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# Φύσις in Plato's *Republic*

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'Nature' is a concept that is central to Socrates' argument in the *Republic*.[1] It is crucial to what has come to be known as the 'principle of specialization', the premise that better goods are produced when each person does the one work for which they are 'naturally suited'.[2] In turn, this premise informs the dialogue's primary object of inquiry: the form of justice is revealed, in book 4, to be a version of the principle of specialization.[3] Despite the argumentative role of φύσις, the concept itself and the way that Socrates deploys it are both underdiscussed and misunderstood.

When Socrates says, in book 2, that 'each of us is by nature not entirely like the next (ἡμῶν φύεται ἕκαστος οὐ πάνυ ὅμοιος ἑκάστῳ), but we differ somewhat in nature (διαφέρων τὴν φύσιν), one being suited to one task, another to another', he seems to be asserting that nature differs from one person to the next in accordance with difference in occupation (370a-b).[4] Accordingly, there appear to be as many unique natures as there are (possible) occupations. However, Socrates also says in book 9 that there are 'three primary kinds of people', delimited in accordance with three fundamental desire orientations—philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving (φιλόσοφον, φιλόνικον, φιλοκερδές)—and he suggests that this simple three-category system can exhaustively account for salient differences between individuals (581b-c).[5]

[1] My discussion focuses on the concept of nature in reference to human beings, i.e., 'human nature'. Thus, I am not aiming to treat the wider extension of φύσις that Benn 2009 has found in Plato's corpus. It is worth mentioning, though, that the first mention of φύσις in the *Republic* is in reference to the account of a form. Specifically, in his book 2 reformulation of the challenge presented by Thrasymachus, Glaucon says that the 'nature of justice' (φύσις δικαιοσύνης) is what the folk believe it to be, a compromise between the best way to live and the worst way to live (425d-e). Translations are from Shorey 1969, modified where needed in consultation with Grube revise by Reeve, in Cooper ed. 1997.

[2] The principle of specialization is assumed as a premise at 369e-370a. For discussion of the principle, see Reeve 1988, 172-176, Sauvé Meyer 2004, and Greco 2009b.

[3] The principle is identified as an 'image of justice' at 434c. See Martin 1981 and McDavid 2019 for discussion of the relationship of the principle to the book 4 account of justice.

[4] See also 454c-d: 'male and female doctors have souls of the same nature…but a doctor and a carpenter have different ones'. Note, though, that Grube translates ἡμῶν φύεται ἕκαστος οὐ πάνυ ὅμοιος ἑκάστῳ as 'we aren't all born alike'. My discussion will show why this is a mistake.

[5] The 581b-c passage reiterates a taxonomy of three kinds that has already been introduced in the dialogue, with Socrates saying, in the course of introducing the 'philosophical nature', that their love of the whole of truth is 'like what was said earlier about honor-lovers and the erotically inclined' (485b). That is, there are three basic kinds, differentiated at least in part by the objects of their desire.

The compatibility of the system of 'three primary kinds' and the multi-fold system of natural suitedness is questionable. Indeed, the difficulty of making them compatible has inspired some scholars to assert that Socrates must not be genuinely committed to one of the alternatives. Reeve 1988, 172, for example, interprets the three primary kinds as three basic profiles of cognitive aptitude, and he reasons that 'although Plato is committed to thinking that people are born with a natural aptitude to rise to a certain cognitive height (so to speak), there is no place in his theory for the view that they are born with a natural aptitude for a unique craft… [Plato] does not think that people have a natural aptitude for exactly one craft. And if he does not hold this view, he cannot hold [the principle of specialization] either'. Klosko 1986, 142 draws a similar conclusion, rejecting the multi-fold classification of natural suitedness: 'It should be pointed out that this principle pertains much more to classes than, as is widely believed, individuals. Plato does not believe that each individual is able to perform only one task in the state, which only he can do.'[6] To the contrary, Sauvé Meyer and Greco argue that the multi-fold classification of natures is more fundamental. On their reading, what makes a person fit for a particular work is that they have acquired a skillset that ensures their excellence in that work. 'Nature'—or 'natural suitedness'—is *developed*, on this view, and there are as many natures as there are occupations. Accordingly, the system of 'three primary kinds' is posterior to the multi-fold classification.[7]

My aim is to provide a broad examination of φύσις in the *Republic* that traces Socrates' use of the concept in building his argument and reconciles seeming inconsistencies. He distinguishes what I call 'original nature' from 'fulfilled

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Johnstone 2013, 143 takes the five psychic consistutions, inclusive of the aristocrat, described in books 8 and 9 to be the 'main kinds of person', but those are not kinds of persons. They are 'ways of life for soul' (ψυχῆς τρόποι) that correspond to 'ways of life for cities' (πολιτειῶν τρόποι, 445c). There are five of them because, Socrates says, there are as many 'ways of life for soul' as there are 'ways of life for cities, possessing the forms [of virtue and vice]' (ὅσοι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πολιτειῶν τρόποι εἰσὶν εἴδη ἔχοντες, 445c). That these are not 'kinds' of people, and therefore not in tension with the three-fold classification, is obscured by Shorey's translation of the 445 passage as 'five kinds of soul', and Grube's translation, revised by Reeve, as 'there are as many types of soul as there are specific types of political constitution'.

[6] Annas 1981, 74 seems to be on the side of Reeve and Klosko when she says, 'The differences of aptitude that interest [Plato] are not the differences which distinguish one person from everyone else, but differences which suggest that people come in different types suited for different kinds of life.'

