

THE ORIGIN OF THE JUXTAPOSITION OF "NATURE" AND "NURTURE":
NOT GALTON, SHAKESPEARE, OR MULCASTER, BUT SOCRATES.

Andrew M. Colman and Peter Woodhead

University of Nottingham

Abstract

Several people have attributed the verbal juxtaposition of "nature" and "nurture" to William Shakespeare, but Karl Teigen recently found an earlier use of it by Richard Mulcaster. There are, however, several examples of the juxtaposition in Plato's works and the earliest is attributed to Socrates, who may have been the true originator. Plato always refers to nature and nurture as complementary or parallel, rather than opposing, influences on development.

Several recent articles of note have addressed the origins and development of the verbal juxtaposition of "nature" and "nurture". Raymond Fancher credited Sir Francis Galton with its popularization. James Conley conjectured that William Shakespeare may have been the first to use it in The Tempest (IV.1) where Prospero describes Caliban as "A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/Nurture can never stick." Fancher agreed that Shakespeare was the probable originator, but pointed out that this discovery had been made earlier by Sir Cyril Burt and others.

Karl Teigen subsequently found a passage in Richard Mulcaster's Elementarie (1582), published nearly 30 years before The Tempest, in which the development of a child's natural capacity is summed up in the striking sentence: "Nature makes the boy toward; nurture sees him forward." Teigen pointed out that priority disputes are seldom settled conclusively, but he suggested that Mulcaster, a prominent Elizabethan pedagogue, may have originated the juxtaposition and that Shakespeare may have taken it directly from this source.

We suggest that the originator may have been Socrates - or his amanuensis Plato - almost 20 centuries before Mulcaster's Elementarie. The nature-nurture juxtaposition appears at least seven times in Plato's works. In the Republic and Phaedrus it is attributed to Socrates. In book IV of the Republic, written in the 370s BC, Socrates discusses the retentiveness of courage (within the context of justice in the State) and says (Republic, IV, 430A) that soldiers must be steeped in the spirit of the law so that their faith becomes deeply ingrained "because of the fitness of their nature and nurture" (διὰ τὸ τὴν τε φύσιν καὶ τὴν τροφήν ἐπιτηδεύειν ἔαχηέναι). This may be the earliest recorded juxtaposition of "nature" and "nurture". In the Phaedrus, probably written about 370 BC (slightly later than the Republic), Socrates notes (Phaedrus, 272D) that an aspiring speaker needs no knowledge of the truth about what is right or good, "or about men who are of such character by nature or nurture" (ἢ καὶ ἀνθρώπων γε τοιούτων φύσει ὄντων ἢ τροφῆς).

In the *Timaeus*, a late work written shortly before Plato's death in 348 BC, Socrates describes philosophers as a class which "by nature and nurture" (φύσει καὶ τροφῇ) shares the qualities of the poets and the Sophists (*Timaeus*, 20A). Three sentences later he describes Hermocrates as an example of someone who "in nature and nurture" (περὶ φύσεως καὶ τροφῆς) is competent in philosophy and the affairs of state.

Book V of the *Laws*, edited by a pupil after Plato's death, contains a discussion of purges of the citizen body to be carried out by, for example, capital punishment, exile or emigration, just as a shepherd or cowherd separates sound animals from unsound ones in the knowledge that his efforts would be wasted on animals that "nature and bad nurture" (φύσις καὶ κνηρὰ τροφή) had ruined (*Laws*, V, 735B). Later on in the *Laws*, Plato discusses the legal treatment of lunatics, and then turns (XI, 934D) to a consideration of people who, owing to a disastrous "native and aquired" (φύσιν ἄμα καὶ τροφήν) tendency to anger, shout their heads off in mutual abuse in any trivial quarrel. Later still (XII, 961B), he proposes a method of introducing new blood into the council of legal studies, whose main function in an ideal state would be the drafting of legislation. Each member of the council should introduce a young man of at least 30 years of age, but only after selecting him as particularly well qualified "by nature and nurture" (φύσει καὶ τροφῇ).

It is noteworthy that all these Platonic juxtapositions refer to nature and nurture as parallel or complementary - rather than opposing - influences. This repeated emphasis on what is nowadays called genotype-environment covariance may perhaps suggest that the views of Socrates and Plato on the nature-nurture question were more progressive than Shakespeares.

Still earlier usages of the nature-nurture juxtaposition may, of course, come to light, but there are grounds for believing that Socrates (or Plato) may have originated it. Homer, Europe's earliest (c. 800 BC) writer, used the word φύσις (nature) only once, and he never used τροφή (nurture). Hesiod (c. 700 BC) used neither word. By the fifth century BC both words appear to have come into common use: Herodotus, for example, used them frequently in his *Histories*, but we have not found any instances in which he juxtaposed them.

NOTES

1. Raymond E. Fancher, "A Note on the Origin of the Term 'Nature and Nurture'" *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 15 (1979): 321-322; and Raymond E. Fancher, "Alphonse de Candolle, Francis Galton, and the Early History of the Nature-Nurture controversy," *ibid.* 19 (1983): 341-352.
2. James J. Conley, "Not Galton, but Shakespeare: A Note on the Origin of the Term 'Nature and Nurture'" *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 20 (1984): 184-185.

3. Raymond E. Fancher, "Not Conley, but Burt and Others: A Reply," Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences 20 (1984): 186.
4. Karl H. Teigen, "A Note on the Origin of the Term 'Nature and Nurture': Not Shakespeare and Galton, but Mulcaster," Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences 20 (1984): 363-364.
5. Richard Mulcaster, The First Part of the Elementarie, which Intreateth of Right Writing of Our English Tung (London 1582), p 35.
6. Karl Teigen, op. cit., suggested for this reason that Mulcaster held more advanced views than Shakespeare.