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J. N. Andrews Honors Program

Andrews University

Honors Thesis

Ataraxia: A Modern Platonic Utopia

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Abstract:

My research focuses on the effects on children raised according to the guidelines for training the Guardians of the ideal society described in Plato's Republic. I explore this concept creatively in a fictional modern Utopian community like that of B. F. Skinner's Walden Two and support this with firsthand accounts of the attempts to make Skinner's work a reality. Combined with a perspective on education in Plato along with the Hitler Youth program, this framework allows me to analyze how we use ideals and philosophy to justify our actions, and ultimately how human nature confounds our attempts to build paradise.

When Sir Thomas More coined the word Utopia in the early sixteenth century, humanity had already been dreaming of a better place for thousands of years. The concept of an ideal place was not a new one as the beliefs of various religious groups around the globe suggest. Whether it be the Christian heaven, Buddhist nirvana, or pagan Avalon, there is something that makes us long for a better world. This longing has inspired the works of such as More, Marx, Sartre, and Skinner which deal with the nature and function of such a place. Modern science fiction books, movies, and television shows often feature Utopian societies and themes. Still others have tried to put the idea of Utopia into practice in communities set up in order to create the perfect society in real life. There seems to be something essentially human about striving for perfection.

The word Utopia has an interesting duality in that it is written as "no place," but when spoken aloud it can also sound like "good place." It is at once desirable and unattainable. As humans we long for perfection, but something about our humanity holds us back. The question then arises as to whether Utopia has any use in the real world. Why try to create perfection if it's impossible? Some would say it has no purpose, others that it will be some day, and still others that our ideals at least give us something to strive for. Whether or not they are even put into practice, Utopian ideals serve as a commentary on contemporary life and society by giving us something to look up to.

It could arguably be said that the first Utopia was that of the ideal city described in Plato's *Republic*, and its influence on Utopia ideas in Western thought throughout the centuries is uncontested. The essential question of the *Republic* is whether it is better to be just than unjust. Socrates seeks to answer this question by creating an ideal city as a model for the soul, so that justice can be studied through a sort of philosophical magnifying glass. Scholars do not agree as

to whether Plato intends this city as a thought experiment, or as a literal model for the best city. The dialogs of the *Republic* touch on a variety of topics, from hermeneutics and philosophy to sexuality and politics. For the purposes of my project, I chose to focus on how young children are to be educated in this ideal city. Plato describes in detail the education and way of life that must be instrumented in order to turn children into the Guardians best able to protect their community. My project focuses on creatively exploring what the results might be if these guidelines were applied in the modern world. This project questions not only the effectiveness of Plato's suggestions, but also their moral character.

In the *Republic*, the Phylax, or Guardians, are the military force that protects the community from outside attack as well as internal deviation. They are described as possessing the best balance between body and soul, physical prowess and intellect. Their training should therefore be balanced on these two fronts. The former so that they can effectively protect the city, the latter so that they may temper their violent nature with philosophy. They are to be quick in the eye, quick in pursuit, strong to endure, brave above all, and lovers of wisdom (Book 2). They are in some ways a paradox, being at once gentle and high-spirited. One difficulty that arises when trying to create the perfect guardian is that, as Socrates says, "whenever a man is a good guardian of anything, he is also a good thief of it" (1.334a). In order to be able to protect something, you have to know how it's going to be attacked. Therefore the best guardian would also be the best thief. This is why the Guardians' moral and intellectual education is equally important with the physical and also why the selection of future guardians was to be strictly regimented.

The curriculum laid out in the *Republic* for the "artistic" half of their training is to be strictly guarded from the corrupting influence of change. While new songs, poems, and stories

are allowed, no new type of thing is allowed. This education begins early on with stories for young children. The sole purpose of these stories is their uplifting effect on the children and so special attention must be paid to the content of not only these stories, but the poems and songs the children will learn when they are older. Strict limitations are placed on poets and songwriters so that the content of their work will not teach negative attributes or actions. One is not allowed to say anything negative about gods or heroes and all stories in which they are involved should only emphasize the positive traits of bravery, camaraderie, justice, etc. The goal is to "persuade our people that no citizen has ever hated another and that this is impious" (2.378c). There should also be no horror stories told to children since they make them cowardly. These restrictions exist to make all art serve the purpose of teaching children to fit the role that has been created for them, and that, above all, it is better for the individual and the community to be virtuous.

According to Socrates, the Guardians should not be allowed to own any property above what is necessary for survival in order to make them the best servants of the city. They are absolutely forbidden from possessing, or even touching, gold or silver in any form and are not even allowed to be under the same roof as it. This is to keep them from becoming tyrants, and to emphasize the gold and silver nature that they have within themselves. The Guardians are to live together in a communal dwelling, share their meals, and are not allowed to have any locked doors. They earn no wage, but all of their needs are supplied through taxation. Their diet must be simple. They cannot drink any alcohol or use any seasonings in their food. They are to be subjected to frequent changes in food and water supply as well as weather to make them more hardy. They must have good eyesight and hearing and be quick to wake. Once the education of a Guardian is complete, they become perfect soldiers and masters of self-restraint as well as philosophers harmonized with "the beauty of reason" (3.401d).

According to Robin Barrow in *Plato, Utilitarianism, and Education*, "The aim of education is to produce sociable and happy citizens. Education is...the development of virtuous character" (179). This education with the goal of virtue also has a very pragmatic goal. The overall happiness of the community is ultimately served through such an education and the needs of the community supersede both individual autonomy and self development as the prime concern of education (1). The education of each individual benefits that individual indirectly by improving the community as a whole. R.L. Nettleship agrees, stating that the purpose of education, in the *Republic*, is to turn the "eye of the soul" towards the light (7).

