

Education, Sophistry, and the Polis, according to Plato and Hume

By Jack Iles



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Kenneth Cardwell, Br., Advisor

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Preface

It is bad form to tease and toy with a reader who is so charitable with both his or her time and attention as to direct it towards this sophomoric endeavor. For that reason, the end point of our argument will be laid out, plainly, here at the onset. This paper is political. It aims to elucidate, but not entirely solve, the current pistological-political crisis America currently finds itself in. On one end of the spectrum is a force of sophistry that is presently unbridled, and on the other side is an arrogant and dividing force of new Gnosticism. This paper aims to show how two incredibly brilliant, opposed, and relevant thinkers, hold in common the idea and importance of a tradition for the polis or state, in terms of education.

Plato and Hume – idealist and materialist – both recognized the need for a shared culture, sense of duty, and education, taken together as a tradition, while additionally fending off attempts to usurp that tradition, here labeled sophistry. These two philosophers are both claimed relevant for varying reasons. Plato, because of the historic context of his writing shows that the polis Athens during and following the Peloponnesian war, is eerily similar to our current state¹; Hume, because of the kinship our liberalism and philosophic tradition our state shares with his thinking. Not to mention the shared looming threat of regime change, at the hands of the Spartans or Jacobinists and Reformations, respectively. Gramsci, and Nietzsche before him, both demonstrate the importance of cultural hegemony, and its devastating counter force. Our aim, ultimately, is to validate a particular and traditional mode of educating as the proper mode for rearing a stable body politic.

¹ An appeal to reader, doubtless made numerous times before our own, but valid nonetheless.

Preliminary Remarks

Our paper, the subject of which is education, depends on two possible presuppositions. Naturally, these presuppositions should be laid down before anything else is said. The first is that education requires a body of knowledge, *i.e.*, some truth, of which things can be taught. The second possible assumption is that there is a mode or process of thinking, *i.e.*, reasoning, in which it is possible to arrive at knowledge. While these two are intricately intertwined, let us consider, examples of them individually. Eating leafy greens will make you healthy, so we should educate kids to eat green things. Likewise for the second: because it is important to be healthy, we should teach kids to read the nutrition label of their food, and think about what they are eating. Notice also how the second example relies on a premise: that it is important to be healthy. That premise is the truth to which the reasoning is directed. Both presuppositions rely on some truth.

These two presumptions do have consequences. An admittance of either brings along with it the admittance of the possibility of sophistry. What we mean by this is that either premise, if considered in the negative, permits sophistry. For example, if there is a body of knowledge that we consider to be true, then there must also be so in the negative sense, *viz.*, there must be verisimilitude, or the semblance of truth. Further, if we consider that there is a right way to reason, then in the negative, there must also be a wrong way to reason. Sophistry is then, among other things, the assertion of verisimilitude or employment of invalid ways of thinking or directing reason.

Education, naturally, must also concern itself with sophistry, as sophistry is the natural enemy to a proper education. The focus of our discussion is to examine how

education allows one to identify the sophist. This will be achieved by examining what two of history's greatest thinkers, Plato and Hume, what have to say about education, epistemology, and sophistry.

Yet before turning to our main discussion, let us examine the historical context of the sophist. Sophist comes from the Ancient Greek word for wisdom: *sophia*. In order to be influential in the democratic city of Athens, one would need to be think critically and use that reasoning to influence fellow statesmen, one would need to be rhetorically inclined. And in order to learn these skills, one would need a teacher. Yet Athens did not offer any sort of higher public education, instead education was sought out from wise men, literally: sophists. Yet as word spread that a fortune could be made in Athens from teaching the youth, the sophist became a person of contempt – something of a swindler, so to speak. This is clear in much of Plato's writings and Aristophanes's *Clouds*. Also clear is that sophists are very handsomely paid teachers. In Plato's *Greater Hippias*, Hippias brags about making “much more than a hundred and fifty minas in a short time” (282e), and in *Alcibiades* Zeno charges a hundred minas for one of his lessons (119a)². In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates crafts the metaphor that the sophist is to the politician as the pastry baker is to the doctor, and that “pastry baking has put on the mask of medicine, and pretends to know the foods that are best for the body” (463b ff). And in the dialogue named after the sophist, Plato writes, “the sophist hides in the darkness of non being” (*Sophist* 254a), where the light of being is considered truth. Hence, the sophist hides in falsehood, verisimilitude.

