

Plato's *Republic*

An Introduction

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3. A Fresh Start

Book II

Socrates is not the only one who is dissatisfied with the results—the non-results, really—of Book I. Glaucon and Adeimantus feel let down, too. It is not that they have been convinced by Thrasymachus. Quite the contrary. They agree with Socrates that the just life is happier than the unjust life, but they do not find Socrates' arguments persuasive and thus they recognize that they cannot defend or justify that belief, to themselves or others. We could put their predicament thus: they *believe* that the just life is happier, but they do not *know* that it is—and they know that they do not know this.

When thinking about knowledge—more precisely, about propositional or factual knowledge, the kind of knowledge involved in knowing *that* certain claims are true, in contrast to the knowing *how* to do certain things, the sort of knowledge that is distinctive of the skills and crafts discussed in earlier chapters—a good place to start is to think of knowledge as a matter of justified true belief. On the JTB conception of knowledge, so-called because it defines knowledge as Justified True Belief, I *know* that the White Sox won the 2005 World Series because I *believe* that they won, my belief that they did is *justified* (since it is based on good reasons: I watched (and re-watched) the deciding game, I have confirmed their victory on various reliable websites, etc.), and that belief is *true*. We all have various beliefs that are true but unjustified and beliefs that are false but justified. For example, looking at the usually reliable and accurate clock on my office wall, I form the belief that it is half-past eight and thus that I still have time for some last-minute preparation and

perhaps another coffee before my nine o'clock class. But unbeknownst to me the clock is malfunctioning because of a power surge, and it is actually a quarter past nine (and most of my students have given up on me). Even though my belief is false, it seems justified, since my evidence is a clock that has always been reliable. More on point, though, are cases in which my belief is true but unjustified. Suppose that I know that my clock is wildly inconsistent, speeding up and slowing down with no rhyme or reason. Even so, I come to believe that it is eight o'clock after glancing at the clock. Even if it is eight o'clock, I am inclined to think that I do not know that it is eight o'clock, because my belief, while true, is not justified: it is based on evidence I myself regard as unreliable. Similarly, suppose I 'just have a feeling' that the White Sox will win today, and suppose further that my gut-feelings about the outcomes of baseball games are not especially reliable, being wrong at least as often as they are right. Even if the Sox win, you would be right to disagree when I say, 'I knew they would win today!', since a crucial element in knowledge, namely justification, is missing.

Even though the JTB conception of knowledge does not feature in the *Republic*, it has its roots in another of Plato's dialogues, the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates and Theaetetus consider (among other things) whether 'it is true judgment with an account (λόγος [*logos*]) that is knowledge' (201d).¹ They ultimately reject the JTB account because, ironically, they cannot come up with a satisfactory account of what an account or reason is. We will see in Chapter Eight that Socrates has a very different conception of knowledge in the *Republic*. But even though the JTB conception of knowledge lacks Platonic *bona fides* (not to mention contemporary philosophical disagreements about what justifies beliefs and indeed about whether knowledge is best thought of as JTB), it is helpful in understanding the dynamics of Books II and III. Glaucon and Adeimantus, having been raised properly, have (let us assume) a true belief about the relation between justice and happiness. But they recognize that they lack a justification for this true belief, and they hope Socrates can help provide them with one. We saw in the previous chapter that Socrates' arguments in support of this belief leave a great deal to be

1 As before, '201d' refers to the page in the standard edition of Plato's works. Translations of the *Theaetetus* are from *Plato: Theaetetus*, trans. by M. J. Levett, rev. by Myles Burnyeat, ed. by Bernard Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

desired, a fact of which Socrates as well as Glaucon and Adeimantus are painfully aware. Thrasymachus, for his part, would insist that Glaucon and Adeimantus do not know that the just life is happier, not because they lack a justification for their true belief, but because their belief is false: the just life is *not* happier than the unjust life, on his view.

The most striking feature of their request for help is their asking Socrates *not* to proceed as he did in Book I and ‘give us [yet another] theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice’ (2.367b). Nor are they asking Socrates to become more like Thrasymachus and give long speeches. But they also do not want him to crank out argument after argument, as he did in Book I. They are reasonably bright young men, but they are not philosophically sophisticated, and want something that is convincing without being too abstract.

