

# **PLATO'S TWO REPUBLICS**

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## Preface

This essay is intended for students of politics who have an interest in Plato's *Republic*. The novelty of the essay consists in explaining the existence of two conflicting interpretation of Plato's text, one totalitarian and the other liberal. By disrupting the continuity traditionally ascribed to

the work I am able to extract from it two related but independent teachings, one about a progressive conservative practical politics, and another about **true** philosophy that has disastrous consequences for political rule. My main thesis is that there are two republics contained in the *Republic* as we have it today: two contrasting views about morality and politics; hence, the title: *Plato's Two Republics*. In particular, my claim is that, based on Books II to IV, one can ascribe to Plato the view that all types of individuals, not just philosophers, can be just. In support of this claim I propose to read out from the *Republic* a distinction between what **type** a person is, and on what condition such a person might be **virtuous**. According to Plato, all persons have all of the three parts (dispositions) in their soul: appetitive, spirited and reasoning, to some degree, but by nature, only one of these parts **predominates**, making them the type of person that they are. But he also suggests, at the end of Book IV, that a person having any one of these natures can be just if its soul is **ruled** by its reason. By predominating a part gives the soul its **value orientation**, but whether a soul is just or unjust depends not on its value orientation, but on which part in it rules, imposing its value orientation on the whole. For example, an appetitive person is oriented towards the satisfaction of its appetites. Its value orientation (what part of its soul is predominant) is innate and stays the same throughout its whole life, but with proper education such a

person could become virtuous, its soul, then, comes to be ruled by the least powerful part of its soul, its reason.

Most interpreters of the *Republic* arrive at the politically and ethically problematic conclusion that, in Plato's view, only philosophers can be just. They arrive at this conclusion because they put undue emphasis on Books V to VII. In addition, they think that their interpretation is made plausible by what is said in Book IX about "philosophers" and "philosophic" types. But, in my view, what is said about philosophers in Book IX is best seen as continuing the discussion of Books II to IV, independently of what is said about philosophers in Books V to VII. Along with most commentators of the *Republic*, I hold the view that the guiding questions of the work are: "What is justice?" and "Whether it is more beneficial to be just than to be unjust?" These questions are settled, in my view, by the end of Book IV. So, one might ask what role the middle books and Books VIII and IX play in answering these questions. My answer is, first, that Books V to VII introduce a hyper authoritarian view of politics, along with a highly contemplative conception of philosophy. Nevertheless, besides Plato's ambivalence about the role of reason in everyday life and in politics, Book VI constitutes a useful account of the theoretical presuppositions of what makes practical ethics and politics possible. It provides a theory of how the conception of reason, and of wise political rule introduced in the early

books, presupposes a deeper understanding of what it means to grasp the unity of diverse conceptual elements. It shows, in other words, how the good of a thing, or of an action, is determined by the role it has in a wider, more complex totality.

My answer to the second question: “Of what role Books VIII and IX play in answering the challenge put to Socrates at the beginning of Book II?” is controversial. I agree that these two books attempt to show that the life of the tyrant, the most completely unjust, is far worse than the life of the completely just, the philosopher. But Plato falls short in his attempt to show this because, first, he spends too much time on how men who are inferior to philosophers enjoy less pleasure than they think that they do; and, second, he collapses the distinction between what type an individual is, and whether he is just or unjust. As a result, Plato fails to make the distinction between why just people are **happier** than unjust people, and in what sense philosophic natures are **more secure** in their happiness than are non-philosophical natures, even if the latter are just.

Plato’s ambivalence about the issue of whether any citizen can be just is linked to his vagueness about what constitutes the so called “third class”. Without saying so, he implies that among the “appetitive” type there are sub-types: some whose labour is gratifying and self-enhancing, and others whose condition of work is dehumanizing, preventing them from making

use of their capacity to reason. There is disagreement among interpreters of the *Republic* whether it recommends that the producers receive some form of philosophical education. If education in music and poetry is considered a form of “philosophical” education, then there is good reason to think that they, too, should receive some of that kind of education, at least, in their childhood. How could they achieve harmony within their soul, and how could they be just and moderate citizens, without it? One of my hypotheses is that the detailed discussion of the education of guardians in Books II and III is meant, following the city/soul analogy, as the education of what ought to be the ruling parts of all individual souls, of reason and of spirit.

My interpretation of the *Republic* has been inspired by the arguments of some of its most acute philosophical critics. Most notable among them are: Bernard Williams, David Sachs, Richard Kraut and George Klosko, all of whom I discuss in some detail. While I agree with much of what they say, I also disagree with them to some extent. My disagreement with them centers around the distinction between “rule” and “predominance”. In my view, none of them recognizes the importance of that distinction, mainly because they all have a unitarian view of the *Republic*: they do not see, as I do, that there is a fundamental change in perspective from the early books

to the middle books, and they do not allow for the possibility that Books VIII and IX are also independent of Books V to VII.

I cite evidence from within the text for my view that Plato held, at the time of writing the early books of the *Republic*, that ordinary people can also be just. (I do not explore the relation between that work and *The Laws*.) Also, I provide textual evidence for my claim that Plato is committed to the distinction between “rule” and “predominance”, even though he is not always clear about the distinction. However, there is no direct evidence for my view that the text is composed of fragments written at different times in line with different perspectives. Nor is there direct evidence against it. My only reason, and basic motivation, for proposing an unorthodox reading is to point to Plato’s ambivalence about a number of central political and ethical questions.

Bela Egyed, Sutton, September 2023.



# Introduction: Plato's Two Republics

Among commentators on Plato's *Republic* the majority consider it a unified text written with a single focus in mind, and a minority consider it to be fragmented, composed of separate pieces written at different times. I will call them "unitarians" and "fragmentarians". I consider myself a radical fragmentarian. Given the distance separating us from Plato's times, and given, also, the relatively obscure history of the transmission of his texts, no decisive arguments have been put forward in favour of one side or the other. Most of the debates centers around skimpy evidence provided by Plato's contemporaries, early followers; and some internal evidence to be found in his other writings.

My radical approach to the text is not motivated by a deep conviction about whether, or not, Plato is responsible for the final composition of *The Republic* as we now have it, or whether someone else was— though I do not exclude either of those possibilities. My main motivation for subscribing to the fragmentarian thesis is that by reading *The Republic* as a complex of several fragments, one can provide a reconstruction of Plato's ethical, psychological and political views which can retain all of the profound insights usually attributed to it, and can, at the same time, avoid some of its extreme totalitarian political implications.

On my reading, Book X is basically irrelevant to the main argument of the text. Book I is a combination of the draft of an earlier dialogue (the *Thrasymachus*) and the foreshadowing of some of the themes of Books II – IV (I take these books to constitute Plato’s main argument about ethics, psychology and politics: his “First Republic”). I consider Books VIII and IX, as even the end of Book IV suggests, to be a sequel to the first four books, independent of the middle ones. Book V, which is introduced, explicitly, as an interruption to the main argument, raises the question whether, and how, the *polis* outlined in Books II – IV could become a reality.<sup>1</sup> Books VI- VII, which are usually taken to provide the answer to this question, do no such thing (the question is raised, in slightly different form, again, at the end of Book IX.) These two books provide Plato’s answer to a deeper question, one which is hinted at Book V, and one which preoccupies him in his later period, namely, “How to distinguish between philosophers and sophists?” In Book VII Plato still talks about philosophers as the ideal rulers of a *polis*, but, paradoxically, he seems to admit that precisely those abilities which would qualify someone to be a true philosopher would prevent them from wanting to rule.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ) Thesleff, (Thesleff 2009) the main proponent of the fragmentarian interpretation considers that the first two thirds, the first two “waves”, of it was part of the, so called, “Proto-Republic”. This leads me to question whether the hypothesis of the Philosopher-King was a response only to the political vision outlined in Books II-IV, or also to the radical communism proposed in the second third (second “wave”) of Book V. All in all, I find the content of the second wave both confused and revolting.

<sup>2</sup> ) I suspect that two passages: the one at the beginning of Book V, referring to the notion that friends should possess everything in common; and the other in the middle of

A number of attempts have been made by Plato's commentators to solve the paradox of the Philosopher-King's unwillingness to get involved in political rule, as well as to clear the text of the charge of "totalitarianism". In my view, these attempts have failed. My alternative is to treat the *Republic* as answering two related but separate questions: First, "Given what we know about human nature and the basic requirement for the survival of cities, what is the best form of government, and why people should be just?"; second, "Who are the true philosophers, and what is the best form of education for them?"

It is undeniable that Plato thought that only if its rulers were wise would cities flourish and be just. Therefore, it was reasonable to make a very close connection between what he says about "guardians" in Book III and IV, and what he says about "Philosopher-Kings" in Books VI and VII. Still, for purposes of a theory about the politics of real societies, and an ethics of real individuals, the account of the qualities of rulers proposed in Books III and IV is sufficient.<sup>3</sup> In fact, there are elements in Plato's first

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Book IV, mentioning the need for a "longer road", are artificial devices to create the appearance of continuity between the early and the middle books. The first construes a comment about "other things we are omitting" [423e4] as a fundamental law of the city; and the second, having to do with the question of the tripartite division of the soul, doesn't get the promised answer with the doctrine of the Good.

<sup>3</sup> ) The *Republic* that students of Plato have been reading for millennia includes Books V-VII. Therefore, my singling out the early books for attention is problematic. How to explain the difference in political perspective in the two? one might ask. My response is that over time both Plato's conception of political rule and of philosophy has changed. Ironically, the worm gets into the apple at the end of Book V, with the introduction of the "Philosopher-Kings". It is there that Plato shifts from a broad

republic<sup>4</sup> which could serve as important lessons for our own political thinking. These include a somewhat conservative, naturalist, but sophisticated, conception of psychology, and of a somewhat elitist politics but one which is egalitarian, based on merit rather than wealth or military power. In sum, I believe that, as far as politics and ethics is concerned, Books II-IV contain important insights, ones that could be of use even today. I believe, also, that Books VI and VII provide an important lesson for understanding metaphysics and its contribution to a higher form of human existence. What these two books do not do is to provide a convincing account of how a city ruled by metaphysicians could be just and flourishing.

Whatever else one might say about it, Plato's *Republic* is a fundamental political work. And, as such, its influence has been enormous. Modern interpreters have to decide whether it is a proto-fascist totalitarian work, whether it is a mere thought experiment that was never meant to be put

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conception of philosophy as an attempt to grasp problems in their global context to a narrow conception of philosophy as a highly specialized intellectual activity. It is the second conception of philosophy that is harmful to practical politics. So, Plato is right in saying that unless cities are ruled by individuals who are capable of seeing issues in their global context "cities will have no rest from evils", but he is wrong to think that in order to avoid evils cities will have to be ruled by individuals having special knowledge of mathematics and metaphysics.

<sup>4</sup> ) As my title suggests, on my reading of the text there are two republics (and two *Republics*), the one of the early books, referred to by some as the "*Proto-Republic*", and the other of the middle books.

<sup>5</sup> ) Plato, *Republic*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett, 1992, Indianapolis, USA.

into practice, or whether it was meant as an ironic work showing that philosophy and politics are fundamentally incompatible. The first of these interpretations was forcefully argued by Karl Popper, and the second and third were defended by Leo Strauss. I find Popper's interpretation plausible but superficial. His is more of a polemic tract than a serious contribution to the history of political philosophy. Still, read in its entirety the *Republic* does have the appearance of a totalitarian work.<sup>6</sup> Whether it is also "the most savage and most profound attack upon liberal ideas which history can show"<sup>7</sup> is debatable. Popper seems to be more interested in discrediting the *Republic* than in finding out why Plato said what he said at the time of writing the work. Strauss is a devout Platonist. He accepts all the fundamental tenets of Plato's essentialist metaphysics and his absolutist epistemology. And he thinks, quite rightly, that philosophy understood that way is incompatible with everyday political practice.<sup>8</sup>

I find something plausible, and something misguided in both Popper's and Strauss' Plato interpretation. Both of their approaches are a-historical, they both see Plato as a fundamentally dogmatic, essentialist, philosopher, but they value that philosophy differently. Popper is unequivocally hostile, while Strauss is far too generous, to it. My approach to the *Republic* is

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<sup>6</sup> ) In fact, totalitarianism is present only in the middle books.

<sup>7</sup> ) *The Open society and its Enemies* Vol. I, Karl R. Popper, Harper Torch Books, New York, 1962, p. 87

<sup>8</sup> ) *The City and Men*, Leo Strauss, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1964, p. 127, 138.

charitable but critical. Inspired by the writings of Holger Thesleff and Debra Nails,<sup>9</sup> I see it as an ingeniously crafted text put together from a number of related but distinct fragments. I could not, even if I had time in this paper, defend the “fragmentarian” interpretation on philological grounds,<sup>10</sup> but abandoning the view that the *Republic* was composed as a unified text at a specific time in Plato’s life allowed me to better understand the existence of tensions and inconsistencies within it. More specifically, seeing the dialogue as composed of fragments allowed me to explain Plato’s apparent failure to provide smooth transitions from one original layer to another. At times even Plato advises his audience that he is shifting from one level of philosophical sophistication to another. As an example, I consider his reminder in Book VI of the difference between a previously adopted “short” road and a subsequently followed “long” road somewhat suspicious: an attempt to stitch together the early and the middle books.

According to a number of Plato scholars, ancient and modern, Plato wrote, as early as the 390’s, a political work that has come to be called the

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<sup>9</sup> ) *Agora, Academy and the Conduct of Philosophy*, Debra Nails, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993. and Thesleff, *Platonic Patterns*, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> ) From my first encounter with the dialogue as a graduate student using the Cornford translation, I was more or less favourably disposed to the political theory presented in the early books. But I found troubling inconsistencies in the work as a whole. I discovered historical and philological arguments in favor of a fragmentarian interpretation only later.

“Proto-Republic”<sup>11</sup>. By most account, this early text was incorporated in a revised form into the *Republic* as we know it today. The “Proto-Republic” corresponds to Stephanus pages 368c to 472a and is thought to make up the bulk of Books II-IV and the first two thirds of Book V of the final version. On the basis of further evidence of internal tensions, I leave open the possibility that even what Thesleff considers to be the “Proto-Republic” may be a composite of fragments.<sup>12</sup> However, my main motivation for writing on the Plato’s major work is not only exegetical, it is also political. On a generous reading the *Republic* can be seen as a conservative/humanist work. Leaving aside Books V-VII, one finds in the

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<sup>11</sup> ) A good summary of these writings can be found in: *Platonic Patterns: A Collection of Studies by Holger Thesleff*, Holger Thesleff, Parmenides Publishing, 2009, Las Vegas. Thesleff is not the first, or the only, champion of a “Proto-Republic”, but he is the scholar who has made the most thorough argument for it.

<sup>12</sup> ) The first two thirds of Book V contain the so called “two waves” in which Plato introduces his views on the equality of women and men, and on the common ownership of property and the community of women and of children among the guardians. It also includes a proposal about eugenics. I find the last highly disturbing, and do not think that it follows necessarily, as the opening pages of Book V claim, from 424a of Book IV. First, the phrase in Book IV that “Friends possess everything in common” is introduced in Book IV as something “insignificant” that “reasonable men” will see for themselves, and not as a law to be enacted. Second, the idea of owing common property is inconsistent with the view that guardians should owe no property, beside the bare minimum of personal belongings. Third, at 417ab it is said that while it would be unlawful for guardians to own land and to have gold and jewellery “under the same roof”, they will still be “provided with housing”. But it is not asserted that they could not have families. It is possible, therefore, that the phrase was meant only as a lighthearted reference to an “old proverb”, or was simply introduced later as a pretext for the defence of radical communism.

*Republic* elitist, conservative, but also, humanist echoes.<sup>13</sup> A contemporary reader could find in it questionable assumptions about human nature, but given these assumptions one can also see efforts on Plato's part to articulate a vision whereby all human being could, with the right attitude and the right education, be just; and that a socially just society could exist based on the co-operative spirit of its citizens. In this connection I make a distinction between predominant traits differentiating people in terms of their fundamental nature, and rule which any these traits (reasoning, spirited or appetitive), whether it is predominant or not, might exercise in governing their souls. In particular, regardless of their dominant trait, I maintain, that reason may rule the soul of **any** individual, rendering them just, and if another trait, whether it is predominant or not, rules the soul, it would render it unjust. Similarly, a city may also be just or unjust depending on what part rules in it.<sup>14</sup>

In the political context of today, giving a fair hearing to Plato's *Republic* is especially pertinent. The attacks on democracy in that work are familiar. But it is not often noted that Plato's attacks on what he calls "democracy", could be best seen today as attacks on "populism". In other words, Plato is

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<sup>13</sup> ) My view that there are two distinct republics in the *Republic* is based on the different versions of the "beautiful city" (Kallipolis) in the early and the late books, on the one hand, and in the middle books, on the other. The difference is so great that it is plausible to see them as describing two different cities.

<sup>14</sup> ) For example, the four unjust cities and individuals listed in Books VIII are unjust not because a class other than the reasonable class is predominant in them, or a certain trait other than reasonableness **predominates** in the individual, but because a class or trait other than reason **rules**.



critical of a lawless form of popular political control. And this puts his conservatism in a different light. Yes, he makes assumptions about the essence of human nature, and about the role of reason in governance that most progressive thinkers would reject today. But those who claim to be progressive dismiss these conservative ideas too quickly, not realizing that by failing to give them a fair hearing they play into the hands their own worse enemy: populism. But if one is to give a fair assessment of the dangers of conservatism, let alone populism, Plato, one of the most dominant voices of conservatism in the Western tradition, should also be taken seriously. My effort to retrieve a moderate, one might say “progressive”, conservatism from the *Republic* aims to serve that purpose.

A defender even of the first four books of the *Republic* needs to give a more or less favourable account of the constitution described in them. Still, even those who champion liberal democracy today might agree that executive decisions about urgent key political questions need to be made by those who have an expert knowledge about how to govern a society. Aristotle, who also held that view, distinguished between participation in politics and making important decisions.<sup>15</sup> But Plato’s position on popular participation in politics is different. Clearly, he did not favour decision making by large assemblies; in that sense he did not believe in direct democracy. His political stance could be described as a form of paternalistic

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<sup>15</sup> ) In his *Politics* (Aristotle 2013, p.79) Aristotle recommends that ordinary citizens should have some part in politics, without taking part in the “greatest offices”.

liberalism. Liberal<sup>16</sup> because he felt that everyone should have freedom to realize what they are capable of, and paternalist because he felt that most individuals needed outside help to achieve full self-realization.<sup>17</sup>

Plato is not clear about what contribution ordinary citizens could make to the life of the city. He does not give a clear account of the education of the producing class. But, as others have also suggested,<sup>18</sup> it is difficult to see how they would acquire the level of moderation required for the harmony, let alone the unity, of the city without some education. It seems reasonable to think that some education would be provided for all citizens up to a certain age. However, a more delicate question is what civic activities, other than direct political participation, the members of the third class would be engaged in. In order to produce effectively, they would need to have expertise in their own craft. How would they acquire that expertise? How would it be taught? Most likely, limits on production and consumption would be imposed by the rulers. But within those limits producers would have to have discretionary power. It seems that most of what today is

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<sup>16</sup> ) By “liberal” here I mean “positive liberalism”, the view that true liberty is not simply having free choice but to be able to act rationally in accordance with one’s nature. And, this form of liberalism is compatible with what I have called “humanistic conservatism”. Hegel, for example was a liberal in this sense.

<sup>17</sup> ) At [590d2] Plato says the following: “It is better for **everyone** to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without”. In other words, to be just is to be ruled by reason, and those who are unjust must be ruled by those who are just. This corresponds to how I understand “positive (rational) liberty”.

<sup>18</sup> ) See for example Vlastos (Vlastos 1971, p. 93) who argues for the need to provide a minimal universal education to ensure harmony within the city, and to make sense of the meritocratic egalitarianism, presented at [415ab].

thought to constitute the realm of politics did not seem to Plato to be important.<sup>19</sup> Education and having wise laws would be decisive factors. A significant absence in Plato's account is the role of administrators: the soft power contributing to the unity of the city and of its socioeconomic well being. These are areas where a generous interpretation of the early books might provide the missing elements.<sup>20</sup> In any case, what appears as Plato's paternalism need not, especially in its historical context, be an obstacle to the flourishing of a city in which greater value is placed on community than on individuals. My aim in this study is to provide such generous interpretation.

In this study I engage a number of scholars on specific issues. In **Chapter One** I discuss Charles Kahn's view that Book I was never a separate dialogue. I argue that the speeches by Cephalus and Polemarchus could have been a later addition to an earlier dialogue, the *Thrasymachus*,

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<sup>19</sup> ) An aura of legal minimalism pervades the *Republic*. Repeatedly, Plato puts the emphasis on firm basic laws and their wise guardians. Much of what goes for political deliberation today would be conducted by these guardians. Ordinary citizens would not be concerned with fundamental religious or scientific matters. In those areas they would defer to experts. Similarly, wise and just rulers would respect the expertise of farmers, craftsmen and merchants: their providers.

<sup>20</sup> ) In the *Statesman* there are suggestions about what trades and administrative functions are required in a well-run city.

in order to anticipate the character types developed in Book IV.<sup>21</sup> Also, in Chapter One, based on Adkins' work on the evolution of Athenian attitudes to morality, I suggest that Socrates' debate with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus indicates Plato's rejection of a competitive, Homeric, conception of virtue in favor of a cooperative one. **Chapter Two** introduces Glaucon and Adeimantus' challenge to Socrates that he prove that being just is more profitable than being unjust. Next, I turn to Socrates' reply based on the analogy between city and soul as an attempt to meet the challenge. In this chapter I question Plato's argument for his method of defining of justice in terms of the analogy between city and soul. At the same time, I endorse his tripartite division of the city and of the soul, as well as the suggestion that there is a form of relation between city and soul. To conclude, I comment on Bernard Williams' and Jonathan Lear's evaluations of the analogy. I find Williams' criticism of [435de] valid. Also, I find Lear's attempt at reconstructing the views expressed in that passage partially correct.

**Chapter Three** develops my main thesis about the *Republic*. Restricting my self to Books II to IV, I argue that according to those books

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<sup>21</sup> ) It is plausible to think of Cephalus as the appetitive, Polemarchus as the spirited and Socrates (and Thrasymachus) as the reasoning types. The abrupt introduction of Glaucon toward the end of Book I is also suspicious. Given the introduction of a) the penalty for the best who would not want to rule [347a], b) the need for internal justice in a city, in an army and in a band of robbers [351c7] and c) the introduction of the topic of functions [352d-353e] does also suggest that Book I, re-written in its present form, was meant to stand on its own as a defense of justice, with only [354a7-c3] as a later introduced link to the subsequent books.

all citizens, not just philosophers, could be just. A key element in my argument for that view is the distinction between what a person is naturally: what its dominant characteristic is, and what part of its soul rules it. Education plays an important role in a person's becoming virtuous. So, I address the question of whether individuals of the third, appetitive, type receive some form of primary education. Two scholars, Kraut and Klosko, also believe that it is possible for all citizens to be just. I explain how my views resemble, and how they differ from theirs. In **Chapter Four** I evaluate David Sachs' view that Socrates fails to meet the original challenge. My defence of Plato's conception of internal justice is to claim, first, that it puts emphasis on an agent centred, in opposition to an act centred, conception of justice, and, second, that by doing so he moves the discussion from of what one ought to do, to what constitutes the good life.<sup>22</sup>

In the next chapter, **Chapter Five**, I turn to Books VIII and IX, partly because I think that they are closer to Book IV than they are to Books V, VI and VII, and partly because Kraut and Klosko rely heavily on them for their views on ordinary justice. I evaluate the merits of Plato's theory of civic and individual decline in justice, proposing what I take to be a more

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<sup>22</sup> ) Definitions of justice that fall under Socrates' criticisms in Book I are all action centred. This raises the possibility that Plato thought it to be impossible to give a precise definition of justice in terms of actions, hence, he might have thought that only an agent centred definition could achieve that result. If this is correct, and if the agent centred definition of justice as inner harmony under the rule of reason is completed in Book IV, one may ask what more could be said in Book VI about the definition.

adequate treatment of the issues. My discussion of Book IX is not charitable. First, I point to Plato's failure to make clear the distinction between having pleasures and leading a fulfilled life. Second, I criticize his failure to distinguish between possessing a virtue and the security of possessing it, depending on the type of person one is.