² One drachma equals 100 mina. A drachma a day seems to be the average pay for a skilled worker, and enabled him to maintain a small family (Thucydides 612). The reader is encouraged to do the math themselves.

We can begin to form something of a composite of the sophist. The sophist is a paid teacher, who is unconcerned with truth and perpetuates the semblance of truth, or falsehood. This verisimilitude has detrimental effects on the body politic. Additionally, the sophist arises alongside education, as was shown with Athens and considered as education in the negative sense at our onset. With this understanding of the sophist, and the art of sophistry, we may begin to examine education, and how it attempts to combat sophistry.

Plato

What does it mean to know something, or to have knowledge? How is a city to be governed? How does Plato define the sophist, and how are all these things related? We will search for answers to these questions in Plato's timeless *Republic*.

In the *Republic*, a good chunk of ink is spent regarding how a theoretical city's guardians are to be educated. The guardians are to have "the most freedom," (374e) and their role in the city is to guard it like a dog from external forces, and internal sophistry. The guardians must judge anything as "friend or enemy" and "must be a lover of learning and wisdom" (376b-c). Socrates asks, if "philosophy, spirit, speed, and strength must all be combined in the nature of anyone who is to be a fine and good guardian of our city... then how are we to bring him up and educate him³?" (376c-d). The guardians of the city are to be educated as to exhibit a specific aretē, – same aretē dogs exhibit – and this is the excellence required by their role in the city.

To the ancient Greeks, *cosmos* (κόσμος) literally means, "order, duty, good order, good behavior, a set form of state or government, the world or universe" (Liddell and Scott, 389). A well-ordered government is a reflection of a well-ordered soul and a well-ordered universe. A well-ordered city, like the one Socrates is constructing, is to have a cobbler who is an excellent cobbler, a weaver who is an excellent weaver, and a guardian who is an excellent guardian. Here lies the reason for the guardians to have the most freedom in the city. It is not an exploitative freedom over the producers of the city, but a freedom from the work of producing. Further, the guardians do not actually have private property. Instead

³ Although we aim to progress through Plato's *Republic* chronologically, we want to hear make a point that Socrates himself makes clear much later in the text, "you mutn't think that what I've said applies any more to men than it does women who are born with the appropriate natures" (540c).

they actually hold everything communally, like the subsequent Joachimites. Later in the text Socrates claims, “the guardians must be kept away from all other crafts so as to be the craftsmen of the city’s freedom” (395c). Hence why the city’s freedom is twofold: freedom from the subjection of another city, and freedom from internal falsehood. The freedom from falsehood is important, because, “to be false to one’s soul about the things that are, to be ignorant and to have and hold falsehood there, is what everyone would least of all accept, for everyone hates falsehood in that place most of all” (382b). Because the well-ordered city is a larger reflection of the individual, the same regarding falsehood can be predicated of the city and the individual. Naturally this calls into question Socrates’ noble lie, which will be examined shortly.

Returning to our main thread, the cobbler is a cobbler by nature. Not necessarily personal election, yet personal election would lead the cobbler to elect to a profession in line with his or her nature. All non-guardian and guardian roles in the city harmonize together like the cosmos. Yet Adeimantus, one of Socrates’ interlocutors, will later point out, “The city really belongs to [the guardians] yet they derive no good from it” (419a). To which Socrates replies: “we aren’t aiming to make any group outstandingly happy, but to make the city as a whole so... We take ourselves, to be fashioning the happy city, not picking out a few people happy people” (420b-c). Although, in the same breath, Socrates also suggests “it wouldn’t be surprising if these people were happiest just as they are.” While this brief digression may seem frivolous, it offers great insight into understanding much of Plato’s reasoning through Socrates. Reasoning that may strike contemporary readers as elitist, and thus reasoning that may cause contemporary readers to conclude

that Socrates is inherently wrong. Additionally, recall the reason for Socrates' discussion⁴: an answer to "What is justice?," sought by proposing that justice in a city is easier to find, simply because it is larger, than justice in an individual (369a), as well as being a response to the proposed relative definition of justice produced by the sophist Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus' definition is called relative because it quite literally is. According to Thrasymachus, "justice is the advantage of the stronger" (343c). So Socrates, in proposing to look for justice in the city, could easily argue, the well-ordered theoretical city is not to be taken literally, but as an expansion of the well-ordered individual, and that within the individual there is hierarchy of freedom.