Glaucon’s approach in seeking a justification for his belief that the just life is happier is twofold. First, he makes a distinction between three different kinds of goods, which will help them clarify the kind of good Socrates should show justice to be. Second, he articulates three claims or theses that he thinks capture the heart of Thrasymachus’ position, adopting the role of devil’s advocate. It is not, Glaucon assures Socrates, that he believes any of these Thrasymachan claims (2.358c, 2.361e). But if Socrates can show him how to refute these theses, Glaucon’s belief that the just life is happier will inch closer to being justified.

Three Kinds of Goods (2.357a–358a)

There is healthy scholarly disagreement about the details of Glaucon’s division of goods, but we can get a good sense of the division without getting tripped up in a scholarly tangle. For the sake of clarity, I will depart slightly from Glaucon’s ordering, switching the second and third categories.

The first kind of good comprises *intrinsic goods*, which ‘we welcome not because we desire what comes from it, but [...] for its own sake—joy, for example, and all the harmless pleasures that have no results beyond the joy of having them’ (2.357b). The idea is that we value certain things, experiences, and activities in and for themselves and not for their consequences. This way of putting it is not quite right, though. Possessing these goods makes our lives go better, and having one’s life go better

because one possesses x seems to be a consequence of possessing x . We can get clearer about what Glaucon means if we think of the relation between such goods and a good life as a part-whole relation, rather than a means-end relation. Enjoying a sunset is not a means to having a good life, it is part of a good life. To modify an example from the philosopher John Akrill (which he made in a different but related context), driving to a golf course is a means to playing a round of golf that is external to the game: I drive to the course in order to play a round. I drive the ball off the tee and putt in order to play a round of golf, but these activities are not external means to playing golf, as driving to the course is; they are constituent elements or internal parts of playing a round of golf. So Glaucon's intrinsic goods are constituent parts or elements of a good life conceived as a whole; they are not external, instrumental means to such a life.

Where first category goods are best thought of in terms of the part-whole relation, the second category (which Glaucon takes third) contains things, activities, and experiences that are best thought of as means to an end external to them. We can think of such goods as *instrumental* rather than *intrinsic* goods. Glaucon takes them to be 'onerous but beneficial' (2.357c), valued not in themselves but for 'the rewards and other things that come from them' (2.357c). Physical training and medical treatment (and, it will later turn out, governing) are offered as examples of such instrumental goods. There is a certain subjectivity here, though, as some people find physical training enjoyable in itself, even apart from its instrumental benefits. Some people love running, for example, enjoying the activity itself; others loathe it, valuing it only for the benefits it brings. We might put the difference this way: the lovers enjoy running, while the loathers enjoy having run. Flossing one's teeth seems an everyday example of an 'onerous but beneficial'—i.e., purely instrumental—good: we do it not because it is enjoyable in itself, but because of its good results: healthier gums and fewer lectures about the importance of flossing from finger-wagging dentists. But a person who enjoys the activity itself is not making a mistake; they merely have preferences and tastes that are not widely shared.

The third kind of good (which Glaucon takes second) is mixed, comprising intrinsic and instrumental goods: 'a kind of good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from it' (2.357c). For

some people, physical exercise is completely a second-category good, onerous but beneficial: instrumentally good but intrinsically bad. But for others it belongs to this third, mixed category: one recognizes the health benefits of running five miles every day, but one also enjoys the activity itself. And perhaps watching that sunset relaxes you and lowers your blood pressure, so it too might be a mixed good. Glaucon and Socrates regard goods of this third category as the best kind of goods, since they combine both intrinsic and instrumental goodness. It might be that the drive to the golf course is lovely and thus valuable both intrinsically, since you enjoy it in itself, and also instrumentally, since it is an efficient way to get to the golf course.

Where does justice belong? Most people, Glaucon says on behalf of Thrasymachus, place it in the second category of things and activities that are intrinsically bad but instrumentally good, to be valued not for their intrinsic features but for the external benefits they bring—especially the benefits of having a reputation for being just: ‘most people [...] say that justice belongs to the onerous kind, and is to be practiced for the sake of the rewards and popularity that come from having a reputation for justice, but is to be avoided because of itself as something burdensome’ (2.358a). Socrates and Glaucon, by contrast, think justice is the best kind of good, belonging in the third, mixed category, ‘to be valued [...] both because of itself and because of what comes from it’ (2.357e). Even though acting justly will not always be easy, its being challenging does not make it onerous, something one wishes one did not have to do, any more than running a marathon is onerous and to be avoided in virtue of its being difficult or challenging.

