Philosophy and the good life

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Abstract

This paper considers the implications for education of a reworked ancient Greek ethics and politics of flourishing (particularly as found in Plato), where 'flourishing' comprises the objective actualisation of our intellectual, imaginative and affective potential. A brief outline of the main features of an ethics of flourishing and its potential attractions as an ethical framework is followed by a consideration of the ethical, aesthetic and political requirements of such a framework for the theory and practice of education, indicating the ways in which my approach differs from other recent work in the field. I argue that the teaching of philosophy in schools and philosophical approaches to the teaching of other subjects are ideally suited to meet the pedagogic requirements of individual and communal flourishing so understood, contributing greatly both to the understanding of what a well-lived life might be, and to the actual living of it. I further argue that these requirements are not only derived from ancient Greek philosophy but are in turn especially well-served by the teaching and deployment of Greek philosophy itself. My claim is not that Greek philosophy has all the answers, or that other philosophers and philosophical approaches should be excluded; it is simply that Greek philosophy offers rich resources for those seeking to introduce children and young people to philosophy and to foster thereby their flourishing in both childhood and as adults.

Key words

education; *eudaimonia*; good life; Greek philosophy; Plato

Plato's ethics of flourishing

> So you see how our discussion concerns that which should be of the greatest importance to any person, even if he has only a modicum of sense—that is to say, how one should live. (Plato *Gorgias* 500c)[1]

This question about how best to live is Plato's fundamental ethical starting point, and is entwined with the question of what sort of person to be. In both cases, Plato believes that we would all answer 'flourishingly': all the substantive ethical and political questions that he addresses are situated within the framework of an ethics and politics of flourishing.[2] 'Flourishing', *eudaimonia*, is not the same thing as pleasure, or even happiness. *Eudaimonia* literally means 'blessed by a beneficent guardian spirit' and it is a more objective notion than pleasure or happiness as currently understood, being concerned with the fullest realisation of our best faculties, the actualisation of our best potential. We cannot always be happy—and sometimes even striving for happiness would be inappropriate, for example in the midst of a natural or human-made disaster—but we can always aim to fulfil our best potential as far as circumstances allow. The challenge, of course, is to decide what this involves: we first need to do some informed thinking about what our faculties are, what their best actualisation would look like, and what social and political conditions would facilitate such actualisation. For Plato, the faculties of our psyche comprise, in descending order of importance, a rational element which desires truth and reality, a spirited element which desires honour and success,[3] and an appetitive element which desires food, drink, sex and money; there are in addition our physical capabilities. Other Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, conceive of our psychic faculties rather differently, although they still employ a loose distinction between reason, (certain) emotions and the appetites. Nevertheless, however our faculties and

[1] See also Plato *Republic* 352d: 'For our discussion is not about some trivial question, but about how one should live'. A similar phrase occurs at *Laches* 187e-188a and is almost certainly that of the historical Socrates.

[2] For a more detailed discussion of the ideas outlined in this section, see Hobbs (2000, pp. 50-75). Although there has been considerable interest in recent years in notions of flourishing as the main aim of education (e.g. Brighouse 2006; White 2011; de Ruyter 2015), there has not, so far as I am aware, been a discussion of the implications for education which stem from an analysis of the structure of an ethics of Platonic *eudaimonia* of the kind I am offering here. Even the educational theorists who are most influenced by the ancient Greek concept (e.g. Curren 2010, 2013; Sanderse 2012) have focused on Plato's pupil Aristotle and paid most attention to the formation of character, rather than considering the structure of eudaimonic ethics as a whole. For a helpful recent overview of the field see Kristjánsson (2017).

[3] The *thumos* or *thumoeides*; we will be coming back to this element of the psyche below in our discussion of examples and the shape of a life.

their best actualisation are conceived, what is in no doubt is that an ethics of flourishing is an *agent-centred* approach which is at least capable of taking on board the complexities of the lived human experience; for this reason it is to my mind more compelling than act-centred ethical theories based on notions of duty and rights (e.g. Kant), or of utilitarian consequences (e.g. Bentham and Mill).