[7] Sauvé Meyer 2004, 236 takes the more extreme view here, asserting that Socrates' argument allows that there could be a person 'who is naturally capable of both carpentry and justice', i.e., who belongs to both the philosophic and money-loving kinds. On her view, the three primary kinds are posterior to the multi-fold classification in the sense of being a construct of the city's institutions, and order that emerges after the sortition into occupations is complete. Greco 2009a, 19n6 also says that the '[three primary kinds] underpin the tripartition of society into classes at a merely ideological level'. Confusingly, though, she argues that the processes of training and education will reveal 'pre-social natural qualities', which implies that individuals have some kind of talent or disposition prior to any training. This points the way to my interpretation, which—I will show—appeals to a complex of both innate and developed abilities.

nature'. Original nature is defined by the raw aptitudes that determine an individual's potential. Fulfilled nature is the set of actual abilities that the same individual possesses at the close of their development. Distinguishing these dimensions of φύσις allows us to account for how a multi-fold classification of fulfilled natures can be compatible with a three-fold classification of original natures.

## I. The Complexity of Nature

Socrates conceives of φύσις, much like he conceives of the soul, as a complex unity.[8] Original nature and fulfilled nature should be understood as the parts of that complex. These parts are not related as identical, but as potentiality to actualization, for the development from origin to fulfillment is mediated by upbringing and education.[9] Variations in environment eventuate in variations in fulfillment. Understanding the theory of φύσις in the dialogue is not achieved merely through tracking the mediating role of education, however. We must also see that original natures are varied. That is, where original nature is an input and fulfilled nature is an output in the complicated process that is human development, the input is not the same for every individual. 'There are three primary kinds of people (ἀνθρώπων λέγομεν τὰ πρῶτα τριττὰ γένη)', Socrates says in book 9: 'philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving (φιλόσοφον, φιλόνικον, φιλοκερδές)' (581b-c). A given individual is born with just one of these profiles as their original nature, and the course of their development will be mediated by myriad factors, resulting in some specific actualization.

One's original nature is a set of aptitudes, then. These aptitudes are the material upon which education, training, and apprenceships work in order to develop in individuals the skills they need for performing the work that is 'their own' (τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττειν) in the city (433d). Fulfilled nature is the set of actual skills possessed by individuals for performance of that work. It might be surprising that the range of fulfilled natures that we find in the city is greater than the range of three original natures, then, but this is explained by the flexibility of at least one of the original natures for being actualized in various ways. Specifically, the money-loving kind is most simple and indeterminate and, therefore, moldable into the most various fulfillments. To be clear, each of the three original natures may be *developed* in various ways, but the philosophic kind—and perhaps the victory-loving kind, too—counts as *fulfilled* only in attainment of the philosopher's skill, which is wisdom.

We must allow that development and fulfillment are non-identical in order to accommodate Socrates' insistence that some modes of education and resulting

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[8] See Brown 2012 for an account of the complex unity of the soul.

[9] Arruzza 2016, 47 also appeals to the Aristotelian distinct for understanding Plato's conception of φύσις, but she suggests that it is only the potentiality that is constitutive of nature, and the actuality that is achieved at the close of development is character (ἦθος). Incidentally, she also uses the term 'original nature' once for referring to the pre-developed condition. The disadvantage of Arruzza's reading is that she cannot accommodate Socrates' myriad uses of the word φύσις to refer to the condition possessed at the close of development.

outcomes of rearing count as 'against nature' (παρὰ φύσιν) in the sense of failing to realize a (or *the*) good for the original nature in question.[10] He says that poor rearing 'destroys' (διόλλυται) original nature and that the nature is 'corrupted' (φθοράς) as a result (490e). He rejects the idea that a poorly reared original nature reaches fulfillment, then. Accordingly, we can understand fulfilled nature specifically as original nature made to flourish. But there is only one mode of flourishing for the philosophic kind, and perhaps also one mode for the honor-loving kind. There are myriad modes for the money-loving kind, though.[11]

Original nature and fulfilled nature, though certainly bound together, play distinct explanatory roles in the dialogue. An individual's original nature explains why they ought to be brought up in a particular way, receive a particular education, and belong to a particular class in Kallipolis. Fulfilled nature explains why they ought to perform a particular work.[12] Plato observes this explanatory distinction sharply, and he employs different locutions for tracking them. When original nature is explanatory, he has Socrates use a dative construction (φύσει), and when it is fulfilled nature that is explanatory, he uses the phrase κατὰ φύσιν. For example, he says that the rulers must 'assign to each the status belonging to them by nature' (τὴν τῇ φύσει προσήκουσαν τιμὴν ἀποδόντες, 415c), and he warns of trouble if 'someone who is a workman or a money-maker by nature' (δημιουργὸς ὢν ἤ τις ἄλλος χρηματιστὴς φύσει) attempts to enter the guardian classes (434a-b). Original nature is the cause of these individuals belonging to the producer class and, by extension, of the harm in their rebellion. Original nature also explains why the part of the soul that corresponds to the producer class 'ought to be a slave by nature' (τοιούτου ὄντος φύσει οἵου πρέπειν αὐτῷ δουλεύειν, 444b).[13] By contrast, the benefits of specialization are attained when

[10] The παρὰ φύσιν formulation is used at 456b and 456c in specifying that provision of the early education to women possessed of the guardian nature is not 'against nature', but in fact comports better with nature than the alternative of depriving a guardian nature of its due education.

