European College of Liberal Arts
Syllabus for Autumn 2008 AY Core Class
Greek Thought and Literature on Education

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Introduction

Why Education?

Every one of us is educated, and every one of us has been educated differently.

Sometimes we were educated most thoroughly when we did not even know it was happening. Other times, perhaps, we refused to be educated precisely when others were trying their hardest to educate us. Inevitably, each of us developed a more or less conscious attitude towards our own education. We became enthusiastic or reluctant learners, trusting or suspicious of teachers and of the change, growth, trauma, or corruption taking place. In groups, with a single other person, or in solitude, we were educated sometimes joyfully; other times, perhaps, it was especially in suffering that we felt ourselves to be learning the most. With various degrees of ambivalence, enthusiasm, depression, passion, and confusion, each of us has gone through something called education.

Memorizing the capitals of countries, learning the chemical formula for salt, discussing our feelings, working with the quadratic equation, feeding the homeless, playing the flute, repeating the Lord's prayer, wrestling, taking care of a hamster, reading the *Iliad*: all these activities have been considered educational. Why? Do these apparently very diverse activities share something fundamental? Or do they have different and perhaps irreconcilable aims?

The fact that education is necessary for human beings, plus the fact that there are many ways to be educated, some of which differ profoundly from others, makes education itself into an issue of some urgency.

From a list of concrete educational practices, it is a short step to some serious and abstract questions. For example: To what extent should or can education be "value neutral?" If education is not value neutral, what values should it seek to impart? Or is this somehow a false dichotomy? What are the important differences among the various educational modes, such as stories, poems, speeches, conversations, dialectic, mathematics, visual arts, and music? Do these modes by themselves suggest, express or impart values? To what extent should or must education be metaphysically committed? That is, does every educational practice or program take a point of view on the nature of the world and the place of human life within it? Should we think of education chiefly as

the development of something called "reason" in human beings, or of the understanding in some other sense of the word? Should it be chiefly practical in orientation? If not practical, then what? Is the same education good for everyone? How should our sense of justice determine, inform, or restrict our educational processes and aims?

What should education aim at? How should it accomplish its aims?

Why the Greeks?

This class does not have an agenda in the sense that it tries to convince anyone that the best education is *x* or *y*. However, of necessity, it operates with some educational attitudes and assumptions.

One may ask: "Why not deal with the subject of education simply through contemporary writing? What is the sense of going backwards?" One may ask even more specifically, "What is the sense of going back *to the ancient Greeks*?"

By the time we are capable of raising the question of education for ourselves, everyone already has answers. These answers are found in the form of attitudes and opinions about education. Some of these opinions may prove, upon examination, to be very deeply held. We may, however, wonder whether the attitudes and opinions we have inherited—from our parents, teachers, and culture in general—are true or good ones. Ancient Greece is the source of many of the opinions and institutions we live with even now, in the modern West. At the same time, the ancient Greeks are certainly not us. This tension makes for a fruitful educational opportunity. In ancient Greek thought, we expect to find our own opinions reflected *and* challenged. In order for us to experience the challenge, however, it is important to approach these texts *not* simply to learn how others answered these questions in the past, hovering over a body of knowledge at a safe distance. Rather, we should try to approach these texts in the spirit of hope that we may deepen our own questions, improve upon our answers, and possibly change our minds in fundamental ways.

As you move through the class, you will quickly realize that there is no single ancient Greek answer to the question of education. For example, both the *Works and Days* and the *Republic* aim to educate human beings in "justice." But what they even mean by justice are very different things. The texts have partly been chosen to reflect a diversity of opinions within the ancient Greek corpus. Perhaps even more importantly, they have been chosen in order to reflect the diversity of forms in which education can take place. The ultimate inseparability of these two features of education—content and form—is one of the subjects we deal with throughout the term.

Specific Approach

It is one of the special features of education at ECLA that we bring together, in our core classes, not only students from incredibly diverse educational backgrounds but also faculty from various disciplines. We believe that the most serious subjects concern all the humanistic disciplines. Not every faculty member will agree with every other about what a given text says; in fact, one should expect rather the opposite. Not every faculty member will agree with every claim made in this syllabus. However—all of us do agree that the subject of education is worth a serious investigation and that the Greeks provide an excellent vehicle for that investigation.

In this class, our chief vehicle, the text we most often take our bearings from, is Plato's *Republic*. The *Republic*—or, in Greek, *Politeia*: "Regime" or "Civil Society"—is arguably the most profound and influential investigation of education ever written, and unarguably the most profound examination of education *and* justice ever written.