It is also an approach which considers the *whole* person living a *whol*e life, and thus invites us to consider the *structure*, *shape* and *narrativ*e of a well-lived life; and is in consequence an ethical approach which has particular connections with aesthetics, and with stories. We may of course wonder whether the shape and order are illusory, and the answer will in part depend on whether we think we are able to sculpt order out of the messy rush of daily existence—be artists of our own lives. Plato certainly seems to imply that this is both possible and desirable,[4] and more recently the heavily Greek-influenced Nietzsche and Foucault have followed a similar path[5]. It is in addition an approach which requires us to consider the links between ethics and political theory and practice, in that Plato believes that the actualisation of potential, except in very rare beings of great gifts (such as Socrates), can only occur in certain political and social circumstances.[6] While few would now agree with Plato's precise depiction in the *Republic* of what these political circumstances should be, the general underlying points remain pertinent: we need a good education and the opportunity to debate freely in order to develop our intellectual and moral potential,[7] and also a social setting in order to exercise virtues such as justice. As his pupil Aristotle succinctly expresses it: 'the human is a political animal':[8] in other words, humans are animals naturally suited to living in the context of the *polis*, or city-state, and, as a result, ethics is a branch of political theory.[9]

[4] E.g. *Protagoras* 326b; *Republic* 588a; *Laws* 803a-b; see Hobbs (2000, pp. 61-63; 227-230).

[5] Nietzsche's ideas on sculpting a life are perhaps most clearly explored in *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Gay Science*: see especially *GS* 276, 290 and 299. For discussions of this theme in both Nietzsche and Foucault, see Nehamas (1985).

[6] E.g. *Republic* 558b.

[7] Although the ideally just state outlined by Socrates in the *Republic* does not itself permit freedom of expression, Plato as author certainly encourages it through his choice of a dialogue form in which the character of Socrates often debates with robustly critical interlocutors, such as Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1 and Callicles in the *Gorgias*. I discuss the dialogic nature of Plato's philosophy in more detail below.

[8] *Politics* 1253a2-3.

[9] *Ethics* 1.ii 1094a26-b11.

Implications for education

Some of the educational implications of an ethics of *eudaimonia*, suitably reworked for the 21st century, are already becoming clear. Education will need to receive appropriate political support, both in the sense of government support and support from political parties, and also in the broader sense of support from the local community, the local (modern version of the) *polis*.[10] Through such support it should seek to enable children and young people to actualise all their faculties: intellectual, emotional and physical; furthermore, as Plato (and indeed Aristotle) believed that morally appropriate choices and actions depend on rationally guided emotional responses, such intellectual and emotional development will inevitably involve some moral character training too. Crucially, education should assist such actualisation of potential not simply as a preparation for adulthood, hugely important though this is. The years of school attendance form a substantial part of any individual's life, and in some tragic cases they form the entirety of it: it is vital that these years are in themselves a time of flourishing, in themselves richly stimulating, fun and fulfilling. And these stimulating and enjoyable years should help the child and young person start to form ideas of what a flourishing life should involve, and what kind of shape it might take and narrative it might follow. They should also help the child to understand the links between the individual and community, and how each can affect the other.

Given the link between an ethics of *eudaimonia* and the idea of the shape or structure of a life, it follows that both the aesthetic and political dimensions of the flourishing life may be greatly assisted if at least some teaching and learning takes place through the hearing or enacting of *stories*. Although in what follows I have, for the sake of clarity, initially separated form from content in considering the potential educational benefits of ancient philosophy, we will increasingly see that the two are intimately intertwined—which is precisely what we would expect to find in an ethical approach based on the narrative of a life.

The role of Greek philosophy in education: Development of rational and emotional skills

These, then, are the main educational requirements which arise from an ethical approach founded on a suitably reworked notion of *eudaimonia*. In this section and the next I aim to show that such requirements can most effectively be met by the

[10] Kristjánsson (2017) is particularly strong on the political and civic preconditions for flourishing.

inclusion of at least some Greek philosophy (not just that of Plato) in both primary and secondary education. I am not suggesting that teachers work through entire Greek texts with their pupils and students, even in translation: such an approach would not be suitable until at least the mid-teens. Rather, my suggestion is that the treasure house of Greek philosophy can be explored for particular concepts, arguments, methods of argumentation and debate, images, puzzles, examplars and stories, either to be taught in dedicated philosophy and critical thinking classes (whether examined or unexamined) or woven imaginatively into other subject classes, starting from as young as seven or even earlier. It may be objected that the Greeks themselves do not appear to have advocated philosophical studies until the teenage years (even later in the *Republic*),[11] but I do not believe that this matters: my argument is simply that Greek philosophy is a supremely useful pedagogic resource, including for primary school children, whether or not the Greeks viewed it as such.

