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WHY JUSTICE DOES NOT PAY IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

It is generally recognized that, in the *Republic*, Plato faces a difficulty in reconciling his requirements for good government with the main thesis of the dialogue. The main argument is devoted to answering Glaucon and Adeimantus, who question the rationality of just behaviour on the ground that such behaviour is against one's self-interest. All assume that it is rational to be just only if it is in one's self-interest to be just, and that it is in an agent's self-interest to be just only if just behaviour is something that is good in itself for the agent. The dialogue's primary aim is to establish that it is indeed in one's self-interest to be just because justice is an intrinsic good.

In Plato's ideal city, justice demands that the philosopher perform the task of ruling. According to the overall thesis of the dialogue—justice pays—it should follow that it is in the self-interest of the philosopher to rule. But Plato also thinks that whenever people with access to political power believe that they themselves benefit by ruling, good government is impossible. For then it is inevitable, in Plato's opinion, that conflict and disunity will arise in the city as a result of different people or factions competing for power. So it is fundamental to the *Republic*'s political philosophy that those who rule regard ruling as something that is *not* in their self-interest, as something that is evil rather than good for themselves. The present paper will argue that this essential requirement for the government of the ideal city is clearly present in the *Republic*: the philosopher-kings rightly regard ruling as an intrinsic evil. But then in this case, a very important case, Plato's argument that justice is in one's self-interest breaks down.[1]

While the problem created by the case of the philosopher is generally recognized, I will argue further that Plato faces another serious problem that has not been recognized: for all, or almost all, members of Plato's ideal polis, when justice is a matter of doing one's job, justice does not pay.

I. WHAT PLATO MUST PROVE

1. Justice is good in itself

Plato's argument begins in Book II with a classification of goods into (1) those that are good in themselves but not for their consequences, (2) those that are good both in themselves and for their consequences, and (3) those that are evil in themselves[2] but good for their consequences.

[1] Many have laboured to exonerate Plato by claiming that he does, or could, affirm that ruling is in the philosophers' self-interest. Others regard it as a mistake to think that Plato believes that all rational just actions must be in the agent's self-interest. I believe that these views are wrong but, apart from discussion of a few points, I cannot consider them here.

[2] One point that proves that goods in the third class are evil in themselves is that they are described as in themselves '*to be avoided*' (αὐτὸ δι' αὑτὸ φευκτέον) (358a). Only something intrinsically evil could be something that is in itself to be avoided. And since goods of the third class are *good* because of their consequences it cannot be in virtue of their consequences that they are to be avoided.

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The disagreement between Socrates and the many, as represented in the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus, cannot be a disagreement about the value of the consequences of justice and injustice since everyone agrees that the consequences of injustice are evil and the consequences of justice are good. Socrates affirms that justice belongs to the second class of goods, whereas the many claim that justice belongs to the third class of goods (358a). Since members of the third class—like members of the second class—have good consequences, the many agree with Socrates that justice has good consequences. The many also agree that the consequences of injustice are evil. This agreement is presupposed in Glaucon's setting up of the question which the *Republic* is supposed to answer. For in order to focus on the worth of justice and injustice themselves he considers a case where the consequences of justice are given to the unjust man and the consequences of injustice are given to the just man (361a–d). And the consequences of justice are all good (362b–c; cf. 363a–d) and the consequences of injustice are all evil (361e–362a; cf. 363d–e). Glaucon is setting out the view of the many, so the many as well as Plato accept the point that the consequences of injustice are evil. Similarly, in Adeimantus' speech the many are said to blame injustice (363d–e; cf. 367b–c) because of its evil consequences, in particular punishment.[3]

Thus, at *Republic* 612, at the close of the part of his argument which ignores the consequences of justice and injustice, Socrates describes what he has done in these terms:

> I yielded . . . [to the 'request that the just man should be reputed unjust, and the unjust man just'] for the sake of the argument, so that *justice itself* could be judged in relation to *injustice itself*. (612c–d)[4]

Hence, since the issue is *solely* a disagreement over the *intrinsic* goodness and evil of justice and injustice, Plato's argument that justice pays will fail if he must concede that justice is an intrinsic evil.[5]

2. Just action is good in itself

The many, in claiming that injustice pays and justice does not pay, are concerned above all with just and unjust *actions*. Consider the speech of Glaucon. The many are said to hold that '*to do injustice* (τὸ ἀδικεῖν) is by nature good' (358e3), not that the state of injustice in the soul is a good. When Glaucon explains their account of the origin of justice (358e–359b), it is an account of why people agree to *behave* justly, not an account of why they agree to be in a certain soul state. Next, he argues, not that certain people are in a certain soul state unwillingly, but that all who *behave* justly do so unwillingly, using the example of the man with the ring of Gyges who performs many unjust actions for his own benefit (359b–c). Finally, there is an argument that the life of the unjust is better than the life of the just (360e–362c), and the unjust man is above all the man who has committed unjust acts and the man who is just is the man who acts justly. In this part of Glaucon's speech, the man who is

[3] Although the many claim that injustice pays, their claim is that injustice pays *only* in the unusual circumstances in which the consequences of injustice can be avoided, since the evil of those consequences when not avoided outweighs what they regard as the intrinsic good of injustice. This, together with their belief that those evil consequences of injustice cannot normally be avoided, explains why they agree to the social contract (358e–359b).

