A recurrent theme in Plato’s moral and political writings is a response to the cynicism of those who, like Thrasymachus and Callicles, take politics to be the practice of ruling others for one’s own benefit. Instead, Plato’s Socrates insists, the job description of the true πολιτικός (“politician” or statesman) is to benefit the citizens (Rep. 345d-346e). The success of a true statesman, however, is not to be measured by the extent to which he supplies the citizens with wealth, security, material goods and other things they might desire. This is because it is not through having such things, but by using them well, that a person (or a city) is truly benefited.¹ Thus the way to benefit the citizens is to teach them how to use these “good” things well, and this is to educate them in virtue (Euthd. 292a-e). Hence the job description of the true statesman, Socrates insists, is to make the citizens good.²

This is why Socrates in the Republic claims that the most important set of institutions in the ideal city are those of education (παιδεία) (Republic 424a). These institutions aim to make the “young people” of the city pious, courageous, temperate and just.³ These virtues are the proper qualifications of the citizen (πολίτης), as Plato’s Protagoras makes clear in his “Great Speech”.⁴ Plato’s privileged speakers in the Statesman and the Laws concur that producing citizens with these virtues is the premier function of the statesman or lawgiver.⁵ This is how the statesman benefits the citizen.

It is thus a striking anomaly that in the Republic the artisans, who compose the largest class of citizens and indeed are the original citizens, fail to

¹ Euthydemus 278e-282d; cf. Gorgias 511a-512a; Laches 194c-195d; Charmides 173a-175a.
² Gorgias 513e-515d, 517b-c; Republic 500d; cf. Gorgias 4630465, 503-506;
³ Republic 395c, 399a-c, 402b-c, 405a-b, 410a.
⁴ Protagoras 320d-322d. On the virtues as the qualifications for citizenship, see Laws 807e-d.
⁵ Statesman 306a, 308e-310a; Laws 631a-631c; cf. 653a-b.
receive this education. The paideia in question, extensively detailed in Books II and III, is a variation of the traditional cultural education (μουσική) and physical training (γυμναστική) of an Athenian “gentleman” (κόλπος κ’ αγαθός). It is the job-specific training of the guardian class (here not further distinguished into rulers and auxiliaries), coordinate with the vocational training of the artisans. Cobbler is trained in cobbler, guardians in virtue (405a-b; 456d8-10). Thus in being assigned to the artisan class, a person is cut off from receiving the greatest benefit that a city can provide for its citizens. Why, if the goal of the polis is to benefit its citizens, are the vast majority of them excluded from this ultimate benefit?

Even though none of Socrates’ interlocutors in the Republic voices such a concern, it is worthwhile, nonetheless, for us to raise the question because Plato’s reasons for assigning people to the artisan class are relevant to a full understanding of his notorious preference for non-democratic institutions. It is not just in the ideal city of the Republic that the largest class of citizens has no share in ruling the city. In superficial contrast, the constitution outlined in the Laws distributes political power much more broadly among the citizens. But this difference is achieved by the simple expedient of denying citizen status to the artisans—so the restriction on political participation among the city’s population is effectively the same. In both cases, the artisans are excluded from political participation by the famous principle that: “Each person must practice a single occupation in the city, for which his nature is best suited” (Republic 433a4-6; Laws 846d-e).

This Principle of Specialization, on which Socrates explicitly relies in relegating citizens to the artisan class in the Republic, is commonly understood to imply that the artisans are so relegated because of a natural inability to perform the function of the ruling classes. That is, the members of the artisan class are incapable of acquiring the political excellence that is the job description of the rulers and auxiliaries. Since Socrates claims that adherence to this principle is the very thing that makes the city just (433a),

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6 No doubt this is because they identify with the guardian class: they are quick enough to voice concerns about the justice of the constitutional demands placed upon the guardians—their inability to acquire wealth (419a), and the requirement that they come back down into the cave to rule (519d-520d)—concerns to which Socrates responds with assurances that the guardians are not being unjustly treated.