Most educational systems are built on a singular ideological purpose or goal, but there have been times when such a purpose has produced unseemly results. The purpose of the general education given to the Hitler Youth was not to promote virtue, but rather to instill a sense of nationalism at an early age. A child's "entire education and training must be designed to convince him of his absolute superiority over others" (Koch 163). This had an obvious benefit to German society, tying its citizens to a belief of German superiority and destiny. Yet the Hitler Youth training had more than just an ideological goal. "The army, of course, saw in the Hitler Youth [...] an ideal reservoir of manpower well suited to plans envisaging the rapid expansion of Germany's military forces" (Koch 171). The educational goals of the Hitler youth program seem less noble than those of the *Republic*, but they have similar goals: to produce citizens who are deeply loyal to their society and who are also prepared to act as an elite military force.

Seeking to inspire virtue and goodness in young minds and hearts seems like a very noble endeavor. Yet the means by which this is done as described in the *Republic* limit severely the individual's ability to make informed decisions. The environment of the ideal city is set up in such a way that it is almost impossible to think any other way than how the society has

engineered you to think. Barrow points out, however, that every society imposes its values on children rather directly or indirectly (Barrow 179). A society which attempts to promote positive values in its citizens, even if through non-rational means, is acting as any good parent would with their young child (Barrow 135). He concludes that it is better to influence and even determine the beliefs of a child rather than letting them be determined at random by possibly negative societal influences (Barrow 121).

It is somewhat interesting that Barrow uses this analogy of parenthood to justify the social engineering found in the *Republic* seeing as the parents of the city are not allowed to know who their children are. Their children are lumped into similar age groups and raised by the community at large. We can see the idea of children belong to the community before their parents mirrored, though in a less drastic way, in the case of the Twin Oaks community. Twin Oaks was one of the Utopian communities that sprang up in the wake of behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner's fictional Utopia *Walden Two*. Twin Oaks was founded in 1967 in rural Virginia. Its habitants theorized, as Plato might agree, that being raised by the community was beneficial to the children, as they would receive more love and attention, and to the community because it would help to avoid favoritism (Kincade 143). In theory, the children of Twin Oaks were to be raised by scientifically trained child rearing experts and their parents were to have no direct influence (146). This ultimately failed because the parents stepped in to intercede when they didn't think the community was doing such a good job.

My story draws from the Twin Oaks experience of trying to live Skinner's *Walden Two*. However, the founders of this story's modern Utopian community go back all the way to Plato for their inspiration. It begins, as Plato says it should, by taking children under the age of ten out into the country to start a new society, city, and way of life. The goal of this community is to

promote justice and the happiness of the community. Almost everything that has to do with how the children are raised and educated will be pulled directly from the *Republic* and adapted to modern life. From lodging, to personal possessions, to the balance between physical and mental training. They are raised with the intent of producing Guardians worthy of Plato's ideal city.

There are many specific ways in which the content of my story mirrors or plays off of that of the *Republic*. The characters in my story fill, in some ways, the places of those who discuss justice with Socrates. In my story, each bedroom is labeled with the name of a character from the *Republic*. Nearly every detail of the Utopian community in my story, from its beginning of taking children out into the country to start a new society to the minute details of its operation, come directly from the suggestions of the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, the Guardians are not allowed to have locked doors. In my fictional community of Ataraxia, the doors slide into the walls and cannot be locked. Not only are the details of the story heavily influenced by Plato, but so is its format. A significant portion of the sample included takes the form of a dialog in which the characters discuss certain issues or ideas in an attempt to come to an agreement and better understanding of the topics.

Though the research groundwork of my story is set and around 50 pages written at this point, there is still much left to be developed. There are many more references and allusions to the *Republic* as well as content transposed from it directly which I will be including in chapters to come. We will be able to see first hand the everyday workings of the educational system based on Plato as well as political functioning of the community. The children will be indoctrinated with Plato's origin myth: that they were born from the earth with different aptitudes (bronze and iron, silver and gold). Plato's *Republic* is and will be the defining inspiration for story content, form, and ideological considerations throughout the story.

As the story of Ataraxia continues, it alternates between the perspective of Erik Thompson, who becomes one of the teachers at the community, and of a young girl called Antheia. These two perspectives allow for a more complete picture of the community, not only as it is seen by the adults that run it, but by the children who are to become its first generation. This story will continue to explore what the real-life effects of Plato's ideas on education might be through the experiences of the citizens of the community of Ataraxia.

One major question that will be asked throughout the course of this story is not only what sort of result this strict education will have or whether or not such a curriculum is practical when applied to the real world, but even if it is practical and the desired result is achieved, is it right? Should personal "freedoms" be sacrificed for the betterment of the community as a whole? Is it possible that those who read Plato with a Western capitalist ideology are blinded to the benefits of such a system by our attachment to being able to determine our own destiny? This story does not seek to offer simple answers to such complex questions, but rather asks the reader to think critically. What is the use of Utopia in the real world?

There is no simple way to apply Utopian concepts directly to life and immediately produce all of the desired results. Even given enough time, the results will be mixed in nature and, as always happens, the society will eventually collapse no matter how strong its beginning. Human nature as it has been observed seems to always prove incompatible with perfection. This is one of the more obvious themes that this story seeks to explore. There are many factors which affect the outcome of a Utopian endeavor other than the plan which is its basis, such as personal ambition and corruption, as well as the freedom of choice and even a love of justice. Human beings are not simply cogs and gears formed by their environment and then left to function in the greater machine of society. Human society is an organism, bursting forth with vibrant life and

individuality.