The question of justice’s proper categorization shapes the rhetorical strategy of the rest of the *Republic* in an important way. Most people only halfway agree with Glaucon’s classification of justice. They concede the instrumental value of having a reputation for justice, of *seeming* to be just, but they deny justice’s intrinsic value, holding that *being* just is not by itself good. Thus what Glaucon and Adeimantus want from Socrates is to show them that a just life is intrinsically good: all by itself, it makes its possessor’s life go well. There is no need to try to show that a reputation for it is instrumentally good, since that is conceded on all sides—even Thrasymachus could agree with this. To show that justice is intrinsically good, they need to find a way to bracket off and ignore its instrumental

value; if they do not do this, they cannot be sure that justice is being valued intrinsically, in and for itself, rather than for its extrinsic benefits. Thus it will not be enough to compare the just and unjust persons. To ignore the instrumental benefits a reputation for justice brings, Socrates must draw on the distinction between *being* and *seeming* and saddle the just person with a reputation for *injustice*. If he can show that the person who *is* just but *seems* unjust is happier than the person who *is* unjust but *seems* just, he will have shown that justice is intrinsically good—that all by itself it makes its possessor's life better.

Glaucón's Three Thrasymachan Theses (2.358a–362c)

Let us now turn to the second prong of Glaucon's challenge, his devil's advocacy of Thrasymachus' view. We should pause to appreciate what good intellectual practice Glaucon models here. To understand an opponent's view well enough to be able to state it clearly and forcefully and fairly is not easy, but it is a hallmark of intellectual fairness. Most of us are more familiar with someone's arguing against a view by presenting and then rejecting a caricature of the view in question. To argue this way is to commit what is known as the strawman fallacy (so-called because strawmen and -women are so easy to knock over). To take an obvious contemporary example, consider arguments about the morality of abortion. Most of us have probably heard arguments like these: 'Of course abortion is immoral; those who think it is not seem to think it is okay to murder babies' and 'Of course abortion is permissible; those who think it is not seem to think a woman should have no right at all to decide what happens to her body'. Both of these arguments commit the strawman fallacy: it is a safe bet that no defender of the moral permissibility of abortion takes pleasure at the thought of murdering babies; nor does the typical opponent relish the opportunity to interfere with a woman's bodily autonomy. Indeed, the phrase 'they seem to think that...' is a fairly reliable indicator that a strawman fallacy is coming your way. Now it may be that strawman characterizations are rhetorically effective; they are no doubt good ways to 'energize the base.' But they are intellectually debased ways of providing reasons in support of one's view, whatever that view may be. There is nothing wrong with arguing for one's view by arguing against an opponent's

view, but intellectual integrity requires that we characterize the opponent's position fairly and charitably, such that they will recognize it as theirs and that it appears to be a view that a reasonable person might hold, rather than—as seems sadly typical—a view that only a morally corrupt, irrational person would find compelling.

Thrasymachan Thesis #1: Justice is Conventional, Not Natural (2.358e–359b)

The distinction between nature (φύσις [*phusis*], whence the word 'physics') and convention (νόμος [*nomos*], whence words like 'economics') is common in the *Republic*. In one sense, what is natural is what is real or true independently of what anyone thinks or does, while what is conventional is true or real only in virtue of a decision one or one's culture makes. The difference between rivers and trees is a natural difference, not a conventional one; but borders between states are matters of convention, even when the border is a natural object such as a river. In a different but related sense, a thing's nature is what makes it the kind of thing it is—a knife rather than a fork, a plant rather than an animal, etc. In his *Physics*, Aristotle said that a thing's nature is its internal principle of change and stability, and what is natural to the thing is to follow this internal principle.² Although most acorns will not become oak trees, becoming an oak tree is natural to an acorn in this sense. In claiming on behalf of Thrasymachus that justice is not natural but a matter of convention, Glaucon is suggesting that *injustice* is what comes naturally to us; left to our own devices, we strive to outdo our fellows without regard to the propriety of doing so. But since we weak folks fear being treated unjustly, we band together and take power, inventing the rules of justice to protect ourselves against the more powerful, who are fewer and can be subjugated by the many. Thus justice is conventional, not natural: it is an invention, imposed upon us from without, existing only as the result of intentional human activity and choice.