Some of the potential educational benefits to be gained from deploying Greek philosophy in various ways are distinctive to Greek philosophy, whereas others are shared with all or most philosophers; it is the entire Greek package that is unique, not every element within the package. A benefit that it shares with almost all philosophy is the training it provides in the analysis of concepts: the majority of Platonic dialogues, for instance, focus on the analysis of an ethical or aesthetic concept, such as justice, courage or beauty.[12] Again, as in almost all philosophy, Greek philosophy enables children to construct and analyse both deductive and inductive arguments.[13] An example of the former might be:

major premise:	all humans are mortal
minor premise:	Socrates is a human
conclusion:	Socrates is mortal

[11] In the *Republic* the character of Socrates does not introduce dialectic into the curriculum of the trainee philosopher-rulers until their thirties (537d) –but this is undercut by the fact that in a number of the dialogues, such as the *Lysis*, Socrates engages quite young teenagers in philosophical debate (and the slave-boy in the *Meno* may be younger still).

[12] Debated, respectively, in the *Republic*, *Laches* and *Symposium*.

[13] As delineated, for example, in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics* (see particularly *Posterior Analytics* 71a8-b8 and 81a38-b9 where Aristotle clearly distinguishes deductive and inductive forms of reasoning). I am certainly not suggesting that these highly advanced texts be studied in schools; my point is simply that, as with almost all philosophy, any exposure to Greek philosophy is a good training for a young person in different modes of reasoning.

and an example of the latter:

major premise:	to date, the sun has risen every new day
minor premise:	tomorrow is a new day
conclusion:	the sun will rise tomorrow

The acquisition of such logical tools is vital if children are going to learn how to reason, analyse and ask good questions. Yet perhaps equally important in its capacity to develop and hone rational capabilities is a feature of Greek philosophy that is particularly distinctive to it, namely the very variety of styles in which it is written. To take just four examples: we have the dialogues of Plato, which seek to represent in writing the oral debates in which the historical Socrates engaged with his fellow citizens; the paradoxes of Zeno ('the runner cannot cross the stadium'; 'half the time is equal to its double'); the paradoxes and aphorisms of Heraclitus ('the road up and down is one and the same'; 'God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace …'); and the epic hexameters of Parmenides ('For you could not recognize that which is not …/Nor could you mention it'). We will discuss some of the content of these philosophers in the next section; my point here is that encountering this wide diversity of styles serves three crucial purposes. Firstly, they are fun and engaging in themselves, and attractive to young minds; secondly, they positively invite interpretation, questions and debate. Finally, the sheer variety of them helps develop suppleness of mind in pupils and, as they grow older, encourages them to reflect on what philosophy itself is, and on what forms it may take.

In addition to this assistance in the development of a young person's rational and imaginative capacities, there is the potential for character development too. The dialogues of Plato in particular exemplify that philosophy is often most fruitfully undertaken in debate with others, and by engaging in such philosophic dialogue themselves pupils can hone both their specific philosophic skills and, more generally, improve their social skills and increase their social confidence. They can come to appreciate that a good philosopher knows how to *listen* as well as talk. And we should note that the debates in Plato can be truly robust: he makes sure that the main character (usually Socrates) has to converse with genuinely tough opponents, whose views and manner (at least initially) are sometimes positively hostile to Socrates (see Hobbs 2017). Again, given current worries about the dangers of interacting on social media exclusively with those who agree with you and in consequence inhabiting an isolated echo-chamber, the way in which the character of Socrates is shown taking on all-comers is refreshing and helpful. Children and

young people can learn that it is possible to disagree with someone, even robustly, without actually shouting, let alone coming to blows.[14] Furthermore, the fact that Plato never appears as a speaking character in any of his dialogues means that we can never know for sure whether he agrees without qualification with any of the views that his characters express, even those of Socrates.[15] Again, the distance that Plato is careful to create between himself as author and his *dramatis personae* positively invites discussion and debate: it is a distance which opens up a space for future readers and hearers, including pupils just starting out on their philosophical journeys. It encourages them to think actively for themselves and question supposed authority figures (something that teenagers in particular are usually more than willing to do), but, crucially, question them in a reasoned, rigorous and constructive way.

