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The Philosopher's Happiness in Plato's *Republic*

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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Department of Philosophy  
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# The Philosopher's Happiness in Plato's Republic

## Abstract

In this thesis, I argue for the position that happiness is a communal concept in Plato's *Republic*. By a communal concept, I mean that one must act for the sake of one's community in order to be happy. I make this argument by contending that justice, a notion which involves the consideration of others, is the key to making an individual happy. I argue that Plato has both an altruistic and egoistic concept of justice, and that the interplay between these two concepts of justice constitutes Plato's concept of happiness in the *Republic*. What results is a kind of happiness which is associated with internal goods, such as having a well-balanced soul, as opposed to the idea of happiness being related to the acquisition of external goods like wealth.

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## Introduction

This thesis deals with Plato's philosophy, and it is my attempt to perform two tasks. First, I wish to explain what I take to be Plato's position, and secondly, I wish to argue that his position is one that contributes to our understanding of happiness. Throughout the thesis, I will concern myself with these two tasks, because I feel there is something to be gained from learning about Plato's position. The point in studying the history of philosophy, as far as I see it, is to expose ourselves to the ideas of history and to adapt them to the ideas of today.

The position which I shall argue for, and thus my thesis statement, is that happiness is a communal concept in Plato's *Republic*. By a "communal concept", I mean that one must act for the sake of one's community in order to be happy oneself. The idea that one's own happiness is dependent upon acting for the sake of one's community brings in an altruistic aspect to what is otherwise an egoistic question, i.e., the question of how an individual is to lead a happy life. What brings in an altruistic aspect is that one needs to act for the sake of one's community in order to be happy. Thus, on the way towards becoming happy oneself, one must consider the interest of one's community. In other words, to live a happy life, one must abandon selfish motives and act for the interest of one's community. This notion of altruism is a weak one, since there is always an egoistic motivation underlying one's communally oriented actions.

The key to understanding Plato's communal concept of happiness in the *Republic* is to focus on the role which justice plays in the happiness of an individual. My line of argument will therefore begin with a discussion of justice. Chapter 1 begins with the challenge Plato has Thrasymachus put forward against Socrates, a challenge regarding the value of being just. Plato has Thrasymachus present the immoralist position, which upholds the idea that injustice leads to happiness, while justice leads to unhappiness. For the immoralist, justice only serves the interest of another, and will not ensure that one has the kinds of things that will make one happy, namely external goods such as wealth. Against this immoralist view, Plato has Socrates argue that an altruistic virtue like justice (altruistic because it is normally understood to be a way of regulating society and is not concerned with furthering the interest of an individual), also has an egoistic aspect to it.

Because justice has this egoistic aspect, according to Plato, it can benefit the individual as well as serving a role in regulating society. If Plato can successfully argue that justice benefits both the individual and one's community, then he will have established that the same virtue can be both altruistic and egoistic. Having already established the link between justice and happiness in the discussion between Thrasymachus and Socrates, the task for Plato is to show how being just benefits the individual, and therefore is necessary if one wants to be happy.

My line of argument continues with Plato's expansion of the idea of justice. Plato has Socrates express the idea that justice is the virtue of the soul. This characterization of justice demonstrates that Plato wants to present us with a revised definition of justice, one which locates justice on the level of a person's soul. Nevertheless, he has Socrates define justice in the city first, perhaps to show that justice in the soul is nothing different from the usual notion of justice which the Greeks had in mind. Plato has Socrates describe the origin of a city, and it turns out that the city will meet the needs of its citizens most successfully if all of the citizens keep to their naturally suited tasks. This state of affairs is said to be a just one, and Plato has Socrates discover that justice in the city is the condition under which each of the classes keeps to its own task. Plato has Socrates point out that the unity of the city enables the classes to keep to their own tasks. This unity, I shall argue, comes from the citizens of the city, and they are responsible for enabling the city to be unified. The discussion of justice in the city and what accounts for it, is Plato's attempt to identify the origin of a just city, and more specifically, the origin of the altruistic justice that is seen in the laws and the courtrooms of a Greek city.

The search for justice in the city has helped Plato clear the way for a more fundamental definition of justice, one which locates justice on the level of a person's soul. Like the city, a person's soul is just if each of its parts, namely reason, spirit, and appetite, perform their proper tasks and do not interfere with the tasks of the other parts. I shall evaluate the extent to which this definition of justice is an accurate reflection of the common Greek understanding of justice. One criticism from commentators, which I shall address, is that Plato has not provided an argument as to why it is beneficial to be just as

it is normally understood by the Greeks, but rather he has changed the meaning of justice and explained why it is beneficial to be just in this new way. In opposition to several commentators, I shall argue that being just in one's soul puts aside the need to engage in πλεονεξία, i.e., having more than one's share. For once one's soul is just, one recognizes that contemplation and other internal goods outweigh the importance placed on external goods such as wealth and fame.

Still, it is not clear that the soul has three parts, and that it is analogous to the city. That is why, in Chapter 2, I begin with a detailed exploration of Plato's argument that there are three parts to the soul. After presenting what I take to be Plato's argument, I shall assess its merit. I shall argue that there is something legitimate in saying that there are instincts which have no consideration for the good of the person as a whole. In this respect, the appetite does seem to form a separate class of desires, one which is concerned with instinct, and which therefore has no consideration for the person's overall good. As to the desires of the spirited part, the examples which Plato gives seem to contradict one another, and it is not so clear that the spirited part has no concern for a person's overall good. Despite the problematic nature of the division of the soul, I contend that Plato has identified an important difference between appetite and reason, even if the distinction between these parts is not so clear and analogous to the city as Plato would like to think.

Accepting that justice involves the balancing of one's soul, I point out that having a just soul enables one to know the Good, which is the ultimate source of value. By virtue of its role, a just soul acts instrumentally towards a person's knowing the Good, and it is this final end which provides the motivation for a person to desire having a just soul in the first place. It turns out, however, that only a philosopher has a soul that is sufficiently just for him to contemplate the Good, and the problem arises that Plato's conception of happiness may be overly exclusive. However, I shall argue that the auxiliaries and the producers have the capability of being habitually just, and this allows them to achieve at least a certain degree of happiness.

When the philosopher acquires knowledge of the Good, one may wonder what further point there is in having a just soul. I shall argue that the philosopher still needs to concern himself with having a just soul even once he contemplates the Good, for having a just soul will lead toward happiness. Even though the philosopher has acquired what is of ultimate value, namely knowledge of the Good, he needs to address the needs of all three parts of his soul, for that is the way in which the soul becomes just. He cannot retain a just soul by solely contemplating the Forms, because this will cause him to neglect the needs of his spirited and appetitive parts. Therefore, a just soul has more than an instrumental role in the philosopher's ascent toward the Good. It also has a value in itself once the philosopher knows the Good, and this value is that it contributes towards his happiness.

What is questionable in my account thus far, is why the philosopher, who knows the Good, should be mistaken about what is of most value. As Chapter 3 begins, I discuss the issue that the philosopher is not aware of how valuable having a just soul is. I contend that the philosopher is overwhelmed by his initial exposure to the Good, and that this is why he must be compelled to rule over the city. Even though he has knowledge of the Good, he still does not know what is best for himself because he only wants to know the Forms at this point. He only wants to address the needs of the reasoning part of his soul, because he is fascinated by the appeal of the Forms. Yet what he needs to do, in order to be completely happy himself, is to rule over the city, for this is his naturally suited task. By ruling over the city, he will address the needs of all three parts of his soul, thus ensuring that his soul remains just. At the same time, he will provide the firm foundation that is necessary for the citizens to excel at their tasks and to keep to their own naturally suited tasks. Since he, like all human beings, is not self-sufficient, he benefits from the contributions made by the other citizens. In the philosopher's case, he must set the wheel of co-operation in motion, he must provide the foundation for the entire city to work together as a unified whole.

The philosopher accomplishes this task by activating the Good, by implementing his knowledge of the Good in the day to day existence of the city. The philosopher's most

important responsibility when it comes to implementing the Good is the educational aspect of his leadership. He must provide the citizens with the opportunity to be as just as possible, so that they can exercise enough self-control to keep to their tasks, and thus to contribute to the welfare of all. In the role as ruler of the city, the philosopher acts for the sake of his community, because he establishes the inner discipline which is necessary for the citizens to keep to their tasks. Once the citizens keep to their tasks, they contribute to the creation of a unified city, one which works for the good of the citizens as a whole, one which meets the needs of all its citizens. The philosopher himself benefits from this state of affairs because he too depends upon the contributions of his fellow citizens.