[4] Cf. 612a–b. Translations are based on the translation of G. M. A. Grube, *Plato: The Republic* (London, 1981).

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unjust but is able to hide his injustice hides not a state of his soul but what he has done (cf. 392b). When his injustice becomes public and he needs to resort to persuasion or force to avoid the consequences, what has become public is not a state of his soul but his unjust actions. Likewise the man who is just but has the reputation for injustice is the man who has the reputation for wrongdoing despite having *done* nothing unjust, not the man who is in a certain soul state but has the reputation for being in the contrary soul state. Similar remarks apply to the speech of Adeimantus.

So the question about justice and injustice raised by Glaucon which Socrates must answer applies above all to behaviour. This is explicit in the formulation of the question of whether justice pays at 444e–445a:

> It is left for us to enquire, it seems, if it is more profitable to act justly (δίκαια πράττειν), to engage in fine pursuits and be just, whether one is known to be so or not, or to do wrong (ἀδικεῖν) and be unjust, provided one does not pay the penalty and is not improved by punishment. (cf. 588b with its clear reference back to Book II)

Since Plato must demonstrate that justice is good in itself, we can now say that he must show that *just behaviour* is good in itself.[6] Thus, the dialogue closes (621c5–6) with Plato asserting that all will be well with us if we strive in every way to *act* with justice and intelligence.

II. THE INTRINSIC GOODNESS OF JUST ACTION AND THE PROBLEM OF RULING

Plato addresses the question of the intrinsic value of just and unjust actions at 443e–445b and 588b–591e, where he claims that just actions promote justice in the soul and unjust actions promote injustice in the soul.[7] Since 612a–b describes the argument up to that point as a demonstration that justice itself[8] is good and injustice itself is evil, 443e–445b and 588b–591e are meant to establish that just action is good in itself and unjust action is evil in itself.[9] Plato has argued that justice in the soul is good in itself and injustice in the soul is evil in itself. Now, at 443e–445b and 588b–591e, Plato argues that just behaviour causes justice in the soul, and unjust behaviour causes injustice in the soul, and he understands this to show that just behaviour is good in itself and unjust behaviour is evil in itself.[10]

But since Plato considers ruling evil in itself, it appears that the philosophers,

[5] Cf. Simon H. Aronson, 'The happy philosopher—a counterexample to Plato's proof', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 (1972), 383–98, at 385; C. Kirwan, 'Glaucon's challenge', *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 162–73, at 171–2.

[6] Likewise, when Plato turns to discussing the consequences of justice and injustice as opposed to their intrinsic value (612a–614a), the good consequences follow for those who behave justly (612b3–4, 613a8–b1, c5–6, 615b6–c4, 621c7–d1) while the bad consequences follow for those who behave unjustly (615a5–b6, 615c2–616b1, 619a3–5). The punishments in this life for injustice which is not successfully hidden (613d–e) result from others' awareness of a person's unjust acts, not from their awareness of the state of a person's soul (cf. 613a1–2).

[7] The assumption that injustice in the soul is caused by unjust actions is also made by Adeimantus at 366e–367a. Cf. *Cri.* 47d–48a, 49b, *Grg.* 503c–d, *Tht.* 176e–177a, *Leg.* 726a–728c.

[8] This at least includes just action—612b3–5.

[9] In 'Plato's division of goods in the *Republic*', *Phronesis* 47 (2002), 309–35 I argue that Plato regards the causal consequences of justice or injustice that are independent of the reputation for justice or injustice as possibly relevant to their intrinsic goodness and evil.

[10] Thus, David Sachs was wrong to claim that Plato's response to Glaucon's challenge is irrelevant in limiting itself to showing the good effects of a just soul ('A fallacy in Plato's *Republic*', *Philosophical Review* 72 [1963], 141–58).

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though doing what is just in agreeing to rule, thereby act contrary to their self-interest. So in this most crucial case of just behaviour justice does not pay, contrary to the main thesis of the dialogue.

The *Republic* twice discusses the question of whether the philosopher-rulers could have a better life than the one they will get in the ideal polis. At 419a Adeimantus raises the question on the grounds that, although the philosophers are in control of the city, as a result of Plato's ban on their right to own private property, they do not own money, land, or fine homes with elegant furnishings.

Socrates' immediate answer is that the city can exist only if essential public functions are carried out, and citizens are not to be given anything that threatens their ability to carry out their tasks as well as possible. Socrates had just pointed out (417a–b) that if the rulers are allowed to own money and private property, they will be rendered unfit for the job of ruling:

> If they themselves acquire private land and houses and money, they will be household managers and farmers instead of guardians, hostile masters of the other citizens instead of their allies; they will spend their whole life hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against, and they will rush themselves and their city very close to ruin.

This is the justification for Plato's well-known adoption of communism for the ruling class.

Later (465e–466c), Socrates returns to Adeimantus' challenge and rejects its 'adolescent' view of happiness. With regard to that alternative life—the life of accumulation of money and property—Socrates affirms that the life of the philosopher is far superior. So the philosophers do act in their self-interest in refraining from what would be for them the unjust acquisition of property.

But Glaucon's question at 519d raises a significantly different case. For there the alternative to the life of ruling open to the philosophers is not some misguided view of happiness but Plato's own view of a supremely happy life—the life devoted to contemplation of the Forms.

