

The Parts and Whole of Plato's Republic

Anton Ford and Benjamin Laurence

Introduction

In the second book of Plato's *Republic*, Glaucon challenges Socrates to defend the thesis that justice is a benefit to its possessor. As every reader of the dialogue knows, Socrates thinks that the justice of a human being will best be understood after one has considered the justice of a city. But his reason for thinking this is far from obvious. Why should Socrates discuss the city first? Why, indeed, should he bother to discuss it at all?

Socrates compares the difficulty of answering Glaucon's challenge to the difficulty of reading small letters from a distance, letters that, for some reason, we believe are the same as some bigger ones elsewhere (368d). For his part, Socrates believes that the justice of a human soul is identical in form with the justice of a city (369a, cf. 434d, 435b, 435e): beginning with a just city is, he says, like beginning with the larger inscription. Now when Socrates first compares the justice of a city to the bigger letters, it is natural to imagine these letters as large and as legible as the Hollywood sign. But a later methodological remark reveals that this is not at all what Socrates has in mind. After he has identified the justice of his *Kallipolis*, but before turning to the individual human being, Socrates warns Glaucon that if justice should turn out to look different in the individual than it did in the city, the account of the city will have to be revised (434e-435a). This suggests that the justice of a city is fairly inscrutable in its own right: if the bigger letters were so big as for it to be obvious what they said, it would be ludicrous to suggest that we revise our interpretation of them on the basis of letters that are illegibly small. Though Socrates evidently believes that it is difficult to read *either* inscription in isolation, he nevertheless thinks we will see *both* of them aright if we examine them together (434e). Just as it requires two fire-sticks to make a fire, Socrates thinks he will need two accounts to illuminate justice (435a). "All will be well," he says, when the two accounts have finally been brought into line (434d).

These methodological remarks are commonly taken to announce an argument by analogy.¹ On any such interpretation, Socrates believes that the justice of a soul is *like* the justice of a city: this is what it means that the two inscriptions say the same thing. He also believes that the justice of a city is easier to apprehend: this is what it means that one inscription is bigger. So the city will serve Socrates as an expository device. He will exploit the given similarity in order to illuminate the soul, which is the primary object of his interest.

The usual interpretation of Socrates' method, which is first encouraged by his methodological remarks, seems later to be confirmed by the results of his investigation. For Socrates' accounts of the city and the soul are, in the end, obviously and intentionally parallel. According to him, a just soul, like a just city, is one each part of which performs its own function.²

¹ See, for example, Annas (1981) pp. 72-73 and (1999) pp. 81-83, Cross and Woosley (1964) pp. 75-78, Irwin (1971) p.204 n.29, Kraut (1997) p. 201, Murphy (1951) pp. 68-86, 89, Reeve (1998) pp. 236-237, White (1979) pp. 82-83, Grote (1865) p. 46, and Williams (1997) p. 49.

² See 435b.

However, the usual interpretation faces a number of formidable difficulties. In the first place, it is unclear why Socrates (or we) should expect that the justice of a city and the justice of a soul are, in any interesting way, alike.³ Even supposing that they are, it is difficult to understand why Socrates should go on to devote the greater part of the dialogue to his account of a just city—if, that is, this is merely an object of comparison, introduced for the sake of an analogy with the soul. What is more, Socrates discusses countless features of the city to which he never draws any psychic analogy.⁴ How then are we to avoid the conclusion that much of the dialogue is a highly elaborate distraction, which fails to serve even the modest function of an expository device?

The most serious difficulty for the usual interpretation is that it appears to leave Socrates without an answer to Glaucon's challenge. Near the end of Book IV (444c-445b), Socrates argues that one cannot be happy unless each part of one's soul performs its proper function—that is, unless one possesses psychic justice. He appears to think that in giving this argument he has offered some form of answer to Glaucon's challenge, for at this point he and Glaucon agree that the challenge looks "ridiculous" (445b). However, David Sachs has rightly emphasized that Socrates' principal task in the *Republic* is to show, not that happiness depends on having a well-functioning soul, but that it depends on treating others fairly, on refraining from actions like murder and swindling, actions that are proscribed by the justice of a city.⁵ But if the primary relation between what goes on in well-functioning soul (psychic justice) and what goes on in a well-functioning city (civic justice) is *analogical*, then Socrates appears to need an additional argument to the effect that a well-functioning soul does not, in fact, issue in actions like murder and swindling. But no such argument is to be found in the text.

In view of these difficulties, there is reason to seek an alternative to the usual interpretation of Socrates' method.

If you ask a man to defend his judgment that such-and-such is health in a human hand, and if he begins his reply by explaining certain facts about the anatomy of the entire body, doing so on the grounds that you could not understand the answer to your question without appreciating these facts, he is *not* giving you an argument by analogy. Neither, we will argue, is Socrates. We will argue that Socrates begins with an account of

³ Annas (1981) writes that, "Plato does not even consider the possibility at the outset that justice in the case of cities, and collections of individuals, might be a very different matter from justice in the case of an individual," p. 73. Concerning Socrates' remark that the word 'justice' is predicated of cities and individuals alike, Vlastos (1971) comments: "Had Plato seen...how absurd it would be to expect that a man, a complexion, a habitat, and a diet must be 'exactly alike' in the respect in which the predicate 'healthy' applies to each, he could scarcely have failed to see how little his [argument at 435a] would cover the case of a predicate like 'just,'" p. 88. Cross and Woollsey (1964) look elsewhere in the text for an argument that a just city and a just soul are alike, and reach for the idea (at 435e) that the justice of a city *comes from*—and therefore resembles?—the justice of its citizens: "[Socrates'] argument at 435e may or may not be a good argument, but it is there," p. 77. Williams (1997) claims that, in fact, the argument at 435e induces a regress, p. 50. Most commentators who attribute to Socrates an argument by analogy conclude, in the end, that he has not said enough to justify this method.

⁴ Socrates discusses the sort of story that should be told to children, and the equality of women, to choose two random examples. But now, to what features of a soul could these features of a city conceivably be analogous? Annas (1999) mentions this as a problem for the extreme view that Socrates' discussion of the city is merely metaphorical, but she does not explain how it can be avoided by a proponent of the usual interpretation, p. 83.

⁵ See Sachs (1963). We return to the problem raised by Sachs in Section 5, below.

the city and proceeds to an account of the soul, not primarily because he believes that a city and a soul are alike, but because he believes that a human being is *part* of a city *by nature*, and because a city, as he conceives it, is a natural, functional whole. This latter is to say, not only that a city is a natural whole, and that it has a function, but also that each of its parts has a function, a function that serves simultaneously to further the work of the whole and to further the work of each of its other parts.⁶

It is no secret that Socrates thinks something of the sort. He is forever comparing a city to a body, a citizen to a bodily part and the virtue of justice to health.⁷ But the idea that there is a natural relation between an individual human being and some larger social whole is nowadays widely regarded with suspicion. Recent commentators have tended to play down this idea (without denying its presence in the dialogue) roughly to the extent that they have *defended* Plato's ethical and political teachings. The scholarly consensus today is that Socrates is an individualist: he believes that the nature, virtue and happiness of a human being can all be understood in abstraction from social life, and that human society is a mere conglomeration to which an individual belongs accidentally, rather than by nature. This hypothesis is rarely advanced explicitly, much less defended by argument, but it silently informs the interpretation of the *Republic* at every turn. Much of our effort will be directed against that presumption.⁸ For we think it prevents one from seeing even the rough shape of Socrates' argument. Our own interpretation is to be justified by the result that many problems now commonly thought to ruin the argument will immediately vanish. We count among these, not only the fallacy alleged by Sachs and the other difficulties mentioned above, but also the appearance that Socrates merely assumes that justice is a virtue in a city.⁹ As we are concerned with the whole of Plato's republic, and not the whole of his *Republic*, we will limit our discussion to Books I-IV.

In order to show that Socrates is arguing from whole to part, and not from like to like, we needn't deny that he thinks a city and a soul are alike, or even that this thought plays a role in his argument. We need only to show that the salient resemblances are subordinate to a more encompassing structure, and that this structure is what explains and unifies Socrates' basic theses.¹⁰ To this end, let us distinguish two claims that Socrates

⁶ We will elaborate the idea of a functional whole in Section 2.

⁷ For some conspicuous examples in the *Republic*, see 357c-e, 420c-e, 444c-e, 462c-e, 608e-610b. See also *Gorgias* 479a-c.

⁸ Our proposal is in line with a tradition of reading the *Republic* that seems to have ended sometime during the Cold War. There is a casual acknowledgement of Plato's "organicism," as it is now disparagingly called, on every page of Barker (1906) and Foster (1931). And in 1912, Cornford could begin an essay with these words: "It is now generally recognized that Plato's whole theory of the Ideal State is based upon the principle that human society is 'natural' (φύσει). As against the antisocial doctrines of certain sophists, this proposition means, in the first place, a denial of the view that society originated in a primitive contract. But Plato does not merely reject this false opinion; he also sets up an alternative doctrine that the state is natural, in the sense that a human society constructed on ideal lines would be one that should reflect the structure of man's soul, and give full play to the legitimate functions of every part of his nature." What was once "generally recognized" to be Plato's view is no longer even acknowledged as an interpretative possibility. It is now presumed obvious that Plato holds the very "antisocial doctrines" that Cornford attributes to the sophists.

⁹ The last point is discussed in Section 4, below.

¹⁰ Lear (1998), too, argues that the analogy between city and soul is embedded in a larger structure. We write in sympathy with his claim that, "*psyche*-analysis and *polis*-analysis are, for Plato, two aspects of a single discipline," and hope that our analysis of the *polis* might complement his analysis of the *psyche*, p. 220.

makes for an analogy between a city and a soul: first is the claim that a city and a soul are both functional entities composed of functional parts (with all that this entails about the harmonious relations of their parts); second is the claim that the parts of a city and the parts of a soul are equal in number and similar in function. Notice that the first claim is logically weaker: it is presupposed and elaborated by the second, but by no means entails it. Now consider the following passage from Book V, where Socrates asks Glaucon *how* a city is like a human being:

What is it about the city that is most like a single person? For example, when one of us hurts his finger, the entire organism that binds body and soul together into a single system under the ruling part within it is aware of this, and the whole feels the pain together with the part that suffers. That's why we say that the man has a pain in his finger. And the same can be said about any part of a man, with regard either to the pain it suffers or to the pleasure it experiences when it finds relief.—Certainly. And, as for your question, the city with the best government *is* most like such a person.—Then, whenever anything good or bad happens to a single one of its citizens, such a city above all others will say that the affected part is its own and will share in the pleasure or pain as a whole. (462c-e)

This passage is particularly important for understanding Socrates' method because in it he addresses both analogy and mereology at once. Socrates says that a good city and a human being are "most" alike inasmuch as they both have parts, and are related to their parts in similar ways: here we have the first point of analogy, upon which the second depends. But Socrates does not present a city and a human being as two entities, side-by-side, which happen both to have parts. For he says that the parts of a city are human beings! This means that the parts of a human being—body and soul, to begin with, and the parts of each of these—are themselves parts (or subparts) of a city, rather as the parts of an organ are parts of the organism to which the organ belongs. For our purposes, the important point is that any analogical relation there may be between a city and a soul is subordinate to a mereological relation.

