administered and provided, apparently without cost, to all citizen children. To the extent that its public administration is subject to processes of collective self-rule, it is democratic, and because the schools are day schools, parents retain a prominent role in their children’s upbringing and education. So, although Aristotle did not conceive of the education he advocated as “democratic education,” it is reasonable to see his proposals as formative contributions to democratic education as we know and contemplate it today.

Several aspects of Aristotle’s educational proposals evoke concern: the singularity of his perfectionistic conception of the best life, the systematic state interventions that would be deployed to advance it, and the restriction of citizenship and public education to a leisured class that does not engage in manual labor. Can these be jettisoned or brought into alignment with principles of liberal democracy? Scholars disagree about the extent to which the unattractive aspects of Aristotle’s politics can be separated from the attractive aspects, but the underlying ethic is arguably one of respect for human rational self-determination and valuing of human flourishing (Curren, 2000). From an ethical standpoint, the distance between Aristotelian and liberal-democratic ideals is smaller than it may seem, and there is merit in pursuing a neo-Aristotelian approach to liberal-democratic justice and education (Curren, 2013, 2023). In the spirit of Aristotle’s scientific naturalism, there is much to be gained by examining the supposition underlying Aristotle’s conception of the best life and liberalizing it (Curren, 2013, 2023), and much to be gained by examining his hypotheses about the effects of intergroup contact and using what we learn to strengthen democratic institutions and culture (Curren & Elenbaas, 2020).10

10 I am grateful to Lawrence Philpot for his perceptive comments on an earlier draft.
References


4

Rousseau on Democratic Education

Avi I. Mintz

4.1 Introduction

In 1794, amid much fanfare, officials in France had Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s remains moved to Paris and placed among others deemed worthy of the highest regard in the recently completed Panthéon. Rousseau was honoured in 1794 for the same reasons that his work remains on the syllabi of political theory courses today: he articulated a vision of political community in which legitimate rule was to be based on the collective interests of all citizens. A deep egalitarianism runs through Rousseau’s political thought – citizens are equally part of the sovereign body and the demands of that body’s general will are imposed on all citizens equally. The leaders of the French Revolution celebrated Rousseau’s influence and generations of political theorists continue to reckon with his ideas.

Rousseau’s rank in the canon of Western educational philosophy is arguably even more elevated. Rousseau is a staple of introductory courses in educational theory. Of thinkers outside the last half century, the same could only be said of Plato and John Dewey. Rousseau today is best known as perhaps the most influential proponent of child- or student-centered education – and more narrowly, experiential or discovery learning – in which children learn through encounters with problems in their environment (rather than by reading about them or hearing a teacher discuss them). Rousseau presented these ideas in *Emile: Or on Education*, published in 1762.¹

Rousseau also discussed education in other works, particularly in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*. But Rousseau’s ideas of education in those works highlight not the student-centered principles of *Emile* but rather a collectivist education in patriotism. Rather than allowing the children to discover principles and ideas on their own schedule, Rousseau calls for public schooling that explicitly cultivates patriots. In *Considerations of the Government of*

¹ Note on Rousseau’s works: The translations of Rousseau’s works cited in this chapter are *Emile (E)*, by page number; *The Social Contract (SC)* by book, chapter, and paragraph number; *The First Discourse (FD)* by part and paragraph number; *Political Economy (PE)* by paragraph, *Considerations on the Government of Poland (GP)* by chapter and paragraph number; and *Plan for a Constitution for Corsica (CC)* by page number.
Poland and in some other works, Rousseau writes about the need to cultivate a strong attachment to both one’s country and one’s fellow citizens.