Glaucon asks (519d8–9) whether we are to do the philosophers 'an injustice and make them live worse when they could live better'. Glaucon's question implies two claims: (1) we are doing the philosophers an injustice, and (2) we are making the philosophers live a worse life when a better one is open to them; and (2) appears to be the basis for (1). Socrates' reply concedes (2) but denies that (1) follows from (2), and argues that (2) is necessary if there is to be any possibility of good government.

(1) We are not doing the philosophers an injustice. Unlike in other cities, in Plato's city the philosophers have been nourished and brought up by the city, and hence they owe something to the city that justice requires to be repaid (520a–c).

(2) The philosophers can be excellent rulers *only because* there is a life better than the life of ruling which they prefer to the life of ruling (520e4–521a1): 'If [and evidently only if] you can find a life better than ruling for those who are about to rule, it is possible for a well-governed city to come to be for you.'

When Socrates responds to Glaucon's question, he is using the term 'life' in such a way that one person can share in more than one such life (520b7–c1, 521b1–10): those who rule, and thus have a political life, will at the same time *actually have* a better life which they pursue at other times—the life of philosophy. Having their own private goods independently of the political life, the philosophers will not be tempted to secure their good from the possession of political power. Hence, they will have no desire to

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rule in their own interest instead of the interest of the whole city, and they will not be tempted to compete with others for political power.

Nevertheless, if the life of philosophy, so understood, is better than the life of ruling, it also appears that—other things being equal—someone who could devote the whole of their life to philosophy would be better off than someone who must take time off from philosophy to do other things. And Plato's guardians must take a great deal of time off from philosophy. For, even if they spend most of their time engaged in philosophy after taking up their duties as guardians at the age of fifty, their preceding twenty years would have involved five years of study and *fifteen years* of administrative work (539d–540b). Since ruling is the sort of work that the philosophers *despise* (521b),[11] such administrative work must rank even lower in their eyes.

Here is what the *Republic* says about the value of ruling, the philosophers' attitude to it, and why it is essential for the philosophers to be reluctant to rule:

A. The value of ruling

1. Ruling is neither good nor fine (347d[12] [cf. 520c–d, e], 540b).
2. Ruling is an evil (520d–521b).
3. Ruling is not something that is enjoyed (347d).
4. Ruling is a laborious task (*πόνος*) (519d, 520b, d, 540b).
5. Ruling is difficult (551c10).

B. The attitude of the philosophers to ruling

6. The philosophers view ruling as neither good nor fine (347d [cf. 520c–d, e], 540b).
7. The philosophers view ruling as a great evil (520d–521b).
8. Ruling is seen as something necessary (347d, 520e, 540b).
9. The philosophers will despise political rule (521b [cf. 496b]).
10. To rule is to go down into the cave (519d), turning from the contemplation of divine entities to deal with merely human affairs (517d).
11. The philosophers are not lovers of ruling (521b).
12. The philosophers are less eager to rule than any other rulers (520d).
13. The philosophers do not wish to participate in human affairs but to contemplate the Forms (517c–d, 519d, 520d2–4).
14. The philosophers do not rule willingly (519c; cf. 499b2–6). (That rulers rule willingly is the thesis of Thrasymachus [345e], and Socrates argues that the claim is false in the case of true rulers [345e–347a]).
15. To willingly seek to rule without being compelled is shameful (347c).
16. In a city of good men, they will compete with each other to avoid ruling (347c–d).
17. The philosophers are compelled to rule (347c, 421b–c, 519e, 520a, 521b).
18. The true ruler does not seek his own advantage in ruling but the advantage of the ruled (347d, 521a).

[11] It is the same word—*καταφρονεῖν*—that Plato uses to describe the philosopher's attitude to ruling and the educated man's proper attitude to slaves (549a2).

[12] If anyone objects to the use of Book I, the reply is that the references show that Book I differs not at all from the rest of the dialogue in its view of ruling.

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C. The danger when people seek to rule as a good thing

19. In cities in which the rulers seek their own private good from ruling, the government is fought over with discord as the result (521a).
20. In any city in which ruling is considered a good, disunity, civil strife and the destruction of the city will result (520c–521a).
21. Any city with rulers who are most eager to rule will receive the worst rule (520d4).
22. It is possible to have a well governed polis only if the rulers know a better life than ruling (520e–521a). There is one life that is better than ruling, the life of philosophy (519d, 520e–521b). The education of the future guardians is introduced precisely as aiming at the production of people who will know of a better life than ruling in order to prevent disunity arising in the city (521a–c).

Except for (2) and (7), all of these statements are explicit. But the following shows that they too are accepted in the *Republic*.

At 540b4–5 Plato says that the philosophers will undertake to rule but rule 'not as something fine but as something necessary' (*οὐχ ὡς καλὸν τι ἀλλ' ὡς ἀναγκαῖον πράττοντας*). This seems to suggest that the philosophers will not love ruling and do it unwillingly. Vernezze and Brickhouse deny this and say that Plato means only that the philosophers will approach ruling as a moral requirement, or as a duty.[13] But this cannot be right.