[11] Languishing is also bound by kind. The philosophic nature poorly brought up will 'become worse than the others under a bad education' (491e), and this is because in such circumstances 'each of the gifts of nature which we praise corrupts the nature possessing them (ἓν ἕκαστον ὧν ἐπῃνέσαμεν τῆς φύσεως ἀπόλλυσι τὴν ἔχουσαν ψυχὴν) and drag it away from philosophy' (492b). The traits that distinguish the 'three primary kinds' are significantly determinant of any and every outcome, then, because the traits themselves are recruited by bad education for facilitating the destruction of the soul. NB: Shorey translates the 492b passage as 'each of the gifts of nature which we praise tends to corrupt the soul of its possessor'. This obscures the idea that it the *nature* that gets corrupted *by its own traits*, and also misleadingly suggests that the traits 'tend', as if 'naturally' (κατὰ φύσιν), to corrupt, whereas this state of affairs is most certainly παρὰ φύσιν.

[12] It might seem that I have miscategorized class-belonging, for the classes in Kallipolis can easily be understood as sorting citizens according to their fulfilled abilities. But in fact, the descriptions of educational programming indicate that sortition in to classes occurs prior to education. Or, at least, it must occur prior to the *completion* of education, for the auxiliaries and rulers do share the early education.

[13] The 'natural' allyship of spirit to reason is captured with the dative construction as well (441a). This observation is valuable, for it conveys that spirit is inclined in potentiality, i.e., in its original nature, to ally itself to reason prior to any training. It is fulfilled in the realization of that allyship. See Singpurwalla 2013 for exploration of this 'naturalness'. But Socrates also says that appetite

each person does 'one thing in accordance with nature' (εἷς ἓν κατὰ φύσιν) (370c). More fully, 'it is fitting that the work assigned to each person be that which accord with their nature' (ἔργον ἑκατέρῳ προσήκει προστάττειν τὸ κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν, 453b-c).[14] It is the condition achieved as a result of training and education—*fulfilled* nature—that explains their suitedness to a particular work.[15]

Their explanatory work distinguishes them, then, but they are nevertheless unified under the form of nature. That form is accounted for in book 5, when Socrates is pressed to clarify what he had meant by φύσις when he said, and the interlocutors agreed, that people 'differ in their nature' (διαφέρων τὴν φύσιν, 370b).[16] He openly admits that he has been relying on an unsubstantiated principle:

> We're bravely, but in a quarrelsome and merely verbal fashion, pursuing the principle that natures that aren't the same must follow different ways of life. But when we assigned different ways of life to different natures and the same ones to the same, we didn't at all examine the form of natural difference and sameness (τὸ τῆς ἑτέρας τε καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως) we had in mind or in what regard we were distinguishing them when we assigned different pursuits to different natures and the same to the same (ὅτε τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα ἄλλῃ φύσει ἄλλα, τῇ δὲ αὐτῇ τὰ αὐτὰ ἀπεδίδομεν).[17] (454b)

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is 'by nature insatiate of money' (χρημάτων φύσει ἀπληστότατον, 442a). This disposition is less trainable and, thereby, less plausibly a mere potentiality. As Lorenz 2006, 2 says, 'Plato thinks that even in the well-disposed, virtuous soul, reason and spirit will need to watch over appetite', and this is because appetite does not undergo much, if any, development toward actualization.

[14] The summary of the account of justice provided in this same passage utilizes the same locution: δεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἕκαστον ἕνα ἓν τὸ αὑτοῦ πράττειν (453b).

[15] Socrates also describes the establishment of conditions of virtue in the city and the soul with the κατὰ φύσιν locution. See 428e (wisdom), 432a (temperance), and 444d (justice and, analogously, health).

[16] Note that this accusative formulation neutralizes the distinction between original nature and fulfilled nature as causes. The pressure in book 5 is the first 'wave' of criticism that Socrates and his interlocutors imagine to be raised against their vision of the perfectly just city: the issue of including women among the guardians (451d). The answer to this challenge hangs on the possibility of women sharing in the guardian nature, and Socrates acknowledges that they cannot make progress on this issue of women and guardianship without clarifying what was meant by 'nature' when they initially agreed that each should do the work for which they are 'naturally suited'. See Harry and Polansky 2016 for extensive discussion of this argument concerning women and defense of it as representative of Plato's true view, against scholars such as Bloom 1968, 380-383, who argue that 'Book V is preposterous' and that Socrates legitimates equal treatment of women only by 'fabricat[ing] a convention about the nature of women'.

[17] The φύσει here may seem to undermine the distinction between two locutions, argued above, but the verb here (ἀπεδίδομεν) and the object (τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα) support understanding him as claiming that each person will be submitted to the training that suits their original nature, for the 'giving' echoes the Myth of Metals 'giving to each the status that belongs to them' (415c) and ἐπιτηδεύματα are ways of life, not specializations. In other words, he appealed to a particular form and went about deploying it as an explanation in particular ways, but he did not specify the general account of the

Following this observation, Socrates provides an account of φύσις that specifies that 'being naturally well suited' (τὸν μὲν εὐφυῆ) consists in (i) ease and quickness of learning, (ii) retention of what is obtained, and (iii) physical capability (455b). Glaucon agrees that the three factors outlined above entering into ability exhaustively fill out the salient notion of the concept, and Socrates immediately pivots to inserting the term φύσις, as thus understood, into his argument concerning the inclusion of women in the guardian classes.