To modern ears, Rousseau’s treatment of education in Considerations seems poorly suited to modern liberal democracies. Extreme nationalism seems to invite xenophobia and jingoism. Can the patriotic, nationalistic aim of education in Considerations be reconciled with the child-centered, individual education of Emile? Were either of these ideals (or both) theories of democratic education? In this chapter, I first discuss the individual ideal presented in Emile and I explain why educators and philosophers committed to democratic education embraced Rousseau’s work. I then discuss the national aim of education that Rousseau articulated most prominently in Considerations. Finally, I discuss some of the scholarly attempts to interpret whether the ideals are contradictory. I argue that there has been an overlooked, unifying theme in his educational works grounded in his discussions of amour-propre. Rousseau believed that education – whether national or individual – must generate social cohesion, concord, and fellow-feeling; that is, education ought to provide a foundation for citizens to recognize each other’s dignity and live harmoniously with one another.

### 4.2 Domestic Education, Education for Citizenship, and Democratic Education in Emile

Rousseau’s Emile is an unconventional book on education in many ways. It is not merely a treatise on education; much of it is presented as a novel where the relationship of a boy, Emile, and his tutor, Jean-Jacques (and later his wife, Sophie), is a thought experiment designed to elucidate philosophical, psychological, and educational principles. But Rousseau also includes anecdotes from his own experiences in addition to those he imagines Emile encountering. A discussion of natural religion, “The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,” reads as though it is a completely separate essay (over 50 pages in Bloom’s translation) that was inserted into Emile.² (Rousseau wrote that he included it “as an example of the way one can reason with one’s pupil in order not to diverge from the method I have tried to establish” [E 313]).

To modern readers, Emile’s scope seems remarkably wide. Today’s books on education are typically divided into those for parents and those for educators. Among parenting books, there are some about infants, others about toddlers, and those that address further stages of development. Education books for teachers might focus on classroom management, pedagogy, curriculum, or communication strategies. Emile is comprehensive; it discusses child rearing and education with a tutor (though not in a classroom). Its five books are based on different stages of development. This first covers infancy (and Rousseau does out advice on topics like nursing, swaddling, and bathing); the second covers toddledom through age 12, the third ages 12–15 (the age of “adolescence

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² Jurgen Oelkers (2008) argues that the section on religion is key to interpreting the entire book.
without yet being that of puberty” ([E 165]), the fourth ages 15–18, and the fifth early adulthood (including marriage and a discussion of girls’ education).

That Rousseau divided childhood into stages is noteworthy. He insisted that children are not mini-adults and, therefore, the education suitable to them at different stages must be carefully thought out. Rousseau writes, for example, that, in education, the “wisest men concentrate on what it is important for men to know without considering what children are in the condition to learn” ([E 34]) and “childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it” ([E 90]).

But, since this chapter is not a general survey of Rousseau’s educational thought but rather a discussion of the connection of his educational thought to democratic theory, I must focus on what Rousseau says about education for democratic citizenship. Unfortunately, it is not clear that the education outlined in Emile is directed at citizenship, let alone democratic citizenship. Rousseau posits that educating the man and the citizen are two wholly opposed projects. “Civil man,” Rousseau writes, “is only a fraction unity dependent on the denominator; his value is determined by his relation to the whole.” On the other hand, “natural man” is “a numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind” ([E 39]). Rousseau then gives examples of Romans and Spartans as exemplary citizens, men and women who were great patriots and took delight in their fellow citizens’ accomplishments without jealousy. Rousseau argues that man and citizen are “necessarily opposed objects” which require “two contrary forms of instruction – the one, public and common; the other, individual and domestic” ([E 40]). Rousseau then dismisses the idea of public education because there is no longer a fatherland (or, he implies, there is no country worthy of a citizen’s patriotic commitment).

Despite claiming that the individual and the citizen are distinct, Rousseau recognized that even the product of a domestic education will become a citizen, and he discusses what kind of citizen Emile will become. As readers discover at the end of Book V when Emile has traveled Europe to examine the variety of political regimes, Emile will take up residence in a country where he can live simply and peacefully. Thus, though Emile may, by necessity, become a citizen of some country, his education can hardly be understood as an education for robust participation in a democratic society.

