3. Plato

William Haines, July 10, 2026

> "Unless the private household in our cities is run in the correct way, there is no point in expecting the community's legal system to have any stability."
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> —Plato, *Laws* 790b[1]

Plato reconceived the family almost beyond recognition for the leading class in one of his ideal cities. But it would be misleading to say simply that Plato rejected the family. He always saw family as a central topic for political thought. He once proposed that in the real world, governing a state is no different from governing a household (which at that time normally included a farm and other activities we might think of as economic production). He proposed parental authority as a model for the authority of law, and he proposed good parenting as a model for the way the laws should be written. In the *Republic* he took the compelling power of family feeling so for granted that the scheme of that book relies on radically extending family feeling and the forms of family life without preserving the conditions that ground them. But in the same work he used the dynamics of the traditional family as a model to understand and explain constitutional change.

In the end Plato thought the city should encourage strong and enduring household families by a wide variety of means, some quite invasive. He thought the community should offer norms for child rearing. He suggested many strenuous means to ensure the adequate prosperity of household families (as distinct from their individual members) while protecting them from the

[1] Schofield and Griffith 2016, p. 246.

corrupting temptations of accumulation, a danger that we appreciate today. Among family norms he especially emphasized filial piety, during and after one's parents' lifetimes.

The *Statesman* (*Politicus*)

In a famous passage in Plato's *Statesman*, "young Socrates" holds that governing a state is no different from governing a household, except for the size. He may be thinking especially of what we would call the economic aspects of household life, such as the management of the farm and the control of expenses (though he distinguishes managing a household from managing slaves, who did much of the labor in Athens).[2]

> VISITOR: Then shall we posit the statesman and king and slave-master, and the manager of a household as well, as one thing, when we refer to them by all these names, or are we to say that they are as many sorts of expertise as the names we use to refer to them?
> …
> VISITOR: Well then, surely there won't be any difference, so far as ruling is concerned, between the character of a large household, on the one hand, and the bulk of a small city on the other?
> YOUNG SOCRATES: None.
> VISITOR: So, in answer to the question we were asking ourselves just now, it's clear that there is one sort of expert knowledge concerned with all these things; whether someone gives this the name of expertise in kingship, or statesmanship, or household management, let's not pick any quarrel with him.
> YOUNG SOCRATES: I agree—why should we? [3]

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[2] In Xenophon's *Memorabilia of Socrates* 3.6.14f., when Socrates argues that being able to govern a household is a necessary condition of being able to govern the city because the city is made of households, he clearly has in mind a conception of the "household manager" as someone focused on the estate as distinct from the family, since he speaks of someone serving as household manager for his uncle.

[3] Plato 1997, p. 297f. (258e-259c).

The focus of Plato's passage is not the similarity between the household and the city, much less between the family and the city. Rather it is the transferability of the craft of governing.[4]

Plato's *Statesman* is a strange and abstract dialogue. It is little-read and little-known apart from that passage, which is famous only because, as we shall see, Aristotle declares at the beginning of the *Politics* that it is wrong.[5]

The *Euthyphro*

Plato's *Euthyphro*, on the other hand, is a staple of the Western gen-ed curriculum.

China/West comparativists have been interested in the *Euthyphro* mainly in connection with Confucius' remark at *Analects* 13.18 that there is something admirable in fathers and sons protecting each other from the penal law. In this context the *Euthyphro* has been taken to raise the question whether the claims of family should trump the claims of the state or public.[6] But in fact the

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[4] Compare Ni 2016 on the Confucius of the *Analects*: "To Confucius, governing a state is no different from regulating a family. … If one can regulate a family well, one can rule a country well" (p. 90f.; cf. Ni 2017, p. 60f.). I submit that no such view is suggested in the *Analects*. Indeed the Confucius of the *Analects* never mentions regulating a family or household, and says approximately nothing about specific aspects of it such as parenting. Much of his expertise was on ritual specific to state governance.

