

"LISTEN THEN, OR, RATHER, ANSWER": CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO SOCRATIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. The popularity of Jacques Rancière in recent work in educational philosophy has rejuvenated discussion of the merits and weaknesses of Socratic education, both in Plato's dialogues and in invocations of Socrates in contemporary educational practice. In this essay Jordan Fullam explores the implications of this trend through comparing Rancière's educational thought to an analysis of the relationship between dialectic and stultification in Plato's *Republic*. This task clarifies what is useful in the recent wave of scholarship that brings Rancière's work to bear upon Socratic education, and what we might redeem in the practice of teaching that Plato assigns to the character of Socrates in the *Republic*. Fullam also draws on the educational literature on Socratic education to provide further context to explore the usefulness of both Rancière and Socrates for contemporary teaching.

The image of Socrates as enlightened questioner is a prominent one in Western intellectual culture, especially in the field of education. Socrates in his persistent curiosity and renegade questioning represents the victory of reason over superstition and dogma. Wherever questioning leads to knowledge and wisdom, the spirit of Socrates is thought to be somewhere close by. The influence of this idealization of Socrates in contemporary educational practice is clear. A. G. Rud points out that Socrates is "used as an example of a master teacher in many contexts, from elementary school discussions, to college philosophy classes, to law school."¹ But are Socrates and the question-centered, Socratic teaching methods that are his modern-day namesake deserving of this reputation?

The recent popularity of Jacques Rancière in educational philosophy has contributed to an increasing tendency to answer this question in the negative and has rejuvenated discussion of the problems and possibilities of Socratic education. My aim in this essay is to compare Rancière's critique of Socratic education to (1) adaptations of Socratic education that are documented in the educational literature, and (2) Socratic education as it is portrayed through the character of Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. This task, while missing in the secondary literature on Rancière as well as in Rancière's own work, aids in clarifying what is useful in the recent wave of scholarship that brings Rancière's thought to bear upon Socratic education, and what we might redeem in the practice of education that Plato assigns to the character of Socrates in the *Republic*.

Before moving to an analysis of the *Republic*, I offer an account of Rancière's critique of Socratic education and provide a few examples from the educational literature of how Socratic education is practiced in contemporary classrooms, from

1. Anthony G. Rud Jr., "The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 5, no. 5 (1997): 1–14.

kindergarten to law school. My inquiry reveals that what is called “Socratic education” looks different in the *Republic*, in Rancière’s critique, and in adaptations of Socratic education that are documented in the educational literature. Ultimately, I argue that Rancière’s critique is applicable to the *Republic*, but is limited in several ways. Rancière and his commentators, for example, focus narrowly on the pedagogical strategy of posing leading questions while offering no discussion of the role of the *elenchus* in triggering Socratic perplexity. Rancière’s critique of Socratic education is also problematically extended to include contemporary invocations of Socratic questioning; in my view, this line of analysis erroneously suggests that contemporary Socratic teachers often produce intellectual dependency in their students through posing leading questions. I conclude that much of what has been characterized as “Socratic” in contemporary educational practice is worth preserving rather than abandoning on account of Rancière.

THE CHALLENGE TO SOCRATIC EDUCATION

The defining pedagogical achievement of Socratic education is stultification, according to Rancière and much of the secondary literature on Rancière’s work. Rancière defines stultification as intellectual subordination: “there is stultification whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another.”² Socratic education is a unique case for Rancière in that it is a “perfected form of stultification” (*IS*, 29), its “most formidable form” (*IS*, 59), because it stultifies discreetly through interrogation. Building on Rancière, Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta argue that Socrates and contemporary teachers who claim the Socratic mantle pose as unbiased questioners, but “the sole purpose of interrogation is to lead the student to a point that is already known by the master.”³ Rancière states that “good masters” who follow this Socratic model use questions to “discreetly guide the student’s intelligence — discreetly enough to make it work, but not to the point of leaving [the student’s intelligence] to itself” (*IS*, 29). Socratic teachers, according to this account, interrogate not in service of intellectual emancipation — that is, not to allow the student to think for her- or himself — as is often thought in more generous interpretations of Socratic education. Instead, Socratic teachers interrogate because questions are a more effective means to intellectual subordination, to stultification, than lecturing.

Describing the intellectual dependency that results from stultification as the coincidence of two intelligences, Rancière adds that stultification is “all the more

2. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 13. This work will be cited in the text as *IS* for all subsequent references.

3. Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta, *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 29.

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profound, the more subtle, the less perceptible, the coincidence" (IS, 59). Socratic education, in other words, is powerful because it accomplishes stultification more covertly than traditional pedagogies of knowledge transmission that do not use questioning. For example, pedagogies of knowledge transmission, according to Rancière, often take the form of explication, meaning to explain something to someone in a manner that demonstrates the person cannot understand it by her- or himself (IS, 6). The trick of the master explicator, unlike the Socratic questioner, is that he or she claims to impart an understanding to the student through offering explanations, but in and through the process of explication nevertheless succeeds in subordinating the student's intelligence to that of the master. Explication, unlike "perfected stultification" in Socratic education, is therefore a kind of "enforced stultification" (IS, 7) — a less covert form, but stultification nonetheless.

While this account of explication is central to Rancière's educational thought, he also intends as an audience for his primary educational work theorists and practitioners who already reject explication. Rancière, for example, directs his criticism toward progressive and Socratic educators engaged in attempts at subverting teacher authority in service of emancipatory pedagogies. Drawing out this aspect of Rancière's intention, Goele Cornelissen suggests that antiauthoritarian educators who draw on Socratic principles often unknowingly reproduce covert forms of stultification:

According to Rancière, different anti-authoritarian pedagogies, which mostly draw on Socratic maïeutics, have reacted against the figure of the master explicator. They want to remove the master's assumed inherent authority in favour of the capacity of one intelligence to enlighten another one. This is the model of the master who feigns ignorance in order to provoke the student's capacity to think. But what really happens, according to Rancière, is that the master, while pretending to provoke a capacity, actually demonstrates incapacity, and hence practices, in effect, a perfected form of stultification.⁴

Cornelissen's argument is useful for illustrating how Rancière's critique of Socrates is extended to include contemporary invocations of Socratic questioning. Some educators, according to this view, take Socrates's example as a starting point and adopt teaching practices that (while claiming to be emancipatory) lapse into stultification and produce intellectual subordination. The source of this failure, for Rancière, is the practice of "feigning ignorance," questioning students in order to lead them to an answer that is already known by the teacher. Socratic education, to put it simply, is faulted for appearing to allow students to think for themselves while actually employing a strategy of posing leading questions.