Additionally, the early mentioned noble lie supports our claim that the city's hierarchy is not actually elitist. The noble lie (414e *ff.*) gives purpose and reason to the citizens of the city. It both makes them, "plan on its [the city's] behalf and defend it as their mother," and makes the citizens "brothers." The lie also encourages a two way mobility of the citizens to a class fitting of their nature, not birth. The progeny of guardians may be better suited as a craftsmen, or vice-versa. All of this is to, "make them care more for the city and each other" (415d), yet it is still a lie, or verisimilitude.

Socrates describes the gods as "in every way free from falsehood" (382e), but also sets out to ensure that, "our guardians will be as god-fearing and godlike as human beings can be" (385c). If to be free from falsehood is to be godlike, yet the guardians are reared on a "useful falsehood," (414c) then how can we claim the guardians to be godlike? Is the noble lie not sophistry as we defined sophistry at the onset? Especially if holding falsehood

⁴ Recall, also, the partial reason for Plato's writing. Set during the Peloponnesian war, Thrasymachus' justice should remind the reader of The Melian Dialogue, how Athens acted, and how Athens expected to be treated by the approaching Spartans.

in one's soul is the least desirable thing of all. It seems as if the only solution to our discord is that because a higher and more harmonic unity is reached within the city, the unity itself must be more godlike than being free from falsehood. What we are about to assert is speculative, but it seems to be right, according to Plato and Socrates: sophistry is to be permitted, if it achieves a unity or order not achievable otherwise. Naturally then, sophistry that divides, the counter force to unifying, is not to be permitted by any means. It appears sometimes dissonance is simply a higher form of resonance.

Having a thorough understanding now of the the guardians will play in their city in leading and protecting it, we return to the answer to Socrates' question of how the guardians are to be educated, "physical training for bodies and music and poetry for the soul⁵" (376e). Our focus will be directed towards the soul's education. Music and poetry are taken to include stories, of which it is suggested by Socrates that there are two kinds: true stories and false stories. Adeimantus and Socrates discuss at length the content of these stories, and the style of stories to be used in education. It breaks down that of stories, their content may be true or false, and their style may be an imitation or a narrative. Socrates notes, "imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought" (395d). This is, of course, to be further developed by Aristotle in the form of habits. It is then concluded that of the poets, "only the pure imitator of a decent person" (397d) will be permitted into the city. The stories taught are to serve as models as to how one is act.

Music, like poetry, is examined and two conclusions are drawn. First, "because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul... if someone is properly educated

⁵ In other places: mind, *e.g.*, 403d.

in music and poetry it, it makes him graceful.” And second, “since he has the right distastes, he’ll praise fine things, receive them into his should, and, become fine and good. He’ll rightly object to what is shameful,” (401e-402a), *viz.*, sophistry. An education in music then serves as a vessel to learn harmonic things. Again, recall the Hellenistic idea of harmony and order, cosmic, in the city, and in someone’s soul (402d). An idea of noble harmony will counter ignoble sophistry. Having established harmony in the individual soul, Socrates and Glaucon briefly discuss the role of *erôs*, or passions and desires. While not directly here linked as the passion necessary for education, the dots are easy to connect. Having received an education on beautiful harmonies, the individual will be drawn to one whose soul and body are harmonious, and through moderation, begin to imitate the harmonious other. The parallels to true friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* need not be stated.

Thus concludes the education of the soul or mind. Recall our suggestion that the freedom pursued by the guardians is a two-fold freedom. The education described above will, according to Socrates, be best to foster the philosophic nature of the guardians to be defenders and lovers of their way of life in the city. Yet an additional education is needed to provide the means to defend that way of life from internal falsehood. A falsehood which is perpetuated by the sophist. We suggest that it is not an accident this secondary education follows Plato’s cave allegory. The conversation begins its transition to the secondary form of education with a metaphoric defense of true philosophy (490b) as erotic love for learning and begetting of truth and understanding. The defense of philosophy follows Plato’s beautiful ship as state metaphor (488 *ff.*).