A further challenge of discussing Rousseau’s work in relation to democracy is that Rousseau would have been unlikely to view himself as a democratic theorist. The word democracy appears only at the end of Emile and even there Rousseau merely notes that “we shall conclude that generally democratic government is suitable for small states, aristocratic government for medium-sized states, and monarchy government for large states” ([E 466]). In The Social Contract – published in the same year as Emile and reflecting ideas similar to the political analysis in Emile ([E 459–67]) – Rousseau makes the same claim. But he goes on to

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3 On p. 465 of the 480 pages in Bloom’s translation.
4 Allan Bloom notes that Emile’s analysis of politics has some notable omissions in comparison with The Social Contract. There is no discussion in Emile about the legislator and civil religion ([E, p. 494, n. 61]).
say there that a pure democracy is an unattainable ideal, even in a small state: “If there were a people of Gods, they would govern themselves democratically. So perfect a Government is not suited to men” (SC III.4.8). Nevertheless, one should not overlook the fact that democracy is the ideal. And Rousseau hardly endorses the large societies for which he says monarchy and aristocracy are suited. Capital cities, in particular, are a frequent target for Rousseau as breeding grounds for vice. Indeed, one could read Rousseau; he deems them saying that life in large countries is so corrupt and debasing, they might as well be governed by a monarchy or aristocracy. Rousseau viewed tyranny as one of the greatest plagues of humanity (E 466) and envisioned societies in which people cared for each other, treated each other as equals. He was a fierce advocate of popular sovereignty – calling for a radical increase in citizens’ participation in public life. Indeed, Rousseau is credited as an early advocate of what is now called “participatory democracy,” a form of governance in which citizens deliberate about the state’s laws and some other important matters. (Advocates of representative democracy, on the other hand, call for the election of officials who deliberate about public policy while representing groups of citizens.) So, there is good reason to treat Rousseau as an advocate for democracy even if he might have seen himself as, more generally, a republican.

In addition to Rousseau’s influence on democratic theory, there is another reason that it is valuable to consider Rousseau in the context of democratic education. Rousseau was highly influential among progressive educational philosophers and theorists who understood themselves to be developing an educational theory appropriate for democracy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these progressives often invoked Rousseau. Indeed, when John Dewey and his daughter Evelyn surveyed progressive educational experiments in Schools of To-Morrow (1915), Rousseau’s name arose often. The Deweys wrote there were a range of practices at the schools, but “most of these points of similarity are found in the views advocated by Rousseau” (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 290). These progressive educators thought that traditional schooling was appropriate for authoritarian regimes. Democracies, on the other hand, required citizens to take initiative rather than passively waiting for others’ commands but democracy also required cooperation – citizens must be able to work with all citizens

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5 In Considerations, Rousseau (somewhat surprisingly to many readers), notes the danger or political revolution and outlines reforms while preserving the monarchy.

6 When Emile is about to begin his life as a young adult in Book V, Jean-Jacques takes him away from Paris and says: “Adieu, then, Paris, celebrated city, city of noise, smoke, and mud, where the women no longer believe in honor and the men no longer believe in virtue. Adieu, Paris. We are seeking love, happiness, innocence. We shall never be far enough away from you” (E 355). In the Plan for a Constitution for Corsica (CC), Rousseau wrote, “If cities are harmful, capitals are even more so. A capital is a pit into which almost the entire nation goes to lose its morals, its laws, its courage, and its freedom . . . From the capital is exhaled a continuous plague which undermines and finally destroys the nation” (CC 132).

7 Progressive educational theorists were explicitly reckoning with the role of education in democracy. It was no accident that Dewey titled his most important work on educational philosophy Democracy and Education (1916). In Chapter 9, Dewey explicitly wrote that nature as aim is “of recent influence” and that, “since no one has stated in the doctrine both its truth and falsity better than Rousseau, we shall turn to him” (1916, p. 112). I have argued elsewhere (Mintz, 2016) that Dewey uses Rousseau as a stand-in for his contemporary child-centered progressives whom he declined to identify explicitly. I discuss Rousseau’s educational legacy among progressives more generally in Mintz (2012).
regardless of ethnic, class, religious, or other differences. Rousseau, they believed, identified a way to cultivate the kind of initiative and independence suited for democratic citizens.