This extension of the critique of Socrates to the practice of Socratic education in contemporary classrooms, however, becomes problematic when one takes into account adaptations of Socratic education that are documented in the educational literature. While there are many adaptations of Socratic education in practice,

4. Goele Cornelissen, "The Public Role of Teaching: To Keep the Door Closed," in *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, ed. Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 19. In this excerpt, Cornelissen cites Jacques Rancière, "Sur 'Le maître ignorant'" (online post), <http://www.multitudes.net/Sur-Le-maitre-ignorant/>.

none that appear in the literature include a strategy of posing leading questions. Avi Mintz has suggested that there are two distinct versions of Socratic education conducted in contemporary educational settings: "Socratic teaching," which is typically practiced in primary, middle, and secondary schools, and the "Socratic method," which is, for the most part, limited to law schools.⁵ While the examples that follow by no means constitute an exhaustive list, these categories illustrate the spectrum of interpretations of Socratic education that have influenced contemporary educational practice.

Representing the first category, two of the most well-known advocates of Socratic teaching in contemporary educational settings are Matthew Lipman, founder of the *Philosophy for Children* program, and Mortimer Adler of *The Paideia Proposal*. Richard Paul suggests that the foundational assumption driving the work of Lipman, Adler, and their colleagues is that children have a natural ability to think philosophically, a "natural and spontaneous tendency to wonder and question," that traditional teaching strategies "discourage and stultify."⁶ In the *Paideia Proposal*, for example, Adler lamented that traditional lecturing and other teacher-directed pedagogies dominate in our nation's schools, and the learning that results is often superficial and fades with time.⁷ To remedy this situation, Adler recommended open-ended discussions that came to be known as Socratic seminars or Socratic circles. In a Socratic seminar, students sit in a circle and ask and answer their own questions about a text. Far from being a strategy in which students respond to leading questions posed by a teacher, Matt Copeland points out, Socratic seminars shirk the search for correct answers completely and "turn partial classroom control, classroom direction, and classroom governance over to students by creating a truly equitable learning community."⁸ Researchers have documented the use of Socratic seminars with students at the primary and secondary levels in all content areas, in college classrooms, and even among teachers themselves in working collaboratively on problems of curriculum and policy — and often with favorable results.⁹ The Socratic seminar is perhaps the

5. Avi Mintz, "From Grade School to Law School: Socrates' Legacy in Education," in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 476. Herein, I use "Socratic method" interchangeably with "negative dialectical questioning" — and both terms are used to indicate an area of pedagogical practice that is based on the *elenchus* in Plato's dialogues.

6. Richard W. Paul, "The Socratic Spirit: An Answer to Louis Goldman," *Educational Leadership* 42, no. 1 (1984): 63–64.

7. Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

8. Matt Copeland, *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005), 3.

9. See, for example, Barbara Fink Chorzempa and Laurie Lapidus, "To Find Yourself, Think for Yourself," *Teaching Exceptional Children* 41, no. 3 (2009): 54–59; Jeanne Ting Chowning, "Socratic Seminars in Science Class," *The Science Teacher* 76, no. 7 (2009): 36–41; Dubravka Knezic, Theo Wubbels, Ed Elbers, and Maaïke Hajer, "The Socratic Dialogue and Teacher Education," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26, no. 4 (2010): 1104–1111; Jennifer R. Mangrum, "Sharing Practice Through Socratic Seminars," *Phi Delta*

interpretation of Socratic education most prominently featured in the literature, but, as we shall see, it is also one of the least faithful to the practice of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. The Socratic seminar, in this sense, is rooted in what Paul characterizes as a redefinition of the Socratic spirit as the "educational power of rational dialogue focused on questions of significance in an atmosphere of mutual support and cooperation."¹⁰ As Mintz points out, this interpretation of Socratic education is based more on Socrates's reputation as a passionate and skillful teacher than on considerations of Socrates's practice in Plato's dialogues.¹¹

The second category in the educational literature includes the strategy of negative dialectical questioning that Mintz identifies as the Socratic method. In contrast to Socratic seminars, negative dialectical questioning is based on a more faithful interpretation of the *elenchus* in Plato's dialogues. Nigel Tubbs, for example, suggests that the *elenchus* arose in Socrates's realization that when he questioned his interlocutors about their beliefs, it was not long before contradictions or internal inconsistencies arose in their defense of those beliefs. Moreover, if Socrates's interlocutors were sincere in responding to Socrates's questions, "they would eventually have to admit that the certainty of their knowledge was pretty flimsy and that doubt, in fact, replaced their certainty."¹² Rob Reich points out that this practice of Socratic refutation "drew Socrates' interlocutors into common inquiry" because it "cleansed them of the cobwebs of false beliefs."¹³ While negative dialectical questioning is less common in the educational literature than Socratic seminars, there are several notable examples of its application in contemporary classrooms. Negative dialectical questioning, for example, is perhaps most notorious as a kind of verbal sparring used in training law students, an interaction in which a law professor calls on a student to offer an argument and the professor attempts to expose weaknesses in the student's argument by posing questions that reveal its internal inconsistencies.¹⁴ This use of Socratic questioning is intended to prepare law students for the challenges of litigation. However, some argue that the Socratic method of refutation produces an environment of excessive

Kappan 91, no. 7 (2010): 40–43; Molly Mee, "Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me: Student Voice in the Classroom," *National Middle School Association* 10, no. 3 (2007): 37–38; Vernon C. Polite and Arlin H. Adams, "Critical Thinking and Values Clarification Through Socratic Seminars," *Urban Education* 32, no. 2 (1997): 256–278; Michael L. Tanner and Leah Casados, "Promoting and Studying Discussions in Math Classes," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 41, no. 5 (1998): 342–350; and Lynda Tredway, "Socratic Seminars: Engaging Students in Intellectual Discourse," *Educational Leadership* 53, no. 1 (1995): 26–29.