Those whose philosophic nature has been corrupted, and their striking of “false notes” brings about the current reputation of philosophy as “vicious” and “useless” (489d

ff.). Note the employment of “false notes.” The corrupted philosophic soul employs a false harmony, compared to the truly philosophic. The corrupting agent of the philosophic souls and the polis is explicitly named by Socrates as the sophist, “certain young people are actually corrupted by sophists” (492a). The nature of the sophist is elaborated upon, “its is among these men that we find the ones who do the greatest evils to cities and individuals... they lead lives are inappropriate and untrue” (495b-c). Consider how the corrupt philosophic nature leaves lady philosophy desolate, and a true philosophic nature begets truth and understanding. Socrates states the problem plainly, “the majority cannot be philosophic” (494a) and of the philosophic minority, “only a very small group consort with philosophy in a way that’s worthy of her” (496b). How then, is a city to be governed if the majority is resentful of the philosophic minority, and the majority of the philosophic are actually sophists?

To answer this Socrates begins the true philosophic education, a secondary education, something comparable to our contemporary collegiate education, that can only be begun once *erôs*, through music and poetry, has been moderated to drive the soul towards what is harmonious, beautiful, and good. Socrates suggests that of the guardians, there will be a small group who’s intellectual attributes and stable character give them the right to rule as philosopher-kings. We now turn our attention, skipping over the allegory of the cave, to the education of the philosopher-kings. Socrates begins the new thread of thought by asking which subjects lead the soul to true philosophy (521c-d). Glaucon wonders if the subjects could be related to music and poetry, yet Socrates reminds Glaucon those “educated the guardians to habits” (522a), as we argued earlier.

Socrates suggests that there is a “common thing that every craft, every type of thought, and every science uses and is among the first compulsory subjects for everyone. In short, number and calculation” (522c). We will here take a catalog of the four subjects Socrates proposes, as fitting for philosophy, as well as why these subjects. The first subject is calculation and arithmetic, which “lead us towards truth,” and is a necessary subject of study in order to become rational (525b). Geometry is second, because it “compels the soul to study being,” and “draws the soul towards truth and produces philosophic thought” (526e-527b). Third is solid geometry, as the natural progression from the secondary subject “that deals with plane surfaces” (528d). The fourth, and final, subject is astronomy, because “we consider the decorations in the sky to be the most beautiful and most exact of visible things” (529d). Yet just as music and poetry are both the vessel from which harmony and habit could be delivered, these four subjects are taught for the mode in which they induce thought. Meaning, just as geometry is described, as producing philosophic thought, so do the other four subjects, *i.e.*, they produce a mode of critical thinking in which the conclusions are well reasoned and undeniable – the conclusions are true. All these subjects are the necessary precursor to dialectics, “the power of dialectic could reveal it [truth itself] only to someone experienced in the subjects we’ve described” (532b-533a).

It is the journey of dialectics that permits release from bonds [of the cave] (532b). For our readers unfamiliar, or forgetful, of philosophy’s greatest allegory, we will provide a concise account. Further our interpretation of the allegory is how Socrates himself tells us, seemingly without being ironic, to interpret.

The allegory of the cave begins Book VII and is said to explain “the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature” (514a). We are asked to imagine prisoners,

lacking freedom and immobile. Prisoners chained up since birth, deep in the bellows of a cave. The prisoners have their gaze fixed, straight ahead, and are unable to look left or right. A fire – behind, and beyond the realm of gaze for the prisoners – casts light onto a wall, which occupies the fixed view of the prisoners. Then, from behind a little wall, in between the prisoners and the fire, there is a parade of puppeteers whose puppets extend up over the wall, and intercept the light of the fire, casting long shadows that the prisoners see. These shadows of artificial objects are all the prisoners know and understand. These shadows are all the prisoners' hold to be true. Now, imagine one prisoner is released from his or her bonds, and turns to see the artificial objects. Instead of the shadow of a horse, the prisoner comprehends the puppet of a horse. The prisoner also views the fire, the source of light, for the first time. It is not long before the prisoner makes his or her way up out the cave, and into the world beyond. The new light is blinding, and the prisoner dwells in the shadows while the eyes adjust. Eventually the prisoner, hiding in the shadow of a tree, is able to see the tree itself or a horse itself – not just the shadow or imitation of a horse. With enough time, the liberated prisoner is able to gaze upon the sun itself, the font of light, which “provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he used to see” (516c). As a trope, Plato frequently employs the sun. Here it is “the form of the good... the last thing to be seen.” “The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling... the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul [or, dialectics] to the intelligible realm” (517b-c).

