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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 The principle is first articulated in the *Republic* at 369e-370c and is regularly invoked or referred to thereafter: 374a-e, 394d-e, 400e, 406c, 415a-d, 421a, 421c, 423c, 423d, (cf. 397e), 433a, 434a-b, 435b, 441d, 444b; *Laws*, 846d-e; cf. 807c-d