The idea that a human being is naturally a part of a functional whole in fact fits very nicely with Socrates' methodological remarks. A functional whole is, in some fairly straightforward sense, "bigger" than its parts. Because the functions of the whole and its parts are internally related, it is necessary for someone who is interested in a part to investigate the whole; and if it is not quite necessary to *begin* with the whole, this is at least a perfectly reasonable way to proceed. Moreover, it is reasonable to revise one's account of the whole in light of one's account of a part, for the two accounts must ultimately harmonize. Now the claim that a just city and a just soul share the same form is put forward to legitimize Socrates' method, and it is connected with an observation about ordinary language (see again 369a, 434d, 435b, 435e). Socrates points out that both a city and a soul may be called just. Notice that it is likewise the case that both a body and a hand may be called healthy. A complete account of the health of the body *is* a complete account of the health of a hand, and vice versa: for the health of the hand and the health of the body are not two things, but one, and their account is one, as a body and a hand are one. But of what there is one account, is there not also—one form?

Needless to say, an interpretation of Socrates' methodological remarks must stand or fall with an interpretation of the method he actually pursues. Our aim here is to sketch

the argument of Books I-IV in the broadest possible strokes. In Section 1, we will argue that the accounts of justice put forward by Socrates' principal interlocutors are united by an underlying conception of human nature, according to which society unites human beings in something like the way that a contest unites its contestants. In Section 2, we turn to Socrates' account of a city: we will argue that he conceives of a city as a functional whole the members of which are "partners and helpers" (369c), rather than the adversaries that his interlocutors imagined. Next, we will draw out the implications of Socrates' account of a city, first for his conception of happiness, in Section 3, and then for his conception of justice, in Sections 4 and 5. Finally, in Section 6, we will attempt to distinguish the form of Socrates' account from its content, with a view to showing how much of its political and psychological content may be criticized, and rejected, even by one who is committed to an account of the same form.

1. Polemarchus, Thrasymachus and Glaucon

To see what Socrates is arguing in the *Republic* one must first see, at least in outline, what he is arguing against. Our aim in this section is to show that Polemarchus, Thrasymachus and Glaucon are all moved by the same general conception of human nature. We will argue that their three accounts of justice are three increasingly sophisticated expressions of the idea that human beings are united in their life together as adversaries. This conception of human nature is, we think, the real object of Socrates' criticism. We offer the following abstract reflections about competition and cooperation as simple framework within which to understand the dialogue's central dispute.

Competition and Cooperation

Some of the things we do we can only do together: playing checkers, for example, or felling a tree with a two-man crosscut saw. We might call these *collective activities* to mark that they essentially involve a plurality of agents, and to distinguish them from *solitary activities* such as hammering a nail or playing the card game solitaire.

Among collective activities we can distinguish those that are *competitive* from those that are *cooperative* according as they unite their participants either as *adversaries* or as *partners*. Where the activity is competitive, doing is a matter of outdoing. It is built into the game of checkers, for example, not only that there should be two players, but that the two should be at odds: the end pursued by each player is precisely his own victory over the other. Note that the ends in question are *opposed*, and not merely distinct: far from being unconcerned with his opponent's doing well, each is positively set against it; indeed, the failure of his opponent is the *sole* concern of each inasmuch as this is identical with his own success. In a game of checkers, as in a duel, or in a wrestling or a tennis match, each participant attends to the moves of his adversary because getting the better of him requires divining his intentions and thwarting his efforts, discovering and exploiting his weaknesses and capitalizing on his mistakes. And since each knows this of the other, he employs what tricks he can to conceal his own plan of action, or else, if it is possible, he simply overpowers him. Hobbes rightly observed that, "force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues."¹¹ But the remark applies as well to tennis as to war. For it is feature of competitive activities as such that to be good at them—that is, to possess

¹¹ *Leviathan*, p.78. R.E. Allen (1987) also sees competition and cooperation as being at the heart of the dispute between Socrates and his interlocutors, and also draws the connection to Hobbes.

the salient intelligence and skill—is to be capable of getting and maintaining the upper hand over another by just such means as these.¹²

In cooperative activities, agents are joined, not as adversaries, but as partners. Now felling a tree with a crosscut saw is as much a job for two as checkers is a game for two. But whereas the adversaries in a competitive activity pursue ends that are distinct and opposed, the partners in a cooperative activity share a single end and pursue that end together. Because partners share an end, they also share success or failure. It follows that two partners, considered merely as such, never have a thought of outdoing one other, whereas two adversaries never think of anything else. And while each partner, like each adversary, attends to the actions of the other, this is in order to further his partner's efforts, and not to undermine them. Where the one partner is noticeably weak, struggling or in need of something, the other lends his strength, support or aid. Neither sees his partner's inability as an opportunity to exploit; for his partner's inability is, in a sense, his own. This being so, partners tend to communicate, rather than to conceal, their intentions. Here force and fraud are out of place.

Now the internal structure of certain activities neatly combines competition and cooperation. Where the opponents in a contest are collective agents rather than individuals—as in a war, a soccer match or a game of bridge—there are teams or sides. But at the same time that opposing teams are related as adversaries, players are related within a team as partners: thus the end shared by the members of one team—viz. their own victory over their opponents—is opposed to the end shared by the members of the other. With these observations in mind, let us turn to the text.

Polemarchus

The poet Simonides wrote that, “It is just to give to each what is owed to him” (331e). What he meant by this, Socrates claims, is that it is just to give a person what is *appropriate*, or *fitting* for him (332c). Polemarchus accepts this interpretation and offers a substantive account of what it is to treat people appropriately: it is appropriate, he says, to benefit one's friends and to harm one's enemies (332b, 334b). Polemarchus' double-standard may appear too unpromising an account of justice to merit serious philosophical consideration. But in fact it inaugurates the idea that will occupy Socrates for the remainder of the *Republic*—an idea that is helpfully expressed here in a crude and unguarded form. As the game of football collects the players on a field into opposing teams, Polemarchus imagines that social life collects human beings into relations that are essentially adversarial. Nothing could be more appropriate for a football player than to further the efforts of his teammates and to undermine those of his opponents. Likewise, Polemarchus thinks, it is appropriate for a human being to benefit his friends and to harm his enemies.¹³

¹² The remarks of this paragraph have nothing to do with cheating or dirty play; they concern the internal dynamics of a competitive activity as such, and are intended to be uncontroversial. The point of these reflections is ultimately to illuminate the debate between Socrates and his interlocutors over justice, so we have emphasized the features of competitive and cooperative activities that are relevant to that debate. Nothing we have said is meant to imply that there is anything morally objectionable about enjoying competitive games.

¹³ In fact, the theme of competition reappears throughout Socrates' discussion with Polemarchus, beginning with their very first exchange. When Polemarchus and his friends overtake Socrates and Glaucon, who are heading back to Athens, Polemarchus makes a joking threat that he and his companions will force Socrates

Polemarchus' account of justice first comes to grief when he tries to specify the matters in which justice is useful. He tells Socrates that justice is concerned with guarding money for safe keeping (333c). The problem is that if justice is helping one's friends and harming one's enemies, it would seem that it is appropriate to *guard* money only when it has been deposited by a friend, and that when an enemy deposits the money, justice demands one to *steal* it. Thus, Polemarchus appears to be committed to the thesis that a just person is as much a thief as he is a guardian (334b). Though he concedes this must be false, Polemarchus boldly reaffirms his original claim. Socrates then confronts him with another of its apparent consequences: if Polemarchus' account is correct, then justice requires one to harm people who are good and innocent of any wrong-doing, so long as they happen to be one's enemies (334d). Of course, Polemarchus cannot bring himself to accept this, either. No one as conventionally-minded as he could maintain that justice requires thieving and harming the innocent: for justice is conventionally thought to exclude precisely these actions; and what is more, justice is thought to be a virtue, whereas these actions are thought to be vicious.

Thrasymachus

These difficulties are resolved by Thrasymachus, who carries on the spirit of Polemarchus' account in a more coherent and radical form. The details of Thrasymachus' account of justice are notoriously difficult to pin down, and scholars debate whether all of the things he says are consistent with each other, much less expressions of a single idea.¹⁴ But Plato marks a point in the dialogue where Thrasymachus' driving thought is finally articulated. At this point, Socrates says, chillingly: "We mustn't shrink from pursuing the argument and looking into this, just as long as I take you to be saying what you really think. And I believe that you aren't joking now, Thrasymachus, but are saying what you believe to be the truth" (349a). What Thrasymachus says, once he has stopped joking, is that true human excellence lies in injustice. To see how this resolves the difficulties that confounded Polemarchus, recall that Polemarchus tried to maintain: (1) the adversarial conception of human nature and society (implicit in his account of justice); (2) the conventional idea that justice rules out actions like stealing and harming the innocent; and (3) the equally conventional idea that justice is a virtue. Thrasymachus realizes that if the third idea is rejected, the first two can be coherently maintained. He therefore claims justice is a human vice: it is not a trivial defect of the body, but an infirmity of the soul

to do what they want: "Do you see how many we are? [Y]ou must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here" (327c). Socrates questions whether they are right to conceive themselves as matched in a contest of strength, rather than as partners to a rational conversation: "Isn't there another alternative, namely, that we persuade you to let us go?" Later, when Socrates asks what field of activity stands to justice as healing stands to the art of medicine, Polemarchus' reply is, "wars and alliances," (332e). Once he has been forced to admit that justice is also valuable in peacetime, Polemarchus says that what it is useful for is getting partnerships in money matters (333a). Now Polemarchus was famously the son of a rich arms dealer, and it cannot have been lost on Plato's audience that nearly every word put into his mouth concerns either arms or deals. War is a paradigm of adversarial activity, where (if anywhere) stealth and force are obviously fitting. But in business, too, one's own advantage is always at odds with that of the competition.

¹⁴ On the interpretation we are proposing, inconsistencies are to be expected: just as difficulties internal to Polemarchus' position are worked out by Thrasymachus, so difficulties internal to Thrasymachus' position will in turn be worked out by Glaucon. If the three accounts are indeed related in this way, then the salient problems with each of the first two accounts are indicated by the shape of the account that follows.

suffering from which one goes about one's entire life in the wrong way; it is a thing worthy of scorn, or perhaps pity, but certainly not the praise it commonly receives.

Though he thinks that justice a vice, Thrasymachus has a fairly conventional conception of what is involved in being just. He is happy to say, for instance, that justice requires treating others fairly; that it involves being honest, peaceable and beneficial, not only in relation to friends, but all around (343d-e); and that a just person is not the sort to try to get the better of his fellows (349b). Moreover, he is happy to say that injustice is characterized by the use of "stealth and force" in maintaining the upper hand over others (344a).¹⁵ What Thrasymachus praises as the health and vigor of the human soul is *pleonexia*, the state of character that is, on all accounts, directly opposed to justice.