The message that this story ultimately sends will in many respects depend on the reader. Whether it is seen as a denunciation of Utopian communities, an exploration of Utopian concepts with no easy answers, or useless speculation is entirely up to whoever might pick up this book in the near future. What I hope gets across is the idea that seeking to be a virtuous person, as Plato suggests, is a worthwhile endeavor. The way in which Plato suggests we produce virtuous citizens focuses solely on the results desired. After that, whatever means necessary to acquire the desired end are justifiable. I seek to question not only the effectiveness of those means, but also their morality. The *Republic* is an attempt to move in the right direction, but it falls short of the mark. The story of Ataraxia will be very much the same.

Extract from *Ataraxia*:

The envelope was addressed by hand so I didn't throw it away automatically. The last few years of my life had convinced me that the postal service was supported solely by the contributions of creditors and con artists. Some people still find letters terribly romantic, but I am confident that their numbers are ever dwindling under the weight of foreclosure and collection notices. No one has ever written me a love letter. The only positive thing that I can expect from USPS is my monthly copy of *Time* magazine.

The return address was "George Edmund Newhouse III, Custer City PA, 16725". I laughed softly to myself. The last time I heard from Jed was more than three year ago. It had been an address-labeled, insert-name-here appeal for me to donate to his political campaign. After his defeat I had heard almost nothing of him in the public media, let alone personal letters. I ripped open the end of the envelope and pulled out a single, folded sheet of paper. It read as follows:

Dear Erik,

How have you been lately? Are you still working as a university professor? It's so funny how things turn out, isn't it?

I was talking with a few of the members from our old crew at University and we thought it would be great to have a little reunion on the weekend of May 27th. We thought that would be a good idea since its a holiday weekend but not one where people usually visit family.

We were thinking that we could do it over that weekend at one of my condo complexes in upstate Pennsylvania which isn't being rented out at the moment. I know its a bit of a trip, but I felt it would be the most accommodating option.

You can bring bring family and/or a special friend if you would like. The address is 1875 Forest rd 321. The rest is the same as on the envelope. All you'll see from the road is a long driveway. Look forward to seeing you there old friend. Sincerely,

George Edmund Newhouse III

I read the letter again and then laid it on the table beside me. I got up to get a drink of water, filled a glass from the tap, sat back down, then set the glass down and got up to pace. "I suppose there's no real reason why I shouldn't go," I said aloud to myself. The years of living as a single university professor had taught me to talk out my problems aloud when no one was available to lecture to. It's a habit which becomes dangerous when you have visitors. Thankfully for my reputation as a person of generally sound mind I had very few. And it always seems to me that eccentricity is attributed to intellect in the academic world where elsewhere it would lead to admission to another sort of institution.

I hadn't seen George Newhouse, in person at least, for next to ten years. I had no

particular desire to spend a long weekend swapping awkward pleasantries with people who were now strangers to me. Especially when I could spend it grading papers. In any case, I found it somewhat suspect that George only made contact now that he was no longer in the running for office.

I tossed my the letter onto a pile of papers on my desk and then had a microwave chicken dinner over Dostoevsky.

* * *

I was eating lunch in my office about a week later when I got a call from a number I didn't recognize.

"Hello?" I asked, expecting to hear, "Oh sorry, wrong number-click-"

"Um, hi," the voice on the other end sounded unsure. "Is this Erik?"

"Yes ma'am, this is Professor Erik Thompson."

"Oh good it is you!" she said excitedly. "You sound so stuffy and old Erik, what happened to you?"

"I'm sorry, who is this? I asked.

"Okay, don't pretend you don't recognize my voice, Erik. You never were a good jokester."

"I'm terribly sorry ma'am," I responded lamely, "but I don't recognize your voice." The familiarity of her response confused me. "Do I know you?"

She laughed high and loud and I had to hold the phone away from my ear.

"Now I'm beginning to almost feel insulted Erik," she said in a playful tone. "Don't tell me you've forgotten your poor old friend Jess from all those years ago. I must say I'm very disappointed."

"I-" I started to speak but she talked over me.

"Now I do understand that you're a big important *university* professor," she put a ridiculous stress on the word university. "And I'm sure that your brain's capacity is almost completely taken up by the strain placed upon it by your massive intellect. And so I suppose that's why there's so very little room for any fond memories of old friends. Honestly Erik, I'd expected better."

"Um..." My brain stalled. I was hearing the words she was saying but they came fast and I wasn't comprehending them.

She sighed dramatically. "Really Erik, I didn't think you'd be speechless. Although I am aware that I can make quite the impression, even over the phone." She laughed again. She seemed to find the situation fairly amusing in general. "But really Erik, you didn't know it was me? Your old friend Jess, your constant companion, your best college buddy? What do you think, laying it on a bit thick am I?" she gave another a short laugh.

"Jessica? Jessica Trees?" I asked.

"Of course, dummy. Who else would it be?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said, feeling a little annoyed at her for laughing at my expense, "maybe just anybody who picked up the university registry."

She burst into a fit of high-pitched laughter again. "Oh dear, have I upset the great professor Erik?"

"Why didn't you just say it was you?" I asked.