7 Here I disagree with Bobonich 2002, who claims that the Laws advocates broader political participation than the Republic.

8 The principle is first articulated in the Republic at 369e-370c and is regularly invoked or referred to thereafter: 374a-e, 394d-e, 400e, 406c, 415a-d, 421a, 421c, 423c, 423d, (cf. 397e), 433a, 434a-b, 435b, 441d, 444b; Laws, 846d-e; cf. 807c-d
it is tempting to conclude that it functions in this case as a principle for the just distribution of the most important good in the city. According to this interpretation, naturally occurring differences in people’s abilities to acquire excellence justify their assignment to their respective political classes. Only those who are naturally incapable of performing either of the guardian functions (including that of the auxiliaries) are relegated to the class that has no share in ruling the city.

My task in this essay is to contest this reading of the Republic. Upon careful examination of the Principle of Specialization, and of the institutions of the ideal city, I will argue that, first of all, Plato gives us no good reason to suppose that the artisans are excluded from political participation because of any natural incapacity. Second, I will argue that the institutions of the ideal city show no evidence of having been designed with a concern to make sure that all those with the natural capacity to be guardians are given the opportunity to develop it. Let us begin where Socrates first introduces the Principle of Specialization in the Republic: the model of the “original city” constructed in Book II (369a-372e).

Although this original city is populated solely by artisans, it is not simply a collection of artisans. Rather, it has an intelligible structure and organization in the service of a clearly articulated goal: meeting human needs in a way that makes life better for its participants than it would be outside the structure of a state (369b-c). The basic human needs are for food, shelter, clothing, shoes and medical care. So, the first articulation of the most basic city would be a collective of specialists in servicing these needs: a farmer, a builder, a weaver, a cobbler, and a doctor. The Principle of Specialization introduced here motivates this first step in civic construction: we satisfy our needs better and more easily in a case of specialization and exchange than if we each tried to minister ourselves to all of our own needs (369d-370a). Successive applications of the principle to the same set of basic needs warrants the introduction of further specialists, since you cannot properly specialize in farming if you need to make your own tools and raise oxen for ploughing; weavers and cobbler cannot concentrate on their own specialties if they have to raise sheep and cattle for fleece and hides (370c-e), and so on. So the next stage of specialists are those who produce the tools and materials used by the original specialists: herdsmen, smiths, and carpenters. Since it is unrealistic to expect that all

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9 On the just city as one in which distributive justice is observed, see 433e.
10 I deal with the corresponding issue in the Laws in Meyer 2003.
the necessary materials will be available in the city’s location, provision will need to be made to import the missing items. This necessitates the introduction of yet another set of specialties (importers, merchants, and navigators), along with an increase in the number of the people engaged in the previously enumerated specialties, so that there will be, not only enough goods for the increased domestic population, but also a surplus of goods available for export (371a-b). Finally, in order to facilitate the exchange of goods between the artisans who populate the city, without impeding the specialization on which the city rests, there will be further market specialists who exchange goods for currency and currency for goods (371c-d). The final specialty added to the city is that of the μοσθωτός, who provides unskilled bodily labour to assist the other specialists as needed. For example, the cobbler who has to devote part of his time to hauling and unloading supplies is less able to devote his time to cobbling per se.

At each successive stage of articulation, both the range of occupations in the city and the number of citizens engaged in each is adjusted with a view to the original goal: the service of the basic human needs for food, shelter, clothing and health. Thus the city has an intelligible structure and a conception of good that it realizes. Of course the suggestion that the range of goods that make life good for the citizens is restricted to the satisfaction of bodily needs should fly a red flag to anyone familiar with other dialogues of Plato—where Socrates (or another privileged voice) consistently claims or argues that living well consists not simply in having these so-called goods, but in knowing how to use them well.11

However, is it clear that this knowledge is in fact absent from the original city? To be sure, it is not identified as a specialty in the city and no one is assigned to it. But it (or something like it) seems to be deployed in the construction of that city, at least by Socrates, who claims that (at least as contrasted with the feverish city that he goes on to describe) it is a true and healthy city (372e). The city avoids both poverty and war (372b-c), something Socrates will stress later as the goal of the guardian (IV 421d-423c), by pursuing a restricted range of goods and by living within its means. These good features of the city are reliably transmitted from one generation to the next (372d). Socrates is deliberately provoking his audience (and Plato his readers) to ask, what is responsible for these good features? This too is a competence that must be present in a properly functioning city.