The role of Greek philosophy in education: Content

Greek philosophy in general is also a treasure trove in terms of its content (though, as we touched on above, it will become increasingly clear how often form and content merge in Greek thought, as indeed elsewhere). Unlike some other eras in the history of philosophy, it is unashamedly bold about tackling big questions with gusto, and thus taps into young people's natural curiosity, imagination and intellectual zest; in the case of younger children in particular, it also speaks to their lack of self-consciousness about asking such big questions. Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* by saying that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder and his own and other Greek writers' works certainly bear witness to that. What really exists? How do we know that it exists and how do we know that we know? What are time and space? What makes me me? Furthermore, as we have already begun to see, it tackles these fundamental issues in ways which are hugely appealing to both primary and secondary school pupils: paradoxes, puzzles and puns; vivid aphorisms and powerful images; fabulous stories and resonant myths. If you are investigating time and space, for example, Zeno's paradoxes are the perfect introduction: Achilles cannot overtake the tortoise; the moving arrow is motionless. Or if you are starting to explore questions of identity, Heraclitus is ideal (and, like Zeno, conveniently memorable): you cannot step into the same river twice; the sun is new every day. In

[14] Not that all philosophers have avoided this in practice, of course: Wittgenstein, for instance, allegedly once threatened Popper with a poker (alleged at least by Popper). But the possibility and indeed probability of non-violent disagreement remains.

[15] Plato only refers to 'Plato' twice in his entire corpus: *Apology* 38b (present at Socrates' trial) and *Phaedo* 59b (absent 'sick' from the prison on the day of Socrates' death).

my experience, the paradoxes concerning identity work well even with quite young children of seven or so upwards; as for older students, an otherwise disaffected teenager can be intrigued by Heraclitus' more psychedelic pronouncements: 'immortals are mortals, mortals immortals, living their death, dying their life.' And how better than to direct the attention of young minds onto issues surrounding truth and falsity than through the Cretan Liar paradox: 'I always lie'? For children and young people raised on Harry Potter, *Doctor Who*, *The Hunger Games* and *The Lord of the Rings*, imaginative leaps through time and space into fantastical other worlds are an enticing challenge, not an obstacle. Tackling such profound conundra fulfils the twin aim mentioned at the outset: helping to actualise the child's or young person's intellectual potential, and doing it in such an enjoyable way that the classroom becomes not only a preparation for future flourishing as an adult, but a place where the child can flourish *as* a child.

And the ideas sown into a young child can remain embedded deep inside them and grow and blossom later in unexpected ways. When my daughter (I have her permission to recount this story) was about seven, she had to attend an undergraduate lecture I was giving on Parmenides and his views on 'not-being' one half term. I had given her colouring books and so on, but I noticed her watching me with an unnervingly beady eye. I was discussing Parmenides' claim that you cannot think nothing, and to give the students a way in I wrote on the board 'nothing exists' and 'nothing does not exist' and got them to discuss the sentences for a few minutes. I then put inverted commas around the word 'nothing' in each sentence: '"nothing" exists' and '"nothing" does not exist' and asked them whether the inverted commas made a difference. My daughter was still attentive, still with a beady eye. Later that evening I heard her gleefully telling someone that she had found out what her mum did at work: 'mum discusses nothing all day long'. She thought this a great joke for several years, but when she started at secondary school and became very interested in physics, she wrote, entirely of her own volition, an essay on whether existence can be ascribed to black holes. I asked whether she had remembered anything of the Parmenides lecture years before and, rather reluctantly, she admitted that she had. We should never underestimate what even quite young children can grasp, or partially grasp, and how those planted seeds can develop deep roots and produce, even years later, fine blossom and nourishing fruit.

The shape of a life

When we turn to the ethical and political resources of Greek philosophy, the willingness of Greek thinkers to ask the fundamental questions is again refreshingly apparent, and the questions they ask show how closely notions of form and content are intertwined in Greek thought. What is the good life and is it the good or the bad people who get to live it? What is the relation between goodness and beauty, or goodness and pleasure? How can we best live together? And, as we touched on above, Greek philosophy is especially useful as it often deploys historical, fictional and mythical examples of characters and lives to help us understand what kind of model of flourishing we find attractive and how best to achieve it (and, just as saliently, what to avoid). Aristotle's *Rhetoric* Book 2, for example, is brimming with such case studies. These exempla and stories allow (perhaps mainly slightly older) pupils to start to form the notions of the narrative shape and structure of the well-lived life that we saw at the outset are integral to any ethics and politics of flourishing. They are also, of course, naturally appealing to imaginative young minds and, properly handled, excellent pedagogic tools. The use of exempla in education, of course, is not without its pitfalls, as Carr and Davis (2007) have eloquently exposed: what if the impressionable young mind is attracted to the apparent glamour of evil? But although such dangers can never be entirely eliminated, they can, I think, be substantially reduced if the teacher makes sure that a wide variety of characters and lives is made available to the class and, crucially, that there is rigorous discussion of those on offer, and a thoughtful consideration of where the different characters are heading, of how their lives turn out.