The basic picture will be familiar to readers acquainted with the great seventeenth-century British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. Imagine a world before law and civilization. In this state of nature, Hobbes

2 Aristotle, *Physics*, II.1 192b20–23.

thought, we have complete freedom to do whatever we want to do; there are no moral or legal restrictions on one's conduct. The good news, then, is that you can do whatever you want to do: take someone else's stuff, kill them if you feel so inclined, etc. The bad news, of course, is that everyone else can do so as well. Life in the state of nature, Hobbes said, is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. There is no right to life in the state of nature, understood as a claim-right or entitlement not to be killed, which imposes a duty on others not to kill. But most of us, Hobbes plausibly thought, are willing to give up some of the total freedom we have in the state of nature in exchange for the sort of security a right to life brings. I agree not to kill you and take your stuff but only on the condition that you agree to do the same for me. Thus is civil society, and indeed morality, born. Justice, on this view, is the result of a bargain; it is an invention, and thus conventional rather than natural. Only a fool, Thrasymachus and Hobbes think, would altruistically refrain from killing and taking from others without getting a corresponding guarantee in return. Most of us find it to our advantage 'to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor to suffer it' and thus we 'make laws and covenants, and what the law commands [we] call just and lawful' (2.359a). (Hobbes takes an additional step not mentioned by Thrasymachus or Glaucon, holding that there must be an authority to settle disputes and enforce the social contract, but we need not linger over this point.)

On this Thrasymachan view, justice is not natural in either sense distinguished above. Far from being mind- or culture-independent, it is something we invent rather than discover, and there is nothing more to it than the rules agreed to. Thrasymachus expressed such a view in Premise 2 of the Error Argument back in Book I. Moreover, it is injustice, he holds, and not justice, that comes naturally to us. Injustice 'is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good' (2.359c), on the Thrasymachan view. The ideal of masculinity implicit in this view of justice will seem to many a toxic one: 'a true man', Glaucon says, wearing his Thrasymachan mask, 'would not make an agreement with anyone not to do injustice in order not to suffer it' (2.359b). He would not make such an agreement because he would not have to: the Thrasymachan man is able to impose his will on his fellows in the state of nature; *he* has no need of rules restraining his natural inclinations to

outdo others, since he is powerful enough not to fall victim to others' attempts to outdo him. (Later in the *Republic* Plato will criticize this picture of masculinity, but for now it is part of the Thrasymachan picture Glaucon is painting.) Even though most of us lack this kind of strength and power, if enough of us band together we might be more powerful than the Thrasymachan 'true man'. If so, we can make rules to protect ourselves against him, since morality—or, rather, "morality"—is merely the mechanism by which the powerful protect their interests. But if this group of individually weak but collectively strong people is driven by self-interest, it is unlikely to extend the protections of morality to those whom it can exploit for its own ends. This brings us to the second thesis.

Thrasymachan Thesis #2: Those Who Act Justly Do So Unwillingly (2.359b–360d)

The second thesis is intimately connected with the first. Since injustice comes naturally to us and justice is unnatural and artificial, acting justly is contrary to our natural inclinations; it goes against our grain because 'the desire to outdo others and get more and more [...] is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good' (2.359c). On this view, people who act justly do so unwillingly; if they could get away with acting unjustly, they would. And in fact the artifice of justice does not merely go against our nature, it distorts it: 'nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness with respect' (2.359c).

This is a pretty bleak view of human nature and of the nature of morality, but it has an undeniable plausibility. But Glaucon does not rely merely on forceful language to garner agreement, he gives a famous argument for it: the Ring of Gyges Argument, important both for its content but also for the kind of argument it is. The ring in question belongs not to Gyges but to an ancestor of his, so the argument is misnamed—but that does not really matter to the point at hand, which is Thrasymachan Thesis #2. Gyges' ancestor happens upon a ring with magical powers: when he turns it in a certain direction, he becomes invisible. What does he do with his newfound power of invisibility? He seduces the queen, kills the king, and takes over the kingdom. The key move in the argument happens next: imagine, says Glaucon, that there

is another such ring; what do you think its wearer would do? Would they be so thoroughly, incorruptibly moral that they would not take advantage of the situation to enrich themselves at the expense of others? If you think the wearer would act unjustly because they can do so with impunity, you should agree that the second thesis is true. We act justly only because we think we have to, Thrasymachus thinks, not because we want to; if we could act immorally and get away with it, we would do just what Gyges' ancestor did.