These three traits have inspired some frustration among scholars, for they seem to underdescribe nature by failing to disambiguate φύσις as a condition possessed at birth or as a product of upbringing.[18] But the conception of nature in the dialogue straddles that divide. Nature, generally, is the set of traits that makes a person fit from some activities and unfit for others. That fitness belongs to its possessor as a potentiality at the beginning of their life and is actualized as a result of development, but the process of change that constitutes the development preserves the form of nature as the set of traits determining fitness. Original and fulfilled nature are the same through the form of φύσις, then, but they differ as potentiality to actuality and in their explanatory roles in the dialogue's argument. In what follows, I explore the deployment of φύσις more fully.

## II. 'Natural Suitedness' in the First City

The first city—what Glaucon calls the 'City of Pigs' and Socrates calls 'healthy' (372d-e)—functions as a model of how to organize human expertise and labor in a way that optimizes the production of the goods and services that meet basic need.[19] Socrates asks Adeimantus whether the citizens of a fledgling city will each specialize in the production of a single good, the surplus of which can be exchanged for the surplus goods produced by the others, or else pursue a life whereby each produces for themselves all of the goods they will consume (369b-370a). Adeimantus answers that the exchange model sounds 'easier', and Socrates agrees it 'would not, by Zeus, be at all strange' if exchange were easier because—here is his introduction of φύσις—'even as you were speaking it occurred to me that, in the first place, each of us is by nature not entirely like the next (ἡμῶν φύεται ἕκαστος οὐ πάνυ ὅμοιος ἑκάστῳ), but we differ somewhat in nature (διαφέρων τὴν φύσιν), one being suited to one task, another to another'

form that would allow us to understand its explanatory power.

[18] See, e.g., Smith 2010, 33 and Greco 2009a, 21. If the dative construction indicates original nature, though, then he could be understood as saying that he wants to clarify the notion of original nature in particular. But it is implausible that doctors and carpenters—the specialists referred to as examples in the passage—already possess their distinctive natures from the outset and prior to any introduction to the activities of these crafts. This implausibility is generally acknowledged. See Greco 2009a; Klosko 1986; Reeve 1988; and Sauvé Meyer 2004.

[19] This is what Socrates has in mind when he says, 'Come, then, let's make a city in speech from its beginnings. Our need, as it seems, will make it' (369c). The target is to meet need, and the city is organized according to mechanisms that Plato understands as best for hitting that target. Each producing everything he naturally needs is ruled out as a viable mode of organization because it is relatively inefficient (369e-370a).

(370a-b). Following this, a conception of specialization according to *nature* is adopted as an organizing principle for the city. The benefit of this adoption is that 'more plentiful and better quality goods are more easily produced' and basic needs are more readily satisfied (370c).

There are two ways of understanding how specialization occurs according to nature, both of which appear to be intended by Plato. First, specialization must meet our natural needs, i.e., the necessary needs of vulnerable embodied organisms. These natural needs are designated as the products of the 'four or five' founding members of cities (369d): food (the product of farming), shelter (building), clothing (weaving), shoes (cobbling), and health (healing).[20] The reason why these are the founding members of the society is because they supply the goods necessary for survival. That is, natural need governs specialization, determining which specialties will be present in a society. The second way that specialization occurs according to nature is in the differentiation of the 'natural' farmer from the 'natural' builder, and so on for all 'four or five' of the founding specialists. There is something of 'nature' that makes it the case that each of these producers is meaningfully distinct from the next. Altogether, specialization occurs according to nature because (i) specialization is grounded in natural need and (ii) our specialized abilities to satisfy our needs are counted natural abilities.

Each of these conceptions of nature's role constrains the scope and direction of productive expansion in the city. New specializations are identified as belonging to the city because they will augment the productivity of the core specialists and will also employ the natural abilities of other citizens. Producers of special tools are the first group named (370c). Carpenters and metalworkers are among these, emerging for the production of ploughs, hoes, hammers, and looms (370c-d). Next, animal husbandry emerges for supplying animal labor to the farmer and the builder, carving out specialized labor in cowherding and shepherding and other kinds of herding (370d-e). Then the specialists emerge for facilitating trade abroad: duplicates of all the core producers, and of the craftsmen who supply tools for them, and merchants (ἔμποροι) by land and sea (371a). We should not mistake simple population growth as the cause of all of this further specialization. He uses the word 'need' (δεῖ) to justify adding more and more specialties to the city (370c, 370e, 371a, 371b).[21] That is, the city itself 'needs' these specializations for meeting natural need and for ensuring that natural ability is rightly employed.[22]

[20] Socrates refers to this last community member as 'some other purveyor for the needs of body' (τιν' ἄλλον τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα θεραπευτήν). Θεραπευτής is the word used in book 1 for specifying what a doctor (ἰατρός) is in the 'precise sense of the term' (τῷ ἀκριβεῖ λόγῳ, 341c). In book 5, the female and male doctors are ἰατρικόν and ἰατρικήν, respectively (454c).

[21] Socrates does acknowledge population size: 'it won't be a huge settlement even if we add cowherds' (370d); 'It won't be a small one either, if it has to hold all those' (370e). But, strictly, the text does not indicate that the first city undergoes population growth. Since it is need, not growth, that necessitates the range of specializations found there, it is best to understand the illusion of population growth as a pedogoical device.