First consider two previous passages where, as in 540b, Plato speaks of people doing what they regard as necessary. Glaucon's second thesis is that

> all who practise justice do so unwillingly as something necessary but not good (*ἄκοντες ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ὡς ἀναγκαῖον ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς ἀγαθόν*). (358c3–4; cf. 360c6–7)

At 347c–d, after saying that necessity and punishment must be laid upon good men to convince them to wish to rule, Plato says

> . . . to willingly approach ruling rather than wait for necessity (*τὸ ἑκόντα ἐπὶ τὸ ἄρχειν ἰέναι ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνάγκην περιμένειν*) is thought shameful. Now the worst punishment is to be ruled by a worse man than oneself if one does not wish to rule. I think it is the fear of this which makes men of good character rule whenever they do. They approach ruling not as something good or something to be enjoyed, but as something necessary (*ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ ἄρχειν οὐχ ὡς ἐπ' ἀγαθόν τι ἰόντες οὐδ' ὡς εὐπαθήσοντες ἐν αὐτῷ, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐπ' ἀναγκαῖον*).

When 358c says that the many do what is just not because they regard it as good but because they regard it as necessary, this plainly does not mean that they do it because they regard it as a moral duty. Rather, as 360c indicates (cf. 359c), it is necessary in that if they acted unjustly, they would be punished for violating the law. So the just action, though evil in itself, is necessary in order to avoid a greater evil. The same notion of an action's being necessary is present in 347c–d as well: ruling is necessary for the men of good character because, though evil in itself, it is necessary to avoid the 'punishment' of being ruled by inferior men. In both passages, then, a 'necessary'

[13] P. Vernezze, 'The philosopher's interest', in N. Smith (ed.), *Plato: Critical Assessments* (London, 1998), 153–73, at 158. T. Brickhouse, 'The paradox of the philosopher's rule', in Smith, *Plato: Critical Assessment*, 141–52, at 149–50. Cf. T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford, 1995), 299; R. Kraut, 'Return to the cave, *Republic* 519–21', in J. Cleary and W. Wians (edd.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (Boston, 1996), 43–62, at 47.

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action is one that is seen by the agent as evil in itself but something that must be done to avoid a greater evil.

Now consider how Plato describes the attitude of the philosophers and non-philosophers to the task of ruling:

> With the philosophers in power, 'the city will be governed as a waking reality and not as in a dream, as the majority of cities are now governed by men who are fighting shadows and striving against each other in order to rule, as if this were a great good' (*στασιαζόντων περὶ τοῦ ἄρχειν οἰκοῦνται, ὡς μεγάλου τινὸς ἀγαθοῦ ὄντος*). (520c6–d1)

> Each of [the philosophers] will approach ruling as something necessary, in a manner opposite to that of present day rulers in each city (*ὡς ἐπ' ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῶν ἕκαστος εἶσι τὸ ἄρχειν, τοὐναντίον τῶν νῦν ἐν ἑκάστῃ πόλει ἀρχόντων*). (520e2–3)

> They will spend much of their time with philosophy, but when their turn comes, they will labour (*ἐπιταλαιπωροῦντας*) and rule in political affairs, and they will do this not as something fine (*καλόν*) but as something necessary. (540b2–5)

In 520e Plato says that the philosophers 'will approach ruling as something necessary', and then he explains this by adding that they approach it 'in a manner opposite to that of present day rulers in each city'. How do present-day rulers approach ruling? It is explained a few lines earlier at 520c–d: they approach ruling 'as a great good'.[14] So

(i) In approaching ruling as a necessity, the philosophers approach ruling in the way opposite to the way in which present-day rulers approach ruling, and
(ii) Present-day rulers approach ruling as a great good.

Since the opposite of a great good is a great evil, when Plato says that the philosophers approach ruling as a necessity and in a manner opposite to that of present-day rulers, he means that they approach it as a great evil—(7)—which, nevertheless, they must do.[15] And since the philosophers have knowledge, ruling is an evil—(2).

Further support for (2) and (7) is provided by comparing the characteristics attributed to ruling with the attitude of the many to justice:

23. Justice is laborious (*ἐπίπονος*) (357c, 358a, 364a; cf. 365b6).
24. Justice is approached not as a good but as a necessity (358c).
25. Justice is evil in itself (358a).
26. Justice is difficult (358a, 364a; cf. 364d2–3).
27. Justice is done unwillingly (358c, 359b, 360c, 366d).
28. Justice is to be fled (*φευκτέον*—358a).
29. The many are compelled to do what is just (360c).

As (25) indicates, the many regard justice as evil in itself. Clearly, the fact that it is laborious (23) is part of the explanation of why justice is regarded as evil in itself.

[14] Cf. Thrasymachus' response at 345e2–4.

[15] Note the same contrast between the necessary and the good in 358c3–4, 360c6–7, 347b9–d8, and 540b2–5. Even if (i) and (ii) do not show that for ruling to be a 'necessity' consists in, or includes, its being an evil, they still show that the philosophers' attitude is the opposite of the attitude which sees ruling as a good. That suffices to show that the philosophers see ruling as an evil.

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Plato says that ruling, too, is a laborious task (4). Further, the many say that justice is χαλεπόν (26), which I have translated as 'difficult', but which might just as well be translated as 'grievous', 'painful', 'disagreeable', 'irksome', or 'hard to do'. In any case, it matches (5)'s statement that ruling is difficult (551c10—χαλεπωτάτη).

