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INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367-0904, U.S.A.

Republic, Book II, and the Origins of Political Philosophy

DREW A. HYLAND

Trinity College

As has often been observed, Book I of Plato's *Republic*, if taken in isolation from the rest of the work, reads remarkably like one of the earlier "aporetic" dialogues, such as the *Charmides*, *Lysis*, *Laches*, or *Euthyphro*.¹ The topic in the *Republic* is "justice," and a number of "definitions" are asserted by Socrates' interlocutors, each "definition" is in turn subjected to Socrates' elenchus, the dialogue does not "succeed," in the sense of finding an acceptable definition. Nevertheless, at the conclusion, the interlocutors (and the readers) are better off than they were, since now, at least, they do not "think they know what they do not know," but realize their ignorance; they are left in philosophic aporia. Moreover, as often happens, Socrates closes Book I, in an apparent effort to make the interlocutors feel better, by taking the blame himself for the failure to achieve a successful definition (*Republic* 354b–c). So far, so aporetic, so "early," so "Theaetetan."

What makes the *Republic* virtually unique among such dialogues is that the interlocutors, at least two of them, do not let Socrates go home at this juncture, but insist that he stay and defend more adequately his refutation of the preceding assertions of Thrasymachus. Glaucon and Adeimantus, younger brothers of Plato, transform a typically short aporetic dialogue into the monumental *Republic* by asserting their recognition that Socrates' elenchus was inadequate and by demanding that he do a more adequate job of defense. They thus accomplish the notoriously difficult task, which more famous rhetoricians such as Thrasymachus or Protagoras find next to impossible, of turning the tables on Socrates and making him speak positively, developing and defending a view of his own. To be sure, he does so in his usual context of a "dialogue" with the two brothers, but no one fails to see that the setting out of the "city in speech" (369a) of the *Republic* is primarily Socrates' doing.

Book II, however, belongs at least as much to Glaucon and Adeimantus as it does to Socrates. Not only are they the efficient cause of the continuation of the dialogue, but they establish the terms, the context, in which Socrates will have to develop the more positive view of the succeeding books. They do so, with Glaucon taking the lead, by developing a more adequate defense of a position

1. It should not be forgotten that it is also similar to the "later" *Theaetetus*, reminding us that Plato did not "abandon" this possibility in his later writing.

similar to Thrasymachus', and by grounding that defense in an account of the origins of justice, of the polity, and indeed of human nature itself. Because that account is so clearly determinative for the rest of the *Republic*, it will be worth our while to examine it and Socrates' initial response to it more closely than is often done. For, I shall argue, Book II contains to a remarkable extent a statement of many of the fundamental controversies of political philosophy.

Glaucon begins by distinguishing three kinds of goods and asking Socrates to say to which class he believes justice belongs. The distinction Glaucon draws is both subtle and not especially clear.² The first class is "a kind of good that we would choose to have not because we desire its consequences, but because we delight in it for its own sake—such as enjoyment and all the pleasures which are harmless and leave no after effects other than the enjoyment in having them."³ The second class "we like both for its own sake and for what comes out of it, such as thinking and seeing and being healthy" (357c). The third kind of good, for which Glaucon lists as examples gymnastic exercise, medical treatment, and the other activities from which money is made, are "drudgery but beneficial to us; and we would not choose to have them for themselves but for the sake of the wages and whatever else comes out of them" (357c–d). The distinction, especially between the first two, is made somewhat obscure because in each case the measure, enjoyment, or delight, would itself seem to be an "effect" and so belong to the second class. It has been plausibly suggested that the first class must refer to goods whose good effects are "in themselves" and exerted within the soul of the possessor, whereas the second includes goods which "in conjunction with other things, have additional good effects."⁴

While the distinction itself may be somewhat vague, the point towards which Glaucon drives is relatively clear. He asks Socrates to which of the three classes he supposes justice belongs and when Socrates predictably puts it in the second class of things "liked both for itself and for what comes out of it" (358a), Glaucon notes that most people, on the contrary, would put it in the third class of goods which are drudgery in themselves but pursued for their good consequences. The challenge to Socrates therefore becomes to show that justice is indeed in the second class. However, since those who would place justice in the third class agree about the good consequences of justice, the real challenge to Socrates lies in showing, in contrast to the common view, that justice "in itself" is a good and not drudgery. This is the force of Glaucon's otherwise extreme demand that Socrates show that the just man, stripped of the

2. David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," in *Plato's Republic: Interpretation and Criticism*, ed. Alexander Sesonske (Belmont, California: Wadsworth; 1966) pp. 66–81. See especially pp. 70–72.