It is an unusual feature of this class that we read and discuss texts in between sections of the *Republic*. There is some risk that, so positioned, these texts will distract us from Plato. But if used well, the *Works and Days*, poems of Sappho, *Cleitophon*, and *Hecuba* may help us to better appreciate and evaluate the arguments and the actions taking place in the *Republic*, and to develop our capacities to be informed interlocutors for Plato and for each other.

Schedule and Guiding Remarks

The guiding remarks given below are not intended to restrict our investigations or to provide definitive interpretations. This syllabus was assembled through a process of thought; the remarks are an attempt to make that thought transparent.

Week 1: The *Iliad*
October 6 – October 10

We begin with the *Iliad* because much of Plato's *Republic* presents itself as a revision of Homer, and because Homer's epic poetry constituted the cornerstone of an ancient Greek's education:

> My father was anxious to see me develop into a good man . . . and as a means to this end he compelled me to memorize all of Homer; and so even now I can repeat the whole *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by heart (Xenophon, *Symposium*, 3.5).

Although to us it may seem bizarre for a child's schooling to be centered upon the *Iliad*, even we moderns may detect and appreciate something peculiarly educational about it. In 2000, two British storytellers were commissioned to create a new audio version of the *Iliad* for nine and ten year-olds, so that it could be re-introduced into the UK's primary

school curricula. One contemporary classicist begins his scholarly study of Homer in the following way:

> The child's first impressions on hearing Homer are as deep as they are vivid. The wrath of Achilles conjured up all at once; Achilles and Agamemnon standing out in strife against each other; Chryses suddenly appearing before the Achaens to ransom his daughter . . . . How to explain the spell they cast upon a child's mind? How to explain it quite apart from any preliminary learning? One reason for it is precisely that no preliminary learning is required. For these scenes are self-contained and self-explanatory. What they present comes to life through a power of its own (Paolo Vivante).

In the *Republic*, Socrates agrees: Homer's *Iliad* is appealing, not just to children but to the "best of us" (605c). However, this appeal is treated as a terrible danger. Socrates seems to argue that there is no worse mistake for a human being than to take tragedy as a model for one's life, and Homer was "first among tragic writers" (607a).

Before turning to the *Republic*, we take some time to appreciate the power of Homer's *Iliad* by itself. What is it that one learns, exactly, from the *Iliad*? And given that the *Iliad* has been found to be so suitable for education, what is it that one learns about education from the *Iliad*?

Monday: Iliad (DH)
Wednesday: Iliad (DH)
Saturday, noon: Papers comparing *Iliad* translations

Week 2: *Republic* books 1 & 2
October 13 – October 17

The first book of the *Republic* introduces many of the themes that stay with the dialogue throughout: the relation of the philosopher to the city, eros, the gods and the afterlife, the questionable wisdom of poetry, and of course, justice. We pay special attention to Socrates' famous confrontation with the sophist Thrasymachus, who teaches (for money) the disturbing truth that "justice is nothing other than what is good for the stronger" (338c, translation modified). Book II begins with the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus, the two brothers who become Socrates' chief interlocutors for the rest of the dialogue. *Contra* Thrasymachus (but no less disturbingly), Glaucon argues that justice is the good of the weaker; it is a social contract in which the "true man" (359b) would never agree to participate. The famous "Ring of Gyges" story demonstrates, for Glaucon, man's secret irresistible will to injustice.

Next, Adeimantus lays the responsibility for injustice at the feet of the poets and educators of Greece. They have praised justice, he says, for the rewards it brings—not for being good in itself for the just man. Adeimantus raises the possibility of a complete education to justice: "If that were what you had all been saying right from the start, and if you had been persuading us from our earliest years, we would not now be keeping an eye on one another, to guard against injustice" (367a). As he and his interlocutors begin to construct a city-in-speech, it is this possibly that Socrates runs with. The education of the

city's "guardian" class is to be a total one, to prepare them for the special way of life by which the health and safety of "Kallipolis" ("Beautiful/Noble City") stands or falls.

Monday: Republic Book 1 (JR)
Wednesday: Republic Book 2 (Devin Stauffer, Associate Professor, Department of Government, University of Texas)
Thursday: In lecture room, a plenum session to discuss writing papers in the AY core at ECLA.