Plato's dialogues are particularly helpful in this respect, as he not only alludes to established fictional and mythical exempla, but he often invents new myths and legends as well, such as the powerful and moving Allegory of the Cave in *Republic* 7, in which our shadowy, imprisoned existence in the cave of the phenomenal world is vividly contrasted with the sunlit, liberated life of those who escape the cave by means of philosophy. Other resonant examples are the ladder of love in the *Symposium*, which the philosopher must ascend to glimpse perfect Beauty, and the exhilarating image of the flying philosophic lover in the *Phaedrus*, to whom eros has given wings. Children and young people also much enjoy discussing the moral lessons of Plato's retelling of the tale of Gyges' Ring, in which a poor shepherd is able to make himself invisible with the help of a magical ring that he finds; within a month he has murdered the king, married the queen and is lording it over Lydia.[16] Most importantly of all—and a key instance of how form and content can merge—is

[16] Cave: *Republic* 514a-518c; ladder of love: *Symposium* 210a-212a; the flying philosopher: *Phaedrus*: 251a- 252c; Gyges' ring: *Republic* 359c-360d (the story first appears in Herodotus 1.8-14).

the dialogue format itself, through which Plato depicts a large and diverse cast of characters, and thereby provides a wide variety of possible role models and life models for our consideration (immoral and amoral as well as virtuous). We can reflect on the assorted attractions and dangers represented by, for example, Socrates, prepared to stand at his philosophic post until the hemlock-induced end; Callicles, arguing that it is simply a matter of natural justice that the strong man should have more power, wealth and pleasure than others; Thrasymachus, cynically portraying all man-made justice as nothing more than the interest of those in political office; or Alcibiades, rejecting philosophy for an unstable mix of public glory and private unrequited love.[17] Plato shows us, brilliantly, how what we believe affects how we live and who we are, and how who we are and how we live affects what we believe. This intricate intertwining of belief, character and life is also used as a test of belief: if you decline to live it then you do not really believe it. Furthermore, the fact that he is writing in the fourth century BC but setting almost all his dialogues in the previous century, when Socrates was still alive, allows him to make full ironical use of the time gap and exploit the fact that in many cases his contemporary audience knows what happened to the historical sources of his fictional characters after the fictional dialogue ends. In Alcibiades' case, for example, there are a number of ironical allusions in the *Symposium* (the dramatic date of which is 416 BC) to Alcibiades' chaotic and treacherous future and untimely end, murdered by a Persian agent with probable Spartan connivance in 404 BC.[18] I am not of course suggesting that all these ironic details would or should be picked up by any but the oldest of school pupils, or even that teachers should point all these details out; my point is simply that Plato's technique allows us both to glimpse a life at a particular moment, and also to get a sense of how it turned out later. Plato himself is acutely aware of the potential problems that Carr and Davis outline surrounding the deployment of examples, and is careful to provide or at least delicately suggest the context that will allow for some judicious assessment.

Plato's use of characters, both as participants in the dialogues and as examples alluded to, springs in part from a crucial element of the tripartite psychology of his mature middle period that we touched on at the outset.[19] In works such as the *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* the *psyche* is not just divided into two, reason and the appetites, as it had been in the earlier *Gorgias* for instance: a third, and vitally

[17] Socrates: *passim*, but see particularly *Apology* 28b-30c; Callicles: *Gorgias* 481c-492c; Thrasymachus: *Republic* 336b-339a; Alcibiades: *Symposium* 212c-223a.

[18] See Hobbs *Plato and the Hero* (2000, pp. 258-261).