11 In addition to the references in note 2 above, see also Laws 631b-e and Statesman 306e-310a.
Plato addresses this issue obliquely, by first of all raising the challenge, in Glaucon’s famous objection, that the range of goods produced by the city falls below civilized standards (372c). Socrates responds by increasing without limit the range of goods and services available in the city (372e-373d). No longer are the increased population or additional specialties justified in terms of the basic needs of the citizens. Instead, “what people nowadays have” is the standard (372d) and the city surrenders itself to the “limitless accumulation of property (or money)” (373d). Thus the original “healthy” city is transformed into the “feverish” city (372e). As a result, the population increases along with its territorial and material demands to the point that conflict with other cities is now inevitable (373e). This motivates the introduction of a new specialty, the military (374a).

The military specialty is initially given the function of defending the city against external aggression (presumably from other feverish cities). The job description gradually expands to the point that the soldiers become “guardians” of the city in the broadest sense, which coincides with the function of the true statesman. They aim at the city’s preservation (σωτηρία, 417a) or freedom (395c, 414b) and the well-being of its citizens. The program of education aimed at inculcating in the guardians (here not further distinguished into rulers and auxiliaries) the requisite qualities to carry out this function takes up the rest of book II and all of Book III. It turns out not to be simple military education. Indeed, physical avō military training is dealt with very sparingly (403d-405a, 410c). Rather, it is training in the ethical virtues.12 Indeed, the goal of the training shifts away from the initial concern of making sure that they will not be savage to the other citizens (375b-c), to focus on inculcating proper fellow-feeling (φιλία) among the guardians themselves.13

At the end of this gradual transformation of the guardians’ job description, the feverish city has been reduced in size again to something like the original city. It avoids both poverty and wealth (421d), and the range of

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12 See references in note 4.

13 This part of the Republic bears the marks of having originated as a self-standing treatise on the education of citizens in virtue—independent of any specifically military function—since at one point Socrates contrasts the lives of the educated youth from those of the craft workers by referring to them as the leisured rich (406-408)—whose specific civic function is to cultivate virtue (407a). The discussion of the program of cultural education outlined in II-III clearly serves as the model for Plato’s later development of models for inculcating the virtues in citizens. Aristotle’s account of habituation in the Nicomachean Ethics clearly builds on it.
goods once again approaches that of the original city—except that delicacies (διοῦ) are also to be included.¹⁴ ‘Thus we are returned to a version of the original city that satisfies both Socrates’ and Glaucon’s constraints. The main difference is that Socrates has introduced into the city something that explains why the city observes and maintains these good limits. Identifying this feature is what will illuminate the justice or injustice of a city, Socrates indicates (372e). What is this feature? It is the competence of the guardians (here not further distinguished into rulers and auxiliaries). What is that competence? Resulting from the program of education outlined in detail in Books II-III, it is not the simple military competence with reference to which Socrates introduced this additional group of citizens, but ethical virtue: courage, temperance, piety and justice.¹⁵

While Socrates’ interlocutors in the Republic are inclined to think that the guardians do not have an advantageous position in the city (419a), Socrates’ own point of view is quite the opposite. The guardians receive a great benefit from their education. This is so not only for those who receive the further intellectual education of the philosopher rulers and thus can engage in the highest activity of which a human being is capable (519c-520d; cf. 420b). It is also true for the auxiliaries. For these, we have seen, are educated in the excellences of citizenship, and an enduring theme in Plato’s dialogues, we have seen, is that the job description of the true political ruler is to make excellent citizens.