Further, the philosophers approach ruling not as a good but as a necessity (6 and 8)—as the many approach justice not as a good but as a necessity (24). Plato regularly connects the fact that an agent views an action as evil with the agent's unwillingness to do it, as he connects the fact that an agent views an action as good with the agent's willingness to do it.[16] Thus, as the many are compelled to do what is just (29) and do so unwillingly (27) because they see it as an evil, the philosophers are compelled to rule (17) and do so unwillingly (13–16) because they see it as an evil. And as the many regard justice as something to be fled (28), the philosophers regard ruling as something to be avoided (16).

Further evidence of the valuelessness of ruling for the philosopher can be found in the cave analogy where Plato describes the attitude of the philosopher who has seen the Form of the Good to those who remain behind in the cave (516d):

> Do you think our man would desire those rewards [found in the cave] and envy those who were honoured and held power among the prisoners, or would he feel, as Homer put it, that he certainly wished to be 'serf to another man without possessions upon the earth' and go through any suffering, rather than share their opinions and live as they do.

As Grube points out,[17] Plato's reference is to the *Odyssey* (11, 489–90, quoted at *Resp.* 386c) where 'Achilles says to Odysseus, on the latter's visit to the underworld, that he would rather be a servant to a poor man on earth than king among the dead.' Obviously, the possession of political power is regarded as worthless by the philosopher who has seen the Form of the Good.

The point that ruling is an intrinsic evil for the person who does it is crucial to the government of the polis. Essential to the polis' unity is the avoidance of antagonism in competition for political power. Such unity is possible only if the rulers would prefer not to rule, and that reluctance is possible for the philosophers, who have knowledge, only if ruling is indeed an evil rather than a benefit for themselves (19). If ruling were an intrinsic good, the philosophers would end up fighting for political power with resulting disunity for the city.

One might object that, even if ruling were an intrinsic good, the justice of the philosophers would suffice to prevent any discord. After all, Plato does say that the justice of the philosophers ensures that they will take on the burden of ruling despite its disagreeableness (520d–e). If so, then if ruling were a positive good, their justice should also ensure that in *that* case they would give it up when the time came to hand over power.

But Plato cannot with consistency hold that disunity could be avoided even if the

[16] *Willingly xing*:
(i) One believes that one will get some benefit from x (345e, 346e–347a, 399a–c, 412e–413a, 592a).
Unwillingly xing:
(i) One regards x as not a good for oneself (347c–d, 358c, 359a–b, 360c).
(ii) One regards x as an evil for oneself (381c, 382a, 399a–c, 412e–413a, 485c).
(iii) One regards x as a necessity (347c–d, 358c).
(iv) One is compelled (ἀναγκαζόμενος) to x (360c).

[17] Grube (n. 5), 195, n. 2.

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philosophers thought that ruling is a good thing. Recall the dire consequences that follow if the philosopher-rulers are allowed to own private property (417a–b):

> When they themselves acquire private land and houses and money . . . they will be hostile masters of the other citizens instead of their allies; they will spend their whole life hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against; they will be much more afraid of internal than of external enemies, and they will rush themselves and their city very close to ruin.

Evidently the fact that the guardians are just does not suffice to prevent the sort of conflict which Plato envisages if they are allowed to own private property.[18]

It is useless to suggest that, at 416–21, Plato is not yet assuming the degree of justice in his rulers that he requires later, and once that level of justice is attained the problem disappears. For Plato is already assuming that the rulers have received the best possible education (416b), even if he only specifies its content later, and he says (416b) that such an education would be the best security against the rulers abusing the citizens under their control.

Further, if the suggestion were correct, there would be no reason for Plato to retain the law that the rulers cannot own private property as part of the constitution. But it is perfectly clear that the ban on the ownership of private property remains a fixed part of the constitution (464b–e, 465c–466a, 543b–c; cf. *Ti.* 18b).

The fact is that the position would be even worse in the case of ruling than in the case of private property if ruling were an intrinsic good. As philosophers the rulers will understand the true worth of things and so will recognize that the possession of private property is of no importance for a good life (465e–466c, 485d–e). Nevertheless, despite this knowledge, Plato fears that if they acquired such property there would be a serious possibility that the philosophers would be corrupted.

Now suppose that political rule were an intrinsic good. If the philosophers, having been exposed to private property, can become corrupted even when they initially understand its valuelessness, it should be even more obvious that the philosophers, knowing (on our supposition) that ruling is an intrinsic good, can become corrupted by political power once they start to exercise it.

Irwin[19] has suggested that the philosophers do not sacrifice their own interest in agreeing to rule, and that it is not qua helping other people, as Thrasymachus held, that the philosophers will regard justice as burdensome. It is qua administrative tasks, planning for war, and so on, that the just actions involved in ruling are seen as worth avoiding. But to prove that justice pays in the present case it is enough for Plato to show that, qua doing what is just, ruling is worth choosing for itself.

But it will not be enough. For to allow that qua ruling the action is an intrinsic evil would concede to the many all that they claim. Glaucon did not argue that *qua* doing what is just an action is evil in itself and *qua* (for example) handing money over to another person it is good in itself or indifferent; nor that *qua* stealing and getting one's hands on another's goods an action is evil or indifferent and *qua* doing what is unjust it is good in itself. Rather just action is regarded as evil in so far as it is a matter of handing money over to other people, and unjust action is in my self-interest in so far as it is a matter of getting my hands on another's goods. It is because of the specific

[18] So I cannot agree with Christopher Bobonich that 'Plato in the *Republic* shows little concern that philosophers might be seduced by the pleasures of the lower parts of the soul' (*Plato's Utopia Recast* [Oxford, 2002], 353; cf. 369–70). Rather, this concern is the primary reason for one of the most distinctive features of the constitution of the *Republic*.