# Chapter 1

## How Being Just Contributes to Being Happy

### 1.1 The context in which happiness arises: Thrasymachus' challenge

I shall first explore how the idea of happiness arises in the *Republic*. Such an understanding of the context will help set up the notion of happiness which Plato is going to have Socrates present. This notion of happiness, as I shall argue, is communal. Under the Thrasymachean view, as we shall see, happiness is an entirely selfish notion. Therefore, under this view, there would be no need for a person to place any limits on the acquisition of goods, with the result that concerns of justice would be disregarded. If there needs to be any limiting of one's own actions, this is only done for the purpose of ensuring a more secure existence, which will in turn allow for a more predictable life, in which a person may with some confidence expect to satisfy his yearnings for pleasure, wealth, honor, or whatever good he desires.

Perhaps this Thrasymachean position alludes to the traditional values of Homeric society, where the competitive excellences are seen as primary:

"Homeric society does value most highly the class it needs most: men who are well-armed, strong, fleet of foot and skilled in war, counsel, and strategy. Naturally, too, it values most highly in these men just those qualities which it recognizes as being essential to the security of society. In comparison with the competitive excellences, the quieter co-operative excellences must take an inferior position."<sup>1</sup>

If Plato makes Thrasymachus hold such a conception of value, then justice, being a co-operative excellence, will not enable a person to have success in life in the same way that these competitive excellences will. I assume that the possession of these competitive excellences is thought to bring about happiness from this traditional point of view as well. For if someone is happy, presumably his life is full of those things which are most highly valued, and under this conception of value, the competitive excellences are most highly valued.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if this is the conception of value which Plato has Thrasymachus

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<sup>1</sup> Adkins, Arthur W. H., *Merit and Responsibility, A Study in Greek Values*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> What establishes this connection between happiness and value is that happiness is seen as a person's final end in Greek ethics, if one is allowed to make a general statement about happiness (εὐδαιμονία). This is

hold, it appears that excellences such as justice are not as important for happiness. What I shall argue is that justice, being one of the co-operative excellences (in Adkin's terminology), is not something that will help someone attain happiness from the Thrasymachean point of view. However, determining just what the Thrasymachean position regarding justice *is* turns out to be a contentious issue when it comes to Platonic scholarship. Therefore, I will now examine some of the different interpretations which have been suggested. After having considered these interpretations, I shall present my own.

Much has been written about the Thrasymachean position by commentators, and different attempts have been made both to understand exactly what this position is and to argue that it is incoherent. J. Annas sets out two ways in which the Thrasymachean position concerning justice can be understood. One option is to view the position as a conventionalist account of justice, where acting justly is to act in conformity with the laws of one's city.<sup>3</sup> Under a conventionalist interpretation, justice is nothing other than obedience to the laws, and it has no independent existence. Alternatively, the Thrasymachean position has been called an immoralist one. Annas describes this immoralist position, where justice and injustice have an existence beyond their expression in the laws of a city, such that when a city makes laws, justice and injustice are not thereby conventionally decided upon.<sup>4</sup> What makes the Thrasymachean position an immoralist one, under this interpretation, is that injustice is the better thing to pursue when it comes to a choice between being just and being unjust. These two interpretations of the Thrasymachean position are both based on statements which Plato has Thrasymachus make in the text. These statements are the following, as stated by G. Hourani: "1. Justice is serving the interests of the stronger" (the statement which is used as evidence for the immoralist interpretation), and "2. Just action is obedience to the laws

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Julia Annas' contention in her book: *The Morality of Happiness*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 35. I assume that whatever a person values most reveals his conception of happiness. For once he has those things which he values most, he will have reached his final end, which is understood as happiness.

<sup>3</sup> Annas, Julia, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

of one's state" (the statement which is used as evidence for the conventionalist interpretation).<sup>5</sup>

Hourani argues that the Thrasymachean position is a conventionalist one. However, it is not clear that Hourani offers a persuasive argument for supporting this interpretation. Concerning the first statement that I mentioned above, "that justice is serving the interests of the stronger", he says that it is "an important generalization, based on the underlying conventionalist definition combined with supposed facts of psychology and politics".<sup>6</sup> Due to this statement being a generalization, presumably based on experience, Hourani does not think that it is intended as being a definition, for a definition, according to Hourani, is more of a fact about language usage, and not something which delves into the empirical sphere.<sup>7</sup> S. Everson, however, does not think placing restraints on definitions such that they must be analytic is a legitimate move.<sup>8</sup> Everson's point is that a definition could still help one discover something about the world. Therefore, even if this statement that "justice is serving the interests of the stronger" helps one discover something about the world, this in itself is not a reason to discount it as being a possible definition for justice. If Everson is correct here, then Hourani has not discounted the possibility that this first statement is what the Thrasymachean definition of justice actually is. Consequently, Hourani cannot so easily discard this immoralist definition of justice because it does not have the character of a definition, and then conclude that the Thrasymachean definition of justice must be a conventionalist one, since it is the other alternative.

What is more problematic for Hourani is that he never seems to argue that the second statement above, that "just action is obedience to the laws of one's state" is the actual definition of justice which Plato has Thrasymachus convey. He seems merely to insist that this is a definition. He argues that this statement is "basic to the argument, which would collapse without this link".<sup>9</sup> The conclusion of the argument, as Hourani sees it, is that justice is the advantage of the stronger.<sup>10</sup> Plato gets to this conclusion (according to

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<sup>5</sup> Hourani, George, "Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice in Plato's *Republic*", *Phronesis*, Vol. 7, 1962, p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup> Everson, Stephen, "The Incoherence of Thrasymachus", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XVI, 1998, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Hourani, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Hourani) by assuming: (1) that the rulers are the stronger party in a city, (2) that they are the ones who make the laws, and (3) that when they make laws, they make them for their advantage. Thus, whenever people obey the laws, they are acting in the interest of the rulers who have made these laws for their own advantage. Moreover, since the rulers are the stronger party, when people obey the laws, they are acting in the interest of the stronger party. While it is true that the statement “just action is obedience to the laws of one’s state” is basic to the argument, this fact alone does not mean that it must be the Thrasymachean definition of justice. Hourani seems to be arguing that the conventionalist position, that justice is obedience to the laws, must be the Thrasymachean definition of justice because the immoralist definition is no longer a possibility. However, if Everson is correct, Hourani has not sufficiently argued that the immoralist definition of justice is not a possible one for Plato to have Thrasymachus hold. Therefore, it is not so clear that the immoralist position that “justice is serving the interests of the stronger” must be the conclusion of an argument whose premises include the conventionalist definition of justice.

While Hourani’s position is not satisfactory for saying that the Thrasymachean position is a conventionalist one, Everson argues that Plato *does* have Thrasymachus hold this conventionalist position, and this helps Everson maintain that there is an inconsistency because he believes that Plato has Thrasymachus shift into the immoralist position eventually.<sup>11</sup> Here we have a case where Everson interprets the position as being both conventionalist and immoralist, which he thinks shows its incoherency. For under the conventionalist interpretation, justice is not something real which exists outside of the laws of one’s city, while under the immoralist interpretation, justice is something real, which exists on its own, and is to be avoided. Therefore, what is incoherent about holding both positions is that justice is two different things: something conventional and something real.

Yet Everson’s argument that Thrasymachus does hold this conventionalist position is not clear and therefore not persuasive. He bases his argument on the fact that there are three candidates in what Thrasymachus says from 338 C to 341 A, which could be taken

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<sup>11</sup> Everson, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

as definitions of justice.<sup>12</sup> The possible candidate at 338 C is (1) that justice is the advantage of the stronger, at 338 E (2) that justice is the same in all cities, the advantage of the established government, and at 339 C (3) that whatever laws the government makes must be obeyed by their subjects, and this is justice.<sup>13</sup> Everson argues that (2) is not a definition because it would entail not only that all just acts are to the advantage of the rulers, which is acceptable as it stands, but also that “every action which is to the advantage of the ruler would thereby be a just act”.<sup>14</sup> This last point Everson calls “highly implausible”, and I suppose because it is highly implausible, it is not something which Plato would have Thrasymachus put forth as a definition. Yet why this is implausible is not clear. Why is it implausible that every action which is advantageous to the ruler is regarded by Thrasymachus as being a just action? The only reason I can think of as to why Everson would think this is “highly implausible” is that he must be assuming some notion of justice while in the process of evaluating this point. Perhaps Everson thinks justice always retains its usual Greek meaning as being a social virtue which limits one’s acquisition of goods and places regulations on people’s actions. This kind of background assumption would explain why for Everson it is “highly implausible” that every action which is advantageous to the ruler is a just action. For any action which the ruler takes, for example, any theft or murder which is to his advantage, is not thereby a just action according to the usual Greek meaning of justice. However, in this context where Plato has Thrasymachus alter the meaning of “justice”, one should be open to the possibility that Plato is trying to present a certain conception of value which does not take into account any concern for such social virtues as justice, as it is normally understood. Therefore, in this context, it is not “highly implausible” that every action which is to the ruler’s advantage is a just action. For the meaning of justice could very well be something that Plato is altering in order to make his point.