"Because, Erik dear, reunions are just as important as first impressions. And what can I say, I always loved to mess with you. You're so dreadfully gullible." The superior smile in her voice irritated me. "So tell me Erik, how have you been these last, oh how long has it been-"

"I don't exactly remember when the last time was," I said. I was sure we hadn't seen each other since graduation.

"It feels like it's been a century. Honestly Erik, how did we get so old? Anyway, it's been a terrible long time in any case and I just *had* to call you to ask something."

I waited for her to continue.

"Well, don't you want to know?" she asked with mock annoyance.

"What is it, Jessica?"

"I'm glad you asked," she said. "And don't call me Jessica. You know I always hated it. Anyway, I got a letter from Jed, or I guess he goes by George now, a week or so ago saying that he and some of the friends from back in university were planning a reunion next month and I was wondering if you knew anything about it."

"Well I did get a letter as we-"

"Please don't interrupt me while I'm speaking Erik. It's very rude. But as I was saying, I was very offended first of all that he didn't get in contact with me in order to plan it, and really I think I could have done things a lot better than what I've seen so far. He knows I love to plan parties so I think it's very insensitive of him. Some people seem to think that just because they dabble in politics they don't need to associate with their best and truest friends anymore.

Humph! Who do you think he actually planned it with? Oh never mind it doesn't really matter, whoever did it couldn't be as good as me anyway. Though I do think the location sounds very nice don't you? Being from a rich family always had its perks didn't it? Anyway, I just wanted to call and ask you if you were going. I haven't seen most of those people in years and I somehow I think I would feel better if I knew you were going."

There was a space of silence before I realized that she actually wanted a response.

"Uh..., well I hadn't really thought about it much actually."

"Well you have to come because I'm not going alone. Please Erik? Oh! We could go as a date, wouldn't that be hilarious? Then they would all think that we got together after college. What a laugh! Ha! No, but seriously Erik, I would feel better if you came."

"Well," I fumbled for an excuse. Part of me didn't want to go at all and part of me was somewhat intrigued, but all of me wanted to avoid the embarrassment I would be sure to suffer as Jessica's "date." "Well, there was a research conference that I was hoping to attend that weekend," I lied.

Jessica clucked her tongue chidingly. "Don't think you can get out of it that easily Erik. Stop pretending that you would ever think some stuffy conference would be better than a weekend with old friends. And calm down, I was just joking about you going as my date."

"Well," I stammered, "I suppose I could see about arrangements."

"You will definitely have to Erik dear, or I'll never speak to again." She said this with a smile in her voice, but I could tell she was at least somewhat serious.

"Do you think I should bring a date? I'll bring a young stud and George will just die of jealousy. Then he'll be forced to make a fool of himself and declare his undying love for me in front of everyone. I'll have to turn him down at first of course, since he's had the nerve not to call for the last four years, but after much pleading and some expensive gifts I'm sure I would consent to be his wife."

I wondered to myself briefly if everything that came out of her mouth went through any kind of filter at all and decided that it most likely did not.

"Anyway Erik, it's been great talking to you but I have an appointment to go to. So glad we could catch up."

We said our goodbyes and I sat down the phone somewhat bewildered. I didn't like how Jessica tried to bully me into going and talked so fast that I didn't have a chance to get out the word "no".

I tried to grade papers for a few hours but gave up when I realized that I had just read the same page five times in a row without really reading it. I got out my personal planner and grudgingly wrote, in what I thought looked like defiant handwriting, "May 27, Check Availability - Weekend." I locked up my office, went home early, and sat down with a good book and a cup of hot chocolate to distract me.

* * *

Despite the half dozen arguments for not going that I came up with during the weeks after my conversation with Jessica, I still found myself at the bus station on Friday May 26 with a ticket to Pennsylvania. I had found myself looking up rental car and plane ticket prices against my own will, but I eventually determined that a bus ticket was the option that best fit my teacher's salary. I would take the bus all the way to Custer City and then somehow find a ride out to George's property.

It was early in the morning and when my bus pulled up through the thin fog I was happy to find my seat. I drifted fitfully in and out of sleep for the next few hours.

The mid-morning sunshine broke through the gray clouds about halfway through our trip. I stretched and yawned and my brain began to slowly wake up as I watched the suburban landscape slowly change to fields and orchards. The change of scenery reminded me of where I was going and I pulled out a leisure reading book in an attempt to distract myself from thinking about that for as long as possible.

It worked for about an hour or so. But then I found a typo on page 110, set the book

down in disgust, and mumbled something about the general worth of the New York *Times* Best Sellers List.

I stared blankly out of the window at the rolling green hills for a space of time and then gave up trying to avoid what was bothering me. I had been hesitant to agree to this weekend reunion partially because I was no longer close with any of my friends from college. I also didn't want to miss an opportunity to get some of my essays graded and was wanting to have some time to relax at home over the school break. I do admit that I had been somewhat interested in seeing how everyone's lives had turned out. I thought it might be nice to catch up with my old friends even if they hadn't felt the need to call or write for the last decade. But mostly I hadn't wanted to go because I was afraid that she would be there.

The last time I had seen her was the week after graduation. We had a stupid argument about which graduate school she should go to and in the end I told her I didn't care what she did. She said that was just fine and walked off. She was always a strong and independent woman. I was sure that she had done well in life. Sometimes I wondered if... But no, there was no point in that.

I had to stop to change buses in Harrisburg and I was able to get a seat by myself seeing as it was less crowded. I sat behind the bus driver because I had heard that it was the safest seat. As we left the city limits, the signs of civilization grew thinner and thinner, and the farms mingled with wide patches of forest and crystalline lakes. I spread myself out on the two seats and dozed.