3. *Republic* 357b. Unless otherwise noted, I shall follow the translation of Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

4. Sachs, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72.

good consequences of justice, that is, with the reputation for great injustice, will nevertheless be happiest (358a, 361a–d). In any case, it is a matter of considerable scholarly controversy whether, in the ensuing books, Socrates even takes up this precise challenge, much less whether he successfully meets it. What he does do is dictated by the way in which Glaucon now presents the thrust of his position.

Glaucon develops his challenge in three ways (358c–d). First, he sets out “what kind of thing they say justice is, and where it came from” (358c). That is, he presents us with what we shall see is an extraordinary account of the origins of justice and the polity. Second, he supports the common view that justice belongs to the third class of goods, that “all those who practice it do so unwillingly, as necessary but not good” (358c), and third, he argues that they are right to do so, for “the life of the unjust man is, after all, far better than that of the just man, as they say” (358c).

Glaucon’s stunningly compact account of the origins of justice is worth quoting at length:

They say that doing injustice is naturally good, and suffering injustice bad, but that the bad in suffering injustice far exceeds the good in doing it; so that, when they do injustice to one another and suffer it and taste of both, it seems profitable—to those who are not able to escape the one and choose the other—to set down a compact among themselves neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. And from there they began to set down their own laws and compacts and to name what the law commands lawful and just. And this, then, is the genesis and being of justice; it is a mean between what is best—doing injustice without paying the penalty—and what is worst—suffering injustice without being able to avenge oneself. The just is in the middle between these two, cared for not because it is good but because it is honored due to a want of vigor in doing injustice. The man who is able to do it and is truly a man would never set down a compact with anyone not to do injustice and not to suffer it. He’d be mad. Now the nature of justice is this and of this sort, and it naturally grows out of these sorts of things (258e–359b).

We can begin by noting the profoundly alienated and negative character of the teaching Glaucon sets out. As the first line makes clear, the natural order of things is radical injustice; justice is an imposition on this natural order by those incapable of flourishing within its context. The natural order, what we might call Glaucon’s “state of nature,” is truly a “war of all against all,” and more than one commentator has noted the affinity with the position subsequently set out and made famous in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.⁵ Glaucon’s view implies, in accordance with Thrasymachus’, that justice is indeed a human convention, that it is functionally identical to legality, that “the strong” will not feel themselves

5. E.g., R. E. Allen, “The Speech of Glaucon in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, XXV, No. 1 (Jan. 1987), p. 5. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), acknowledges the connection but qualifies it. See especially p. 88.

bound by its strictures, and that it originates as the negation of, and so is defined by, "natural" injustice.

Perhaps more light can be shed on Glaucon's position if we think through the conception of the human situation implicit in it. I begin with an outline of two fundamentally different characterizations of this situation, which I shall call respectively the relational and the atomistic.⁶ According to the first view, our very nature is determined by the quality of our relations with the world and other humans. What I am is a given set of relations, or the potentiality thereof. If I say, for example, that I am a teacher, husband, father, American, these are words naming the specific relations which constitute who I am. One of the most famous instances of this conception of the human situation is Aristotle's "definition" of human beings as "the political animal."⁷ The thrust of this characterization is that humans do not merely happen from time to time to gather in polities, but that it is part of our essential nature to do so. We would not be the beings that we are if we were not political. The same is true of Marx's famous formulation of us as "species beings,"⁸ or of Buber's assertion early in *I and Thou* that "There is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It."⁹ In each case we see a characterization of our very natures as relational. This view is almost always presented positively by its proponents, as in the three cases mentioned; but it is worth noting that such an understanding of human nature can be criticized by proponents of the "atomistic" view as entailing an excessive dependence on others, a lack of autonomy or self-reliance.

According to the second, "atomistic" view, a human being is naturally an autonomous, independent, radically self-interested "monad" or "atom," who, to be sure, may enter into relations with others, but where such relations will never be essential to, literally definitive of, the individual. That is, our nature is entirely intrinsic. Probably the best example in all of philosophy of the atomistic conception of the individual is the "ego" of Descartes' "ego cogito" which, at least originally, does not even know whether it has a body, much less whether an external world exists to which it might be essentially related. But its predominance in the thought of Thoreau, Emerson, and certain representatives of the "existentialist" tradition suggest the strong appeal of this conception in our tradition. In its positive versions, such a conception of the individual emphasizes autonomy, independence, "self-reliance," and as such is often pre-

6. For a more detailed formulation of these two standpoints and their significance, see my *The Question of Play* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), especially Chapters 4 and 5.

7. Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Chapter 2, 1253a.

8. Examples of this notion can be found in T. B. Bottomore, *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963). See especially "Bruno Bauer, 'Die Judenfrage,'" pp. 13, 26, 31; "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," p. 127. Perhaps the most explicit and succinct formulation is in the famous sixth "thesis on Feuerbach": "But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each separate individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations."

9. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. R. G. Smith (New York: Scribner's, 1958) p. 4.

sented as a desirable way to be, indeed as a situation toward which we should strive. Its negative possibilities, however, point toward a sense of isolation and a self-interest so radical as to imply an indifference towards and even a fundamental alienation from other humans.¹⁰

As I hope my examples suggest, these two views have exerted a strong influence on our tradition, and a worthwhile study could be done of their “dialectic” in the history of western culture. But we can return to Book II by noting that, clearly, Glaucon presents a prototypical version of the atomistic view, including within it the negative consequence of radical alienation from others.¹¹ Human beings “naturally” are alienated and selfish; the establishing of the conventions which lead us “not to do injustice” are impositions on the natural order of alienation.¹² I want to emphasize here that, according to Glaucon, the political situation arises out of a situation of fundamental negativity or limitation; there exists a “natural” injustice, alienation, and self-interest, all of which is founded in a deeply atomistic conception of the individual. It is to counter this initial negativity, to turn limitation into possibility, that Glaucon develops his understanding of the “social contract,” the origins of the polity and conventional justice. If humans were not limited by our atomistic alienation and natural injustice, we presumably would not need a social contract, not need a polity, not need conventional justice. “Justice” is thus a response to a specific version of human nature and a specific form of negativity and limitation. It is not part of our original nature, not “natural” in that sense.

Glaucon’s second thesis is that those who do justice do so unwillingly and only for the good consequences that accrue from a reputation for justice, that is, that justice belongs to the third category of goods outlined earlier. His chief support for this claim is the myth of Gyges. Gyges is presented as an arch-typical human being. Thanks to the acquisition of a magical ring which enables him to become invisible whenever the collet is turned inward, Gyges is placed in a situation where he can do injustice without risking the negative consequences thereof. Freed from those consequences, he does all manner of injustice with a vengeance. The clear implication is that we would all behave accordingly, and therefore that the only reason we are just is because we fear the

10. Marx draws out these implications especially well. See *op. cit.*, “Bruno Bauer, ‘Die Judenfrage’,” pp. 13, 25, 26.

11. R. E. Allen sees this in passing: Glaucon “tends toward a view of human intercourse which is remarkably atomic and isolated.” *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

12. It is worth noting that Glaucon’s is hardly the only version of an originally atomistic state of nature. For the most challenging alternative, consider Rousseau, who characterizes human beings in the state of nature as radically atomistic but not alienated, and construes the movement from the state of nature to civil society as necessitating a change in human nature from the atomistic to the relational. In my judgment Rousseau is deeply ambivalent about this change. See e.g. “The Second Discourse” in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964), pp. 106, 110, 127–35, especially pp. 133–34; *Of the Social Contract*, trans. Charles Sherover (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), all of Book I but especially p. 18.

consequences of getting caught doing injustice. Justice is in the third category of goods, not at all a good in itself (359d–360d).

The point of the Gyges story is clear enough. If Gyges can be taken as typical of humans, then Glaucon is surely right that justice is not something that we would do without fear of punishment for doing unjust acts. We thus really are, as his account of the origins of the polity suggested, atomistic beings, alienated from each other and naturally unjust. The Gyges story is consistent with the earlier account of our origins.

Glaucon's third point is an elaboration of the second. The people who are just, who control under duress their natural tendency to do injustice and do so only from the fear of punishment, are right. Justice really is in the third category, drudgery in itself, pursued only for its consequences. To bring this out and to culminate his challenge to Socrates, Glaucon develops his two "statues" of the utterly just man who, however, not merely misses the rewards usually associated with a reputation for justice but, to the contrary, has a reputation for the greatest injustice and is treated accordingly with the harshest of punishments, and on the other hand, a massively unjust man whose injustice is accompanied by clever intelligence, so that he both avoids the usual penalties for injustice and enjoys the benefits of a reputation for justice. Having not only stripped away the usual consequences of justice and injustice but reversed them, Glaucon asks Socrates to show that, notwithstanding, the just man would be happier than the unjust (360e–362c).