10. Paul, "The Socratic Spirit," 63.

11. Mintz, "From Grade School to Law School," 491.

12. Nigel Tubbs, *The Philosophy of the Teacher* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 104.

13. Rob Reich, "Confusion About the Socratic Method: Socratic Paradoxes and Contemporary Invocations of Socrates," *Philosophy of Education* 1998, ed. Steve Tozer (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1999), 68–78.

14. Rud, "The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching," 7.

combativeness and is not suited to law school, especially given that only a small percentage of juris doctor candidates go on to work in litigation.¹⁵

The Socratic method has also been used outside of law school in order to bring students to a state of *aporia*, or Socratic perplexity. Daniel Pekarsky, for example, advocates for a Socratic questioning strategy that moves students “from dogmatism and smugness to perplexity and humility.”¹⁶ In a similar manner, Donald Thomas describes examples from his secondary school teaching in which he attempted to “stun” students into perplexity, into realization of their ignorance, through questions and other kinds of provocations.¹⁷ While these examples draw their inspiration from what Reich refers to as the “destructive component of the Socratic method,”¹⁸ some argue that negative dialectical questioning and the perplexity it engenders are meant to be therapeutic and generative. Jonathan Lear, for example, suggests that Socrates assisted his interlocutors in drawing out and resolving conflicts previously hidden in the interlocutors’ unconscious, and this enhanced their ability to address the fundamental philosophical question of how one ought to live.¹⁹ Similarly, Reich identifies *aporia* as a “state of utter perplexity” that was necessary for preparing “Socrates and his fellow inquirers to stand on common ground, not pretending to know truth, but ready to engage in a collective search for it through further dialogue.”²⁰ Advocates of Socratic perplexity in contemporary classrooms see value in this application of the Socratic method for reasons similar to Reich and Lear — perplexity is viewed as a better position than unthinking prejudice and dogmatism because it arouses curiosity, inspires inquiry, and opens new pathways of thought.

While there are many variations of Socratic education and describing them all is beyond the scope of this essay, the preceding examples illustrate that (1) some adaptations of Socratic education in contemporary practice are more faithful to the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues than others; (2) none of the adaptations of Socratic education in the educational literature include a strategy of using leading questions to stultify students, as Rancière’s critique suggests; and (3) there is enough diversity among adaptations of Socratic education in contemporary classrooms to warrant taking account of the merits and weaknesses of each, rather than creating an all-encompassing characterization of the Socratic teacher and rejecting

15. Katherine S. Mangan, “Lani Guinier Starts Campaign to Curb Use of the Socratic Method,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 43, no. 31 (1997): 12–14.

16. Daniel Pekarsky, “Socratic Teaching: A Critical Assessment,” *Journal of Moral Education* 23, no. 2 (1994): 119–134.

17. Donald W. Thomas, “About Teaching and Teachers: The Torpedo’s Touch,” *Harvard Educational Review* 55, no. 2 (1985): 220–223.

18. Reich, “Confusion About the Socratic Method,” 69.

19. Jonathan Lear, *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 56. See also Reich, “Confusion About the Socratic Method,” 69.

20. Reich, “Confusion About the Socratic Method,” 69.

it as Rancière has. My own view is that some adaptations of Socratic education retain the value their advocates ascribe to them and should not be abandoned on account of Rancière. This aspect of my argument will be taken up in more detail in the concluding section. Next, I outline an interpretation of Socratic education as portrayed through the character of Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. This task will allow me to assess the degree to which Rancière's characterization of Socrates is faithful to Socrates as depicted in the *Republic*, and will provide further context to explore the usefulness of both Rancière and Socrates for contemporary teaching.

SOCRATIC EDUCATION IN THE *REPUBLIC*

C. D. C. Reeve notes that dialectic is the primary component of the *elenchus* in the *Republic*, a procedure whereby Socrates elicits a definition of a concept from an interlocutor and then demonstrates that the definition is inconsistent with the interlocutor's other firmly held beliefs. The interlocutor, then, is pressed to come up with a new definition and, as Reeve explains, "the process continues until a satisfactory definition emerges, one that is not inconsistent with other firmly held beliefs."²¹ My own reading of the *Republic*, however, suggests that taking Reeve's account to be a complete picture of Socrates's practice overlooks some of the complexity of Socratic education. The dialogical process that Socrates follows in the *Republic*, for example, includes negative dialectical questioning akin to that which Pekarsky and Thomas advocate, as well as a strategy of posing leading questions in the manner with which Rancière is concerned. My own view is that the *Republic* is an ideal text within which to explore Socratic education for precisely this reason. A complex picture of Socratic education is revealed in the *Republic* through the different ways Socrates interacts with different interlocutors, and the different ways his interlocutors respond to his questions. Furthermore, as Allan Bloom suggests, the *Republic* is characterized by having not only varied interlocutors, but also "perfect interlocutors."²² Glaucon, for instance, is passionate yet persuadable; he is "young, teachable, and ambitious," and has the "spiritual substance required for the sublimating experience of Socratic education" (*IE*, 337–339). Glaucon, according to Bloom, provides Socrates with a rare opportunity to carry the practice of Socratic education to completion: "With Glaucon, we have the opportunity of seeing how Socrates educates and his effect on the young" (*IE*, 346). The *Republic*, therefore, is unique in Plato's catalogue as an opportunity to explore how Socrates's varied questioning tactics can be combined in a coherent, systematic educational program.