Glaucon has offered a thought-experiment, which is a very common way of doing philosophy: here is a fanciful scenario, what do you think about it? What is the right thing to do? Philosophical inquiry is rife with thought-experiments: Would you throw the switch to divert a runaway trolley car from a track on which it will kill five workers to a track on which it will kill only one? If you were kidnapped by the Society of Music Lovers and awoke with your kidneys connected to those of a famous violinist who will die if you disconnect yourself, are you morally permitted to disconnect yourself, resulting in the violinist's death?³ Etc. There is certainly a place for thought-experiments in philosophical thinking, and their artificiality is no objection to them; they are not intended as realistic situations we encounter in our everyday lives but rather bear certain similarities to situations we *do* encounter in ordinary life: if you think disconnecting yourself from the violinist is permissible, should not you also think that it is permissible for a woman to terminate an involuntary pregnancy? Thought-experiments are common in philosophy—and in theoretical physics, too (just ask Schrödinger's cat)—but when fundamental claims about human nature are at issue, perhaps thought-experiments should yield to fields like evolutionary biology and psychology. That the Thrasymachan takes it to be obvious that most people think they would act as Gyges did if they had the chance might tell us a lot about the culture these Thrasymachans inhabit, even if it does not establish any trans-cultural truths about human nature. But that is probably all it is intended to do here: Thrasymachan Thesis #2 articulates a widely-held view of human nature, one that Glaucon thinks is false and that he wants Socrates to refute.

3 Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1 (1971), 47–66 (pp. 48–49).

Thrasymachan Thesis #3: The Unjust Person is Happier than the Just Person (2.360e–362c)

This of course is Thrasymachus' answer to the second of the *Republic's* two main questions, whether the just or unjust life is happier, which Socrates realized that he'd tried to answer before answering the first one. What is most relevant here are the constraints Glaucon proposes for answering it. If the unjust person is really going to outdo everyone, they will find that having a reputation for justice will greatly help them use the rules of justice to exploit others: they will find that they are more effective at *being* unjust if they *seem* just. No one who thought that Bernard Madoff was a conman running a Ponzi scheme would have invested with him; his cheating his investors out of billions of dollars was made possible in no small part by his sterling reputation.

The last third or so of the *Republic* is devoted to assessing this third Thrasymachan thesis; Glaucon is here stating it, not arguing for or against it (though we do know that he actually thinks it is false, devil's advocacy aside). Instead, he is setting the parameters for how Socrates is to defeat this thesis. Harking back to the distinction between kinds of goods, Socrates and company think that most people regard justice as onerous but beneficial: bad intrinsically but good instrumentally, especially the reputation for justice. Glaucon and Socrates think justice is both intrinsically and instrumentally good, but since even skeptics agree with them about its instrumental value, what Socrates needs to do is to show that justice is intrinsically good: that all by itself, a morally good life benefits the person living it, and indeed is better for them than a morally bad life, even if they do not get any of the extrinsic, instrumental benefits. We need to bracket off the instrumental benefits of having a reputation for justice because if we do not find a way to ignore them, we cannot be sure that we are valuing justice intrinsically, in and of itself, and not for the instrumental benefits a reputation for justice brings:

we must take away his reputation, for a reputation for justice would bring him honor and rewards, so it would not be clear whether he is just for the sake of justice itself or for the sake of those honors and rewards. We must strip him of everything except justice and make his situation the opposite of an unjust person's. Though he does no injustice, he must have the greatest reputation for it, so that his justice may be tested full-strength and not diluted [...] (2.361c)

So in settling the question of which life is happier, we must draw not only on the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value but also on the distinction between appearance and reality. Glaucon will regard his belief that the just life is happier as justified only if Socrates can show him that the person who really *is* just but *seems* unjust is happier than the person who *is* unjust but *seems* just.

It is quite a tall order, as Socrates recognizes, but it is the only way they can think of to separate off the intrinsic goodness of justice from its instrumental, reputational benefits. If Socrates can show us that the really just but apparently unjust person is happier than the really unjust but apparently just person, he will have shown us that justice is intrinsically good, since he will have shown that being just in and of itself makes one better off. If he can do this, he will have justified Glaucon's presumably true belief that the just life is happier and thereby transmute his belief into knowledge.