[19] Irwin (n. 11), 300–1.

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content of the unjust action that it is supposed to be good in itself, and it is because of the specific content of the just action that it is supposed to be contrary to my self-interest. The position is that when—as it typically is in the view of the many—doing what is just is realized in the performance of an action which involves the agent securing an evil or losing some good, then doing what is just is against the agent's self-interest. There is no reason to think that the many favour injustice or have any objections to justice when it is just for them to assign more goods to themselves than to others.

III. JUSTICE PAYS NOBODY

It is generally agreed that a difficulty about whether justice pays arises for Plato solely in the case of the philosopher-ruler. But, in fact, the explanation of why justice does not pay the philosopher applies to every other working citizen in the polis: when justice is a matter of the performance of one's specific task, justice pays nobody in the city. In the case of the philosopher, the just action of ruling does not pay because ruling is an intrinsic evil. But Plato regards every other form of work in the city as an even greater evil. I am not sure that what I am about to say about other forms of work would be thought by Plato to apply to farmers or the work of the auxiliaries. But since the main function of the auxiliaries is waging war (543a), it is plausible to say that the performance of their work is not an intrinsic good for them.

To see this, consider first Plato's attitude to the value of the kinds of jobs that members of the producing class will engage in. The jobs performed by producers include carpentry, pottery, housebuilding, farming, weaving, making agricultural tools, cobbling, and the work performed by shepherds, merchants, sailors, retailers, metalworkers, and rowers in triremes—in general, manual labour or any other way of making money.[20] For all of these citizens, when they carry out their assigned tasks, they are doing what is just.[21]

But a number of remarks show that Plato regards such forms of work as mean, debasing activities which are evil in themselves and damaging to their practitioners. I will assume that what Plato says about these jobs applies to other jobs of the producing class.

1. The practice of medicine and other ways of making money are assigned to the third class of goods (357c). They are said to be laborious but good for their consequences because they are rewarded by pay (357c7–d2). Since any member of Plato's third class of goods is an intrinsic evil,[22] this means that all forms of work done in order to make money are regarded as evil in themselves. For example, at 371e Plato refers to wage earners such as shoemakers who receive payment for heavy labour.

[20] *Resp*. 370c–e, 396a–b, 406d, 407b, 420e–421a, 428c–d, 434a, 443c, 454c, 467a, 468a, 547d.

[21] The conflict between justice and self-interest arises in the case of the philosophers only because it is just for them to do their work. At 519e–520a, speaking of the philosophers, Plato says that 'the law has not made men of this kind in the city in order to allow each to turn in any direction they wish but to make use of them to bind the city together' (cf. 395b–c). But what holds for the philosophers holds for the other citizens as well. Unlike in democracies (557b, 557e–558a), the law in the ideal city no more allows the rest of the citizens than it allows the philosophers to 'turn in any direction they wish' (421b–c, 423d). Since the laws in Plato's ideal city are just, and the law demands that each citizen perform his or her proper work, a citizen's performance of such work is just.

[22] See n. 2 above.

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2. The structure of Plato's city, as of the original city described in Book II, is that all engage in some specific form of work to provide a good which will benefit others, and in return receive the benefits provided by the work done by others. Thus, everyone both gives and receives (369c). The giving—that is, the benefiting of others and not of oneself—lies in doing one's job. This is what the philosophers do in ruling, and it is also what *all* in the justly ordered polis do in performing their various jobs. This does not entail that work is evil in itself but it certainly suggests that work does not directly benefit the agent and, therefore, is not good in itself for the agent. At 347d a clear contrast is drawn between benefiting oneself and benefiting others in the performance of one's job.
3. Socrates argues at length (345d–347e) that true rulers do not benefit from ruling, regard it as of no benefit to themselves, and therefore do it unwillingly. To prove this point he appeals to an analogy with the crafts, and says that the exercise of a craft benefits its subject but is of no benefit to the agent.

If payment is not added, is the craftsman benefited by his craft?
It appears not. (346d6–8)

The man who intends to practise his craft well never does what is best for himself. (347a1–2; cf. 345e5–7)[23]

The argument takes it for granted that the work of a craftsman does not benefit the craftsman, and then claims that the same applies to the case of ruling. If so, the craftsman's work cannot be good in itself for the craftsman.

4. As the many consider justice a πόνος, and the philosophers regard ruling as a πόνος, so the work of *all* in the polis is called a πόνος, a laborious task (357c, 371e, 519d, 520b, d).
5. The crafts are rightly despised (496b; cf. 466a–b), they are all mean or base (βάνανσοι) (522b).[24] Mechanical work with one's hands is to be reproached because it indicates that reason in the labourer's soul 'is naturally weak and cannot rule the animals within but pampers them and can learn nothing except ways to flatter them' (590c).

This last statement immediately follows Plato's argument that unjust action is evil for the agent because it 'enslaves the most divine part' of the agent to 'the most ungodly and disgusting part' (589e). He then condemns licentious behaviour, softness, and the pursuit of money because they promote the subordination of reason to the lower parts of the soul (590a–c), before going on to condemn mechanical work in the quoted passage. It appears, therefore, that Plato regards mechanical work as having an effect on the soul that is similar to the effect of unjust action.