My interpretation of the differences in Socrates's interactions with his interlocutors in the *Republic* takes into account the manner in which Socrates may be responding to the different personalities of his interlocutors, draws on Bloom's suggestion that characters such as Glaucon function as perfect interlocutors, and

21. C. D. C. Reeve, "Introduction," in Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1992), x.

22. Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 331. This work will be cited in the text as *IE* for all subsequent references.

focuses on what I identify as the laudable and suspect uses of questioning in Socratic education. For some readers, my account will raise some of the more thorny interpretive issues in Plato's dialogues. The mention of one alternative interpretation, at the outset of my task, is useful for illustrating where such interpretive issues may arise and how I narrow my argument to account for these issues. Gregory Vlastos, for example, argues that Socrates in the early dialogues (including *Charmides*, *Georgias*, *Crito*, *Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, and book 1 of the *Republic*) is less likely to advance a position, content instead to use the *elenchus* to leave his interlocutors in a state of perplexity.²³ The common view, drawing on Vlastos's work, is that Plato's rendering of the character of Socrates in the early dialogues is more faithful to the historical Socrates. In contrast, in Plato's middle (or mature) dialogues (*Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and books 2–10 of the *Republic*) Socrates possesses strong knowledge in the areas of metaphysics, mathematics, and politics; he advances positions on a variety of philosophical topics; and his tone is didactic in contrast with the adversative tone that is characteristic of the early dialogues. Here, the mature Plato likely uses the character of Socrates as a mouthpiece for his own philosophical doctrines, and this version of Socrates is generally thought to be less accurate as a representation of the historical Socrates. Applying this insight to the *Republic*, book 1 was potentially written during Plato's early period, and was pieced together with books 2 through 10 after Plato's philosophical ideas had come to maturity during the middle period. The differences in Socrates's interactions with different interlocutors in the *Republic*, therefore, can be explained as corresponding to Plato's portrait of the historical Socrates in the early dialogues (book 1) and Plato's use of Socrates in the middle dialogues as a mouthpiece for his own philosophical project (books 2–10).

While I recognize this as an important and valid interpretation, I apply a different interpretive strategy herein and focus my analysis exclusively on the plot of the *Republic* rather than on the genealogy of the character of Socrates across the dialogues. I agree with Bloom that the plot of the *Republic* provides a unique opportunity to explore deeply the "perilous activity" of Socratic education (*IE*, 346); moreover, I doubt that the evolution of Plato's use of the character of Socrates across the dialogues compromises the integrity of the *Republic* as a text with a developed plot that is complete unto itself. Bloom, for example, suggests that the plot of the *Republic* centrally concerns the choice Glaucon is given between the philosophical and tyrannical lives through his exposure to Socratic education and, further, that Glaucon's "feverish intensity" and his philosophical disposition carry Socratic dialogue forward to its "greatest innovations and most extreme satisfaction" (*IE*, 412–413). Throughout the *Republic*, Socrates's interactions with Glaucon and others provide an illustration of Socratic education that is systematic and complete, albeit one that is rife with complexity and raises more questions than it

23. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

answers about the usefulness of Socratic education for contemporary classrooms. In what follows, I summarize Socrates's interactions with Polemarchus, Thrasy-machus, and Glaucon in order to piece together an account of Socratic education that recognizes this inherent complexity. My analysis reveals that Socratic education in the *Republic* is a practice that employs the *elenchus* to perplex and then poses leading questions to stultify.

SOCRATIC EDUCATION AS INTELLECTUAL LIBERATION: SOCRATES AND POLEMARCHUS

When Socrates engages Polemarchus in the beginning of the *Republic*, the encounter is reminiscent of Socrates's use of the *elenchus* in Plato's early dialogues. Socrates appears intent on negating Polemarchus's position and bringing him to a state of perplexity through posing pointed dialectical questions. While Polemarchus begins his Socratic encounter with a conviction about justice, for example, Socrates's questions cause him to abandon his conviction and exclaim, "I don't know any more what I did mean."²⁴ The result of this Socratic encounter is that Polemarchus is brought to a state of intellectual limbo; he comes to accept that he is ignorant on a topic about which he formerly thought he knew something; and he is freed from limiting prejudice. In what follows, I summarize Socrates's interactions with Polemarchus in order to illustrate that Socrates's first pedagogical step in the *Republic* is to bring his interlocutors from unthinking prejudice to a state of perplexity through a dialectics of negation, and I explore the *elenchus* as a destructive activity that is carried out for the purpose of intellectual liberation.

Responding to Socrates's question about the nature of justice, Polemarchus first defines justice as a craft that "gives benefits to friends and does harm to enemies" (*Republic*, 332d). Socrates begins his examination of this position by pushing Polemarchus to make his account more precise. Socrates suggests that if justice is a craft, it is analogous to other crafts such as those of doctors and ship captains, both of which have specific domains within which they work; from this, it follows that the craft of justice must also have a domain of work. Building on this analogy, Socrates asks Polemarchus to specify the domain within which a just person practices justice.

SOCRATES: What about the just person? In what actions and what work is he most capable of benefiting friends and harming enemies?

POLEMARCHUS: In wars and alliances, I suppose ...

SOCRATES: And to people who aren't at war, a just man is useless?

POLEMARCHUS: No, I don't think that at all.

SOCRATES: Justice is also useful in peacetime, then?

POLEMARCHUS: It is. (*Republic*, 332e–333a)

24. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Grube, 334b. This work will be cited in the text as *Republic*, followed by the Stephanus number(s), for all subsequent references.

Here Polemarchus is forced to modify his definition in light of the inconsistency exposed by Socrates. Polemarchus concedes to Socrates that justice is indeed useful in peacetime. Socrates then asks Polemarchus to specify the sort of affairs during peacetime for which justice is useful. Polemarchus replies that justice is useful in “money matters” (*Republic*, 333b). Socrates exposes an inconsistency in this revised account by posing a counterexample. When one enters into partnership to buy a horse, Socrates asks, isn’t a horse breeder a better partner than a just person? Polemarchus answers this question in the affirmative and must try again to specify the kind of financial partnership for which a just person is more useful than experts in other crafts.

SOCRATES: In what joint use of silver and gold, then, is a just person a more useful partner than the others?

POLEMARCHUS: When it must be deposited for safekeeping, Socrates.

SOCRATES: You mean whenever there is no need to use them but only to keep them?

POLEMARCHUS: That’s right.

SOCRATES: Then it is when money isn’t being used that justice is useful for it?