In **Chapters Six and Seven** I discuss those books of the *Republic* that fall outside what I consider its defensible political and psychological contributions. Book V addresses two questions: the community of women and children, and the possibility of "how and under what conditions would most be possible to found such a city", namely, the one they have been describing so far. Apart from Plato's correct view that women have the same nature as men and, therefore, any character trait could be predominant in their soul, including the one that would qualify them for rule, I cannot support his view that women and children should be possessed in common, nor can I support his argument for achieving the practically best constitution. Neither of these issues, apart from the basic equality of women, are relevant to the main political, ethical and psychological teaching of the *Republic*. Books VI and VII, I argue in Chapter Seven, constitute a profound epistemological and metaphysical theory. The theory is mostly useful to philosophers interested in foundational questions but not to those who wish to learn how to institute meaningful radical political and ethical change. One way of making Book VI

relevant is to locate on the divided line philosophers, scientists, guardians and ordinary citizens. I offer a way of doing that.

There are a number of assumptions behind my interpretation of Plato's text: a) it provides a conservative, but defensible, political teaching in its early books. (Even those books will appear paternalistic to modern readers.) However, most likely, Plato believed that ordinary people whose material and spiritual needs have been met would be neither qualified nor interested in governing their city, b) the psychology presented in those early books is, again, conservative but defensible. The view expressed in it, that the soul and the city are dynamic structures in dominance composed of three different powers, is especially insightful. c) the early books offer an elitist/meritocratic, yet, egalitarian, social arrangement, d) it makes a plausible claim that those who have economic or military power ought not rule. This means that while the producing class may enjoy the benefits of a materially rich life, the city's guardians should not have private wealth, e) its emphasis on education as a key factor in creating social harmony makes it a pioneering work both in political and in educational philosophy, and, finally, f) its conception of justice as non-meddling and co-operation, within the soul and the city implies that anyone can be just as long as its reason rules. In other words, Plato's theory of justice requires the distinction between **predominance** and **rule**, both within cities and individuals. This means, for example, that people or cities where appetites are predominant can still be just as long as their reason rules.

My assumptions about, and my general approach to, the *Republic* are open to criticism, but I believe that my study as a whole could provide a tenable alternative to the way most scholars have read the work. By pointing to some of the tensions within the text, and attempting to resolve them, I hope I was able to encourage readers of the *Republic* to see it in a new light.



# *Republic* I: Justice and Power

Fragmentarians claim that Book I is a reconstruction of an earlier dialogue, the "*Thrasymachus*", on which, in significantly modified form, it was based. No one denies that Book I, in its present form, anticipates many of the major themes of the final version of Books II to IV *Republic*. But, the question is how much of it was re-written explicitly with a view to those subsequent books. Some themes, or statements, which "anticipate" later ones, could have been present in a work which was not intended as an "overture" to a longer one. After all, it is likely that Plato has thought about major "Platonic" themes, in some form or other, most of his life. Another question is this: even if Book I was designed as an overture to the rest, which of the subsequent books was it designed for? Were there, in other words, several "proto-Republics"? A close look at the text reveals serious gaps, and even inconsistencies in the *Republic* as a whole. Books VIII and IX seem to fit better with Books I-IV than with the middle books, but they do not fit very well even with those.

In addition to Thesleff's detailed survey of the debates regarding the structure and composition of the *Republic*, C. H. Kahn's important article on the subject: "Protreptic Composition in the *Republic*, or "Why Book I Was Never a Separate Dialogue", needs to be mentioned in this connection. Kahn is an advocate of the unitarian interpretation of the *Republic*. He is

aware of Thesleff's arguments in favour of the view that Book I is an adaptation of an earlier, independent, dialogue, but he rejects them. The opposition between these two views may be brought into focus by the following two citations:

The main arguments against (the existence of other versions of *Republic* I), produced repeatedly by the unitarians, are that Book I does function as an introduction, and that many of the ideas dealt with in later books are "foreshadowed" in it. But surely, we underrate Plato if we consider him unable to transform a separate sketch into an introduction. (Thesleff's, p.256)

Without referring to this passage in Thesleff explicitly, there is little doubt that Kahn wishes to refute exactly that argument when he suggests that if one were to remove the passages which are protreptic to the later books "roughly half of the twenty-seven Stephanus pages of Book I" would have to be removed from the original dialogue. And he adds:

Unless one believes in extraordinary coincidences, on the hypothesis of an independent earlier composition it will follow that these passages must all form part of the later revision...What, then, would be left of the original dialogue? (Kahn 1993, p.139)

Kahn's article lists twelve passages (Kahn 1993, 136-8) that he thinks are protreptic to the rest of the *Republic*. Some of these must surely have been written with subsequent section of the work in mind. However, those passages could most likely have been added later, anticipate Books II-IV only. Many of the passages Kahn considers protreptic need not have been

originally written with a view to anticipating later developments. But even without them we could still have a coherent dialogue, (**especially if some of the original dialogue, of the so called *Thrasymachus*, had been left out.**) In addition, the beginning of Book II itself could have served as an introduction to the rest of the work without Book I. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that while Plato did not absolutely need an earlier version of Book I as an introduction to the rest of the work, he found it valuable enough for inclusion with certain modifications.

In sum, I sympathize with Kahn's decision to debate the issue in terms of internal evidence. I, too, have doubts about the usefulness of stylometric methods in connection with such delicate issues. As far as reworking an original dialogue is concerned, I find it plausible that the character, Cephalus, was written into the work at a later date. In fact, Cephalus' speech in Book I is fairly important, as it will turn out, for my reconstruction of the main political argument of the *Republic*. There is only one passage in Book I that I had some hesitation about. It is the reference to the "band of robbers" towards the end of the book, which some commentators have linked to the psychological doctrine of Book IV. I had some difficulty deciding whether it could have been part of an early version, therefore, constituting a fairly extraordinary coincidence, or whether it was added later. Finally, I opted for taking it to be a later addition. This is no small matter for me, because I think that the reference

to the band of robbers nicely sets up Socrates' strategy of turning to the city as a model for discussing justice.

Leaving aside the question whether Book I is a revised version of an earlier dialogue, or whether it is a composite made up of separate fragments, let me concentrate on the fact that it has many features suggesting that it is an overture to the rest of the *Republic*. Still, it should be noted that the speeches delivered by Glaucon and Adeimantus at the beginning of Book II could, in themselves, also have served as an adequate introduction to it. In fact, my view that there is a humanist political theory implicit in the *Republic* could be supported without reference to Book I, although Cephalus' speech, and his very presence in it as a *metic* without political rights, provides added support for interpreting it as a humanist text. Also, the reference to the "band of robbers" at 351c throws some light on Socrates decision at 368e to look at justice in the city as a way of getting an insight into the nature of justice in general.

In my view, the thematic unity of the *Republic* is to be looked for in the way the whole work provides a response to Glaucon's and Adeimantus' challenge. In short, their challenge to Socrates amounts to this: First of all, clarify for us the precise nature of justice, and having done that, explain to us how a life of justice could be made attractive to a reasonable, and more or less decent, individual. And, even though Book I brings into focus some of the more commonly held views about justice, it is Glaucon and

Adeimantus' challenge, at the beginning of Book II, that sets the stage for what is to come. The two brothers challenge is very powerful. And, I believe that by the end of Book IX Socrates has an adequate reply to it. So, now it remains to be seen how the debate with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus sets up this challenge, because without it we would miss the serious attention Plato pays to the conflicting view about justice that were emerging in Greece at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries before the Christian era.

There are few existing Platonic dialogues in which Plato is so attentive to the merits of the points of views he criticizes<sup>23</sup> as he is in Book I. In fact, it is possible that the whole of the *Republic* was motivated by his realization of how fragile ordinary notions of justice, and how powerful the cynical arguments against it, still were. In the remaining portion of this chapter I shall try to show how revealing some of Thrasymachus' comments are about general uncertainties about justice that intelligent people might entertain even today. But before doing that, let me make a few observations about the evolution of the concepts of **arête**, **agathon**, and **dikaiosune**, from the sixth to the fourth century in ancient Greece.

It is difficult to determine with precision just exactly what meanings the ancient Greeks attached to their value terms. The only sources available to us for discovering how these terms were understood during the period

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<sup>23</sup> ) But, note the remarkably fair characterization of Protagoras' (the Sophist) position in the *Theaetetus*.

preceding the fourth century are the writings left to us by the poets, the historians, and the philosophers. Plato's writings are unique among these sources because they represent a systematic attempt to resolve the tensions created by two centuries of gradual change in the way Greeks evaluated social conduct and human excellence. What this implies for our approach to Book I is that we should see it as a serious effort on Plato's part to give as accurate an account as possible of the theoretical crisis brought about by the fact that while the traditional values of the "heroic" age were in decline there was not a satisfactory alternative to them.

Adopting the terminology introduced by A.W.H. Adkins in his survey<sup>24</sup> of the evolution of value terms during the period between the Homeric poems and Plato's writings, I shall distinguish between "competitive" and "co-operative" excellence. Also, following Adkins, I venture the following observation: the primary virtue (*arête*) denoted "competitive excellence" during the heroic period. Co-operative excellence was thought to be merely an adjunct of the former, existing only among members of the same clan. It was not valued in and of itself. In other words, **arête** was the attribute of those who, by reason of their birth, and power, were successful in attaining the greatest benefits, material as well as spiritual, for their clan (**oikos**) and for themselves. Co-operation within the clan was intimately related to the

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<sup>24</sup> ) A.W.H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece*. W. W. Norton & Co. New York 1972. Adkins work covers the period between "The World of the Homeric Poems" (Ch.2) to the "Late Fifth Century" (Ch.5).

personal success of its leader, the *agathon*. Co-operation among clans was possible only if it served the interest of each. If the interest of a clan was jeopardized by its co-operation with another it was abandoned in favour of gaining competitive advantage.

To the extent that there was a notion of justice operative during the heroic period, it was linked to the concept of **hubris**. The only inducement for being just was the fear of punishment by the gods for committing an act of **hubris**, that is, transgressing the limits of what was "natural". Primarily, "transgression" meant usurping the roles reserved for the gods alone. This imposed a certain amount of constraint on everyone's behaviour, including that of the **agathon**. But more typically, hubris meant the failure to respect one's place within their **Moira** structure: to demand more than what was one's due, and to transgress what was appropriate to one's social status.

However, with the changes in the way in which warfare and commerce were conducted, the importance of co-operation within larger units, namely city states, gained prominence. Consequently, Homeric values came under a certain amount of strain. First signs of a shift away from **arête**, as a "heroic", virtue to the more egalitarian conception of "justice" can be seen in the Theognis poems: be willing to be a pious man and dwell with little wealth rather than be wealthy with possessions unjustly

acquired. The whole of *arête* is summed up in *dikaiosune*: every man, Cyrus, is *agathos* if he is **dikaios**.<sup>25</sup>

But it is not until the end of the fifth century BCE that justice as a co-operative virtue comes to be held essential to the survival of cities: injustice comes to be seen as a disruptive element in societies. But, even with the growing consensus about the desirability of co-operation a clear definition of what it means to be just is still lacking. It was left to Plato to give a precise definition of it.

Plato's *Republic* is the first attempt at giving a systematic account of the nature of justice. Even more importantly, it is a direct attempt at reconciling the tension between the ancient, heroic, concept of **arête**, which put the emphasis on the excellence of exceptional individuals; and the emerging concept of justice that could apply to all individuals and city states.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, Plato addresses a number of interrelated questions: first, What is the exact nature of justice?; second, What is the relation

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<sup>25</sup> ) Quoted in Adkins, p.42.

<sup>26</sup> ) Thucydides, writing his *History of the Peloponnesian War* at the end of the fifth century seems to be aware of this tension. In his account of the "Melean Dialogue" - which some take to be less of an accurate report of what took place than an expression of his own views on the relation between imperial power and the moral constraints that its exercise might be subject to - Thucydides implies that there is a conflict between the Meleans' and the Athenians' respective conceptions of justice. Whereas the Meleans invoke a conception of justice which goes beyond self-interest (Book V, 90 and 98), the Athenians hold that "it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can" (*ibid.* 105). The Athenians' position might be characterized as a naturalized version of the heroic conception of justice, and the Melians' position as a more universalistic conception of justice, one that should apply even to those who are not equal.



between power and justice?; and finally, Is happiness more likely to result from justice than from injustice?

If Plato is to give a satisfactory solution of the problems raised in Book I, he must show that there is a necessary connection between the pursuit of individual excellence and respect for the rights of others. Naturally, this will require a re-definition of "individual excellence" as well as giving an account of what it is to respect individuals. However, it must not be thought that Plato is starting from zero. Throughout Book I, it is assumed that ordinary consciousness has already attained a limited conception of justice, except that it is unable to clearly articulate it. It is more or less able to tell which acts are just and which are unjust, but it is unable to grasp the essential nature of justice itself. And, because of the conflicting views about what constituted human excellence, putting the emphasis on competitive success on the one hand, and putting it on co-operation on the other, fourth century Greeks had no clear models of human excellence to appeal to. Still, it is safe to assume that by the end of the fifth century, Greeks had the following intuitive idea of justice: neither to take from others that which is rightfully theirs, nor to allow others to take from oneself that which is rightfully one's own.

In this context, the arguments of Book I are revealing of Plato's general strategy. Book I aim less at providing a definite solution to a theoretical crisis about justice than it is to reveal the tensions implicit in the way even

his most thoughtful contemporaries think about it. For this reason, the positions of Socrates' adversaries must be taken seriously. Plato knew his audience well enough not to present them with caricatures of the views they might hold. Thus, for example, Thrasymachus' positions ought to be seen, even if they require subtle re-interpretation, as positions most intelligent Athenians might have endorsed.<sup>27</sup>

Given the gradual evolution of conceptions of morality during the centuries preceding the composition of *Republic* I, the discussions with the three interlocutors: Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus, should be seen in this context. Cephalus' conception of justice reflects the kind of moral valuation that might have been adopted by the Athenian commercial class. But when it is shown that: "simply to speak the truth and to pay back any debt one may have contracted", cannot be an adequate **definition** of "justice", his son, Polemarchus, attempts to broaden the definition by an appeal to the early fifth century poet, Simonides.

The ensuing argument between Polemarchus and Socrates seems, on the surface, to be very unsatisfactory. However, if one accepts that Plato may have had a definite motive for having Polemarchus make such an inappropriate intervention, things appear differently. It is clear that

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<sup>27</sup> ) The intellectual force of Thrasymachus' position may have appeared to Plato as he was re-working an earlier dialogue. Hence, he could not leave Socrates with a pyrrhic victory. Or, simply, he may have come to realize over time that the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachus raised more questions than it answered. Hence, he decided to bring it, in subsequent books of the *Republic*, to a more satisfactory resolution.

Polemarchus is not qualified to engage in serious philosophical discussion. He makes rash claims from which he is too easily dissuaded. But, his speeches do evoke two conceptions of virtue which must have been familiar to fourth century Greeks. The first is the "naturalized" version of the Homeric conception of justice, namely, to give to each what is his due. But, Polemarchus misapplies Simonides' saying, as Socrates' reminder at 332c implies. The point of the saying is not that debts should be repaid, it is, rather, that existing social, economic, and political distinctions should be respected. Thus, it is plausible to think that in having Polemarchus distort in such an obvious way what Simonides was saying, Plato wanted to show how difficult, if at all possible, it was to reconcile heroic and commercial values.

In an attempt to turn back to the spirit of Simonides' views on virtue, Polemarchus declares that "justice is to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies" (334b). Now, while this is an accurate reflection of Simonides' heroic conception of **arête**, it expresses, as we have seen, a competitive conception of excellence which is in conflict with the co-operative conception of justice held by Cephalus. Once again, it is reasonable to assume that Plato wanted to show by the difficulties this new definition runs into, that a competitive, clan oriented, conception of excellence will not meet the current demands of justice. Socrates' arguments against this definition, weak as they might be against the definition provided by a more able debating partner, do show that an adequate definition of justice must

have universal import (335b+) and, for that reason, being just requires more critical judgement than was required of individuals during the heroic period.

Already in the dialogue, *Clietophon*, the question is raised: "what operation the just man is capable of performing for us?". The context makes it clear that Clietophon wants to find out what specific art is required in the exercise of justice, and how it can apply to human conduct. This question is raised, in Book I by Socrates himself, in his critique of traditional conceptions of virtue.

The exchange with Thrasymachus takes place on a higher level. Thrasymachus' attacks on justice clearly trade on the confusion surrounding attempts to reformulate the Homeric virtues in contemporary terms. One of the conclusions Polemarchus is made by Socrates to accept is that "it is never just to harm anyone" (335e). However, Thrasymachus rejects the key premise required for drawing such a conclusion, namely that justice is a human excellence. Consequently, the main point of his intervention is to show that the best will always act unjustly, if it serves their interest. In order to achieve this, however, he needs to make explicit what is implicit in any talk of justice.

Thrasymachus begins his intervention by an attack on the Socratic method of question and refutation (336c).<sup>28</sup>

If you really want to know what justice is, don't only ask questions and then score off anyone who answers, and refute him. You know very well that it is much easier to ask questions than to answer them. Give an answer yourself and tell us what you say justice is.

Socrates' response is somewhat disingenuous. It is unfair of him to suggest that Thrasymachus is prejudging the kind of answer he should give. On the contrary, the Sophist does not want him to prejudge the issue by suggesting that justice is on the side of the needful, the beneficial, or the useful. So, when he is urged to give his own views, Thrasymachus declares that "justice is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" (338c). During the ensuing discussion he qualifies this statement but, in the end, he does not come up with a positive account of justice either. The reason for this is that in the course of his debate with Socrates he becomes convinced that justice understood as a positive virtue is hopelessly incoherent. And, therefore, those who advocate its adoption are either dishonest, (a virtue) or stupid (a vice).

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<sup>28</sup> ) This criticism is repeated, in somewhat more polite terms, by Adeimantus at 487b. Also, it recalls the point Clitophone makes in the dialogue with his name: (Ref.?) Do not simply exhort us to be just, explain what justice is, what precisely is involved in the exercise of justice, and whether it is really beneficial to those who exercise it. In short, do not simply repeat what is said in favour of justice, for, it remains to be shown whether justice does, in fact, possess those qualities.

Nevertheless, there is a certain amount of confusion in the way Thrasymachus' position is presented, due to the fact that it is an attempt to capture a number of disparate ideas about justice. For example, his opening statement could be taken to mean that "might is right". But this phrase is ambiguous. On the one hand it could be taken as a simple descriptive claim opponent of morality might make. Namely, that in the end everyone does only that which is in their power to do regardless of what morality commands. And, it is not clear that Socrates ever manages to refute this position. In fact, it might be argued that the *Republic* does no more than to deepen the notion of power, making this position acceptable. On the other hand, the phrase could be taken prescriptively. It could, in that sense, be used to exhort those who are in a clear position of weakness to act always in the immediate interest of those who are strong because that is the only way they can protect their own long-term interests. In its prescriptive use, the phrase might also have a more insidious intent. It could be appealed to as way of discouraging those who only **seem** to be weaker from acting in defence of their own interest. Therefore, in order to appreciate the full impact of the claim that "justice is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" one must keep in mind the number of possible ways Plato's audience was likely to have interpreted it. They could have interpreted it as a council of prudence: 'do not challenge recklessly the power of the stronger'. Or they could have interpreted it cynically: since only the strong can enforce the laws, "justice" is always their justice.

In his response to Thrasymachus' opening statement, which may simply be a description rather than a definition of "justice", Socrates focuses his attention on the meaning of "stronger". To which Thrasymachus replies that it is not simply physical strength but political power: tyrannical, aristocratic or democratic. [338de] And, this fact indicates a certain amount of sophistication on his part. It indicates that he is not content with simply reiterating the heroic conception of justice which was applicable only in a purely static, hierarchical, social structure lacking the need for law making. Also, his invoking democratic political power shows that he is sensitive to the important role laws play in pluralistic societies. Finally, he reveals himself to be sensitive to the fact that even in constitutional states, where the rulers are prepared to abide by the laws, they are, by virtue of the power they wield, capable of formulating law in such a way that it will serve their own advantage.

Assuming that these political points are implicit in Thrasymachus' first rejoinder, his refusal to accept Cleitophon's help is somewhat surprising. Just before the latter's intervention in the debate between the two major protagonists, Socrates had raised an objection which could have been easily dismissed. By way of objection Socrates had posed the following series of questions: 'if justice is the advantage of the stronger, and if the stronger are those who rule, and if even rulers can be fallible, is it not possible that the "just", i.e. the rulers, the strong, will sometimes act in a way which is against their own interest?' One way of deflecting this objection would be

to point out that in it Socrates has shifted from "legislation" to "direct action". For, it is not evident that the objection has the same force against the ruler's capacity to legislate in their own interest as it has against their capacity to always act in their own interest. Socrates could have made a stronger objection, one which he only hints at in (339e), namely, that no legislator could foresee all the possible applications of the laws they institute. Consequently, there might be instances in which laws designed to serve strictly the interest of the strong would place constraints on the way in which they could act.<sup>29</sup>

One might wonder how Thrasymachus would have replied, had the question been put to him in this way. But that is not the direction in which the argument proceeds. Instead, Clitophon enters the discussion by his attempt to "help out" Thrasymachus. His suggestion is that "the advantage of the stronger is what the stronger believes to be advantageous to him. This, the weaker must do and that is what he [Thrasymachus] defined the just to be." (340b) Had Thrasymachus accepted this suggestion, he could have, then, claimed that once the laws are in place everyone must obey them, but, since, generally, and in the long run, laws serve the interests of the rulers, it is (generally and in the long run) to their advantage that the

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<sup>29</sup> ) It might be instructive to compare the way the question of the relative power of law and of political wisdom is handled in *The Statesman*, thought to be a late work by Plato, and in Aristotle's *Politics*. The first holds that while written laws are fallible wise rulers are not. The second, by contrast, holds that both laws and wise individuals are fallible with regard to political matters.



ruled (the weaker) obey all the laws - even those which go against the particular, short term, interests of the rulers.<sup>30</sup> Legal stability is always in the interest of those in power.

But Thrasymachus refuses the suggestion made by Clitophon. Why does he do that? Why does Plato make him reply that he would not call someone "stronger" **at the time he errs**. In the context of his previous claim: that the stronger is the ruler, this sounds strange. Why should he think that a ruler ceases to be a ruler, i.e. stronger, just because as a result of his legislation he, or his subjects, will occasionally have to act in ways which do not serve his immediate interest. There are a number of possible reasons Plato may have had for making Thrasymachus give this reply. He might have wanted to steer the discussion in the direction of the idea of a "perfect" (true) ruler. Or, he may simply have wanted to establish the point that, short of pure tyranny, rulers (kings) must accept certain constraints on what they are able to do.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> ) If a law legislated by the rulers appears to go against their long-term interests, then they will simply change it. That is the essence of their power. And that is the reason why a distinction has to be made between the ruler's power to legislate, which is absolute, and their power to act, which is relative. In sum, unless it is admitted that "constitutional rulers" (in the words of *The Statesman*, "Kings") will occasionally be constrained in what they can do, Thrasymachus' position loses its force. For one thing, his inclusion of "democratic" rulers would make sense only if one thought of it as completely tyrannical. Neither a tyrannical individual nor a tyrannical mob would institute laws in the required sense, they would simply "act out" their power.

<sup>31</sup> ) In the *Eighth Letter*, which is intended as practical political advice for the followers of Dion, he recommends "responsible kingship" with the "laws punishing kings and citizens alike if they disobey".(355e) In Book I, where the emphasis is put on legislators, one might still raise the question: under what conditions may legislators change

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the laws they have instituted themselves. Thrasymachus holds that "true" rulers will not make laws that will need to be revised to accord with their interests. Plato, on the other hand, might be taken to hold the view that true rulers might revise **written** laws only in conformity with the science of statesmanship. This is, in fact, what he will argue in Book VII. The philosopher kings must be good legislators, but more importantly they must know the art of either adopting the written laws to unforeseen situations or to revise them if the need arises.