Since Everson argues that the first candidate as a definition above (that justice is the advantage of the stronger), has the same sense as the second candidate above (that justice is the same in all cities, the advantage of the established government),<sup>15</sup> then for Everson

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

the first candidate is not a definition either. Everson argues that since neither (1) nor (2) are meant to be definitions of justice, this makes it more likely that (3) is, which is the conventionalist position.<sup>16</sup> However, if I am right in saying that Everson's argument for (2) and hence (1) is not very clear and therefore not very persuasive, it is not so certain that he could infer that (3) is more likely to be the definition which Plato actually makes Thrasymachus hold. I contend therefore that it is not clear, based on Everson's argument, that Plato has Thrasymachus hold a conventionalist position.

We have seen that both Hourani's and Everson's attempts to interpret the Thrasymachean position in a conventionalist way have failed. This fact shall have repercussions when I make my own pronouncement on the issue. In the meantime, I shall address an interpretation that this position is an immoralist one. An argument in support of this interpretation is the following.<sup>17</sup> Plato has Socrates object that rulers can sometimes be mistaken about what is to their advantage, and in such cases they may make laws which are not advantageous to themselves (339 B-D):

“You say, do you not, that obedience to the ruling power is just? ‘I do.’ ‘And are those in power in the various states infallible or not?’ ‘They are, of course, liable to make mistakes,’ he replied. ‘When they proceed to make laws, then, they may do the job well or badly?’ ‘I suppose so.’ ‘And if they do it well the laws will be in their interest, and if they do it badly they won't, I take it.’ ‘I agree.’ ‘But their subjects must act according to the laws they make, for that is what justice is.’ ‘Of course.’ ‘Then according to your argument it is just not only to do what is in the interest of the stronger party but also the opposite.’”

In order to deal with this objection, Plato has Cleitophon suggest what Thrasymachus means, where justice is what the ruler *thinks* is advantageous for himself. Annas argues that if Thrasymachus were to take up this suggestion, he would be taking the conventionalist position.<sup>18</sup> I think the reason is that following Cleitophon's suggestion, justice does turn out to be conventional, since it is still to be defined as obeying the laws, only now one can accept that the laws will not always be to the rulers' advantage because they will sometimes make mistakes about what is to their advantage. If Plato were to have Thrasymachus make this choice, at one and the same time he would be accepting the plausible suggestion that rulers may make mistakes, yet also holding that justice is nothing other than obedience to the laws, which is to take the conventionalist position.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Given by Julia Annas, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

However, since Plato does not have Thrasymachus take this position, Annas feels that this position is not a conventionalist one.<sup>19</sup>

For Everson, this account of the situation is not satisfactory, for it could still mean that Plato has Thrasymachus hold a conventionalist position up to the point where he is forced to make a choice by the objections Plato has Socrates put forth.<sup>20</sup> The evidence that Plato does have Thrasymachus hold this position, for Everson, is that he has Thrasymachus agree that rulers can make mistakes before he deals with Socrates' objection that rulers sometimes can be mistaken about what is for their advantage. If Plato has Thrasymachus accept that rulers can make mistakes about what is to their advantage, while still having him maintain that it is just to follow the laws of the rulers, then justice is conventional according to Everson's argument. Everson makes the assumption that if the citizens follow the laws in a blind fashion, without considering whether they are advantageous, then a conventionalist sense of justice accounts for their behavior. For if the rulers make mistakes, then the laws they make will perhaps not be for the good of the citizens, and as such, obeying the laws may not be for their own good. Still, if the citizens are nonetheless to obey the laws, even laws which may be disadvantageous for them, then justice appears to be something conventional, something which does not take into account any underlying sense of justice which the laws of a city must safeguard. I do not have the scope to explore Everson's argument in more detail. However, I shall make the following comment in regards to it. It is not clear that Plato wants to have Thrasymachus commit to the conventionalist position, since Thrasymachus' response is that a ruler is only a ruler when he does not make mistakes in what is for his own advantage (340 E- 341 A). In this case, people will still be following the laws, but whenever they do so, there is a person or group who benefits, namely the ruling party. Therefore, it seems that even when Plato has Thrasymachus appear to hold the conventionalist position, the immoralist position is lurking in the background, guiding the way the ruling party behaves when it acts for its own advantage. Consequently, Everson makes too strong a claim when he argues that Plato has Thrasymachus hold the conventionalist position. What seems more likely is that

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Everson, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

Plato wants to present Thrasymachus as confused, and as not being sure what position he holds on the meaning of justice.

Let us now consider this confusion in more detail, so that we may eventually understand why Plato presents Thrasymachus' position in this way. What brings the account of Thrasymachus into full incoherence is what Plato has him say later on, at 343 C, according to Everson.<sup>21</sup> Here, Plato has Thrasymachus claim that justice is another's good, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler (343 C-D):

"You are not aware that justice or right is really what is good for someone else, namely the interest of the stronger party or ruler, imposed at the expense of the subject who obeys him. Injustice or wrong is just the opposite of this, and rules those who are really simple and just, while they serve their ruler's interests because he is stronger than they, and as his subjects promote his happiness to the complete exclusion of their own."

It is not clear exactly why Everson thinks Thrasymachus' position is incoherent. He claims that Thrasymachus' description of a tyrant acting unjustly, e.g. kidnapping and murdering, is "nonsensical" when one considers the earlier conventionalist account of justice.<sup>22</sup> The reason why this talk of the unjust tyrant is nonsensical, according to Everson, is that it makes no reference to the law.<sup>23</sup> Given the earlier conventionalist account, justice does not exist outside of the laws. Therefore, when Thrasymachus says that the tyrant acts unjustly, he appears to be bringing in a different notion of justice. When Thrasymachus says that the tyrant is unjust, Everson thinks that the tyrant is not unjust by acting illegally, but by being "both selfish and powerful".<sup>24</sup> If Thrasymachus were to be consistent, given Everson's reasoning, he would have to maintain that when the tyrant acts unjustly, he disobeys the laws, since this description would be consistent with the conventionalist account of justice, and would not depend on a notion of justice which exists outside the laws of one's city. Though I do not have the scope to address this issue in more detail, I hope that what I have to say in the next few paragraphs provides an explanation as to why Plato has Thrasymachus present his definition of justice in what could be seen as a confusing manner.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Simply put, I think Plato is trying to retain the usual conception of justice, and that is why he retains the usual understanding of justice as being the good of another. If this makes the Thrasymachean position an incoherent one when combined with the point that justice is the advantage of the stronger, then so much the better for Plato's argument. For it could be argued that Plato is fully aware that the Thrasymachean position is incoherent, and this is why it is an inadequate position, one which needs to be replaced with a different understanding of justice. Let us now consider a text which explains this usual conception of justice which the Greeks operated with. Afterward, I shall explain why Plato thinks this conception of justice can be exploited by those whose conception of happiness is based on the acquisition of external goods.

The usual Greek understanding of justice can be seen in such extracts as this one from Solon's poetry:

"Many to Athens their god-built country I brought back that had been sold for export, this one extra-justly, that one justly, and others under necessity pressed into exile for debt, ceasing to utter the Attic tongue, diversely scattered as they were; while those right here enduring slavery ignoble, trembling before the moods of their masters, I set free. These (things) by (using) power fitting close together force with justice I achieved and completed as I had promised. And laws according with the lowly and the noble by fitting justice straight to each man I enscribed."<sup>25</sup>

Here we have justice being applied to the treatment of people, being combined with force, and being discussed in relation to laws. I contend that this usual understanding of justice is something that Plato does not want to have Thrasymachus abandon. This is why part of the Thrasymachean definition of justice is described as being the good of another (343 C).

The reason why Plato wants to have Thrasymachus retain this meaning of justice is so that he can show how a strong person or a ruler can exploit it. Justice is something the ruler or government is going to appeal to as a way of advancing its own position. This appeal will only work if the usual, traditional meaning of justice as being another's good is already in place among the citizens. Otherwise, there would be no point in making the appeal in the first place. The government has the unique position of being able to use the laws to its advantage, and hence it may promote the idea that it would be just for the citizens to follow these laws. Justice, so understood, is a tool the government can use to

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Havelock, Eric A., *The Greek Concept of Justice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978, pp. 252-253.

promote its own interest. This use of justice which the government makes is what I call “the magician’s trick version of justice.” The government makes the appeal that it is just to obey the laws, and this appeal works because the citizens believe that justice is necessary for regulating society, for exacting punishment. However, the government will only aim for its own advancement. It is therefore like a magician showing his greatest trick: it appears as though the government is acting in accordance with justice, when in reality, it is only using the citizens’ belief in the value of justice to further its own ends. While the citizens are watching the show on stage, the government is secretly scheming, advancing its own position while escaping the notice of the citizens. This is the sense in which justice is at one and the same time another’s good and also the advantage of the stronger. Justice is not *really* for the citizens’ good (from the government’s point of view). It is merely a way for the government to ensure that the citizens’ behavior will conform with its goals. Being the stronger party, being able to control the citizens’ behavior through force and through the law, helps the government attain its self-interested goals. This use of justice, in which an appeal is made to its value, reflects a conception of goodness which emphasizes self-interested gain. Whether there is something real about justice, whether it exists outside the laws is not really the issue from the government’s point of view. Of course, it is important that the citizens who serve under them have this belief, otherwise they will presumably realize, at some point, that the government is entirely selfish and ruthless. From the government’s point of view, they can capitalize on the persistence of the citizens’ belief that justice is something real and something of value.