[5] As we shall see, Aristotle's point is certainly not what beginners often take it to be: that family or household rule is different in kind from city rule.

[6] For example, "The initial similarity between *Analects* 13:18 and Plato's *Euthyphro* is that both recount a conversation regarding a son in some way taking the side of the civil authorities against his father, further to some illegal act on the part of the father" (Murphy & Weber 2010, p. 190). Rosemont & Ames 2008 comments that Plato's *Euthyphro* does not tell us whether "familial loyalty trumps … loyalty to the *state* (those who govern, and the regulations they enforce)."

> This question of one's ultimate loyalties is a very old one in Western philosophy, beginning at least with the *Euthyphro* (…4a–b). … However, … we gain no insight from the *Euthyphro* as to whether our highest loyalty

Euthyphro does not allude to any conflict or tension between the claims of family on the one hand and state or public on the other.

As we saw at the beginning of the previous sketch, in Athens homicide was not a criminal charge. Suing for homicide was understood as an expression of family interest, the interest of one family against another. The very first lines of the *Euthyphro* stress the distinction between a private action and a criminal charge; but Euthyphro's homicide suit was to be against his own father, in disharmony with the spirit of the law. Euthyphro's account of his purpose makes no suggestion that he is moved by an interest in the authority of law or of the civil authorities, nor the public good, public will, or public opinion. When Euthyphro describes his lawsuit, he says that he expects the hostility of the community. Euthyphro's stated purpose is to protect his father and himself from the wrath of the gods, based on his expert knowledge in that area (4c), though it is hard to see how his father would be a gainer by Euthyphro's success. If one were to seek an inexplicit motive, there are two obvious candidates: that Euthyphro wants to strike back at his father for the loss of one of his laborers, or that he wants to amaze the community by his persuasive expertise; not that he might be seeking to reduce crime.

Euthyphro's position is meant to appear absurd from *every* point of view rather than to evoke an interesting tension between different sources of claims.

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should be to the family or to the state; all we learn is that Euthyphro cannot give good reasons for doing so.

It is perhaps a distinguishing characteristic of the history of Western philosophy that Plato is not alone in this regard: No later thinker has answered the question of divided loyalties between family and state at all satisfactorily, and indeed, for most of the past two and a half centuries, none of our philosophers have even asked it. (p. 11f.)

Nothing internal to the dialogue invites us to seek insight on the question, "*Which* loyalty trumps the other in general, family or state?" Most people's family and state each make compelling claims, trivial claims, and mistaken claims; and family and state are each known to have made some of the most horrific claims around.

To his credit, Confucius too suggests no such general question or answer. For a list of passages in which the Confucius of the *Analects* seems to side with the state or the public good over the family, see Haines 2026, p. 117.

Suing one's own father is absurd (4a1), not least from a legal standpoint; but this particular suit is comically flimsy (4cd). Furthermore, what we know of Athenian law suggests that Euthyphro's application to bring suit might well be rejected on the grounds that Euthyphro lacked legal standing.[7] The reported conversation takes place before the official decision has been made.

The overt topic of the dialogue is the nature of *holiness* (*to hosion,* τὸ ὅσιον, sometimes rendered by Plato's English translators as "piety"). The dialogue's deeper lesson is about the vocation of intellectuals. Euthyphro's disrespect for his father and community is bad thinking.

A perceived tension between philosophy on the one hand, and the claims of family and law on the other, may lie behind the choice of a practical issue to house the philosophical dialogue. The dialogue was written after Socrates' fellow citizens had executed him by due process, as the beginning of the dialogue reminds us; and Plato's report of Socrates' defense in court (the *Apology of Socrates*) suggests that much of the responsibility for this tragedy lay with Aristophanes' clownish portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds*. Aristophanes had used Socrates to stand for glib intellectuals and lawyers in general and presented him especially as encouraging disrespect for law and parents. (Such disrespect is often tempting to the young, while anti-intellectualism can be tempting at any age.) There is much ancient testimony that Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates

[7] When Plato at 4ab points out that Euthyphro was not a relative of the victim, he is not suggesting that Euthyphro is siding too much with law as against family. Rather he is pointing out that Euthyphro's project is questionable from the point of view of the law. He is suggesting that Euthyphro lacks the usual sort of standing the law required to bring suit for murder (Hyde 1918, p. 332; Harris 2015, p. 11). And since it is in fact unclear from the dialogue (and may well have been ambiguous in legal fact, if the character was real; Morrow 1937, p. 221f.) whether the victim of this negligent homicide was in fact a slave or a free servant, it is unclear whether the court would allow Euthyphro to bring his suit at all. If the man were a slave, which he was not exactly, only his owner (Euthyphro) would have standing to sue. If the man were free, only his closest extant kin (not Euthyphro) would have standing to sue.

was inaccurate in this and most other respects.[8] A reader of Plato may be forgiven for thinking that Plato often has an eye to repairing Socrates' reputation in these regards, and the *Euthyphro* seems a likely example.

The *Crito*

More important than the *Statesman* or the *Euthyphro* for our purposes are Plato's three main constructive sociopolitical works. These are the *Crito*, one of his earliest writings, from before he developed the theory of forms; the *Republic*, from his middle period; and the *Laws*, from the end of his life, after he had left the theory of forms behind. The first two have long been among the five or six most widely read Western works of social or political philosophy, and are permanent staples of the undergraduate curriculum. The third is little-read, but it has by far the most practical detail and reflects the most mature stage of Plato's thinking about cities. Let us look briefly at each of the three dialogues. They emphasize filial piety in different ways.

The *Crito* is set in an Athenian holding cell. An Athenian jury of 501 male citizens has voted that Socrates must die. The decision is erroneous and harmful to the city, and Socrates' friends have arranged an escape for him. Against this plan, Socrates argues that citizens must obey the law. That is the general thesis of the piece. The main engine of the argument is the invocation of our obligation to parents (and teachers when these are distinct) as a model. We have filial obligations to the law. The argument is made in the dialogue by the laws themselves, as the character Socrates imagines the laws of Athens questioning him.

> "Did we not, first, bring you to birth, and was it not through us that your father married your mother and begat you? … Or in those of

[8] In addition to Plato's *Apology*, see e.g. Xenophon's *Apology* and *Memorabilia of Socrates*.

> us concerned with the nurture of babies and the education that you too received? Were [these] not right to instruct your father to educate you in the arts and physical culture? … and after you were born and nurtured and educated, could you, in the first place, deny that you are our offspring and servant, both you and your forefathers? … You were not on an equal footing with your father as regards the right, nor with your master if you had one, so as to retaliate for anything they did to you, to revile them if they reviled you, to beat them if they beat you, and so with many other things. Do you think you have this right to retaliation against your country and its laws? … We have given you birth, nurtured you, educated you, we have given you and all other citizens a share of all the good things we could. … We say that the one who disobeys [us] does wrong in three ways, first, because in us he disobeys his parents, also those who brought him up, and because, in spite of his agreement, he neither obeys us nor, if we do something wrong, does he try to persuade us to do better."[9]

Socrates concedes all these points to the laws of the Athenians. Note that what is importantly modeled here is not the disposition to obey, but rather the reason to obey. The underlying idea is that if you think your reason for obeying parents and teachers is compelling, you should therefore obey the laws as well, because the same sort of reason applies.

We might distinguish this kind of argument from two in the Confucian tradition. Youzi at *Analects* 1.2 argues in the opposite direction, from (a) a broader or political norm (the value of *ren* 仁 and of good order or respect for authority) and (b) two correlations suggesting a view about the psychological consequences of filial piety and respect for elders, to the conclusion that (c) one ought to remain scrupulous about filial piety and respect for elders. And whereas Plato's Socrates says that the people *should* obey legal authority because the law *has been* father and mother to the people, the *Mencius* suggests that the king

9 50d-52a; Cooper 1997, p. 44f.

should act like a father and mother toward the people so that the people *will be* more likely to follow him (e.g. 2A5).