POLEMARCHUS: I’m afraid so. (*Republic*, 333c–d)

In this exchange Socrates has brought Polemarchus’s conviction to a place where it begins to appear ridiculous and untenable. If justice is only useful when money is in safekeeping, Socrates explains, then “justice isn’t worth much, since it is only useful for useless things” (*Republic*, 333e). Returning to an earlier analogy, Socrates argues that those who practice the craft of medicine are not only most able to guard against disease, but they are also those most able to produce it unnoticed. Likewise, “the best guardian of an army is the very one who can steal the enemy’s plans and dispositions” (*Republic*, 333e–334a). From this it follows that a just person — who, according to Polemarchus’s definition, is good at guarding money — is also good at *stealing* money. Confronted with this implication of his original conviction, Polemarchus is ready to abandon it.

By the end of the Socratic encounter just summarized, Polemarchus exclaims, “I don’t know any more what I did mean,” and enters into Socratic perplexity. In fact, he is so convinced of the untruth of his original conviction that he commits to accompanying Socrates in the quest for a true account of justice. Socrates describes Polemarchus as his “partner” at this point in the dialogue, after having liberated Polemarchus from his previous conviction regarding justice through the destructive activity of the *elenchus* (*Republic*, 335e). But Socrates’s invitation to “partner” with Polemarchus is suspect; it may be interpreted as indicating that Socrates does not trust that Polemarchus is capable of navigating his own way out of perplexity. Later in the dialogue, for example, Socrates argues that “a great danger comes from dialectic as it is currently practiced”: “Those who practice it are filled with lawlessness” (*Republic*, 537e). Rather than seeking to partner with Polemarchus, therefore, Socrates may be appointing himself as a guide, as one to lead Polemarchus out of the lawlessness of perplexity and toward new beliefs of Socrates’s choosing. In the next section, I show how Socrates shifts his strategy

to conveying his own philosophical doctrines when his interlocutors are prepared to learn and adopt them — when they are perplexed, curious, eager to engage in further dialogue with Socrates, and (in Socrates's view) in danger of succumbing to lawlessness in the liminal state of Socratic perplexity.

SOCRATIC EDUCATION AS STULTIFICATION: SOCRATES AND THRASYMACHUS

Socratic irony is essential to understanding how Socrates in the *Republic* moves his questioning strategy from triggering perplexity to conveying his own philosophical doctrines. While Socrates, throughout the dialogues, denies that he is a teacher and makes frequent claims to ignorance, Tyson Lewis points out that Socrates teaches "procedural knowledge or a method of inquiry ... a certain way of thinking and organizing reasons, of evaluating arguments."²⁵ This procedural knowledge provides ample textual evidence to warrant characterizing Socrates's claims to ignorance as ironic. We know that Socrates is not as ignorant as he claims, for example, by the skillfulness with which he employs the *elenchus* to undermine the arguments of his interlocutors, as indicated in his encounter with Polemarchus described in the preceding section. But Socratic irony goes deeper than Socrates's procedural knowledge and dialectical acumen. In books 2 through 10 of the *Republic*, Socrates conveys elaborate theories on numerous philosophical topics through a strategy of posing leading questions. Socrates clearly knows a lot about many topics, and he appears eager to share this knowledge with anyone who might listen.

Socratic irony moves to center stage in the *Republic* during Socrates's interactions with Thrasymachus in the second half of book 1. During Socrates's discussion with Polemarchus, Thrasymachus is so eager to intervene that it is necessary for him to be restrained by those sitting by him. By the end of Socrates's discussion with Polemarchus, Thrasymachus coils himself up "like a wild beast about to spring" (*Republic*, 336b) and bursts into the conversation with a desire to take revenge on Socrates for what he sees as his dishonest behavior: "You disgust me, Socrates. Your trick is to take hold of the argument at the point where you can do it the most harm" (*Republic*, 338d). Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of using the *elenchus* to satisfy his "competitiveness or love of honor" and states outright that Socrates's usual procedure is one of deception. In response to this accusation, Socrates suggests that he is ignorant and seeks to cooperatively search for a true account of justice, a thing "more valuable than even a large quantity of gold" (*Republic*, 336e). But Thrasymachus is not convinced; he maintains that Socrates is a "false witness to arguments" who engages in "trickery" (*Republic*, 340d, 341b).

While Thrasymachus interprets Socratic irony unequivocally as deception, corroborating this argument as readers of the *Republic* is a more complex matter. Vlastos, for example, suggests the key to understanding the philosophy of Socrates is his use of "complex irony," a rhetorical and pedagogical device in which what

25. Tyson E. Lewis, *The Aesthetics of Education: Theatre, Curiosity, and Politics in the Work of Jacques Rancière and Paulo Freire* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 124.

is said both is and is not what is meant.²⁶ To support this thesis, Vlastos cites several examples of Socrates making ironic statements that are clearly not meant to deceive — the most obvious cases being Socrates's use of irony for humorous effect. Applying Vlastos's notion of complex irony to some of the more perplexing interpretive challenges in Plato's dialogues problematizes the claim that Socrates intends to deceive and opens interpretive space for acknowledging the complexity inherent in Socratic education. What are we to do, for example, with Socrates's denial that he is a teacher in the *Apology*? Drawing on Vlastos's insights, here Socrates's use of irony may be intended to indicate his claim is true in one sense and false in another: there are some ways in which Socrates's activities are like those of a teacher, and some ways in which they are not. Socrates, in this manner, appears to be speaking in riddles, making an ironic statement in order to put forth as a puzzle the fundamental question: What is a teacher? In the case of the *Republic*, Socrates's claim that he is ignorant and seeks to cooperatively search for a true account of justice can also be interpreted as complex irony, as Socrates's usual practice of speaking in ways that leave us puzzled. Thrasymachus's assertion that Socrates's method is one of deception, therefore, is too simplistic; and a more nuanced conception of Socratic irony is necessary for understanding Socratic education in the *Republic*.

Following the accusations of Thrasymachus, Socratic irony continues to be apparent in the remainder of the *Republic* as Socrates constructs an elaborate theory of justice in the form of the city-soul analogy. In this philosophical system, which occupies the majority of the *Republic*, we find deepening complexity in Socrates's claims to ignorance and an illustration of what perfected stultification might look like in practice. Perfected stultification, as indicated in my analysis of Rancière at the outset of the essay, is a covert form of stultification; it is the subjugation of one intelligence (presumed ignorant) to another intelligence (presumed superior) in a manner that is all the more profound because it is more subtle and less perceptible than other forms of stultification. Characterizing Socrates's practice as perfected stultification requires softening the charges of deception that are frequently leveled against him. Drawing again on Vlastos, Socrates may *unintentionally* deceive through his use of complex irony combined with his characteristic aloofness. Therefore, while it may be overstating the argument to suggest that Socrates *deceptively stultifies*, it is less so to argue that Socrates stultifies in a manner that is obscured in riddles and avoids being noticed. My own view is that it is most fitting to suggest that Socrates *stealthily stultifies*, since this language acknowledges the complexity and ambiguity of Socratic education while maintaining that Socrates practices a form of perfected stultification.