The import of Glaucon's powerful images is again fairly clear, but a number of points should be underlined. First, the two statues dramatically emphasize the thesis that justice is usually pursued, and injustice eschewed, exclusively because of the consequences associated with them respectively, and that, freed from those consequences, the thesis of the Gyges story, and of the account of the origins of the social contract, would be sustained. Our natural, unconstrained tendency is to be unjust and alienated from each other. Glaucon's three theses hold together coherently, and are grounded in the crucial account of the origins of the polity and conventional justice.

Second, the fact that Glaucon not only strips away the consequences usually associated with justice and injustice but reverses them makes the challenge to Socrates more extreme than its earlier statements suggested. The account of the three classes of goods suggested only that Socrates needed to establish that justice was a good in itself, that is, that it was desirable without appeal to its consequences. With the presentation of Glaucon's two statues, he is asked to show further that even if the respective reputations were reversed, and in particular that if the just man did not enjoy the usual consequences of justice (all that was required by the earlier formulation of goods) but was saddled with the negative consequences of a reputation for utter injustice, he would nevertheless be happier than the unjust man with a reputation for justice. It is at least arguable that Socrates never even attempts to meet this extreme challenge, but rather

proceeds to alter the expectations of Glaucon and Adeimantus. On the other hand, it should be noted that he might fail to meet this challenge but succeed in meeting the earlier one that informed the discussion, to show that justice was indeed a good “in itself” and therefore not desirable merely for its good consequences. It is not obvious that the only way to do that is to meet the extreme challenge of the two statues.

Third, as Bloom nicely points out, Socrates himself might be an example of just such a just man with a reputation for injustice who is nevertheless happy.¹³ He may thus be a sort of existential proof which renders a dialectical one unnecessary. There is surely some plausibility to this. On the other hand, it should be noted that the kind of justice that Socrates seems to exhibit is significantly different from the justice that supposedly will be exhibited subsequently by the philosopher-kings. Their justice will presumably be accomplished by ruling with perfect justice in the light of their comprehensive knowledge of the Ideas; they will be wise, and rule in the light of that wisdom. Socrates, however, “minds his own business and does not interfere with the business of others” in a very different way, by avoiding politics as much as possible and pursuing the life of a questioner and quester after wisdom, who recognizes his lack thereof and seeks after it, in a word, a “philosopher” in the literal sense.

Glaucon’s account of the origins of the city emphasized that people agree to obey the law out of fear of suffering injustice; once established, the efficacy of the laws, he supposes, will depend on their success as a deterrent. His story of Gyges showed that Gyges, and by implication most humans, freed from the fear of punishment, will do almost any manner of justice. And his two statues again place strong emphasis on the dreadful consequences of having a reputation for injustice. In short, his account generally emphasizes as the chief motivation to justice the dire consequences of being caught in unjust acts. His brother, Adeimantus, now enters and supplies the converse emphasis, but with the same final point, that justice belongs not in the second but the third category of goods. People praise justice and are just not for its inherent qualities but for the various rewards that come with a reputation for justice (363a ff.). He thus is most impressed by how pleasant the reputation for justice is, and wants Socrates to show that in fact justice is no less pleasant in itself than is the reputation for justice.¹⁴ Whereas Glaucon wanted to be shown that justice in itself is “worth the trouble,” Adeimantus demands that Socrates show that justice in itself, without reference to the benefits of good reputation, is *no trouble at all*, but intrinsically pleasant. In a sense, his demand is even more extreme than Glaucon’s. Together, the task may well be so formidable as to be impossi-

13. Bloom, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

14. Both Strauss (*op. cit.*, p. 90) and Bloom (*op. cit.*, pp. 342–43) point out the differing emphases of Glaucon and Adeimantus, and connect them plausibly to differences in their respective characters.

ble, and Socrates twice indicates that he believes it is impossible to meet the demands set before him (362d, 368b).

In truth, he does not, at least not explicitly. What he does is change the expectations of Glaucon and Adeimantus. In a masterful rhetorical stroke, Socrates shifts the brothers' attention to a project even more intriguing than a possible response to their explicit challenge: he invites them to found a city. By introducing the famous city-soul analogy (368d) Socrates shifts the focus of the discussion to the nature of the city and the justice to be found in it. The *Republic* thereby becomes the monumental work of political philosophy that it is.

This tack enables Socrates to respond explicitly to Glaucon's earlier account of the origins of the city with a very different account of his own. He constructs "in speech" (369a) the "healthy" or "true" city (372e). This construction presents an altogether different version of the nature of human being and the origins of the polity than that presented by Glaucon, and the differences, when made explicit, reveal some of the decisive controversies in political philosophy.