Week 3: Hesiod's *Works and Days*
October 20 – October 24

At roughly 800 lines, Hesiod's poem is much smaller than either the *Iliad* (whose epic dialect it shares) or the *Republic*. Hesiod's subject, the world of the farm, also seems much more modest than the construction of Kallipolis, or the last war of the age of heroes. This may be misleading. One classicist explains:

> As, on this kind of small farm, human beings live lives largely unmediated by the institutions established to soften our struggle with the cosmos, this farm, as a microcosm, provides a clue to our relation to the macrocosm that we most often call God (Stephanie Nelson).

Like the *Republic*, the *Works and Days* is about education and justice. Most obviously, Hesiod's poem is presented as a kind of lesson to his unjust brother. In this, there is a curious point of contact with the *Republic*; Glaucon and Adeimantus were Plato's brothers. But the educational content and form of the *Works and Days* seems to differ profoundly from that of the *Republic*. Hesiod's education is for a private farmer, not a "guardian." In Hesiod's myth of the metals, unlike Socrates' "huge lie" (often translated "noble lie"), all of us are now irredeemably "iron." Hesiod's teaching is also saturated with religiosity in the "non-rational" sense. In a passage Adeimantus might have cited when he made his accusation against the poets, Hesiod ties the question of justice to the necessity and the difficulty involved in knowing the will of Zeus:

> Nor would I myself
> now be just among men, nor want my son to be just,
> since justice is an evil where go things go for justice –
> but I don't expect, yet, that wise Zeus will bring that to pass.
> (270-3)

Much of the *Works and Days* seems alien to us—more alien that the *Iliad*, probably. On the other hand, many contemporary thinkers would feel that the *Works and Days* supplies something the *Republic* sorely lacks: attention to the educational importance of the world of Nature:

> The world of non-human nature is one grand coherent semiotic system, full of divinely engineered signs and indications which human beings need to read aright if they are to perform successfully the endless toil which the gods have imposed upon them. The stars that rise and set, the animals that call out or behave in some striking way, are all conveyors of specific messages, characters in the book of nature; Hesiod's mission is to teach us to read them (Glenn Most).

Monday: "The *Works & Days*" (Stephanie Nelson, Assistant Professor for Classical Studies and the Core Curriculum, Boston University)
Wednesday: Works and Days (DH)
Thursday: Selections from Thoreau, *Walden* (selections determined by seminar leaders)
Saturday, noon: Papers due

Week 4: Republic 376e→427d, Poems of Sappho
October 27 – October 30

Socrates and his interlocutors continue to lay down the models for the kind of poetry and music that will be permitted or forbidden in their city. Much of the discussion concerns what is true and what is false, and what one should and should not say, about the gods and their role in human life. This is a significant critique of Homer and Hesiod, who, in the view of the Greek historian Herodotus,"created for the Greeks their theogony; it is they who gave to the gods the special names for their descent from their ancestors and divided among them their honors, their arts, and their shapes" (Herodotus, *The History*, 2.53). Homer's wisdom seems to be reduced to that of a dietician (404c). But the revision of music goes beyond the verbal content of the songs; "rhythm and mode" must also be carefully controlled because they "penetrate more deeply into the inner soul than anything else does" (401d).

For many reasons, the poems of Sappho make for an excellent comparison with the *Republic* at this point. The erotic love of the beautiful is *the* major theme of Sappho's poems (or what remains of them). However, while the education of the guardians involves an assault upon their private erotic attachments, Sappho's poems seem to concern and to celebrate private, intensely felt erotic attachments. At the same time, to many scholars, her poems seem to have had a didactic purpose. In fact, it has been speculated that Sappho was the headmistress of a kind of semi-international school for girls, and that her poems comprised the core of the school's curriculum (a curriculum that also included "cult, deportment and dress" (Anne Pippin Burnett)):

> Sappho performed for her girls in order to amuse them ('These things I sing among my friends to bring them joy', 60V), but she also sang as a means of teaching pupils who were expected to imitate her songs. Hymns, epithalamia and other pieces of occasional poetry served as models for performances that would be required of them presently, and even the love lyrics were didactic, since they taught the girls to know their own emotions and to objectify them in song (Anne Pippin Burnett).

In both ancient and modern times, Sappho's poetry itself has been considered to be extraordinarily beautiful. In the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., vases, coins, and bronze statues were produced to commemorate her. A possibly apocryphal story reports that one day Solon, the Athenian law-giver, heard his nephew singing one of Sappho's songs. When his nephew had finished, Solon asked to be taught the song, so that he might "learn it and die." It is good for us to devote some time to the study of beautiful poetry, so that we take stock of what is lost when, near the end of the Republic, it is swept aside:

> If you accept the honeyed Muse, in song or poetry, pleasure and pain will be twin kings in your city in place of established custom and the thing which has always been generally accepted as best—reason (607a).