Once the construction of Socrates's city-soul analogy is underway in book 2 of the *Republic*, Socrates poses the tenets of his philosophical system in question form, each one building on the logic of the one before. It is important to point out that by this time in the dialogue, "Socrates has agreed to offer a defense of the idea

26. Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*.

that just actions are intrinsically worthwhile to the agent. No one in the dialogue has been deceived about the fact that Socrates is advancing his own views."²⁷ Nevertheless, the responses Socrates elicits from his interlocutors are usually obedient affirmations, indications they agree with Socrates's argument and are consenting to think as he thinks: "That's right"; "It is, indeed"; "Certainly"; "All right"; "Apparently"; "It is"; "Absolutely"; "Yes"; and "So it seems" (*Republic*, 369d–371a). Therefore, while Thrasymachus's accusations of deception may be overstated, the *elenchus*, as the first step in Socratic education in the *Republic*, prepares Socrates's interlocutors to be led into the conclusions of his own philosophical system. The second step in Socratic education, as indicated in the preceding sample of his interlocutors' replies, is simply to pose leading questions.²⁸

SOCRATIC EDUCATION AS SUBLIMATION: SOCRATES AND GLAUCON

Through Socrates's use of leading questions in the *Republic*, the loftier aspects of the philosophical system with which Socrates stultifies Glaucon begin to take shape. Socrates teaches Glaucon that the form of "the good" is analogous to the sun: it is the shining light that makes all other forms, and the objects of the visible world that derive from the forms, intelligible. Of course, we may never be able to look directly at the form of "the good," Socrates explains, just as we are unable to look directly at the sun. But we learn to know it is there, so long as the "eye of the soul" is turned in the right direction (as it usually is when Socrates has properly educated it): "Dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards ... turning the soul around" (*Republic*, 533d). This, Socrates explains, is "the song that dialectic sings" — dialectic begins the journey that leads us out of the shadowy cave of ignorance and into the light of truth (*Republic*, 532a). The eye of the soul? The light of truth? Here we begin to suspect that Socrates is attempting to brand himself as seer and truth-sayer. Dialectic looses the intellect from the fetters of prior convictions and unthinking prejudice not so that we can think for ourselves, but so that we might come to know the truth — the absolute truth beyond question — according to Socrates!

Perhaps we should not be too hard on Socrates, though. At bottom, he is concerned not just with dogmatism and prejudice from which our liberation is warranted, but also with the lawlessness that results when unruly desire is unleashed in the process of liberation. This is particularly worrisome for Socrates, who teaches Glaucon that "there is a dangerous, wild, and lawless form of desire in everyone, even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate or measured" (*Republic*, 572b), a desire he refers to as a "multicolored beast with a ring of many heads" (*Republic*, 588c). Socrates teaches Glaucon that the young learn restraint

27. Chris Higgins, personal communication, September 2, 2014.

28. As Rud has noted, Socrates's use of leading questions has also been explored by Nicholas C. Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 122; and Charles J. B. Macmillan and James W. Garrison, *A Logical Theory of Teaching: Erotetics and Intentionality* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 154; both cited in Rud, "The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching."

and develop conventional morality through education in the family: children learn from the family to adopt “convictions about just and fine things” and come to “obey and honor them” (*Republic*, 538c). The influence of the *elenchus*, however, is to undermine learned convictions and conventional morality. When a young man who is not prepared or guided engages in dialectic, Socrates argues, it “shakes him from his convictions, and makes him believe that the fine is no more fine from the shameful, and the same with the just, the good, and the things he honored most” (*Republic*, 538d–e). Socrates is aware that the *elenchus* frees the intellect; he is also aware that it carries the potential to free the beast of desire within us.

Socrates also teaches Glaucon that a tyrannical man is one whose unrestrained desire rules over him like a tyrant. This leads such a man, driven by his passions, to tend toward a tyrannical political system, since “tyranny is the only regime in which no satisfaction can be denied him — it provides him the freedom, power, and money a lover needs” (*IE*, 423). There is a correspondence, therefore, between Socrates’s psychological model of tyranny in the soul and his understanding of tyranny as a form of social and political organization. Socrates’s city–soul analogy, of course, is used not only to illustrate the tyrannical soul and city, but also those that are perfectly organized — the soul and city as the embodiment of Socrates’s idea of justice. Justice in the soul, Socrates teaches Glaucon, is the rule of reason over the passions; and justice in the *polis* is the rule of reason socially and politically through the establishment of an elite class of philosopher-kings. If Socrates is to succeed in leading Glaucon to live according to the Socratic idea of justice, therefore, he must provide Glaucon with a model for the ascendancy of reason over the desiring and appetitive part of the soul; he must provide Glaucon with a pathway to the philosophical life — or, at least, to Socrates’s version of the philosophical life. In the *Republic*, this is the ultimate task of Socratic education.

Bloom suggests that Socratic education in the *Republic* includes (1) Socrates’s use of the *elenchus* in book 1 to free reason from the limits of prejudice, the *elenchus* as a “destructive activity in the name of liberation”; (2) Socrates presenting Glaucon with the choice between the tyrannical and philosophical lives; and (3) Socrates’s attempt “to prove to Glaucon that the tyrant is the unhappiest of men” (*IE*, 312 and 424–425). In Bloom’s broader analysis, Glaucon’s relationship to Socrates and the manner in which the personalities of these two men interact are important factors in Glaucon’s stultification. Over the course of the dialogue, for example, Glaucon becomes bonded to Socrates as his student and companion.

GLAUCON: [Y]ou’ll make better use of me if you take me to be a follower who can see things when you point them out to him.

SOCRATES: Follow, then, and join me in a prayer.