I was awoken by the feeling that we were no longer moving and I sat up to see where we were. We had stopped at the side of the highway where a dirt road intersected it from the left. The bus driver came back into the bus from outside and took his seat.

"Is everything alright?" I asked him.

"Oh yah," he answered, "there was just this guy who wanted dropped off at the Newhouse farm since its on the way into town."

"Is that where we are now?" I asked.

"Yah," he said in a drawn out way that said "Are you stupid?"

I fumbled in my bag for George's letter and flipped it over to check the address. "Okay, great. That's where I'm going too. Can I get off here?"

"Do whatever you want man. All the luggage is in the first compartment."

I said a hurried "Thanks" and quickly got all my things together. I exited the bus and looked to see a lone figure growing smaller down the dirt road. I got my bag from underneath the bus, waved to the driver, and started off down the road anxious to know who was walking ahead of me.

Even though I walked as briskly as I could without breaking into a trot, it took me quite a while to catch up. The winding dirt track took me through a section of old woods and then opened up on an immense field of corn, now about waist high. The figure ahead of me was just cresting a rise when I left the woods and I sped up my walk. I reached to top of the rise in less than a minute and what I saw made me slow my pace. Before me stretched a wide plain surrounded on all sides by the woods through which I had passed. The entire seemed to slope gradually down towards the center like an immense bowl. The plain was crisscrossed by wood and stone fences which seemed to mark the old boundaries of seedless fields and orchards fallen into disrepair. Some hills rose toward the north and a small river wound it's way past them through the middle of the valley and into the woods on the far side.

Remembering my desire to catch whoever was in front of me, I started to walk again and

my eyes scanned the path ahead. My quarry was only a hundred or so yards ahead and approaching a wooden bridge which spanned the river. Beyond this I saw an old barn and farmhouse, and still farther beyond that a building that looked newer but not necessarily more modern. I decided to run to catch up and hobbled down the road as fast as my luggage would allow.

I approached the him as he neared the bridge and I could tell that he was of average height and build. He carried a small bag slung over his shoulder and as I drew near he turned to face me. I slowed to a walk.

"Hi Erik," he said looking at me blankly.

"Hi Alex," I replied. He had aged since I had seen him last, and I wondered if it he had grown any less reserved over the years. "Funny thing, us being on the same bus," I said. I stopped and extended my hand. His handshake was cold and lacked vigor. He nodded in agreement and turned to continue across the bridge. I had to take quick steps to keep pace beside him.

"Are you excited about seeing everyone again?" I asked, trying to make conversation.

"I guess so."

We walked in silence past the barn and farmhouse while I tried to think of something else to say. I wasn't much for making conversation about anything other than academics and I have to admit that my social skills have not seen much practice since I took on my professorship.

"Do you know who all is coming?" I asked.

"I don't know."

With that I let the conversation drop and we walked the rest of the way in silence. I took the opportunity to take a closer look at my surroundings. The road approaching the low building

ahead was lined with squat stone walls that had a look of novelty about them. The building itself was only one story tall but its breadth gave it a solid and almost imposing air. We were approaching the southward-facing side and I noted that the front was lined with a sort of porch which ran the entire width of the building and which was overhung by a roof supported in turn by a long row of squat wooden pillars. As we drew closer it looked to me as if they had been cut out with hand tools.

Alex mounted the steps and opened the door with what seemed like an air of familiarity. I followed and he shut the door behind me. We found ourselves in a sparsely furnished anteroom from which a long hallway extended to both my left and my right. Straight ahead of me was another hallway at the end of which was a door. I sat my suitcase down in relief and let out a contented sigh.

"Well," I said happily, "we're finally here."

Alex sat his bag down as well but didn't offer a response. He walked over to where a series of cords with different color tassels on the end hung against the wall to the right of the door. He pulled the brown one and I thought I could hear a ringing in another part of the building.

"How old is this place?" I asked.

He said nothing and I decided to wait in silence.

After a few moments we heard a door open and close and then there were steps coming down the hallway to the left. A tall, balding man in his mid forties entered the room with long strides. He was wearing a tailored suit that seemed to clash somewhat with the our rustic surroundings.

"Good evening gentlemen," he said, extending his hand first to me and then to Alex. "My

name is James Michaelson."

"I'm Erik Thompson," I replied. Alex simply nodded in response.

"I trust you had a pleasant trip?"

"Yes," I replied, "I slept most of the way."

The man laughed heartily. "That's the best way to travel. No time wasted." He gave me a broad smile and clapped me on the back. "If you like I can show you to your rooms."

"Yes, thank you," I responded.

He took my suitcase and lead me down the hallway to to right. Alex followed behind us. There were doors on both sides of the hallway that I now assumed were bedrooms. We slowed in front of one of the plain, wooden doors about half way down the hallway and I noticed that it read "Polemarchus".

"This is where you'll be staying Erik," said the balding man cheerily.

He slid the door open and I realized that none of the doors along the hallway had knobs.

"That's an interesting design," I commented as we entered.

"It was George's idea," responded the balding man. "It's more space efficient."

"I suppose that's true." Looking around the room it seemed to me like more than the doors had been designed with efficiency in mind. The bed was built into left wall and surround by a closet on the left, bookshelves on the right, drawers below and more storage above. To the right of the room was a desk and washbasin. The back wall of the room was dominated by a window which looked out onto a courtyard and garden that I hadn't realized were there. I set my shoulder bag on the bed.