The *Republic*

Plato's *Republic* offers no comment on whether the traditional family's influence in the real world is positive or negative on the whole, though it is concerned with one potentially bad effect of family: that it inclines people to side with a few against others. The book says that a certain kind of ideal city, avowedly virtually impossible to institute and avowedly premised on unjust aims, would recast the family for the ruling class, for reasons Plato presumably approves. The lengthy presentation of the impossible republic is preceded by a brief sketch of an even better and very simple kind of city, *not* said to be hard to achieve.[10] Regarding this better scheme, there is no suggestion that it involves

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[10] The Socrates character says that the "true city" involves a minimalist lifestyle, which he describes in glowing earthy-crunchy terms (372a-e); but then he accedes to Glaucon's undefended demand that the people in the city have wealth and luxury. Socrates points out that such an "unhealthy" city will have to be large—thousands of people—to encompass and support a wide variety of otherwise undesirable or unnecessary specialists, such as chefs, beauticians and doctors. This requirement has an awkward consequence, which frames the construction of the republic:

> "Then must we cut off a piece of our neighbors' land, if we are going to have sufficient for pasture and tillage, and they in turn from ours, if they let themselves go to the unlimited acquisition of money, overstepping the bounds of the necessary?" —"Quite necessarily, Socrates," he said.

This "feverish" city will therefore need a warrior class, a class of guardians, who (being stronger) must rule the rest, and whose special training will be the focus of the remainder of the *Republic* (372e-374e; Bloom 1968, pp. 49-51).

In that way, Plato says, the project is conditioned by the steps that must be taken in order to ensure material abundance. Thus we should not accept Henry Rosemont's report about Plato and Western social thought in general:

> Confucian ethical and social thought can be relevant today because it directly addresses the issue of how a society best distributes the basic necessities of life when these are in short supply, and how human lives can be dignified, and significant, in such circumstances. [By contrast,] Western philosophers from the time of Plato have simply presupposed at

> least a minimal amount of overall affluence when constructing their ideal societies, from the *Republic* to the present. (Rosemont 1991, p. 93)

Though the *Republic* is of course not representative of Western social or distributive thought, its approach to the issues Rosemont raises is interesting. Socrates' first serious interrogation in the book is on the question why affluence is worth seeking, a question he introduces by suggesting that a concern for affluence can mislead us on that question (329e-331d). The answer is that affluence helps us to be just. The follow-up question is *What is it to be just*? That is how the project of the book is framed. And as we have seen, the design for the republic begins from the acceptance, for the sake of argument, of questionable desiderata, from questionable desires for affluence, that require competition for scarce goods.

The conversants hold that cities came to be in order to serve economic needs through the efficiencies of the division of labor (369b-70d), using the same terms that are later used to characterizes justice (in soul and city) as *each part carrying out its proper function* (433a,b,d; 435b; 441d,e). Because of its leadership role, the ruling class should seek only minimal material goods for itself (416d-417b).

The Greeks not only often redesigned the constitutions of their cities, often with an eye to the economic position of the poor, they often founded new cities to relieve the pressure of population on resources. An essential step was to choose a suitable territory. Key considerations were prosperity and defense. Aristotle discusses these matters for his ideal city at *Pol*. 1325b33-1327b17.

Rosemont's criticism of the West here assumes that the West's big thinking about distribution has not addressed norms for conditions of scarcity *unless* by constructing *ideal societies* for conditions of scarcity (which Rosemont implies the West has not done). Perhaps for parity he is making the same assumption regarding the Confucian side of the comparison, but he does not say.