GLAUCON: I’ll do that, just so long as you lead.

SOCRATES: I certainly will, though the place seems to be impenetrable and full of shadows. It is certainly dark and hard to search though. But all the same, we must go on.

GLAUCON: Indeed we must.

SOCRATES: And then I caught sight of something. Ah ha! Glaucon, it looks as though there’s a track here, so it seems that our quarry won’t altogether escape us. (*Republic*, 432c–d)

Glaucón is unique in the *Republic* in that he is the first to request that Socrates provide a true account of justice; he is the most willing to allow Socrates to "take me as a follower"; and he is the most passionate and enthusiastic about being led by Socrates to the realm of the forms, to Socrates's version of philosophical truth. In addition, Bloom characterizes Glaucon as a perfect interlocutor because he sincerely wishes to be convinced that justice is best without being duped in the process, and yet he is one whom argument can convince to adapt to a different kind of world (*IE*, 331 and 341).

For Socrates's part, he has his own reasons for being attracted to Glaucon. Bloom points out, "Glaucon is a man of intense desire" and therefore a "dangerous man but also an eminently interesting and educable one" (*IE*, 345). As with all young men Socrates finds most attractive, Glaucon has a potential for evil in that he is intensely passionate and a potential subverter of the law, but he also has a potential for good in that he tends toward philosophy (*IE*, 345 and 413). With these characteristics, Glaucon possesses the spiritual substance necessary for the sublimating experience of Socratic education. Leading questions are the second step in Socrates's strategy for bringing Glaucon into this sublimating experience, but they are not enough. Socrates can only cure Glaucon of his tyrannical desires by providing him with a model for how to combine moderation and eroticism in the philosophical life; Socrates must show Glaucon how *eros* can come to inhabit the philosophical life. Socrates has himself as a model for how this union of opposites can be accomplished. Socrates, for example, is engaged in such an act of sublimation through his interactions as a teacher of philosophy: "By curing Glaucon of his lust for tyrannical pleasures," Bloom points out, "Socrates can indulge his own lust for beautiful souls" (*IE*, 424). Glaucon, therefore, has already a man who is a model for the sublimating experience of Socratic education standing before him, if he can only recognize Socrates for what he is (*IE*, 347). The *Republic* is primarily a story of two men: a vibrant, young man and the philosophical father to which he is bonded, engaged together in an educational practice that involves liberating *eros* through the destructive activity of the *elenchus* and then channeling *eros* away from baser satisfactions and instead toward the arena of philosophy as a new playground for passion. "Socrates was also a great erotic."²⁹

Socrates, in sum, encourages intellectual dependence in Glaucon so long as we take "encourages" to not necessarily imply conscious intent. In my discussion of complex irony, I argue that it is difficult to corroborate the claims that Socrates consciously deceives due to his characteristic practice of speaking in ways that leave us puzzled. However, Socrates at least unintentionally deceives through his use of irony in combination with his characteristic aloofness.³⁰ In the case of Glaucon, we know that he is stultified through the manner in which he asks Socrates to "take me to be a follower who can see things when you point

29. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968).

30. Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*.

them out to him." In addition, Glaucon is not taught to sublimate through his own philosophical theorizing, but through taking Socrates to be a model for the philosophical life (*IE*, 347). Socrates, in essence, teaches Glaucon to be like Socrates rather than to think independently. Whether or not Glaucon consented to the process, and whether or not Socrates intended stultification, are of no consequence for determining if stultification has taken place; it is enough to establish that Socrates develops intellectual dependence through a strategy of leading questions while obscuring his intentions through his method of irony. On the basis of this evidence, Socrates indeed practices a form of perfected stultification — what I refer to as Socrates's practice of stealthily stultifying in the *Republic*.

SOCRATES VERSUS THE IGNORANT SCHOOLMASTER

Now we return to the question posed at the outset of this essay: Does Socrates deserve his reputation as enlightened questioner? My analysis of Socrates in the *Republic* suggests that Socratic education is his method of systematically perplexing and stealthily stultifying his interlocutors. Plato provides his readers with a subtle indication of the nature of Socrates's practice in the Socratic slip that is quoted in the title of this essay: "Listen then, or, rather, answer" (*Republic*, 595c). By asking Glaucon first to "listen" and then providing the correction, "rather, answer," Socrates seems to unwittingly reveal that he is not an unbiased questioner or innocent participant in joint inquiry; he instructs. To respond to Socrates's questions is, in a way, to "listen" to him: it is to hear Socrates's thoughts while inviting the risk of mistaking his thoughts for your own. In the *Republic*, Socrates stultifies through a strategy of asking leading questions that is welcomed most heartily by Glaucon. Before employing this strategy, Socrates uses the *elenchus* to undermine the beliefs of his interlocutors, thereby preparing them to adopt new beliefs that he introduces. What is more, Socrates obscures his intentions by ironically claiming that he is ignorant about the topic being discussed: he first claims to know nothing, and later proposes an elaborate philosophical system when his interlocutors are most ready to adopt it as their own.

Rancière's critique of Socratic education, therefore, is applicable to the *Republic*, but it is limited in two ways. First, Rancière and his commentators identify Socratic education as a straightforward practice of posing leading questions to guide the student to a point that is already known by the teacher. As I have demonstrated, however, Socrates engages his interlocutors in a process that has two steps: in his interactions with Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon, Socrates first attempts to undermine their beliefs through the *elenchus*, and then poses leading questions in an attempt to bring them to adopt new beliefs of his choosing. Socrates is most successful in bringing Glaucon through this two-step process. As Bloom points out, "the confrontation with Thrasymachus was in a sense carried out for Glaucon's benefit," and ends with Socrates's "success at perplexing and attracting Glaucon" (*IE*, 339). Rancière explores the second step of this process, posing leading questions to stultify, and ignores the first, posing dialectical questions to perplex. It is surprising that Rancière and his commentators offer no discussion of the first step, since their analyses draw primarily from the *Meno* in which there is ample

textual evidence of the importance of Socratic perplexity. Meno, for example, illustrates Socratic perplexity through his comment that likens Socrates to a torpedo fish. Like the sting of the torpedo fish, Socrates's questions leave Meno feeling "numb," and he accuses Socrates of "bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell, so that I am quite perplexed."³¹ Socrates responds to Meno's accusation by maintaining that perplexity is a better position than thinking you know something when you do not. Calling to mind his interactions with the slave boy, Socrates suggests that bringing about perplexity in the boy was beneficial since "we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out."³² Socrates argues, in sum, that perplexity is beneficial because it brings about the motivation to engage in learning, it awakens wonder and spurs inquiry — and Meno eventually agrees. This strategy of bringing about Socratic perplexity is important in the *Republic* as well as the *Meno*, and Rancière's critique is limited on account of leaving it out.