Thus to be relegated to the artisan class is to be denied one of the greatest benefits that a state can confer upon its citizens. On the interpretation of the Principle of Specialization that we are considering, the city’s failure to provide this benefit to those so relegated is justified by the fact that these citizens are naturally incapable of functioning as guardians or auxiliaries. But does the Principle of Specialization provide such a justification? Are the institutions of the ideal city in fact designed with the goal of ensuring that all those with the natural aptitude to perform the guardian or auxiliary function are given the opportunity to develop it? I submit that a

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¹⁴ Necessary desires, as explained by Socrates in Book VIII, include desires for delicacies (559a-b).

¹⁵ Whether, as is often supposed, the auxiliaries fail to achieve wisdom, and as a result achieve a lower degree of the other virtues than the philosopher rulers, is not relevant here. (See Irwin 1977, p. 226, Reeve 1995, and Bobonich 2002.) The salient point is that the auxiliaries are benefited by their education, and thereby made “better” than the artisans are by theirs.
careful examination of the Principle of Specialization, and of the institutions of the city built in accordance with it, yields a negative answer.\footnote{\ref{footnote}}

Let us begin by examining the Principle more closely. Would strict adherence to it entail that only those who lack the natural aptitude to be guardians are excluded from that class? Not at all. In fact, on closer scrutiny the Principle does not even yield a unique class assignment for each person. Precisely stated, the principle has two clauses:

THE PRINCIPLE OF SPECIALIZATION:
Each occupation in the city should be practiced by a person who has a natural aptitude for it; and specializes in it, to the exclusion of competing occupations.

The basic rationale Socrates offers for the Principle of Specialization in the context of the original city of artisans is that it yields “better and finer results” (370c). Each clause of the principle specifies one factor relevant to the quality of the “results.” The first cites differing natural aptitudes: each of us is naturally suited to different endeavours (370a). As elaborated in Book V, natural aptitude for a practice involves facility at learning the rudiments, the ability to carry on by oneself after initial instruction, and ease in having one’s body carry out what one has learnt (455b-c). Thus I will be better able to learn and carry out a practice for which I have a natural aptitude than one for which I am naturally ill-suited. Accordingly, an occupation will be performed better if it is practiced only by those who have a natural aptitude for it. Hence the first clause of the Principle. These facts about natural aptitude, however, are insufficient to support the second clause, which requires a person to specialize in a single craft. For it is perfectly consistent with the possibility that a single person might have a natural aptitude for more than one craft. If I am naturally suited to both carpentry and farming, why should I not engage in both?

The benefits of adhering to the second clause of the Principle are additional to those of the first. While the performance of the crafts will be improved if people restrict themselves to practicing crafts for which they have a natural aptitude, they will be even better if each person further restricts himself to a single such craft. This is because of a set of considerations we might label “the requirements of expertise”. These fall into two main types. First of all, specializing enables the practitioner of an occupa-
tion to properly attend to the demands of his craft in a timely manner: for example, striking when the iron is hot and, in general, seizing the right moment (370b). If you are trying to juggle many different projects, the demands of some will likely interfere with your ability to meet the requirements of the others. Thus the expert practice of an occupation requires focus and lack of impeding distractions:

More plentiful and better quality goods are produced if each person does one thing for which he is naturally suited (eis hen kata phusin), does it at the right time, and is released from having to do any of the others (370c).

Each person is assigned one thing, to which his nature is suited (pros ho epephuke hekastos), at which he should work throughout his life, with leisure from all other pursuits, so as not to miss the right moment to practice his own work well. (374b-c)

Second, acquiring expertise in a discipline requires that one devote sufficient time to acquiring the relevant knowledge and practicing the relevant skills (375b-d). Unless you regularly engage in, for example, cobbling, you will not be able to keep up your skills. There just isn't enough time in one life, the Principle presupposes, to acquire and maintain proficiency in two different disciplines.