[22] The first city may appear to be more advanced than this bare subsistence level. After all, its

Particularly to this point about the right employment of natural ability: Socrates predicates specialization on the idea that nature equips us with the abilities necessary for producing all these goods that we naturally need. In what way can nature do this? It is implausible that a person might be specifically a cowherd—but not a shepherd or a goatherd—*by nature* in the sense that we usually understand in that term, i.e., in the sense of *by birth*. Human beings cannot be born with differences in aptitude so finely grained as to differentiate cowherds from the shepherds. There may be general aptitudes for tending to animals—a disposition to enjoy long stretches of time in isolation from other people and to energetic vigilance in watching for aberration—but the general aptitude will be applicable to any of the particular tasks that exploit that natural aptitude. Further, the idea of unique suitedness implies that the person who is 'naturally suited' to carpentry was born ready to make tables. Even if Socrates does think that there is an innate aptitude for carpentry in some people, which is doubtful, he cannot think that the aptitude is fully fledged at birth. It must be brought to fulfillment by upbringing. The *Republic*'s emphasis on education undermines the idea that anyone is fully anything 'by birth'.[23]

But if Socrates does not mean, by 'naturally suited', that each individual is suited *by birth* for their work, then what can he mean? Here the paradigm of original and fulfilled nature wields tremendous explanatory power. Through that paradigm, Socrates can be understood as saying that the farmer, the builder, and so on, are possessed of a *fulfilled nature* for farming, building, respectively. Regardless of what traits were possessed by these individuals at birth and prior to their upbringing (though I will explain in the next section that this does make a difference), it is the set of traits they possess as the output of their upbringing that determines their being 'natural' farmers, builders, and so on. Specialization occurs in accordance with *fulfilled nature*, on this view.

This reading is consistent with two conceptions of the *original* nature that corresponds with the fulfilled nature: either (i) all of the craftspersons and moneymakers in the first city are born quite distinct, with non-overlapping or minimally overlapping sets of general aptitudes and inclinations, or (ii) they were all born with the same general aptitude. According to either interpretation, the traits pos-

citizens engage in import and export trade (371a), have retail shops (371d), employ wage-earners (371e), and enjoy a range of 'delicacies' such as 'salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots, and vegetables', *et cetera* (372c). Socrates insists, though, that the citizens 'produce enough for themselves at home but also goods of the right quality and quantity to satisfy the requirements of others (ὧν ἂν δέωνται)', making clear that production is limited to meeting *need* (371a). We find the society expanding to meet *want* only when Socrates acquiesces with Glaucon's request to add 'the delicacies and desserts that people have nowadays' (372d-e). The new productive specialties in the luxurious city—for production of paintings, perfumes, and furniture—are unmoored from natural need and are, accordingly, counter to the conception of specialization according to nature. But there is one new specialty in the luxurious city that is not productive: guardianship. I will return to this point.

[23] This is not yet to agree with Reeve 1988, 172 in denying the 'unique aptitude doctrine', as he calls it. Socrates may yet be committed to the idea that each person is uniquely suited to just one work in the city, even if he does not think that uniquely is determined by conditions *at birth*. Indeed, I will argue that *fulfilled nature* determines unique suitedness.

sessed by the 'natural' farmer at birth are only inputs that distinguish him as a good fit for being brought up in the farming way of life, but he nevertheless counts as a 'natural' farmer strictly in accordance with the practicable skills that he acquired as an output of that upbringing. But the two conceptions are worth considering because Plato shapes the dialogue in a way that subtly capitalizes on both.

Conception (i) appears to be endorsed when, in presenting the Myth of Metals, Socrates says that the city should believe that a god mixed 'iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen' and that anyone found to have 'a mixture of iron or bronze' should be given to the class of producers (415a-b).[24] The specification of two metals in the souls of this one class, contrasting the selection of a single metal for each of the other two classes, suggests that there is variation among the original aptitudes of the citizens who are producers. Socrates' claim here is not that each producer has both iron and bronze in their one soul, but that iron is in the soul of some producers, bronze in the souls of others.[25] This can explain the wide range of specializations they are able to master. By pluralizing the potentiality of the original nature, Socrates can better accommodate the breadth of their occupations.

Conception (ii) homogenizes all of the variation found among these craftspersons, emphasizing their sameness to one another in belonging together in the producer class rather than their differences. What distinguishes them, on this conception, is their difference from auxiliaries and philosophers, which is a difference in original nature. Again, as the Myth of Metals passage indicates, citizens must be selected into their appropriate class at or very near to birth (415b). That is, they must be directed to a class and way of life that will bring their original nature to its fulfillment. The person with the philosopher's original nature must be directed to the ruling class. The person with the producer's original nature must be directed to the producing class. There is something common to all original natures of the producers that makes them belong together in a single class, then. It may be that this common feature is very thin and only a negation (that they are not fit for the guardian classes), but that is sufficient, to Socrates' mind, for grouping them all together and saying of them that they all belong to the 'profit-loving' (φιλοκερδές) variety of the 'three primary kinds of people' (581b-c).

What must be noted, though, is that these two conceptions are not explored in

[24] See Gonda 2021 for an account of the Noble Lie that denies that this element concerning metals is a falsehood. I agree with his reading that the myth of metals tracks a vital (for Socrates) truth regarding the hierarchical rule.

[25] Martin 1981, 9 suggests that the iron-souled might be producers of necessary goods and the bronze-souled of unnecessary goods. See Hulme 2022 for exploration of the extension of the terms δημιουργός and τέχνη, offering an opportunity to understand the iron and bronze souls as differentiated by categorical differences in the activities they will go on to make their own. The 434a-b mention of δημιουργὸς ὢν ἤ τις ἄλλος χρηματιστής accommodates one such reading. Whatever conclusion we draw, it is preferable to preserve the purity of each, for Socrates often emphasizes the importance of keeping the metals unmixed in the interest of guarding the office of the ruler (415b-c).

the context of the book 2 presentation of specialization. The first city illustrates the importance of fulfilled nature in the division of labor and the well-functioning of cities. This illustration is best achieved by ignoring differences in original nature or, even better, by holding original nature constant, so that differences in fulfilled nature can be seen to be doing the relevant work. It is only when we advance to the second city that we are afforded an opportunity to consider the contours of original nature.