Pleonexia fits a human being to live well only on the assumption that our living together is the kind of activity in which doing well is outdoing. It is important to see that if this underlying conception of human nature is accurate, then Thrasymachus is right: justice is a vice. To bring this out we may imagine a kind of sentimentalist about tennis, all of whose actions are guided by the concern that his opponent do well: from the fact that his opponent has a weak backhand, he infers that he ought to serve to the forehand; and when his opponent serves the ball he lets it go by. He is wildly confused, for he thinks that this is how the game is played—not in special circumstances that call for something less than one's full effort, but normally, and by its experts. Yet, as everyone knows, it is not for his having *such* thoughts, or for his acting in *such* ways, that someone is an excellent player. According to Thrasymachus, anyone who believes that justice is human excellence is a kind of sentimental idiot, radically mistaken about the kind of game we are playing.¹⁶

Glaucon

When Thrasymachus loses his composure, Glaucon takes over, giving the idea first introduced by Polemarchus its most sophisticated and persuasive expression. Glaucon famously prefaces his account with a three-fold division of goods (357b-d). He does so in order to argue that justice, like surgery, is onerous in itself and good only for the sake of what comes from it. He wants Socrates to argue against this and to prove that justice is instead like being healthy: something that is good not only for what it brings, but for its own sake as well.

¹⁵ The importance of "stealth and force" in Plato's conception of injustice is signaled by Socrates, whose immediate response to Thrasymachus begins from the idea that injustice is exercised through "trickery or open warfare," (345a).

¹⁶ Let us make a brief suggestion about how all this might be related to Thrasymachus' earlier claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c–339a). Much of what he says in that speech falls neatly into place if it is seen against his background conception of human nature. For if the members of a society are locked in a competition in which success is a matter of getting and maintaining the upper hand over everyone else, then a ruler is naturally seen as the reigning champion—one who has already used stealth and force to defeat his opponents, and who now constantly defends his title against challengers by means of laws that he manipulates to his advantage. Against that background, Thrasymachus appears to be right about what the art of ruling is. He also appears to be right in thinking that laws established in accordance with that art will dictate actions that benefit those in power. In saying this little, we admittedly pass over countless matters of detail. But our aim here is only to suggest the shape of an idea that promises to organize the various pronouncements of Thrasymachus and to place him in line with Polemarchus and Glaucon.

Glaucon's account of justice takes the form of a creation myth, but inasmuch as this is intended to be an articulation of the nature of justice (358c), and not an exercise in speculative anthropology, we may abstract from its historical trappings. The by now familiar line of thought is encapsulated in Glaucon's opening claim that, "to do injustice is naturally good and to suffer it naturally bad," (358e). As Glaucon has it, we are by nature creatures who aim "to outdo others and to get more and more—this is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good" (359c). Since human beings are each others' natural adversaries, human flourishing is a kind of supremacy, the capacity to win it is excellence, and the actions through which it is typically won are naturally good actions.

But Glaucon goes on to point out that a perpetrator of injustice often benefits significantly less than his victim is harmed (358e). Indeed, if nothing restrained the use of stealth and force in our struggle for supremacy—if people went around inflicting the greatest harm upon others for the slightest advantage to themselves—the typical person would live in constant peril. That is why it necessary for us to impose laws upon ourselves and why we praise those who curb their own *pleonexia*. It serves everyone (except the most powerful) to have the protections of law and reputation in place (359a). Still, the whole business of justice is properly understood as an artifice designed to inhibit our true nature. That we treat it with respect is a kind of "perversion" (359c).

The fact that we have the protections of law and reputation does nothing to alter our fundamental antagonism—a fight in padded gloves is nonetheless a fight—but it does make winning the advantage more complicated than it would otherwise be. For as things stand, to break the law is risky business. And no one will get ahead in life who is known to employ stealth and force. Since we often need the help of others to get what we need, we are forced to win their trust; and this requires that we at least *appear* to be trustworthy. On Glaucon's account, there is nothing wrong with injustice except that, if it is discovered, it tends to incur harsh punishments and to undermine our success in a subtle contest. It is thus good and wise and to any individual's advantage to throw off the gloves, when he can do so without getting caught. Anyone who is not "wretched and stupid" will do just this when the occasion arises (360d). For a person whose "way of life is based on the truth about things" (362a) sees that justice is a burden and practices it only unwillingly (359b).

So understood, Glaucon's account of justice is a notable improvement over that of Thrasymachus. In the first place, Glaucon points out that violence, deceit and unlawfulness are apt to cause one trouble in life; and that many social and financial advantages accrue to a person who has a reputation for justice. This went totally unacknowledged by Thrasymachus, who refused to count justice as a good even of the lowest sort. Glaucon also insists that life would be impossible for most of us without the impositions of law and reputation. This means that justice is an advantage, not only for rulers, as Thrasymachus claimed, but for the ruled as well. It is no doubt common sense thoughts like these that lead Polemarchus to say that justice is a benefit to its possessor. Glaucon shows that this conventional belief is not as wildly confused about human life as Thrasymachus would have had us believe.

Perhaps Thrasymachus would have embraced Glaucon's account. Doing so would have enabled him to recuperate the common sense moving Polemarchus while maintaining his own driving thought. For although, on Glaucon's account, justice inhibits

the exercise of our natural *pleonexia*, still, pleonectic satisfaction remains the standard of human well-being. So justice is at once a natural vice and a pantomime virtue.

In his closing remarks, Glaucon offers a final description of the unjust man that neatly ties the three accounts together:

He rules his city because of his reputation for justice; he marries into any family he wishes; he gives his children in marriage to anyone he wishes; he has contracts and partnerships with anyone he wants; and besides benefiting himself in all these ways, he profits because he has no scruples about doing injustice. *In any contest, public or private, he's the winner and outdoes his enemies.* And by outdoing them, he becomes wealthy, benefiting his friends and harming his enemies...That's what they say, Socrates, that gods and humans provide a better life for unjust people than for just ones. (362b–c)

Glaucon invokes Thrasymachus with his allusion to a ruler who profits himself by injustice; and his reference to contracts and partnerships recalls Polemarchus, whose definition of justice is then explicitly quoted. Glaucon thus presents his own account as the culmination of the two that preceded it. He suggests that at the center of it all has been a picture of human life as a contest, a contest that injustice fits one to win. If Socrates is to show that justice belongs in the highest class of goods, he will have to explain what is wrong with this conception of human life.

2. The Nature of a City and a Citizen

As he indicated that he would in his methodological remarks, Socrates begins his reply to Glaucon with an account of the city:

I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient ($\alpha^{\alpha}\tau\alpha\rho\kappa\eta\varsigma$), but all need many things. Do you think that a city is founded on any other principle?—No.—And because people need many things, and because one person calls on a second out of one need and on a third out of a different need, many people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers. And such a settlement is called a city. (369b–c)

What Socrates describes here is the genesis of a city.¹⁷ But as the genesis of a thing may be natural or artificial, the question arises which sort of genesis Socrates has in mind. Is he thinking that a city is a natural growth, to which a human being belongs by nature? Or is he rather thinking it is an artifact, a conglomeration of naturally independent individuals, who for some reason find it expedient to join their disparate forces? Much depends on the answer to this question. For if a human being is naturally a citizen, then human virtue and happiness cannot be understood in abstraction from civic life. Whereas they must be so understood, if a human being is not by nature part of such a whole.

Commentators today seldom pause to consider the question. They proceed as though it were obvious that Socrates holds the latter, individualistic conception of human nature.¹⁸ This, however, was not obvious to Aristotle, who rejected individualism

¹⁷ Here and throughout this paper we are using the word “city” as a technical term, as Socrates uses the word “polis” (369c). The entities in question need not resemble Paris, much less France. Vlastos (1977) rightly emphasizes that Socrates’ account here “abstracts rigorously from all political institutions (no mention of government, laws, courts, army and the like),” p.78, n.40.

¹⁸ Thus Cross and Woosley (1964) write: “It should be realized not only that Plato supposes men induced to cooperate by their *economic* needs, but also that he maintains that they do so entirely selfishly. The first city is no high-minded community, fired by ideals of brotherly love. It is a group of men, each still out for

himself, and who did so in the apparent belief that this was a point on which he and Socrates could agree. Aristotle criticizes Socrates throughout the *Politics*, perhaps even exaggerating their differences on occasion, but he never complains that Socrates denied, or even that he failed to affirm, the fundamental thesis of Aristotle's own theory: that a city is a natural creation (**φύσει ὁ πόλις**), and man by nature a civic creature (**πολιτικὸν ζῷον**).¹⁹ On the contrary, Aristotle defends this thesis in terms that he borrows directly from Socrates himself:

The proof that the state (**πόλις**) is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, *is not self-sufficient* (**ἀτάρκῃς**); and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, *or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself*, must be either a beast or a god," (1253a25-28).²⁰

This appears to be an allusion precisely to *Republic* 369b.

Quite apart from what Aristotle thought, the individualistic interpretation of 369b is implausible. Socrates' claim that "none of us is self-sufficient" is *on the face of it* a claim about our nature. Notice, first, that it is categorical, much like the claim that we have speech but not telepathy, and thumbs but not wings. Moreover, the claim is conspicuously presented as the starting-point of Socrates' argument that justice is a genuine human virtue. But the virtue of a living thing is nothing but a perfection of its nature. So it would be very strange for Socrates to argue from our lack of self-sufficiency, if he supposed this were an accidental feature of human life. Nor is there any sign, here or elsewhere, that he *does* think it is accidental.²¹

But if it is by nature that we lack self-sufficiency, then by nature we possess the "partners and helpers" who answer to our lack. For it is in general the case that a living thing has by nature, not only its need, but also the goods by which that need is satisfied, and the means by which such goods are obtained. Along with its characteristic hunger, the spider has both its fly and its web. Now the spider is a solitary creature in the sense that *its* way of providing for itself does not involve others of its kind. But very young children know that not all creatures are like this—that a honeybee, for instance, obtains

his own interest as much as if he were living in a state of nature, but now realizing that enlightened self-interest is better served by a degree of cooperation. [...] It is straightforward capitalism: 'to each what by economic exchange he can get'. The attitude which Socrates ascribes to each of his imaginary citizens is that of putting into the common stock, or on the market, whatever he must in order to get out of it what he wants," p. 80. That Cross and Woosley take the individualistic conception of human nature for granted (and so beg the question we have raised) is clear from their sense of the possibilities: the cooperation Socrates describes must be understood *either* as egoism *or* as altruism. They do recognize the possibility that human beings might have a shared interest. This theme will recur in Section 4.

¹⁹ *Pol.* 1253a2-3.

²⁰ When Aristotle says that a city is a whole, he has in mind is a functional whole, comparable to a body. The quoted sentence is preceded by this: "the city is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except homonymously" (1253a19-21).

