

# THE CONTEXTUAL COMPREHENSION OF PLATO'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC

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**Abstract:** In *The Republic*, Plato presents a compelling educational framework aimed at realizing the fullest potential of the soul. He argues that this system is rooted in a societal structure based on innate capabilities, which differentiates the educational paths for Guardians and Philosopher-Kings. Despite the enduring influence of his framework and principles like compulsory education, Plato ultimately reveals that the myth of metals embedded in one's soul is a mere fabrication that should be propagated for state purposes. This raises critical questions: Why does Platonic education remain relevant today? What contextual understandings justify the continued application of this framework despite its acknowledged flaws? This essay seeks to illuminate the apparent shortcomings of the Platonic system and, drawing on scholarly research, explore the contexts that lend it legitimacy. Ultimately, it concludes that while certain aspects of Plato's educational philosophy may seem outdated, its emphasis on character development, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge continues to resonate in modern educational discourse, suggesting that elements of his framework can still inform and enhance contemporary educational practices.

**Keywords:** Education; Myth of metals; Virtue; Ethics; Capabilities; Civic responsibility

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Plato on Education in *The Republic*

The genesis of numerous educational policies and systems can be located in ancient Greece, the wellspring of Western civilization, where formal education first took root [1]. Plato's perspectives on education, as articulated in *The Republic*, offer enduring insights into the challenges that contemporary educators grapple with: those of justice, equality, and truth-seeking [2]. Raised in Athens and witnessing the contrasting societal structures of Athens and Sparta, Plato's integral ideas hold considerable significance now and then.

An event central to Plato's understanding of education was the Athens' defeat by Sparta; Afterall, both Socrates and Plato, as war veterans, recognized the inadequacy of existing educational methods in fortify citizens' body and soul for a just and undefeated state. In this way, many of his view is given. Unlike philosophers who prioritized education for individual well-being and happiness, Plato posited education as a fundamental instrument for a stable and prosperous state, empowering citizens to contribute effectively to the collective [3].

From this premise arise three influential concepts in Plato's educational philosophy on warrior-soldiers, which most citizens are perceived to become. First, Plato underscores the critical role of physical fitness, termed "gymnastics," as a universal requirement for all citizens. This emphasis reflects his aspiration to cultivate a stronger military. Second, he advocates for education through allegories, which, despite their fictional nature, serve to instill loyalty to rulers or foster critical thinking skills essential for future leaders [4]. Similarly, the "noble lie" or "myth of metals", being a typical example of false belief, as described by Plato, aimed to promote social harmony and acceptance of the social hierarchy [5]. Third, Plato asserts that musical education is crucial for nurturing the soul and fostering communication and collaborative abilities among citizens [4].

Plato also establishes key educational principles, including advocating for gender equality in educational opportunities and asserting that the state should raise children as a public good, ensuring access to free education for all [6]. Equally importantly, he recognizes the significance of vocational training in preparing citizens to serve the state, as it is the idea of God, and a virtue to their existence [3].

Above, scholars today find these ideals of Plato applied in countries like China and Korea. Although the education of Guardians and rulers differed in specifics, the aforementioned ideals remained constant and influential. Plato envisioned education as a lifelong pursuit, divided into early education and advanced studies, with those lacking a refined soul facing limitations in their development.

### 1.2 Fundamentals of Education Contrasted Between Plato's Society and Modern World

In contemporary society, the value of music and sports education persists. Principles championed by Socrates, such as mandatory education to a level necessary for state service, tailored education, and the promotion of equity irrespective of gender or socioeconomic status, continue to be reflected in modern policies [7]. Examples include China's nine-year compulsory education, specialized high schools, and educational rights initiatives by the United Nations. These policies demonstrate a clear link between contemporary educational systems and those proposed by Plato, suggesting a

continuity of philosophical inspiration. However, fundamental differences remain, notably concerning the myth of metals, which forms the foundation of Plato's societal structure and educational philosophy [8].

## 2 EXAMINING THE DISCREPANCIES

### 2.1 The Myth of Metals

Socrates contends that citizens should be told a "noble lie" (*gennaion pseudos*) to cultivate allegiance to the state and reinforce its hierarchical social structure. According to the myth of metals, all citizens originate from the earth of the state and are considered siblings. However, divine intervention has infused their souls with different metals: gold for rulers, silver for guardians, and bronze or iron for farmers or craftsmen [9].

Typically, offsprings are rarely made of the same metal as their parents, if this is not the case the child must either descend or ascend in the social order. However, should a child of inferior metals aspire to become a guardian, it would pose a threat to the state's stability. Conversely, as guardians are made of divine gold and silver, they should have nothing to do with the earthly sorts which have been 'the source of many unholy deeds', such as scandal and corruption. Equivalently, guardians should not have any private property; they should live together in housing provided by the state, and receive from the citizens no more than their daily sustenance. Still, Plato constitutes: guardians may be the happiest of men in spite, or because, of their deprivations, for the arts and crafts are equally liable to degenerate under the influence of wealth as they are under the influence of poverty: 'the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent' [8].

This is not the case for societies today. Modern societies do not classify individuals based on innate divine capabilities. Instead, social stratification tends to be hereditary and informed by scientific insights; in turn, citizens obtain an enlightened, scientific perception of the state's operation. This calls into question, if the myth, as the foundation in deciding how to educate? what to educate? and who to educate is inherently wrong, or changed, why shall Plato's education system be descended into modern use? And what differentiations are to be made in accommodation to discrepancies between states and individuals now and then. On the one hand, if either Plato himself makes a rational justification of his educational system being independent of social foundation or future scholars propose a way of implementation not basing on the method of the myth, Plato's system shall be considered lasting and valid. On the other hand, modern system being tilted towards a holistic education that used to be appointed to guardians may also suggest some understandings as to whether people nowadays shared the lowest talent or innate principle of a silver in the platonic system. This essay will explore such areas in the following.