In any case, as the sequel to this exchange indicates, Thrasymachus is not interested in examining the complexities of constitutional governments. But, before abandoning his account of justice in terms of political rule he is made to see that there is an important theoretical difference between tyrannies and constitutional governments, even if it may arise that in practice the laws of the latter serve primarily the interests of those who are in power. Plato's point behind all this is that, once we grant the existence of a constitutional government, however flawed its laws might be, we are also granting that there must be at least some interests shared by the rulers and the ruled; and, consequently, there is a need for compromise on both sides in the interest of the whole.<sup>32</sup>

At this point Socrates is not yet interested in pursuing the question of how justice and political power are related. Instead, he takes up the question of the relation between justice and excellence. He appeals to an opinion that most of his contemporaries would have held, namely, that the

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<sup>32</sup> ) In other words, Thrasymachus' position at 343b has to be qualified. Shepherds, in promoting the welfare of their sheep, act in their own interest. Similarly, rulers promote the welfare of their subjects in order that they be more efficient servants, more co-operative, in short, better subjects. This, as Hegel will argue with great force, means that in all but the most primitive societies subjects also have some power. Therefore, the secret of intelligent rule is to create the conditions whereby the exercise of the power subjects have is in the interest of their rulers. How this is worked out in specific contexts is the central question of politics. And, the central political question of the *Republic* is how political power is to be distributed among citizens in such a way that the interest of the whole is maximally satisfied. And, in the course of answering this question, Plato is providing insight into the nature of power. By refusing Cleitophon's help, Thrasymachus opens the door to the Socratic conception of power, namely, the one according to which self-control guided by knowledge is power.

excellence of a thing is intimately related to how well it can fulfil its function. In case of a "craft" this means that its excellence lies in the best performance of its function. And, if ruling can be considered a craft; and if, as Thrasymachus claims, justice is the proper exercise of this craft, then justice is to rule the best way possible.

Still, this way of approaching the question of justice does reveal the ambiguity in Thrasymachus' attempt to define justice in terms of political rule. In hindsight, it is clear that by choosing political rule as the highest form of power he did not consider in sufficient detail what is involved in the art of dominating subjects that themselves have some power. However, it is also clear that Thrasymachus' claim that justice is in the interest of the stronger has not been refuted. All that has been established is that, once there are laws, subjects - the weaker - also enjoy a certain amount of power granted by those laws. And, even though these subjects may believe that by obeying the laws they are, ultimately, acting in the interest of those who have the power to legislate them, they can also expect that the laws give them some protection against the most vicious arbitrary actions of those who rule them.

Therefore, if Thrasymachus is to maintain his position that justice is that which is always and everywhere in the interest of the stronger, he has to give up his appeal to a political conception of justice - which he, in fact, did when he invoked the nature of law making in different forms of

government (338e) - and has to fall back on a "naturalistic" critique of the moral conception of justice. This is what he proceeds to do. His final position is that there is no justice, understood as a moral virtue. And, by so doing he makes a devastating attack on **traditional** values and the different versions of them held by his contemporaries.

Those individuals who are lucid, he suggests, realize that acting justly means no more than acting in accordance with the power one has at one's disposal. Those who are weak will not challenge those who are more powerful, for prudential reasons; and those who are strong will not act in ways which will diminish or compromise their power.<sup>33</sup> This implies that Thrasymachus' position stands or falls on the issue of power. So, if Socrates is to present a serious alternative to it he needs to show that justice **is** in the interest of the powerful but in a sense different from how Thrasymachus understands it. All he needs to do is to show that the relation between justice and power is more complex than Thrasymachus takes it to be. And this he will do in Book IV.

Having made these anticipatory remarks, we can go back and examine in more detail the central argument between Socrates and Thrasymachus. The latter's opening statement of his position that, "the just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" is best seen as ironic. That is, it should be seen not as seriously meant definition of "justice", but as a sarcastic

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<sup>33</sup> ) I am deliberately interpreting Thrasymachus' position in a Spinozistic fashion. For, nothing in the *Republic* suggests that such an interpretation is inappropriate.

comment on what is commonly understood by it. In fact, his position is that no adequate definition of "justice" is possible since it is an incoherent notion. It is incoherent because it purports to invoke a moral absolute.<sup>34</sup> Those who praise justice are confused because they think that to be just is in everyone's interest, not realizing that it is only in the interest of the strong.<sup>35</sup> Justice, on this account, presupposes the existence of norms which everyone is expected to follow. But following those norms serves only the interest of the stronger. For, the power of the strong consists precisely in that it can present its own interest in the guise of some imaginary universal norm.

The irony in Thrasymachus' position is that in following existing norms both the strong and the weak are guilty of injustice as it is commonly

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<sup>34</sup> ) Throughout this study I have in mind the distinction between ethics: 'how best to live, given who I am?', and morals: 'what must I do, unconditionally, as a human being?'. It is my view that Kant was the first moral philosopher to make this distinction absolutely clear. And my reservations about the "moral view of the world" will become evident as I pursue Plato's text. However, let me say this for now: Plato is faced with a dilemma, if he is to meet Glaucon and Adeimantus' challenge he must either give up on a purely "moral" reply to them - he cannot show that justice is an intrinsic good irrespective of its consequences for the welfare of individuals - or he must restrict his account of "morally absolute" justice to only those "godlike characters" who possess "superior knowledge" (366c). On a more generous reading, which is mine here, Plato opts for the first alternative. On a less generous reading, one which is also plausible, Plato opts for the second. I comment on this issue in more detail when I discuss the relation of Books VI and VII to Book IV.

<sup>35</sup> ) In view of my earlier comment that Plato's contemporaries had an intuitive idea, that justice is both the respect of the interest of the other, as well as one's own, Thrasymachus may be thought to overstate his opposition to it. However, his position can be seen to apply even to this "level headed" conception. For, he could be making the more radical claim that when power relations are significantly uneven, respecting the interest of the other leaves no room for safeguarding one's own.

understood. Neither act in accordance with neutral universal norms. Both act in the interest of the stronger, one to its own advantage, the other to the advantage of the other. This is the point that Socrates fails to understand when he accuses Thrasymachus to have 'turned the definition of justice into its opposite'. (343a) Thrasymachus' point from the beginning was that what is ordinarily called "justice" is really a form of injustice. (What you call "justice" is serving the interest of another, but no one serves the interest of another unless that one is stronger, therefore, what you call "justice" is really injustice.)<sup>36</sup>

Thrasymachus' appeal to "established government" (339a) is, therefore, pertinent. Since what is at issue is the existence of objective social norms, one must presuppose that there are agencies capable of instituting and enforcing them. His point, then, is that the norms, whether they are formulated expressly as laws or whether they are simply implicit rules of conduct, are instituted, and enforced, by those who are in power.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ) The only effective objection to Thrasymachus would be to argue that a) in a post-heroic society power is distributed evenly enough for the most part that serving the interest of another need not conflict with one's self interest, and b) in a complex enough society co-operation between all citizens requires an active co-ordination of interests. This, I will argue, is Plato's main objective to prove in Books II to IV.

<sup>37</sup> ) 'Platonism', as a metaphysical doctrine, holds that there are real transcendent norms, from which it follows that there is a transcendent Form of justice which can only be grasped by those who have absolute knowledge, the 'true' philosophers. It might be, then, that the middle books were meant to make that point. But, that point is not made **specifically** in those books, and, even if it were, it would not convince a sophist like Thrasymachus who is less interested in transcendental moral norms than in those who interpret and enforce them.

Consequently, groups or individuals will, depending on the extent of their power, establish governments which would best suit their own interests.

Socrates' reply to this, stripped of the rhetoric, is that once universal norms are instituted, societies move beyond the exercise of brute force by a few, to the rule of law; and those in power are forced to formulate laws (norms) in such a way that they can also follow them themselves. They must, in other words, not appear arbitrary in their legislation, and they must not appear to be breaking laws of their own making. But this, he would add, involves certain risks. Assuming that rulers are fallible, it may happen that they institute, unwittingly, norms that have adverse consequences for them.

Thrasymachus' refusal to accept Cleitophon's suggestion gave rise to an ambiguity that Socrates is able to exploit to his own advantage. In effect, what Thrasymachus was implying is that the strongest, those who are powerful intellectually as well as materially, are infallible, and will never institute laws which might lead to consequences disadvantageous to themselves. His reason for claiming this is that those who are in power within a constitutional framework dominate by formulating laws that serve their own interest. They need not be infallible in every respect, but if they make mistakes in formulating laws - a vital aspect of the exercise of their power to dominate - they show weakness and, for that reason, are not truly strong.



Damaging his position, Plato has Thrasymachus invoke the example of crafts. 'Is a physician, at the moment of committing a medical error truly a physician?', he asks. ["no practitioner of a craft ever errs" (340e)] But this example does not seem to help his cause at all. Why, then, is he made to identify the exercise of political power as a "craft"? In order to maintain the coherence of his position Thrasymachus would have to define this "craft" as the craft of exercising political rule in such a way that it is always to the advantage of the ruler (established government). The "perfect ruler", in this sense, would not be the one who serves the interests of its subjects, but the one who is able to formulate laws which are both generally accepted **and** serve his own interest. In other words, having formulated norms which he will have to violate subsequently would be a sure sign of weakness.<sup>38</sup>

The above does not preclude the possibility that subjects, in obeying the laws established by the rulers, derive some advantage from them. For, after all, at least the appearance of equality before the law is a necessary presupposition of constitutive government, that which distinguishes it from pure tyranny. What the above does preclude is that the advantage of the weaker be served without at the same time serving the interest of the stronger. In view of this it is not surprising that Thrasymachus "tried to fight" the conclusion that "No science of any kind seeks or orders its own

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<sup>38</sup> ) "To speak with precision, the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, unerringly decrees what is best for himself, and this the subject must do" (341a), is a good summary of Thrasymachus' position on this issue.

advantage, but that of the weaker which is subject to it and governed by it" (342cd). In fact, he had two counter objections open to him. He could have rejected Socrates analogy of medicine, or he could have rejected the claim that no science seeks its own advantage. As it turns out, Thrasymachus' reference to sheep herding does suggest that the analogy with medicine is not an appropriate one. A shepherd, he maintains, acts in the interest of the sheep only because it is in his own interest to rear healthy sheep.

Socrates' comment, at 343a, that "the definition of justice had turned into its opposite", marks an important turning point in the discussion. It becomes clear at that point that Thrasymachus sees justice as necessarily connected to power. Still, it would be hasty to conclude that he is simply endorsing the heroic conception of justice. At most, he is saying that the heroic conception of "justice" reflected, while it lasted, the true relations of power. His view needs not even be construed as an outright rejection of the co-operative conception of justice. All he is committed to is holding power relations to be a limiting factor in determining relations of co-operation.

A possible objection to the way I am interpreting his views might base on Thrasymachus' claim that: "you do not realize that the just is really another's good, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, but for the inferior who obeys it is a personal injury". (343c) It might be argued that this raises the following question: How can Thrasymachus claim that

justice is both the interest of the other and, also, of the stronger? If the weak is the stronger's "other", then, as far as the strong is concerned, justice is the interest of the weak. But this claim ceases to be problematic once one realizes that in making it he is simply reaffirming his view that justice, **as it is commonly understood**, demands respect for the other. Thus, according to the commonly held view, it would make no sense to call a completely selfish individual "just". For, whatever else ordinary consciousness means by "justice", its rational kernel is the respect for the good of another. It is a demand made upon groups and individuals, in relation to others, that they respect the interests of others', in addition to their own.

The above is the view of justice that everyone accepts, at least tacitly. However, not everyone realizes that justice so defined is in the interest of the stronger. And this is so because, once the definition is put into practice, it will always serve the interest of the stronger. Of course, if "the interest of the other" was **all** there was to the definition of "justice", no reasonable individual would subscribe to it. No one would disregard their own interest so completely as to sacrifice it to the interest of the other. And again, Thrasymachus does not have to be committed to seeing ordinary justice in such a one-sided way. All he needs to claim is that, assuming healthy self-interest, justice, as an imperative, commands respect for

another.<sup>39</sup> But, simply by exhorting agents to look beyond their self-interest the balance is tipped in favour of the stronger, for, it can determine, to its own advantage, the terms of what it constitutes to respect the interest of the other. The only constraint imposed on the stronger is that they ought to go to the very limit of what they are capable of, including the exercise of their intelligence in the formulation of laws that **invariably** serve their own interests.

Still, there is a problem with Thrasymachus' position, one which becomes increasingly evident in the course of his discussion with Socrates. On the one hand, the willingness to accept a constitutional form of government does reflect a certain amount of weakness on the part of rulers, for, if they had absolute material power over their subjects they would not need even the semblance of laws. But, as Hegel noted, at a certain point in social and economic development some degree of power is achieved by those who are required to produce/reproduce the material conditions of their master's existence. And this changes the nature of power. Power becomes the ability to cause subjects, who by the nature of their contribution to the essential needs of society have some freedom (i.e. power), to manipulate them into serving **freely** the interests of their rulers (masters).

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<sup>39</sup> ) The idea here is that even when an agent demands the respect of its own interest it sees it as demand on another. Hence, justice involves an imperative, both on the part of the agent and on the part of its other.

So, the perfectly unjust cannot simply be some lucky tyrant who finds himself in the fortunate position of having so much material power over his subjects that their very existence depends on abject servitude to their tyrannical rulers.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the fifth century, especially in Athens, pure political and economic tyranny within city states could be considered a thing of the past.<sup>41</sup> And, if Thrasymachus' position is to have any plausibility, his perfectly unjust ruler must be capable of the highest level of political manipulation. The "art" of his ruler, in other words, is the art of dissimulation, as well as the art of knowing the nature of power and being capable of going to its limit. In other words, to be an expert at this art, the unjust must exercise it completely and whole heartedly - it cannot be content with just committing "petty crimes".

Thrasymachus position is best seen as a combination of rational egoism and a naturalist conception of rights. In this sense it is an anticipation of Hobbes' views. (The theory of social contract is not made explicit by him, but as the interventions of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II show, it is implied by it.) Having stated it, he is preparing to end the debate with

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<sup>40</sup> ) In Books VIII and IX, Plato will suggest the tyrannical governments are also very unstable. Not only does the tyrant need infinite resources of wealth and manpower, he also needs a great deal of luck, in order to stay in power.

<sup>41</sup> ) As the *Peloponnesian Wars* indicate, tyrannical relations among city states was an accepted reality. However, typically, these relations existed only in times of war, and even then, only when alliances with stronger cities was difficult for the weak to achieve. I shall say more about "justice" among city states in connection with the question of Socrates' reasons for appealing to the analogy of the city in order to clarify the question of individual justice.

Socrates with the statement that "the just is what is advantageous to the stronger, while the unjust is to one's own advantage and benefit". (345c) And this, as I have been arguing all along, ceases to be paradoxical if one realizes that "justice" is used by Thrasymachus in two senses. In the way it is ordinarily understood "justice" is, in fact, the advantage of the stronger, and in the Thrasymachean sense it is its negation, injustice that serves one's own interest.

The assumption behind Thrasymachus' conception of justice is that human beings are essentially selfish, and, that if they are lucid enough and radical enough about their selfishness, they will realize that the only way they can be just is to be just to themselves, namely to achieve for themselves all that is in their power.<sup>42</sup> So, the question is: Why, having said this, is Thrasymachus made to stay on? What possible reason could Plato have had for having him stay on? The answer is that Socrates shifts the focus of the discussion away from the question: what is justice? to the question: which of the two, justice or injustice - still understood in their ordinary sense -

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<sup>42</sup> ) In a subsequent essay I shall take up the question raised by David Sachs regarding the relation between "Platonic" justice and "ordinary" justice. For now, it is sufficient to note that the position Socrates will eventually adopt is not radically different from Thrasymachus' position. Their difference will hinge on their respective understanding of "power". It might also be that Plato intended Socrates position not as an alternative to Thrasymachus' but as a refinement of it. Could this be a clue to Socrates' somewhat obscure remark in Book VI (498c) that he and Thrasymachus have just become friends? If what I have just said is true, then a sharp distinction needs to be made between Thrasymachus' and Calicles' position. For the latter, power serves only the unrestrained satisfaction of desires. In short, the tyrannical individual of Book IX is represented by Calicles and not by Thrasymachus.

results in "the most profitable life" (344d). This is not to say that the first question has been settled.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Socrates' own answer to it does not come till the end of Book IV. At which time it becomes clear that Socrates' definition of justice differs from the commonly held one. And it remains to be seen to what extent the re-definition of justice in Book IV captures what I suggested to be essential to any concept of justice: respect for the interest of the other.<sup>44</sup>

Socrates puts his challenge to Thrasymachus about the profitability of injustice in two ways. First, he asks whether an expert craftsman would want to outdo another who is expert in the same craft, and, by analogy whether those being expert in the craft of injustice would want to outdo another expert unjust individual [...]. In short, what Socrates demands is that it be shown that a policy of thoroughgoing selfishness is profitable to those who adopt it. This demand does go to the heart of Thrasymachus' position, but its force is somewhat diminished by the fact that it trades on an ambiguity surrounding the nature of crafts. One needs to distinguish **between**

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<sup>43</sup> ) In fact, Socrates promises at 347e that "we will look into this matter another time". By the way, this comment, coming as it does somewhat prematurely before the exchange with Plato's brothers, has the feel of a later insertion.

<sup>44</sup> ) In Book II Glaucon turns the tables on Socrates with the reference to Gyges. In effect, he is asking Socrates to persuade them that it is in the interest of those who have absolute power to be just, namely, that it is in their interest even to respect the interest of others. This raises the question as to who Socrates is speaking for when he says that even those who have absolute power are better off being just than unjust. As I shall argue, in connection with Adeimantus' intervention in Book II, the burden on Socrates is to show that not only saintly individuals - like himself? - but everyone would be better off being just, even if they could get away with being unjust.

competitive crafts such as warfare and the art of domination, and co-operative<sup>45</sup> crafts such as medicine and sheep herding. In the former case, there is no expectation that the interest of the "other" be considered. One might say that in these crafts the imperative for justice is absent, the goal is to vanquish the other. In the latter case, by contrast, acting in the interest of the other is part of acting in one's own interest.<sup>46</sup>

The ambiguity noted above diminishes the force of Socrates' argument against Thrasymachus in what follows in the rest of Book I. He argues, first, that experts do not compete in matters that concern their expertise - "in respect to the same action".(350a) For example, if a physician has found the best possible diagnosis, given the norms of his craft, he will not be challenged by another physician, if the other is an expert, in his capacity as a physician, although he may do so for selfish, non medical reasons. Socrates is making the point here that there are objective constraints on how far self interest can extend in the exercise of a co-operative craft. However, this does not prevent experts in the competitive crafts to oppose the actions of an opponent, however wise or courageous that opponent might be. If a contestant in a competitive craft is really an expert it will

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<sup>45</sup> ) "Co-operative" may not be the most fortunate way to call what I have in mind here: sheep do not co-operate with their keepers, nor do patients co-operate, normally, with their doctors. But, I cannot think of a better term that would capture the essential other-directedness of these crafts.

<sup>46</sup> ) Socrates' argument appears stronger than it is because the term "rule" is itself ambiguous. It can mean "governing" in the interest of both subjects and of rulers (shepherds, captains etc.), and it can mean simply "dominating".



always attempt to out do its opponents.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the extent to which a contestant will be able to outdo an expert opponent will be an indication of its own expertise. If, on the other hand, the contestant recognizes that it is unable to defeat its opponent, its own expertise would dictate that he avoids the conflict, if he can. Thrasymachus could have agreed to all of the above without "blushing". (350d) Whether or not Plato was aware of the ambiguity, it is clear that his dramatic character, Thrasymachus, was not.

The second way Socrates challenges Thrasymachus is given at the end of Book I. This challenge relies on the analogy of cities (351b) and "band of robbers" (351c). With this analogy Socrates shifts the discussion from individual justice to justice within communities - of citizens, and of robbers. But once again, Socrates introduces an ambiguity. His question, had it been formulated clearly, would have had to have been: Must not, even an unjust city, or a band of robbers, that engage unjustly in a **common cause**, exercise some form of co-operative justice among themselves in order to be unjust competitively?

Had the question been put to him this way, Thrasymachus could have replied, in accordance with what he had already said, that, in order to maximize one's self interest, one is occasionally required to respect the

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<sup>47</sup> ) The situation is different if two experts of a competitive craft debate the merits of a certain military strategy. In that case it would show a lack of expertise not to recognise the merits of the opponent's views on the matter. Once again, failure to make the distinction between a theoretical discussion and an actual conflict, would bias the issue in favour of Socrates.

interest of others. This could also have brought out the important difference between cities and band of robbers. A city could, conceivably, prosper without pursuing a policy of extreme injustice towards other cities,<sup>48</sup> but it is in the very nature of a band of robbers to systematically injure the interest of others.

On the assumption that there is a perfect analogy between cities and bands of robbers, and assuming that "perfect injustice" means "the unrestrained pursuit of selfish desires" Socrates can argue that a life of perfect injustice is unsustainable.<sup>49</sup> But neither of these assumptions are justified, for, the second would involve an unwarranted assimilation of Thrasymachus' position in Book I to that of Calicles in the *Gorgias*. There is nothing to indicate that Thrasymachus advocates complete slavery to one's desires. (so, what about Book IX? i.e. Annas) Everything that he says in defence of injustice is consistent with the view that the most unjust is the one who acts most wisely in its own interest. It may even co-operate with others provided it keeps its own interest in the forefront.

Thrasymachus' position is made clear by its reconstruction by Glaucon and Adeimantus at the beginning of Book II. However, already in Book I a number of central ideas of the *Republic* are anticipated. Cleitophon's

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<sup>48</sup> ) Thucydides' account of the "Mytilenian Debate" and of the "Melian Dialogue" are, as I shall argue in the next chapter, relevant to Socrates' shifting the question, in Book II, to that of justice among cities.

<sup>49</sup> ) This is what he will argue in Book IX, in the case of tyrannical cities and individuals.

intervention and Thrasymachus' rejection of it indicates that, according to Plato, there is an intimate connection between knowledge and power: the truly powerful has to have superior knowledge. The analogy of the band of robbers indicates that Plato sees an intimate connection between the welfare of individuals and of communities, and their ability to achieve some form of inner harmony. The main challenge Plato needs to meet in the rest of the *Republic* - and, without meeting it he could not go beyond Thrasymachus' position - is to show how it is possible to reconcile rational self-interest with a serious commitment to respecting the interest of others. In other words, he has to show that respect for others is not just a **means** of furthering one's own interests, but that it is essential to the best life possible for an individual, and of the greatest well-being of a city.

What, finally, is at issue in the debate between Thrasymachus and Socrates are two different views of human nature and what it means to have power? According to the one, it is essential to the well-being of humans, and of cities, to dominate others whenever possible. According to the other, the well-being of humans, and of cities, demands self-restraint and co-operation with others whenever possible. The main point at issue is not whether justice is inseparable from power. They both agree that it is. The issue is about how power is constituted and how it is to be maximized. Plato's view, articulated by Socrates in Books II to IV, is that there are certain essential internal and external conditions for achieving and

maximizing power, and these are: a well constituted soul inhabiting a well constituted city.<sup>50</sup>

At the beginning of Book II Glaucon and Adeimantus take over as Socrates main interlocutors. Their intervention indicates that Plato was not entirely satisfied with the outcome of the exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus. In fact, the beginning of Book II is a reformulation, in clearer terms, of the essential content of Thrasymachus' speeches. It lays out in clear terms the challenge that the rest of the Republic will have to meet.

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<sup>50</sup> ) I might as well spell out right here at the beginning, that my reading of the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachus is inspired by Spinoza's *Ethics* or, more precisely, by what I see as a crucial, though subtle, difference between Hobbes' and Spinoza's political ethics. As Glaucon's reconstruction of it shows, Thrasymachus' position is basically a Hobbesian contractualist one. Spinoza's, which I take to be also Plato's, is more profound. In it power, freedom, autonomy, and reason are all constitutive of what is right or just. On this view, individuals do not "contract away" their power, their freedom or their autonomy, for the sake of a safe and secure life. Instead, they make use of the resources available to them to attain maximum power they are capable of. Another essential part of this view is that the most valuable resources available to individuals are other (rational) individuals, along with the institutions they create with the "guidance of reason".

An important consequence of this way of reading the Republic is the need to admit that the Hobbesian-Thrasymachean position is unassailable in its application to cities and individuals as they exist today. But, then, again, is not the main contribution of Plato's Republic to political ethics its insistence on the importance of education and on the need for an adequate political, social, and economic context for the achievement of justice by individuals?

# Justice in The Individual and In the City

Glaucon is the one who takes up, in Book II, where Thrasymachus left off.<sup>51</sup> He asks Socrates to convince them that justice is a kind of good which is valued for its own sake and not simply for the benefits which result from

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<sup>51</sup> ) Book II, and not Book I, could have been the beginning of the *Republic*. In my view, the reference to Thrasymachus at [358b] (Book II), and the inclusion of Glaucon as an interlocutor at [347a] (Book I) are editorial devices for providing a continuity from the *Thrasymachus* to Book II. It is unlikely that Book II was written at the same time as Book I, or immediately after it.

them.<sup>52</sup> While his brother, Adeimantus, will raise doubts about what people say in praise of justice, he wants Socrates to refute those who praise injustice. To do wrong, he says, echoing Thrasymachus, is generally held to be "naturally good" (359e). But, since to suffer wrong is held to be bad, they "come to an agreement with each other neither to inflict injury nor to suffer it". (359a) In short, they make "laws and covenants", and what these laws command they call "just". Only those who "lack the power to do wrong" (359b) will enter into these covenants. "The man who has that

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<sup>52</sup> ) When Glaucon says that he wants to hear "justice praised for itself" (358d), he should not be taken to make a purely anti-consequentialist request. On the previous page he lists three types of goods: a) those which we desire for their own sake, having "no further consequences beyond the joy we find in them"; (357b) b) those which we welcome "for its own sake and also for its consequences; (357c) and c) those we which welcome, even though they are "wearisome", "because of the rewards and other benefits which result from them" (357d). An example of the first would be a "harmless pleasure" like eating; of the second would be (the exercise of) knowledge; and of the third be money making.