[19] p. 2 and n. 3.

important, motivational set is introduced, a spirited element called the *thumos* or *thumoeides*, which desires respect, honour, success and glory (Plato portrays Alcibiades, for example, as chiefly driven by it). But if the yearning for honour is one of our deepest psychological needs, how should we go about acquiring it? The easiest route, as Plato is well aware, is to emulate those whom our society (or a relevant sub-section of it) already honours. This is another reason why his ethics of flourishing leads swiftly to a forensic examination of his society's current role models, such as Achilles and Odysseus, and why he quickly realises that he needs to create new role models, such as Socrates (see Hobbs 2000, especially 235-249). He also, of course, comes to the drastic conclusion that new role models will need a new society to endorse them, and in which they can more easily be emulated. Clearly, teachers in contemporary classrooms cannot undertake such radical social reform;[20] but they can learn much from Plato about the central psychological importance of role models and the need, at the very least, to expose children to a wide range of possible models, some of them perhaps taken from Plato, and encourage them to discuss their merits and flaws in the narrative context of the model's whole life.

Ancient Greek philosophy and moral development

Philosophy in general, then, is one of the best subjects for showing young people that there are different ways of living, being and thinking than those immediately on offer in their local postcode; it can extend their imaginative grasp of possible lives. We are not just the product of our genes[21] and environment: reason can provide at least a partial way out, but only if reason is properly trained. A number of subjects, of course, can offer both different models for thinking and being and some rational training in how to assess them, but I would argue that philosophy is at least as good as history, geography or literature at providing the former, and better equipped to provide rigorous training in the latter. Furthermore, it is clear that in this case as well form and content are not only both crucial to the liberation that well-taught and deployed philosophy can facilitate, but that they are intimately intertwined. The

[20] The role of teachers as potential social reformers is interestingly discussed by Kristjánsson (2017, pp. 93-95).

[21] The Greeks, in so far as they attributed characteristics to inheritance at all, variously attributed them to one or more of blood, semen, female 'seed' and bone marrow: see, for example, Plato *Timaeus*; Aristotle *On the Generation of Animals* and *Parts of Animals*. In the mostly late 5th century Hippocratic corpus, inherited characteristics are discussed in *On Generation*, *The Nature of the Child* and *On Regimen*, while in the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*, physical and character traits are said to be largely dependent on environment.

form taken by the narrative of a different life is in itself part of that life: it is only by considering the narrative as a whole that young people can start to get an understanding of what a flourishing life or a stunted or warped life might look like, and what kind of intellectual, emotional and physical faculties need to be developed, and what intellectual and moral virtues fostered, in order to help a person live the former and avoid the latter.[22]

Furthermore, both Plato and Aristotle (in so far as he employs exempla, even though he does not of course write in dialogue form) do not want this understanding to take place solely at an intellectual level: they are both clear that it is desire that propels action, and they want their readers and hearers to be emotionally attracted to what they believe to be flourishing and worthwhile lives, and repelled by the reverse; and the models they create and use work at least as powerfully at an affective level, on our emotional understanding. In addition, as D'Olimpio and Peterson eloquently attest (2017, this special issue), imaginative engagement with various characters—whether in philosophical dramas or other forms of art and story-telling—can directly assist in the moral development of sympathy, empathy and compassion in particular.[23] It might perhaps be claimed that such a result, though highly desirable, is nevertheless a modern aim, and not one that Plato himself particularly sought. However, even if this were true, it would not matter: as I have already made clear, the benefits of deploying Greek philosophy in teaching in various direct and indirect ways do not all need to have been acknowledged as benefits by the Greeks themselves. Furthermore, in this instance the charge is not in any case entirely accurate. Although concern and pity for the weak and vulnerable is admittedly less prized by Plato than by many contemporary societies, it is not true that he is uninterested in, still less contemptuous of, empathy and compassion. At *Republic* 463e-464a, for example, the character of Socrates says that in the ideally just state that he is describing the citizens will share in the successes and misfortunes of fellow-citizens to such a degree that they will refer to all such events as 'my success' and 'my misfortune', and it is certainly possible to argue that the development of such fellow-feeling is part of Plato's intention in depicting his ideal state in the form of an emotionally engaging dramatic dialogue rather than a plain monograph. Aristotle,

[22] Although his interest is in the pedagogic potential of the personal narratives of students, Harrelson (2012) offers a thoughtful examination of the role of narratives in philosophy courses, and the way in which the form of the narrative is intrinsic to an understanding of its content.

[23] Harrelson (2012) also highlights increased empathy as one of the two main benefits produced by narrative pedagogy (the other is self-knowledge).

too, emphasises the central role that sympathy plays in friendship in the *Art of Rhetoric* 2.4:

> it necessarily follows that he is a friend who shares our joy in good fortune and our sorrow in affliction, for our own sake and not for any other reason.