4.3 Emile and the Autonomous and Independent Citizen

Perhaps most striking to Emile’s readers – both past and present – is Emile’s freedom up to age 15. Emile has no classroom, no classmates, no traditional teacher, no set curriculum, no books, and hears no lectures. “Emile will never learn anything by heart” (E 112). He will not be forced to read – “Reading is the plague of childhood and almost the only occupation we know how to give it. At twelve Emile will hardly know what a book is” (E 116). Until the age of at least 12 or 15, he won’t learn languages – “I number the study of languages among the useless parts of education” (E 109). Likewise, until that age it is “ridiculous” to study history. Rousseau notes that when a child studies geography, he may learn to list the names of cities and rivers but has no understanding of the subject: “There is not a single child of ten who can find his way from Paris to Saint-Denis,” a nearby town (E 110).

Rousseau rejected these facets of schooling (which are as common in our own era as they were in his) because he made a set of assumptions about physiological development. He believed that children were not capable of grasping abstract ideas. When learning history, a child may be able to repeat facts but cannot grasp the complex context of those facts – a historical understanding of causes and effects (E 110). When studying foreign languages, a child is simply mapping synonyms onto his native tongue, Rousseau believed.

Rousseau was guided by an ideal about the value of children’s freedom and independence. Books – “the instruments of their greatest misery” (E 116) – are not only filled with ideas young children cannot adequately grasp. They also do something more pernicious: they “teach us to use the reason of others . . . to believe much and never to know anything” (E 125). Rousseau insists that submitting to the authority of others must be assiduously avoided (a topic I discuss in Section 4.4).

Rousseau sometimes called these educational principles the “inactive method” of education. He writes, “usually one gets very surely and quickly what one is not in a hurry to get” (E 117). Elsewhere he writes: “Dare I expose the greatest, the most important, the most useful rule of all education? It is not to

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8 The Deweys wrote, “Education that associates learning with doing will replace the passive education of imparting the learning of others. However well the latter is adapted to feudal societies, in which most individuals are expected to submit constantly and docilely to the authority of superiors, an education which proceeds on this basis is inconsistent with a democratic society where initiative and independence are the rule and where every citizen is supposed to take part in the conduct of affairs of common interest” (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 163). They also wrote, “The conventional type of education which trains children to docility and obedience, to the careful performance of imposed tasks because they are imposed, regardless of where they lead, is suited to an autocratic society . . . Children in school must be allowed freedom so that they will know what its use means when they become the controlling body, and they must be allowed to develop active qualities of initiative, independence, and resourcefulness, before the abuses and failures of democracy will disappear” (pp. 303–04).
gain time but to lose it” (E 93). He also calls this education up until the age of 12 a “purely negative education,” and says, “It consists not at all in teaching virtue or truth but in securing the heart from vice and the mind from error” (E 93). From the earliest pages of Emile, Rousseau emphasizes this message: “What must be done is to prevent anything from being done” (E 41). Rousseau calls for governing without explicit instruction, which he argues is really “doing everything by doing nothing” (E 119).

What the progressive educational philosophers, so deeply committed to devising a new democratic education, would have liked about these ideas is clear. Children are presented with ample opportunities to explore with the freedom and independence appropriate for someone who will be an adult citizen empowered to govern her own life and, with others, society in general. But Rousseau also articulated something else that proved appealing to those educators. Rather than force children to study something that was ill-suited to their development or their interests, one should wait for the child to desire to study it. That is, Rousseau understood the child’s intrinsic motivation to be essential to learning. Forward-thinking educators of Rousseau’s day proposed various ways to engage students in learning. They had dice and card games (just as we do now) to generate students’ interest. Rousseau writes, “What a pity! A means surer than all these, and the one always forgotten, is the desire to learn. Give the child this desire; then let your desks and your dice go. Any method will be good for him” (E 117). Though Jean-Jacques does not teach Emile to read, Rousseau writes, “I am almost certain that Emile will know how to read and write perfectly before the age of ten, precisely because it makes very little difference to me that he knows how before fifteen” (E 117).