From the context of the ensuing discussion it is clear that Glaucon accepts Socrates suggestion that what needs to be shown is that justice is in the b) category: the "finest", class of goods. That is, it is something we welcome for the joy we find in practising it, and for the beneficial consequences its practice has for us.

In anticipation of Book VI, we might ask what more than what is said in Books II-IV needs to be said about the nature of justice. In fact, I shall argue that the *Republic* could have, and perhaps should have, ended with Book IV. For, in that book Socrates gives a convincing argument that justice is among the finest class of goods. So, is there another, finer, kind of good than the one that gives us both joy and has beneficial consequences? There is not. Book VI raises different type of questions: what makes what is good what it is? What is it about actions and objects that produces joy in us, and what really are the beneficial consequences of possessing knowledge. Read in this way, Books V-VII turn out to be less important to the main ethical/political argument of the *Republic*. Their importance lies only in the fact that Book IV leaves open some troubling philosophical questions about the metaphysical assumption behind political/ethical thinking, not in the fact that it adds anything substantive to the political/ethical theory defended in it. There is no "finer city"!

power, the real man", say the people, "would not make a compact with anyone not to inflict injury, [and The reason is the desire for undue gain which every organism by nature pursues as good, but the law forcibly sidetracks him to honour equality." (359c)

To illustrate the point, Glaucon tells the story of Gyges. The point of the story is to invite those who praise justice to prove that it is to anyone's interest in all circumstances to be just, even when doing wrong could have no possible adverse consequences for them. Glaucon concludes by describing all the advantages of being most unjust - an essential aspect of which is always to **seem** just - and asks Socrates to "put the most just man and the most unjust man face to face". (360e)

Glaucon's challenge to Socrates seems formidable. And if its suppressed premise were accepted, there is no way that Socrates could refute this "popular" praise of injustice. The suppressed premise behind the challenge - one that is not brought out clearly in the discussion, but whose negation is central to the whole argument of the *Republic* - is that cities will continue to be the way they have been hitherto, and that individuals will continue to have the same desires that they have today. As long as tyrannical individuals are sure that they will be able to hold on to absolute power they have no good reason for being just. As long as cities are governed by unjust ruler's citizen have every reason for being unjust, if it serves their interest. In short, given the status quo, the views about justice articulated by Glaucon are

plausible.<sup>53</sup> What Socrates needs to show is that a) all forms of government that have existed hitherto, from pure tyranny, through oligarchy, to democracy, make it impossible for citizens to be just, and that b) it is possible to reform cities and individuals in such a way that they will have good reasons for being just.

The nature of Adeimantus' subsequent intervention indicates that Plato meant his views on justice to apply, also, to ordinary citizens, and not just to philosophers. If Glaucon represents Plato's philosophical audience, Adeimantus represents the man of the street. It is no accident, therefore, that he is made to express scepticism about what is ordinarily said in defence of justice. He is especially critical of the incoherent teaching<sup>54</sup> about the benefits of justice the young receive, and concludes by asking:

So, given all that has been said, Socrates, how is it possible for anyone of any power...to be willing to honour and not laugh aloud when it is praised? He knows that apart from someone godlike character...no one is just willingly.  
(366c)

Near the end of his speech (367b&c), Adeimantus asks Socrates to give "not merely theoretical proof that justice is better than injustice but tell us

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<sup>53</sup> ) How can individuals be convinced that being just is to their advantage? That depends on how much power they have, and how well disposed they are to promoting the common good.

<sup>54</sup> ) It is important to note that it is Adeimantus who raises the question of education: what effect, he asks, will the stories usually told about the gods "have upon the minds of our youth?". (365a) The fact that he asks the question indicates, that at least at this point, Plato is thinking about education in general, and not simply about the education of guardians.



how each, in and by itself, affects the man, the one for the good the other for evil". How is one to understand what Adeimantus wants Socrates to avoid? His reference, a few lines earlier, to a "man of godlike character", may help to answer this question. A man of godlike character is someone whom "injustice disgusts", or is someone who has "superior knowledge".<sup>55</sup>

As I have already suggested, Adeimantus is the spokesman of ordinary, non-philosophical, consciousness. In fact, it is he who in Book VI will express misgivings about the usefulness of philosophy and philosophers for the city. It is possible to see Adeimantus' role in the dialogue as a simplistic foil against whom Socrates makes the argument that only philosophers can be truly just. However, if my interpretation of 366c is correct, Adeimantus does not wish to be convinced that saints and philosophers are just. What he is saying, in effect, is that he wants Socrates to show that practical man - more or less reasonable, more or less decent, having some power to do good or evil - could be both just and happy. Therefore, when he demands that Socrates give a non-theoretical defence of justice, he is obliging Socrates to make a case for justice that would be able to convince everyone, not just philosophers.

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<sup>55</sup> ) It is worth noting that Adeimantus seems to grant that those with superior knowledge will avoid injustice. At this point this concession to Plato's view of justice seems premature. For, until it is decided what this "superior knowledge" consists of, one cannot decide whether those possessing it will avoid injustice. Still, the fact that the request is made negatively, could simply mean that, as far as Adeimantus is concerned, it is important that Socrates not presume that he is talking either to saints, or to philosophers.

True philosophers, as Socrates will argue in Books VI and VII, have a passion for "that everlasting reality which does not wander through generation and decay". (485b) Adeimantus would agree that these individuals do not need to be convinced of the superiority of justice over injustice. The situation is different with non-philosophers who neither shun the pleasures of the body, nor have an insight into the structure of reality as a whole but can engage in "reasonable discourse". Since they will never have a noetic insight into it, their grasp of reality extends only to what concerns them more immediately. And if they have sufficient insight into who they are, and what they are capable of achieving, and if they live in a well-run state, they can be both just and happy. To show this is one<sup>56</sup> of the main challenges of the *Republic*, one which will be accomplished, already in Books II-IV.

Having acknowledged the difficulty of the task that the two brothers have set for him, Socrates proposes to inquire into the nature of justice as it relates to cities. What he says in favour of this approach does not sound very convincing:

Perhaps there is more justice in the larger unit, and it may be easier to grasp.

So, if you are willing, let us first investigate what justice is in the cities, and

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<sup>56</sup> ) The other challenge will be to show how different cities and character types will degenerate, ending up with the image of the most completely unjust person, the tyrannical one. This will be accomplished in Books VIII and IX. It will show, finally, that the most just life is more beneficial than the most unjust one.

afterwards let us look for it in the individual, observing the similarities to the larger in the smaller (369a).

Why is it easier to see what justice is "on a larger scale"? What reason have we for thinking that there are similarities between the "larger" and the "smaller"? Nevertheless, one might think of a number of more profound reasons for starting with the question of what makes a city just. First, one might think that whether a citizen can be just depends on whether he lives in a just city, and, for that reason, one might want to look for justice in the city first. However, an even more profound reason, one that Plato may also have had, is that the soul of an individual can also be seen as a political structure. In that case, starting with the city, which has a clear political structure, might provide a clue to the nature of the soul and its virtues. The only problem with the approach of using the city as an analogue for the justice of the individual is that, contrarily to what Plato says later [435b], "justice" does not, typically, have the same meaning in both the city and the individual. Typically, a city is said to be just, or unjust, not so much because of the way it relates to other cities, (external justice) but because of the way its citizens are treated in it (internal justice). By contrast, individuals are typically said to be just, or unjust, depending on how they treat other individuals. (external justice)

In fact, there is a passage in Book I that suggests that Plato had already in mind a conception of justice as a power internal to individuals. Near the end of that book [351c-e], Socrates asks the following:

Do you think that a city, an army, a band of robbers or thieves, or any other tribe with a common unjust purpose would be able to achieve it if they were unjust to each other?

A number of things are noteworthy in this passage. First, it implies that there is a form of internal justice which is required by even those who aim to be unjust to others, effectively. Second, it points to the difference between internal justice and external justice; namely, it already contrasts the conventional conception of justice (competitive) with a radically different conception of it (co-operative), anticipating a perspective on justice that will be developed in Book IV. The question is whether Plato had in mind his innovative conception of justice already at the time of writing the original version of Book I (the *Thrasymachus*) or did he add it to a later version. In my view the second alternative is quite possible. In any case, the inclusion of the reference to injustice “arising within a single individual” [351e6] suggests that the idea of internal justice was on Plato’s mind when the passage was written.

Still, the question needs to be asked: “Of what value the long description of education in music and poetry, and of imitation, given in Books II and III, has to the development of this novel conception of justice?”<sup>57</sup> Would it not have been enough to concentrate on the structure

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<sup>57</sup> ) A plausible hypothesis might be that the discussion of the education of guardians is a metaphor for educating the higher elements within every soul, namely, reason and spirit. In any case, the length of the discussion might also be explained by Plato’s desire to make a clear distinction between his and the traditional, Homeric, model of education.

of cities in general, and the structure that makes for the best, in order for the city soul analogy to serve its purpose? So, let me spell out what I think is relevant in Books II and III to the issue of modelling justice in the soul on justice in the city.

An underlying assumption in Books II and III<sup>58</sup> is that a well constituted city is just because it serves the needs of its citizens, and that it is autonomous. A city can achieve autonomy because it respects the natural differences among its citizens, encouraging them to do the one thing "for which (they are) naturally suited" (370bc). In the first instance, this means that different individuals will be engaged in farming, commerce, and other crafts needed in the production of the material means of existence.<sup>59</sup> Citizens of this "primitive" society will lead modest but fulfilling lives. However, instigated by Glaucon, Socrates is forced to acknowledge the possibility of the emergence of excessive desires, and, which will lead to attempts to satisfy less immediately necessary material desires. This takes the discussion from the realm of basic material needs to the realm of complex human desires.

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<sup>58</sup> ) Apart from its end, Book III does not say much about the proper constitution of cities.

<sup>59</sup> ) At this early stage, in the description of what Glaucon will call the "city of pigs" (372d), Socrates distinguishes between only those who make use of their intelligence - those engaged in the various crafts -, and those who earn wages by the mere use of their physical strength (371e).

At first, Socrates resists this move, for, he thinks that the introduction of "luxuries" will undermine the city's stability: it will become "feverish" caused by the excess of unnecessary desires. The desire for the "limitless acquisition of wealth" (373d), will result in war with its neighbours. However, once it is agreed that a realistic description of cities must include the realm of excessive, unnecessary, desires, and, along with it the possibility of wars, the question becomes how stability is achieved within such a city. Socrates' answer to this question requires a strict differentiation of social functions, and, as a result, a stricter division of tasks among citizens. First, warriors (guardians) will have to be separated from those engaged in farming and the different crafts. Finally, those with aptitude for deliberation will have to be chosen from among the guardians (389b/412c).

Toward the end of Book III Plato introduces the famous "noble lie". Most commentators have a negative view of it, taking it to be an evidence of Plato's disregard for the political rights of ordinary people. However, a charitable reading of Plato's treatment of different types of individuals might yield more positive account of what he proposes. That there are natural differences between people is central to his moral psychology. On his view, people have different inclinations and talents on the basis of which they are assigned social and economic roles. The metaphor of metals indicates that these inclinations and talents are innate. What type a person is does not depend, necessarily, on the nature of one's parents, for, in rare

cases, an offspring of a reasoning (philosophical) type might have the nature possessed by a spirited or a producing type. It is only after having been tested in childhood that type differentiation can be made. One might call this a form of meritocratic egalitarianism.<sup>60</sup> Also, in order for the tests to be meaningful those being tested need to have had some prior physical training and some exposure to music and poetry. It is probable that these tests are to be taken at around age seven.

Book III concludes by declaring that the guardians should have no private property. By contrast, producers could have private property within limit. There is every reason to think that at this stage Plato envisioned the life of ordinary citizens as happy and self-contained even in a “luxurious” city, provided that they accepted the rule of those who had talent for ruling it. But it is in Book IV that he gives a more detailed account of the evils of social meddling and of the rewards of avoiding it.

In Books II and III it is assumed that there are three basic functions that any well constituted city must fulfil, and that there are three basic types of individuals best suited for these functions. It is reasonable to think that in a city where the three functions are clearly separated, and where the three types of individuals perform those, and only those, functions which they are best suited for, will be a just city. And, this is what Book IV will seek to establish.

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<sup>60</sup> ) As I note elsewhere, Plato rules out the possibility that someone might change its nature during the course of its life.

Having established that injustice in the city is "meddling and exchange between the three established orders"<sup>61</sup> (434bc), and that justice is "doing one's own job by the money making, auxiliary, and guardian group, when each group is performing its own task"<sup>62</sup> (434c). Socrates says the following:

Do not let us, I said, take this as quite final yet. If we find that this quality, when existing in each individual man, is agreed there too to be justice, then we can assent to this - for what can we say - but if not, we must look for something else. (434d)

What Socrates says immediately after indicates that Plato had some reservations about the approach taken in Books II and III. The second sentence above is conditional, i.e. the possibility is left open that justice in the individual does not mean "performing its own task". In that case, we

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<sup>61</sup> ) There is an ambiguity here, the solution of which will be crucial to my main argument about Plato's political ethics. What are the three established orders? Are they the three different functions? Are they the three different groups best suited for these functions, or, are they the three different types of individuals who make up these three groups? To anticipate, my short answer is that it is more important for the justice of a city that the three functions (economic; military and administrative; and deliberative/judging) not be confused, and that the three groups performing these functions not "meddle" with each other, than it is for individuals to find themselves performing specific trades not perfectly suited to their capacities and inclinations.

<sup>62</sup> ) Some commentators (Vlastos, 1978) want to foist on Plato the view that justice is each individual's doing its own task, in the strict sense that, for example, a cobbler may not be anything else but a cobbler because cobbling is properly its own function. However, Plato insists on a weaker form of segregation. First, he is, as this passage indicates, more interested in separation according to basic civic functions. Second, what he insists upon is that "each man does one thing which is congenial to him" (370c), and that no man have more than one occupation "at once" (397e), which leaves open the possibility that an individual does different things at different times of his life.



might ask, where could one look "for something else"? and what could that be? Socrates continues:

For the present, let us complete that examination which we thought we should make, that if we tried to observe justice in something larger which contains it, this would make it easier to observe it in the individual. We thought that this larger thing was a city, and so we established the best city we could, knowing well that justice would be present in the good city (434d).

This passage reintroduces another aspect of the "method" for discovering individual justice mentioned earlier: find a city that is "completely good", and since it is "good", it will have all the virtues including: wisdom, bravery, moderation, and justice. Having found one of the virtues, we can search for the others. In this way we can discover justice by a process of elimination (427c). However, not knowing the result Plato wishes to reach by this method, it is not clear how this particular method will reach it. In order for the method to work, several assumptions have to be accepted. First, that it is easier to find the other virtues than it is to find justice. Second, that the three previous virtues are correlated directly with the three civic functions, and with the groups performing them. Third, it must be assumed that the last virtue, justice, not yet found, must be correlated with a "second order" civic function, namely the way in which these functions can harmonize with one another. But, in order to make this last assumption, we must already believe that justice is a kind of harmonization. And, the trouble is that this is precisely what Plato needs to

prove. So, once again, we have a profound insight into the nature of civic justice, that it is a form of inner harmony, but the argument we are given in favour of it is not very convincing.<sup>63</sup>

Also, if the analogy of the city is to be applied strictly, we should first find the best individual, then, assuming that individual and civic virtues are the same, we could discover individual justice by the same process of elimination. But, instead, Socrates suggests, not without some hesitation,<sup>64</sup> that since: It [justice] has now appeared to us there [i.e. in the city], so let us now transfer it to the individual, and if it corresponds all will be well (434e).

Notwithstanding his hesitation, Socrates asserts that since a "name" applies to a thing univocally whether it is big or small, justice must mean the same whether it is applied to an individual and to a city: "So the just man and the just city will be no different but alike as regards the very form of justice" (435b). This, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, is unconvincing, for, it begs the question, it assumed the identity in nature

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<sup>63</sup> ) Socrates' starting with the virtue of wisdom in the city, possessed by its rulers, anticipates associating justice with the rule of reason.

<sup>64</sup> ) Socrates' hesitation is caused by his suspicion that justice may be something different in the individual. And if that turns out to be the case - we get very little idea of how and why it might turn out to be the case - "we must go back to the city and examine this new notion of justice. By thus comparing and testing the two, we might make justice light up like fire from the rubbing of fire sticks" (434e-435a). What does Plato have in mind here? Does he, at any point, perform this experiment? Is he referring to this (thought) experiment when, a few paragraphs later, he makes a mysterious reference to "another longer and fuller way" (435d)?

between individuals and cities. So, instead of just assuming it, Plato needs to argue for the identity. And this he does by an argument which is also question begging. He goes on:

Now the city was thought to be just when the three different kinds of men within it each performed their own task, and it was moderate and brave and wise because of some other qualities and attitudes of the same groups

True.

And we shall therefore deem it right, my friend, that the individual has the same parts in his soul, and the same qualities in those parts will correctly be given the same names.

That must be so. Once again, my good man, I said, we have come upon an easy enquiry whether the soul has these three parts or not (435c).

After saying this, once again, Socrates expresses reservations about the adequacy of this "easy enquiry".<sup>65</sup> However, urged by Glaucon, he goes on:

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<sup>65</sup> ) He notes that, "we shall not attain any precise answer by following our present methods. There is another longer and fuller way which leads to such an answer". It remains to be seen a) what exactly the question is which requires a "precise answer". Is it the question about the nature of justice? or is it the question whether the soul of individuals has the same parts as the city? At 441c Socrates concludes his argument for the tripartite division of the soul by the following comment: 'We have now made our difficult way through a sea of argument to reach this point, and we have fairly agreed that the same kinds of parts, and the same number of parts, exist in the soul of each individual as in our city' (441c3). Now, this is puzzling. For one, it implies that starting with 436a the discussion has left behind the "present (easy) method", and has already embarked upon the "longer and fuller way". Also, it suggests that the argument from the analogy with the city was not absolutely necessary. All Socrates needed to say (which he does simply assert without argument, anyway) was that corresponding to the three types of individuals there are three parts in the soul. For, the argument that the soul is structured politically can be made - is made - independently of the political structure of the city, and of the virtues it

Well, then, I said, we are surely compelled to agree that each of us has within himself the same parts and characteristics as the city? Where else would they come from? It would be ridiculous for anyone to think that spiritedness [the love of learning, and the love of money] has not come to be in the city from individuals who are held to possess it... (435e).

This argument is pointless. For, if the city has the parts that it has because the individuals constituting it have it, then what is the point in looking to the city for discovering individual justice? Since justice in the city is based on the right distribution of the characters that it contains, and since these characters are determined by the structure of the dispositions within their soul, one might just as well begin the search for justice in individuals by the consideration of individual characters and their dispositions. This is one part of Williams' criticism of the city soul analogy, the other is that the rule applying to parts of the city when applied to parts of the souls leads to an

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might have. I shall address the question of the "longer way" at the time when I discuss the connection between the early books and Books VI and VII.

absurdity, an infinite regress.<sup>66</sup> Williams' is a serious critique of the analogy, one that he shares with Annas (Annas 1981, p. 302), for, it does seem that the city/soul analogy invites treating the souls as having parts which, in turn, leads to treating those parts as if they were fully fledged individual subjects themselves. One way of avoiding the so called "homonculi" problem, without abandoning the city/soul analogy, would be to abandon the terminology of "parts" and to replace it by the terminology of "functions", "drives" and "dispositions". In fact, the tripartite division of the soul could be maintained on its own, without the analogy. The relation

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<sup>66</sup> ) According to Williams (Williams,1973, p.199), the city soul analogy seems "to help Plato to have it both ways". Namely, in order to avoid the absurdity of positing an "extra little logisticon of its own" within the appetitive part of the soul so that it could "harken" to the logisticon part in a just soul, one must say that appetites are weakened, kept in their place, by reason. However, going back to the city following the analogy, from the description of the individual soul, Williams continues, results in the totally logisticon rulers holding down, with the help of a totally thymetic military class, a weakened and oppressed epithymetic class. But this way of avoiding the original absurdity prevents Plato from claiming that there is a harmony, a co-operation, between appetite and reason. In short, according to Williams, Plato is wavering between two conflicting views of the relation between reason and appetite with the help of the city/soul analogy. In my view, there are two reasons for what appears Plato's having it both ways. He is troublingly vague about the "third class", calling it: "appetitive", "producer's "craftsmen" "money makers" wage earners" and "manual workers". It is likely that he shared the general contempt for *banausic* individuals. Also, Plato does not make a clear distinction between what I call "dominance" and "rule". In fact, Williams is not clear about the distinction either.

between soul and city might also be seen as a causal one.<sup>67</sup> As I have suggested earlier, the most important aspect of the analogy is the fact that on the model of the city the soul can be seen as a structure in dominance, consisting of three separate but interrelated parts. So, while Williams is justified in his criticism of what is said in [435de] this criticism does not undermine the usefulness of proposing the city as the analogue for the soul.<sup>68</sup>

So far, we have reached the following results: We are told that in all (existing) cities there are three essential functions: economic (producing/reproducing wealth); defensive (defence/policing/administration); and deliberative. We are also told that there are three types of individuals with three different capacities and inclinations: the "desiring", those who are capable of producing wealth and

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<sup>67</sup> ) As I show in what follows, tracing the genealogy of cities along with the genealogy of human needs one might find an interconnection between them. Human needs and their satisfaction might cause different functions, and groups performing them, emerging within a city. In this context it is worth mentioning Jonathan Lear's suggestion, (Lear, 1992), about the relation between civic and individual traits. He sees it as "a dynamic account account of the psychological transaction between.... a person's inner life and his cultural environment". He sees guardians playing a crucial role in this process of "internalization" and "externalization". My view, by contrast, puts emphasis on the role of the material production of the means of existence. In other words, while I consider the psychological dynamic essential I see the material dynamic more fundamental.

<sup>68</sup> ) There are two responses to Williams' argument. The first is (Lear 1992) which proposes that the characteristics of cities and souls are in a reciprocal causal relation. He calls them "externalization" and "internalization". But as Ferrari suggests (Ferrari 2005, p. 51-2), in this way Lear does not present a significant improvement on the position presented at [435de]. Ferrari, by contrast, rejects the causal interpretation, proposing instead that the analogy be construed simply as a "proportional hierarchical metaphor". In this, he comes close to seeing the analogy in terms of what I call "structure in dominance".

who enjoy the material benefits deriving from it; the "spirited", those who are steadfast in their defence of the city and its traditions; and the "reasonable", those who love learning, are capable to deliberate "about the city as a whole" (428d), and are, in addition, gifted educators. Also, we are told that, at least in the "completely good" city we can expect the spirited to be courageous, the reasonable to be wise, and the desiring to be moderate. Finally, we are told that a well constituted city is just, because in it the three essential functions are performed by the three distinct groups made up of the three types of human beings (427e-432b). With certain qualifications, the politics and psychology presupposed by this view is plausible.

However, before explaining in greater detail what I take to be Plato's "politics of the soul" let me conclude this discussion of the merits of the Platonic method of starting with the enquiry into justice in the city. First, already in Book I it is suggested by the reference to cities and to bands of robbers that there is a kind of justice which even the most unjust cannot do without. This has the effect of shifting attention away from justice as a

feature of "external actions", to justice as a form of inner co-operation.<sup>69</sup> Second, while Plato's argument for the shift from justice in the city to justice in the individual is not very convincing - and might even be considered question begging -, the political parallel between the city and the soul is very fruitful. The idea that different civic functions are best kept apart, and that they are best performed by groups of individuals most suited for them, has a fair amount of plausibility. Also, the idea that there are three basic human types in whom one of three different character traits - traits that all humans possess to varying degrees - dominates, is a sound starting point for a political psychology.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> ) It is significant that near the end of Book IV Socrates admits that the primary sense of justice does not lie in a man's external actions, but in the way he is within himself: that he is really concerned with himself and his inner parts, he does not allow each part of himself to perform the work of another, or the sections of his soul to meddle with one another, he orders what are in the true sense of the word his own affairs well; he is master of himself, puts things in order, is his own friend, harmonizes the three parts like the limiting notes of a musical scale, the high, the low, and the middle, and any others there may be between. He binds them together, and himself from a plurality becomes a unity (443cd). Immediately following this passage, he suggests that an individual who is just in this "Platonic" way (I have in mind D. Sachs thought provoking article to which I shall turn at the end of my next chapter) will also be just in his "external" actions. But, why that is so, will require a bit more argument. It is also significant that Plato does not think that whether it is more profitable to be just than unjust is not yet established by the end of Book IV (444e).