"There's a restroom down the hall if you need it," said the balding man. "I'm going to show Alex to his room and then I can take you both to where to others are."

I thanked him and they left. I slid the door closed and, noting that there didn't seem to be any way to lock it, thought that maybe George shouldn't play architect. I splashed water on my face from the basin and then pulled out the desk chair to sit and wait.

It wasn't too long before they came back. Our guide popped his head through the door to say, "Alex is staying in Glaucon. It's down the hallway and around the corner." I left my things and slid the door closed as we left. We continued down the hallway, turned the corner, and passed Alex's room. At the halfway point what I thought must be the east side of the building was a small room like the one by which we had entered. We turned left down a shorter hallway which eventually opened onto a covered porch which ran round the length of the large courtyard that I had seen through my window.

Our guide led us out into the courtyard along a paved stone path and through a line of trees that served as a partition. We found ourselves in a smaller division of the courtyard which I now noticed was almost completely surround by trees aside from two archways cut into the wall of trees on either side. This miniature courtyard was edged with spring flowers just bursting into bloom and in the center there was a large table at which sat a small group of people. They turned as we entered. A man of less than average height stood to greet us.

"Welcome friends," he said cheerily, "I hope James has made you comfortable." He stepped forward and shook my hand. "It's good to see you Erik." He looked me in the eye when he said this and I imagined the hours of practice he had put into that handshake, that steady gaze, the sincerity in his voice.

"Good to see you too George," I responded.

He turned and shook Alex's hand. "Alex." Alex nodded in response.

"Please come and join us." He motioned for us to take up some of the empty seats around

the table. "So, how many does that make us so far James?" he asked as we made our way towards the table.

"That makes nine counting you, me, and Hendricks."

"Great. We're just waiting on Harry and Jessica then."

I started to take a seat by Alex to the right of the table, but George intervened.

"No Erik, come sit by someone you haven't talked to yet. We all have so much catching up to do. Cecelia will move over and you can sit by her and Kenya."

I started to say that I was fine but then, remembering how stubborn George could be, moved to take my seat on the other side of the table. I decided that it would be childish to try and avoid Kenya and that I should make the best of the situation.

Kenya was sitting to my left and next to her was an elderly man and past him another man that I didn't recognize. He was sitting next to Alex who was next to George. Our guide was still standing and Amelia was past Cecelia on my right.

"Erik you know everyone except Hendricks," said George, gesturing to the man to Alex's right. I smiled and nodded and he gave me a curt smile in return. "And I'm sure you haven't forgotten Dr. Zamo." I realized now that the elderly man next to Kenya did look quite familiar, though the light in his eyes seemed dimmed by age. It had been years since I had seen Dr. Zamo and now to see him as an old man touched something painful inside of me.

We passed the next hour or so filling in the gaps in our personal histories. Amelia had become a doctor like we all expected, but she had never married. Cecelia quit medicine and became a psychiatrist instead. She had married and divorced with no children. George made a point of noticing how ironic it was that both Kenya and I had become college professors. I began to wonder if he had an agenda. George also felt the need to emphasize the fact that Alex

had become a successful businessman even though he dropped out of college. Dr. Zamo was retired now, as I would have guessed.

"So now that we've all caught up, tell us what you've been doing lately George," said Amelia. I had to admit to myself that I too was interested to hear what our host had been doing since he disappeared from the public eye three years ago.

George leaned back in his chair and I could see him searching for the just the right way to phrase his response.

"Yes, do tell us George." I recognized Jessica's voice even before I turned to see her standing in the green archway. She was wearing a black and white dress of the latest fashion with a shawl her shoulders protected from the spring breeze. All eyes were on her now. "What has been so important that it's kept you from getting in touch with your old friends until now?"

"I've been keeping busy," Erik answered simply.

"Well, I find that easy enough to understand." She let out a light, airy laugh and strolled over to take a seat at the table. "I suppose someone has to take care of the family farm, right George?" She crossed her legs gave him a smile that was too sweet to be sincere.

"It's good to see you Jess" said George flatly.

"But what *have* you been doing out here?" pressed Amelia. "Or is this just a vacation spot?"

George was silent for a moment before he began, like an orator who wants to capture his audience attention. It grew noticeably quiet. "Ever since the election I've been spending a lot of time here on my grandparents' old property. I found the quiet and tranquility very soothing in those first few months. I had a lot of time to think and get to know myself better." He paused and breathed a contented sigh. "When I came here as a kid I always remembered it as a place of

peace and happiness, and so that's what I came back here looking for. In some ways now I'm happy that I didn't win that race, and I feel that I know myself better because of it."

"You seem to have take your loss quite well, George," remarked Cecelia evenly.

"Well I think losing was very selfish of you," interjected Jessica. "It ruined several dinner parties that I had been planning for months."

The conversation moved to other subjects after this and we talked up until the dinner bell rang. Throughout the meal there were three or four conversations going at once with everyone talking over each other. We laughed and told stupid jokes, and we seemed more like a group of old friends again. After the food had been taken away and we had quieted down some, George stood and addressed the table.

"I must admit that I haven't been completely honest with you all." We all looked at him, not sure if this was another joke. "I didn't just invite you here for a twenty-five year reunion."

"What do you mean?" asked Amelia.

"After I lost the election I was severely depressed, not just about myself but about the political systems of our country and the world. We put so much time and resources into making legislation and regulations, but does it really work? I still see so much suffering and corruption in the world. After my defeat I wanted even more to do something that would really change something for good in the world."