Socrates' interlocutors, and us the readers, are told to interpret this allegory as suggesting our visible realm is a reflection of the intelligible realm of forms. This is

essentially Plato's theory of forms. In the forms lies true knowledge, and in the forms lies true goodness – in the forms lies truth. This may, or may not be, in line with Plato's unwritten teaching. We simple do not know. Yet this is how Plato's Socrates, who seems to be speaking here in earnestness, wants the myth to be interpreted. Truth, for Plato, exists in the realm of intelligible. Consider again why geometry is studied, "it compels the soul to study being." The study of being itself. The visible realm is in a constant state of becoming and change, yet what is intelligible is static and being. Further, there is a harmony, order, and perfection, which we understand the Greeks to hold in high regard, of the intelligible realm, which or knowledge of harmony in music and sensible things drives us to pursue.

Perhaps a final recapitulation of what has been said is necessary. In order that a city be harmonious, its free citizens need to be educated. And educated rightly. There are citizens free in the sense that they are free from the labors of production, but are still bound to the city. Be it bond to protect the city's freedom be either a) preventing an attack from an outsider or b) preventing the corrupting nature of falsehood. In order to defend the city well, the guardians must be educated in what we can clearly see to be the early forms of liberal arts. This education is a precursor to conducting philosophy, whose concern is the knowledge of truth and being. Truth and being which reside in the intelligible realm, hence Plato's theory of forms. People who seem philosophic, yet are not true philosophers are sophists. It is also exceptionally difficult to distinguish the two, yet we understand some defining characteristics, *viz.*, the sophist is concerned with verisimilitude and nonbeing, which is corrupting and bad for both the soul of the individual and the soul of the city, and creates discord.

Ultimately, it is suggested by Plato that a city takes all types, productive and protective occupations, to be well ordered. And those whose nature, not birthright, is philosophic, and therefore fitting to lead and protect, are to be educated in the above-mentioned way. As such an education will foster a love for the city as it is, and a love for the community and its members. The counter to such an education is sophistry, either brought into the city by outsiders looking to cash in and corrupt, as happened historically in Athens, or arising internally from disregard for the city, as embodied by Alcibiades.

Hume

Turning now to our modern philosopher, Hume, let us first examine his treatment of our presuppositions, *viz.*, that either education requires something can be taught or there is proper way to reason or mode of thought of which is to be taught.

In his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Hume examines how it is that we reason. In doing so, Hume reduces cause-effect relationships to nothing but a habit of mind, writing, “one [effect] even follows another [cause]; but we never can observe any tie between them,”(Hume 360). What we come to understand as cause and effect is nothing other than experience or habit. As in, one habitually expects a particular effect to follow from a corresponding cause. Yet this radical empiricism causes Hume to divide all objects of human inquiry into two kinds, “relations of ideas and matters of fact. Of the first kind are the sciences of geometry, algebra, and arithmetic; and in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain” (Hume 322). Note that relations of ideas does not include cause and effect, rather, Hume writes, “all reasoning concerning matter of fact seem to be found on the relation of cause and effect” (Hume 323). When describing matters of fact, they are “not ascertained in the same manner [as relations of ideas]; nor is their evidence of truth, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so comfortable to reality” (Hume 322).

A brief note on how Hume is able to say this. As a materialist, Hume believes and effectively argues that people are born a clean slate and shaped by impressions received from experience. Additionally, ‘fact,’ comes from Scholasticism. Before the seventeenth century ‘fact’ was an English rendering of the Latin ‘Factum.’ Factum means something like

a deed, or an action, and in Scholastic Latin it is *an event or an occasion*. Thus when Hume is referring to matters of fact, he quite literally means events impressed onto the mind. All of this leads Hume to conclude his text by writing the following regarding other books, “Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion” (Hume 430).

The philosophic reader should here be rattled. To call all that is neither scientific nor mathematical sophistry is a lofty accusation. And it is such an accusation that awoke Kant from his “dogmatic slumber,” and caused him to write the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But what does it mean for us if all of speculative philosophy is rebranded as sophistry? Is there then no body of knowledge of which can be taught? Shelving the counter-argument that Hume’s assertion would itself be an example of sophistry, and by his own reasoning, cast to the flames – are we able to find an alternative way to talk about education?