Monday: Republic 3 → 427d (JR)
Wednesday: Poems of Sappho (DH)

Week 5: Republic 427d→end of book 5, Republic 6 & Cleitophon, The Breakfast Club
November 3- November 7

In this section of the *Republic*, Socrates and his interlocutors turn from the city to the soul and what "justice" would mean from this point of view. This section also contains a dramatic interruption; the assembled group "forces" Socrates to take up the issue of women and children in the Kallipolis. Socrates confronts in succession what he calls the "three waves," each of which threatens to overwhelm and defeat the project. These three waves are: 1) that women can be guardians, 2) that women and children should be held in common, and 3) that philosophers should be kings. In defense against this last wave, the philosophers are described as the erotic lovers of the truth. This discussion culminates in the claim that Beauty itself is real and much more important than actual individual beautiful things.

In book 6 of the *Republic* describes the relation of the philosopher to the city. Through several images, cities (perhaps especially democratic ones) are portrayed as antagonistic to the philosophical life. Socrates describes how the individuals who are most suited for the best education are ruined by the city, and ruin cities in their turn by becoming tyrants (495b). Then the challenge is reversed, and Socrates tries to investigate how it is that "a city can handle philosophy without being destroyed" (497d). We consider the increasingly abstract treatment of education in the dialogue and the call to increased abstraction within education. How does abstraction, and mathematics in particular, help to turn souls in the right direction (cf., 514c-d)? Why does Socrates believe that mathematical experience (geometry in particular) is the right educational tool for turning the soul towards the perception of the relation of the true, the good, and the beautiful? What exactly do we learn from the peculiar mathematical image which concludes book 6: "the divided line"?

In book 1 of the *Republic*, during Socrates' confrontation with Thrasymachus, a character named Cleitophon comes in on Thrasymachus' side. Although Socrates is later

seen to have mended his differences with Thrasymachus (498d), his quarrel with Cleitophon (or vice versa) remains unresolved. In the *Cleitophon*, the shortest of all the Platonic dialogues, Cleitophon makes his accusation against Socrates. Or perhaps better put, Cleitophon defends himself for criticizing those who spend time with Socrates. Since we too are "spending time with Socrates," in a school committed to the idea of dialogue, the *Cleitophon* contains a puzzle we should consider. The dialogue ends—perhaps surprisingly, perhaps not—with silence on the part of Socrates. What does it mean that Socrates does *not* try to continue a dialogue with Cleitophon?

On Wednesday evening, we view and discuss John Hughes's *The Breakfast Club* (1985). Like the *Republic*, this film takes the form of a lengthy dialogue conducted in a single setting. In *The Breakfast Club*, the interlocutors consist of different types, or stereotypes, of American high school students. One of these teenagers—the "Criminal"—plays a role that might be compared to a Socratic gadfly, provoking the others until they realize or confess something new about themselves. What, according to Hughes, is the content of the self-knowledge which these teenagers are supposed to arrive at? Under what conditions are they able to get there?

Monday: Republic 427d→end of Book 5 (JR)
Wednesday: Republic Book 6 & Cleitophon (JR)
19:30: *The Breakfast Club*, in lecture hall
Saturday, noon: Papers due

Week 6: Republic book 7, The Parthenon & Thucydides selections
November 10 – November 14

We take time to carefully examine the allegory of the cave: Socrates' most famous image of "the effect of education—or the lack of it—on our nature" (514a). True education, he claims, involves not the implanting of knowledge or the development of skills, but a "turning-around" of souls (*periagogē*, in Latin = "conversion").

On Wednesday, we examine the architectural masterpiece the Parthenon, a temple completed when Plato was born and which dominated the Athenian civic landscape during his lifetime. The building is discussed by us in the light of issues raised in the *Republic*. To what extent does the Parthenon "educate" in the Homeric mode? How, on the other hand, does the building embody a Platonic invitation to dialectical thought?

Monday: "Where is your Master?", Republic Book 7 (TC)
Wednesday: The Parthenon, Thucydides selections (GL)
Thursday: visit to the Pergamon musuem

Week 7: Euripides' *Hecuba*, Republic books 8 & 9
November 17 – November 21

In this section, Socrates compares the best way of life (philosophy) with the worst way of life (successful tyranny). Most of the *Republic* concerns the construction of

Kallipolis and its guardians through education. Now, Socrates considers how this city, and the other possible regimes and their corresponding souls, become corrupted and destroyed. Of special interest to us is his portrait of democracy and democratic man.