He also discusses the value of pity in the *Art of Rhetoric* 2.8, and pity is of course one of the two main emotions, along with fear, that he claims in the *Art of Poetry* to be stirred by the watching and acting out of tragic drama. For our present purposes, it is particularly telling that both these Aristotelian works not only argue that fellow-feeling and pity are developed in us partly through the power of the tragedians' stories, but often appeal to fictional, mythological and historical examples themselves.

Philosophy in schools and 21st century challenges

Up to this point the potential benefits of incorporating some Greek philosophy into curricula and lesson plans have been of perennial application. In this final section, I want to consider ways in which some acquaintance with philosophy in general and Greek philosophy in particular can help children and young people flourish in the specific conditions of the early 21st century, and indeed tackle some of its specific challenges. One of the most pressing of these is the way philosophy can provide young people with the mental resources which may assist them to resist indoctrination. Training in rational thinking and questioning is of course something which Greek philosophy shares with most philosophical traditions; as I have suggested, however, the Greeks deliver such training in forms particularly appealing to the young, and this is important: we need to start to educate children in primary school in the analysis of concepts and the construction and analysis of arguments, in order to enable them to question authority figures, and to ask themselves whether there is any good reason why the particular pronouncement of a particular authority figure should be believed. Such figures might be mainstream teachers or politicians, or they might be religious or nationalist extremists, and acquiring the resources to assess what they are saying is vital even if in some cases the questions cannot immediately be articulated out loud by the young person out of safety concerns. Philosophy, I would suggest, is one of the best ways of helping children resist attempts to indoctrinate them, and it needs to be introduced early into schools precisely because indoctrination attempts also start when the child is very young. An additional advantage is that philosophy teaching seems to me a much more inclusive

approach than the British Government's current Prevent strategy, which aims to identify and engage with people believed to be at risk of becoming involved in terrorism and is at least potentially divisive. The British Department for Education's own research in 2010 suggested a link between Philosophy for Children (P4C) and protection against indoctrination,[24] and similar thinking seems to have informed a 2015 British Council working paper on education and extremism (Rose 2015), which calls for greatly increased provision of teaching in the humanities in the Middle East and North Africa (the need for philosophy is specifically mentioned on p. 14). It would be very good to see more studies undertaken in this area, and I note that the Nuffield Foundation is currently undertaking research on the non-cognitive impacts of philosophy teaching in primary schools, analysing the data provided by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Durham University 2015 project, which had originally looked at the effects of P4C in reading, writing and maths in a cohort of 48 schools.[25] It is very encouraging too that the EEF together with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is in the process of initiating a greatly expanded version of the 2015 project, this time involving 200 schools, which will from the outset assess the non-cognitive impact of P4C teaching as well as progress in reading, writing and maths, and general learning and teaching.[26]

As stated, these general resources can be found in most philosophical traditions, even if they are deployed in particularly appealing form in Greek philosophy. However, there are two respects in which Greek philosophy could be especially helpful in negotiating current religious tensions. Firstly, it offers to some extent a shared cultural resource which can be of great use in contemporary inter-faith, or faith-secular, scenarios: although many ancient philosophers were profoundly religious—and Plato is one of them—they did not, at least in the classical and Hellenistic periods, espouse any of the current dominant world religions.[27] Greek philosophy thus provides a relatively inclusive space in which people can vigorously debate profound ethical, religious and metaphysical issues without feeling so keenly that their specific religious beliefs and identities are being immediately threatened. It

[24] Bonnell, Copestake, Kerr, Passy, Reed, Salter, Sarwar & Sheikh (2010; see particularly the summary of the P4C case study, pp. 122-130).

[25] The draft report on non-cognitive impact of P4C: http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/non-cognitive-impacts-philosophy-children. The original analysis of the 2015 cohort in terms of progress in reading, writing and maths: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/our-work/projects/philosophy-for-children.

[26] https://www.nfer.ac.uk/schools/taking-part-in-our-research/eeps/

[27] Although Judaism was of course in existence at the time, none of the Greek philosophers of the period was Jewish.

is of course true that it is the foundation of the tradition of Western rationalism, and many do not wish to situate themselves within such a tradition; nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that not all Greek (and later Roman) philosophers lived within the confines of modern Europe, and not all were white. Furthermore, we owe the preservation of the Greek corpus to Islamic scholars such as Al-Farabi and Averroes (Ibn Rushd), who also did much to enrich the tradition with their own original thought.