²¹ Vlastos (1978) is representative of the interpretation we are opposing here. Vlastos says of the city introduced at 369b: "Its people had to choose between two options: on one hand, self-sufficiency, every man working only for himself, relying on his own labor to meet all of his needs; on the other, interdependence, every man working for himself *and* for each of his neighbors..." p.106. Vlastos appears to understand Socrates' claim that "none of us is self-sufficient" to mean that each of us is self-sufficient: for otherwise how could there be a choice between self-sufficiency and interdependence? The idea that we "choose" to be part of a city is nowhere in the text.

what it needs largely through the activity of other bees, together with whom it forms a hive. The point here is not that it is impossible for a honeybee to survive alone, but only that, if one were somehow to do so, *this* would be an accident, alien to its nature. We might express this homely truth by saying that, though the spider is, the honeybee is not self-sufficient. The corresponding truth about human beings is equally plain: we do not get what we need by ourselves; this is not our way. Socrates calls a city whatever stands to human need as a hive stands to the honeybee's. Need is the principle of its unity, and our place in it is every bit as natural as our need.

This interpretation of 369b is confirmed by the subsequent development of Socrates' account. He begins with our need for food, shelter and clothing (369d). But because the availability of such goods depends on their having already been produced by human beings, he straightaway introduces the farmer, the builder and the weaver (369d). Socrates then reminds us that no productive activity is self-sufficient, but each needs many things: farming, building and weaving each depend for their possibility on the antecedent production of their tools and materials, as in turn do the productive activities responsible for these (370d). The idea is familiar from the opening lines of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. When its implications are drawn out, the result is a system of mutually dependent productive activities related to one another as parts of a whole. Out of this whole there arises: an olive, a house, a pair of shoes—whatever it may be that satisfies the day-to-day needs of an individual human being.

Socrates says that the members of a city "share things with one another, giving and taking" (369c). The meaning of this claim is best understood in connection with the system of activities we have just described. Notice that Socrates' construction of the city proceeds in two clearly marked phases. He first asks Glaucon how the necessary productive activities should be distributed amongst the members of the city (369d). Once this question has been answered, Socrates turns to the distribution of goods: "And how will those in the city itself share the things that each produces?" (371b). With an answer to the second question, the city is said to be complete (371e). The two questions that frame Socrates' construction of the city are on the face of it questions of policy, and we will eventually need to say a word about the specific policies that Socrates endorses.²² But the tasks that these (or some other) policies are needed to address have been set for Socrates by a prior conception of the nature of a city. In asking *how* the city's work and goods are to be shared, he has already presupposed *that* they are to be shared. We discern, then, behind his pair of questions, the following two defining features of a city: (1) what a city does is done by its citizens, each of them doing a share, and (2) what a city has is had by its citizens, each of them having a share. The share that each individual citizen does is his contribution to the sum total of activity performed by the city as a whole, upon which sum total of activity depends, not only the share that he himself has, and so not only his own life and well-being, but also that of each of his fellow citizens.

Socrates develops his account of a city by focusing on material need. But of course, our need is not only material, and our mutual dependence is not only economic. Since Socrates introduces the members of a city as responding to one another's need quite generally (369b-c), we should expect him to have other aspects of human life in view, even at the earliest stage of his account. And indeed he does: we find the members of his rustic village sharing meals together, enjoying sex and singing hymns to the gods.

²² See Section 4.

These activities reflect a many-sided need and a many-sided dependence on others of our kind. As Socrates' account of the city develops, other, more exalted aspects of human life will enter the scene: e.g. education, art, medicine, law and philosophy. In all of these ways and more, partners and helpers answer to our lack of self-sufficiency.

At this point we must digress from Socrates' main argument in order to see how his account of a city, here in Book II, fits with his earlier claim that a city belongs under a common genus with an army and a band of robbers (351c-352c). He calls each of these groups a "tribe" (*'unoq*). If we allow ourselves momentarily to abstract from the differences between a city and these other tribes, so that we may consider the lot generically, the first thing we will notice is a common teleological structure. A tribe is a functional whole: each of its parts has a function, and the function of each part is such as to harmonize both with that of the other parts, and with that of the whole. This much can also be said of an artifact or a living organism. In each case, the salient harmony of part with part, and of part with whole, is made possible by the structure of the activity which it is the function of the whole to perform. Notice that in each case, the activity of the whole can be analyzed into teleologically ordered parts: a clock keeps time, but this involves various movements of gears, springs and hands; a humming bird lives, but its life-activity includes seeing, flying, eating, and laying eggs; a band robs, but this involves, say, casing a bank, cracking a safe, collecting the loot and driving a getaway car away. The complex activity of the whole is in each case divided amongst its parts, so that the whole does what it does by way of its parts doing parts precisely of this.

What appears to distinguish a tribe from other functional wholes is the fact that its parts are *agents*. Thus an army, a band, and a city are composed, respectively, of soldiers, robbers and citizens. It is among these that the activity of each is divided. This means that a division of productive labor, such as Socrates describes in the city, is but a special determination of something we find in all tribes. So, too, is the "partnership" of citizens. Socrates says that, whatever the end of a tribe may be, its success depends on a certain "friendship" (351d) holding amongst its members. Insofar as the members of a tribe are "enemies" or "at odds" (351e), he says, they are incapable of acting "as a unit" (352a), and so incapable of achieving their "common purpose" (351e).²³ The point of Socrates' talk about "friends" and "enemies" may be expressed less prosaically by saying that each member of a tribe must act so as positively to further the activity of his fellows, or else undermine the success of the tribe as a whole, and fail to perform his own function. The relationship between agents who act in this way is "friendship," or, as he says in the case of a city, "partnership."

The significance of the fact that a city is a tribe will become clear later on (in Sections 4 and 5) when we consider a generic feature of a well-functioning tribe about which we have so far remained silent: namely, that it has *justice* in it. But we should at no point lose sight of the great difference between a city and the other tribes that Socrates mentions. The fact that we belong to a city by nature, as we do not belong to an army or a band of robbers, means that a city stands in a special relation to human life and well-being, and also that it has a special kind of unity.

Because that for the sake of which a city works is the well-being of its members, the benefit of a city's members is internal to its end. This is not true of an army or a band

²³ Socrates accordingly speaks of "faction" or "civil war" (*stásiq*) as a liability, not specifically of social or political associations, but of tribes in general (351d).

of robbers. To see why, it is helpful first to consider the work of a solitary agent, such as a fisherman. Insofar as he is what we call him, a fisherman aims only to catch fish: he does not aim to eat them, or to sell them, or to enjoy sea air and sunshine. Someone who is a fisherman might of course benefit from fishing in these and many other ways, but such benefits to himself do not figure into the description of his end *qua* fisherman (346b).²⁴ The same is true of a band of robbers and of an army. Whereas the end of a fisherman is caught fish, the end of a band is stolen loot and that of an army is victory won in battle. Notice that in describing the ends of *such* tribes we make no mention of any benefits accruing to the members thereof. Nor need there be any: a modern band of Merry Men might all have day-jobs and perform their moonlight theft for the poor,²⁵ just as an army of mercenaries might fight on behalf of a foreign nation. Even when benefits do accrue to someone who is part of such a tribe, they do not accrue to him *qua* member of it. The man who defends his country in war may thereby secure his own well-being, but this is because he wears the hat of a citizen as well as that of a soldier: it is *qua* citizen, and not *qua* soldier, that he is benefited by the army's success. A city differs from such tribes inasmuch as it is necessary to mention the good of its members in order to describe its work. Unlike an army or a band of robbers, a city aims to benefit its members *qua* members of it, and thereby to benefit itself. Recall in this connection that we identified *two* essential features of a city: a citizen both *does* part of what the city does and *has* part of what the city has. Yet only the former could figure into our general account of tribes. The reason for this should now be clear: there is nothing corresponding to the latter in an army or a band of robbers.

This points to a deep ontological distinction between a city and these other tribes. A city is a self-maintaining system: it is, as Kant might say, both the cause and effect of itself, and therefore the cause and effect of its parts; meanwhile its parts are reciprocally the causes and effects of each other.²⁶ For a city exists at one time only because the activity it performed at a previous time has sustained it in the interim. And since the parts of a city are citizens, these, too, owe their present existence—i.e. their lives—to the past work of the city. But the past work of the city was performed precisely by its citizens. Each citizen is thus partially responsible for the present existence of, at once, his city, his fellow-citizens and himself. A city is in this respect like a living organism, whose organs each reciprocally maintain both one another and the whole. But these natural wholes have a different kind of unity than we find in a clock and a band of robbers. It is true that the parts of a clock each serve to further the work of the others, and even that they exist in order to do this; but a clock does not make or maintain its gears, nor its gears the clock,

²⁴ This point is made repeatedly, and at length, by Socrates in Book I. See, for instance, 342c-e and 346e-347a.

²⁵ See Plato's *Sophist* (219c-222d), where the fisherman and the pirate are both classified as hunters (cf. Aristotle's classification of the brigand at *Pol.* 1256a35-39). If what we said about the solitary fisherman is true—viz. that no benefit to himself is properly mentioned in a description of his end—then the same should apply e.g. to a team of whale hunters. And if it applies to them, it should also apply to a band of thieves.

²⁶ See his *Critique of Judgment*, §65, Ak. 372-376. Though Kant is primarily concerned in these pages with living organisms, he remarks that it is fitting to apply the cognate "organization" in a context that is distinctly social. He says that, "In a whole of this kind [sc. a body politic] certainly no member should be a mere means, but should also be an end, and, seeing that he contributes to the possibility of the entire body, should have his position and function in turn defined by the idea of the whole" (Ak. 375n.).

nor its gears its springs. Part and whole alike owe their existence to an agency that is external to the system: namely, to a smith or clockmaker. The same is true of a band of robbers, which, because it aims to rob, aims at something quite other than its own existence.

Though we have cast this last point in a Kantian idiom, its true origin is Platonic. The idea that a city maintains itself, day by day, and generation by generation, is, in fact, a broad organizing principle of the *Republic*. Among other things, it explains Socrates' conspicuous concern with production (in Book II), education (in Book III)²⁷ and reproduction (in Book V). Socrates himself draws attention to the fact that a city's growth is cyclical:

Once our city gets a good start, it will go on growing in a cycle. Good education and upbringing, when they are preserved, produce good natures, and useful natures, who are in turn well educated, grow up even better than their predecessors, both in their offspring and in other respects, just like other animals. (424a)

This perpetual self-maintenance is characteristic of other animals, both solitary and gregarious, and of living nature in general. In it we see the substance of the claim that a city is a natural growth.

This natural association of partners and helpers contrasts starkly with the conception of a city we found implicit in the accounts of Polemachus, Thrasymachus and Glaucon. We will now see how it guides Socrates in Book IV, where he turns his attention to happiness and justice.