This persistence of the citizens’ belief that justice is something real and something of value means that the Thrasymachean position is more of an immoralist one. I contend that Plato has Thrasymachus uphold the idea that justice exists outside the laws of a city. This kind of existence provides a justification for obeying the laws in the first place. Without this kind of underlying value and existence of justice, there would be no reason for the citizens to obey laws in order to ensure that the value of justice is retained within the city. If this argument is correct, then the Thrasymachean position does not seem to be a conventionalist one, for the citizens only obey the laws of the city because they believe the laws reflect the value of justice, whose value transcends the laws.

Another argument in favour of the immoralist interpretation is that it fits best with what appears to be the Thrasymachean conception of value. Though Plato is not explicit about what is most valuable under the Thrasymachean point of view, the fact that he says the highest happiness (εὐδαιμονέστατον) comes from the extreme of injustice and wrongdoing (344 A) is an indication as to what is valued most under this point of view. Here is what Plato has Thrasymachus say when he is thinking of the unjust man (343 E-344 A):

“I’m thinking of the man I referred to just now who can further his own advantage in a big way: he’s the man to study if you want to find how much more private gain there is in wrongdoing than in right. You can see it most easily if you take the extreme of injustice and wrongdoing, which brings the highest happiness to its practitioners and plunges its victims and their honesty in misery...”

If injustice brings about the highest happiness, then I assume injustice brings about what is of most value for the individual. For it seems that the highest happiness would be brought about by whatever is of most value. Thus, the Thrasymachean conception of happiness supports the interpretation that the Thrasymachean position is an immoralist one. It is simply better to pursue injustice because that will lead to the highest happiness for the individual. At the same time, pursuing justice will lead to unhappiness, since it will limit one’s ability to acquire external goods. Thus the immoralism of Thrasymachus’ position can be succinctly characterized as follows. Injustice leads to happiness, while justice leads to unhappiness.

What we have learned from looking at the context in which happiness arises in Book I is how it is being contrasted with justice. There is simply no reason to be just if one wants to live a happy life, according to the account of justice Plato has Thrasymachus present. For being just, which encourages one to place a limit on one’s pursuit of external goods, will only stop one from achieving whatever external goods one desires. Thus, when Plato has Socrates go on to consider the question of what justice is, it has already been considered in relation to living a happy life. Justice is also related to happiness in one of the quotes we have seen, when Plato talks about how a ruler’s subjects “promote his happiness to the complete exclusion of their own” (343 C-D). If Plato is going to have Socrates convince anyone that the life of a just man is happier, he must show how it is in a person's self-interest to be just. Moreover, he must show that the kind of justice being considered here is not what I have called the magician's trick version of justice, not some

kind of trick to be used for the person who wants to gain the upper hand on others. What Plato needs to have Socrates do is to attack the ground of the Thrasymachean account of justice, which is based on a certain conception of what is ultimately of value in a person's life. The idea behind the Thrasymachean account of justice is that having limitations placed upon one's actions serves as an impediment to the things of value for living a happy life. This is the result of my interpretation that the Thrasymachean position is an immoralist one. If Plato can have Socrates show that being just is itself the ultimate good worth striving for, then the ground will fall out from under the Thrasymachean position.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the context in which happiness arises sets out the path which Plato must have Socrates take: he must show that justice is itself a thing of value in the living of a happy life.

## 1.2 The egoistic conception of justice

Socrates' first step in showing that justice does benefit the individual is to show that it brings about something desirable for that person, in opposition to the idea that justice is a limitation on one's ability to be happy. This attempt to show how justice does benefit the individual is what I shall call Plato's "egoistic conception of justice". At first glance, the idea that there could be an egoistic account of justice may seem rather odd, simply because justice, as it is understood by the Greeks, places some sort of limit on an individual's self-seeking activities, in the sense that it keeps order in a city. Eric Havelock makes reference to this meaning of justice when he refers to some of the things which the Furies say in Aeschylus' play *Eumenides* (550-565):

"But I advise that the rash transgressor who accumulates goods forcefully without *justice* will come to grief in time; his calls for help will be vain; the *daimōn* mocks his lack of foresight; his previous prosperity is smashed on the *reef of justice*, and he goes under forever".<sup>27</sup>

In this example, it is implied that he who does not heed justice will meet his doom in time. Therefore, at least with this example, we see how justice is a limitation on the accumulation of goods (πλεονεξία), so that justice seems to conflict with the egoistic pursuit of an individual's aims. As such, justice deals with the interest of others, or with

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<sup>26</sup> This is also a way for Plato to deal with the "free rider" objection. If he gives an account of justice as being an internal good having to do with the condition of one's soul, the motivation to escape the notice of others, to be a free rider by benefiting from the lawful behaviour of others, is lessened.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

some greater concern for a cosmic order, and not with one's own interest necessarily. Therefore it is not obvious that justice should provide any benefit for the individual, seeing as it is primarily concerned with the interest of others, or at least it is not necessarily concerned with one's own interest. However, as I have argued up to this point, Plato needs to show how justice is beneficial to the individual, because otherwise he would not be able to provide a reason for why one needs to be just, and he would not be successful in showing that justice is the kind of good that is worth having on its own. Later on, I will deal with criticism of this egoistic version of justice.

Let us first see how Plato modifies the definition of justice, which shall be followed by an account of how justice is revealed through the construction of a city (in speech anyway). Since he must show that justice leads toward a kind of good that ought to be valued for its own sake, Plato's first step is to give an account of the kind of good which justice can bring about for a person. He concentrates his efforts on what is considered to be the principle of life in a person, or any being for that matter, namely the soul.<sup>28</sup> Yet before showing how justice benefits the soul, Plato first shows how justice benefits the groups of which people are members. Thus to the extent that one values being a member of a group, the success of the group is only possible through justice. So Plato's first move in showing how justice is beneficial to the individual is to argue that whatever relationships one is going to have with others, justice is necessary to keep those relationships working well.

Justice enables a group, be it a city, an army, or even thieves, to establish "... a unity of purpose and friendly feeling..." (351 D). Plato assumes that if the individuals within a group do not treat each other justly, thereby creating a unity of purpose and friendly feeling, then the group will not be able to accomplish its aims. Here there is a first indication of how the usual altruistic conception of justice is going to benefit the individual at the same time. As we saw with the quotes from Aeschylus and from Solon, justice is seen as a check on one's own activity and a lack of consideration for it causes one to be punished, it causes one's prosperity to be "smashed on the reef of justice".<sup>29</sup> Here Plato wants to say that justice, as well as having this regulating role, also helps the

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<sup>28</sup> Grube, G. M. A., *Plato's Thought*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., co-publisher: Athlone Press, 1980. First published in 1935 by Methuen in London, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> *Eumenides*, Lines 550-565.

individual in a positive way. If one co-operates with others, then one is able to achieve one's own goals as well, at least those goals which one shares with others. We will come to see the importance of co-operating with others in more detail when we examine justice in the city. For the moment, I want to emphasize that justice, according to Plato's account, is going to enable unity and friendship to be present within a group of people, and the presence of unity and friendship will benefit the individual. Hence we get our first indication as to how an altruistic concept like justice can have an egoistic element as well.

Justice also provides a benefit for the individual in a way that has to do with the development of character, i.e., one's soul. Plato argues that justice is the kind of thing which allows one to achieve an interior good. This interiorization of justice is Plato's attempt to show how the kind of good one needs to strive towards is an inner good, one having reference to a soul that is virtuous, or that performs its function well, which is living (353 D). Justice, therefore, in its interior manifestation, is that which makes a soul live well, since it is the virtue of the soul (353 E). I will deal with this notion of justice as a function later on (section 1.3). This path towards an inner definition of justice is Plato's attempt to show how justice is something that the individual must strive towards, and by defining justice with reference to the soul, the idea of external goods is excluded from the picture. The idea now is that somehow one's happiness will be achieved by the proper development of one's soul. I will look at what Plato means by the soul being just in section 1.4. What is important to realize in the meantime is that Plato's argument against the immoralist position takes the form of a re-assessment of what is most valuable in a human being's life.