Socrates begins his account as follows:

"Well, then, I said, a city, as I believe, comes into being because each of us isn't self-sufficient but is in need of much. Do you believe there's another beginning to the founding of a city?"

"None at all," he said.¹⁵

"So, then, when one man takes on another for one need and another for another need, and since many things are needed, many men gather in one settlement as partners and helpers, to this common settlement we give the name city, don't we?"

"Most certainly."

"Now, does one man give a share to another, if he does give a share, or take a share, in the belief that it's better for himself?"

"Certainly."

"Come now, I said, let's make a city in speech from the beginning. Our need, as it seems, will make it."

"Of course."

The city originates according to Socrates because of something about human nature, our lack of self-sufficiency, our need of each other. That is, and explicitly contrary to Glaucon's account, we are *relational* by nature. We see posed in the contrast between Glaucon's and Socrates' accounts those two conceptions of human nature as atomistic and relational which I outlined earlier. Moreover, and, crucially, from the very beginning, human beings encounter each other not in alienation, as Glaucon insisted, but in the spirit of cooperation.

If we take the two pairings, atomistic and relational, alienated and non-alienated, we can see that there are four possible accounts of the origins of the

15. Adeimantus here either forgets, or quietly indicates his disagreement with, his brother's utterly different account of the origins which we have just discussed.

city, the two extremes of which Plato presents in the mouths of Glaucon and Socrates. Those accounts would be:

1. A state of nature in which human beings are atomistic and, when they do encounter each other, alienated. This is Glaucon's position.

2. A state of nature in which human beings are atomistic but, when they do encounter each other, nonalienated. Possibly the best example we have of this view is that set out by Rousseau, and made famous in his notion of the "noble savage."

3. A state of nature in which human beings are relational but alienated. Something like this seems to be Marx's view, where the conditions of scarcity bring about the necessity of alienation, which must in turn be overcome as we move toward the telos of history, where we will be relational and nonalienated.

4. A state of nature in which human beings are relational and nonalienated. This is the account which Socrates formulates.

Socrates' position is thus the pole to Glaucon's as an account of that fundamental human condition which might give rise to the city, to politics. Plato puts into the mouth of Glaucon the most pessimistic and into the mouth of Socrates the most optimistic account of the human situation and the origins of the city.

Still, in both cases we see the confrontation of an original experience of limitation or negativity which must be turned into possibility by the founding of the city. For Glaucon, the original limitation or negativity was our natural alienation which led us, in the state of nature, to do all manner of injustice to each other. The city, the social contract, is a construct to ward off this original tendency. With Socrates, the limitation, the *negativity*, is quite different. We *lack* autonomy; we are *not* self-sufficient; we *need* each other. Our response to this, our effort to turn limitation into possibility, is to gather together into cities so that, in the spirit of cooperation, we may enhance the lives of each other.

We lack, we need, we seek ways to overcome those lacks and needs. We need only recall Plato's *Symposium* to recognize the phenomenon to which Socrates here alludes as that aspect of human nature which leads us to be political; it is our *eros*. Not just the formulation of "laws and institutions," to which Diotima called our attention in the *Symposium* (209b), but the very impetus to gather in cities, is founded in our nature as erotic.

But it is an *eros* which, at least until Glaucon breaks in at 372c, is portrayed by Socrates as strikingly easy to satisfy. If we are simply furnished with the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter (369d), that it, furnished with reasonable, even rustic comfort, we will be content, or so Socrates seems to suggest. To accomplish this comfort, this enhancement of our lives together, Socrates introduces the crucial principle of the division of labor at 369e:

Now, what about this? Must each one of them put his work at the disposition of all in common—for example, must the farmer, one man, provide food for four and

spend four times as much time and labor in the provision of food and then give it in common to others; or must he neglect them and produce a fourth part of the food in a fourth part of the time and use the other three parts for the provision of a house, clothing, and shoes, not taking the trouble to share in common with others, *but minding his own business for himself? (all' auton di' hauton ta houtou prattein?)* 369e–370a, my emphasis).

According to Socrates, the principle of the division of labor, that most decisive of events in the economic history of the world, arises not out of an original alienation but out of the cooperative effort to enhance the lives of each other. Once again, an initial limitation is confronted and transformed into possibility, done not as a control over our capacity for injustice, as Glaucon would have it, but in the spirit of cooperation.