The answer, at least to Hume, seems to be yes. In his essay “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” Hume claims that the philosopher merely need to distinguish what is a chance from what is a cause in things concerning human affairs. Hume writes, “what depends upon a few persons is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to chance... what arises from a great number, may often be accounted for by determinate and known causes” (Hume 112). To Hume, if there is to be a science regarding human nature, then the actions of man must have the same regularity of the physical world, least it be a mere chance. Essentially, things are to be descriptive, not prescriptive. We have here an example of what Hume in the closing of his *Inquiry* “experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence.” How Hume conducts himself philosophically in the essay will serve two

purposes. On the other hand, serve as an example of how to avoid sophistry. Avoid sophistry, at least according to Hume. Unhappily, Hume is not as explicit with the make up of a quality education as Plato is, but he does draw the same connection between the politics and education that is found in the *Republic*.

“Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” along with occasional references to Hume’s *Inquiry* and his *Treatise* will make up the bulk of our examination regarding how the sophist is poisonous to the state, as now derived from Hume’s thinking. Yet we will also then turn to briefly address Hume’s Is-Ought problem. Our examination of the problem is to follow our reading of “the Rise and Progress.”

This relationship of politics and education is immediately clear in the first point Hume makes, “it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people, unless that people enjoy the blessings of a free government” (116). Security, provided by a free government, regulates property and punishment (118). And it is through this security that man is able to become curious, and the curiosity leads to knowledge (119). The leisure provided by security leads man to pursue education. Moreover, Hume lumps together “experience and education,” in the same utterance, suggesting they are synonymous. Experience and education are necessary to pass judgment and be critical of a ruling magistrate (116). Should we take Hume’s assertion be true, then it explains how both education and sophistry were able to flourish in Athens’s democratic government. Curiosity, arising as an accident of security, permits the possibility of education. Since curiosity leads to knowledge, it and therefore also leads to things that can be taught. Yet the requirements for curiosity, or by its other name “the love of knowledge,” are “youth,

leisure, *education*, genius, and example, to make it govern any person” (114). It is then clear that the arts and sciences, which arise from knowledge, are the ends of education to Hume.

The second point Hume makes on the progress of education is “nothing is more favorable to learning, than a number of neighboring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy” (120). The idea here is simple, “the divisions into small states are favorable to learning, by stopping the progress of authority as well as that of power” (121). In this manner, there is a market place of ideas from state-to-state without the oppression of ideas that naturally follows from extended governments. That oppressive governments are detrimental to the progress of education is even found in Plato, as the sentencing of Socrates, and Polemarchus of the *Republic*, to drink hemlock. Yet Hume is clever to point out that it is not only extended governments that can retard progress. Blind submission to philosophic traditions can have the same effect. Hume writes that truth is to be found in nature, “not in the several schools where they supposed she [truth] must necessarily be found” (124)⁶. It is safe to assume Hume would consider these philosophic traditions sophistry, as they do not follow the mode of his experimental reasoning and hinder progress through their fraudulent authority regarding philosophic matters.

Hume’s third observation is perhaps of the most interest to us. Hume writes, “though the only proper nursery of these noble plants [arts and science] be a free state... a republic is most favorable to the growth of the science, and civilized monarchy to the polite arts” (124-5). Our interest is found here because it is where sophistry, as we defined it at the onset, makes itself most evident. This is clear with Hume writing,

⁶ Hume’s “Superstition and Enthusiasm” is worth mentioning here. In the essay Hume addresses the affects of false religions on reason and man. Hume chides the enthusiasts. Although they are friends of civil liberty, their gnostic like arrogance leads to civil disorder.

“in the republic the candidate for office must look downwards to gain the suffrages of the people; in a monarchy, they must turn their attention upwards, to court the good graces and favor of the great. To be successful in the former way, it is necessary for a man to make himself useful by his industry, capacity, or knowledge: to be prosperous in the latter way, it is requisite for him to render himself agreeable by his wit, complaisance, or civility. A strong genius succeeds best in republics; a refined taste in monarchies” (127).

A brief note is necessary. While the arts and sciences may only arise in a free state, through mutual commerce and policy (which is Hume’s second observation), those ends of education may be imported to other states whose modes of governing may be other than a republic. Further, should a state be wholly republic, then it seems as if sophistry would have little influence in the state. The flattery of the sophist (*Gorgias* 463b ff.) would be held in low regard compared to the inventiveness of the industrious man. Hence if sophistry is to be truly abolished, then there would need to be a true republic. Yet because a prerequisite for a true republic is equality of opportunity, then there must then be true equality of opportunity to avoid sophistry. For as long as one is able to use flattery to gain power and influence, sophistry will continue to grow like weeds⁷.