Learning takes place when children enjoy an activity or pursue something for the sake of some other goal (E 116). When the child reaches 15 or so, the period of losing time ends. But Rousseau does not believe that one should then proceed to teach in a traditional way (E 172). In Book III, Rousseau outlines a pedagogical strategy to engage Emile in lessons that are now appropriate to his age.

Rather than lecturing the child (or assigning a book on the topic), educators must create an educational experience. Rousseau describes how Jean-Jacques would teach Emile geography and astronomy through a situation where understanding emerges from activity. Jean-Jacques takes Emile to the forest and pretends that they are lost. Emile is tired, hungry, and begins to cry. Jean-Jacques laments the predicament along with him but then notes the position of the sun in the sky. Emile, prompted by a few questions, deduces which direction is north from the shadows, then reasons that he needs to go south to emerge from the forest. Emile concludes, “Astronomy is good for something” (E 181).

9 Lines such as this one appear frequently. For example: “The education of children is a vocation in which one must know how to lose time in order to gain it” (E 141); “Nature’s instruction is late and slow; men’s is almost always premature. In the former case the senses wake the imagination; in the latter the imagination wakes the senses; it gives them a precocious activity which cannot fail to enervate and weaken individuals first and in the long run the species itself” (E 215); “I shall repeat it endlessly: put off, if possible, a good lesson for fear of giving a bad one” (E 96); and “Keep yourself from giving it today if you can without danger put it off until tomorrow” (E 94). See also Rousseau’s critique of parents who are overly eager to have their children learn to speak (E 93).

10 Children must feel “the real and present advantage in either pleasure or utility” (E 116).
Because Rousseau calls for learning in immersive experiences where students discover facts on their own, he has been credited as the father of “experiential education” and “discovery learning.”

Rousseau writes, “let him know something not because you told it to him but because he has understood it himself. Let him not learn science but discover it” (E 168; emphasis added). The educator should not only avoid teaching a lesson directly, he should not even suggest what the child ought to learn (E 179). Rousseau wrote something of this process that would seem familiar to anyone acquainted with contemporary educational theory. Emile should learn to learn rather than acquire knowledge, and he should come to love learning. In studying geography, for example, “the goal is not that he know exactly the topography of the region, but that he grasp the means of learning about it” (E 171). Rousseau elaborates: “The issue is not to teach him the sciences but to give him the taste for loving them and the methods for learning them” (E 172).

Educators are keen to impart lessons to their charges but, Rousseau warns, “our didactic and pedantic craze is always to teach children what they would learn much better by themselves” (E 78). Rousseau recognized an important implication of this approach to pedagogy. Educators must not create an educational experience but then jump in as soon as the youth struggles or errs. One must wait until the youth recognizes them himself: if Emile “never made mistakes, he would not learn so well” (E 171).

Some of Rousseau’s critics from the pedagogical right thought he called for a completely laissez-faire approach to education. Such an interpretation, however, neglects Rousseau’s repeated calls for the tutor to create the conditions under which Emile will be prompted to investigate, just as getting lost in the forest is the occasion for the study of geography and astronomy. When Rousseau writes, for example, that the educator should not even suggest what Emile ought to learn because “it is up to him to desire it, to seek it, to find it” he advises next that “it is up to you to put it within his reach, skillfully to give birth to this desire and to furnish him with the means of satisfying it” (E 179).

Some of Rousseau’s critics from the pedagogical left who consider the teacher’s authority to be a threat to the student noticed that Rousseau was anything but laissez-faire and warned that Jean-Jacques’ hidden agenda introduced a pernicious manipulation that undermined Rousseau’s aim of educating an independent, free person. Rousseau, however, saw no inconsistency in maintaining that Emile’s tutor ought to be in complete control while Emile believed himself to be completely free. He confronted the matter head on:

Let [your pupil] always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of

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11 Concerning the importance of the use of the senses in children’s learning, Rousseau was particularly influenced by Condillac. See Roosevelt (2021, pp. 101–07).
12 Rousseau also writes, the governor “ought to give no precepts at all; he ought to make them be discovered” (E 52).