The second respect in which Greek philosophy can help us negotiate current religious tensions is that most of its practitioners saw no conflict between religion and science, or religion and philosophy: in Plato's case, for example, the mathematical and physical laws which he believed shaped the cosmos are in themselves the best possible evidence of the divine in action. The view that there is a divine controlling intelligence (*nous*) and that the cosmos is divinely ordered can be found in many of his dialogues;[28] it is of course not necessary to follow Plato in his specific religious beliefs to take on board the fundamental point that philosophic/scientific and religious approaches can be compatible.

Philosophy in general and Greek philosophy in particular can also assist with another of the chief challenges of our times: the training they offer in conceptual analysis and the sparking of a young person's interest in epistemology that they may ignite can also help counter the current disturbing fashion for claiming that we live in a 'post-fact' and 'post-truth' world. Such claims are extremely inchoate, and perhaps all the more dangerous for that. Is the assertion that facts are unimportant and to be disregarded? Or that an individual creates his or her own reality? Or even that there is no such thing as 'fact' or 'truth' at all? Deciding what is to count as a 'fact' or 'truth' are among the most profound of philosophical questions, and, again, it is good to encourage children to start their exploration of such questions young, as the process will help them to see that the very phrases 'post-fact' and 'post-truth' are arguably self-refuting: is not the user of such phrases claiming that this very state of affairs is itself a fact, is itself true? Again, while almost all philosophical traditions can assist a young person to begin examining such claims, Greek philosophy is an enticing introduction: the paradoxes of Heraclitus and Zeno that we have already touched on can encourage a child to start puzzling about what to believe and why to

[28] e.g. *Phaedo* 97b-98b; *Philebus* 28d-30e; *Laws* 967d-e; the mathematical nature of this ordering is particularly emphasised in the *Timaeus* (*passim*). See Hobbs (2017).

believe it, and older children and teenagers can be invited to consider a summary[29] of Plato's analysis of why he believes Protagoras' 'Man is the Measure' doctrine to be ultimately self-refuting (for the same reason as above, namely that Protagoras' claim 'Man is the Measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not' is the one claim being presented as an objective truth, the one reality that is not created by the whims of individual humans or groups of them).

Finally, as we have seen, philosophy in schools does not simply help young people spot and avoid various dangers; it can also provide them with something positive to sustain them. If we return to our starting point of an ethics and politics of flourishing, one of its great strengths is that it encourages young people to develop a conception of flourishing which is both strong and flexible. The strength comes from foundations and a framework which are clear and robust enough to stand firm in an increasingly uncertain world; the flexibility derives from the fact that the ways in which the actualization of potential can be understood and made manifest—the pictures of flourishing individual and communal lives that comprise the specific contents of the structural framework—are adaptable to changing historical, political and geographical circumstances, and advances in biological and psychological understanding. As a result, it is an ethical framework which can accommodate, and indeed facilitate, the suppleness and agility of mind which uncertain times require, and which are plainly currently required in the great global shifts of the early 21st century, both in the workplace and beyond.

Conclusion

To sum up: for all the above reasons, both the study of philosophy in schools and the studying of other subjects philosophically can add zest and interest to the years of education in themselves, and also provide some grasp of what constitutes a flourishing life and an imaginative appreciation of a range of such lives that will provide those leaving school with lasting support. In addition it can offer the kind of training in mental rigour, precision, flexibility and resilience that the 21st century so clearly requires. Many philosophers and philosophical approaches can be fruitfully deployed, but as an overall package ancient Greek philosophy is of particular use to the educator, especially as some of its elements can appeal to primary school

[29] I say 'summary', because Plato's full discussion of Protagoras' Man-Measure doctrine in his *Theaetetus* is highly complex, and would be beyond all but the most gifted school student. But the basic gist of his final refutation can be clearly grasped by an attentive teenager.

children. Such philosophical studies do not all need to be examined: when Socrates claims at *Apology* 38a that 'the unexamined life is not worth living' he does not have in mind the current regime of frequent tests for the very young—in the U.K. at least—a regime that can risk draining all the fun out of learning and exploring.[30] I submit that a greater provision of philosophy in schools, and in particular greater use of the rich resources of ancient Greek philosophy, would facilitate both the immediate living and the developing understanding of a good life by all who studied and taught it, and would nourish and sustain both pupils and teachers and help prepare them for what may well prove to be turbulent years ahead.

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[30] See *Republic* 536e-537a: 'Then don't use compulsion … but let your children's lessons take the form of play.'

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