But Plato has chosen his words carefully here, and anyone who is reading the *Republic* for at least the second time cannot fail to note in the passage just quoted the first occurrence in the book of the phrase which I emphasized, “minding one’s own business.” This is, of course, to become the core of the subsequent “definition” of justice (433a, 433b, 433d, 434c) which is to inform the dialogue. But we can also not fail to note that it is here used in precisely the opposite sense than the one that will be given to it as the principle of justice. Justice, that is, will be formulated as “each one minding one’s own business and not interfering with that of others” in the sense founded on the first of the alternatives suggested by Socrates in the above quotation, to wit, that in accordance with the principle of the division of labor, or “one person, one job,” each person will pursue one’s own designated activity, presumably do it well since it will accord with one’s particular abilities, contribute that activity to the whole, and receive the other necessities of life from the work of the other citizens who will be following a similar principle. Justice, construed on this interpretation of “minding one’s own business,” thus makes each citizen radically, indeed irrevocably *political*, contributing to the welfare of others but also utterly dependent on the help of others for sustenance.

By contrast, the sense of “minding one’s own business” quoted above at 370a is entirely different. Here, minding one’s own business implies doing everything for oneself, that is, making one’s *own* food, clothing, shelter, and whatever else, and therefore neither contributing to the welfare of others nor depending at all on the help of others for sustenance. This latter interpretation of minding one’s own business thus would make one radically *apolitical*, a fundamentally autonomous, atomistic being for whom any relations with others would be entirely extrinsic to one’s nature and welfare. It is hardly surprising therefore that this interpretation is not the one pursued in the “city in speech” of the *Republic*¹⁶ (though Socrates himself seems to be a virtual instance of

16. Rousseau would seem to agree. Consider *The Social Contract*, Part 2, Section VII: “He who dares undertake to give institutions to a people ought to feel himself capable, as it were, of

it). But that should not blind us to the provocation Plato here presents us. For in the two possible interpretations of “minding one’s own business” we see reiterated precisely the two fundamental conceptions of human being earlier discussed, the one which makes us fundamentally relational, the other which characterizes us as naturally atomistic. The *Republic* will now pursue the relational interpretation in great detail. But we should not forget its important, and unrefuted, alternative.¹⁷ To put the point differently, justice in the explicitly political sense of “minding one’s own business” will now be emphasized in the *Republic*. However, we should not forget that its apolitical sense is limned, but passed over for the most part in silence. Socrates will speak in behalf of the political version while himself exhibiting the alternative.

The relational interpretation that is pursued is acknowledged, if tentatively, by Adeimantus (370a) and then supported by Socrates with a strikingly strong statement of the uniqueness of each human being’s talents:

“I myself also had the thought when you spoke that, in the first place, each of us is naturally not quite like anyone else, but rather differs in his nature; different men are apt for the accomplishment of different jobs. Isn’t that your opinion?” “It is.” (370a–b).

The principle of the division of labor is thus said to be founded in the natural differences in human nature rather than, say, in economic conditions. But the principle Socrates here articulates has other important ramifications as well, not the least of which is that it offers us our first clue as to why the later “noble lie,” that there are three kinds of souls, gold, silver, and bronze, each suited for different activities (415a ff.), is in fact a lie; it simply fails to take adequate account of the genuine complexity and diversity of human nature. The later “city in speech” will therefore be founded on principles (the lie of metals in

changing human nature; of transforming each individual, who in himself is a complete and independent whole, into part of a greater whole, from which he receives in some manner his life and his being; of altering man’s constitution in order to strengthen it; of substituting a social and moral existence for the independent and physical existence which we have all received from nature. In a word, it is necessary to deprive man of his native powers in order to endow him with some which are alien to him, and of which he cannot make use without the aid of others. The more thoroughly those natural powers are deadened and destroyed, the greater and more durable are the acquired powers, the more solid and perfect also are the institutions; so that if each citizen is nothing, and can be nothing, except in combination with all the rest, and if the force acquired by the whole be equal or superior to the sum of the natural forces of all the individuals, we may say that legislation is at the highest point of perfection which it can attain.” (Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Charles Sherover (New York: Meridian Books, 1974), p. 65.

I suggest that the ambivalence present in this paragraph is reflected in the *Republic* itself.

17. In the *Charmides* at 161b ff., *sophrosyne* is defined, first by Charmides who is then supported by Critias, as “doing one’s own business,” and Socrates refutes this definition by interpreting it as an extreme version of the atomistic thesis, that it means doing and making everything for oneself. For a longer discussion of this passage, see my *The Virtue of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato’s Charmides* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), pp. 71ff.

particular) which ignore the realities of human diversity, ignore, one might say, the complexity of human eros. Can it therefore be genuinely just?