Let me now summarize the benefits of justice for the individual, at least at this early stage. Justice enables one's relationships with others to succeed, while also enabling a person to develop his soul in a way that will benefit himself. The next step is to clarify what justice is, according to the account Plato will have Socrates present. We know that this account is going to explain *how* justice is of benefit to the individual, since that is the kind of account which will provide a person with a reason to be just which will not

conflict with his wish to be happy. What we now have to ask is *what* justice will turn out to be, under the account Plato will have Socrates present.<sup>30</sup>

### 1.3 Plato's attempt to define justice

Up to this point, we have seen that the question of a happy life arises out of a discussion about justice. Plato has Thrasymachus oppose the two, while he has Socrates try to show that not only are justice and happiness compatible, but that justice itself provides a benefit to an individual's soul, and thus makes one happy. We have noted the fact that someone holding Thrasymachus' position may not be convinced by this interiorization of happiness, making a happy life something that has to do with the state of one's soul. For the moment, I have assumed that it may be possible for Plato to provide some sort of convincing account of how a just soul could be something of high value for an individual to have. As I present Plato's discussion of justice within the city, we ought to remember that the reason behind this search for justice in the city is to provide an account of justice which will eventually show how justice is beneficial to the individual. Though I have already mentioned in a cursory way how justice is beneficial to the individual, now we will see in more detail how justice can provide such a benefit for people.

Why does Plato first discuss justice in the city, if he wants to revise the definition of justice so that it describes the state of one's soul? A reason why it may be legitimate to look for justice in the city may have to do with the nature of justice itself, as Plato understands it. We have seen that justice is usually thought to be something that regulates society, exacts punishment, and limits the acquisition of goods. Perhaps the influence of the usual understanding of justice is the reason why Plato wants to first discover what justice is in the city and only then to define it in reference to the soul. J. Moreau thinks the presence of this social, altruistic aspect of justice explains why the *Republic* moves

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<sup>30</sup> A concern which may lead one to accuse Plato of question-begging is his assumption that happiness has to do with the state of one's soul. Those who value external goods would disagree with this conception. Plato could respond by saying that a just soul is more valuable than having external goods. The essential path toward making an argument against the Thrasymachean account is to show how the idea of the ultimate good which underlies this account must be modified. We will have to wait and see whether the kind of good which a just soul provides is more valuable than having external goods.

from the political to the psychological level.<sup>31</sup> If justice is understood in this dual way, this does seem to explain why Plato focuses on justice in the city first. By seeing how justice operates on this social level, Plato is merely making reference to the usual understanding of justice. This fact in itself could be Plato's attempt to say that his notion of justice still retains this otherness aspect to it, where it regulates the relations among people. That justice can be defined in terms of the soul is a recent development in the notion of justice in ancient Greek thinking.<sup>32</sup> Havelock notes how Herodotus, in describing King Deioeces, discusses a kind of justice which is "a step toward the 'internalization' of the concept".<sup>33</sup>

Accepting that it may be legitimate to look for justice in the city, we must now examine Plato's reasoning for why the city comes into being. Plato's strategy is to describe the formation of a city and thereby to identify justice within it. If he does not present an accurate picture of a city's origin and its eventual establishment, then his identification of justice within it will not reflect the way justice operates in reality. His definition of justice, consequently, would be based on a city which does not reflect the way human beings actually interact.

Plato notes the fact that an individual is not self-sufficient (369 B), and that for this reason, people come together to form a city. Let us consider what Plato means by this. An individual has many needs which he cannot satisfy on his own. Therefore, he needs the help of others to satisfy all of his needs. At the most basic level, a person needs food, shelter and clothing. So Plato reasons that a person will need the help of at least the following people, specializing in their respective crafts. He has Socrates say (369 D): "Well then, how will our city supply these needs? It will need a farmer, a builder, and a weaver, and also, I think, a shoemaker and one or two others to provide for our bodily needs."

After arguing that it is best if workers concentrate on their own particular tasks, Plato has Socrates say that a few more people are required to make the city into an efficient one (370 C-D):

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<sup>31</sup> Moreau, Joseph, "La Cité et l'âme humaine dans la *République* de Platon", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 1986, Vol. 40, p. 88.

<sup>32</sup> By recent, I mean that by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when Simonides lived, justice first started to be explained by reference to one's state of being or soul.

<sup>33</sup> Havelock, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

“We shall need more than four citizens, then, Adeimantus, to supply the needs we mentioned. For the farmer, it seems, will not make his own plough or hoe, or any of his other agricultural implements, if they are to be well made. The same is true of the builder and the many tools he needs, and of the weaver and shoemaker.”

Added to these, Plato has Socrates say that people are needed to care for the animals who will be given to the farmer to help with his work (370 D-E), that there will be a need for importers and exporters (371 A), and experts on sea travel if the trade is going to take place overseas (371 A-B). There will also be a need for people to act as middle-men in the marketplace who buy and sell the goods that others produce (371 C-D), and finally wage-earners who are only suitable for manual labour (371 E). Once enough people have come together to fill all of these roles, then the city has come into being. This is Plato’s first city, one that does not yet have the luxuries of civilization.

Plato’s explanation for the origin of a city accurately reflects the way cities originate. It appears to be an exceptionless fact that human beings organize themselves into societies, and that they do this in order to ensure a more successful, secure, and ultimately happy life. What they gain from organizing themselves into societies is a co-operative environment where each person is willing to contribute to the good of the whole. At this initial stage in the description of the city, Plato has identified an element that is so fundamental to human society that it can be accepted as true that human beings must organize themselves into societies in order to live more happily.

### 1.3.1 The principle of specialization critically examined

Accepting the idea that the city comes into being so that people can meet their needs more successfully, we now need to look at what else contributes to Plato’s account of a city. Whatever else follows in Plato’s account, we first need to remember what is the guiding principle of the city’s organization. The ultimate criterion for evaluating the success of a city, based on its reason for coming into being, is how well the citizens’ needs are being met. It is on this basis which, I contend, Plato introduces what one usually calls the Principle of Specialization.<sup>34</sup> This Principle is first introduced when Plato has Adeimantus answer Socrates, agreeing that it is better for one man to work at one task rather than many tasks (370 A- B):

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<sup>34</sup> E.g., Annas, Julia, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 73.

“... ‘As you were speaking, it occurred to me that, in the first place, no two of us are born exactly alike. We have different natural aptitudes, which fit us for different jobs.’ ‘We have indeed.’ ‘So do we do better to exercise one skill or to try to practice several?’ ‘To stick to one,’ he said. ‘And there is a further point. It is fatal in any job to miss the right moment for action.’ ‘Clearly.’ ‘The workman must be a professional at the call of his job; his job will not wait till he has leisure to spare for it.’ ‘That is inevitable.’ ‘Quantity and quality are therefore more easily produced when a man specializes appropriately on a single job for which he is naturally fitted, and neglects all others.’ ‘That’s certainly true.’”

So the Principle can be stated as follows: one individual should concentrate on one and only one task. Since this Principle is presumably intended to make the city better at providing for people’s needs, we need at present to examine it, and to see whether it indeed accomplishes this aim. The reason why it is important to examine this Principle for my argument is that it serves as Plato’s definition of justice in the city (434 A1). If this definition is going to be used as a basis for defining justice in the individual, then it is important to evaluate its merit.

Before assessing the merit of this Principle, we must understand a little more about it. We need to realize that Plato is only interested in establishing the Principle of Specialization once it is acknowledged that people will meet their needs best by co-operating, by working together to meet those needs. The basis for co-operation is the realization that people are not self-sufficient, and hence they will live better lives by co-operating. Once it is established that co-operation is necessary for achieving a better life, then the Principle of Specialization comes in as a way of most efficiently meeting the needs of the citizens who have made this decision to work together. As J. Annas emphasizes,

“[Plato] is not interested in efficiency as such, only efficiency in an association where people’s lives are interdependent...”<sup>35</sup>

Placing the Principle of Specialization within the context of a co-operative group of individuals serves to limit its application. Rather than trying to make human beings as efficient as possible with no other aim in sight, Plato’s goal is to make the city efficient so as to best meet the needs of its citizens. Thus when Plato applies this Principle to the city, the co-operative nature of the city is assumed as the overriding goal.

This underlying co-operative structure helps us to understand what Plato’s intentions are when he assigns each person a specified task or function (ἔργον) within the city. He is not trying to give each person a function just for the sake of industrial diversity. Rather,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

he wants to capitalize on the co-operative structure underlying the city. It is helpful to keep in mind this idea of co-operation when trying to understand the assignment of a function to a citizen. When Plato first discusses the idea of a function in the *Republic*, the way to define the function of something is to look at what only it can do or at what it can do better than other things. In this way, Plato determines that the function of the eyes is to see, since no other part of the body can perform this action (352 E). If there are a group of objects which can perform the same function, like a group of knives which could all cut a vine-shoot, the way to decide which knife to use is to see which knife cuts the vine-shoot most effectively. By this method, we determine that the pruning-knife is the best at cutting the vine-shoot, and therefore determine that this is the function of a pruning-knife (352 E- 353 A):

““And would you define the function of a horse, or of anything else, as something one can only do, or does best, with the thing in question?’ ‘I don’t understand.’ ‘Look at it this way. Can you see with anything but eyes?’ ‘No.’ ‘Again, can you hear with anything but ears?’ ‘Certainly not.’ ‘So we can rightly call these the functions of eye and ear.’ ‘Yes.’ ‘So again, could you cut off a vine-shoot with a carving-knife or a chisel or other tool?’ ‘You could.’ ‘But you would do the job best if you used a pruning-knife made for the purpose.’ ‘True.’ ‘Shall we then call this its “function”?’ ‘Yes, let us.””