## III. The Natures of Guardians in the Luxurious City and Kallipolis

As the argument of the dialogue advances from Glaucon's request that luxuries be added to the first city, we learn that there are individuals who possess the nature of guardians from birth and prior to any training (376c). These citizens are 'well-born youths', Socrates says, and there is no difference between their nature and that of a pedigree puppy (375a). 'Each needs keen senses, speed to catch what it sees, and strength in case it has to fight it out with what it captures. … And each must be courageous if indeed he's to fight well' (375a). And each will be, 'in addition to high-spirited (πρὸς τῷ θυμοειδεῖ), also philosophical in their nature' (ἔτι προσγενέσθαι φιλόσοφος τὴν φύσιν, 375e).[26] These traits mark the potential of such individuals. When such potential receives the education appropriate to it, it will be actualized. Only then will their nature be fulfilled in the requisite way to make them specialists in the work of guarding. The traits that they possess 'at the outset' and prior to any training are constitutive of their *original* nature (376c).[27]

Socrates is emphatic that any person found to possess these special traits must be granted an education in music and poetry and physical training.[28] They must be immersed in an environment that maximizes the chance that their nature will be fulfilled rather than spoiled. And in contrast to the silence with which Socrates treats the apprenticeships and training programs of farmers and cobblers, the description of the educational program for the guardian original nature is extensive and detailed.[29] The remainder of book 2 and majority of book 3 are dedi-

[26] It is interesting that an accusative is used here instead of the dative construction. We go on to learn that only a subset of individuals possessive of these traits have the properly philosophic original nature, described in book 6, so perhaps the accusative here avoids erroneous attribution of original nature. When he says next, about dogs being philosophical, that it is an 'exquisite (κομψόν) trait of his nature' to be friendly to what is 'familiar' (γνώριμον). The young natural guardian is 'philosophical' in that same sense. What is lawful and *kalon* is γνώριμον for him, but this 'familiarity' is adjacent to knowledge. The philosopher is not simply loyal to what is good because it is 'familiar', but because he *knows* it. See Arruzza 2016 for discussion of the philosophical dogs.

[27] Shorey 1930 translates ὑπάρχοι as 'the basis of his character', noting that the word 'marks the basis of nature as opposed to teaching' (376n3).

[28] For the importance of music and poetry, see 377a-b, 386a, 391e-392a, 395b-396b, 401d-402a. For physical training, see 403c, 410b, 411e.

[29] The question of whether or not the craftspeople and money-makers will receive the education is a controversial issue, but it must be understood that the guardians will not endure any craft apprenticeships, not only because it would be practically useless for them, but also because 'it will be forbidden them even to pay any attention to such things' (396a-b). The apprenticeships, time-consuming as

cated to describing and arguing for various details of a 20-year educational program in music, poetry, and physical training.

There are two crucial ingredients in the making of a guardian, then. The first is the set of raw aptitudes that fills out potential, and the second is the education that delivers that potential to its fulfillment. Ultimately it is the fulfilled nature that is suited to the work of guarding, but original nature determines that the individual should endure the guardian education in the first place. In other words, the principle of specialization pertains to fulfilled nature—each one should do the work for which he is 'naturally suited' in the sense of what their fulfilled nature is suited to—but selection into an educational program is determined by original nature.

This interpretation is reinforced by the depiction of the philosopher rulers at the end of book 3 and in book 6. We first catch sight of these individuals and understand that they are distinct from auxiliaries when Socrates emphasizes that there will be a subset of guardians whose beliefs and attitudes persist through stringent testing (413d-414a). 'Anyone who is tested in this way as a child, youth, and adult, and always comes out of it untainted, is to be made a ruler as well as a guardian' (413e-414a).[30] Those who are identified as 'complete guardians' in this way are pulled into a longer education: the program in mathematics, practical application, and dialectic that is described in books 6 and 7. At the end of this near-lifelong program of training, they officially become rulers in the city.

The schema of original and fulfilled natures is observable at each step of this partitioning of the guardian class and extension of the rulers' education. First, because rulers and auxiliaries endure the same early education, with no deviations from a single prescribed plan, the fact that the education can result in two types of people—those fit to advance to philosophy and those fit to leave it alone—plainly indicates that education is not the sole determinant of type. We may try to explain the difference by appealing to the eagerness and dedication of some students, namely, those who will be identified as rulers, as if their hard work is explanatory of their outcome. But the text better supports understanding the differences in outcome as being the result of differences in input. When we hold the educational program constant, and we input different original natures, we will readily find differences among outputs.

Socrates lays the question to rest when he presents, in book 6, the philosophic nature. A primary contention of that presentation is that the individuals fit for the

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they are, since they require time-sensitivity (370b), will preclude full-enrollment by any money-maker in the full program of music and poetry and physical education.

[30] Socrates does indicate that he might be fashioning a new type of person, rather than only carving out a subset of the guardians, when he says, 'The young people we've hitherto called guardians (οὓς δὴ νῦν φύλακας ἐκαλοῦμεν) we'll now call *auxiliaries* and supporters of the guardians' convictions' (414b). The standard reading is that the rulers are 'recruited from among the guardian warriors' (Martin 1981, 3). In any case, the rulers will receive the early education alongside the auxiliaries so that their upbringing is identical up to this point. This is not to say that they are indistinguishable throughout that early education, as I discuss presently.

philosophical life possess distinctive capacities from birth.