The assumption that Socrates makes through his use of the *elenchus* — namely, that he knows that his interlocutors think they know something when they in fact know nothing — is precisely the sort of condescension with which Rancière takes issue in his broader philosophical project. However, Rancière's critique of Socrates focuses on leading questions while offering no discussion of the role of the *elenchus* in inducing Socratic perplexity. Extending Rancière's critique to address the epistemological underpinnings of Socratic education in the *Republic* would require us to reject the *elenchus* on account of its presumption of ignorance: Socrates, for example, enforces the idea of the inequality of intelligences through presuming his interlocutors' prior knowledge is faulty and should be undermined, as well as through presuming his interlocutors need help recollecting "true knowledge" they have forgotten. In addition, in the *Republic* the *elenchus* is a necessary first step in creating a desire to follow Socrates to his conclusions. The *elenchus*, therefore, is part of perfected stultification because, without it, the interlocutor would be less susceptible to Socrates's strategy of posing leading questions in the second step. These facts make it all the more surprising that Rancière's account of Socratic education excludes the role of the *elenchus* in triggering perplexity.

The second reason Rancière's critique is limited is that it is problematically extended to include contemporary practitioners of Socratic education. While there are many variations of Socratic education applied in contemporary classrooms, none that are documented in the educational literature include a strategy of leading questions in the manner Rancière identifies. Moreover, some adaptations of Socratic teaching are aligned with Rancière's thought and take into account concerns that Rancière raises with respect to stultification. Lipman and Adler, for example, were aware of the tendency for Socratic pedagogies to lapse into stultification, and Lipman recommended extensive training for teachers in questioning

31. Plato, *Meno*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1976), 80a–b.

32. *Ibid.*, 84b.

strategies to guard against this tendency.³³ This situation, of course, does not rule out that there may be educators who practice the sort of perfected stultification that Rancière critiques, or even that some may do so while referring to their practice as “Socratic.” However, it does mean that the broad, unqualified rejection of Socratic education by Rancière is hardly justified.

Having revisited the literature on Socratic teaching in light of the recent wave of scholarship on Rancière’s educational thought, I am led to several concluding thoughts. First, there is much in Rancière’s work that is not new, or at least not as new as the recent excitement around his work would have us believe. Scholars and practitioners working in the Socratic tradition were grappling with how to develop teaching practices that avoid stultification more than a decade before the first English translation of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* appeared. Second, use of the term “Socratic” to describe contemporary educational practice should not be taken to indicate a faithful reproduction of Socrates’s questioning tactics. Socratic seminars, for example, involve students posing and answering their own questions in an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration; and as Rud points out, nowhere in the dialogues does Socrates act as facilitator and encourage his interlocutors to debate among themselves in the manner of Lipman and Adler.³⁴ Likewise, while some agree with Socrates that perplexity may have pedagogical value, it is only when it is divorced from Socrates’s practice of stealthily moving students from perplexity to stultification. Pekarsky, for example, argues against deceptive educational practices and advocates for bringing about perplexity only in students who have intellectual dispositions that enable them to benefit from it. Third, while Socrates’s methods as depicted in the *Republic* may not be suited for contemporary classroom practice, the two adaptations of Socratic education described earlier provide useful tools with which educators should continue to experiment. Socratic seminars, for example, have a rich research literature supporting their effectiveness for creating inclusive, open communities of learners and boosting achievement. In addition, I agree with Pekarsky and Thomas that Socratic perplexity may be useful for stirring up inquiry, curiosity, and divergent thought.

Thus, I share Rud’s view that there is “an enduring core of the Socratic tradition that is valuable for teaching,”³⁵ despite criticisms that have been leveled against it. Dismissing the Socratic tradition on account of Rancière would do a great disservice to Socratic education — to its history, its practice in contemporary classrooms, and to the students and teachers who continue to draw on the (redefined) Socratic spirit in pointing the way forward. Yet, there is also much that is valuable in the recent wave of scholarship inspired by Rancière. To see value in Rancière’s work and the discussions it has inspired, it is helpful to view Rancière’s educational thought not as a complete theory but as an *intervention* on our theories

33. See, for example, Paul, “The Socratic Spirit,” 63.

34. Rud, “The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching,” 6.

35. *Ibid.*, 1.

and practices of education. Taken as an intervention, Rancière reminds us that there are ongoing challenges to Socratic teaching. The most pressing of these challenges may be the tendency for educators to get in the way of our students' learning; we sometimes offer our students too many guidelines for how and what to think and too little space to think for themselves.

Reading Rancière as the polemicist and gadfly that he is, we can count on him to remind us of this fact again and again: as Socratic teachers take on the challenge of providing our students provocation to perplexity and space for free and open inquiry, we often must remember that the most important part of our work is to *get out of the way*. This insight is captured in Cornelissen's interpretation of the Rancièrian notion that the role of teachers is simply to "keep the door closed," to keep our students in the vicinity of some intellectual puzzle but not to intervene in the learning that results from such exposure.³⁶ Rancière, in this manner, provokes us to wonder if our procedural knowledge — in addition to our content knowledge — might serve to stultify students. Whether it be knowledge of how to bring about Socratic perplexity, facilitate a seminar discussion, or any other procedural knowledge, the strategies of Socratic education, to elaborate Rancière's view, may stultify insofar as they prevent students from exercising their own procedural intelligence. Rancière, in sum, brings to the theory and practice of Socratic education an argument in favor of procedural agnosticism, which, too, should be added to the repertoire of strategies with which Socratic teachers experiment.

36. Cornelissen, "The Public Role of Teaching," 535.

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