Corruption is also the major theme of Euripides' *Hecuba*, which many consider to be the darkest of the extant Greek tragedies. In the center of the play, the main character declares:

> How different people are!
> The worthless person stays forever base
> while the man of nobility *is* noble,
> and no disaster drives him to deplete
> that inborn nature—he is good forever.
> (631-35)

But this same character seems to lose her hold on moral decency and to sink into an obsession with revenge. The play appears to possess a bold educational mission: to critique Athenian democracy from the heart of one of its most cherished institutions, the theater. At the same time, the play self-consciously reflects on possible corrupting effect of the theater itself. Certain passages "remind the audience, rather uncomfortably, that they are colluding in the theatrical process precisely by gazing on—and feeling aesthetic pleasure in—the enactment of sadism and anguish" (Edith Hall). Perhaps our investigation of this play will put us in a better position to evaluate Socrates' expulsion of tragedy:

> That's why writers of tragedy, being so wise, will forgive us and those with regimes like ours, if we refuse to accept them into our state on the grounds that they are apologists for tyranny (568b).

Monday: Hecuba (JP)
Wednesday: Republic Books 8 & 9 (TN)

Week 8: Republic book 10, Republic as a whole
November 24 – November 28

Why does the *Republic*—a book apparently devoted to establishing the rule of reason in cities and souls—end with a myth? And why does it end with this particular myth? What are the implications of this for the best education as Socrates understands it?

In light of this, how can we interpret Plato's return, near the end of the *Republic*, to the problem of mimesis – that is, of artistic imitation or representation? How does Plato's articulation of the relationship between representation and its objects comment upon both the *Republic*'s concluding myth and the "city in speech" itself?

On Wednesday, we consider and discuss the *Republic* as a whole. The Republic depicts a single conversation that lasts through the night. We experience the Republic in a less unified form than the dialogues' participants; and because of the way our syllabus is structured, less even than those who would read it straight through. We believe there

are considerable advantages to doing it this way—but it also begs for some sort of effort of the end to deal with it all.

Some possible questions for consideration include: Does the Republic put forward a theory of education? If so, what is it? Is this theory of education the same as or different than the education it shows Socrates practicing with Glaucon and Adeimantus? If different, how would we account for the difference? Do we feel educated by the *Republic*? If so, what have we learned? If not, why not and what happened instead?

Monday: Republic Book 10 (GL)
Wednesday: Republic as a whole (DH)

Week 9: Plato's *Phaedrus*
December 1 – December 5

The *Phaedrus* is Socrates' dramatic educational encounter, outside the gates of the city, a young man in love with speeches. In this dialogue, the question of the place of Eros in human life is taken up without a political context. Some questions to consider include: What is the "love of speeches?" Should we love speeches moderately? The speech of Lysias claims that favors ought to be granted to the non-lover rather than the lover. Is this a "rational" approach to love? As one of the young men present (though silent) during the conversation that is the *Republic*, could Lysias have learned such an attitude from Socrates? Or what could he have gotten wrong? Is the image of the tripartite soul presented in Socrates' "Palinode" essentially the same as image he presents in the *Republic*? Through Socrates' reflections on the art of writing, how does Plato help us understand his own dialogues?

Monday: Phaedrus (TC)
Wednesday: Phaedrus (TBA)

Week 10: Education

This week will be devoted to discussions of educational theory and/or issues that have become important to this year's group of AY students in the course of the term. Readings might include additional ancient works or contemporary essays that discuss Socrates, Socratic education, or the study of the Classics in a modern educational context.

Sunday, December 7th , noon: Final Essay

The final essay question will address the theme of the course and require your answer to involve more than one of the works we have studied.

Grading:

Iliad translation paper: 5%
Regular papers (x3): 15% each
Final paper: 20%
Participation: 30%

Your seminar leaders should inform you of your participation grade at the end of each rotation.

General Guidelines:

Regular attendance and serious preparation for the AY core are essential. Please make sure you sign the attendance sheet before each lecture begins. According to college regulations, over 15% absences will result in academic probation. (See the Student Handbook for a description of college policies.) Lectures, seminars, film screenings, and the museum visit are all separate "classes" for the purposes of counting absences. This means that there are normally 5 "classes" per week in the AY core, though in some weeks there may be more.