<sup>70</sup> ) in the following chapter I shall attempt a reconstruction and defence of Plato's political ethics. My defence of Plato will consist in: a) making a fairly sharp distinction between the politics of Books I to IV and VIII to IX on the one hand, and the politics of Books VI and VII on the other and, b) arguing that in terms of the "factual" knowledge available to Plato about politics and psychology, his political philosophy is much more plausible than it is commonly taken to be.



In sum, there is a merit to the analogy between cities and individuals, even if Plato's argument from the city to the individual appears circular. One may ask: "why is the analogy convincing?" The answer to this question might also absolve Plato's argument from a vicious circularity. What makes it plausible, we might ask, to correlate the three functions within a city with the three aspects of the human soul? How, in other words, does the economic function correlate with appetite, the executive with spiritedness, and the legislative with reason?

On the basis of what Plato says about the nature of humans, one could make the following hypothesis: Human individuals have basic appetitive (economic) needs. In order to satisfy these needs they need to engage in producing the means of satisfying them. Most of them will do just that. However, having produced the means of satisfying these needs their consumption needs to be restrained, for, appetites are inherently *pleonexic*. Also, they and what they produce, need to be protected against the attack from enemies. This requires a defensive apparatus staffed by courageous (spirited) individuals. As a human community<sup>71</sup> gets more complex it needs to rely on individuals who have good judgment about what and how much needs to be produced and consumed. Good judgment is also needed to restrain the defensive element from becoming over aggressive.

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<sup>71</sup> ) What distinguishes a human community as opposed to an animal community is its capacity to judge and to deliberate.

The above account of the joint evolution of civic functions and human needs and dispositions gives support to seeing them as being interconnected. What it does not show is that the political structure of the city and the psychological structure of the soul are identical. But, one may suppose that in the process of fulfilling civic functions, different individuals with different dispositions and talents would emerge; and over time these qualities would get entrenched, creating different types of people who would be most suitable for those functions. So, if this hypothesis is accepted, there would be no need to explain how structures of the city are reflected in the structure of human souls by invoking ethnic stereotypes, as does Plato at [443e].

The problem with Plato's argument is that, by failing to make a clear distinction between civic functions and social groups he is lead to an uncritical shift from individual virtues to civic virtues when he promised to explain the former by the latter. Even so, he could avoid arguing in a vicious circle by invoking the distinction between the order of knowledge and the order of reality. He could say that, even though the civic functions are ultimately determined by the make up and specific needs of individual citizens, we can only come to know the way individual souls are constituted by first examining the way cities are constituted. More specifically, he could argue that, even though we might know that individuals are constituted by appetite, spiritedness, and reason, we would have to look to the city in order to discover how a configuration of these

aspects can result in human justice. For example, we might look to how in a just city a wise ruler rules, in order to find out how in a just individual reason rules.

Plato did not give the above justification for starting with justice in the city. However, it is consistent with what he says in Books I to IV. Still, the important question is whether Plato's theory of justice merits serious consideration. My answer to this question is an emphatic "yes!". Making a case for the merits of his theory of justice will require a more detailed examination of Book IV of the Republic - a task to which I shall turn in a subsequent chapter.

# On Plato's Defense of Justice

More than half century ago, David Sachs argued (Vlastos, 1971)<sup>72</sup> that Plato has committed a fallacy in his *Republic*: the fallacy of irrelevance. In his view, while Plato can show that those whose souls possess inner harmony are happier than those whose souls do not, but that is irrelevant to the question whether those who do not commit acts of injustice, understood in the ordinary sense, are happier than those who do.

The ordinary conception of **individual**<sup>73</sup> justice is restricted to the way individuals relate to one another: respecting one another, and refraining from taking advantage of one another. If justice is understood this way, it is difficult to see what it has to do with simply having a harmonious soul. For, while it might be argued that those individuals whose souls is in harmony are not likely to commit acts of grave injustice, they might, in order to maintain that harmony, commit some minor unjust actions. In other words, it is problematic whether one can reduce the question of the quality of actions to the question of whether the agent performing them has its soul in harmony. Yet, according to Sachs, this is what Socrates needs to prove in order to meet Glaucon and Adeimantus' challenge. He presents

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<sup>72</sup> ) "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*" in G. Vlastos (Ed.) *Plato: a Collection of Critical Essays* II, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1971. Originally published in 1963.

<sup>73</sup> ) Sachs does not raise the question whether a city's being just or unjust **internally** contributes to the likelihood of individuals leading a just or unjust life.

two arguments against Plato. First, Plato does not establish that those who are just in his sense are also just in the ordinary sense. Second, because he fails to do this, Plato does not meet the challenge of Socrates' interlocutors. Thus, Plato fails to prove that those who are just in the ordinary sense are happier than those who are not.

Sachs' criticism raises a number of questions. The first is whether the ordinary conception of justice, applying to the way individuals act in relation to one another, is reducible to the question of the harmony within the soul of individuals. This is basically the Stoic view, and it is possible that Plato also held a version of that view. Sachs is right in claiming that if Plato held that view he should have given a better argument for it. In my view, a case could be made for there being a causal connection between ways of acting and ways of being, but not for a logical connection between them. Second, from this follows the question of what, precisely, Plato seeks to prove. At times he suggests that one needs to define what justice is before deciding whether it is a kind of virtue or a kind of vice. [354b3] But, at other times he collapses the two questions: a) what justice and injustice are?, and b) what are their respective benefits? [368c3]. The suggestion has been made that these two questions are inseparable, and it may be that Plato also held that view, which may be the reason for his ambivalence about which of the two questions was more important. Third, at the end of his article (Vlastos, p.50-51), Sachs considers the possibility that by "what he took to be permissible exceptions to moral rules... led Plato to –

or confirmed him in – the view that rules of conduct do not constitute anything essential to morality or justice”. If Sachs’ speculation about what motivated Plato to emphasize an agent centred view over an act centred one is correct, it might also explain why Plato felt that it was natural to collapse the two questions: a) and b).<sup>74</sup>

In modern discussions, especially among continental philosophers, it is customary to make a distinction between ethics and morality, the first having to do with what is a good life and the second with what ones’ obligations are. Followers of Nietzsche<sup>75</sup> emphasize ethics over morality, and those who follow Kant do the reverse.<sup>76</sup> Others, being more cautious, hold that the good life cannot preclude following some rules of conduct. In their view, what makes for a good life must include respect for others. (See, for example Comte-Sponville 1988.) In my view, Plato was ambivalent about this question. Many of his comments suggest that he thought that

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<sup>74</sup> ) Cephalus’ suggestion that justice is to refrain from cheating and from deceiving someone is sound. The problem is, as Socrates argues, that it does not amount to an adequate definition. So, one possible motivation Plato may have had is his view that no action centred definition of justice can be adequate, but that an agent centred one can be. If this hypothesis is accepted, then justice, as defined in Book IV, is the last word on the matter, making the search for the “Form” of justice in Book VI redundant.

<sup>75</sup> ) Unlike the Stoics, Nietzsche and his followers do not consider morality to follow from ethics, they simply dismiss the moral perspective on life as slavish. (See, for example Nietzsche, 2003)

<sup>76</sup> ) In my view, Kant was the first to make the clear distinction between pure morality (deontology) and ethics (eudaimonianism), arguing that morality has nothing to do with happiness. In other words, he was the first to give a rigorous definition of what it is to be moral. Hegel, in contrast to Kant considers “ethical life” a higher development of morality. (See Kant, 1959 and Hegel, 1971.)

while being moral is desirable (following rules of conduct) it cannot simply be reduced to ethics (leading a happy life). In other words, contrarily to the Stoics, he did not think that leading a good life logically implied acting justly, though he believed that there was a real connection between them. A clear example of this is at the end of Book IV. [442d6-443b3] Having argued that those individuals whose soul is in harmony are happy, he goes on to say that they will not commit acts commonly thought to be unjust. This is so, according to Socrates, because justice is nothing other than “this power, the one that produces men and cities of the sort we’ve described” [443b3], echoing the reference to the soul’s inner power Glaucon [358b5] and Adeimantus [366e4 and 367b3] made at the beginning of Book II.<sup>77</sup>

Speaking of justice and injustice as inner powers indicates that from the beginning Plato thought of justice and injustice, whatever else they might be, as internal attributes of the soul.<sup>78</sup> In Books II-IV three conceptions of justice are introduced, the first is justice in, and of, cities. A city is just if three of its basic functions: economic, defensive and legislative are separated from one another. The second conception refers to the civic justice of individuals. Individuals possess civic justice only if they perform those tasks, and only those tasks, for which they are qualified. In other

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<sup>77</sup> ) It is significant that both the two brothers and Socrates refer to justice as a “**power**” within the souls.

<sup>78</sup> ) I have already suggested that even at the end of Book I, by referring to cities and bands of robbers, Plato opened the door to approaching justice as an internal feature complex totality.

words, if they do not meddle with the tasks they are not qualified for. The third conception refers to the inner structure of individual souls. On the analogy of the city, the soul, too, can be said to be just or unjust depending on how its three parts: appetite, spirit and reason, avoid meddling and act in harmony with one another.

None of this proves, as Sachs thinks Plato should, that individual justice understood the third way, is logically equivalent to the way it is understood ordinarily. But, Sachs' criticism would apply only if logical equivalence was Plato's criterion for the relation between being just and acting justly.<sup>79</sup> It is generally agreed that Plato's definition of justice is most fully articulated in Book IV, and that his fullest answer to the question whether the just are happier than the unjust is provided in Book IX. It is in the latter book that Plato comes back, also, to the subject of which of the three types of individuals, appetitive, spirited and reasoning, are more likely to be just than the others. Sachs focuses on the question of what is meant ordinarily to be just or unjust, but he pays no attention to the question of what it means ordinarily to be happy. However, in most of the early books of the *Republic* Socrates' interlocutors assume that having a good life means having plenty material goods, having an advantage over others and to have unrestrained political power. By contrast, for Plato, the good life means

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<sup>79</sup> ) The question is whether Plato is redefining the ordinary conception of justice or he is pointing to a deeper aspect of it.



something quite different. His conception of the good life is inseparable from moral considerations.

Take, for example, the case of Gyges. Those who take the good life to be having unlimited material wealth, and having unrestrained access to pleasures, and, also believe that for attaining those goals one needs to be unjust; for those individuals it would be reasonable to be unjust. But those who do not consider material wealth and bodily pleasures as essential to the good life would not be inclined to commit unjust actions in order to attain those goals. What is assumed by Glaucon and Adeimantus' challenge is that acting justly must be shown to be beneficial in this world, in the world that they are familiar with. However, there are indications that Plato did not think that being just was possible, either in his sense or in the ordinary sense for most people in an unjust world, such as the one that existed in his time. He believed that a certain amount of justice within the city is necessary for achieving individual justice.<sup>80</sup>

At the end of Book IX, [592c] which I take to be the effective conclusion of the *Republic*, Socrates raises the possibility that a person of understanding will always cultivate the harmony of his body for the sake of the consonance in his soul [591a]. Properly understood, his final exchange

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<sup>80</sup> ) It is clear that neither Socrates nor his interlocutors believe that it is desirable, or even possible, to be conventionally just in a completely unjust world. But, while it is difficult for most people to be Platonically just in an unjust world, some might achieve Platonic justice, inner harmony, within their souls in a world that is not just. [443c] and [592c] suggest this.

with Glaucon sheds light on who the intended audience of the *Republic* really is. The audience, as the two brothers suggest at the beginning of Book II, are individuals like them: more or less decent individuals, having some aspiration for political power and, in addition, having a love of learning through intelligent discussion. The assumption, as I suggested, is that while they are citizens of a relatively unjust city they need to put their souls in order, and, at the same time hope to make their city more just. In other words, the best one can hope for is that men of understanding will bring as much harmony into their own souls as it is possible, given their circumstances. And, by having done so, and acting as if they were already citizens of that just world, they can search for others who will join them in achieving their goal.

At this point one may ask what the preceding discussion has to do with Plato's defense of justice. Is it a defense of justice in the ordinary sense, that is, following rules laid down by convention? There are passages in the *Republic* indicating that Plato viewed **acting** justly, in the ordinary sense, to be desirable. But, he also believed that **being** just is ethically more fundamental than acting justly. His main contribution to the subject of morality is the claim that being just means having harmony within one's soul. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that Plato did not have the clear distinction between what since Kant and Hegel has come to be known as "morality" and "ethics". For this reason, Sachs is justified in his objection that Plato did not pay sufficient attention to the question of how acting

justly benefits an agent. At the same time, Sachs' criticism is not wholly satisfactory, for, he does not question what Plato's interlocutors meant by benefiting from one's actions. If benefiting, and, therefore, being happy, is not restricted to having material goods and pleasures in excess, and to dominating others, one might have a different view about the benefits of acting unjustly. Yet, it is notable that neither does Plato explore in any detail the relation between acting unjustly and what are commonly held to be its benefits.<sup>81</sup>

In sum, Plato's defense of justice consists in showing that being just, having a proper balance within one's soul, is superior to being unjust, namely, not having a balanced soul. Sachs' worry is that having a balanced soul may not entail acting justly. He is right. It is possible to have a balanced soul and still act unjustly. In other words, acting unjustly may benefit a person regardless whether its soul is in harmony or not. Consequently, Socrates' defence of justice must allow for occasional, minor, acts of injustice: he must allow that in all but the most exceptional circumstances, namely, living in a perfectly just city, having a balanced soul requires occasional violation of what are conventionally accepted norms of

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<sup>81</sup> ) In Book IX Plato argues that being unjust results in an inferior, more miserable, life than being just. Still, he lists the advantages or disadvantages associated with one or the other life in traditional terms. For example, a tyrannical individual is said to be a slave "full of fear, convulsions, and pain throughout his life" [579dc]. What Plato does not do, even in describing the disadvantages of injustice compared to justice, is to spell out clearly difference between benefits looked at from the ordinary point of view and from the point of view of someone who values the Platonic life. All he says is that those who are following reason are more reliable judges of what pleasure consists of.

just actions. In fairness to Sachs, it has to be admitted that Socrates does not explore the question of how far conventional norms of less than perfectly just cities may need to be violated in order to achieve harmony in one's soul. His emphasis is on extreme cases [443a] such as temple robbery, theft and the betrayal of friends.<sup>82</sup> In those cases the harmony of one's soul would surely be undermined. How, then, could a person committing grave injustices be always better off than one who does not? Socrates' answer to this question is in Book IX where he compares the lives of the completely just and the completely unjust. That answer given there may satisfy Glaucon and Adeimantus, but it has misled many interpreters of the *Republic* into thinking that only philosophers, the completely just, are just. My essay is an attempt to block that inference.

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<sup>82</sup> ) On my first visit to Hungary in 1978 I was surprised by how many decent people thought that it was honourable to commit acts of injustice against the (totalitarian) regime in power.

# Plato's Politics of the Soul

My my main objective in this study is to propose an interpretation of the *Republic* as a conservative, yet humanist, text. In order to do this, I make a number of assumptions. First, I assume that there is a difference in perspective between the early and the middle books. Second, I assume that there is a tacit distinction in the early books between an individual's specific nature, its innate characteristic, and its virtue or vice, depending on what part of its soul rules it. On a number of occasions (435b, 441c, 580e) Plato declares that all human beings have three parts (drives, inclinations) within their souls to different degrees. In other words, a person may naturally be an appetitive type but still have the faculties of spiritedness and reason within it. As a result, under the right conditions, an individual could be ruled by its reason even if it is naturally weaker than its other parts.

The above distinction could be marked by the terms: "predominance" (or "preeminence") and "rule".<sup>83</sup> Given this distinction, one might say that regardless of which part (characteristic, inclination, drive etc.) is in dominance within an individual, its reason may rule it. For example, an

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<sup>83</sup> ) There is no clear distinction in English between the use of "dominates" and "rules". But, in my view, a person's nature is dominant (innate), while its virtue is determined by what part of its soul rules it. The latter is a matter of experience, habits and education.

appetitive type of person may, or may not, be ruled by its reason and, as a result, it may, or may not, be just.<sup>84</sup> This reading is controversial because most interpreters of the *Republic* maintain that, according to Plato, only philosophers can be just. But, even if one disregards the middle books where justice is not discussed seriously, one can find passages which collapse the distinction between the nature of individuals and what part of their soul rules it. These passages can be found, mostly in Book IX. However, the strongest support for my interpretation can be found in Books III and IV.<sup>85</sup> What, then, is Plato's conservative humanism?

Plato holds that there are natural, innate, differences between human beings. This is his conservatism.<sup>86</sup> He also holds that all human beings could lead happy lives, fulfilling their desires and living in accordance with their natural capacities, provided they are capable of moderating their own nature: not meddling in areas outside their competence. This is his

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<sup>84</sup> ) At [442a] after having declared that that it is appropriate for the rational part to rule. He goes on to say that it should educate and govern the appetitive part "which is the largest part in **each** person's soul". This puts appetite in a special position. It is different from being dominant, reason or spirit could also be dominant, it does not necessarily rule in a soul but it is the largest and "strongest" [580d] in it.

<sup>85</sup> ) [586b] (of Book IX!) also implies that, if they follow knowledge and argument, any individual might attain the highest possible pleasure possible for them.

<sup>86</sup> ) Still, modern critics of Plato's strict class division between those who can accumulate wealth, those who are in charge of the armed forces and those who who make executive decisions, should keep in mind that it has its merits even today. Not all of the third type of citizens, for example, poor workers, would be able to accumulate wealth. But Plato thought that on their own they would not be interested in politics, anyway. Why, he might have asked, do some citizens of Athens need to be pain in order to attend the meetings of the assembly?

humanism. Without outside influence, dominant traits will also rule. Take the three innate traits: appetite, spirit and reason. Since appetite is the most *pleonexic*, it needs other forces to moderate it. Its primary function is the satisfaction of needs necessary for human survival, and as long as it does that within limits, it will benefit the soul as a whole. But it cannot do this without being guided by reason, and constrained by spirit. Guidance and constrain might be direct, but in an ideal situation, where there are wise laws and there is a proper system of education, an individual could place, with the help of its spirit, its own faculty of reason in command. Still, since in an appetitive person's reason is weakest, even after having achieved control, the happiness and justice it brings to the whole person will be fragile. Satisfying the desire for honour and competitive success is also open to uncertainties, only reason, which is self directed and whose main objective is the maintenance of harmony within the whole soul is free from unexpected disruptions.

My reason for calling Plato's conservatism humanistic is because I see in it an attempt to advocate rational freedom: providing the condition for human autonomy. On a charitable reading, the definition of justice as non-meddling has a positive value for individuals, directing them to live

according to their nature, and, thereby, realizing their full potential.<sup>87</sup> Admittedly, his comments about the productive class are not always generous. He does not say so, but it is likely that he saw a difference within the class of producers. According to him, some manual workers, metal-workers, and day labourers, whose contribution to the city does not depend on their mental abilities [371de, 590c], do not have the same independence and dignity as independent farmers and craftsmen might have. On the other hand, his frequent comments to the effect that the producing types are inferior [431c1] follows from his view that those who are by nature appetitive are inferior to those who are by nature rational.

There is no clear distinction made between “dominance” and “rule” in the *Republic*. And, as I suggested earlier, it is hard to find a terminology that would mark the distinction clearly. An added difficulty is that Plato does not use the term “nature” consistently. At [434ab] it is made clear that the difference between natures is based on the psychological characteristics (producers, soldiers and guardians) and not on professional occupation

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<sup>87</sup> ) Apart from [443e3] where Plato suggest that before an individual can “engage in politics” it must harmonize the three parts of himself, it is clear that he does not think that everyone, except reasonable types, should, or would want to, engage in politics. It is difficult to reconcile [443e3] with what he says about civic justice at [434b], where he is firm in his rejection of meddling between the different classes. The best one can say is that Plato has two different issues at in mind: one is the proper ordering of any soul (soul craft), and the other is the proper ordering of the best city (state craft). As I suggest elsewhere, it makes sense to separate civic functions. Or, perhaps he is anticipating Aristotle’s position (Aristotle, 2003, 1281b25) that free citizens, not including manual workers, could have some role in politics, but not in making important decisions “having them take part in the greatest offices” *ibid*.



(cobbler, carpenter). But elsewhere, notably in Book V [454d3], he extends the concept of “nature” to cover the relative aptitude for some trades rather than for others. This extended use is incorrect. By nature, Plato can only mean one of the three psychological types. The main support for my interpretation is in Book IV, especially two passages in it. The first is the one I already invoked. It gives a clear description of the kind of meddling that leads to injustice in the city:

(cobblers and carpenter exchanging their trades would do no harm to the city)  
But suppose that when someone is by nature a craftsman or some other kind of money-maker, is puffed up by wealth or, by having a majority of votes, or by his own strength, or by some other such thing, and attempts to enter the class of soldiers, or one of the unworthy soldiers tries to enter the class of the judges and guardians, and these exchange their tools and honours, or when the same person tries to do all these things at once, then you’ll agree that these exchanges and this sort of meddling bring the city to ruin. [434ab]

The second passage moves from the city to the soul. Unfortunately, he starts by referring to people being cobblers or carpenters “by nature”, adding, fortunately, that the separation of trades is only “a sort of image of justice”. And he continues:

And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn’t with someone’s doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself do the work of another part or allows the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts

himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes on a musical scale - high, low and middle. He binds together those parts and others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one moderate and harmonious. Only then does he act. And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private contracts – in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that over sees such actions. [443cd]

The concluding sentence of this definition of individual justice is highly significant for my interpretation. In it, it is made clear that anyone, not just philosophers can, under favourable conditions, be just. By definition guardians/philosophers do not acquire wealth, nor do they engage in private contracts. Therefore, those who do, cannot be philosophers.<sup>88</sup> This is the interpretation I wish to defend. In my opinion, those who restrict justice only to philosophers put too much weight on the middle books, which as I argue elsewhere are more about epistemology and metaphysics than about ethics and politics.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> ) Earlier, at [425], Plato declares his support for legal minimalism. He is against the proliferation of laws. In his view, the emphasis should be placed on providing a proper education. The context suggests that he has education of the general public in mind. In short, he advocates basic, primary, education for those who will participate in “market business” and “private contracts”. Unfortunately, Plato’s loose references to “producers”, “craftsmen”, “money makers”, “manual workers” “metal workers”, all as appetitive types, creates confusion.

<sup>89</sup> ) The allegory of the cave in Book VII has a certain political resonance. Plato’s reference to the fifteen years, between thirty five and fifty, that prospective rulers need to spend down in the cave is the only suggestion in these books that he is concerned with

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practical politics. But even here he does not explain how their experience in the cave would be applied in their ruling of the city.

Plato's moral and political philosophy is intimately connected to his psychology. Virtues are related to the three parts of the city and of the soul. Courage is the primary virtue of the spirited part, wisdom of the reasoning part and the other two virtues: justice and moderation are virtues of the whole, of the way all three parts are related to one another. Moderation is the consent among the parts about which of them is to rule.<sup>90</sup> Justice is the harmonious working together of the parts under the guidance of reason. How Plato views the relation between virtues is not obvious. For example, he does not say what the relation between wisdom and justice is, nor what it is between justice and moderation?<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> ) Consent by ordinary citizens about who should rule makes sense. But, how a part the soul can **rule** and how it can give **consent** is more problematic. This is a question to which I will return to later.

<sup>91</sup> ) In the *Charmides*, for example, he defines temperance (moderation) the same way he defines justice in the *Republic*.

The main form of meddling to be avoided is meddling with rule.<sup>92</sup> The job of reason is to rule, both in the city and in the soul. And while at [434ab] Socrates warns against one type of person doing the job of another type, real harm comes to the city when the rule of reason is taken over by spirit or appetite.<sup>93</sup> This raises the question as to what it is for reason, or any other part, to rule. In connection with the city this question has a relatively simple answer. A healthy city is ruled by reason when its leaders are the wisest, the best educated among the reasoning type. A somewhat deficient city is ruled by the best trained spirited types. An even more deficient city is ruled by the appetitive majority whose greatest value is material well being and the acquisition of material goods.