3. The Happiness of a City and a Citizen

The mature city that Socrates names the *Kallipolis* is notoriously composed of three distinct classes: there are the producers, who perform the city's manual labor; the auxiliaries, who are soldier-police; and the guardians, who see to the affairs of state. In addition to performing three different functions in the life of the city, the members of these classes themselves lead three very different kinds of lives. The guardians, for instance, are forbidden to possess private property (416d-417b). When Book IV opens, Adeimantus is objecting to the *Kallipolis* on their behalf:

How would you defend yourself, Socrates, if someone told you that you aren't making these men very happy and it's their own fault? The city really belongs to them, yet they derive no good from it, (419a).

Adeimantus thinks, quite reasonably, that the guardians ought to benefit from their membership in the *Kallipolis*, but it seems to him that in fact they do not. For as Socrates has arranged things, the guardians are without "gold and silver and all the things that are thought to belong to people who are blessedly happy" (419a).

Socrates begins his reply to Adeimantus with an allusion to the method he has pursued thus far:

I think we'll discover what to say if we follow the same path as before. We'll say that it wouldn't be surprising if these people were happiest just as they are, but that, in establishing our city, we aren't aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so, as far as possible. (420b)

²⁷ Education belongs on the list because "the final outcome of education is a single newly finished person" (425c).

When Adeimantus objects that a part of the city is unhappy, Socrates diverts his attention to the happiness of the whole. But why does Socrates do this? And how is the maneuver continuous with the “path” he was following before?

Two things are reasonably clear. First, it is clear that Socrates believes that the *Kallipolis* as a whole is happy. As far as he is concerned, he has achieved his professed aim: the city is very close to being as happy as a city can be (see 427e and 434d-e).

It is also clear that Socrates believes there is an intimate relation between the happiness of a city and the happiness of its citizens.²⁸ Simply recall the passage from Book V, where he compares a city to a human body and a citizen to a bodily part (462c-e, quoted in our introduction). Socrates remarks that when a person's finger suffers either pleasure or pain, *he* suffers it: that is, the *whole person* suffers whatever is suffered by any of his parts. Likewise, he says, a city as a whole shares in anything good or bad that befalls its members. It must therefore detract from the happiness of a city if even one of its members is unhappy.

But what is not clear, and what we must understand in order to interpret Socrates' reply to Adeimantus' objection, is how, exactly, the happiness of a city supposed to be related to the happiness of its members. This question concerns the general shape of Socrates' political theory. Two interpretations of that theory have dominated the literature, and 420b is at the center of the controversy. Some commentators claim that, for Socrates, the happiness of a city's parts is derivative of the happiness of the whole. Other commentators reverse the priority, claiming that the happiness of the city as a whole is derivative of the happiness of its parts. Let us consider these in turn.

Karl Popper is the most famous proponent of the first interpretation, which attributes to Socrates a certain methodological totalitarianism. According to Popper, Socrates begins from a conception of a city's well-being—one that makes no essential reference to the well-being of a citizen²⁹—and proceeds to define a citizen's well-being as whatever conduces to the well-being of a city. Popper offers the following derisive summary of Socrates' position: “the criterion of morality is the interest of the state... the individual is nothing but a cog... ethics is nothing but the study of how to fit him into the whole.”³⁰

This, however, is certainly wrong. Socrates says explicitly that a city exists for the sake of satisfying the needs of its members (369b-c, 419e). But there is no conception of a thing's need apart from a conception of its benefit, nor of its benefit apart from its well-being. In that case, the function of a city cannot be understood prior to the well-being of its citizens. And if a city's function is not understood, then neither is its happiness: for its happiness lies in the performance of its function. Therefore, Socrates cannot think that the happiness of a citizen is a derivative phenomenon.

Commentators like C. C. W. Taylor reject Popper's interpretation, and instead attribute to Socrates a methodological individualism. According to them, Socrates begins

²⁸ This is a point on which most commentators agree. One notable exception is Grote (1865), who denies there is any significant relation between the happiness of a city and that of its members. Grote reads 420b as a declaration that Socrates is concerned with “happiness for the abstract unity called the City, supposed to be capable of happiness or misery, apart from the individuals, many or few, composing it,” vol. 4, p. 139. See Vlastos (1977) for a decisive refutation of this interpretation, pp 80-84.

²⁹ Popper (1962) claims that according to Plato the well-being of a city consists in political stability and might, p. 106.

³⁰ Popper (1962), p. 108.

from a conception of the well-being of an individual human being—one that makes no essential reference to the well-being of a city—and proceeds to define the well-being of a city as whatever conduces to the well-being of the individuals who belong to it. Taylor writes that, for Socrates, “the function and aim of the state is simply to promote the welfare of its citizens, that welfare being defined independently in terms of such individual goods as knowledge, health, and happiness.”³¹

Proponents of the second interpretation claim to find in the text the very idea that Popper is enraged to find missing. But this, too, is difficult to reconcile with Socrates’ account of the city. As we have understood that account, a human being is part of a city by nature. In that case, Socrates cannot think that the happiness of a city is a derivative phenomenon. For if we cannot understand human nature in abstraction from the nature of a city, then neither can we understand human happiness in abstraction from the happiness of a city.

A third interpretation is possible, though it has received little attention from recent commentators.³² Socrates may think that the happiness of a city is related to the happiness of a citizen in such a way that neither can be understood prior to, or independently of the other. This is, in fact, what he must think, if he thinks that a human being is by nature a civic creature: what it is to be a (happy) human being must both determine, and be determined by what it is to be a (happy) city. Moreover, this is precisely what his comparison of a city to a living body suggests (see again 462c-e): for what it is to be a (flourishing) body of a certain kind both determines, and is determined by what it is to be a (flourishing) organ of such a body.³³ The comparison between a city and a body is significant for our present purposes, because Socrates first introduces it in the course of his reply to Adeimantus’ objection (420c-d, see below).

Now if it is read in isolation, Socrates’ remark at 420b appears to be consistent with any of the three interpretations. But that remark is only the preface of his reply to Adeimantus’ objection, and we will argue in a moment that the substance of his reply speaks decisively in favor of the third. Unlike the arguments we have given so far, that argument will not depend on our interpretation of Socrates’ the account of a city (see Section 2); on the contrary, it will provide independent textual support for that interpretation, and for our broad claim that Socrates is not an individualist.

Before coming to this, however, we must mention one point on which commentators tend to agree, whether they favor the totalitarian or the individualist interpretation. Socrates says at 420b that, “we weren’t aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so.” It is characteristic of commentators on both sides to suppose that with these words Socrates is conceding to Adeimantus that the guardians have *not* been made “outstandingly” happy: Socrates, too, believes that the guardians would be happier if he had given them riches, but he has found it necessary to subordinate their interests to ‘the greater good,’ understood in either totalitarian or individualistic terms.³⁴ This consensus is surprising for several reasons. First, on the most

³¹ Taylor (1986), p. 34, see also p. 42. For a similar view see Levinson (1953), p. 530.

³² This view seems to be implicit in Allen (1987).

³³ Our claim here is not that it is impossible for a flourishing organ to exist outside a flourishing body—for instance, in a sick body. We do not take a position on that question, or on the question whether a human being can be happy outside a happy city—for instance, in ours.

³⁴ See for example Vlastos (1977), pp. 85-86, Williams (1973), p. 50.

literal and straightforward interpretation of the claim, it has no such implication: from the fact Socrates was aiming at Φ rather than at φ , it does not follow that φ was undesired or unachieved; Socrates may think that the best way to achieve φ is precisely to aim at Φ . Second, in the preceding clause of the very same sentence, Socrates says, “it wouldn’t be surprising if these people were *happiest just as they are*.” Third, it would be extremely uncharacteristic of Socrates to think that riches contribute anything much to happiness, and he will later claim to have been “shocked” by Adeimantus’ suggestion (465e). Finally, the guardians are the happiest people in the *Republic*: they are happier than Olympian victors (466a), happier than Socrates, and happier, presumably, than any human being on earth. So it is remarkable that commentators often come away from 420b with the distinct impression that Socrates is knowingly limiting their happiness. We will return to this point shortly: as we said, 420b should be interpreted in the light of what follows it.

The substance of Socrates’ reply to Adeimantus takes the form of an analogy. He compares Adeimantus’ objection to a certain wrongheaded criticism of a statue:

Suppose that someone came up to us while we were painting a statue and objected that, because we had painted the eyes (which are the most beautiful part) black rather than purple, we had not applied the most beautiful colors to the most beautiful parts of the statue. (420c)

The imagined critic begins from the idea that one ought to paint the most beautiful part of the body—in this critic’s opinion, the eyes—more beautifully than the other parts. This is already rather odd, but let it pass. More bizarre is his idea that there is an answer to the question, “What is the most beautiful color?” asked just like that. Perhaps he has settled on purple because he associates it with a childhood memory, or with royalty, or with plums; perhaps it is because of the price of ultramarine. In any case, he thinks that, if one aims to make a part of a statue beautiful, purple is the color to paint it. And it would seem to follow that, if (contrary to the critic’s advice) one aims to make the whole statue perfectly beautiful, one should paint it purple from head to toe. The result, of course, would look nothing like a beautiful body, and nothing like an ugly one, either.

In the face of such a criticism, Socrates imagines giving the following defense:

You mustn’t expect us to paint the eyes so beautifully that they no longer appear to be eyes at all, and the same with the other parts. Rather you must look to see whether by dealing with each part appropriately, we are making the whole statue beautiful. (420d)

Socrates believes that if he paints the eyes “so beautifully” that they do not resemble eyes, they will not be beautiful *at all*: an eye has its beauty as a part of a beautiful body, and a plastic representation should reflect this. But the statue is analogous to Socrates’ own discursive representation of a city. So he is comparing happiness to beauty, a city to a body and a citizen to a bodily part.

What is significant here is Socrates’ diagnosis of the art critic’s error. The critic has tried to conceive the beauty of an eye in abstraction from the beauty of a body: he has treated the eye as though it were self-sufficient; he is, as we might say, an aesthetic individualist. Socrates diverts the critic’s attention from the part to the whole because he thinks it is in this context alone that the beauty of the part can be seen. The point of the analogy is that Adeimantus has made a corresponding error. He has tried to conceive the happiness of a human being in abstraction from the happiness of a city.

As a result, Socrates thinks, Adeimantus has a ridiculous conception of both a happy human being and a happy city. Recalling the eyes of the statue, Socrates suggests that we might “clothe the farmers in purple robes,” and “settle our potters on couches by the fire, feasting and passing the wine around,” each with a pottery-wheel beside him in case he should tire of reveling: “And we can make all the others happy in the same way, so that the whole city is happy” (420d-e). Socrates will later call this conception of happiness “silly” and “adolescent” (466b). But his point is really that it is empty. Socrates diagnoses Adeimantus’ error by saying that he “isn’t thinking about a city at all” (421b): he is thinking, instead, about a festival. In that case, he is thinking about a merrymaker’s merry-making and not about a human being’s life.