Adeimantus Ups the Ante (2.362d–367e)

Glaucon's brother Adeimantus thinks that Glaucon has left out 'the most important thing' (2.362d), which he takes to be the way justice is treated in Athenian popular culture. Adeimantus' attention to culture shapes the *Republic* by anchoring Socrates' focus on education in the ideal city that they will soon start constructing, if only in theory. His complaint is that Athenian culture and Greek culture more broadly, 'don't praise justice in itself, [but] only the high reputations it leads to and the consequences of being thought to be just' (2.363a). He worries about the effect of such a culture 'on the souls of young people' (2.365a), when they see through their culture's shallow platitudes to the deeper antirealist view that 'injustice [...] [is] shameful only in opinion and law' (2.364a) and not in itself. Agreeing with Thrasymachus about the value of *being* unjust but recognizing the importance of *seeming* just, they will become cynical and hypocritical, desiring to cultivate only 'a façade of illusory virtue' (2.365c) rather than a genuinely virtuous character.

The stories Athenian culture tells about the gods, such as the ones we find in Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey* or Hesiod's *Theogony*, suggest that the gods can be influenced by prayers, sacrifices, and offerings. It is more profitable, on the Thrasymachan view of individual happiness,

to reap the benefits of acting unjustly, and then toward the end of one's life to seek absolution by building a temple or making many sacrifices, thus avoiding the just deserts of a life of injustice. Although there will be a few people of 'godlike character who [are] disgusted by injustice' (2.366c), most of us will find the allure of material success too attractive to resist. Some of us will feel guilty or ashamed, but others—perhaps *because* we will feel guilty or ashamed—will 'laugh aloud' when we hear justice praised (2.366b), since, like Thrasymachus, we think 'justice' is for suckers.

Thus it is vital, Adeimantus thinks, for Socrates to show that justice is intrinsically good and to ignore any benefits that might accrue to someone with a reputation for justice. He wants Socrates to swim against the tide of Athenian culture and show them that 'injustice is the worst thing a soul can have in it and that justice is the greatest good' (2.366e). Only if Socrates does this will Glaucon and Adeimantus be justified in their belief that the just life is happier—only then will that belief become knowledge.

Socrates' Plan: Investigate Personal Justice by Investigating Political Justice (2.367e–369a)

Socrates' way of responding to Glaucon and Adeimantus' request for a fresh defense of the just life will resonate with anyone who needs drugstore reading glasses to deal with a restaurant menu. Just as it is easier to read larger than smaller letters, Socrates argues (2.368d), it will be easier to figure out the nature and value of justice if we see it on a larger scale. So the plan is to examine the nature and value of justice writ large, in a *polis* (city-state), in order to see what it tells us about justice in a person: 'let us first find out what sort of thing justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual' (2.369a). This method of investigation is apt to strike many readers as odd, since it assumes an analogy between persons and cities that will seem a stretch to many. The analogy has certainly intrigued philosophical commentators on the *Republic*. Socrates is assuming that justice in individuals and justice in city-states do not differ in any relevant ways. A person (more properly, their soul) and a *polis* differ in size and thus so too does the *amount* of justice each contains, but the amount of justice is not relevant to its

nature, Socrates assumes, any more than a glass of water differs in nature from a gallon of water: water is water, regardless of how much of it there is.

As we move forward, we will want to keep in mind the big *if* at the heart of Socrates' method: *if* people and city-states are relevantly similar, then what we learn about the nature of justice in the latter can be mapped onto the former. We will see in Book IV that Socrates will try to do more than just *assume* they are similar; he will *argue* that they are. But for now, let us grant the analogy and see what Socrates does with it.

A False Start: Socrates' Rustic Utopia (2.369b–373a)

Socrates plans to 'create a city in theory from its beginnings' (2.369c), but of course it cannot be just any city; for the plan of the *Republic* to work, it must be a just city. And this city must not only *be* just, if they are to determine the truth about the nature and value of justice, it must also *seem* just to Glaucon and company, if they are to be persuaded that the just life is the happier life. Once all agree that the theoretically constructed city is just, the task will be to determine the nature of the virtue of justice, or what makes it just. We should note too that since Plato wants his readers to imaginatively participate in the dialog, readers will have to determine for themselves whether they find the city Socrates has created to be just (which, remember, is synonymous with being morally good, generally). Readers who do not think the ideal city is just or who are not sure can still follow the argument in a hypothetical way: 'Well, *if* this were a just city, does Socrates plausibly explain what makes it just?'. But this will be less than fully satisfying, especially if, like Glaucon and Adeimantus, we want Socrates to provide us with reasons we find plausible that would justify the belief, if indeed we hold it, that the just life is a better and happier life than the unjust life.