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<sup>92</sup> ) Given the central role “meddling” plays in Plato’s definition of justice, it does not get the clarification it deserves. One of the problems is that Plato does not give a satisfactory definition of what the proper job of a part of the city or of the soul might be. He does not, for example, describe what the positive job of the members of the third class might be. If he did, one might ask whether, and how, the higher functions or classes would meddle with it. A third type of citizen would do its job, according to him, by obeying the rulers. And although he refers to possible meddling within the third class, for example, cobblers doing the job of carpenters, he does not think it would seriously undermine justice if they did. [434a] The conclusion one might draw from this is that the kind of meddling that is relevant to the question of justice is meddling between types, classes and functions. Even there the question is left unanswered whether reason could meddle with the lower parts. In my view, meddling is a minor issue. The real issue is harmony within the whole city or soul. And that can be achieved by reason. Justice, then, is dependent on the rule of reason. And that would mean that there is a close connection between them.

<sup>93</sup> ) In [434ab] Plato suggests that meddling occurs when a lower type misappropriates the job of a higher one, he does not explain what the proper, positive, job of an appetitive type is. But, if reason rules by overseeing the interest of the whole, meddling occurs when the rule of reason is undermined.

The two scholars whose views are closest to mine, R. Kraut and G. Klosko, believe that Plato's third, producing, class can also be virtuous, and they also take up the question of what it is for a part of the soul to rule. The difference between their views and mine is due to our different notion of "rule". Kraut begins by distinguishing two conceptions of "rule": normative and non-normative rule. (Kraut, 1973, p. 208 and 211) Non-normative rule is a form of decision making regardless of motives that underlie the individual's decision. Normative rule, by contrast, is motivated by an individual's preference of a value associated with one part of the soul over others. An example of the first would be a spirited person restraining its anger in order to protect its chances of attaining political office. In that case, Kraut declares, reason non-normatively rules spirit while spirit normatively rules reason. [...] My reading of this example is different. Instead of following normative or non-normative **rule** I would distinguish between acting in accordance with one's nature, and acting under the rule of reason. The rule of reason is the exercise of practical wisdom: "exercising foresight on behalf of the whole soul" [442e23]. A person who systematically acts under the rule of reason is just, even if he is not a reasoning or philosophical type.<sup>94</sup> A spirited type of person may occasionally follow the counsel of reason in advancing its particular psychological nature, as it does in the example cited by Kraut. But, such a person would be unjust if it could not, or would not, restrain its will to

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<sup>94</sup> ) I will return Plato's use of "philosophical" in Books II-III and Book IX].

victory and good repute, even if failing to do so would threaten the harmony of its soul.

According to Kraut, the non-normative concept of rule can be found in Book IV and that of normative rule in Books VIII and IX. It is Plato's introduction of the "correspondence" [580d] between parts and pleasures in Book IX that inspires Kraut to invoke the idea that different parts of the soul to having different value preferences. But here one needs to move cautiously. The degenerate constitutions and individuals of Book VIII are all unjust, to different degrees, In none of them does reason rule. So, a timocratic person is unjust not because its nature is the love of victory but because its constitution is ruled by it. The same goes for the appetitive person. Based on his reading of Book IX, Kraut suggests that justice in the producers is achieved by reorienting their value orientation. Since, according to him, they are by nature lovers of physical pleasures with limited intellectual capacity, they need philosopher rulers to instill in them their own values for learning. This is achieved by compelling appetitive persons to devote whatever intelligence they possess to the pursuit of **one** occupation. And since doing their job is the most important aspect of their lives, doing it with devotion will promote their limited reason to the position of ruling their soul, thereby achieving justice. In this way demotic virtue is made possible through the direct intervention of guardians in the lives of ordinary people:

The idea is that since the craftsman does not have the intellectual capacity to develop a love for philosophy, he would, if left to himself, become an appetitive person. However, he has enough intellectual to learn a skilled trade, and the philosopher of an ideal polis exploits this ability by making sure that as a child the craftsman receives the proper training and environment in which his love for his special trade can develop. He thus fosters a rule in the craftsman's soul what rules his own soul. (Kraut, 1973, p.221)

I find Kraut's solution to the problem of how ordinary citizens can be just, relying too much on the middle books. It assumes that only philosopher-kings are truly just and that justice is only the love of learning. It does not give an adequate explanation of the conditions for *demotic* justice. In my view, all individuals, in so far as they have an element of reason, tend to act in the interest of their soul as a whole. In some soul's reason, due to its relative weakness is subjected to the values of stronger parts. That is why it is unjust. But, with the right education in music/poetry, and wise laws, citizens can also develop the capacity for ruling their souls' as a whole. That would be a form of wisdom, and justice, appropriate to their own nature. As far as their production and consumption has wider social and political consequences producers would have to be under some constraint. And if one were to include in the love of learning the desire to see the whole context in which ones needs arise- a form of wisdom appropriate to one's nature- then we could agree with



Kraut that demotic justice would have to involve a love of learning. To the extent that third type citizens are given space to develop in accord with their nature, they become more virtuous.

I also disagree with Kraut's claim that wise rulers, wise laws and proper education do not make producers citizens virtuous. He says that "(the craftsman) continues to have appetitive goals in spite of being ruled by someone else's reason" (Kraut 1973, p.218), suggesting that having appetitive goals, being an appetitive type, implies that one cannot, by oneself, be virtuous.<sup>95</sup> In my view, reasonable craftsmen are ruled by their own reason and are serving their appetitive goals wisely. It is only in exceptional cases that they would require continued outside compulsion. [590c] Pursuing appetitive goals, such as having adequate nutrition, comfortable housing and healthy family life, does not prevent a person from being virtuous, provided it pursues those goals in moderation.

Klosko, who relies on most of Kraut's findings, also argues that ordinary citizens could become just. While Klosko's position is even closer to mine than is Kraut's, I disagree with him, too. He points to, but does not make, the distinction I make between "predominance" and "rule". As does Kraut, he distinguishes between two types of rules: normative and non-normative (instrumental). Also, he notes, but does not solve, a key problem presented by the city/soul analogy (Klosko 1982, p.371), the so called "homunculus"

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<sup>95</sup> ) By becoming virtuous an appetitive person does not change it nature. This is one instance where the distinction between rule and predominance is relevant.

problem.<sup>96</sup> As Kraut, and most interpreters of the *Republic* do, including Ferrari, Williams and Lear, Klosko relies too heavily on Books VIII and IX in discussing rule by reason. More specifically, he relies on these books to explain normative rule by reason. But Book IX complicates, unnecessarily, a solution to that issue presented already in Book IV.

In the end, Klosko comes to the same conclusion as I do. In fact, with a small terminological adjustment our two views would coincide. What Klosko (and Kraut) calls “normative rule” I call “predominance”: the dominant trait of an individual that gives its life a general orientation, a direction for its plan of life. In other words, on my interpretation what is normative for an individual does not necessarily rule it. A normatively appetitive type of individual could be ruled by its reason even if the latter is only a small part of its soul.<sup>97</sup>

Klosko is right in thinking that only philosophers, whose life orientation is toward learning about the truth, could be perfectly virtuous. He is also right in thinking that the value orientation of an individual does not change once its reason takes command. This allows him to claim, correctly, that the virtue of an ordinary person is deficient. (Klosko 1982, p.

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<sup>96</sup> ) The problem is, that parts of the soul are treated as if they were little subject within a larger one.

<sup>97</sup> ) On two occasions [442a5] and [580d9] Socrates notes that the appetitive part is the largest part in each individual’s soul. So, what is predominant cannot be the largest. In that case, all individuals would be appetitive by nature. Predominance by one part is the soul’s (abiding) value orientation.

376) His reasons for claiming that demotic virtue is deficient is that “it stems from self-interested appetitive motives” [*op cit* 279]. Putting it this way gives a concrete and plausible reason for taking the virtue of an appetitive person to be inferior to that of a philosophical (reasoning) type of person. An appetitive, producer, type of person is focused on bringing harmony to his own kind of life. Its wisdom would be prudence. With the guidance of reason such person could lead, for the most part, a happy and virtuous life. While it would refrain from harming them, it is not primarily concerned with helping its fellow citizens, nor is it primarily concerned with making the city as a whole virtuous. That is the primary virtue of guardians, the philosophic types.

The main similarity between Klosko’s views and mine is that he also sees demotic virtue guided by a holistic orientation of reason. This is what he says: “It is this holistic orientation of the individual’s reason, in a soul ruled normatively by a lesser a lesser appetite that strikes me as the essence of demotic virtue” (Klosko, 1982, p. 376). And, he concludes:

To sum up then, the lives of the producers will be lives of balance and moderation. Though they pursue the goals of appetite, they will produce them ‘holistically’ rather than ‘factiously’. It is a necessary condition of their virtue, as well as that of the rulers, that education in *mousike* and *gymnastike* impose order on their souls [441e-42a]. (Klosko, 1982, p.379)

It is significant that Klosko allows for the possibility of educating producers in music and gymnastics. Not all commentators of the *Republic*

would agree.<sup>98</sup> But, there are reasons for claiming that unless they were educated to some degree, producers could not be counted on to obey their rulers. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, it is possible that in the context of the city/soul analogy the lengthy discussion of the education of the guardians in Books II and III, had as a subtext the education of the ruling parts (reason and spirit) of all human souls. That might explain why there is no specific reference there to the education of the producing class in the early books.

Appetites are unstable because they are *pleonexic*, and if there is no constraint on them their attachment to virtue is fragile. However, under the rule of reason, promoted by an adequate educational system, a person would be more stably happy and virtuous because the object associated with its value orientation would be more harmonious, leaving it less vulnerable to external factors. Reason, as I have shown earlier, has the function of self-reflection on the soul as a whole, which means not only that reason strives to comprehend the truth, but it also strives to grasp the truth about itself. And this self directedness provides it with the means to hold onto its virtue.

At the end of Book IV, having discovered the nature of justice and of injustice, [445e] Socrates proposes that, now, they have to examine how

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<sup>98</sup> ) See Hourani (1949) arguing that Plato does not allow for the education of the “third class” in the *Republic*, and Mintz (2016) giving examples of those who think Plato does.

many forms of vice (injustice) there are. In Book VIII, one that could be read as a sequel to Book IV, he goes on to describe four types of cities and four types of individuals which are increasingly more degenerate forms of the best, the one ruled by philosophic reason.<sup>99</sup> It is safe to say that the degenerate forms are distinguished by what rules in them and not by what their innate nature is. As I suggested earlier, injustice is not simply having a timocratic nature, it is, rather, having excessive pride and love of victory in one's soul. Again, the tyrant is the most completely unjust person because its soul is under the rule of its most oppressive desire, and not because its fundamental nature is appetitive. Without saying so explicitly, Plato assumes that cities and individuals of a superior nature might abandon the rule by their particular nature and adopt the rule of the next inferior one. A philosophical type abandons the rule of reason and opts for rule by the love of victory because living under its better nature proves to be unsustainable.<sup>100</sup>

Assuming that Book VIII is about degrees of injustice, Book IX poses a problem, for, that book seem to be focused more on differences in types of

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<sup>99</sup> ) It is difficult to see the point of listing four degenerate type of constitutions and individuals, unless it is meant to illustrate four different degrees of injustice, and how they arise. Namely, how the rule of reason is replaced by the rule of spirit which, in turn, is replaced by three forms of appetite.

<sup>100</sup> ) I find Plato's appeal to external conditions for decline helpful, but he does not put enough emphasis on the fact that both in the case of the city, and of the individual, it is the second-best nature available that takes the position of rule from the no longer available best. In the case of the philosopher's son we need to assume that he, too, like his father, has a philosophical nature whose rule it needs to give up due to external circumstances. In the case of the city the internal factor is more explicit.

persons than on degrees of justice. One source of the problem with Kraut and Klosko's account of demotic justice is that both rely on Book IX for their concept of normative rule. And, in my opinion, the confusion of rule and dominance in Book IX leads them to assimilate what someone is by nature and which of their desires rules. But if Book IX is to be a response to the challenge put in Book II, the focus should be on showing that different degrees of injustice lead to different degrees of unhappiness and not that different kinds of value orientations lead to more or less pleasurable life. But instead of showing that, Book IX shows only that types of individuals who are by nature spirited or appetitive have less pleasure than those who are by nature philosophical.

There is a fundamental distinction Plato does not make explicit in Book IX between the reasonable appetitive person who enjoys his pleasures in moderation and the immoderate one who, without the rule of reason, fails to set limits to its pleasures; and the perfectly just individual whose nature is philosophical and who is ruled by its reason. Such person prefers intellectual to physical activities and, therefore, is the happiest of all. The distinction between being just and having a certain value orientation is also missing from Kraut and Klosko's account of normative and non-normative use of reason. They distinguish two different uses of reason derived from their reading of Book IV, and of Book IX. The first is exemplified by the conflict between different parts of the soul (Book IV) and the other is exemplified by one part infusing the whole soul with its values. However,

they do not give an adequate account of the relation between two different function of reason in its non-normative use.

For example, Klosko claims that only in the philosopher's soul does "instrumental reason looks to the interest of all the soul's part" (Klosko, 1982, p. 373). For this reason, he claims, "philosophers live well while other men live badly". My claim is that non-philosophical persons can also live well if their soul is ruled by reason, holistically.<sup>101</sup> In other words, any individual can be just and happy in the Platonic sense, whether its dominant characteristic is "philosophical" or non-philosophical.<sup>102</sup> In my view, it is conflating rule and value orientation that leads Kraut and Klosko to devalue demotic justice as a form semblance of perfect, philosophical, justice. It is their emphasis on the "proofs" Book IX that leads them to invent the concept of normative rule. But, as I claim in a subsequent chapter, the proofs of Book IX confuse question of justice, rule by reason, and the question of normative orientation corresponding to ones nature. For this reason, it is preferable to discuss the rule of reason only in terms of the way it is described at [443cd] in Book IV. A person whose soul is ruled by appetite is ruled by one part of its soul factiously. But a person whose whose dominant character trait is appetitive, or spirited, could be ruled by

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<sup>101</sup> ) (Klosko, 1988)

<sup>102</sup> ) In my discussion of Book IX in the next chapter, I raise the question whether "philosophical" can be applied to individuals whose dominant trait is appetitive.

its reason holistically. In which case its direct decisions would be in the interest of its whole soul.<sup>103</sup>

Kraut and Klosko are right to think that decisions made by demotic reason are fundamentally prudential ones. But they are wrong to deny that prudential action are not just actions. (Instrumental, Humean?) They seem to ignore that in its fourth century BC context *phronesis* meant both “prudence” and “practical wisdom”.<sup>104</sup> This is also the reason that Klosko considers demotic virtue deficient. Still, in addition what I have already said about prudential reasoning and self-interest, it needs to be said that what Kraut and Klosko call “instrumental reason”, the faculty of resolving conflicts between parts of the soul, is most often part of promoting a

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<sup>103</sup> ) My interpretation is controversial for a number of reasons: First, I do not take Book IX seriously as a “proof” of the view that the just life is more profitable than the unjust life. Nor do I find it enlightening regarding the question which type of individuals lead an unjust and which an unhappy life. Second, I do not attach importance to the resolution of psychological conflicts presented in Book IV. It does not prove that the soul has as many parts as does the city. That there are three basic drives within the soul can be assumed, based on sociological, psychological and economic considerations. Third, I do not think what Kraut and Klosko call “normative rule” is morally relevant. A persons morals are not determined by what type a person is. It is determined by what part of its soul rules it. The type of an individual determines not whether it is virtuous, but how securely it is in having that virtue.

<sup>104</sup> ) Dismissing demotic justice as “deficient” compared to the justice of guardians and of philosophers may be responsible for the commonly held view that only philosophers are just. For example, Julia Annas considers that “As the *Republic* proceeds, Plato in fact loses interest in anyone but the guardians.” (Annas, 1981, p.136) This is true of Books VI and VII, but not of Book IX. Kraut and Klosko’s departure from the commonly held view is that they think that, while all citizens could be just only philosophers could be “truly” just. In my view, even though the justice of ordinary individuals is more fragile and more self-centred than that of philosophers, when they are just they are just exactly in the same sense. (see 443de)



certain plan of life. In other words, even if a decision is between two appetitive choices, it would, normally, impact on one's quality of life.<sup>105</sup>

Earlier in this essay I referred to the so called "homunculus" problem. Taking the relation between city and soul as an analogy of parts makes the problem almost inevitable. Classes, and individuals of the city will have their reason, spirit and appetite, but it is absurd to claim that parts of the soul can be split into the same three parts. Seeing the city as having three different functions: economic, protective and deliberative, and seeing the soul as having three different (non-purposive) drives makes more sense. Reason in the individual is a drive to self-reproduction and self-reflection. It is not an independent agent within a larger agent. Instead, it is like a programme within the soul that does not have a specific goal apart from maintaining the harmony and integrity of the soul.

This chapter argued that all citizens in Plato's city can be just, if they receive some basic education in soul craft. To be just, according to Plato is to avoid meddling among parts of one's soul. This, in my view, is achieved by the holistic rule of reason. Unfortunately, there is no account of how different parts of the soul, would meddle with one another. In the case of

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<sup>105</sup> ) Throughout this chapter I had in mind what David Sachs calls "Platonic justice", the balance within one's soul. This leaves open the question whether being just in the ordinary sense makes one happier than being unjust in the platonic sense. The best answer to that question is the one Plato gives on a number of occasion, as, for example, at [442e-443b]. Namely, that being unjust in the ordinary sense leads to being unjust in the Platonic sense as well.

the city meddling has two versions: a) it is meddling among producers: interchanging their crafts and work tools, b) and more importantly, encroaching on the field of competence of a superior class by an inferior one. Thus, it might be said that meddling in its most important sense is encroaching on the rule of reason by an inferior function of the soul. In the city it would be the rule of the wise, and in the soul it would be the faculty of reasoning.

In order to prove my main thesis, I needed to distinguish between rule and dominance within the soul of individuals. I define dominance as the natural inclination of individuals, their innate nature. I define the rule of reason as the “exercise of foresight on behalf of the whole soul” [441e4].<sup>106</sup> Two commentators, whose views I find attractive, distinguish between normative and non-normative rule by reason. My basic disagreement with them is threefold: I do not share their emphasis on Book IX, I do not consider what they call value orientation as a form of rule. For me, value orientation corresponds to an individual’s basic nature, nor do I place as much emphasis as they do on the virtue of philosophers as a model for demotic virtue.

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<sup>106</sup> ) The question of how the inferior parts can rule the soul is more difficult, especially if these parts are not treated as agents having their own agenda. The best answer I can think of to this question is that the appetites are blind and pleonexic, so if they are uncontrolled they would over run the whole soul. Spirit is, as Plato says, is “in between”. It is partly blind and in itself controllable. But, in its drive to valour it is also self-directed. It rules when its drive to victory or its anger overwhelm both reason and appetite.

# Some Problems with Books VIII and IX

Books VIII and IX of the *Republic* present a number of problems. The end of Book IV, where Socrates promises a discussion of the topics to be covered in the subsequent books (which turn out to be Books VIII and IX), as well as the reference to the middle books as “the digression that brought us here” [543c] at the beginning of Book VIII, suggests that Books VIII and IX should be read as natural continuation of Book IV. Leaving aside the question whether the late books were written before the middle books, there is evidence that their content is independent of them.<sup>107</sup>

At its end, Book IV mentions five different constitutions, the best and four deviant ones. This move is justified by the claim that “there are as many types of soul as there are specific types of political constitution” [445c]. But, this seems to clash with an earlier claim [435e+] that there are three types of cities corresponding to the three parts of the souls. So, where does the idea that there are **five** types of constitutions and five types of souls, come from? The main thesis of Book IV is that there are **three** types of individuals depending on which part of their soul (disposition) is

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<sup>107</sup> ) The reference to joining brides and grooms at the wrong time as a cause of the decline of aristocracy suggests that there is a connection between Book V and Book VIII. However, this explanation for decline here seems weak and was perhaps also a later addition. I will say more about this in the main body of the following chapter.

predominant, and, that there are three types of cities depending on which type of functions and individuals dominate in them.<sup>108</sup> Getting clear on this issue requires a closer look at what is said in Book VIII about the decline from the best to the worse cities and souls.

A close reading of Book VIII invites the question of what relevance that book has to the main theme of the dialogue. Modern readers of Book VIII could find some interesting political insights in it. The main ones being: the account of the emergence of tyranny from populism, and the emergence of democracy from oligarchy.<sup>109</sup> Plato gives an account, also, of the emergence of timocracy from kingship (aristocracy) and the emergence of oligarchy from timocracy. I find no merit in the first account, and little merit in the second. (But I find the description of the decline of the individual soul of a kingly person more persuasive.) In general, Plato could have made a better theoretical case had he focused on the **internal** structural causes of decline. For example, an emphasis on the tension between theoretical and practical constraint within the best regime might have yielded a more satisfactory explanation of its decline than the one Plato gives.

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<sup>108</sup> ) In my earlier chapter, on Book IV, I offer a different account of the relation between types of cities and types of souls, but here Socrates seems to take an other position. Could this represent a different stage in his thinking?

<sup>109</sup> ) As the dialogue assumes, the ideal regime has not yet existed. So, Plato could not have any direct knowledge of its decline. Therefore, he speculates. And although he mentions Sparta and Crete as examples of timocratic regimes, his description of timocracy does not fit them completely. His description of the transformation of timocracy into oligarchy is also somewhat problematic.

Let me begin with what I consider the weakest argument: the decline from kingship to timocracy. It is hard to tell why Plato invoked the absurd number mambo-jumbo to explain the decline. For, he starts with the correct insight that: "it is a simple principle that the cause of change in any constitution is civil war breaking out within the ruling group itself" [545c]. From this he could have gone on to give a more realistic explanation of what those causes might be. It is correct to say that the responsibility for revolt lies with the leaders of the ruling group who are the guardians of the constitution. Plato does imply that the culprit was the rulers' (mis)use of reason (poor calculation): they made errors in calculating the geometrical numbers guiding births. But it would be more realistic to say that wise rulers could turn into unwise ones as a result of taking to an extreme what they are most qualified for, that they become victims to their excessive emphasis on rational calculation. In short, I find Plato's account of decline in terms poor eugenic practice based on esoteric mathematics very unhelpful. So, instead of criticizing it directly, I will give a different account, all along staying close to the spirit of Plato's own conception of justice as non-meddling.

In my chapter on Plato's definition of justice, I indicated that if injustice is a form of meddling (overreaching) which could be committed by any one of the three parts of the soul, including the reasoning part, a reasoning soul could also be unjust. Therefore, it is possible for a reasoning type, indeed for reason itself, to be unjust. In the case of a completely good city this

might happen in the following way: the leaders might overstate the need for rationalizing the administration of the city. They may put too much weight on perfecting it, either by putting too much emphasis on the unity of the city at the expense of keeping up with traditional values, or by instituting measures which would undermine its spirited auxiliaries' sense of honour. In other words, excessive emphasis on reason might result in inner conflict. In that case the military faction might take over power. However, excessive emphasis on maintaining traditional values by the military, and on the need for protecting honour, might require increased amount of wealth. Which would lead to the ascendance of an interest in making money, hence, the increase in power of the money-making, economic, faction.

Initially, the money makers, the most frugal and rational segment of the economic class, would avoid incurring unnecessary expenses and indulging in unnecessary desires. But excessive frugality will lead to its opposite. So, again, over emphasis on what starts out as a noble characteristic, defending the integrity and honour of the city and its traditions, and providing the economic means for achieving it, would bring out its opposite. As Plato himself recognizes, the wealthy, having become tired of their austere way of life will become soft, leading them to indulge in all form of pleasure, and in response to this, the poor, whose desires are, by contrast, frustrated, will overthrow them. This, in turn, would lead to a popular demand for freedom to enjoy, openly, pleasures that decadent oligarchs enjoyed in

secret. And, as these demands of the majority are met, rule would be taken from the few rich by the many poor, giving rise to democracy which Plato sees as the realm of “insatiable desire for freedom” [562bc].

Plato’s account of the emergence of democracy might be seen as a critique of Solon’s reforms. By giving power to the poor, the sixth century law maker also acted in the interest of the rich by curbing their destructive practices which had, in turn, led to the accumulation of excessive wealth. But, for the most part, Plato’s account of the degeneration of oligarchic constitutions is not based on a knowledge of Solon’s reforms. It is more likely motivated by his own theoretical and political biases. Some of these biases have nothing to do with historical fact, others use historical facts only as a basis for speculation. For these reasons, modern readers of Book VIII have mixed reactions to it. They feel that some aspects of it resonates with historical fact and their own experience, but other aspects seem to them no more than speculations based on distortions of ancient Athenian history.