With this in mind, let us return to 420b. In the imagined scenario, Socrates has aimed to make the whole statue as beautiful as possible; the result (supposing that he achieved his aim) is that its parts are as beautiful as possible; and what explains this result is the fact that the beauty of a part is internally related to beauty of the whole, neither being prior to the other. This is how to understand his claim that, “in establishing our city, we aren’t aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy, but to make the whole city so, as far as possible.”³⁵ Things have turned out precisely as Socrates expected: the guardians are “happiest just as they are” (420b).³⁶

The story of the statue is an allegory by means of which Socrates explains why he must proceed the way he does in the *Republic*—why, that is, he must depict a happy city if he is to paint for us the visage of a happy human being. It is true that in his earliest remarks about happiness, at the end of Book I, Socrates was silent about the relationship between the happiness of an individual human being and the happiness of a city. What he said there was that the *ergon* of a human soul—its characteristic function, or work—is “living”, and that to live well is to be happy (353d-354a). But as his account has unfolded, in Books II and III, Socrates has revealed the context in which alone he thinks the function and happiness of a human being can be understood. No less than an eye, a human being is naturally a part of larger whole.

³⁵ We have argued that our proposal is consistent with most literal interpretation of Socrates’ words: though he was aiming at Φ rather than at φ , nevertheless, he achieved φ , as intended, and he did so in the only appropriate manner, by aiming at Φ . “Still,” someone might object, “doesn’t Socrates *suggest* that he has *not* made the guardians ‘outstandingly’ happy? For instance, mustn’t Adeimantus have heard the claim, not as you have interpreted it, but precisely as commentators usually do?” The answer is that there is some such suggestion, but it is ironic. Socrates suggests that, if he followed Adeimantus’ advice, he would make the guardians supremely happy. He also suggests that, if he followed the critic’s advice, he would make the eyes supremely beautiful—“so beautiful that they [would] no longer appear to be eyes.” The irony of the latter suggestion should be obvious, and the two suggestions are presented as analogues. This irony may have been lost on Adeimantus at first, but it cannot have been long before even he realized that he was being ridiculed: Socrates’ discourse on the statue and the farmers’ purple robes is burlesque comedy.

³⁶ Then why do commentators suppose that 420b implies a subordination of individual interests? Perhaps it is because they operate on the premise that individualism is true. Those, like Popper, who attack Socrates do so by arguing that he is *not* an individualist, and those, like Taylor, who defend Socrates do so by arguing that he *is* an individualist: all parties appear to agree that he should be. Cross and Wooldley cannot decide which of these two sides they are on, but they are sure about Socrates’ claim at 420b: “at least it entails the idea of mutual-cooperation, of a man being expected to subordinate his own interests to those of others,” p. 97. Vlastos (1977) calls this an “excellent gloss,” p. 82, n.53. The idea of a shared interest is, evidently, so foreign to their way of thinking that it appears to them that “mutual-cooperation” *must* involve the subordination of an individual’s interest. For a different view, see Allen (1987).

Socrates continues to maintain that it is part of a human being's function to do a share of the city's labor. The importance of this contribution is not to be underestimated. Socrates goes so far as to claim that a person's life "is of no profit to him if he does not perform his work [*rgon*]" (407a). This comes out in the course of his saying that a reasonable carpenter would refuse any lengthy medical treatment that required him to neglect his carpentry: "he'd bid good-bye to his doctor, resume his usual way of life, and either recover his health or, if his body couldn't withstand the illness, he'd die and escape his troubles" (406e). The same goes for every other member of the city (407e).

But the share of activity that a citizen *does* is related to the share of goods that a citizen *has*. On Socrates' view, there is such a thing as having too little or too much of something for one's own good. Because happiness depends on doing one's share, it is necessary to have everything that makes doing one's share possible, and nothing that makes it impossible. Socrates argued in Book III that private property would make the guardians unable to perform their function, and that is why he thinks it is incompatible with their happiness. Referring back to his exchange with Adeimantus, he will later invoke Hesiod's saying that, "the half is worth more than the whole" (466c).

As we have understood it, Socrates' reply to Adeimantus proceeds on two assumptions. The first assumption is that the happiness of a city both determines and is determined by the happiness of a human being. The second is that the *Kallipolis* is a happy city. Now the first of these claims may be true though the second is false: it is one thing to know that the flourishing of a human body stands in a certain formal relation to the flourishing of its organs and quite another thing to have a correct anatomy.³⁷ We have thus far bracketed Socrates' substantive conception of a happy city, and we will not address this until the final section of the paper. Our aim here has only been to establish his commitment to the first claim, and to show how that is continuous with the "path" he was following before (420b). In the next two sections, we will explain what this has to do with justice.

4. Civic Justice

We have argued that the happiness of a city lies in the performance of its function, and that the function of a city is to provide for the happiness of its members. We will now argue that a city can perform this function only if it is just—that is, only if its members tend to act justly. But in order to do so, we must first gain a clear view of what civic justice is. That requires us to disentangle justice from Socrates' substantive conception of a happy city, a task that will occupy us for most of the present section. Once this disentangling is accomplished, however, we will see that the relation between a city's justice and its happiness is a simple consequence of Socrates' conception of the nature of a city. At that point, we will also see the ground of several other important Socratic theses.

³⁷ There are, of course, many different analogies one might draw between a city and body, and such analogies can be used for the most nefarious purposes: for instance, one might try to justify harming a minority by comparing it to a gangrenous limb that must be cut off. But the analogy that we have attributed to Socrates does not imply that such a thing is ever permissible. The point of our analogy is that what flourishing *is* for a human being stands in a certain formal relation to what flourishing *is* for a city. This abstract metaphysical claim gives us no indication of what should be done in this or that particular circumstance. The answer to any question of policy depends on some substantive conception of human happiness. See Section 6, below.

Socrates presents his official account of civic justice in this well-known passage from Book IV:

Justice, I think, is exactly what we said must be established throughout the city when we were founding it. It's either that or some form of it. We stated, and often repeated, if you remember, that everyone must practice one of the social services, the one for which he is naturally best suited.—Yes, we did keep saying that.—Moreover, we've heard many people say and have often said ourselves that justice is doing one's own and not meddling with what isn't one's own.—Yes, we have.—Then, it turns out that this doing one's own [**τὸ τᾷ αἵματι πράττειν**], provided it is understood in a certain way, is justice. (433a-b)

According to Socrates, justice is “doing one's own.” He appears confident both that there was some form of justice in the original city, and that it can be found in the mature city as well. We will eventually identify the basis of this confidence. But first we must determine what it is to do one's own—for as Socrates says, this formula must be “understood in a certain way.”

By this point in the dialogue, Socrates has offered a very detailed description of a happy city. He has argued that each member of a happy city ought to spend his entire life performing that work, and that work alone, for which he is naturally best suited. Socrates reminds us of this thesis in the passage quoted above: let us call it the *Principle of Specialization*. Shortly after the quoted passage, Socrates reminds us of another idea that has come to light since the city was founded. According to him, the members of a fully-fledged city collectively perform three fundamentally different kinds of work: they provide themselves with their material sustenance; they protect themselves from internal and external threats to the order of their city; and, finally, they impose that order, managing their life together in accordance with reason.³⁸ When this idea is combined with the Principle of Specialization, the product is a very determinate conception of what it is one's own to do in a happy city: a citizen belongs to one of three functionally distinct classes, and spends his entire life performing the work thereof. Call this the *Principle of Classification*. It is his commitment to this latter principle that leads Socrates to claim that the grossest form of injustice consists in a citizen's taking up the “tools and honors” of a class other than his own (434a-c).

Socrates does not himself call attention to the different strata of his account. On the contrary, he moves smoothly between the general claim that justice is “doing one's own” and his more determinate theses about what it is one's own to do. As a result, commentators frequently identify civic justice either with the Principle of Classification³⁹ or with the Principle of Specialization.⁴⁰ But Socrates has a conception of justice that is more basic than either of these principles, and that is presupposed by them both. There are two independent ways of arriving at this conclusion: one is to reflect on Socrates' claim, back in Book I, that a city is a tribe (see Section 2, above); the other is to consider the role that these principles play in Socrates' construction of a city.

³⁸ Note that one might maintain this thesis and reject the *Principle of Specialization*. See Foster, pp.1-38, for an illuminating discussion.

³⁹ See Reeve (1998) pp. 242-243, Shorey (1933) pp. 222-223, Cross and Woosley (1964) pp. 110-111, and Annas (1981) pp. 118-119.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Vlastos (1977) pp. 78-79.

In his early discussion with Thrasymachus, Socrates claims, not only that a city is a tribe, but also that *any* well-functioning tribe must have justice in it (351c). So whatever Socrates thinks justice is, it must apply to tribes generically. But it is surely not *necessary* that the members of an effective tribe each perform one, and only one clearly-defined task: a tribe of cooks *might* prepare a meal together by one of them chopping, one stirring, one seasoning, etc.; but they *might* each do a little of several things, or even a little of everything, and yet still do very well. In the latter case, they must still be acting justly. But then, the sort of rigid specialization that we find in Socrates' city cannot be essential to justice. *A fortiori*, it cannot be essential to justice that the members of a tribe perform specialized tasks that fall into three (or any number of) functionally distinct classes. Neither specialization nor classification belongs to well-functioning tribes as such.

If we are to speak of tribes generically, we must have a very general notion of what it belongs to a member of a tribe to do. The most definite thing we can say is that the activity of a tribe as a whole must be distributed *somehow or other* amongst its members: what, exactly, it is a member's part to do will depend on the principle of distribution that is in place. But whatever this principle might be, it will hold both, that each member will have a part to do, which will be *his* part, and that the proper functioning of the tribe as a whole will depend on each member's being disposed to do his part. For the member of a tribe to act justly is simply to act in accordance with that disposition. So we can say of tribes generically that the whole can do its work only insofar as its parts do theirs. We can also say that the success of a tribe—its doing well, or thriving—depends upon its members acting justly. For justice is the virtue of a partner *qua* partner.

Now since a city is a tribe whose function is to provide for the happiness of its members, the actions of a just citizen must contribute to this end. Where such conditions prevail in a city—i.e. where each is disposed to do his part—there we have civic justice. This idea does not depend on specialization or classification.

We reach the same conclusion by a different route if we consider how Socrates develops his city. In the passage quoted above, where he says that justice is “doing one's own,” Socrates suggests that his city has been just from the beginning (433a-b; see also 342d-e, 372a and 443b-c). But, of course, there were no classes in the original polis: the members of that city all did the same kind of work (viz. production), and they themselves were all the same kind of citizen (viz. producers). Nevertheless, each did what it was his own to do. So whatever civic justice is, it must be something more abstract than we find expressed in the Principle of Classification.

One might still think that specialization is essential to justice, since each member of the original city did perform a single life-long task. Recall, though, that Socrates' construction of the original city proceeds in two discreet phases (see Section 2): first he answers the question how it is best to distribute the shares of what a city does; then he answers the question how it is best to distribute the shares of what the city has. As we remarked in Section 2, these questions *presuppose* that what a city does and has is to be distributed—somehow or other—amongst its members. So the idea of a person's doing and having a share is already built into Socrates' conception of the nature of a city: it is this prior idea that forces him to address his two questions of distributive policy.