Plato's reasons for thinking that cultivating virtue falls within the scope of the Principle of Specialization—that attempting to cultivate justice and carpentry is like trying to be a ballerina and a sumo wrestler—need not concern us here. Our concern is with the principle itself, which we are now in a position to see is perfectly consistent with the possibility that a person might not be assigned to an occupation for which he is naturally suited. While the principle does require that any occupation to which I am assigned be one for which I have a natural aptitude, it does not entail that I lack a natural aptitude for an occupation to which I am not assigned. A person who is naturally capable of both carpentry and justice might still be relegated to the artisan class by political authorities because of the second clause of the principle. Somebody, after all, has to build houses.

Nonetheless, a proponent of the reading I am contesting might insist: even if the Principle of Specialization as it is originally formulated in Book III does not entail that those relegated to the artisan class are so relegated because they fail the requirement of natural aptitude, surely Socrates makes it clear, when he applies the Principle, that natural suitability is the

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17 Plato makes it quite clear in both the Republic (395b-c, 407a-c) and the Laws (807c-d, 846d-e) that cultivating virtue is as time-consuming an activity and demanding an expertise as the most strenuous of the manual crafts. I discuss the evidence for this in Meyer 2003.
relevant factor. For instance in Book IV, when arguing that the Principle is the very thing that makes the city just (433c-435b), he warns against the danger of someone who is “by nature an artisan” attempting to enter the guardian class (434a), and insists that “someone who is by nature a cobbler should practice cobblerly and nothing else” (443c). In these cases, is it not evident that he understands a person’s nature to be the determining factor in assignment to an occupation?

Here it is important to distinguish between two different ways in which Socrates employs the term ‘nature’ (φύσις) in the Republic. On the one hand, there is the natural aptitude for learning and practicing an occupation, which we have already considered. Let us call this a person’s “antecedent nature”. Nature in this sense is to be contrasted with nurture and training. But this is not the only way that Socrates uses ‘nature’ (φύσις and its cognates) in connection with the Principle of Specialization. He sometimes uses ‘nature’ to refer to a person’s developed capacity: the results of antecedent nature combined with nurture and training. This is explicit in Book III, when he warns of the importance of properly training the young guardians, who must be forbidden to engage in “imitation” of inferior people because “imitations practiced from youth become part of nature (εἰς ψωμα, φύσιν), and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought” (395d1-3). So too in Book IV, when Socrates stresses that the institutions for education (παιδεία) and upbringing (τεφεί) are the most important ones for ensuring the success of the polis, he claims that “good education and upbringing produce good natures” (424a5-6). In both cases ‘nature’ (φύσις) refers to developed nature.18

While nature in the sense of natural aptitude is clearly invoked in the earlier, technical versions of the Principle, nature in the sense of the developed capacity is equally important for achieving the goal of the Principle of Specialization. Just as specializing in what you have a natural aptitude for yields better results than simply doing what you have a natural aptitude for, you get even better results if you specialize in what you have

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18 Other contexts in the Republic where ‘φύσις’ (or its cognates) refers to developed, rather than antecedent nature include Socrates claim that the young guardians must be surrounded by beautiful art and architecture (401a-d). Thus, he concludes, the artisans who make these must be “by nature able to pursue what is fine and graceful in their work” 401c4-5. Clearly developed nature is what he has in mind. See also the recommendations for medical coverage in the ideal city in Book III, according to which treatment will not be wasted on those who are “by nature sickly” (408b2) but will be reserved for those “naturally well endowed in body and soul” (410a1).
a natural aptitude for and also receive proper training. Indeed, if we examine the contexts in which Socrates invokes a person’s nature as the decisive factor in his proper class assignment, it is far from clear that it is antecedent nature rather than developed nature that is invoked. For example, the violation of the Principle of Specialization described at 434a-b (“a carpenter attempts to do the work of a cobbler, or a cobbler that of a carpenter”, 434a3-4) presumably invokes developed rather than antecedent nature, and this makes it reasonable to interpret the “natural artisan” invoked a few lines later (434a9-b1) in the same way.