Democracy, as Plato sees it, will be followed by tyranny. For, “excessive action in one direction,” Socrates says, “usually sets up a reaction in the opposite direction” [563e7]. First, the “people” (the workers) “advised by the idle extravagant men” [564b3], will turn against the rich, causing civil

war.<sup>110</sup> The tyrant will emerge, initially, as an appointed champion of the people who he will eventually betray. Once citizens realize that they have been manipulated, it is too late. They have become slaves to a slave whose only power is the one he has over them. The question not addressed at the end of Book VIII is how stable a tyranny can be. One might think that with the help brutal force and clever persuasion a tyrant may stay in power indefinitely. But Plato seems to ignore this possibility. He hints that as a result of the revolt of its bodyguard the tyrant might be replaced by a new one. However, the possibility that it is replaced by an aristocracy, or a democracy cannot be ruled out, for, there are historical examples for the second, and Plato's experiment with Dionysus II indicates that he envisioned the possibility of the first.

In Plato's view, the decline of **individual souls** is meant to be analogous with the decline of the city. The account of the decline of the philosophic type does not fit the analogy perfectly, yet, it is much more realistic than the one given for the decline of the kingly city. The philosophic type will fall prey to the excess of its own virtue. It will disregard aspects of being human beside indulging in activities typical of persons whose main attribute is the love of learning, and participating in reasonable discussion. In short, such person will become less just partly as a

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<sup>110</sup> ) By "drones" Plato seems to have in mind what Marx called the "lumpen proletariat", but it is not clear how the drones can have the kind of influence on politics he wants to ascribe to them. By "people" he means the working class who set up the prospective tyrant. This, too, seems questionable.



result of internal factors. As in his discussion of the city, Plato here, too, emphasizes external causes for the decline of individuals: a nagging wife etc.. Yet, it would have been more consistent with the general spirit of the work to put emphasis on internal causes. For example, it would have been more plausible to show how a reasoning type, having been frustrated in its failure to pay attention to its other inclination, would start to put more weight on self-preservation and honour. Similarly, the spirited type would find that the pursuit of honour, and the preservation of self in a less than perfect world, requires wealth. Hence, it would turn to money making. The money-making, “oligarchic”, type would, in turn, degenerate into a hedonistic, “democratic” type.

Plato’s account of the decline from democratic to tyrannical type in the case of the individual is less convincing than his account of the decline of oligarchic types to democratic ones. Book VIII ends with the description of the wretchedness of the tyrannical man, as a political figure. The issue of the decline of the democratic individual is taken up only at the beginning of Book IX. The account, which should have explained how the soul of the individual is corrupted by the discord of internal factors, starts by invoking external ones: bad company of ‘clever enchanters’ [572e3]. When it comes to internal causes, Plato singles out the powerful effect of the erotic on other desires: “... erotic love lives like a tyrant within him, in complete anarchy and lawlessness as his sole ruler” [574e6]. The fact that intense

erotic desire might tyrannize the soul is plausible. But, it is questionable how an individual so tyrannized could be a successful tyrant.

There are also serious questions regarding Book IX. For example, contrarily to appearances, there is no convincing evidence in it of the major themes of the middle books: the nature of “true” philosophy, of “true” philosophers and of their education. Also, there is no mention of the community of children and women, and there is no mention of philosopher-kings. The point about there not being reference to the philosophers of Books VI and VII might seem controversial because of the frequent use of “philosophy” and “philosophic” in Book IX. Also, the description in it of the completely just individual, the opposite of the tyrannical one as “kingly”, might suggest that the completely just individual is the philosopher-king of Book V.<sup>111</sup>

In order to anticipate the objection that Book IX presupposes the middle books, I want to make two preliminary points about it. The first regards the use of “kingly”. Since Plato calls the best constitution “**kingship**” in Book IV [445d], why would he not call the best individual also “kingly” in Book IX, without presupposing the middle books? A kingly individual could just be one whose soul is ruled, in a secure way, by

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<sup>111</sup> ) Ferrari (Ferrari 2005, p.110-111) notes the difference between the guardians of the earlier books and philosopher kings of Books V-VII. But, he puts emphasis on the “dog-like aggression” of the early guardians, ignoring Plato’s comment [428c8-10] that (complete) guardians must also possess philosophical knowledge, namely, knowledge about the city as a whole.

its reason. And a king, understood that way, would be a completely just individual. But this is a relatively minor point. A more important point concerns the use of “**philosophy**” and “**philosophical**”. Here, too, I believe that the usage of these terms conforms to the way they are used in Books II and III. For example, in Book II [375e-376b] the future guardians are said to be “philosophical” in addition to being spirited; and, philosophy is characterized there, also, as “the love of learning” and “the love of wisdom”. In addition, in Book III [410d] it is said that the ‘the philosophic part of one’s nature is what provides the cultivation’. In sum, there is no reason to think that the use of the terms “king”, “kingly”, “philosophy”, “philosopher” or “philosophical” refers to the Philosopher-Kings of the middle books.

Keeping in mind that the main purpose of Book IX is to give a clear account of the difference between the life of the completely just and the life of the completely unjust, it is natural to identify the completely just with the philosopher, and its life with the philosophic life. Keeping in mind, also, that the guardians of the city, its kings, are a model for the wisdom of a healthy soul, the so called “philosophers” could be seen as the completely just individuals regardless of their being guardians, or kings. As I suggested in a previous chapter, philosophers, as Plato understands them, are the most just because their main characteristic is the love of learning, keeping them less vulnerable to excessive desires of the spirit and to the pleasures corresponding to the inferior parts of the soul. Unlike in Book IV, where

the soul/city analogy is elaborated, [436a] and where the three parts are described as: reasoning, spirited and appetitive, here the reasoning part of the soul is called the “philosophic”. Apart from the misleading use of “philosophical” at this point, there is some resemblance between this description of the soul and the one given in Book IV. Each individual has a reasoning part with which it learns [581b4], and, depending on which part **rules (!)** in their souls there are, Socrates says misleadingly, “three primary kinds of people” [581c3].

But, as I have suggested earlier, I do not think what type a person is depends on which part of its soul rules. I argued that one should distinguish between “**rule**” and “**predominance**”. And, for that reason, I think that what type an individual is, what character it has, depends on which part of its soul is predominant in it, and not on what part rules. This way, I allow that, potentially, every individual type could be just, although not to the same degree. A person in whose soul appetite predominates, the producers of the early books, could be just if its reason rules. Such a person’s being just is fragile and, therefore, vulnerable to decline. Its appetite, which is by nature *pleonexic*, may, on occasion, overrule its reason, rendering its soul unjust.<sup>112</sup> Plato may be forgiven for focusing in Book IX on the reasonable type which, with proper qualifications, could be called

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<sup>112</sup> ) In some cases reason may rule unjustly, as in the case of an individual who is so obsessed by keeping its body thin that it ignores the need for proper nourishment. In such case it would be just for appetite to overrule reason.

“philosophical”. The contrast between the philosophic type and the tyrant does serve to highlight the difference between the most just and the most unjust. Yet, it must not be denied that as there are different degrees of being unjust there are also different degrees of being just.

The “First Proof”, so called, of Book IX argues that, contrarily to appearances, a tyrannical person is a slave. Ruled by its uncontrolled appetite<sup>113</sup> a tyrant is as wretched as is a tyrannical city [576c-577d]. But, not much of significance is added to what has been said already about the wretchedness of individuals whose appetite is not under the control of its reason. (See, for example, 445ab) The emphasis in this proof is on lawless sexual appetite and its genesis. The great lust, as Plato calls it, arises “when other desires buzz around the drone” (erotic love) As Socrates says, “[t]en] this leader of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard”. It is likely that someone obsessed with sex is a platonically unjust, miserable, person. What is not clear is how such a person can achieve the power over others that historically tyrants have had. Toward the end of the first proof Socrates claims that a tyrant of a city is, in fact, a slave lacking in allies and is full of fear. [579de] This is not born out by experience. Real tyrants of cities may be obsessed by having power over others, but they are not necessarily sex

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<sup>113</sup> ) One of the problems with the description of the tyrant in Book IX is that too much emphasis is placed on its appetite. This may be caused by Plato’s peculiar views on sexual appetite. However, a case could be made that an individual may also be a slave to tyrannical passions, for example it may be a prisoner of its desire for honour or to the imposition of its superiority on others.

maniacs. So, one might argue in support of Sachs (Sachs 1963, p.48) that a platonically tyrannical soul does not an ordinary tyrant make. Also, in comparing the tyrannical city and the tyrannical man, Socrates claims that “there is no city more wretched than one ruled by a tyrant”. [576e3] Again, the citizens of such city will have wretched lives, but will the tyrant ruling it be also wretched?

In the second “Proof” Socrates gives a useful account of the different degrees of pleasures enjoyed by different types of individuals. But, as he notes at [581e], the focus of this proof is not about the relative objective value of the lives lead by different types of individuals but on the subjective assessment they make about the merit of the virtues they enjoy. The conclusion Socrates reaches is that since it has more experience, better judgment and is better at arguments, the “philosopher” is best qualified to favour his kind of pleasure. Hence, his pleasure is the most valuable. However, this conclusion should not be used as a way to “prove” that only philosophers, the reasoning types, are, or can be, just. This “proof” is problematic mainly because it collapses two different issues: who is best qualified to judge the merit of its pleasure, and whether pleasure is all there is to happiness.

Throughout this proof, and the following one, Socrates praises the philosophic life, assuming that the life of a philosopher is a just one. A “philosopher” understood in the widest sense, as one who has good

judgment, will be just. Also, understood in a narrow sense as the lover of wisdom and of reasoned discussion, sh/e will be more stably just than those whose souls are dominated (**not ruled**)<sup>114</sup> by their spirit or their appetite. In this narrow sense a true philosopher's life will be more satisfying than that of a tyrant's, or anyone else's, however successful the latter may be in the real world. Regrettably, the previous points are only implied by Plato's text. He does not make them clearly and explicitly.

The third "Proof" ends with the number mambo-jumbo reminiscent of the beginning of Book VIII. It is not the most brilliant insight Plato has left to posterity. But before introduction of the mathematical formula, he does say useful things about the role of reason in the enjoyment of pleasure. The pleasure of those whose soul is ruled by appetite or spirit is not as true and pure as the one's whose soul is ruled by reason. And he notes, quite usefully, that: "those desires of even the money-loving (appetitive) and honour loving (spirited) parts (inclinations) that follow

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<sup>114</sup> ) Let me recall the distinction between **domination** and **rule** I made earlier. In my view, spirited and appetitive type individuals may be just if their soul is ruled by reason. It is strange but not absurd to call individuals ruled by their reason "philosophical", but that is what Socrates seems to do. However there are two other types of philosophers in the *Republic*: the "complete guardians" [414b1] of the third and fourth book, and the philosopher-kings of Books V-VII. In my view, it is not necessary to assume that in Book IX Plato has in mind philosopher-kings when he speaks of "philosophers"

knowledge and argument and pursue with their help, those pleasures that reason approves will attain the truest pleasure possible for them”. (586d6)

This passage is favourable to my interpretation, for, it implies that all types souls could be ruled by reason and, therefore, could be just. In addition, it introduces the question about the value of pleasures of appetites and of spirit. What follows from the idea contained in this passage is that inferior types can also lead happy lives if their soul is ruled by reason, namely, if they are just. As I suggested earlier, unhappiness follows not from what ones nature is. It follows from reason losing control to inferior parts (dispositions, drives) of the soul. Inferior types will, as I also suggested, be less secure in their justice and, hence, in their happiness. Yet, in the context of Book IX, and even in the context of Book IV this point is not made forcefully enough.

Just before concluding Book IX, Plato singles out manual workers whose best part (reason), he says, is naturally weak and, therefore, cannot rule. But he adds that “it is better for **everyone** to be ruled by divine reason, **preferably within himself and his own**, otherwise imposed from without” [590d]. This comment complicates what he said earlier about the producing class. Among producers there are craftsmen and farmers. Some of them work with their hand but some of them do not. Introducing manual workers here, suggests that among the third type of persons there are significant differences: some who are guided (ruled) by



their own reason and some who need to be ruled by others. However, this does not add another type to the three mentioned in the second proof of this book, and in Book IV. It merely introduces a difference within the third type.<sup>115</sup>

Book IX ends with a return to the theme of the early books: How will an **ordinary** person of understanding<sup>116</sup> conduct its life? If he is trained in music and poetry “he will always cultivate the harmony of his body for the sake of the consonance in his soul... (and) also keep order and consonance in his acquisition of money”. [591d] Such person will “look to the constitution within him and guard against disturbing anything in it” [591e].<sup>117</sup> To Glaucon’s objection that such person won’t be willing to take part in politics [592a] Socrates replies that while it may not participate in the politics of his fatherland it might make itself, in thought, the citizen of

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<sup>115</sup> ) One of the more interesting aspects of Book VIII is the differentiation it makes within the “third” type. The notion of “money-maker”, which was not clearly defined in the earlier books (it was used interchangeably with “appetitive”), receives a more plausible account with the introduction of the oligarchic type. But, even aside from the difference between money makers and other craftsmen, with the introduction of wage earners [371de] and manual workers [390c] Plato signals an other empirical difference among the third type. While their soul is structured the same way as is the soul of other craftsmen, because of their occupation their reason will remain undeveloped.

<sup>116</sup> ) It is an important question who Plato means by “persons of understanding”. Is it someone like Glaucon and Adeimantus, or just any of the third type who is curious about the nature of things surrounding him hinted at [443c-e]? While it might be odd to think of third class people would want to engage in politics, (why did ordinary Athenians needed to get pay as an incentive to attend sessions of the assembly?). But it is implied at [443e2] that some might would want to engage in politics.

<sup>117</sup> ) This resonates with a passage from Book IV [443cd] where Socrates claims that true justice is harmonizing the three parts of one’s soul.

the city they have been founding and describing [592ab]. The promise is held out that if sufficient number of citizens look to the city that Socrates and his interlocutors have described in thought, the likelihood of a wise group of persons, such as the guardians whom they have been describing in Book III, would take command of their existing city.

This ending call to mind the question raised in Book V [471c] whether it is possible for the constitution previously described to become a reality. But the question still remains: Which “constitution?” Is it the constitution of Books II-IV? Is it the constitution that includes the community of women and children, or is it the constitution of Books VI and VII? There is no decisive evidence on the basis of which it can be said with absolute certainty which answer the author of of [592] had in mind. Based on internal evidence it could be said that the *Republic’s* political/ethical message, given in its final lines, responds to the original challenge made by the two brothers. Namely, justice is a state of being in which parts of the city and parts of the soul are in harmonious cooperation among themselves. And those who achieve that state of being, will, on the long run, have happy and fulfilled lives.

By way of anticipating Kant’s notion of the “kingdom of ends”, Plato’s answer to the question: “How, more or less decent individuals of understanding could choose to be just in a world that is unjust?”, might be that they should, for the most part, conduct their lives **as if** they lived in a

just world, and, living that way would, in the long run, be beneficial to them. It would allow them to keep keep their soul in harmony with itself, and might also contribute to making their own city a juster one.

In my view, Books VIII and IX have only a limited value. The first offers some insight into the fragility of all constitutional arrangements. The second provides some additional considerations for the superiority of a just life over an unjust one by highlighting how the completely unjust life is miserable and unenviable. But, in neither book does the city/soul analogy turn out to be particularly helpful. For that reason, it is also questionable how one is to reconcile them with the earlier books. Apart from some terminological aspects: the frequent use of “kingly” and “philosophic”, there is no indication that these books might have relied on Books VI and VII. Some doubts could be raised even about their connection to Books IV and V. There is enough said in Books II and III to see the late books as natural sequel to them. And, as Julia Annas has pointed out, the soul/city analogy, to the extent that it is present in in the late books, is more of a hindrance to the arguments in them than a help.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> ) See (Annas 1981, p.305): “The valuable points in Books 8-9 come out with their proper force only when the hampering city-soul parallel is dropped”.

# Republic V: Plato On Women, The Family and Philosophy

At [471c] Glaucon prompts Socrates to go back to a question he set aside earlier [458b4 and 466d6]. The question is: “whether it’s possible for this constitution to come into being and in what way it could come about”. Socrates answers that, “until philosophers rule as kings... that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide... cities will have no rest from evil” [473c7]. This is not a direct, or even satisfactory, answer to the question which is asking not what attributes rulers of the best regime will have to have but how the regime they have been describing so far could come into being<sup>119</sup>. Also, in hindsight, it is not clear which constitution Socrates has in mind. Is it the constitution described in Books II-IV or is it the constitution that has been described in the first two thirds of Book V: the book under discussion here. The way the question is framed at [458e] suggests that the institution of the community of women and of children

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<sup>119</sup> ) Immediately after giving this answer, Socrates takes up the question about the nature of true philosophy. Given that the “complete guardians”, introduced in Book III, [414b1] were described in Book IV as being wise, having good judgment and having knowledge of the whole [428a-d], the question seems redundant: the point that the best city will be ruled by philosophers has already been made. So, it is safe to assume that Socrates’ interest at this point is not in the possibility of the best regime coming into being, but in the question of how to present the true nature of philosophy. I shall return to this issue later.

also requires rule by philosophical kings.<sup>120</sup> At [427e3], in Book IV, Socrates declares that “I think our city, if it has been correctly founded, is completely good”. So, this raises the question whether what is said in the first two thirds of Book V is a description of a still better city, or whether it is just a clarification of the completely good city already presented.

In either case, it is important to find out what motivates Socrates to take up the question of the equality of men and women, and of the community of family. At [424a1], in what seems an aside, Socrates suggests that “reasonable men” will see the desirability of “friends” having wives and children in common. It is this comment that gives Polemarchus and Adeimantus the pretext, at the beginning of Book V, for demanding that Socrates explain to them “the manner in which they are to be held in common” [449c6]. Here, too, Socrates starts by evading the question. Instead of starting with **how** wives and children are held to be in common he starts by arguing that men and women have the same nature and, therefore, they must have the same education and the same opportunity for guardianship.

Leaving aside, for now, the question of what logical relation equality and community have to one another, let me first address the question of what might have motivated Plato to embark on such controversial topics.

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<sup>120</sup> ) It could be argued that from the description of the guardians way of life given at [416d-417] the abolition of the nuclear family would logically follow. I will discuss the logical relation between [416-17] and the so called “second wave” later in this chapter.

One reason, the one I find the most noble, would have to do with the notion of human nature. In Book IV Socrates has established that all human beings have three dispositions, “parts”, to varying degrees in their soul. So, if women are human beings they, too, will have three dispositions one of which would be predominant. The question, then, is whether all women have only one or two of the three dispositions. This is what Plato wants to deny. According to him, there are differences among women just as there are among men, but women are not naturally different from men. There are, in other words, appetitive, spirited and philosophical women. Most women, as most men, have appetitive nature but some of them will be spirited and still fewer of them philosophical. For that reason, women should, if they qualify, be admitted into the ranks of guardians. Plato does not make the case for equal opportunity exactly the way I have just done, but he is committed to it.<sup>121</sup>

Plato was not a feminist. He thought that, as a group, women were weaker, and therefore inferior to men. This may have been true for soldiering, but Plato does not examine the question whether it would also

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<sup>121</sup> ) Plato’s discussion of “nature” here is misleading. In the context of arguing, correctly, that not all differences are natural ones, he uses the example of excelling in different crafts as an indication of possessing different natures. But the difference between being a cobbler or a carpenter, or even a doctor, is no indication of what type a person is. What type a person is is decided by which disposition (part) is predominant in their soul. In other words, it is what type a person is that determines its nature. Learning something easily and remembering what has been learned is a mark of aptitude for a given activity, but it is not a decisive factor in determining whether someone is basically appetitive, spirited or philosophical. And it is those character traits that indicate whether one is, or is not, qualified to be a guardian. [454cd]

be true for governing, nor does he indicate whether some women might be superior to all men, or whether some men are invariably superior to all women. Neither does he examine the question whether women would make up a smaller, or larger, number of guardians. Given the pressure on them to give birth to the greatest number of children, it is likely that fewer of them would be.<sup>122</sup> So, one can dismiss the idea that advocacy for woman's rights, regarding all aspects of their lives, is a strong motivation for Plato's advocacy for equal opportunity for them. Stronger motivations for it are his commitment to social unity and to the production of as many excellent guardians as possible.<sup>123</sup>

There are a number of assumptions Socrates makes indicating that he saw some sort of connection between equal opportunity and the community of family. First, he assumes that the nature of parents is, most of the time, inherited by their children and, second, he assumes that both parents need to have superior nature if their offspring are to be superior. Based on these assumptions, it does follow that marriage between men and women ought not be a private matter but that it should be regulated according to eugenic principles. The state must have some role in deciding which individuals are qualified to form a union; for, it is only the state that

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<sup>122</sup> ) Plato points out, correctly, that females, having the capacity to give birth is no proof that they are different from men [454d7], but he does not consider whether being obliged to give birth frequently would render females less available for civic duties than males.

<sup>123</sup> ) As I shall argue later, his radical eugenic programme, will not serve his intentions.

will be in possession of the knowledge of what it takes to produce the highest possible type of offspring. However, the more important question is whether Socrates totalitarian version of the community of wives and children also follows from the equality of men and women.

All in all, Socrates makes a convincing case for including women among the guardian class. But his programme for the community of wives and children is problematic. The programme is highly oppressive, it contradicts some of what has been said on the subject earlier, and it has some internal inconsistencies. Let me start with the tension between what is said about the topic at the end of Book III, and what is said in Book V. To begin with, the way the guardians' way of life is described at [416d-417b] in Book III is not communistic. Everyone besides the guardians has private wealth but the guardians have none. So, no one shares its property with anyone else: some because they own it privately while others because they have no property to share. The question, as I put it earlier, is whether not having any private possessions necessitates, or even requires, the abolition of the nuclear family. Traditionally, in Athenian society, women were considered property of their husbands. So, when Socrates suggests [424a1] that friends, as far as possible, should "possess everything in common" he assumes that wives are owned privately by "friends" who will share them



willingly among themselves.<sup>124</sup> But, being ordered to share women for reproductive purposes, as he proposes, is not the same as sharing one's wife with someone else who is a "friend".<sup>125</sup> So, even if [424a1] is an accurate reflection of the spirit of [416d-417b], what Socrates says about his programme of eugenics does not follow from it.

One reason that Socrates gives in favour of his eugenic programme is that it will preserve the unity of the city [462a-d]. "[P]rivatization of pleasures and pains will dissolve the city", he declares. [462c] If no one can call anything "mine" or "not mine" without everyone else calling them so at the same time their city would be most like a single person. This seems to ignore the fact that most citizens, the third class, will have possessions and families of their own.<sup>126</sup> A more convincing argument he gives for communism is that all private ownership divides people. This was already

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<sup>124</sup> ) The reference to the "old proverb" is abusive. The proverb was originally referring to material property only. So, including wives and children among property "possessed" alters its meaning. Those who introduced the proverb did not include among possession of friend's women and children. It is doubtful whether they believed that there was a logical connection between possessing material goods and possessing persons. It is also doubtful whether in writing what he does at the end of Book III Plato thought that not having material possessions implied not having wives either. Significantly, the list at [416e] of what property guardians ought not have does not include having wives and children.

<sup>125</sup> ) By secrecy and deception Socrates hopes to convince couples that the decision is made for them by fate and not state authority. This device could hardly be called sharing spouses by friends. It should be noted that sharing spouses for reproductive purposes was not totally unknown in ancient Greek societies, but that choice was left to families.

<sup>126</sup> ) On the question of unity Socrates is ambiguous. At times he seems to be suggesting that "all the citizens", or "most people" will contribute to the unity of the city, without explaining how. At other times he comes back to the idea that communism will exist only for the guardian class.

made clear at the end of Book III regarding private wealth. Here, in Book V, Socrates maintains that by abolishing the nuclear family for guardians makes them even better guardians. [464c3] By doing so, he imputes the evils of privacy in material goods to privacy of the family.

A case could be made that if guardians had private wealth, having a family would augment the chances of conflict. But Socrates does not address the question whether non-owing guardians would also be likely to generate conflict if they had families. It is possible. Strong attachment to wives and children could have that result. But a loose form of family attachment, like the ones that were popular among advocates of the Counter-culture movement during the nineteen sixties, might avoid that danger. Given the emphasis Plato puts on education, and on instilling love for the community, it is likely that all citizens, let alone guardians, would have emotional attachment to children and spouses of their “friends”, and, would welcome sharing their spouses (wives or husbands) if it was in the interest of the family, and of the city. Also, the “noble lie” introduced at [414d-415d] is intended for all citizens, including guardians. Socrates clarifies that if one of their offspring “should be found to have a mixture of iron or bronze, they must not pity him in any way, but give him the rank appropriate to their **nature** and drive him out to join the craftsmen and farmers.”<sup>127</sup> Why would they pity him if they have no particular emotional

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<sup>127</sup> ) There are two things notable in this passage. First, the offspring are referred to in the masculine, second, the term “nature” is used in referring to types.

tie to them? But, more importantly, the selection is made after birth on the basis of tests and not prior to birth based on the quality of parents, as it is in Book V. This point leads to the internal incoherence of Socrates eugenic programme.