What it is important to see, in the present context, is that there is a step between Socrates' basic idea of doing and having a share and the distributive policies that he champions. The Principle of Specialization is his answer to the first question of distribution: each citizen should do *what he is predisposed to do*. In answer to the second question, Socrates initially says that each citizen should have *what he can get through buying and selling* (371b): call this latter the *Principle of Market Exchange*. It obviously requires an independent argument to show that either policy is any good, let alone better than the innumerable alternatives. Socrates recognizes the need for an argument: he provides an argument for the Principle of Specialization at 370a-d, and he provisionally accepts the Principle of Market Exchange from Adeimantus as a plausible default plan (371b). The first thing to notice is that these two principles occupy corresponding positions in Socrates' account: they are, as were, on a level with one another. The second thing to notice is that Socrates revises the Principle of Market Exchange: by the time the mature city is complete, the scope of this principle has been limited to the producing class. Notice, finally, that the idea of having a share survives this revision. It survives, because it is a more abstract idea that attaches to the nature of a city quite apart from any substantive conception of what a flourishing city looks like. But so is the idea of doing a share. It is true, of course, that Socrates never revises the Principle of Specialization. This principle stands, from early on until the very end, on the strength of his argument at 370d-e. But the fact that Socrates is more committed to this principle does not alter its status; it remains his own best solution to one of the two distributive problems raised for him by the nature of a city. When we abstract from the concrete proposal embodied in this principle we are left with the idea that it belongs to a citizen to do a *so-far-undetermined* share, or portion, or part of the activity performed by the city as a whole. Doing this is "doing one's own."

That is by no means a trivial thesis. It entails what many people deny: that good human action is to be judged such in view of its place in an enterprise undertaken by one human being in cooperation with others, an enterprise whose aim is nothing but the happiness of the agents of this common activity. For civic justice is the virtue that fits a human being to be partner in a happy city.⁴¹

Let us sum up. Socrates believes that a happy city should divide into three functionally distinct classes, and that every citizen should perform a single life-long occupation. Neither of these claims is undefended by Socrates: he presents a separate argument for each of them, so that each may be judged on its merits. But neither claim should be identified with his basic conception of civic justice. Having disentangled this latter, we can now address the question how the justice of a city is related to its happiness.

In explanation of his method in the *Republic*, Socrates says that he aims to construct a happy city because he wants to investigate justice, and because he is confident

⁴¹ We say in a happy city, because justice should not be thought of as a disposition that greases the wheels for the operation of any random, rotten system. What justice *is* determines, and is determined by what a happy city *is*. One can, of course, be just in an *unhappy* city. But justice under such conditions will manifest itself differently than it does in a happy city. In a happy city, the just engage in politics. But in a city as imperfect as Athens, Socrates says, the just person who engages in politics will perish before he benefits the city or anyone else (469d, cf. *Apology* 31d-32a). In Athens, the just person leads a quiet life, and practices philosophy—the true political art (cf. *Gorgias* 521d)—in a sadly private way: "like someone who takes refuge under a little wall from a storm of dust..." (496d).

that a happy city will have justice in it (420b, 434d-e). But whence this confidence that a happy city is just? Or again, why think that justice is a civic virtue?⁴² To many commentators, the claim has appeared unfounded.⁴³ For Socrates inaugurates his investigation of civic justice with an assertion: "I think our city, if indeed it has been correctly founded, is completely good... Clearly then, it is wise, courageous, moderate and *just*" (427e). So he appears baldly to assume that justice is a civic virtue. If so, then his method is badly flawed. Things look especially bad on the interpretative hypothesis that Socrates' reply to Glaucon's challenge is an argument by analogy: for then Socrates will seem to move from the unsupported claim that justice is a civic virtue to the analogous claim that justice is a human virtue.

It should be clear by now that Socrates does not *assume* that justice is a civic virtue. It is true that his explanation for the thesis is not to be found at 427e, but this is not the place to look for an explanation. Since the virtue of a thing is a perfection of its nature, if we want to see why justice is a civic virtue, we must look to the nature of a city. A happy city is just because a city is a tribe, a functional whole whose parts are agents. Like anything with a function, a city does well only insofar as it performs its function. Like any tribe, a city is able to perform its function only insofar as its members each do what it is his own to do—that is, only insofar as its members are just. Thus it follows from the nature of a city that a happy city has justice in it.

We are now in position to draw three further implications. The first implication is that the happiness of an individual human being depends on his acting in accordance with civic justice. We argued in Section 3 that since a human being is by nature a partner in a city, and since happiness depends on the performance of one's function, happiness depends on one's doing one's part in a city. It has come out in the present section that doing one's part is "doing one's own"—i.e. acting in accordance with civic justice. In that case, happiness depends on acting justly.

The second implication is that acting in accordance with civic justice is furthering the happiness of one's partners. It furthers their happiness in two ways. On the one hand, doing one's own contributes to the work of the city as a whole, the aim of which work is precisely to secure the happiness of one's partners. But acting in accordance with civic justice also makes a more immediate contribution to the happiness of one's fellows. For the functions of partners are essentially complimentary: the work of one is always such as to further the work of the others. So to do one's part is to help one's partner to do his part. But this is the same as helping him to perform his function (as we argued in the previous paragraph). It is therefore to further his happiness.

The third implication follows immediately from the first two: an individual human being is happy only if he lives in such a way as to further the happiness of his fellows.

These considerations explain the characteristically Socratic thesis that justice aims both at one's own good and at the good of another. It is worth pausing over this thesis, because it might be taken to suggest that justice is sum of prudence and charity. But

⁴² The question we are addressing here is, "Why is a happy city just?" and *not*, "What is civic justice?" The so-called "elimination argument" that follows 427e takes it for granted that a happy city *is* just and proceeds to a discussion of what civic justice is.

⁴³ See Stokes (1987) pp. 69-74, Inwood (1987) p.101, Irwin (1977) p. 206 n.30, Annas (1981) pp.110-111, and Cross and Wooldley (1964) pp. 104-105.

prudence aims at one's own good as distinct from that of another, and charity aims at the good of another as distinct from one's own. These virtues are the stock and trade of modern individualism: given the premise that a human being's nature is to be understood individually, one is forced to interpret all ethical and political phenomena in terms of selfishness and selflessness, egoism and altruism, greed and "brotherly love." But this whole way of thinking is alien to Socrates. The good at which justice aims is essentially a shared good, as the end of cooperative activity is essentially a shared end.⁴⁴ If we are the partners and helpers that Socrates describes, then the good of each of us is inseparable from the good of the others: this principle of cooperative activity is, he thinks, a principle of our nature.

5. Psychic Justice

As the happiness of a city depends on civic justice, the happiness of a human being depends on psychic justice. We will first explain why a just soul, like a just city, is one each part of which does its own. We will then argue that psychic justice *is* civic justice.

In order to see the relation between the happiness of a city and its justice, in Section 4, it was necessary to abstract from certain of Socrates' substantive (political-economic) theses regarding the constitution of a well-functioning city. Similarly, we must now abstract from his substantive (moral-psychological) theses regarding the constitution of a well-function soul. This, however, is easily done. As we have already said, the function of the human soul is living, and living well is being happy, so a human being is happy only insofar as his soul performs its function well. Now if, as Socrates believes, the soul has parts, then we may reapply to the soul the same general principle that we earlier applied to the city: the whole can do its work only insofar as its parts do theirs. According to Socrates, a soul each part of which does its work is just (441d-e). Thus it is only insofar as he is psychically just that a human being lives well, and is happy. Notice that this thesis holds whatever exactly the parts of the soul may be, and however many.

Given what psychic justice is, it is no wonder that Socrates compares it to bodily health (444c). For as health is the good condition of the body, psychic justice is the good condition of the soul. In either case, the whole that is in good condition functions as it ought because its parts function as they ought: if justice is the health of the soul, then health is likewise the justice of the body. Now recall that when he first challenged Socrates to show that justice ranks among the highest class of goods, back in Book II, Glaucon offered health as a paradigm. Having shown psychic justice like health, Socrates believes he has given an (at least preliminary) answer to the challenge. And Glaucon, for his part, is convinced (445a-b).

David Sachs, whom we first mentioned in the introduction to this paper, has famously argued that Socrates' account of psychic justice is, in fact, "irrelevant" to Glaucon's challenge. The putative problem, recall, is that while Socrates has been charged to establish that happiness depends on acting in a certain manner in relation to other people, what he actually argues at the end of Book IV is that happiness depends on the parts of one's soul acting in a certain manner in relation to one another. It may be admitted that a happy human being has a just and well-functioning soul, but what fixes it that such a soul does not give rise to actions that are prohibited by the justice of a city?

⁴⁴ Allen, p. 58, is clear on this point.

For all Socrates has said, mightn't it be that a happy human being is precisely one who is disposed to perpetrate murder, swindling, kidnapping, promise-breaking, and other characteristically unjust actions? That is what Thrasymachus claimed, and what Glaucon asked Socrates to refute.⁴⁵ According to Sachs, Socrates has left a gap between the harmony of the parts of a soul and the harmony of souls: he merely *assumes* that they are connected; and in so doing, he begs the central question of the *Republic*.

The gap that Sachs believes Plato left gaping, and that others have since tried to close,⁴⁶ is one that on our account never opened up to begin with. If the question is why actions like murder and swindling are proscribed by civic justice, the answer is that such actions essentially involve *harming* others, whereas civic justice requires one always only benefit them (see Section 4). If the question is why human happiness depends on acting in accordance with civic justice, the answer is that a human being is by nature a part of a city, and a functional part does well only insofar as it contributes to the end of that of which it is a part. If the question is why the parts of a person's soul must act in accordance with psychic justice, the answer is that a person cannot perform his function unless his parts perform theirs. But it is senseless to go on from here to ask what the relations between parts of the human soul have to do with the relations between human beings. This is like asking what the relations between the parts of a certain organ have to do with the relations between this organ and the other organs of the same body. The latter question could only be asked by someone who did not know what an organ was, or who did not appreciate that the object in question was an organ. The former question gets asked because commentators have in general failed to appreciate that Socrates conceives the virtue of a human being as the virtue of a part of a city.

To say, as we ordinarily do, that a bodily organ is healthy is to say *both* that its parts interact harmoniously *and* that the organ itself interacts harmoniously with the other organs of the body. But this is not an equivocation: we do not have here two different conceptions, or principles, of an organ's health; nor do we use the word "health" in two different senses. For the harmony of parts of an organ and the harmony of organs are not two harmonies, but one. Now if a human being is by nature a citizen, then to say that a human being is just is to say *both* that the parts of his soul interact harmoniously *and* that he interacts harmoniously with the other members of his city. So what we have thus far artificially called "psychic justice" and "civic justice" are not two similar, isomorphic, or analogous phenomena: they are, rather, two aspects of a single phenomenon. The unity of civic and psychic justice is the unity of a city and its citizens.

