

European Citizenship: Economy, *Parrhesia* and Sublimation

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union came into existence in 1992, following the Maastricht Treaty. The ratification of this treaty made European citizens of the populations of the member states, and saw the creation of a European level of educational and cultural policy-making. The construction of the European citizen was central to such policy. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 began the process of the creation of a European space of higher education to contribute to the creation of a Europe of Knowledge as a stable political and economic entity and a citizenship of it. Compatibility and comparability have been organising concepts for the development of this space, not only for the institutions of higher education but also across institutions and for individuals' orientation to learning and work. This demands particular forms of accountability and visibility, which John Drummond suggests amount to a commodification of the self (Drummond, 2003, p. 61).

The implications of these developments for the mode of subjectivation of the European citizen have been the subject of much recent analysis using the work of Michel Foucault. I do not seek to provide another such analysis here. Instead I am concerned with the exploring the possibility of resistance in Foucault's understanding of power and his understanding of this, in part, requiring the interrogation of one's history. The idea of Europe promoted in the construction of European citizenship is based on a particular history, of events and icons, indicative of the shared heritage and values of the European people. There is a sense of inevitability assumed but also exclusions implied. The coming together of the European Union is presented as the inevitable development of the continent—but also as essential for its future survival in a constantly changing globalised world.

The entrepreneurial self, characterized by employability, mobility and adaptability, is the ideal citizen of Europe and is a dominant mode of subjectivation in the creation of Europe as a knowledge economy. The understanding of one's citizenship in this way entails a particular use of the term 'economy', in which it is no longer separable from the social (Simons, 2007). This can be seen as a further intensification of the role of economy in the development of governmentality in Foucault's account. I begin here by drawing attention to the way in which economy, and a particular understanding of education and the self appear in Plato's *Republic*, a central text of the European canon. This introduces a discussion of the way in which both Stanley Cavell and Michel Foucault have reworked ideas in the text. I end by discussing how the ethical stance that Cavell and Foucault advocate enables the possibility to resist and, to use Cavell's term, sublimate the language of economy in relation to education and the self.

PLATO'S REPUBLIC

I consider two aspects of Plato's *Republic* here. First, I show how an early interaction between Socrates and his interlocutor introduces an understanding of economy that exists in the dialogue form itself. Second, I refer to the allegory of the cave to discuss the understanding of education found there.

The dialogic form found throughout Plato's text can be said to represent a mode of education, a constant willingness to question and be questioned, to displace one's former assumptions. There is something productive about this dynamic form, then, but also inherently negative in the sense of the need to be open to loss. The opening exchange of the text indicates the need for this willingness in the line, 'You can't persuade people who won't listen' (Plato, 2003, p. 4; 327c). No change (education) will occur without the willingness to be so.

In an exchange between Socrates and Cephalus they briefly discuss wealth, in which they seem concerned with more than its monetary sense. Socrates asks Cephalus whether he inherited his fortune or made it himself (p. 6; 330a). Cephalus replies:

As a business man I rank somewhere between my grandfather and my father. For my grandfather, after whom I am named, inherited as much as I have now have and multiplied it several times over, while my father Lysanias reduced it to less than what it is now: for myself, I shall be pleased enough if I leave the boys of mine a little more than I inherited (p. 6; 330b).

Socrates continues with a further question:

- What do you think is the greatest advantage you have gained from being so rich?
- One ... which many will perhaps not credit. For you know, Socrates, when a man faces the thought of death there come into his mind anxieties that did not trouble him before ... he is filled with doubts and fears and begins to reckon up and see if there is anyone he has wronged (p. 7; 300d-e).

This brief exchange seems to preempt the nature of the educational value of the exchange found throughout the text. The fortune Socrates refers is monetary but is perhaps also luck on the one hand and some sort of intellectual or moral wealth on the other. As such, the inheritance, while referring to the monetary success of the businessman, may also refer to the concern to pass something on. There is perhaps humility in the contentment to pass on just a little more to his sons than he inherited. This concern with inheritance recurs in the final part of the citation, as one becoming concerned in old age with what one leaves behind. The idea that many will not 'credit' this implies, with its roots in 'belief', that it is a reason one may not be willing to give oneself over to. This exchange draws attention to the ubiquity of reference to economy and accounting in everyday language and implies an orientation to self and other in its usage here with implications for an understanding of education.