There is a fourth and final observation Hume makes. The observation reads, “when the arts and sciences come to perfection in any state, from that moment they naturally, or rather necessarily, decline, and seldom or never revive in that nation where they formerly flourished” (136). Briefly, let us consider the following: if the arts and sciences are the ends of education, and the ends are no longer flourishing, does that mean that education itself is likewise lacking in flourish? And should that be the case, what would a nonflourishing education look like? Have we any examples? It seems as if such a

⁷ Hume has repeatedly employed the metaphor of the arts and sciences as flowers. Naturally sophistry is then the weeds of the garden.

connection may be more in the realm of chance than of cause, and we should then be hesitant to make such an assertion, yet it is still worth considering.

Just as we earlier drew a distinction between the true philosopher and the sophist according to Plato, we may do so according to Hume as well. Hume himself defines sophistry as everything other than the way of ideas or his experimental reasoning. Nevertheless, we can extend Hume's definition to include how we defined sophistry at our onset. All that needs to be considered is the value of the arts in monarchies and their like modes of government. It is for this reason that at the start of his essay Hume suggests almost immediately, "it is more easy to account for the rise and progress of commerce in any kingdom than for that of learning; and a state, which should apply itself to the encouragement of one [commerce], would be more assured of success than one which should cultivate the other [learning]" (114). Because the threat of sophistry is so real, and so dangerous to the body politic, commercial stability should be the end aim of the state.

When writing on the love of learning, or curiosity, Hume – like Plato – remarks that the majority is not philosophic. Rather the majority has avarice as their universal passion (114). With this particular insight, it is no wonder the sophist of Athens would and could charge so much for their lessons. What is comparatively differing in Hume's writing to Plato's, is the redirecting of passions. Where Plato relied on music and poetry to realign passions of man to better the philosophic ends of the city; Hume redirects the end aim of the city to be more inline with the passions of man. The perpetuation of commerce is, to this day, the current aim of the state. Should this claim seem unsubstantiated, note that it is commerce that, according to Hume, keeps the states from warring with each other and permits the exchanging of the arts and sciences. Further, a system of government is

essential to conduct economic affairs. And as Hobbes shows, the final condition of social order is a system of government. To this, Hume writes, “the public instructions of politicians, and the private education of parents, contribute to the giving us a sense of honor and duty in the strict regulation of our actions with regard to the properties of others” (*Treatise* 3.2.6). While Plato’s guardians live communally, private property is essential to Hume. As it is private property that gives rise to a system of order that allows the state to conduct itself in a way both aligned to the passions of man, and fettering the passions of man. And it is with this sense of honor and duty that we will turn to address the Is-Ought problem.

The problem is often, mistakenly summarized as, suggesting you cannot derive an *ought* from an *is*. The argument is that an *ought* relation is not contained analytically in an *is* relation. Yet the above passage seems to suggest that a well reasoned ought can be found. Is “the regulation of our actions,” not an *ought*? *i.e.*, the implication is that our actions ought to be regulated. Hume: “a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new [*ought*] relation can be a deduction from others [*is relations*], which are entirely different from it” (3.1.1). While it may seem contradictory, a reason can be given that leads to an *ought*, as Hume does so himself above, and elsewhere in his writing. Above, Hume’s *ought* is derived from the fact that it already *is*. In fact, much of Hume’s *ought* producing comes from examining the causes of what already *is*, the continual perpetuation of the *is* is itself an *ought*. Essentially, the implied premise is, what *is ought* to remain so. Just as experience and education are necessary to pass judgment on the magistrate, so are experience and education necessary to say how things *are*. Hence, if one really wished to

speak in terms of *ought*, then the only none sophistic *ought*, according to Hume, would be in the past tense, as in: it *was not* as it *ought* to have been.

With all this said, we may now synthesis our understanding of Hume to address our question of how an education fends off sophistry in the state. If the state's aims are commercial, and the state is governed as a genuine republic, which requires equality of opportunity, sophistry cannot arise. Further, so long as some form of traditional values and rules are upheld and promoted by parents and legislatures, as descriptive and not prescriptive, there can be no sophistic discussion. Should sophistry rear its head in the form of rhetorical flattery, then the philosopher is needed to distinguish what is a chance from a cause, and to point out those impossible and device *oughts* to the body politic.