Here, in the city which Plato is constructing, the function of a citizen is determined by the same method. It is determined by what activity that citizen can perform best. I shall look at this idea a little more closely in what follows. What I want to emphasize for now is that the assignment of functions within the city is always with a view towards best meeting the needs of the citizens, who co-operate in order to achieve the kind of life they desire. Thus, rather than simply deciding what function a person performs best with no other considerations in mind, a citizen’s function will be assigned based on how well it enables the citizens who are co-operating to live the kind of life they want.

Now that I have shown what I take Plato’s position to be, it is time to evaluate it. We need to look a little more closely at how a person’s function is determined, assuming that this underlying co-operative structure of the city is in place. Part of Plato’s justification for the Principle of Specialization is that we have different natural abilities which suit us for different tasks (370 B). Plato’s argument is that if each of us keeps to that task to which he is naturally suited, the city will run more efficiently, and hence people’s needs will be met more successfully. However, we need to assess this notion of natural ability and determine how well it applies to a person’s particular task within this first city which

Plato has Socrates construct in speech.<sup>36</sup> The reason why we need to pursue this question is that it serves as the backdrop for the Principle of Specialization, which serves also as Plato's definition of political justice.

We are not left completely in the dark as to what Plato means by the notion of natural ability, since he gives us an idea of what he means when discussing the guardians. One who has a natural ability for a task learns it easily, can discover things on his own after just a little instruction, and has a body that adequately serves his mind (455 B-C):

“When you say a man has a natural ability or inability for a subject, don't you mean that he learns it easily or finds it difficult; and that if his natural ability is good he can pick it up himself after a little instruction, whereas if it is bad he can't remember what he's learnt even after long instruction and practice? And if he has natural ability don't the things of the body adequately serve the mind, if he hasn't, are they not in conflict with it? Aren't these the sort of criteria by which you distinguish natural ability or lack of it? 'No one will deny that.'”

This description of what constitutes having a natural ability could then be used as a guide for assigning tasks in the first city Plato constructs in speech. If a person shows that he can learn a particular task easily, that he can progress in this task after little instruction, and that his body adequately serves his mind in the performance of this task, then he ought to be assigned this task within the city. When all of the tasks are assigned in the city, presumably people's needs will be met successfully because the assignment of tasks is based on what people naturally excel at. This is a plausible argument, since having people perform those tasks which they excel at would seem to make for an efficient city. For if people can pick up the skills required in their craft easily and not waste too much time learning, they would have all the more time to perform their craft. With so many people excelling at their crafts, one could imagine that the city will reap the benefits of expert craftsmen producing the best shoes, furniture, clothes, crops and other such products. The better the products are, the more successfully the people's needs would be met. This system of efficient production being performed by expert craftsmen meets the requirement that the first city came into being to fulfill: taking care of the needs of the citizens.

So it seems that acting in accordance with this Principle could very well contribute to meeting people's needs successfully. However, the case should not yet be closed, for

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<sup>36</sup> Though there are two cities described by Plato, namely this first “city of pigs” and the second one with more luxuries (372 E), I believe assessing the assumptions involved in the Principle of Specialization will impact on both cities, for they are both created based on these assumptions.

there is more to consider here. I will now consider one of the criticisms which G. Santas raises in response to Plato's arguments. According to Santas, there is an ambiguity in a person's optimal task (ἔργον) as it is defined within the city. Optimal task here means the task for which a person is naturally suited. A person's optimal task could mean (1) that a given task, for example farming, is something a person does better than any of the other things he does. Or, it could mean (2) that a given task is something a person does better than anyone else.<sup>37</sup> Is this a problem for Plato? For Santas, this ambiguity allows for two scenarios to arise, one being a best-case scenario and one being a worst-case scenario. In the best-case scenario, a particular citizen does farming better than he does other tasks *and* he does farming better than other citizens. In this case, the city operates well, or so it would seem, because the citizen just happens to be better than other people in the performance of the task which he performs best. If this were always the case, then presumably no problems would arise for Plato's city. For under this best-case scenario, everyone would excel at the craft for which he shows a natural ability. What Santas seems to be saying here is that even though the notion of an optimal task is ambiguous, if it just so happens that everyone excels at the task which he is naturally suited for, the ambiguity would not be damaging. For there would be no need to differentiate between those who are the best at something and those who have a natural ability for something. Everyone who had a natural ability for something would be the best at that craft. Once one starts to think about this best-case scenario more and more, it starts to seem rather unfathomable that everyone could be the best at his naturally suited task. I will pick up on this line of thought shortly.

For now, let us consider the worst-case scenario, to see what problems Santas says arise here. In this worst-case scenario, even though a particular citizen does farming better than he does other things, other people do farming better than he does. The problem which results under this scenario, according to Santas, is that here the needs of the individual are conflicting with the needs of the city.<sup>38</sup> The best thing for the individual, as Santas interprets Plato, is for him to perform that task for which he is naturally suited. However, the best thing for the city is to meet people's needs as

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<sup>37</sup> Santas Gerasimos, *Goodness and Justice*, Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001, p. 80.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

efficiently as possible. Thus it would appear to be better for the city to have this citizen do something other than farming, since other people are better at farming than he is. There appears to be a conflict between the needs of the citizen and the needs of the city. If we remember the reason why a city is formed in the first place, which is to best meet a person's needs, this result, due to an ambiguity in the idea of a person's optimal or naturally-suited task, seems problematic.

However, this worst-case scenario is not as damaging as one may think at first glance. It is not necessarily better for the city to have a person perform a task which he is not as good at. Under this worst-case scenario, apparently a person would have to perform a task which he is not as good at, because other people are better than him at his most naturally suited task. Yet if a person must fulfill a task which he is not as good at, due to there being others who are better at a particular task than he is, then presumably he will not contribute to the needs of the citizens as well. The best thing for the city, it seems, is to have each person perform that task for which he is most naturally suited, regardless of the fact that a person may not be the best at performing a particular task. Assuming, as Santas seems to, that a person can only perform a particular task if he is the best at this task, places unnecessary restrictions on the tasks which are to be assigned within Plato's city. The point in creating a city based on meeting the needs of the citizens is not to create a craft competition, where everyone competes to see who is the best at farming, at carpentry, at cobbling, and so on. Rather, the point is to create a city which reflects the co-operative nature of human beings. Being unable to flourish on their own, (as I have interpreted Plato), people can benefit from one another by combining their talents in a co-operative community. The point in assigning tasks based on natural ability is to take advantage of the talents of the individuals within the city for the benefit of the whole population.

Perhaps it will help to consider how the individuals in one industry can work together, combining their talents to contribute to the city as a whole. Someone who naturally does farming well, though not as well as some other people, could perhaps still be a farmer, or at least he could still work in the farming industry. After all, there is presumably some sort of gradient here, where not everyone does farming equally well, such that the efficiency of the farming industry as a whole admits of a scale of efficiency. What

matters, it could be argued, is that the industry as a whole is efficient, not that a person who farms must be better than other people at farming. Moreover, even if a person is not so efficient at the act of farming itself, perhaps his natural ability could be used for performing research on farming techniques, which satisfies both the criterion of meeting his personal needs and that of contributing to the efficiency of the farming industry. If the ultimate goal is to meet the needs of the citizens most successfully, I do not see any reason to discount such flexibility within the system. Moreover, I do not see how one could coherently argue that one can only do farming or any other craft if one is better at it than anyone else. This reasoning only allows for one craftsman of each type in the city, which I do not think Plato was arguing for. Thus I assume that Plato would allow for such flexibility within his city.

This is not to say that no conflicts would arise within Plato's city. For it could be that many people happen to be naturally suited for farming, with the result that other industries are neglected. In this case, however flexible the farming industry is, one would need to consider the importance of the other industries in contributing to a well-run city. Whether this type of conflict is resolvable in such a way as to still meet the needs of the individual is uncertain. One way of dealing with this conflict is to be less specific about the assigning of tasks to people. As Annas views the situation, Plato is more concerned with there being certain types of people than he is with identifying what makes people unique.<sup>39</sup> This would allow for a more flexible assignment of tasks within the city. Under this view, there are three main types of people, namely the rulers, the guardians, and the producers. As long as the task which each person performs is in line with the type of person he is, in this very general way, the Principle of Specialization is being adhered to, and the city will be meeting the needs of its citizens successfully.