The second aspect of the text I draw on here relates to the concern with visibility discussed earlier, and the idea of education in relation to the self. In Plato's allegory of the cave a particular relation to light and what is visible depicts an understanding of education as the transition between ignorance and enlightenment. Socrates describes the cave thus:

Imagine an underground chamber like a cave, with a long entrance open to the daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Some way off, behind and higher up, a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, ... there are men carrying all sorts of gear along behind the curtain-wall, projecting above it ... (p. 241; 513e-515b).

All that the prisoners can see are the shadows, and their being unable to move means that they assume the shadows to represent 'the real things'. On being released within the cave, the prisoner must grow accustomed to the light before accepting the truth of what it is that he sees and what was merely illusion. The ascent towards the fire, the light, into the upper world is 'the upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region' (p. 244; 517b), where one has access to the form of the good: 'anyone who is going to act rationally either in the public or private sphere must have sight of it' (p. 244; 517b-c).

Socrates suggests unsightedness can result not only from transition from dark to light but also from light to dark. He relates the view that the education of the philosopher rulers—the attainment of the highest form of knowledge by the best minds—implies an obligation on their part 'to return again to the prisoners in the cave below, and share their labours and rewards' (p. 246; 519d). In a society that produces philosophers 'involuntarily and unintentionally' those philosophers should feel no obligation 'to repay for an upbringing which it owes to no-one' (p. 247; 520b). The philosopher-rulers, however, have not been bred for their own benefit but for that of the whole community and thus they are told they must

descend each in turn and live with your fellows in the cave and get used to seeing in the dark; once you get used to it you will see a thousand times better than they do and will distinguish the various shadows, and know what they are shadows of, because you have seen the truth about things admirable and just and good. And so our state and yours will be really awoken ... (p. 247; 520 b-d).

The knowledge of the philosopher ruler then is of value for the society at large and part of the value of the knowledge lies in its enabling a becoming accustomed to the dark in a superior way. The attainment of the higher form of knowledge required of the philosopher ruler requires not only an intellectual orientation to learning, the orientation of the mind's eye, but also the orientation of the body, suggesting that movement is required, being shifted from one's position to elsewhere in relation to knowledge. But this is not solely for the benefit of the individual; this orientation is

also informed by a moral imperative. In Cavell's essay 'Plato' this moral imperative is further explored but in relation to questioning the relation to the self and other assumed in the ascent from the cave.

PLATO, CAVELL AND MORAL PERFECTIONISM

Plato's image in the allegory of the cave, of education as 'a path upward, from darkness to light, concluding in a state of perfection and comprehension of the Forms' (Cavell, 2005, p. 315) is countered, in Cavell's view, by Ralph Waldo Emerson's moral perfectionism, pictured in his essay *Experience* as 'finding ourselves someplace on a series of stairs, perceiving those stairs below us that we have ascended and those above us that we have not reached (without a first or last)' (ibid.). This perfectionism 'does not envisage, even deplores, the prospect of arriving at a final state of perfection' (ibid.) as in Plato's image. Cavell is concerned with the beginning of Plato's path and 'the darkness within which the desire for a step toward another, liberating perspective asserts itself' (ibid.), and with identifying Plato's *Republic* as a source of a 'thematics of perfectionism' (p. 320).

Cavell situates the allegory of the Cave within the context of the *Republic* thus: 'I take the opening of the allegory of Cave, which is the opening of the journey to philosophy, to be Plato's portrait of the everyday, the customary public space in which philosophy is first encountered' (p. 324). He reads the allegory, therefore, as a recapitulation of the opening conversation of the text, the beginning of an exchange. Cavell's interest in conversation and everyday language, informed in part by Wittgenstein, enables the reading of Plato's text in perfectionist rather than perfectible terms. In Cavell's view, Plato and Wittgenstein 'share the sense of liberation as requiring the intervention of a new or counter voice' (p. 328) but Wittgenstein, he says, does not share 'the Republic's idea of a goal of perfectibility, a foreseeable path to a concluding state of the human' (p. 329). Cavell suggests that references to turning in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* captures 'the sense that philosophy's task requires a reorientation of thought' and thus 'if momentary, of one's life' and therefore, 'challenges the claim of Plato's myth to describe the trajectory of a total, unified human life' (p. 328). Rather, Cavell understands the impulse for the reorientation of the self thus:

The measure of direction, or progress, is not assured by a beacon from afar, or what seems to be meant by what today is spoken of as a moral compass, but rather pointed to by what Emerson figures as a gleam of light over an inner landscape, and which is concretely guided, and tested, by whether the next step of the self is one that takes its cue from the torment, the sickness, the strangeness, the exile, the disappointment, the boredom, the restlessness, that I have claimed are the terms in which *Philosophical Investigations* portrays the modern subject. By a step that "takes its cue" from these conditions I do not mean one that attempts to escape them but one that judges the degree to which these conditions must be borne and may be turned (some might say sublimated) constructively, productively, sociably. This puts tremendous weight on one's judgment, critically including one's judgment of whose judgment is to be listened to most attentively (p. 329).

This reference to critical judgment of who one might listen to recalls a line in the opening of the *Republic*, which Cavell sees echoed in the allegory of the cave: ‘You can’t persuade people who won’t listen’ (Plato, p. 4; 327c). To be persuaded implies a loss of previously held belief and thus a willingness in listening attentively to experience such loss, a willingness to be changed. For Cavell, this return to the self and other in everyday conversation problematises the view of education and the everyday presented in the allegory of the cave as a linear moving away from darkness toward a unified, enlightened self. The Socratic dialogue throughout the *Republic* can be seen as exemplifying this continual questioning. I turn now to Michel Foucault’s analysis of Socratic dialogue as parrhesia to explore further the moral imperative that Cavell draws attention to.

FOUCAULT’S ACCOUNT OF SOCRATIC *PARRHESIA*

Parrhesia, translated by Foucault as ‘free speech’, is a particular way of speaking that was central to Athenian democracy due to the critique it provided of those in power. The parrhesiastes, one who speaks the truth, must be free to choose whether to speak, but does so, despite any risk, out of a sense of moral duty. The parrhesiastes does not speak from a position of power or statutory authority, but is always less powerful than who he addresses. What the parrhesiastes says is also always a critique of himself, that is, there is a harmony between what the parrhesiastes says and how he acts. It is the ethical relation of the self to the self—according to which one chooses to speak the truth—that was seen to guarantee one’s access to the truth and thus the willingness of the hearer to listen.

Foucault identifies in the *Republic* Plato’s concern for the implications of parrhesia, the right to free speech, for democracy. He fears that liberty and free speech will result in everyone having ‘his own manner of life, his own style of life’ to the detriment of the common good of the city (Foucault, 2001, p. 84). Foucault suggests, therefore, that parrhesia became more related to one’s choice of existence, that is, freedom of thought increasingly becoming freedom of action.

Foucault suggests Socrates’ role in dialogue is typical of the parrhesiastes and finds Socratic parrhesia to take a particular form. Rather than speaking the truth in the public domain, Socratic parrhesia takes place face to face with another, as seen in the *Republic* for example. Foucault draws attention then to the relationship between parrhesia and care of the self, giving the example of Plato’s *On Courage*.

Lysimachus and Melesias are concerned about the education they should give to their sons (p. 92). Despite belonging to eminent families and their own fathers’ prestige, Lysimachus and Melesias have made no great accomplishments (ibid.).

Clearly ... having a high birth and belonging to a noble Athenian house are not sufficient to endow someone with the aptitude and the ability to assume a prominent position or role in the city. They realize that something more is needed, viz., education (p. 93).

Foucault relates the concerns expressed in the text to the broader role of parrhesia at the time. The ability to criticise and speak freely in the social and political arenas was now found in relation to education, and hence the question arose: ‘if you yourself are not well-educated, how then can you decide what constitutes a good education?’ (ibid.). Socrates’ advice is sought. He reminds the men that ‘education concerns the care of the soul [185d]’ (p. 95).

Nicias, previously consulted by Lysimachus and Melesias due to his military eminence, agrees for ‘his soul to be “tested” by Socrates, i.e. ... he will play the Socratic parrhesiastic game’ (ibid.). This entails being led into giving an account of oneself. Playing the parrhesiastic game with Socrates first requires face to face contact, a proximity to him (p. 96). Second, the being led into giving an account of oneself requires a certain passivity of the hearer, which ‘consists in being persuaded by what he listens to’ (ibid.). This echoes the reference to listening found in the opening of the *Republic* that Cavell also drew attention to.