An especially clear example of developed nature being the relevant factor in one’s appropriate class assignment occurs at the end of the account of the guardians’ education. In addition to giving the young guardians the proper cultural and physical education, the city must place severe restrictions on their material possessions and living arrangements (416d-417b). These restrictions are necessary if the guardians are to develop and maintain the level of concern for the ruled population that has been part of their job description from the beginning (375b-c; 416d-417b). Otherwise, Socrates says, the citizens occupying those positions will be “household managers (οἰκονόμοι) and farmers rather than guardians” (417a5-7). That is, their developed capacity will be that characteristic of the artisan class (to whom alone οἰκονόμος is permitted. So someone with the antecedent nature suitable for the guardian class may properly belong to the artisan class, because of his or her developed nature. But if the Principle of Specialization assigns people to the artisan class on the basis of their developed nature rather than their antecedent nature then it does not provide the sort of justification that it is commonly thought to provide.

Is there any evidence in the Republic that Socrates thinks the artisans lack the antecedent nature appropriate for functioning as good guardians? Although Socrates does say more than once that the requisite nature for the philosopher rulers is very rare (491a, 495a), it is important to note that he does not say the same thing when identifying the antecedent nature appropriate for those who will later be called auxiliaries (375b-376d). Is there other evidence that Socrates understands the artisans to be naturally unsuited for the guardian functions?

To be sure, there is the notorious passage in Book IX in which Socrates says, after likening the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul to a lion and a multi-headed monster inside a person:

Why do you think the condition of a manual worker is despised? Or is it for any other reason than that, when the best part is naturally weak in someone, it can’t rule the beasts within him but can only serve them and learn to flatter them?

Probably so.
Therefore to insure that someone like that is ruled by something similar to what rules the best person we say he ought to be the slave of that best person who has a divine ruler within himself. *(Republic IX 590c)*

Plato here has Socrates appeal to a familiar and enduring social prejudice—that "tradesmen" or "base mechanicals" are morally inferior and incapable of the virtue of a "gentleman" (καλὸς καὶ ἄγαθός). There is no doubt that Plato subscribes to the prejudice. But the crucial question for us is whether the relevant incapacity is due to antecedent nature or to developed nature.

Relevant evidence is provided by Plato's contemporary Xenophon, who articulates and explains the prejudice with admirable candour in his *Economics*, when he has Socrates say to Critoboulos:

> The crafts that are called mechanical are disparaged and quite rightly carry a bad reputation in the cities. For [1] they ruin the bodies both of those who practice them and of their overseers, since they compel them to remain seated—sometimes even at the fire—and to be shut away inside away from daylight. This weakens the body, and [2] consequently undermines the strength of the soul too. Also, [3] the so-called mechanical crafts leave one no leisure for friends or for sharing in the oversight of the city. As a result, it seems, such people are no good to their friends and no good at defending their fatherland. That is why in some cities—especially those that seem to be best at conducting war—no citizen is allowed to practice a mechanical craft. *(Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, IV.2-4; cf. VI.5, VII.2)*

A mechanical occupation, Xenophon explains, robs one of three things that are part of virtue as he conceives it: (1) bodily and mental vigour; (2) the leisure requisite for leading a publicly active life; (3) the resources to benefit friends and city (cf. VI.7, XI.9). Aristotle, another unapologetic advocate of the prejudice, summarizes Xenophon's explanation succinctly: "No one can carry on the activities of virtue while living the life of a mechanical or hired laborer" *(Pol.,* 1278a20). Plato's Socrates too concurs in this picture, when he says that those who engage in the manual crafts (by implication, this is all of the artisan class) have "defective natures" because "their souls are cramped and spoiled by the mechanical nature of their work" *(Republic 495d)*.

These explanations make it quite clear that it is not lack of antecedent natural aptitude, but rather the effects of living a "mechanical" life, that

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19 *Laws* V, 741d4; cf. *Epinomis* VII 334b5; *Laws* I: the "mechanical" trades are slavish (644a4); cf. *Symposion* 203a, *Theaetetus* 176c-d, *Alcibiades* I 131a-b; cf. the pseudo-Platonic *Amatores* 137b5, *Epinomis* 976d3; *Republic* 405a9, 406c, 407a, 495d4-496a1.
keep an artisan from being able to successfully cultivate virtue. These effects of being in the artisan class surely are irrelevant to the justification for assigning someone to that class in the first place. Thus these texts do not support the interpretation of the Principle of Specialization that we are considering.