The origin of any community, Socrates thinks, is that 'none of us is self-sufficient' (2.369b). It is not just that we have needs, but we have needs that we cannot ourselves always meet. Thus, he thinks, communities are formed: 'people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers' (2.369c). This idea of cities as essentially cooperative is an attractive one, and it is at odds with the Thrasymachan view of cities as sites of competition rather than cooperation, where citizens are always

trying to outdo each other. Perhaps Thrasymachus could agree with Socrates about the cooperative origins of any *polis* while thinking that people will strive to outdo each other once a city is up and running. People will always strive to exploit others' neediness for their own advantage, and crafty Thrasymachans will be more successful at doing so than others.

Socrates next argues for a division-of-labor principle that will not only organize the city's economic life but will ultimately have profound ethical implications, as it will be the basis of the definition of justice he arrives at in Book IV. We are all born with different natural aptitudes and preferences, he thinks, each of us having a distinctive *ἔργον* [*ergon*] or natural task or function, a notion we met in Book I, most notably in the Function Argument. Since we are born with different aptitudes, Socrates advocates a division of labor: 'more plentiful and better-quality goods are more easily produced if each person does one thing for which he is naturally suited [...] and is released from having to do any of the others' (2.370c).

At least two things about the argument for what we will call the Specialization Principle are worth attending to. The first is the way Socrates appeals to what he takes to be natural facts in arguing for it, facts which many readers will find quite plausible. Many readers will have known people who have always been good at math, or who can quickly master a variety of musical instruments, or who have a knack with machines, or who excel at certain sports, etc. Though hard work and discipline are necessary for success in such areas, there usually is a natural aptitude at the core that can be developed and perhaps perfected by diligent practice and education—but without the natural aptitude as the raw material which nurture can develop, the chances of high-level success seem slim indeed. The second feature is that Socrates advocates the Specialization Principle because it benefits the community as a whole, not because it enables individual flourishing. This is perhaps the first inkling of Socrates' communitarian inclinations: he is likelier to think of the needs and good of the community first, in relatively sharp contrast to the tendency many contemporary Westerners—especially Americans—have to think individualistically. On this individualistic view, individuals are morally primary and communities exist primarily to enable individual flourishing or perhaps to protect the natural rights

individuals possess. The distinction between communitarian and individualistic thinking is a matter of degree and often context: a baseball team or string quartet comprising dyed-in-the-wool individualists who care more (or only) about their own individual successes will surely be less successful than teams or quartets with more group-minded members.

In the riveting opening chapter of his novel, *Enduring Love*, Ian McEwan writes of 'morality's ancient, irresolvable dilemma: us, or me'.⁴ If McEwan is right, the fundamental moral question is not *us versus them* or *me versus you* but rather *me versus we*: do the needs and interests of the community trump the individual's? Far from regarding the dilemma as 'irresolvable', Plato and Socrates resolve it in favor of *we* over *me*. I suspect that many, if not most, readers will often find themselves resistant to and put off by Socrates' communitarian, *we*-favoring impulses. Even so, there is much value in being confronted with thinking that is fundamentally different from one's own, as this not only provides alternative perspectives but also might force one to play Glaucon and Adeimantus and try to justify deeply-held beliefs that one takes for granted.

There will be many occupations in the ideal city: farmers, builders, carpenters, shepherds, weavers, and cobblers, to name a few. There will also be importers and exporters, merchants, retailers, and physical laborers. Very quickly, in just a couple of pages, we learn that the ideal city is complete: 'our city [has] grown to completeness [... So] where are justice and injustice to be found in it?' (2.371e). As Socrates begins to answer this question by examining the sort of lives its citizens lead, Glaucon objects—to the surprise of many readers—to the food. The food is of 'the sort they cook in the country' (2.372c), he complains, unsuitable for a young Athenian aristocrat, but perhaps suitable 'if you were founding a city for pigs' (2.372d). Most readers are apt to be misled by this charge, since to modern ears talk of pigs suggests gluttony and perhaps uncleanness. But this is not the connotation for ancient Athenians, for whom, Myles Burnyeat points out, 'the pig was an emblem rather of ignorance [...] "Any pig would know" was the

4 Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), p. 15.

saying. What Glaucon means is, “You describe the feasting of people who do not know how to live. It is *uncivilized*.”⁵