This is confirmed by what Plato says at 495d–e where the adverse effects of a craftsman's work on body and soul is described in these terms: 'their bodies are debased by their crafts and services, and similarly their souls are crushed and fragmented by the sordidness of their work'.

Plato's belief in the evil effect of the producers' work on their souls is further confirmed in Book III where he says that those who are to become guardians and who

[23] Whenever practising one's craft is just, these statements directly contradict the main thesis of the *Republic*: justice pays.
[24] Cf. *Resp*. 405a, *Chrm*. 163b.

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we wish to become good men should not be allowed to imitate any of the following (395d–396b): women 'railing at a man or quarrelling with gods, . . . slaves . . . performing slavish tasks, . . . evil men, . . . cowards, or people libelling and ridiculing one another, using bad language whether drunk or sober, . . . madmen . . . neighing horses or bellowing bulls . . .'. Plato fears that individuals who imitate such people or animals may become corrupted in one way or another. But I have omitted another category from Plato's list: to his assortment of madmen, neighing horses, bellowing bulls, and slaves, Plato adds 'metal workers or other craftsmen, or those who row in triremes' (396a–b). Evidently, this sort of work has a corrupting influence on the soul since mere imitation of it can corrupt the soul.

The same view is found in the *Laws*. There (846d, 918d–920a,c), the citizens are farm owners barred from engaging in any handicraft or retail trade because such work fosters an excessive love of money.[25] The undesirable effect of manual labour on the soul is also described in an earlier passage (*Leg.* 741e): 'you know how a freeman's character is coarsened by manual labour, which is generally admitted to be degrading'.[26]

Since it is unjust action's promotion of the subordination of reason to the lower parts of the soul which Plato offers in the *Republic* as the explanation of why unjust action is evil in itself, it seems safe to conclude that the similar effect of mechanical labour on the soul is taken by Plato to be a reason why labouring with one's hands is evil in itself.

It is true that there is one passage which can reasonably be taken to indicate that Plato does not regard the work of the producers as utterly degrading. At 406–7 he explains how medicine should be practised in a well-governed city, saying that a regular labourer such as a carpenter should not be willing to undergo a lengthy and elaborate treatment that would prevent him from doing his work for a long period of time. For 'if he does not perform the task which is his, life is of no benefit to him' (407a; cf. 406d). This suggests that the labourer's work is, in itself, of positive value to the carpenter since Plato's point is presumably not that the value in question consists in the wages that would be the consequence of the work.

Nevertheless, this one passage cannot override the evidence just cited, and if it does mean that work has intrinsic value, it does not save Plato from incoherence in his views but rather adds to it. For he is then ascribing positive value to a form of activity that he normally, and unambiguously, regards as an intrinsic evil. If Plato really is saying in this passage that one's work is what gives value to one's life, the bare assertion is not enough. He must explain how it can be a craftsman's work that gives value to his life if, as Plato holds, the work of a craftsman *debases* and *degrades* the craftsman. I do not believe there could be any satisfactory explanation of such a position. The same thing cannot both debase your life and give it so much value that life is not worth living without it.

It is not clear that 406–7 can be made consistent with Plato's reference to the retirement of the philosophers at 498b–c. Of course, the philosophers will be able to turn to contemplation in their retirement, whereas it is not clear that, in Plato's opinion, the rest of the population would have some meaningful activity to turn to if they stopped working. But 407a–b may suggest that one can practise virtue even when not engaged in some specific task. And at 498b–c Plato mentions the philosophers'

[25] See G. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton, 1960), 138, 143, 144. Cf. *Leg.* 705a, 831b–e, 835e–836a.

[26] Based on Trevor Saunders's translation: *The Laws* (London, 1975).

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failing physical powers as one reason for their withdrawal from 'public life and military service'. Failing physical powers should also be a reason for the auxiliaries to retire from their line of work, nor is there any reason why it would not apply to many forms of physical labour.

So it is far from clear that Plato thinks that the value of one's work is so great that there is no point in going on living after one can no longer engage in it. For he evidently envisages people retiring without the necessities of life being denied to them. And for the city to withhold such support would be unjust, given Plato's argument as to why it is just for the philosophers to agree to rule (520a–c). If it is just for the philosophers to agree to confer the benefit of ruling on the city in repayment for the education they received during a time when they were making no contribution to the wellbeing of the city, it must also be just for the city to confer the benefit of material support on retired workers during a time when they may be making no contribution to the wellbeing of the city, in repayment for the benefits they conferred on the city during their years of work (cf. 568e8–9, *Leg.* 717b–c).

In any case, then, the preponderance of evidence shows that Plato regards manual labour as evil in itself. If so, in this case of just action, it does not pay the producer to do what is just.

It might be said that the fact that the philosophers have a valuable alternative to ruling open to them whereas the other workers do not is of some relevance. For if doing one's job is the best alternative open to a worker, and if doing one's job is just, then doing what is just does secure the best life available to the worker. It then seems reasonable to say that, for this and every other worker, justice pays: they thereby secure the best life that is available to them.

But if it is granted that the particular job of a worker is the best activity that he or she can engage in, all that follows is that it is the least of the *evils* that are open to the worker. Obviously, if all the options open to an agent are evils, it pays the agent to select the least of those evils. But then it remains true that the worker is choosing what is evil whereas Plato is required to demonstrate that justice is *good* in itself. This requirement is not satisfied if justice is 'good' only in the sense that it is the least of available evils.