Finally, we must consider the “Myth of the Metals” in Book III, which says that each citizen is assigned to his or her political class on the basis of natural aptitude: bronze and iron natures to the artisan class, silver natures to the auxiliary class, and gold natures to the class of philosopher rulers (415a-c). It is clear that the iron, bronze, silver, and gold natures invoked by the myth are to be understood as antecedent natures. And there is no doubt that the myth is supposed to supply to the population of the city exactly the kind of justification for their class assignment that the Principle of Specialization is thought to supply, according to the interpretation that I am contesting. However, it does not follow from this that Plato understands and intends the Principle in this way. For one thing, Socrates tells his own audience that the myth is a falsehood (415b-c). Indeed, the one feature of the story that is explicitly identified as a falsehood (rather than an allegory) is the fact that it represents the developed capacities of the members of the three classes (which are in fact a result of their training and nurture) as the simple deliverance of nature (414d-e).

The myth’s further claim that the citizens’ “natures” suit them to their assigned classes in the city (415a) is clearly intended to mitigate resentment on the part of those excluded from the guardian ranks. So too is the promise that the “metal” of all offspring will be tested, so that if an artisan family produces a gold- or silver-natured child, he will be elevated to the rank of guardian (415b-d). But is there any evidence that this part of the myth is any less an expedient falsehood than the first, aimed at fostering unanimity among the citizens whose lot in life is so unequal? That is, do the institutions of the just city outlined in the Republic actually make good on the myth’s promise? Only if they do will the assignment of people to the artisan class be justified by their antecedent nature.

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20 Another text thought to be evidence that the artisans have defective antecedent natures is Book IX 581c, where Socrates distinguishes between three types of people: dominated by the reasoning, spirited, and appetitive parts of the soul respectively. Many readers suppose that these correspond to the denizens of the three political classes, the artisans being populated by the last group. (See Bobonich 2002, Reeve 1995, and Klosko 1986). But even if this is correct, which I doubt, it is highly dubious that these are three types of antecedent nature, as opposed to developed nature.

21 The myth is explicitly connected to the Principle of Specialization at 423c-d.
To be sure, Socrates does once say, outside of the context of the Myth, that the guardians must see to it that any inferior offspring of the guardians is to be demoted to the artisan class, and that any superior offspring of the artisans is to be promoted to the guardian class (423c-d). However, what we are looking for is some indication that the institutions of the city are designed with a view to making good on this promise. I submit that if we scrutinize the institutions of the city, we will find plenty designed to filter out from the guardian classes those with unsuitable natures, but none designed to make sure that every person with a silver or golden nature is assigned to a guardian class.

Socrates devotes considerable time to describing a set of institutional practices intended to sort people by their natural aptitude for the political classes. The context is the program of education (*paideia*) for the guardians outlined in Books II-III. Trainees are subjected to various tests to determine how well they retain, in the face of various stresses (412d-414a, 429c-430b), the main lessons of this education: that they must always do what is best for the city (413c). Those who fail these performance tests may, in extreme cases, be demoted to the artisan class (V 468a). In less extreme cases, they will be disqualified from entry into the higher of the two guardian classes. Entry into the program of education for the rulers (outlined in Book VII) is based on proficiency in the activities of the earlier guardian education outlined in Books II-III (412e-414b).