"Here comes his bid for reelection," said Jess under her breath.

"I struggled for a long time trying to think how I could do anything if I weren't in political office. But while I was here I spent a lot of time thinking, reading, and going for walks. I realized that I wanted other people to have the peace that I was able to find here. I toyed with the idea of a summer camp or a retreat center, but was always bothered by the fact that even if

people found peace here, would they be able to take it back with them? Growing up I saw what working 80 hours a week did to my father and to our family and I believe that a temporary solution isn't really a solution at all."

The room had grown very quiet now. The habitual smirk had left Jessica's face and she now wore a quizzical expression with eyebrows furrowed.

"It was more than a year after the election that an actual solution began to take shape in my head. I was reading Plato at the time and he helped me realize that people who do harm to others and the society actually believe that it's better for them in the long run to be a bad person. But selfish citizens aren't our only problem. Many of the things in our educational system and our cultural memory reinforce selfishness and other negative traits that are harmful to the society. The basic problem with our society is that we throw people out into the world to make their own decisions and to form their own beliefs without giving them the kind of guidance and training that would ultimately benefit society and, by extension, themselves. I realized that to change the world, you have to change the thing that teaches our children both positive and negative traits even before they learn to speak. I realized that you have to change the culture itself."

He paused briefly to let his words sink in.

"But," interjected Cecelia, shifting in her chair. "How would you determine what to throw out and what to keep, first of all, and secondly how could you ever hope to simply *change* a culture?"

"Two very good questions," George responded. "The first is answered quite simply. It's not a question of simply keeping the positive and throwing away the negative, but of completely reworking human society from the most basic element with this guiding principle: how can justice and the happiness of our society best be served? Of course, as you can imagine, changing

an entire culture on a large scale over a short period of time would be quite the prodigious project and some would think it impossible. Humans are creatures of habit, are they not Cecelia?"

She nodded in agreement.

"And the older the habit and the more attached we are to it, the harder it is to break, is it not?"

"It's a little more complicated than that, but essentially yes."

"Do any of you here smoke?" asked George.

"I used to," said Hendricks.

"I do," offered Jessica.

"Let me ask you then Hendricks, how long did you smoke for?"

"Ever since I was sixteen," he replied.

"And I'm assuming it was difficult for you to quit."

"Very."

"Now, imagine for me all of you. If it were possible to offer a cigarette to both the 35 and the 15 year old Hendricks, which one do you think would have more of an urge to smoke that cigarette?"

"Well since he started when he was 15 wouldn't it be the same?" asked Jessica, her tone of voice telling that she did not take the current conversation very seriously.

"I think you're missing several important points there Jessica," George responded. "First of all, if the fifteen year old Hendricks is motivated to smoke that cigarette it's by the pull of the unknown combined with social pressure to be like his friends. The 35 year old Hendricks, however, smokes out of a psychological and physical dependence reinforced over the years. The

desire to smoke can easily be removed by removing the 15 year old Hendricks from his social situation, whereas his older counterpart has internalized that desire."

"Yes, but that puts a lot more stress on the environmental factors that affect us and somewhat ignores the individual's desires and natural tendencies," said Cecelia.

"I'm not trying to deny the complexity of human nature by any means, doctor. But aren't these 'natural tendencies' of which you speak molded into their final form by our environment? Imagine Hendricks growing up in a society where cigarettes don't exist or where the citizens are kept from knowing about cigarettes for the sake of their own health. The result would be exactly the same. If you remove a negative habit such as smoking from the life of an individual, even a very influential one, that will not stop the health problems caused by the large numbers of people who continue belligerently to smoke. But, if you remove smoking from the society in general, and take steps to ensure that no one rediscovers it, then no one would have the desire to smoke or even the knowledge that it was an option."

I shifted in my chair decided to join the discussion, whether or not it was a good idea I'm not sure. "But that's impossible."

"Is it Erik? Let us imagine an extreme case to prove my point. Have you heard of parents who, for some unknown reason, lock up their children from a very young age?"

"I believe I've heard something on the subject," I responded.

"It's a horrible practice. But let us imagine a set of loving parents who decide to protect their children from the outside world. What parent wouldn't want to? They move from their home in the city to a country farm separated from the nearest neighbor by twenty miles of fields and forests. The children are not locked up inside, but rather given free reign of their parents property to explore and learn from the beauty of nature. The father works to support the family,

and the mother educates the children from an early age. They are a happy and self-sufficient family. Now, would a child raised in this environment who has never seen, nor heard of, nor even smelled a cigarette be in the least way tempted to smoke? The answer is, I believe, quite obvious."

"Yes, but they'll have to leave their little farm at some point," said Jessica condescendingly.

"Why?" George asked simply.

"Well because obviously they'll have to come live in the real world at some time," said Jessica in annoyance.

"And why is that?"

"Because they're not going to find a job in the sticks!" snapped Jessica.

"What jobs do they need other than farmer and homemaker?"

Jessica glowered him but decided not to continue the argument.

"I admit that my analogy is quite simplistic, but the point that I'm trying to make is that it is possible to change a culture and a society by shielding and properly educating its children from an early age. The world that we create for them will be the 'real world' as you say. A world in which the prejudices and inequalities of the previous millennia will have no hold."

"You're making it sound like you think this is actually possible," said Amelia.

"I know that it's possible. I've already started."

There was a shocked silence for a moment and then the room erupted with questions. Amellia, Cecelia, and I were all speaking at once so that you couldn't hear what any of us were saying, but Jessica yelled over us all. "What do you mean you've already started? This is crazy!"