The purpose of the accountability drawn out in Socratic parrhesia is of a different order than the confessional sense predominant in Christian culture. It is not oriented toward an admission of faults or an autobiographical recounting of events. Instead giving an account of your life, your bios, is

to demonstrate whether you are able to show that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the logos, you are able to use, and the way that you live. Socrates is inquiring in to the way that logos gives form to a person’s style of life; for he is interested in discovering whether there is a harmonic relation between the two (p. 97).

For example, when Socrates asks Laches the reason for his courage he does not seek ‘a narrative of his exploits’ in the war but ‘the logos which gives rational, intelligible form to his courage’ (ibid.). The result of such listening, then, is a shifted orientation to how one thinks and expresses the relationship between one’s thought and action and a recognition of the ethical relationship between the two.

... one becomes willing to care for the manner in which he lives the rest of his life, wanting now to live in the best possible way; and this willingness takes the form of a zeal to learn and to educate oneself no matter what one’s age (p. 98).

This willingness recalls the perfectionist rather than perfectible understanding of the self and of education that Cavell finds in the *Republic*. The distinctive aspect of Socratic parrhesia in relation to other forms being its appearance in ‘a personal relationship between two human beings’ (p. 101) may suggest that the willingness to listen, to be changed, involves a greater risk and discomfort than its public, political form. Yet arguably it is the willingness to subject oneself to such critique that is, for Socrates, part of what it is to be an educated person.

In both Cavell’s and Foucault’s readings of Socratic dialogues, a form of economy, of accounting for the self and a willingness to submit to a form of lifelong learning are necessary. In the final section I will consider how their reworking of the ideas

found in the Republic offer a critique of the current discourse of the entrepreneurial self.

CONCLUSION: CITIZENSHIP, ACCOUNTING FOR THE SELF AND SUBLIMATION

My concern here has been to draw attention to ways in which the resistance Foucault insisted was inherent in his understanding of power might be effected in the course of the everyday. I have, therefore, drawn on Foucault's and Cavell's reworking of Plato's *Republic* and other texts, to show how attention paid to the level of the individual and to one's moral and ethical relation to self and other may enable the possibility of the sublimation of the language of economy and the way in which it informs current modes of subjectivation.

Cavell suggests the term sublimation in relation to his questioning of the allegory of the cave. The view of education as progress toward a light from afar, or our being oriented by a moral compass, suggests some external and universal source of moral orientation and that this will always lead along a path on which we only accrue the right knowledge of the world. Cavell draws attention to our negative or mundanely everyday experiences, which he takes from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*—'the torment, the sickness, the strangeness, the exile, the disappointment, the boredom, the restlessness'—that constitute our education as humans. Similarly to Foucault's perspective on the necessity of continual negotiation of the operation of power, Cavell's reference to sublimation suggests the use of one's judgment (in the sense emphasized by Cavell) in coming to terms with the world as we find it, in a way that is informed by a moral imperative. In relation to the language of economy, this implies the diversion of its current predominant use, by paying attention to the way in which we use language and its implications.

Foucault's account of Socratic parrhesia gives an illustration of this ethical relation to self and other in pointing to the condition that the account that one gives of oneself must be commensurate with how one acts. This suggests then a mode of accountability oriented not by the economic imperative (or an understanding of ethics shaped by it) but by acknowledgement of the obligation in the relation to the self and the other implicit in one's citizenship. The account of parrhesia, however, suggests that answerability (as also implied by Cavell's work), rather than obligation, to be a more appropriate way to understand our relationship to the ideal of democracy. The use of sublimation is not intended to imply some superior state of being as such in the sense of an elevation above the everyday, but to emphasise the moral aspect of the possibility of resistance in reappropriating forms of language to which we are subject. The idea of accountability in the knowledge economy was described above as being for external ends. This is problematised by the moral imperative in the idea of sublimation. Cavell contrasts the beacon to which those in the cave move towards, an external source, with 'what Emerson figures as a gleam of light over an inner landscape' (Cavell, 2005, p. 329). This invokes the sense of the small, everyday choices we make, the small flash of clarity that enables us to go on within the complex contingent reality in which we exist. Rather than the view of education as the overcoming of darkness, Cavell's account recognises that this is where our education occurs. What is frequently drawn attention to in the texts considered here in relation to the educational value of the Socratic dialogue is the willingness to listen. This

implies then the value of acknowledging a passivity, a willingness to be changed, that defies the current preoccupation with visibility and the anxious activity that accompanies measurable objectives.

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