> We must accept as agreed this trait of the philosophical nature (τῶν φιλοσόφων φύσεων πέρι ὡμολογήσθω), that it is ever (ἀεί) enamored of the kind of knowledge which reveals to them something of that essence which is eternal, and is not wandering between the two poles of generation and decay.[31] (485a-b)

The 'always' in Socrates' description of this truth-loving is quite purposeful. He goes on to say that 'someone who loves learning must above all strive for every kind of truth from childhood on' (εὐθὺς ἐκ νέου, 485d). This echoes the idea that the guardians—now known as auxiliaries—possessed characteristics distinctive of their nature 'at the outset' (376c). A nature can be known to be philosophic if 'it is just and gentle, from youth on' (εὐθὺς νέου, 486b), is 'a slow learner or a fast one' (486c), and is in a person 'whose thought is by nature measured and graceful and is easily led to the form of each thing that is' (486d). Further, the nature is rare: 'I suppose that everyone would agree that this nature (τοιαύτην φύσιν), possessing all the qualities that we just now said were essential to becoming (γενέσθαι) a complete philosopher (τελέως φιλόσοφος), is rare and that seldom occurs naturally among human beings' (491a-b).[32] In other words, this special nature can be identified in individuals prior to any education or training, prior to any becoming (γενέσθαι) that will culminate in completeness (τελέως).

Socrates is describing an *original nature* that has the potential to do the work of ruling the city, but not yet the fulfilled 'natural suitedness' to that work. 'When such people have reached maturity in age and education, wouldn't you entrust the city to them and to them alone?' (487a). Indeed, *if* such persons reach the natural fulfillment of their original nature, then there would be nothing better than to entrust the city to them alone.

These philosophic original natures that are described in book 6 are brought to their fulfillment not at the close of the early education—for that is only when the first stage in their process of development is tested—but at the close of the longer education that culminates in dialectic.[33] It is upon graduation from that education that individuals possessed of the philosophic nature will have fulfilled their potential and become naturally suited to the specialized work of ruling the city.

[31] Socrates here uses the plural φύσεις, which seems inconsistent with there being only one nature that all philosophic individuals have in common. Indeed, in the passage just previous to this one, he used the singular: 'It is necessary to understand the nature of them' (τὴν φύσιν αὐτῶν, 485a). We cannot appeal to the idea that the the guardian class comprises two distinct natures (auxiliaries and rulers), as explains the plural used at 374e, 375b, 375d, and likely 424a. He does use a plural at 502a in discussing the possibility of existing rulers having offspring who are 'philosophers in their natures' (ἔκγονοι ἢ δυναστῶν τὰς φύσεις φιλόσοφοι). Perhaps he uses the plural in these places because he means to have the individuals, i.e., the philosophers, in focus rather than the nature itself.

[32] Grube translates τοιαύτην φύσιν as 'a few natures', which obscures the uniqueness of the philosophic nature.

[33] See Scott 2015 for an account this longer education that makes sense of how it would constitute the 'longer route' to knowledge of the Forms. Scott's discussion accounts for the steps of the education as well as the intellectual achievement in which it culminates. That is, it provides a fuller account of the fulfilled philosophic nature.

Their process of development from potential to fulfillment is the longest of any of the original natures. This is due, the dialogue indicates, both to the value and complexity of their work and to the danger of any mistakes in the process of development.

Lest we have any doubt that philosophers are made both by birth and by education, Socrates emphasizes the dual contribution in his vivid analogy of vigorous seeds.

> We know that the more vigorous any seed, developing plant, or animal is, the more it is deficient in the things that are appropriate for it to have when it is deprived of suitable food, season, or location. For the bad is more opposed to the good than it is to the merely not good. …Then it's reasonable to say that the best nature (τὴν ἀρίστην φύσιν) fares worse, when unsuitably nurtured (ἐν ἀλλοτριωτέρᾳ οὖσαν τροφῇ), than an ordinary one. …Then won't we say the same thing about souls too, Adeimantus, that those with the best natures (τὰς εὐφυεστάτας) become outstandingly bad when they receive a bad upbringing (κακῆς παιδαγωγίας)? Or do you think that great injustices and pure wickedness originate in an ordinary nature rather than a vigorous one (νεανικῆς φύσεως) that has been corrupted by its upbringing (τροφῇ)? (491d-e)

This 'best' and 'vigorous' nature (τὴν ἀρίστην φύσιν; νεανικῆς φύσεως) here refers to the nature of the rulers whom Socrates has already called the 'most valuable' in the city (415a). And there is no doubt that it is their *original* nature, the uneducated potential that they possess at birth, that is the focus of this passage because it is distinguished from and depicted as shaped by upbringing (τροφῇ and παιδαγωγίας). Upbringing can determine how nature develops, whether toward goodness or toward wickedness, if and only if the nature in question is a potentiality. When Socrates says that the philosophic nature must receive a particular upbringing and education, he means that the philosophic *original* nature must be recognized and pulled into the educational program appropriate to it.[34]

Again, we are in a position to better appreciate the truth of the Myth of Metals. Each citizen of Kallipolis is distinguished at birth by their possession of an original nature that determines what is cognitively possible for them in life. Gold, the most precious of metals, denotes the philosophic nature in this myth both because that nature is rarest and because it has the greatest potential for good if brought to