Ideal schemes for conditions of some scarcity have been prominent in Western political philosophy. Locke says that natural law limits appropriation of unclaimed goods to acts that leave "enough and as good" for others (Second Treatise, §§27, 33), though there is interpretive controversy over the implications of that principle for political society. When John Rawls is constructing his ideal for what Rosemont calls "how a society best distributes the basic necessities of life when these are in short supply, and how human lives can be dignified, and significant, in such circumstances," he cites David Hume for the point that distributive justice itself is a norm for conditions of "moderate scarcity…. Natural and other resources are not so abundant that schemes of cooperation become superfluous, nor are conditions so harsh that fruitful ventures must inevitably break down" (Rawls 1971, p. 126f.). Of course, conditions for productive and respectful cooperation need not be presupposed insofar as the question of distribution is conceived not as "What principles should we accept as a community?" but as "What should the lord do?"

Much Western thought about how societies should respond when "basic necessities of life … are in short supply" has aimed in part at finding modes of social organization

any revision of family norms. But the book does show clearly that Plato finds the *divide* between familial and political life problematic for any town that will need to maintain readiness for war. And it shows that he is excessively complacent about people's commitment to kin.

Plato's approach to the problem is not only unrepresentative of Western political thought, it is absurd. The absurdity is one of several arguments against regarding the book's republic as a sincere proposal about political order rather than, say, a metaphorical exploration of moral psychology. But we should be wary of simplistic characterizations of the absurd proposal as radically underemphasizing family feeling and family relational norms. In certain ways it is the opposite.

Plato offers a complex social design. Part of the design is that for the ruling class (which he sees as in some sense constituting the city proper), the social practices surrounding reproduction among the guardians are so engineered that, so far as the typical guardian knows, any other guardian may in biological fact be their close blood kin. Depending on the respective ages, anyone I meet might be my grandparent, parent, sibling, offspring, or grandchild. The explicit though unrealistic aim is to ensure that family feeling and the forms of family life that express it permeate the ruling class, from each to each.

Having sketched the strange institution by interrogating his young friends, Socrates asks one of them:

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that can increase the supply, not just "distribute" the shortage. Adam Smith, Malthus, Marx and Rawls are all part of that conversation. A familiar criticism of socialism, one of the social ideals most influential in the West, is that it assumes moderate affluence available to the society rather than attending adequately to the conditions of the production of that affluence. Unfortunately today, as a consequence in part of technological progress, the rapidly dwindling basic necessities include a livable natural environment, reliable information, civilization, human contact, and basic orientation to life and the world.

"Can you say whether any of the rulers in the other cities is in the habit of addressing one of his fellow rulers as his kin and another as an outsider?"

"Many do so."

"Doesn't he hold the one who is his kin to be his own, and speak of him as such, while the outsider he does not hold to be his own?"

"That's what he does."

"What about your guardians? Would any one of them be in the habit of holding one of his fellow guardians to be an outsider or address him as such?"

"Not at all," he said. "With every one he happens to meet, he'll hold that he's meeting a brother, or a sister, or a father, or a mother, or a son, or a daughter or their descendants or ancestors."

"What you say is very fine," I said, "but tell me this too. Is it only the names of kinship you establish in the laws[11] for them, or also the doing of all the actions that go with the names—with fathers, all that law prescribes about shame before fathers, and about providing for parents and having to obey them—under pain of not being in good stead with gods or human beings, since a man would do what is neither holy nor just if he did anything other than this? Will these sayings from the mouths of your citizens ring in the ears of the children in their earliest age, or will there be others about fathers—whomever one points out to them as fathers—and the other relatives?"

"No, it will be these sayings," he said. "It would be ridiculous if they only mouthed, without deeds, the names of kinship."

"Therefore in this city more than any other, when someone is doing well or badly, they will utter in accord the phrase that we used just now, 'my own' affairs are doing well or badly."

"Very true," he said.

[11] The Greek word for "law" encompasses also unwritten norms carried in the community's talk, or what we might call "social mores"; and that appears to be what the conversants mainly have in mind here.