At [460c2] Socrates declares that “the children of inferior parents... they’ll hide in a secret and unknown place”. This is infanticide, not like the more humane solution proposed in Book III. But what is more troubling about it is that after his proposal for instituting “sacred marriages”, based on “sophisticated lotteries”, where the best candidates for reproducing guardians have been determined, Socrates still puts emphasis on eliminating children of “inferior” parents. Inferior to whom, other superior parents? What is the point of the eugenic programme if it can so easily be undermined by raising doubts about the selection of guardians? Either the initial selection of guardians is inadequate, allowing inferior candidates to qualify as guardians, or eliminating the offspring of qualified guardians defeats the purpose of selecting guardians for ruling and parenting, in the first place.

Another inconsistency occurs regarding promiscuity. Having noted the persuasive force of the erotic necessity, Socrates wants to forbid promiscuity [458d7]. What he really means is that sexual unions should not be based on individual preferences, but on state organized marriages instead, for, the so called “sacred marriages”, a form of state endorsed

promiscuity, would be encouraged. To make things worse, “anyone distinguishing himself... while still on the campaign... As long as the campaign lasts, no one he wants to kiss shall be allowed to refuse.” [468b]. This suggests that sex based promiscuity is allowed for brave soldiers. The brave will have free access to sex both as a reward for valour, and as an incentive to produce as many children as possible.<sup>128</sup>

In view of the difficulties involved in the totalitarian way Plato describes the community of wives and children, it is hard to see why he put so much emphasis on it. As I suggested, it is not necessary either for the goal of reproducing the maximum number of qualified guardians, nor is it necessary for ensuring unity among citizens. With the proper education, persuasion and a small amount of coercion both goals could be achieved without the totalitarian programme Socrates wishes to institute. Why, given the sound, but conservative, vision of political rule, does he still want to go further, beyond his moderately authoritarian proposals of the earlier books?<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> ) Plato acknowledges that the person desired by the brave might be the lover of another. But adds, cynically, that frustrated lovers would, then, be “more eager to win the rewards of honour” [468c2].

<sup>129</sup> ) My disgust with Plato’s programme of genetic engineering is not diminished by believing that he did not intend to implement it. As an ideal, the contents of Books II-IV would have sufficed. The early republic has features that would still offend some modern readers, a) it considers political leadership an art that cannot, and should not, be open to everyone, b) it has a fixed notion of human nature, c) it has a paternalistic view of citizenship and it advocates a strict class division. However, modern conservatives could endorse much of it. For, it is not obvious that everyone is qualified for political leadership, even in democracies voters are expected to acquire some level of political expertise. How

Based on what is said at the beginning [18-9] of the *Timeaus*, Thesleff believes that the programme of community of women and children was part of the *Proto-Republic*.<sup>130</sup> The *Timeaus* also refers to the community of wives and children, and to nuptial weddings as a way of securing the best breed, but, it has a slightly different conception of the details. On the one hand, children of bad parents should be “secretly dispersed among the inferior citizens”, again raising the question how bad individuals can remain guardians. On the other hand, in line with Book III, Socrates declares the following: while they were **all** (presumably offspring of both good and bad parents) growing up, the rulers were to be on the look-out, and to bring up from below in their turn those who were worthy, and those among themselves who were unworthy were to take the place of those who came up. (*Timeaus*, 19)

In spite of the repeated attempts in Book V to make sure that the best individuals will be produced by genetic engineering, there is no guarantee

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they will acquire it is another question. Whether there are distinct personality types based on distinct character traits is open to question. Also, it is feasible even in market societies that those who govern should not be preoccupied with accumulating wealth. Lastly, Plato’s assumption that most people who are given the conditions for realizing their full potential would not want to spend their time participating in politics has some basis in reality. Note that in Athens people were given money to attend sessions of the assembly otherwise they would not attend. These ideas are implied by the early books, and unlike those of the middle books are still worthy of consideration today. That is my reason for salvaging them from the *Republic* as we have it today.

<sup>130</sup> ) Part of Thesleff’s reason for the prior existence of a “Proto-Republic” is the view that Aristophanes’ *Assembly of Women*, an early work, was Plato’s target in the first two thirds of Book V. However, as (Ellis, 2011) argues Aristophanes’ play could as easily have followed as preceded the *Republic*.

that success will be achieved. Superior parents will be likely to produce superior offspring but, in the final analysis, only testing can yield reliable information about the offspring's qualifications. Thus, in the *Timeaus* emphasis is placed, once again, on a kind of meritocratic egalitarianism advocated in Book III. Breeding is still present, but it is complemented by education and supervision. Is it the case that after presenting his vision of the completely good city in Books II-IV Plato was experimenting with different methods for achieving his two main goals: making sure that the city is maximally united, and that it is ruled by the best of its citizens?

As I have noted a number of times, the date of composition of Plato's dialogues, or even their compositional integrity, needs to be left open to discussion. Changes of emphasis, and even inconsistencies within and among the various writings, does not imply intellectual development on his part. We cannot say for sure that the beginning of the *Timeaus* was written before the middle books, but that it was, is a real possibility. The history of the composition of *The Laws* is uncontroversial. Most scholars agree that it is a posthumous work composed from Platonic fragments by Philip of Opus. In that work Plato makes a few remarks about what he takes to be the "absolutely ideal society" [739b3]. This society is both radically and completely communistic: all citizens share all their property which includes not only wives and children but also organs of sense like eyes, ears and hands [739c9], all for the sake of unity. Reading certain passages of the *Republic* one has the impression that Plato is flirting with the idea of

community of property beyond the guardian class.<sup>131</sup> Here, in *The Laws*, he leaves no doubt.<sup>132</sup> So, how can *Timeaus* and *The Laws* shed light on the lengths to which Plato was willing to go in order to achieve civic unity? And how far beyond his account of justice in individuals and cities presented in Book IV is he prepared to go. In Book V he shifts his emphasis from social justice as a form of co-operation among different groups of individuals to the complete unity of the city. Does this signal a new perspective on what is best for a city? Plato's introduction of the hypothesis of philosopher-kings suggests that he is entertaining the possibility of a radical revision of what it means to be a philosopher.

Socrates' initial reply to Glaucon's request at [471c4] that it be shown "whether it is possible for this constitution to come into being and in what way it could be brought about" is question begging. Instead of a direct answer he remarks [472d] that "we weren't trying to discover these things in order to prove that it's possible for them to come into being... we were making a theoretical model of a good city". But, after a moment of prevarication he declares that they might, by making the smallest change in the constitution of their city, approximate it. [473b4] And, this is followed

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<sup>131</sup> ) See, for example [462a-c].

<sup>132</sup> ) In the ideal society, he repeats "the old saying, 'friends' property is genuinely shared", extending it as he did in Book V to children and wives. What he means by "genuinely shared" is perplexing. Does he mean that extending communism to the family is a different kind of sharing from sharing material possessions? Since he puts emphasis on achieving unity without reference to breeding method, it is possible that he had other means of bringing it about. For example, through education, training and supervision.

by the famous passage about philosopher-kings. Namely, that “until political power and philosophy entirely<sup>133</sup> coincide... the constitution we have been describing in theory will never be born to the fullest extent possible or see the light of the sun” [473de].

After what is said in Books III and IV, the request is appropriate: Given what we know about cities as they are at present, is there a way to achieve what we have described as the “completely good city”? [427e4] Socrates suggestion, that a city which comes closest to the best would have to be ruled by philosophers raise the question about who philosophers are. Are the philosophers as they were described in Books III and IV, or are they are philosophers as they existed in Athens at the time. The latter, as Socrates notes, have a bad reputation. Therefore, he feels they need to clarify who a philosopher is. And, that serves as the pretext in Books VI and VII for the discussions of who they truly are and how they should be educated.

However, a simpler answer to the question would have been to recall the qualities of the guardians and the education they received as it was described in Books II to IV, and to say that, if by miracle a ruler with those qualities were found, the best possible city would be achieved. The main quality ascribed to wise rulers in Book IV [428cd] is to have good judgment about the city as a whole. Perhaps something could have been added about what practical and theoretical training they would have had to receive in

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<sup>133</sup> ) Note that this excludes the possibility of a wise adviser counselling a powerful ruler who might accept or ignore his advice.



addition to gymnastics and music, but there was no need to enter into the detailed account of education in mathematics, metaphysics and epistemology provided in Books VI and VII.<sup>134</sup> That way, some of the politically offensive consequences of hyper rational political rule could have been avoided. But, as I have suggested earlier, Plato's interest in writing what he did in the middle books was to find the nature of true philosophy and not find how the practically possible best political constitution could come about.

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<sup>134</sup> ) Note *The Laws* [709e] on founding a new city: a young tyrant who is lucky to have wise legislators as his contemporaries.

# The Longer Road

At [435d1] Socrates notes that using their present method of argument they will never get a precise answer to the question whether the soul has as many parts as does the city. But, he suggests that there is “another longer and fuller road that does lead to such an answer”. A few paragraphs later [436ab] he adds that an even harder question is whether “when we set out after something, do we act with the whole of our soul in each case or do we do them with three different parts?” In spite of these suggestions, Socrates continues the argument in Book IV for the parallel between city and soul following their present method. And, while his argument is not very convincing, the view that there are three parts (three different aspects) to the soul (reason, spirit and appetite) is insightful.<sup>135</sup> Only, it is not clear why the soul/city analogy is needed in order to make that point. One could be convinced of the tripartite division of the soul without the analogy with the city. Also, Socrates does not address the harder question: whether we act in each case with a different part of our soul: in learning, in getting angry, in having a certain appetite; or whether we act with the whole of our soul at the same time as we act with any one of them. More specifically, he

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<sup>135</sup> ) Freud in (Freud, 1949) makes use of the tripartite division of the psyche without invoking the tripartite division of states. Cooper in (Copper 1984) makes a convincing case for the priority of psychology over politics in Plato’s presentation of the tripartite division.

does not address the question whether when we act with one of the dominant part of the soul the other parts are also in play.<sup>136</sup> Besides these cryptic suggestions, Socrates does not give us clear indication of what precise question “the longer road” is supposed to be an answer to, or what precise point the present method was supposed to prove. Was the point that the soul is structured the same way as the city? Was it that they both consisted of exactly three parts? Was it that the virtues are correlated in a certain way with the structures of the city and of the soul? Or, was it that justice is a form of non-meddling of the three constituent parts of the soul?

In Book VI [504a1] Socrates reminds his interlocutors that earlier he made a distinction between the three parts of the soul in order to “bring out what justice moderation courage and wisdom each is”. And, he adds that the longer road would provide “the finest possible view of these matters” [504b1]<sup>137</sup> He, then, raises the question whether the four virtues are the most important things. His answer is in the negative. The most important subject, he says, is the Form of the Good. The longer road, one might assume on the basis of these comments, is the explanation of the

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<sup>136</sup> ) Based on what I say subsequently about the relation between the Forms and the Good, one might think that the hard question is whether the whole soul is immanent in the action of any one of its parts.

<sup>137</sup> ) To anticipate, one might suppose that the subsequent discussion of the Good, the longer road, is thought by Plato to provide a more fundamental approach to the question of justice. Whether that was his motivation for his digression into the highly theoretical account of epistemology and metaphysics is unclear. Still Books VI and VII do not explain how the Good is superior to justice, nor do they contribute to Socrates’ response to the two brothers’ challenge.

Good. And, indeed, the rest of Book VI [505b1-511e3] is devoted to that. Socrates' explanation of the Good in those pages is both difficult and profound. But it does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question in what way the Good is superior to justice and the other virtues. In fact, it does not make clear how the profound metaphysical account of the Good is relevant to the main theme of the *Republic*, namely, to its moral and political teaching.<sup>138</sup> The Good, as it is described in the later part of Book VI, is a concept of pure metaphysics, of epistemology and of axiology, not of practical politics or ethics.<sup>139</sup>

It is clear that part of Plato's intention in the middle books is to show in more detail what is involved in having a knowledge of the whole as it is described at [428e]. The kind of philosophical knowledge Plato ascribes to philosopher-kings is not helpful in the practical day to day affairs of running a city,<sup>140</sup> but it is helpful for a theoretical philosopher who wishes

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<sup>138</sup> ) Aristotle is **reputed** to have told the story of Plato's lecture "On the Good". (See Gaiser 1980) Apparently, the audience was disappointed by hearing a lecture on mathematics rather than on ethics. The same thing might be said about readers who expected an account of virtues but got an account of metaphysics in Book VI of the *Republic*.

<sup>139</sup> ) One of the challenges presented by Plato's concept of the Good is that there is, in fact, a connection between metaphysics and ethics that could be made, but the *Republic* does not make this connection. Spinoza's major work is an illustration of a more satisfactory account of that subject. And, if one were to go a step further and saw the Good of Plato on the model of Spinoza's infinite substance, one might gain insight into the relation between the Good and the Forms. (Think of the relation between *Substance* and *formal essences* in Spinoza's *Ethics*.)

<sup>140</sup> ) The reference in Book VII to returning to the cave for fifteen years might be seen as politically relevant. Still, it does not specify how being active in civic life during that period teaches dialecticians practical wisdom.

to understand what it is to grasp the complex unity of different factors that make it up. For this reason, it is tempting to see the section on the Good as a digression from the main argument, a later addition to an earlier version of the work.<sup>141</sup> In my view, Books VI and VII address the question of what philosophy truly is in contrast to the one articulated in the early books. The guardians of those early books are philosophers in a popular sense, they love learning, and possess knowledge of the city and of the soul in their complex totality. [428c0]<sup>142</sup>

Consequently, the questions raised by the *Republic* as we have it today, including Books VI and VII, are: a) How theoretical knowledge supports

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<sup>141</sup> ) H. Thesleff (Thesleff 2009) gives a number of stylistic and historical reasons for the existence of a “Proto-Republic”, and for regarding the work as we have it today as a complex of fragments completed only at the end of Plato’s life. But, whenever it was completed, today’s *Republic* is a coherent whole. So, the discussion of the Good might have seemed to Plato as a needed meta-theoretical reflection on some of the key concepts of ethics and politics. And, for that reason, he added it later.

<sup>142</sup> ) Cooper (1977, p.151) aims to direct attention to Plato’s metaphysics in order to discover “what kind of person this is whom Plato calls just”. In his view, there are two components to the definition of justice. The first is given in Books II to IV and the other in Books V to VII. His account of justice in the early books is close to mine, but his account of what is said in the middle books is slightly different. Since his account of what it is to be just requires a model of perfect justice, he requires the description of what is the perfectly good. In his view, the knowledge of the good is what provides a substantive account of the rule of reason missing in the earlier books. I differ from Cooper in that he believes that to be just one must have a theoretical knowledge of the good but I do not. In my view, someone can be just without having that knowledge. An appetitive type of person could, in my view, be as “platonically” just as a reasoning type if its soul is in order. The source of the difference between my view and Cooper’s is that for him perfect justice requires promotion of the welfare of others and of the city. This may be part of justice as it is ordinarily conceived but not as it conceived by Plato. In my view, the theoretical knowledge of the good is required by those who wish to know what makes justice what it is, but it is not required by those who wish to be just.

practical knowledge and, b) in what precise way this support is exercised? To say that in an ideal regime philosophers would have to be kings does not answer those questions because it does not explain why rulers of cities need to have more than a practical knowledge (*phronesis*) of politics and psychology. At the end of Book V, having stated that “Until philosophers’ rule as kings...cities will have no rest from evils” [573d], Socrates remarks that “[they] need to define [for the people] who the philosophers are that we dare to say must rule” [474d4]. This suggests that, instead of elaborating on what he said in Books II to IV about philosophy and guardianship, he is turning his attention to the bad reputation philosophy has among the people. And this is what leads him to elaborate a novel, more rigorous conception of it.<sup>143</sup> However, as far as moral and political wisdom is concerned, the training in mathematics and astronomy described in Book VII, is hardly relevant. The guardians of Books II-IV are wiser than their subjects. Having a grasp of the needs of the whole city, they alone know how particular matters fit into the general context, and they alone have the proper judgment for knowing when to make the right political decision. And, in so far as knowing the Good is to know how

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<sup>143</sup> ) The allegory of the cave in Book VII implies, first, a radical difference between philosophers and ordinary citizens, suggesting that philosopher could teach them something about what lies beneath their illusions. Second, the fifteen years spent by prospective philosophers back in the cave [540a2] implies that the education is also about practical and not only highly esoteric theoretical matters. What is missing, though, is an explanation of how training in mathematics and participation in argument will prepare candidates for political rule.

eternal truths (Forms) relate to one another in a coherent totality, it has implications for the process of practical decision making. But this knowledge is not directly relevant to making those decisions. One problem with the politics of the middle books is that it champions **absolute** (infallible) knowledge, and therefore those who have it must have absolute political power.

At [509b5] Socrates notes that the Good is beyond being. Presumably, this means that it is not one of the Forms<sup>144</sup>, but that it is, rather, their condition of existence. On my reading, this means that the Good, like Spinoza's infinite substance, is immanent to Forms (essential beings) and that at the same time it is beyond them<sup>145</sup>. Also, this way of understanding the Good sheds light on the ethical/political issue. Plato identifies **four** virtues in order to define **one** of them. Three of the four are associated

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<sup>144</sup> ) It is puzzling that at [505a] he asks Glaucon whether he has heard of "the form of the good". The question seems to be in contradiction with the claim that the Good is beyond being, and with the comment that "[they] have no adequate knowledge of it". What are Forms if not the ultimate objects of knowledge, and if Forms are the paradigms of being, how can the Good be one of them, yet be beyond them?

<sup>145</sup> ) A plausible reading of Plato's description of the relation between everyday objects, Forms and the Good might be this: scientific knowledge, outlined in the third section of the divided line, decomposes objects of perception into their conceptual elements, Forms. This re-orientation of the soul causes a traumatic experience. However, in the light of the Good these thought objects are recomposed into a conceptual unity, which expresses the true nature, the good, of the perceptual object. It, then, becomes apparent that the latter are mere copies of the former. Thus, for example, is the way the dialecticians learn of the good of being just.

with three parts of the soul. The fourth, justice, is a) a power<sup>146</sup> that makes the other virtues, and cities and souls, what they are [443b3, 443b8]. Also, b) it is a kind of non-meddling of the three parts of the soul. But, in order for it to be an effective power, and an effective coordinator of the different parts of the soul, the just must have a grasp of how different elements within it can combine to form an effective unit, a One. The good of a thing is that which makes it what it truly is. In metaphysical terms, the Good is what reveals individual Forms as the specific Forms that they are in relation to one another. In the moral and political context, the Good of a person, and the Good of a city, their virtue, is what makes them truly what they are, a unified whole. A practically wise person, acting with a view to what a person or a city as a whole is, has a tacit knowledge of what mathematics and metaphysics teaches. But it does not, and needs not, have an explicit knowledge of those two disciplines. So, Plato's discussion of the Good, and its relation to Forms, is relevant to the dialectical pursuit of the basic preconditions of political theory but not of practical political rule.

Socrates declares at [462ab] that “the greatest good in designing a city -the good at which the legislator aims at in making the law (is)...that which brings it together and makes it one”. It is tempting to see this as anticipation of the Good as it is explained in Books VI and VII. In fact, a

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<sup>146</sup> ) What to make of the earlier comment [443b3] that justice is “this power, that produces men and cities of the sort we have described”? Does it imply that justice is the most important subject because it produces all the other virtues? Does it, then, anticipate what will be said about the Good later/ [504e3]



passage in Book VI [504e-505a] implies that the most important subject is that of the form of the Good, because “by their relation to it that just things and the others become useful and beneficial”. Ever since Aristotle, commentators on Plato’s account of the Good questioned its relevance to moral and political philosophy. In my view, the doctrine of the Good is a highly abstract meta theory. It invites legislators, such as Socrates and his interlocutors, to consider not simply what is a just society but, also, to consider what it means for it be just. In Plato’s view, I propose, unity is the precondition of justice in the city and in the individual. It is that which makes it a Good. A guardian of the city must strive to bring about the unity of its many parts, but its founders need to have a higher knowledge in order to see how it is its greatest good.

The tenuous relation between the theoretical philosophy of Books VI and VII and the practical philosophy of the rest of the *Republic* might be clarified by a closer look at the metaphor of the **divided line** given at the end of Book VI. Four sections of the line represent four types of cognition in ascending order (AD, DC, CE and EB). The first section, AD, covers cognition based on fragments of impressions provided by the senses, and from illusions resulting from a disorderly combination of those impressions. The next section, DC, by contrast, covers an orderly, but still partial, construction based on the information gained through the senses.

This type of knowledge is about the actually existing constituents of the perceptible world: of natural objects and artifacts. It is possessed by craftsmen who are experts in their specific realm of endeavour. On my reading of the metaphor, statesmen: craftsmen<sup>147</sup> of the city and of its citizens, would occupy the top of the second section. The third section, CE, the intelligible, represents a radical break with the world of everyday objects, it is a deconstruction of the cognition of actually existing visible objects into their basic conceptual elements: simple, primitive, mathematical Forms.<sup>148</sup> Still, true understanding is not yet obtained on this level of cognition. In order to attain true understanding (*noesis*), the fundamental conceptual elements need to be recombined/reconstructed into coherent thought totalities. It is at this point (EB) that the Good comes into play. It is both the instrument and the end result of the process of reconstruction.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> ) A master craftsman, as it is described in the *Statesman* [259e-260b] would have a grasp of the totality of what is required in his trade. Similarly, the guardians of Books II-IV would have a grasp of the city as a whole [427c8]. Both would have right opinions about what to do, when and why, but they would not have a purely theoretical knowledge of the way their their decisions and actions relate to expertise in other crafts.

<sup>148</sup> ) In the allegory of the cave Plato describes the trauma of leaving and returning as a twofold process. First, leaving the darkness of the cave the escaped prisoner is blinded by sun light. Second, on his return he is once again blinded, this time by darkness. For me, this illustrates the radical break between empirical and conceptual cognition in the move from the first and the second half of the divided line.

<sup>149</sup> ) In to order reconstruct simple primitive Forms into Forms of actually existing things **noesis**, the highest level of intelligence, needs to go back down to the top of second level, that of perceptual totalities, natural things and artifacts as they come into practical

In order to make the above analysis more accessible, a number of interpretive hypothesis might help. How, for example, can the Good be the guiding principle above the Forms yet be inseparable from them? One way of answering this question is to say that the main function of reason is to seek unity within the plurality of elements with which it is confronted conceptually. Without these elements it would be inoperative, but it cannot be identified with any one of them. To the extent that one can speak of a “form of the good” [505a1, 508e1] and at the same time say that it is “not being, but superior to it in rank and power” [509b7], one must have in mind a distinction between singular beings and the Being of their totality.<sup>150</sup>

In conclusion, I wish to restate my interpretation of Books VI and VII of the *Republic*. The connection between the epistemological and metaphysical doctrines of these books and the moral/political teaching of the early books is tenuous. On the most generous interpretation, the middle books provide a metaphysical complement to the more practical

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consciousness. I find the relation between the empirical object, water, and H<sub>2</sub>O, its essence, suggestive here. By understanding what H<sub>2</sub>O is, one understands the elements, Forms, that water is made of.

<sup>150</sup> ) It would not be far fetched to suggest that with his conception of the Good and its relation to the Forms, Plato anticipates Spinoza’s distinction between substance and attributes, or, Heidegger’s distinction between “Being” and “beings”.

notion of philosophy<sup>151</sup> relied on in the early books. In fact, contrarily to the way they have usually been read, Books VI and VII are more about philosophy than about morality or politics.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, the philosophy of Books VI and VII is not completely irrelevant to politics. For, it is Plato's belief that philosophy, both in its practical and its theoretical practice, is fundamentally linked to a search for a complex totality of that which unites disparate factors. The discussion of the Good reveals the nature of what it is to be a complex whole and how it relates to particular beings. In that way, it provides the conceptual underpinning of all forms of thought that seek to be rational. What it does not do, however, is to give practical advice for good governance.

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<sup>151</sup> ) At [410d-412b] and at [428cd] philosophy is associated with music and poetry, and it is characterized as the love of learning, having good judgement and grasping things in their totality. These are the main qualities required for guardianship.

<sup>152</sup> ) What makes the politics of Book VII offensively totalitarian is Plato's misguided belief that philosophy at its best is the precondition for politics at its best.

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