[34] Socrates acknowledges rare instances of the philosophic nature growing correctly (κατὰ φύσιν) rather than incorrectly (παρὰ φύσιν), despite being deprived of its proper education (496b; cf. 444d). Socrates acknowledges Theages as one example, and himself as another (496b-c). The explanations for why these philosophic natures escape corruption are varied: 'the absence of corrupters' (496b); 'a great soul born in a little town scorns and disregards its parochial affairs' (496b); in the case of Theages, a disformed body prevented a political affair, saving him from flattery and corruption (496b)-c); and in Socrates' case, 'the divine sign' saved him (496c). Strictly, Socrates does not say that these individuals achieve knowledge, i.e., the fulfillment of the philosophic nature. But they avoid corruption, and so they are not παρὰ φύσιν.

its fulfillment. This is the 'wisdom-loving' (φιλόσοφον) variety of the 'three primary kinds' (581c). It is distinguished both in its original form—in having gold mixed into it by the god—and also in its fulfilled form, at its completion. But this leaves open the possibility that it could be raised in a way that deviates from the path toward fulfillment, and that it can be destroyed. Hence all of Socrates' admonishments to guard both the type (415b-c) and its upbringing (423d-424b).[35]

We must reject readings such as that of Rowett 2016, 70, then. She argues that 'the [Myth of Metals] seems actually to recommend treating all children as indeterminate at birth and delaying the assignment of classes and roles until the age of majority, when it can be done fairly according to the capabilities manifested during a period of universal comprehensive education'. Rowett does consider the possibility of original natures, wondering, 'Were the infants already naturally differentiated, such that some tend naturally to absorb bronze and some to absorb silver or gold? Or is it the god's whim which gets which?' (92). But she concludes that the difference between these alternatives 'perhaps' does not matter.[36] To the contrary, I understand the difference as being vital to the argument of the dialogue, for it is only in distinguishing original nature from fulfilled nature that we are in a position to assess what determines 'natural suitedness' and, thereby, accurately conceive the principle of specialization and account of justice.

## Conclusion

We are in a position, now, to appreciate the mistake in the assertion by Klosko 1986, 142 that 'Plato does not believe that each individual is able to perform only one task in the state, which only he can do.' The 'ability' to perform only one task takes one meaning when anchored to original nature and a very different meaning when anchored to fulfilled nature. Strictly, original nature does not endow anyone with the 'natural suitedness' that is relevant to the principle of specialization, but it does endow them with a potential that—depending on which of the 'primary kinds' that potential belongs to—can be fulfilled in various ways. The money-lover may be fulfilled as a doctor or a farmer or a cobbler, etc., even if the wisdom-lover may only be fulfilled as a ruler. But once fulfilled is reached,

[35] Some scholars may quarrel with this claim. Sauvé Meyer 2004, 229, e.g., says that 'the most important set of institutions in the ideal city are those of education'. But education is not the singly most important institution in the city. It is the most important of the orders that Socrates and his fellow city-founders are recommending to the philosopher rulers. Guarding education is 'sufficient' (ικανόν), according to Socrates, for satisfying the founders that the other orders they issue will be met (423e). But ensuring that the right people are occupying the guardian classes comes first because it requires attending to original nature before development has begun.

[36] She goes on to say that 'if we are to speculate, the best guess seems to be that the education starts out the same for all, and then as the metals become apparent, students must choose or be directed towards routes that suit their talents, though all are still in the same underground womb' (95-96). See Greco 2009a, esp. 22-23, and Sauvé Meyer 2004, esp. 235-236, for arguments that similarly push back the question of what makes each person capable of developing their particular natural suitedness.

it is absolutely the case that 'each individual is able to perform only one task'. The actualization of the original potential is itself an element of specialization. Klosko has missed the restriction of the principle of specialization to fulfilled nature.[37] Likewise, when Sauvé Meyer 2004, 236 asserts that possibility of an individual 'who is naturally capable of both carpentry and justice', we can see the mistake right away. Sauvé Meyer has overlooked original nature.

Understanding the complexity in Socrates' conception of nature aids us in reconciling seeming inconsistencies in the dialogue and rendering sensible what may seem otherwise ridiculous claims. In imagining his ideal city, Socrates pictures each person doing the work for which they are 'naturally suited', and without clarity on the notion of 'nature' at the core of this account, we might think he means that individuals are born to specialize in their very particular occupations or else that they acquire the skills and desires that suit to them to the work entirely in the course of their rearing. But his view is more subtle and more complex than either of these alternatives.

Nature in the *Republic* is a complex notion of original nature brought to fulfillment through a development that is mediated by environmental factors. Original nature is inborn and comes in three primary kinds. The basic desire orientations of truth-loving, honor-loving, and profit-loving, and the complementary abilities to learn and perform the tasks that satisfy them, are sensitive to the environment in which they grow and develop. When an individual is afforded the education and nurture befitting their original nature, they almost surely arrive at their fulfilled nature, the mature and actualized version of their inborn desires and talents. If deprived of the upbringing appropriate to their dispositions, the individual fares poorly and—in the case of the philosophic original nature—becomes a threat to the wellbeing of the society at large.

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[37] Differently from Klosko, Reeve 1988, 17 insists that 'there is no place in his theory for the view that they are born with a natural aptitude for a unique craft', and concludes from there that Plato is not committed to the principle of specialization. Surely Reeve is right that Socrates does not believe individuals are *born* with unique aptitudes, but the observation obscures that fact that there is room in his theory for unique aptitude: in fulfilled nature. Annas 1981, 75, when she says Plato 'is not interested in what makes a person a shoemaker and not a farmer, but in much wider differences of type', is similarly attending to original nature to the neglect of fulfilled nature.

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