Socrates proceeds to build his “healthy” city (370b–372c) on the “one person, one job” principle established on the basis of the division of labor and the agreement regarding the diversity of human abilities. It is an idyllic, peaceful, cooperative city, comprised of craftsmen, farmers, tradesmen, merchants, sailors, and wage earners. Those activities absent from the city are perhaps more striking than those present in it: There are no doctors, which may be related to the implication that this will be a city of vegetarians. There are no soldiers; apparently the spirit of cooperation which informs the internal functioning of this city will extend to other cities as well. There are no educators, and certainly no philosophers. There is no government; the simple principle that informs the city seems to be something close to “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” The state has not so much withered away as failed to arise. There is no competition, no alienation; it is a classless society.

I use these phrases not only to describe this rustic and idyllic city, but also to invoke the spirit of Marx, since there are clear similarities in Socrates’ city to some of Marx’s aspirations. But Marx, I think, would be entirely in sympathy with Glaucon’s strongly worded objection to the city which the more austere Adeimantus seemed to find acceptable; this is a city of pigs:

“If you were providing for a city of sows, Socrates, on what else would you fatten them than this?”

“Well, how should it be, Glaucon?” I said.

“As is conventional,” he said. “I suppose men who aren’t going to be wretched recline on couches and eat from tables and have relishes and desserts just like men have nowadays” (372d–e).

Socrates’ response to Glaucon’s bold interjection is remarkable. In order to appreciate this, we need only consider what his usual response to this sort of interjection might be. “A bold idea, you best of men. But let us examine what you say to see whether it is true.” Whereupon, we might predict, the usual Socratic elenchus would ensue, showing Glaucon that he thought he knew what in fact he did not know. But nothing of the sort occurs here. Instead, strikingly, Socrates accedes immediately to Glaucon’s objection:

“All right,” I said, “I understand. We are, as it seems, considering not only how a city, but also a luxurious city, comes into being. Perhaps that’s not bad either.

For in considering such a city too, we could probably see in what way justice and injustice naturally grow in cities” (372e).

What, we must now ask, could be so important, so powerful, about Glaucon’s objection that Socrates, that famous questioner of all opinions, does not so much as call Glaucon’s view into question but accepts it immediately?

However boisterously, Glaucon here introduces into the discussion a decisive notion. The city so far constructed by Socrates and Adeimantus is founded

on an idle, and idyllic, pretense, that human erotic striving is so simple, so easily satiated, that if only we meet our elemental needs for food, clothing, and shelter, we will be satisfied, no longer erotic in the sense of experiencing other forms of incompleteness and striving to overcome them. Glaucon knows better. Human eros is far more complex, more manifold; one might say that it is polymorphously perverse. Again, eros is not such that we experience a determinate number of “incompletenesses” which, if only they can be overcome, we will be satisfied, no longer erotic. Instead, eros is indefinitely expanding. The satisfaction of certain needs only leads to the development of others. Because our eros will not be so easily satisfied as Adeimantus and Socrates pretend, because, as Glaucon implies, our eros continually seeks new objects, sooner or later our individual efforts to satisfy our desires will come into conflict; the satisfaction of one person’s desires will only be accomplished by the suppression of someone else’s, and there will be a problem of justice in the luxurious city. For there is no problem of justice in the healthy city. When, at 371e, Socrates asks Adeimantus where in the healthy city justice is to be found, Adeimantus cannot find it, and, we now see, for a good reason. On the pretense of an easily satisfied eros our desires will never come into conflict. There will thus be no *need* for justice, and, if it is present at all, it will be virtually invisible. Justice arises as a need, as a demand, and so becomes visible, only when human desires expand sufficiently that they come into conflict. By recognizing the greater complexity of human desire, Glaucon prepares us for a turn to the real human situation in which justice is a problem, in which it arises as needful.

We thus learn from a comparison of the healthy and luxurious city that justice arises as an issue, as a need, only out of a condition where desires are sufficiently complex as to conflict. As the eventual “definition” of justice, — “minding one’s own business and *not interfering with the business of others*” — attests, justice necessarily involves the control of one’s natural desires or impulses when the satisfaction thereof involves the suppression of others. Justice arises in a situation where eros must be suppressed. There is thus an inherent conflict between justice and human nature, or at least that aspect of human nature which is our eros, and we begin to see why the *Republic* as a whole leaves us so skeptical that a “perfectly just city” could ever come into being.