Socrates acquiesces and agrees to develop ‘a luxurious city’ (2.372e) better suited to his young friends’ expectations about what a good life involves. He does not agree with them, as he quickly makes clear: ‘the true city [...] is the one we have described, the healthy one’ (2.372e). But he goes along with them because the plan of the *Republic* demands it. Glaucon and Adeimantus, remember, want Socrates to provide them with good reasons for a belief they sincerely hold but recognize to be unjustified, the belief that the just life is the happier one. If this requires that they give up their conception of what a good life is—if justice requires that they live the simple, rustic life Socrates depicts—they are unlikely to be convinced by what he has to say. There is some interesting scholarly disagreement about whether and how seriously to take Socrates’ praise of the first city. Its benign anarchy—there is no mention of any political structures or governmental offices—will appeal to many readers, as will its simplicity, its communal bonds, and its relative self-sustainability. But the ideal city they ultimately develop is structured by ‘three *natural* classes’ (4.435b (italics added)), which suggests that the first city, which lacks them, is not natural after all.

In any event, Socrates agrees to sketch a luxurious city, replete with the sorts of delicacies Glaucon and Adeimantus insist upon and, going well beyond the more basic necessities found in the first city, to include perfumes, prostitutes, and pastries (2.373a). More striking, though, than what the luxurious city includes is what follows in its wake: war. Having ‘overstepped the limit of their necessities’ (2.373d), the citizens now require resources they do not possess, and now possess goods that other city-states might envy and seek for themselves. It is striking that Plato finds ‘the origins of war’ (2.373e) not in an innately aggressive human nature; the explanation is social and economic rather than biological: communities come into conflict with each other when they exceed a simple, natural life and grasp for luxury (and here *pleonexia* rears its ugly, Thrasymachan head). If the first, rustic city is a real possibility,

5 Myles Burnyeat, ‘Culture and Society in Plato’s “Republic”’, in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 20 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), p. 231. Italics in the original. (Burnyeat’s lecture and dozens of others can be found online at <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lecture-library.php>).

then acquisitive, *me-first pleonexia* is not what comes naturally to human beings.

Obviously, with warfare comes the need for soldiers, but Socrates eschews the idea of citizen-soldiers in favor of a professional army. 'Warfare is a profession' (2.374b), he argues, and according to the Specialization Principle only someone with a natural aptitude for warfare should become a soldier. But the ideal soldier must naturally be 'both gentle and high-spirited' (2.375c), tough with foes but gentle with friends. Socrates initially despairs of finding such a combination, worrying that these traits are so at odds with each other that 'it seems impossible to combine them' and thus 'that a good guardian cannot exist' (2.375c). His despair vanishes, though, when he thinks of dogs, whom he delightfully regards as 'truly philosophical' (2.376b), since their conduct is knowledge-based. Dogs treat people differently based on whether they know the person or not: friends are proper objects of gentleness, while strangers or foes are not.

Of course, not all dogs make good watchdogs: some are too gentle and sweet by nature, others too aggressive, even with family members. Since gentleness and high-spiritedness are often at odds with each other, proper education will be crucial to the soldier-guardians' proper development and thus to the flourishing of the city. So once we have found someone who seems to possess a natural aptitude for guarding the city (in the case of soldiers) or the home (in the case of dogs) the question is this: 'how are we to bring him up and educate him?' (2.376c). This is the question to which we turn in the following chapter.

Some Suggestions for Further Reading

Readers interested in a philosophically sophisticated account of Glaucon's division of kinds of goodness will find C.D.C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's 'Republic'* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), pp. 24–32 challenging but rewarding.

I first encountered the distinction between instrumental and constitutive means in J. L. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*', in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 15–33. The golf example appears on p. 19.

Readers interested in Hobbes' political philosophy will find helpful Sharon Lloyd and Susanne Sreedhar, 'Hobbes' Moral and Political Philosophy', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes-moral/>

Readers interested in the scholarly discussion of the city-soul analogy will find no better place to start than Bernard Williams, 'The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*', in *Plato's 'Republic': Critical Essays*, ed. by Richard Kraut (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 49–59. G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's 'Republic'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) devotes itself to the city-soul analogy as well as 'attempt[ing] to say what Plato is getting at in the *Republic*' (p. 9), which it does in lucid, lively prose.

For readers interested in the scholarly debate around the first city, an excellent place to start is Rachel Barney, 'Platonism, Moral Nostalgia and the City of Pigs', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (2001), 207–27, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134417-90000032>.

Readers interested in making sense of Glaucon's food-based objection to the first city in particular and Athenian life around Plato's and Socrates' time in general will delight in James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), which is lively and engaging.