Some think that the argument that justice pays is intended to prove solely that it pays for the philosopher, Plato having no interest in the question in the case of the working classes. If so, the present difficulty for the producers should not worry him.

But this view is certainly wrong. First, Plato's conclusion (612b) is that he has shown that the soul must do what is just whether one has the ring of Gyges or not. His conclusion therefore evidently applies to the non-philosopher with Gyges' ring in Glaucon's argument in Book II.

Secondly, when Plato argues that unjust action does not pay he argues that it does not pay '*anyone*' (589d). And given his explanation of why just action pays and unjust action does not pay (588b–591e), it is clear why this is so. Unjust action promotes injustice in the soul, a great evil. Even if a producer cannot attain perfect justice, he is plainly benefited by achieving the degree of justice[27] that he can. Plato says that such a person is benefited by having his life governed by an intellect that is not his own (590c–d; cf. 431c–d). Plainly, that directing intellect will guide the producer to justice in

[27] Presumably, this is what Plato refers to when he speaks of virtue acquired by habit without philosophy (619c–d), and may be what he means by 'popular virtue' at 500d.

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his behaviour, and it is because of the good due to that behaviour that the producer is benefited by being directed by a wise intellect.

Thirdly, in both of the passages where Plato turns his attention to behaviour and argues that just action is good in itself and unjust action is evil in itself (443e–445b, 588b–591e), he says that the just man will act to preserve his inner harmony when engaged in actions concerned with the acquisition and expenditure of wealth (443e, 589d–e). Since the philosopher in the ideal city will do no such thing,[28] the point evidently applies to non-philosophers. Likewise, when Plato completes his argument for justice by pointing out its beneficial consequences, these consequences include the just man's (a) filling public office *if he wishes*, (b) marrying into whatever family he desires, and (c) giving his children in marriage to whomever he wishes (613d; cf. 362b, 363a). Plato could not describe the philosopher-kings with (a), and (b) and (c) are denied to the philosopher-kings in Plato's ideal state. So these beneficial consequences of justice are evidently envisaged as applying to people outside of the ideal state and other than the philosopher-kings. Therefore, it cannot be that the dialogue's argument, of which this is the concluding part, was merely purporting to show that it pays the philosopher-kings (*only*) to be just.[29]

Fourthly, in the myth of Er, after death, those who during their lives on earth had 'virtue through habit and without philosophy'—that is, non-philosophers—receive the reward of ascending the heavenly way rather than the punishment of descending the 'lower way' (614c, 619c–d).[30] Evidently Plato's argument that justice pays applies to them as well as to philosophers.

IV. CONCLUSION

Plato's defence of justice in the *Republic* is seriously flawed. His overriding aim is to show that justice pays. Part of what he must show to prove this is that just action pays the just agent. And in order to show this he must demonstrate that just behaviour is good in itself. Plato regards a citizen's performance of his or her work as a prime example of doing what is just. Thus, it is just for the philosophers to rule. But far

[28] It is plain that, at the very least, Plato is not thinking exclusively of public officials acquiring and spending money on behalf of the state.

[29] Christopher Bobonich ([n. 18], 54; cf. 185–94) is surprised that, in the *Republic*, Plato does not affirm that anything is good for a person only if that person has wisdom and knowledge of the good: this 'Dependency Thesis would provide strong support for the *Republic*'s claim that just people are always better off than unjust people'. But the assertion of the Dependency Thesis would ruin Plato's claim that just action pays 'anyone'. For it would mean that, for anyone without wisdom, just action could not be an intrinsic good. But when Plato argues that justice pays, he is, of course, arguing *against* the claim of the many that justice is not a good but an evil *for them*.

[30] Bobonich notes that in the myth of Er (614a–621d), at the end of the thousand-year period when souls choose their future lives after emerging from the 'heavenly' and 'lower' ways, the following happens: those who have travelled the heavenly way but possess only non-philosophical virtue choose most of the available evil lives that will, after those lives are lived, lead to the chooser's suffering the punishments of the lower way; while those who have just travelled the lower way will choose most of the good lives. Bobonich concludes that those who possess merely non-philosophical virtue enjoy no 'long-run benefit' ([n. 18], 57, 476).

This conclusion should be rejected. Suppose a man achieves only non-philosophical virtue for half of his earthly lives. *Because of* the virtue exhibited in those lives, he gains the long-term benefits of enjoying the delights of the heavenly way and avoiding the punishments of the lower way for half rather than none of those thousand-year intervals between earthly lives.

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from holding that ruling is an intrinsic good, Plato regards it as an intrinsic evil. Here, then, justice does not pay.

Furthermore, the greater evil of lower forms of work shows even more clearly that the work engaged in by the producers of Plato's ideal city is intrinsically evil. Since the intrinsic evil of ruling establishes that it is not in the self-interest of the philosophers to rule, the greater intrinsic evil of lower forms of work likewise establishes that those forms of work are not in the self-interest of the producers. Hence, for at least most citizens in the polis, in the essential case of performing one's job, Plato is committed to saying that justice does not pay, contrary to the main thesis of the dialogue.[31]

University College London ROBERT HEINAMAN
r.heinaman@ucl.ac.uk

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