Ophir writes: 'A deconstructive reading of the Republic, which this book is, is an anti-Platonic treatise that takes Plato seriously in order to help readers be liberated from his spell' (8). I shall return to this claim later. But I want to start elsewhere, with a passage from the Gorgias to which Ophir alludes, but to which, I think, he does not attach sufficient significance.

It is a long, and well-known, passage, from which I shall quote selectively (using Irwin’s translation, but interspersing Hamilton’s (H) agreeably idiomatic variants from time to time). Callicles is cheerfully patronizing Socrates:

For I tell you, Socrates, Philosophy is a delightful thing [pretty toy : H] if someone touches it in moderation at the right time of life; but if he persists longer than he should, it’s the ruin of men ... he is bound to end up inexperienced in all those things in which anyone who is to be a fine and good and respected man [a gentleman and person of consideration : H] ought to have experience ... they turn out entirely ignorant of the ways of men ... they prove themselves ridiculous, just as politicians [men of affairs : H], no doubt, whenever they in turn come to your discourses and discussions, are ridiculous. For it happens as Euripides says ‘Each man shines in that and strives ... where he finds himself best...’ ... and wherever he is inferior, he avoids it and abuses it...

... it is not shameful for someone to philosophize when he is a boy [a lad : H]. But whenever a man who’s now older still philosophizes, the thing becomes ridiculous ... this person is bound to end up unmanly [will never be a real man : H] ... for he shuns the city centre [busy life of the heart of the city : H] and the public squares where the poet says men win good reputations. He is sunk away out of sight ... whispering with three or four boys in a corner, and never gives voice to anything fit for a free man, great and powerful .... .... 'stop these examinations; practise the culture of the world’s affairs' ... emulate ... those with a living, reputation and many other goods. (484b - 486d)

And a good deal more to the same effect.
This is a splendid speech. Real men, gentlemen of consideration who count for something, are men of affairs, steeped in the serious business of the city, with a dignified reputation, well able to hold their own and get weighty business on foot. Philosophy ... well, every (young) man's lace, that sort of tincture of liberal culture which any successful man should have to show he's au fait. But taking it further than that ... well, it's frankly an embarrassment and no-one who knows what's what will want to get involved. It's scarcely a clubbable chap's concern.

The argument is still with us, of course, and not just with philosophizing as its target. And its pretty clear who is winning at present. What it brings to the fore are a number of questions. Should there be time and space for the activity of philosophizing to go on in any society? Is philosophizing a sensible, serious, dignified and honourable occupation for a person to engage in, at all, from time to time, for a lifetime? Should this or that individual have the opportunity (and resources) to take part in this activity, particularly if this will make a call on the public purse (though that wasn't an issue between Callicles and Socrates)? What, anyway, is this activity of philosophizing such that it unmans someone, makes them unfit to take their place as a gentleman among gentlemen?

These questions are serious and difficult, and intensely practical questions in at least the sense that, upon the outcome of them, the possibility of carving out and sustaining a way of life may depend (if, that is, the realisation of such possibilities is contingent upon what anyone thinks in connection with such-like questions as these). Perhaps wealth creation is the only activity there should be time and space for in our society? Perhaps wealth creation is the only occupation proper to a real man?

This passage even brings out a point about the spatial articulation of the city in its relation to the dominant conception of truly manly activity (city centre and public squares versus whispering in corners) which so deeply occupies Ophir and forms a dominant motif in his book (see, particularly, chapters 1 and 3, but throughout really).

I don't in fact want to concentrate on this space/culture/discursive structure/delineation of man theme, despite Ophir's intensive and extensive use of it. I want rather to concentrate on the theme which that matter subserves and which I take to be Ophir's primary contention. It is that Plato's overriding concern in the Republic is with engaging with these practical questions, and with resolving them decisively and permanently in favour of philosophy, philosophizing, the life dedicated to truth.