In all these cases, however, the tests are administered to those receiving the training appropriate to the guardian class. Those admitted to guardian school must pass the tests to continue in that school, and must pass further tests if they are to make the higher grade of ruler. Differences in natural aptitude presumably explain why some trainees pass these tests and others fail. However, unless the entire population of the city receives this training—the children of artisans and guardians alike—these testing institutions are insufficient to make good on the promise made to the artisans in the Myth of the Metals. However, while it is clear enough that the offspring of the auxiliaries and guardians receive this education and have their mettle tested in this way, 22 Socrates gives no indication that any off-

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22 Those at any rate who survive the rigorous eugenic breeding program that works in tandem with the controlled "marriages" between the guardians outlined in Book V (459a-461b).
spring of the artisans will receive it, and as much as says that they do not receive it (405 a-b; cf. 456d)

Thus, the institutions for testing the "mettle" of the population serve only as a filter to make sure that the unqualified do not stay in the ranks of the guardians. They do not provide the promised outreach to the children of the artisans, to identify any "gold" or "silver" natures that arise among them. Are there any other institutions that perform this outreach function?

Socrates invokes the Myth of the Metals one last time when he explains in Book VIII, how the true city might begin to decline (546a-547a). It is here, if anywhere else, that we might expect to find evidence of a concern to make sure that all (not just only) those with silver and gold natures are assigned to the guardian classes. According to the myth of decline, the city’s fallible rulers will inevitably make a miscalculation in the eugenic breeding program outlined in Book V (450-465). Offspring with inferior natures will be produced, so that even when the best of these are given the program of guardian education outlined in Books II-III and V-VII, the results will be sub-optimal (546c-d). As a result, the institutions of education, which they oversee, will deteriorate, producing inferiorly developed natures down the road (546d), who will in turn fail to properly distinguish between iron, bronze, silver, and gold natures when selecting the next generation of leaders (546d-e).

While this "application" of the myth of the metals does imply that the rulers are supposed to test the "mettle" of prospective guardians to make sure that no iron or bronze natures get into the guardian classes, this filtering function requires no institutions other than the testing institutions we have already examined. It does not indicate that there are "outreach" programs to test the nature of all citizens, so that "no natural guardian is left behind".

One might reasonably doubt, therefore, that the promise of equal opportunity for all made in the Myth of the Metals functions as a constraint on the construction of the institutions of the ideal city. The testing programs we have surveyed make good on one half of the myth’s promise that everyone’s mettle will be tested. No one in the city will be allowed to perform the functions of the ruling or auxiliary class unless he has passed the test that weeds out the naturally unqualified. But the other half of the myth’s promise remains unfulfilled: the promise that everyone with a "silver" or "golden" nature will be assigned to one of the two guardian classes.

This is not to say, of course, that the ideal city described in the Republic is inconsistent with the existence of such an outreach program. It is no doubt possible, for all Socrates says, that the children of the guardians and the artisans alike are enrolled in guardian school, and have their mettle
tested there—or that some other testing program, not mentioned in the text, is administered to the artisans' children so as to identify those with the suitable natural ability for guardianship. However, since we are concerned with whether the Principle of Specialization is understood by Plato's Socrates to show that the members of the artisan class are not unjustly treated in being relegated to this status, it is reasonable to require some evidence of a positive concern on his part to design institutions that aim at warding off this potential injustice to its citizens. We have seen no such evidence. The constitutional arrangements outlined for the ideal city give no support to the thesis that the institutions of the ideal city distribute fairly the opportunities to receive the greatest benefit that a state can confer upon its members.

This result should not surprise us, given that the rationale offered for the Principle of Specialization is forward-looking. The Principle is justified by the fact that adhering to it will yield better results for the city. Performance of the various functions of the city—whether carpentry, farming, or ruling—will be "better and finer" (370c) if these functions are performed by those who are (a) naturally suited to it, and (b) specialize in it. The beneficial effects for the city of adhering to the principle will obtain even if someone who is naturally capable of performing the guardian function (but who is also good at carpentry) is relegated to the artisan class. Indeed the principle, properly understood, quantifies over occupations in the city, not persons. It does not have built into it any constraints on how the benefits produced by the city may be distributed among its members.

We may conclude that even though the Principle of Specialization is identified by Socrates as the very thing that makes the city just, it is quite blind to questions of distributive justice. We would therefore do well to be wary of supposing that Plato's notion of a "just society", defined in terms of adherence to the Principle of Specialization, has any significant overlap with modern notions of political justice.

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