> "Weren't we saying that close on the convictions expressed in this phrase follows a community [i.e. sharing] of pleasures and pains?"[12]

Plato wants to appropriate for the city the kind of empathetic mutual identification that he sees as obtaining within good families.[13] Susan Moller Okin comments,

> It is important to notice that Plato's revolutionary solution to the conflict was not to obliterate the primary ties of kinship, but to extend them throughout the entire ruling class. The guardians were in fact "to imagine that they were all one family" [*Timaeus* 18c-d], and it is stressed in many ways that the formation of the rulers into one family is to be no mere formality. … Indeed, as Gregory Vlastos has concisely stated, "The ideal society of the Republic is a political community held together by bonds of fraternal love."[14]

The members would even eat in common dining rooms.[15] Thus a key feature of the imaginary city was the radical *extension* of what Plato saw as the main forms of family life,[16] seen as too desirable to be confined to the internal relations of

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[12] 462b-464a, translation modified from Bloom 1968, p. 142f.

[13] Thus it would be a little misleading to say with Blustein 1982 that "Plato regarded the family as a nest of individualism" (p. 22).

[14] Okin 1977, p. 355, referring to Vlastos 1973, p. 11. It is importantly wrong to describe the scheme by saying that for "the new men and women of the *Republic*, … the laws would be parents and all other citizens brothers" (O'Neill & Ruddick 1979, p. 3; quoted in Cline 2015, p. 99.) Plato's idea is *not* that the laws are metaphorically parents of all so that all are metaphorical siblings. In the *Republic* Plato never likens laws to parents. Rather, he arranges matters so that as far as the male and female Guardians know, any pair of them might *literally* be close kin if the ages fit. Not all pairs could be "brothers," nor does Plato single out sibling relations. Guardians are expected to relate as siblings, parents, offspring, grandparents or grandchildren, as realistically permitted by their respective ages, for they might literally be so (463c, 465af., 467a, 471d, etc.).

[15] 458c.

[16] Not just the "sentiments of family life" (Blustein 1982, p. 22).

small groups.[17] On the other hand, much of Plato's focus here was on an abstract common feature of family relationships, *viz.* dependable closeness or mutual identification, mutual care, and confidence in each other's commitment—what we call *family feeling*—and on the extension of that abstract feature to a *larger* community for the sake of the city's harmony and security.

Plato's student Aristotle objected that this scheme of Plato's amounted to a rejection of the *city*. Plato, he said, was in effect trying to change the city into a single family or even a single person, trying to give it a degree of unity that in truth does not suit cities, for such unity fails to secure the benefits of separateness and difference.[18]

But Aristotle also thought Plato's institutional arrangements would not in reality have such a unifying effect. Rather he thought Plato's scheme was unrealistically optimistic about extending family feeling. He pointed out that regarding too many people as brother or mother would wither family feeling, not expand it as Plato imagined.[19]

Even in this work Plato uses the traditional household nuclear family as an explanatory model for understanding and predicting real-world constitutional and moral change; indeed fully a fifth of the book is given to that analysis (Books VIII and IX). In that sense Plato understood political life on the model of the family.

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[17] Hence we should be careful in what sense we accept the capsule report in Ames & Rosemont 2014, p. 17, and Rosemont 2015, p. 118: "Plato strictly forbade all forms of family life for the guardians of his Republic as corrupting of their abilities to govern and protect the citizens." Plato's complaint about the traditional division of the community into distinct families with private households was that it did not give *sufficient* scope to the forms of relating characteristic of families; it left each person *without* such heartfelt relationships with most of the community.

[18] *Pol.* 1261a10-22.

[19] *Pol.* 1261b15-62a13, 62b4-23.

The *Laws*

The *Laws* is Plato's most mature work of constructive social thought, at least in the sense that it is his last. It claims to design not the ideal city, but rather a more practical one.[20] For realistic civic design the *Laws* puts heavy emphasis on the household families of male landholders along with their citizen wives (qualified for office and military service) and potential heirs.