This more broad understanding of the assignment of tasks within Plato's ideal city is along the same lines as the explanation which C. D. C. Reeve offers of the Principle of Specialization. Reeve suggests that Plato actually ends up abandoning this Principle in favour of one that is more reflective of his psychological account of how people are. Reeve makes the following point:

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<sup>39</sup> Annas, Julia, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 74.

“In Plato’s psychological theory,... differences in cognitive power are not fine-grained enough to explain how one person could have a natural aptitude for carpentry and another for pottery.”<sup>40</sup>

Whatever differences there are in the cognitive abilities of people, these differences are only significant when it comes to dividing the people of the city up into the three classes of producers, guardians, and rulers. As evidence for this view, Reeve points out that it is not problematic for Plato if people within the producer class exchange tasks, yet it is a problem if a producer tries to enter the guardian class, or if a guardian tries to enter the ruling class.<sup>41</sup> Here is the passage on which Reeve relies to make this claim (434 A-B):

“‘Suppose a builder and a shoemaker tried to exchange jobs, or to take on the tools and the prestige of each other’s trade, or suppose alternatively the same man tried to do both jobs, would this and other exchanges of the kind do great harm to the state?’ ‘Not much’. ‘But if someone who belongs by nature to the class of artisans and businessmen is puffed up by wealth or popular support or physical strength or any similar quality, and tries to enter our military class; or if one of our military auxiliaries tries to get into the class of administering guardians for which he is unfit, and they exchange tools and prestige; or if a single individual tries to do all these jobs at the same time – well, I think you’ll agree that this sort of mutual interchange and interference spells destruction to our state.’ ‘Certainly.’”

Reeve argues that Plato is not so concerned about assigning tasks based on aptitude in such a specific way. Rather, people’s tasks are determined based on the cognitive development they achieve, which is a reflection of Plato’s tri-partite theory of the soul.<sup>42</sup> Reeve argues that instead of holding the Principle of Specialization as I have outlined it, where one man works at one task, Plato holds that a person’s task ought to suit the level of cognitive development he is able to reach.<sup>43</sup> In terms of Plato’s tri-partite theory of the soul, this means that some people will only be producers, because only the appetitive element in their soul can rule. Some will be guardians, since the spirited part rules in them, while a selection of people from this group will be philosophers or rulers, namely those who are able to have the reasoning element rule in their souls.

The advantage of Reeve’s interpretation is that it is more plausible than Santas’ understanding of tasks being so specifically assigned. This account of the Principle of Specialization allows for more flexibility within the city, since a producer is not confined to any particular task within his class. This allowance for flexibility within the city is

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<sup>40</sup> Reeve, C.D.C., *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato’s Republic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 173.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174. I shall address the issue of how the Platonic psychology provides the basis for the divisions of the city in due course.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

what makes this interpretation of the Principle more plausible. Where Reeve's interpretation becomes problematic is in his explanation for why Plato first proposes this Principle and then seems to abandon it. Reeve argues that Plato needs to appeal to a Principle which does not presuppose his threefold division of the city into the three classes of rulers, guardians, and producers.<sup>44</sup> If Plato were to argue for the assignment of tasks based on the three classes before arguing that these three classes actually do exist in a city, he would be begging the question. That is why, according to Reeve, Plato first proposes the Principle of Specialization in a way that deals only with the assignment of tasks based on natural ability. The reason why Plato operates in this way, according to Reeve, is to ensure that the argument proceeds from a plausible starting point.<sup>45</sup> The idea is that the Principle of Specialization is plausible enough to allow Plato to eventually add his threefold division into the argument. Once it is accepted that people do in fact have naturally suited tasks, then the division of the city into three classes can accentuate this natural division of people into the producer, guardian, and ruling classes. Seen in this light, Plato's threefold division of the city is only an extension of this plausible Principle of Specialization.

However, we have seen that this Principle is more plausible once it is understood in terms of a broader division of people. As far as my analysis is concerned, the Principle is plausible only if the assignment of tasks is not seen as being so specific that a person must perform a particular task within his range of competence. Yet Reeve argues that the Principle of Specialization is plausible even before it is modified, at which point Reeve calls it the "principle of quasi-specialization".<sup>46</sup> This new principle assigns tasks based on the kind of person one is, namely whether one is a ruler, a guardian, or a producer. This new principle, according to Reeve, builds upon the previous one, which is "pre-theoretical", as Reeve calls it,<sup>47</sup> presumably because it makes no reference to Plato's psychology. The problem with Reeve's account is that the Principle of Specialization is not necessarily plausible without the aid of Plato's psychology. For without this more broad classification of people, the Principle appears too narrow in its assignment of a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

specific task based on one's natural ability. Therefore, if one interprets the Principle of Specialization in a more broad way, by including the Platonic psychology, the assessment of its plausibility must shift as well, so that it includes this new element. We will have to wait until we can more thoroughly examine Plato's psychology before we can make any definitive pronouncements on this issue.

### 1.3.2 Unity makes a city good

It would be helpful to return to the question which has led us to this point. Plato is trying to have Socrates come up with an account of how it is beneficial to be just. To do this, he presents an account, albeit an undeveloped one, of how justice has to do with the state of one's soul. To expand on this account, he embarks on a search for justice in the city. We have seen that there may be some legitimacy in this project. Yet the way in which he establishes this city, especially its adherence to the Principle of Specialization, is open to question. How are we to know whether Plato has established a city which accounts for the citizens' needs and fulfills them successfully? Plato thinks that if the city adheres to the Principle of Specialization, it will be unified, and unity will lead to a good city, one that meets the needs of its citizens successfully. We shall have to see why adherence to this Principle ought to make the city unified. If it turns out that adhering to this Principle makes the city unified, and in this way the city is good, then we will see how justice contributes to the well-being of the city. For this Principle encapsulates what civic justice is. This benefit that justice gives on a civic level will be a first step towards showing how justice is beneficial to an individual.

Plato has Socrates say that this city is good (427 E). Due to its being good, he assumes that justice will therefore be present within it (427 E):

“I think we shall probably find what we want as follows. If we have founded it properly, our city is good in the full sense of the word.’ (τελέως ἀγαθὴν) ‘It must be.’ ‘Then it will obviously have the qualities of wisdom, courage, self-discipline, and justice.’ ‘Obviously.’”

Here Plato proposes the idea that justice is linked to the good, however imprecise that notion is at this point in the *Republic*. That this link is made should not be surprising, since Plato is trying to have Socrates present an alternative account to the self-seeking, immoralist kind of good which he had Thrasymachus present. By examining Plato's

reasoning for why the city is good, we will begin to understand what kind of good he thinks justice is. For he seems to think that the justice of the city will naturally follow from its being good. Thus if we understand what makes the city good, we will be in a good position for understanding what makes the city a just one. From there, we may begin to assess Plato's definition of justice, and to what extent it presents an account which challenges the Thrasymachean conception of justice as not leading to happiness.

Plato has Socrates and his interlocutors consider the city<sup>48</sup> they have constructed in speech to be good (ἀγαθὴν), provided that it has been founded in the right way (427 E). Why does Plato present Socrates as feeling this way about the city? Since Plato does not have Socrates provide an explicit justification for this assertion, we must attempt to understand what his reasons are for thinking the city is a good one. I shall now propose a reason why Plato should think this. He has Socrates claim that the greatest evil for a city is to be split apart and made many instead of one, while the greatest good is to be bound together and made into one (462 A-B):

“Is there anything worse for a city than to be split and fragmented, or anything better than cohesion and unity?’ ‘No.’”

Now this claim in itself is not enough to explain what it is which actually makes a city good. It only states what is the greatest good for a city. There may be other components needed in order to make a city good, such as having enough people to perform all the tasks necessary to make the city run efficiently. However, this claim emphasizes a component which is of fundamental importance for making the city good. For if this state of unity is not achieved, as Socrates claims here, this is the greatest evil for a city.

To understand this concept of unity, it is worth discussing the meaning and importance which Plato attaches to it. Unity is one possible translation of the Greek word ὁμόνοια, which literally means “together-mindedness”.<sup>49</sup> To understand why having a unified city is so important for Plato, one must consider the time period in which Plato was writing. Political conflict was common in Greece before and during Plato's lifetime, with such events as the Peloponnesian War occurring. These kinds of political conflicts

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<sup>48</sup> Both cities Plato has Socrates and his interlocutors construct in speech are seen as being good, I contend.