6. The Form and Content of Socrates' Account

Thus far, we have tried to articulate the bare form of the account that Socrates gives in answer to Glaucon's challenge. At each stage, we have set aside his substantive theses

⁴⁵ See 348d for the characteristic acts of injustice mentioned by Thrasymachus, and see Glaucon's myth of Gyges (359d-360d) for a host of others. Socrates acknowledges that such actions are in dispute in Book IV, where he applies "vulgar tests" to his account of justice (442d-443b).

⁴⁶ Some commentators have argued that an answer Sachs' problem appears later in the *Republic*: Dahl (1999), Demos (1964) and Weingartner (1964) find it in the theory of forms; Kraut (1997) and Cooper (1997) look to the account of the philosopher king; and Vlastos (1971) draws on Socrates' description of degenerate cities. The attempt to link Socrates' early account of justice with later parts of the dialogue is fruitful and necessary work. What we oppose is only the idea that there is a gaping hole in the argument of Books I-IV, which threatens, if unfilled, to ruin the dialogue.

regarding the constitution of a city and a soul. Our aim in this final section is to explain how the form of Socrates' account interacts with its content.

A model may clarify the distinction between form and content that we will employ. Suppose that someone asked for an account of the excellence of a crosscut sawyer. Such an account would seem to presuppose a conception of a sawyer sawing well, for it is an account of the disposition in virtue of which a sawyer does precisely that. Meanwhile, a conception of a single sawyer sawing well would seem to presuppose a conception of two sawyers sawing well together, since (one might think) the former conception is simply the result of an abstraction performed on the latter. On these grounds, it is natural to say that an account of the sawyer's excellence must have a certain form: it must hold itself responsible to a conception of the partnered activity, such that it will count nothing as the excellence of a sawyer that does not fit with a sawyer sawing well, and it will count nothing as a sawyer's sawing well that does not fit with two sawyers sawing well together. Notice that it is because the sawyer's excellence has the place it does within a partnered activity that these formal strictures seem appropriate. But now, having a conception of the partnered activity *to which* one might hold oneself responsible involves having answers to specific questions like these: "With what cadence does the saw pull back and forth?" "Does one partner lead, as in dancing?" "What do they do when they hit a knot?" The answers to such questions will impinge in various ways on an account of the sawyer's excellence. But each answer requires a separate justification, and each justification may be disputed. Such disputes concern the content of the account. Two people may disagree about the content of an account, and yet be agreed as to the form that such an account must take.

Socrates has been asked to speak about human excellence, and this, he thinks, is the excellence of a partner in a city. It belongs to the form of Socrates' account that what an individual human being has and does is to be conceived as a share, or portion, or part of what a city has and does. A city and its citizens are related to one another such that in a happy city every citizen is as happy as possible, every citizen benefits as much as possible, every citizen has what he needs, and every citizen is just. These are formal claims inasmuch as they fix the relation between the concepts, "happiness," "benefit," "need" and "justice" in their application to human beings and to cities. These concepts have the kind of fixedness with respect to one another that "flourishing," "benefit," "need" and "health" have in their application to organs and to organisms. We have argued that, by "justice," Socrates understands the disposition that fits a human being to be a partner in happy city. So several of Socrates' most characteristic theses also belong to the form of his account: that justice requires one to further the happiness of one's fellows⁴⁷—that it requires one always to benefit them, and never to do them harm⁴⁸—and that one's own happiness depends on acting justly.

The *Republic* contains theories of law, political economy, education, art, ethics and moral psychology. That it does is a consequence of the form of Socrates' account,

⁴⁷ Plato's conception of justice is grounded in a shared community; and as he envisions this community, it does not include all rational beings, or even all human beings. In order to extend the account, so that every human (or rational) being is a "fellow citizen," we should need an exceedingly abstract interpretation of the Platonic "city." Interestingly, the Stoics *did* extend the account in this way. For a fascinating discussion of the Stoic conception of a city, see Schofield (1991) pp. 93-103.

⁴⁸ There is a special case of this in the Socratic thesis that the proper aim of punishment is the benefit of the punished (*Gorgias* 477a).

but the theories themselves belong to the content. Socrates believes that an account of virtue is responsible to a conception of the whole of human social life. To articulate and defend such a conception requires one to speak about whatever it may be that human social life essentially involves. And this Socrates does. But what he says when he speaks on these topics is not dictated by the form of his account: that the shares of what a city has and does should be distributed according to the principles that Socrates adduces, that the city should have classes, that education and family life should be thus and so, that certain poetry should not be allowed, etc., etc.—for each of these claims, Socrates must offer a discreet argument. And this he does. Taken together, these arguments constitute a defense of his conception of a happy life in a happy city.

To say this is not to defend his arguments. It is, however, to insist that the arguments are there—everywhere—in the text, and so to defend Socrates against the slander that he has begged the question against Thrasymachus.⁴⁹ It is also to urge, against those who would attribute to Socrates an argument by analogy, and who would therefore suppose that a complete account of the soul could *in principle* be given without mention of the city,⁵⁰ that, in fact, no detail of Socrates' description and defense of the city is superfluous. In that case, the dialogue is the unified discussion of justice that it purports to be.

Once the form of Socrates' account is distinguished from its content, we see that it is possible to hold onto the form, and with it the characteristically Socratic theses, while rejecting any feature of its content that is objectionable. For any account that takes this form is *by its own lights* susceptible to a number of different kinds of criticism.

First, one might criticize a conception of a happy city on the grounds that some or all of its members lack something that a human being needs, whether that thing be material, psychological, intellectual, political or what have you. To show that a city is unwell, it is sufficient to show that someone in it is exploited or otherwise systematically harmed. So one might deny Socrates' claim that the *Kallipolis* is a happy city by defending a conception of individual human happiness according to which, for example, a human being has a significant hand in shaping his own government.⁵¹ One might then argue as follows: (1) since the producers have no such hand in their government, they are unhappy; in that case, (2) the *Kallipolis*, which requires most of its citizens to be producers, fails to perform its function, which is to secure the happiness of its citizens. Such a criticism depends for its force on the considerations that favor one's substantive conception of a happy human life. That such a criticism is forever available shows that

⁴⁹ See again Sachs et. al.

⁵⁰ This idea is explicitly embraced by Annas (1999). She urges us to treat the account of the city as dispensable (as far as the ethics is concerned) on the grounds that, "The political suggestions [of the *Republic*] are absurd if taken literally," p.82. Annas discusses the even more radical view of Robin Waterfield (1993), who invites one "to read the book as a predominantly individualist approach to the issues, with the traditional political terminology of the debate suborned and largely turned over to metaphorical purposes, to describe the inner state of the individual," p.xvi. (What Annas objects to, incidentally, is *not* the suggestion that the *Republic* takes and "individualist approach" to ethics, but the suggestion that the political dimension of the dialogue should be read as a metaphor, rather than an analogy.)

⁵¹ How is this different from Adeimantus' objection at the beginning of Book IV? Adeimantus did not *argue* that individual happiness depends on the possession of riches, he simply asserted a vulgar commonplace.

the form of Socrates' account involves no commitment to the totalitarianism that many now associate with an "organic conception of the state."

Nevertheless, a conception of individual human happiness may be trite, adolescent or fantastic, and it may be shown to be such by an argument that proceeds from a substantive conception of a happy city. The form of Socrates' account fixes it that a life that is incompatible with the happiness of a city is not a happy human life. Socrates exploited this formal stricture in his reply to Adeimantus' objection at the beginning of Book IV (see Section 3), for he supposed that he had established the happiness of the *Kallipolis*. It is a legitimate form of criticism; but again, any actual criticism that takes this form will be as weak or as strong as the arguments put forward to justify one's substantive conception of a happy city.

These two forms of criticism are of equal force, neither having any special advantage over the other. The requirement is simply that a conception of a happy life and a conception of a happy city must harmonize. But now, whatever exactly a happy life may be—whatever specific activities it may include—it is the effluence of a healthy human soul. An acceptable moral psychology must, therefore, reveal the soul to be the source of such a life. In that case, criticism may run both ways between conceptions of a city and a human being, a human being and a soul, and a city and a soul. That none of these has absolute authority over the others is no reason to despair that disputes are unresolvable: anatomies of the body, of the hand, and of the thumb are responsible to one another in a similar way, but this has never prevented their fruitful study.

In this paper, we have attempted to liberate the form of Socrates' account from its often very objectionable content. But it may seem that if we left with only this abstract schema we are left with little or nothing. Notice, though, that the schema is sufficient rule out the claims of Polemarchus, Thrasymachus and Glaucon that a happy human life involves us harming our enemies, or anyone in our way, or anyone we can get away with harming. For it rules out that it is *ever* appropriate to do harm.

The suspicion may persist that lives substantially like the ones championed by Socrates' interlocutors could be fitted into his schema with a simple modification of rhetoric. It may seem that Thrasymachus, for example, could maintain his conception of an ideal human life, if he were only willing to stop *describing* his ideal man as crushing those around him: with a little more savvy, mightn't he weave a tale according to which such a man *benefits* his fellows? This, however, is not as easy as it may seem. Not just anything can plausibly be said to benefit a human being: concepts like "benefit" and "need" are tied to many goods that are beyond dispute, such as food, clothing and shelter, and the development of one's capacities. Nor would it be easy to square the life of Thrasymachus' ideal man with a plausible conception of a healthy community: simply imagine what a city of Thrasymachus' ideal men would look like. The fact is that in giving their accounts of human virtue, Socrates' interlocutors did not see themselves as responsible to *any* conception of civic happiness *whatsoever*. The very responsibility to *some such conception* prohibits one from entertaining many ideas about the virtue and happiness of a human being that might otherwise strike one as plausible.

We may be confident that the form of Socrates' account is not an empty abstraction, if only because so many people nowadays will reject it. The greatest opposition will come from those who suppose that it is possible to know what benefits a human being quite apart from any thought of a community, and prior to any consideration

of justice. This is, in fact, the orthodoxy of Anglo-American political philosophy and ethics. Insofar as the orthodox political philosophy has any use at all for the idea of a happy community, it supposes this to be entirely derivative of the happiness of individuals, which it supposes to be intelligible in advance. Meanwhile, in ethics, the question that occupies Socrates in the *Republic*, whether justice is a *benefit* to its possessor, whether it *profits* one, or is in one's *interest*, or to one's *advantage*—the question, that is, whether justice is a genuine human virtue—this question is thought to require an answer that proceeds from a conception of individual happiness, benefit, advantage etc. that is available in advance of any thought about the actions of the members of a happy community. One claims to know from the start what is good for a human being, and demands a proof that justice will bring one *this*. That is, one demands to be shown that justice pays in a coin that does not already bear its stamp.

If we have understood him, Socrates denies that such a demonstration is possible. For he denies that there is any meaningful conception of a happy human being that is not simultaneously a conception of a happy community, or any conception of a happy community that is not a conception of just human beings. In that case, justice and happiness, both individual and communal, enter the scene at once, or else do not enter at all. There is a great distance between Socrates' position and that of the current orthodoxy, and it is this that explains why his method should so often appear so hopeless, his characteristic theses so improbable, and he himself so strange.

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