The city is to comprise 5040 such families, each with an unalienable land allotment whose agricultural worth is as equal to that of the others as can be arranged, and with strict limits on the total value of the moveable goods that any one household may accumulate (such as tools and money).[21] Citizens are to understand that the household's material goods morally belong to the household as a whole—past, present, and future—and in a broader sense to the city as a whole.[22] Dowries are forbidden, so as not to discourage marrage between better-off and worse-off.

These safeguards against the vices of accumulation and great inequality of wealth are bolstered by official help in avoiding having too many or too few offspring,[23] and by the transfer of potential heirs from families with an oversupply to families with none, apparently after the potential transferees are sufficiently grown that their natural father has judged which son he prefers to keep as heir to the allotment and to the duties of ancestor worship.[24] This device is a way to secure families over time.

Penalties for homicide, injury and other harms are calibrated to support close kinship bonds.[25]

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[20] This passage is usually read to allude to the *Republic*'s account of the ideal city, but there are reasons to doubt this interpretation. See Bobonich 2026, §3.1.

[21] 744d-745a.

[22] 923a.

[23] 740de.

[24] 740bc, 923e. Such transference was actually practiced in Sparta at least (Morrow 1960, p. 107).

[25] E.g. 868de, 872c-73a, 874c, 929a-c.

On the one hand, it is essental that family life support the virtue that the city needs and that is the city's aim. Plato has observed that parents left to their own devices often raise children with significant vices. On the other hand, penal legislation covering the details of childrearing would be inappropriate and unbecoming. Part of the solution is unwritten or "ancestral" laws,[26] which householders will follow because they have learned that the city depends on their doing so (and of course everyone depends on the city).[27]

Even the written laws have a teaching element; they are to have preludes explaining why their requirements are important. Penal provisions are secondary, as they are for people who have proved unteachable.

> But is the lawgiver alone, among the writers, not supposed to give advice about the noble, good and just things, teaching what sorts of things they are and how they must be practiced by those who are going to become happy? … How do we conceive writing about laws in the city should be: should the writings appear in the shapes of a father and mother, caring dearly and possessing intelligence, or like a tyrant and a despot, should they command and threaten, post writings on the walls and go away?[28]

Among the laws and norms in support of the household family line are those addressing filial piety and adjacent matters. For example, although a man should worship the gods, daimons, and heroes,

> Following close upon them would be the private shrines of ancestral gods [deceased ancestors], worshipped as the law directs, and then after these the honors that are due to his living parents.
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> For it is just that one in debt pay back his first and greatest debts, the eldest of all his obligations, and that he consider all his

[26] 788a-c.
[27] 790b.
[28] 858d-59a; Pangle 1988, p. 251.

acquisitions and possessions as belonging to those who engendered and nourished him; he should strive with all his power to devote these things to their service—starting with property, then secondly the things of the body, and thirdly the things of the soul. Thus he will pay back the ancient loans that were bestowed on the young—the cares and laborious pains suffered—and will be returning help to the ancient ones when they especially need it, in their old age.

Beyond all this, it is essential that one maintain throughout life a tone of special respect in one's speech to parents, because there is a very heavy penalty for flippant or winged words. Nemesis, the messenger of Justice, has been set to keep watch over everyone in this regard. So when parents become enraged it is necessary to bear with them and appease their spiritedness, whether they vent it in words or in deeds; one must keep in mind that it is very likely that a father feel an especially spirited anger at a son who he believes is doing him an injustice.

And when parents die, the most moderate burial ceremony is the most beautiful, not one more elaborate than is customary and yet not falling short of those which the forefathers held for their parents. The yearly ritual services in honor of those who have reached their end should preserve a similar orderliness. One should reverence them especially by never ceasing to remember then and by continuing to allot to those who have passed away a well-measured portion of the wealth fortune bestows.[29]

[29] 717b-18a; Pangle 1988, p. 103f.

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