From this standpoint, there is no such thing as a just city which is characterized by the unconstrained pursuit of all one’s desires and aspirations. Justice, again, requires the control of one’s eros; *sophrosyne* is an inseparable requirement of justice, and we can see why the eventual “definition” of *sophrosyne* seems so closely related to that of justice (430d ff.).

In response to Glaucon’s challenge, Socrates develops what he calls the “luxurious” or “fevered” city, which, in the subsequent books of the *Republic*, will itself have to be purged (399e). A brief contrast of the healthy and the luxurious city will enable us to see some of the consequences of an acknowledgment of the indefinitely expanding character of human eros.

The luxurious city will grow much larger due to the introduction into it of all those activities, pastimes, and products “beyond the necessary.” Predictably there will be a plethora of artists and artisans of the unnecessary, such as beauticians, barbers, and cooks. More surprisingly, teachers head a list which includes “wet nurses, governnesses, beauticians, barbers, relish-makers, and cooks” (373c) as unnecessary but luxurious additions to the city. Meat will be added to the diet of the citizens, and, perhaps related, doctors will now become more important members of the community (373c–d). And now, in a decisive passage at 373d, Socrates recognizes that a consequence of the pursuit of unnecessary desires will be scarce resources. The city will be unable to produce enough to meet not just the necessary but the continually expanding needs of its citizens. It will have to go to war against its neighbors.

“Then must we cut off a piece of our neighbors’ land, if we are going to have sufficient for pasture and tillage, and they in turn from ours, if they let themselves go to the unlimited acquisition of money, overstepping the boundary of the necessary?”

“Quite necessarily, Socrates,” he said.

“After that, won’t we go to war as a consequence, Glaucon? Or how will it be?”

“Like that,” he said.

“And let’s not say whether war works evil or good, I said, but only this much, that we have in turn found the origin of war—in those things whose presence in cities most of all produces evils both private and public” (373d–e).

In his earlier account of the origins of the city, Glaucon had described an original, pre-political situation characterized by a “natural” tendency to injustice toward each other. Socrates’ “state of nature,” the healthy city, had been much more idyllic, more peaceful. He now indicates that alienation and injustice is not an original situation with humans but a consequence of the pursuit of luxury, or, as I have put it, of the pursuit of the indefinitely expanding desires generated by eros, which Glaucon had insisted upon and Socrates had accepted. Socrates seems to assume, plausibly, a natural world sufficiently bountiful to supply us adequately with the necessities of life without doing injustice to others, but not sufficient to meet our indefinitely expanding desires without conflict. Our greed for the unnecessary, he implies, can only be satisfied by injustice and war.

To fight these wars, an army will be needed. Utilizing the now established principle of “one person, one job,” Socrates easily persuades Glaucon of the necessity of a professional army (374a ff.) and launches into the elaborate task of training and educating first the soldier class, then the “philosopher-kings” who will rule the city, a task that will take up the next several books. Socrates’ rhetoric immediately shifts to emphasizing the necessity, first, of an army to defend the city against invasion (374a) and, subsequently, an army that functions as an internal police to its own citizens (410a, 415d). But we must not forget that the originating impetus for an army is to wage wars of aggression

against other cities.¹⁸ Within the city in speech, justice as “minding one’s own business and not interfering with the business of others” may be pursued. But it is clear from the beginning that this city will be at best indifferent, and probably straightforwardly unjust, towards the citizens of other cities.¹⁹ We again ask, can such a city be called just?

As I have tried to show, Book II, and especially the challenge to Socrates by Glaucon and Adeimantus and his initial response to them, is in a fundamental way determinative for the rest of the *Republic*. A number of alternative accounts of the origins of political things are offered, alternative accounts of that context of limitation or negativity to which the city is a transcending response. One of those possibilities is pursued in the rest of the *Republic*, without, however, a corresponding refutation of the alternatives. Those unrefuted alternatives are simply left behind, in silence. As such, the problematic of Book II is never resolved in the *Republic*; it remains as a provocation.²⁰ Only by ignoring that provocation can we say that this great book is intended as Plato’s “solution” to the problem of politics. By accepting the provocation and attempting to rethink the development of the dialogue in the light of the set of alternatives presented in Book II, we may hope to plumb some of the depths of the political problematic, presented as such by Plato, and without solution.

18. Bloom, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

19. The consequences of this for the individual soul, if we apply the “city-soul” analogy, are troublesome indeed. See my “Plato’s Three Waves and the Question of Utopia,” forthcoming.

20. I borrow this very apt term from Mitchell Miller, “Platonic Provocations: Reflections on the Soul and the Good in the *Republic*,” in *Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O’Meara (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985), pp. 163–93.