Conclusion

A few concluding remarks are in order to give weight to all that has been said. It seems as if our definition of the sophistry is consistent with our two very different philosophers. Both place the sophist in a realm of none being, and hold the sophist to be dividing and damaging to the body politic. Plato, has the sophist as absent from the light of reason; Hume, as peddling *oughts* and flattery. Further, as we said at the start of our examination, these two philosophers are of the most relevance to us. Plato found himself writing in a time of extreme relativism, which is not unlike our own. The very definition of justice that Socrates refutes, which is one of the main focal points of the dialogue, is that justice is the advantage of the stronger. Additionally, the focus on monetary gain is so extreme in Plato's Athens that it fuels the sophists. Hume because of his great insights and as being a founding figure in the analytic tradition. While Hume is right to suggest that our passions direct our reason – and consequently, Plato is wrong to think our passions can so faithfully be redirected – it is wholly impossible for a republic to avoid sophistry, if avarice is maintained as the primary human end. Because, as was shown in our examination of Hume, inequality leads to a mode of governing similar to that of the monarchies, in that inequalities arise. Through these cracks of inequalities grow the weeds of sophistry.

Still, it is right that the city's total end aim be commerce, but the individual, particularly the city's guardian's, needs some semblance of national pride to combat the sophist. Hume and Plato share this idea also. Hume suggests it is up to the politicians and the parents to impart a sense of duty. Plato suggests a noble lie.

Yet there is a great similarity between Plato's noble lie and Hume's treatment of the Is-Ought problem. Glaucon points out that it is unlikely many people would believe the lie

initially, but perhaps the children and grandchildren would, and that ultimately the matter is best left to “wherever tradition takes it” (415d). Where Plato must rely on a noble lie, Hume’s *ought* comes from an *is*. Plato’s city is constructed, so the tradition needs to be fabricated, but to Hume, the tradition already is. Both philosophers seem sophistic only so as to establish and enforce a tradition and duty, not to be critical of induce instability and change. If nothing else this should show us two things. First, that the line between philosopher and sophist is the thinnest possible line, but it is clear that the philosopher defends the traditions of the body politic from change arising internal. Second, that political stability and unity depends on a sense of duty imparted through that tradition.

Still, change is inevitable, and when occurring naturally, not necessarily sophistic. However to truthfully predict that change – to truthfully arrive at a how things *are going to be* and *ought to be* – a sense of tradition is still needed. Just as you cannot grasp the future path of a projectile from an instantaneous moment, but need to see the trajectory of the object up to that point, neither can you direct a body politic from detached and speculative theories and arguments. Without a proper sense of tradition, a gnostic like faith in positivism leads the would-be guardian to turn from philosophy to sophistry.

How then is order and duty seems to be imparted? Plato is right to suggest, through music, poetry, myths, and their modern equivalent: the novel. It is here that our paper returns to its main subject of education. A study of canonical works, of the great books, imparts to the student a sense of tradition and a mode of thinking, which can combat the sophist whose Protean shape changes with the body politic. This faith in tradition is, perhaps Kierkegaardian, but it seems to fitting. Through the study of great works, one is able to flirt with greatness. One is able to learn the heroism of Alexander, the reasoning of

Aristotle, and the piety of Monica. One is able to see, nearly first hand, the greatness of man and strive to that greatness – instead of lowly monetary gain. Through a study of canonical works, one is able to actually achieve the two requisites – a knowledge of self in the general and particular sense, and a sense of duty or love for the state and its tradition – to fend off sophistry according to both Plato and Hume. Plato's guardians are raised like dogs to protect the city from the sophists. Let the individual pursue their monies, but let them also be proud of their state, lest it otherwise be subjected to sophistry and degrade into unjust tyranny. For in such a mode of educating, the producers may learn to take pride in their state, and turn their focus to a meaningful and natural end, due to avarice. And in this way, a respect for each part in the polis as a whole prevents nasty elitism from arising. For as Plato writes in his *Republic*, "it [is] hard to find anything better than that which has developed over a long period" (376e), and there are few social constructions that have been around longer, and even fewer better fitting, than the classic great books education.

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