It took George a few moments to calm us down. "Please," he said after he had our attention once more, "let me explain. It's not as crazy as it seems. My whole intention is to make achieving this goal as practical as possible. Up until now I've been explaining to you in distant, theoretical terms. Let me show you what I want to do."

"Show us?" I asked

"Yes, I think it would help all of you to understand better. Follow me if you please."

We rose somewhat confused and followed George through a door on the far side of the dining room. I made my way beside Kenya and asked her quietly, "What do you make of all this? You haven't said a thing all evening."

"I'm not quite sure what to think," she responded.

Amelia and Cecelia were in intense conversation ahead of us. Cecelia was insisting on something but Amelia seemed unsure.

"Erik!" hissed Cecelia, motioning for me to come.

"What?" I moved to catch up with them as we turned down a long hallway.

"Didn't Dr. Zamo talk about this kind of thing in our Philosophy class?" she asked as I drew near.

"What kind of thing?"

"Utopia!" she whispered. "Don't you remember when George would argue with him through the whole class period?"

"I thought that was to get us out of homework," said Amelia.

"Or maybe he was serious," hissed Cecilia.

I looked back at the elderly professor and thought that it was somewhat strange of George to invite him to our reunion. I never remembered him as being George's favorite professor,

though George hadn't seemed to like school in general. He had at least been involved in Dr. Zamo's class.

George slowed as we reached another corner. Turning to us he said, "If we could all be as quiet as possible, I don't want us to wake anyone."

I gave Kenya a questioning look. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Most of the rooms on this hallway are occupied by our first citizens." He spoke in a low voice which made us draw closer to hear him.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Orphans and street children. Innocent little ones abandoned by society to a hard, lonely, and short life."

"You, running an orphanage?" asked Jessica in disdain.

"This is not an orphanage. This is a home for them, this is a community. They aren't here waiting for someone to come choose them one day. Here they are chosen, here they will have many parents."

"Somehow I find it difficult to imagine you as a father-" began Jessica, but Cecelia interrupted her.

"How many children are there here?" she asked.

"Around twenty five."

"And who takes care of them?"

"Hendricks, Michealson, and I do our best to make sure they are comfortable and well fed. They only just arrived two weeks ago," replied George. "Come, let me show you."

He stepped over and slid back a nearby door to reveal a girl of about six curled up in the covers. She held herself tight in a ball, but her sleep seemed peaceful.

"Someone needs to do that poor child's hair," remarked Kenya quietly. I now noticed the girl's hair was matted and tangled.

"We have washed them, but I admit we are lacking the feminine touch," George conceded.

"Washing that child's hair is only going to make things worse," said Kenya.

"I don't understand," said George with a confused look on his face.

"Don't worry about it," said Kenya.

George accepted this and slid the door quietly shut.

"What's her name?" asked Amelia.

"I'm not even sure if she knows," answered George.

"Is this even legal, bringing all these children here like this?" I asked

"I think a more important question is if it's right. Would you prefer I leave them on the streets?"

"Of course not, but-"

"I think it's noble," said Amelia.

"But do you have the facilities and the personnel to properly take care of these children's needs?" asked Cecelia.

"Now that," said George as if this whole evening had been building up to this moment.

"That is where I and each of the children in these rooms will need your help."

"Oh, I see. So this is a fundraising event and not a reunion?"

"These children don't need your money," replied George simply. "They need something much more valuable than that. They need your time and dedication. They need your love and your guidance. With your help we could change the world for these and many more children like

them."

He paused for a moment as if deep in thought. Then he said, "I don't expect an answer from you at this moment, but please give it some thought. We need a doctor, as you might imagine, and so your help would be invaluable Amelia. Erik and Kenya, we need learned educators to teach our children both in the academic and moral realms. Cecelia, the human mind is a complex thing and your expertise would be irreplaceable. Alex, your knowledge of business will help keep this community running smoothly and prosperously. Jessica your skills as an artist will help give these children a vision of beauty."

As he spoke he had looked each of us in the eye in turn. "We need you all if these children are to have the best chance they can to live a good and just life. I still have much to show you, but we'll leave that for the morning. We should all get some sleep."

With that led us back out of the hallway and, after a few brief words, we dispersed to our separate rooms.

I lay awake in my bed for hours. Whenever I tried to close my eyes all I would see was the face of that sleeping girl. I saw her in rags scrabbling for food, hungry and cold. George stepped out with his hands outstretched speaking to me, pleading with me but I couldn't hear him. I turned and ran. But everywhere I looked I saw the hollow eyes of starving children, too weak and too broken to ask for help. I shut my eyes to block them out and kept running.

I ran until my feet hit on something soft. I opened my eyes and saw shining grass instead of concrete. The sun was high in the clear blue sky and summer song birds traded melodies. I felt a hand take mine and I looked down to see the little girl, her hair in shining barrettes, a big grin across her entire face. She tugged on my hand and indicated that I should follow her. We climbed to the top of a small rise and she pointed to the valley below. There I saw a city, shining

like a second sun. I feel I know its name.

She let go of my hand and ran ahead of me down the hill, looking over her shoulder to call to me, waving me on. "Erik!" I hear her call me. "Erik! Erik! E-e-e-rik!"

I wake in a sweat and wait to hear if she'll call my name again. I wait for a minute and then I hear a rooster crow. I breath out my tension with a sigh and lay back down.

As I drift back to sleep I'm aware that something has changed. I'm afraid to say yes, but I realize I can't say no.

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