## 3 HISTORICAL REVISIONS TO THE PLATONIC EDUCATION

Throughout history, Plato's educational system has undergone numerous revisions to accommodate evolving societal needs. The Renaissance's emphasis on liberal education shifted focus from rigid adherence to a caste system toward a more inclusive framework that values individual potential. The Enlightenment further challenged Platonic ideals by advocating for personal freedom and knowledge acquisition as universal rights.

In the 20th century, educational reforms amplified critical thinking and creativity over rote memorization, reflecting a move toward more democratic and egalitarian approaches. Contemporary educational philosophies, such as constructivism, build on these historical revisions, promoting active learning and collaboration rather than the rigid hierarchies prescribed by Plato.

## 4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE EDUCATION INDEPENDENT OF FLAWS

Contrary to the evolutions and revisions to the system is advocating voices that argue the system can exist independent of the flaws identified and the myth as an assumption, catalyzing better adapted education in modern context.

Scholars like Martha Nussbaum argue that Plato's educational system can be rationally justified independently of its basis in the myth of metals [10]. Nussbaum contends that the core of Platonic education—fostering critical thinking and virtue—remains valuable even when detached from its original context. Richard Kraut suggests that the emphasis on moral education in Plato's philosophy provides a valuable framework for contemporary discussions on ethics in education [11].

Moreover, the evolution of educational systems can be seen as a catalyst for enhancement rather than a critique of Platonic principles. The ongoing dialogue surrounding education reflects a dynamic interaction between foundational philosophies and modern interpretations. Some scholars argue that even elements of Plato's class-based system can be adapted if all students are viewed as "philosophers" receiving the best possible education [12].

Furthermore, addressing the second half of the question, we can explore how Plato's education system aligns with the hereditary dynamics of modern society. The education of Guardians, as applied in various countries today, offers a realistic and rational framework. Acting as a critical intermediary stage in education, this system aims to prepare citizens to be valuable contributors to the state, not based on innate capabilities but through a utilitarian perspective. In monarchies, rulers such as presidents or kings are typically hereditary, leading to the notion that positions similar to Guardians should be filled by those most intelligent and capable. In this context, the myth of metals takes on a semblance of truth, as the innate qualities of individuals can significantly impact their roles in society.

In democratic systems, leaders are elected and compete for their positions, making Guardianship education essential for citizens' engagement. This education either equips voters with critical thinking and decision-making skills or prepares candidates for campaigning and fostering a virtuous character. In this way, Guardian education serves as a foundational requirement today, enabling citizens to contribute meaningfully to the state and realize their fullest potential. Thus, it is not that individuals have inherently become "of silver," but rather that the demands and ideals of a robust state compel everyone to develop Guardian-like talents.

## 5 OTHER DISPUTES

There are other instances where Plato's educational ideals and ethics contradicts with that of today's society, suggesting changes needed to be made in contrast to Plato's ideals. Most prevalent is continued from the myth of metals: His assertion that offspring of the gold class should not automatically inherit their status remains contentious. This said, Plato proposed families shall be destructed in the avoidance of meritocracy, hereditary or descendancy of privileges, and advocated for communal child-rearing to prevent inequality based on lineage; however, scholars, on the one side, deem this attempt of equality is as unethical and irrational, as they contend it immoral and fearful for the children to be forced to leave their parents; on the other hand, this ideal of raising children together based on different innate categories or given capacities sparked some aspects of a strict communism and authoritarian regime, usually viewed unethical and impractical due to its potential disruption of familial bonds. Continuing to delve in the equality in opportunity as a prerequisite for an ideal system, all educational efforts today shall be deemed screwed. Therefore, as simple to carry out, while some aspects of Plato remain employed, his goal of equal opportunities and strict regime, is rendered obsolete, and indicates the pervasiveness of evolution in the educational system in accommodation of space and time, as well as the possibility of invalidation of the platonic educational system.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In brief, the answer of whether Plato's system of education is eternal remains uncertain but persisting. Nevertheless, *The Republic*, as a philosophical work is immune to criticism and revision, being deeply entrenched in a society. Examinations in the paper does not prove any part of modern education extended from *The Republic* folly, thus is an insight as to what citizens nowadays might be potentializing and achieving in accompany from the state, as education is commonly a public good; the provision of educational system explains more thoroughly the education's role in preparing citizens in serving the state, and a comprehension as to how our modern education may be a descendant from a conceptual ideal system.

The question of whether Plato's educational assumptions remain relevant in contemporary society invites continued examination. The implications of his philosophical masterpiece endure, influencing modern educational discourse and policy. While critiques of *The Republic* may highlight its limitations, its insights into education as a public good continue to prevail. As education remains crucial for preparing citizens for civic engagement, understanding its philosophical origins can inform practices that promote a more equitable and just society.

In conclusion, while certain aspects of Plato's educational framework can be considered outdated, the enduring value of his ideas, those that exist independent assumptions and limitations of space and time, such as the principles, values, virtues, encourages reflection on how modern education can evolve to meet the needs of diverse populations in an uplifting and idealistic way. Plato's emphasis on character development, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge remains relevant in today's world.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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