<sup>49</sup> Kalimtzis, Kostas, *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease, An Inquiry into “Stasis”*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 24; Liddell, H. G., and Scott, R., *Greek-English Lexicon* (Seventh Edition), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 557.

were seen as being occurrences of *στάσις* for the Greeks, a word that is often translated as meaning a “civil war” or “faction”.<sup>50</sup> However, in his analysis of the meaning of this word, K. Kalimtzis considers an arrest of what is otherwise a natural process to be the “governing image of *στάσις*”.<sup>51</sup> The idea of *στάσις* as being an arrest in development shares close ties with the medical meaning of the term, according to Kalimtzis.<sup>52</sup> We can understand this connection in the following way. When an organism is healthy and functioning well, all of its parts are working together to contribute to the overall well-being of the organism. When, however, the organism stops functioning well, when its normal processes are arrested, the organism can be considered to be in a state of *στάσις*, in a diseased state. This medical meaning of *στάσις* came to be applied in political contexts, such that *στάσις* was the result when a healthy city showed signs of decline, of disease.

According to Kalimtzis, when Plato uses the term *στάσις* in the *Republic*, he means it to be “a pathology resulting from injustice”.<sup>53</sup> Thus when Plato says that the greatest evil for a city is to be “split apart and made many instead of one” (462 A-B), it is important to understand that he sees unity as being reflective of the natural and healthy condition of a city, where justice is operative. When the city exhibits signs of *στάσις*, this means that its healthy, best condition has been arrested. Given the time period within which Plato lived, it should not be too surprising that he sees unity as being important in order to maintain the stability of the city. L. Robin refers to this time of disorder which Plato lived through:

“Après la chute des Trente et le retour des bannis (403/2), Athènes connut une heure de magnifique espérance, où l’on put croire, à condition de n’y pas regarder de trop près, que seraient oubliées toutes les divisions, que la restauration démocratique relèverait la République de sa déchéance et guérirait ses blessures.”<sup>54</sup>

Thus for Plato it would have been important to figure out a way to stop all of the divisions which plagued Athens in the early years of his life. When Plato says that the greatest good for a city is to be unified (462 A-B), we can see that a unified city is one

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<sup>50</sup> Kalimtzis, Kostas, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XV.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Robin, Léon, *Platon*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968, p. 4.

that exhibits a healthy condition, one which is not in danger of deteriorating into a chaotic, diseased, fragmented condition.

This discussion of the meaning of unity and its contrary, *στάσις*, has helped us understand why a unified city is a good one for Plato. To sum up, a unified city is one which is functioning in a healthy way, one which is serving its purpose, which is to meet the needs of the citizens in the best way. We may now ask what makes this city unified, why this particular city Plato is constructing should exhibit the kind of unity which will make it a healthy city. To answer this question, I shall evaluate Plato's grounds for thinking the city is indeed unified, so that we may determine whether he is justified in believing that it is in fact unified. This in turn will help us determine how justified Plato is in thinking the city is good, and that he has correctly identified justice within it.

I submit that the unity of the city comes from the unity of its citizens. Let us see why this is the case. Plato makes the point that injustice is the source of disunity both in a group and in an individual (351 E – 352 A):

“Injustice, then, seems to have the following results, whether it occurs in a city or family or army or in anything else: it renders it incapable of any common action because of factions (*στασιάζειν*) and quarrels, and sets it at variance with itself and with its opponents and with whatever is just.’ ‘Yes.’ ‘And it will produce its natural effects also in the individual. It renders him incapable of action because of internal conflicts and division of purpose, and sets him at variance with himself and with all who are just.’ ‘Yes.’”

In this passage the disunity of the city is caused by injustice. The disunity of the groups within the city is also caused by injustice. At the most basic level, it seems that this disunity first occurs within an individual, and only then does it get transferred to the groups within the city, and finally to the city as a whole. Let us now determine what it is about the disunity within an individual which should lead to the disunity of an entire city.

If one is not unified, according to the passage above, one is rendered “incapable of action”. What are we to make of this statement? Taken in its strongest sense, it seems false. For I do not see why a person cannot accomplish anything simply because he has internal conflicts. However, if we interpret this statement in a less strong way, it seems more reasonable. Under a less strong interpretation, Plato means that when it comes to a person's contribution to the city, if he is suffering from inner discord and lack of self-agreement, he will not be able to perform his task as well as one who is more unified. Taken in this way, this statement seems to have some psychological plausibility. For there seems to be something true about the idea that a person will work better if his inner

constitution is unified, if he is not subject to conflicts about what he wants to do. If he is sure of what he wants to do, then he can spend all of his time and energy working to accomplish his one and only goal. By focusing so much attention on one goal, he gives himself the best possible chance to achieve that goal. If he has competing goals and is not so sure what he wants to do, he may work a little at each goal, without achieving any particular goal with as much success.

If we accept that Plato's statement is plausible, we can then ask how this unity on an individual level, which I shall call "personal unity", should lead to the unity of the city. While Plato is not explicit about *how* personal unity carries over to the city, he is explicit about the fact *that* the personal unity of the citizens allows the city to grow (φύηται) as one (423 D):

"We mentioned [this] before when we said that if any child of a guardian is a poor specimen, it must be degraded to the other classes, while any child in the other classes who is worth it must be promoted to the rank of guardian. By this it was implied that all the other citizens ought individually to devote their full energy to the one particular job for which they are naturally suited. In that way the individual will be not many but one, and the city [will] grow to be one, not many."

In the absence of an explicit answer from Plato, I submit that the unity of each individual citizen will somehow carry over to the city as a whole. The bridge which causes this transference of unity to take place is the adherence to the Principle of Specialization. If each citizen is keeping to his own task, then the citizens' needs will be most successfully met. If all of the citizens' needs are being met, then it is hard to imagine why anyone would want to rebel against the government, or why the city would scatter into competing factions. This being said, having everyone's needs being met would not put an end to all conflicts. For it seems to be a general human tendency to have insatiable desires for certain things. This seems to be the case with certain physical pleasures, with the seeking of power, and with the urge to gain more and more wealth. Nevertheless, a city in which people's needs are generally satisfied would probably be a more calm and stable city than one in which there is practically no satisfaction of people's needs. If the city is a more calm and stable one, then it is a more unified city, one which is functioning in a healthy way, free from the kind of στάρσις which shows that it is diseased, that its normal condition has been halted.

One issue which may seem problematic is that people appear to have less freedom in Plato's ideal city. For they have little choice but to perform the task which most naturally

suits them. Though Plato argues that this contributes to the unity of the city, it may cause other values to be sacrificed, like an individual's freedom. I do not have the scope to address this objection in any great detail. I only propose that establishing a unified city may be such a fundamental building block for meeting the citizens' needs that it comes before considerations of freedom. This is an arguable point, but the basic idea is that for one to enjoy certain freedoms, a basic, stable community needs to be in place beforehand.

Notice how the Principle of Specialization guides Plato on his way to an answer as to what makes the city good. Since he argues that keeping to one's own task is good for the citizens, it should be no surprise that a city built on this Principle will also be good. The explanation for why the city is good is that its citizens are unified, and hence the city is as well. Is it true, however, that adhering to this Principle, which turns out to be the definition of civic justice, is going to keep the citizens unified? We have found that this Principle is more plausible when the assignment of tasks is not too specific, but rather when tasks are assigned based on the kind of person one is, which could be one of three kinds, namely a producer, a guardian, or a ruler. If people really are divided into these three classes, Plato ought to provide an argument that this is the case. The argument that he provides is a psychological one, where he explains how the kind of person one is depends on what part is dominant in one's soul. I will deal with this argument in Chapter 2.

In the meantime, we can make the following judgment. Provided that the Platonic psychology can be shown to be plausible, then Plato's conclusion that the city is good may be acceptable. Again, the link between the Platonic psychology and the goodness of the city is as follows: (1) The city is good only if it is unified. (2) The city is unified only if the citizens are unified. (3) The citizens are unified if they keep to their naturally suited tasks. (4) If people are keeping to their tasks, that means they are living a life appropriate to a producer, a guardian, or a ruler, depending on which part within their souls is the dominant one.

### 1.3.3 The search for justice within the city

Let us now recall the reason why we have been talking about these issues of keeping to one's own task and unity within the city. We started talking about justice as being

beneficial to the individual because it is necessary for Plato to establish this in his argument that justice leads to happiness. We then looked briefly at how justice is supposed to benefit the individual, and we found that it helps the individual get along with others and achieve a good soul. However, at that point we still did not understand exactly what kind of benefit justice would give, for this egoistic definition of justice is different from the common Greek conception of justice as an altruistic concept.

To understand the egoistic conception of justice, we have examined Plato's construction of his ideal city, since this city is supposed to reveal the nature of justice. What seems odd about this way of defining egoistic justice is that justice in the city would seem to be representative of the common conception of justice, where it is seen as regulating the affairs of the citizens. Still, I considered the possibility that it is *because* justice has this dual nature, being both an other-regarding virtue and one which can benefit the individual, that it must be defined on the political level first. Once this political aspect of justice is revealed, we ought to get a better idea of how it is that it helps the individual get along with others and achieve a good soul. This seems to be Plato's line of thinking as he proceeds from the political to the individual level.

Let us now look at how Plato defines justice in the city. It is the condition under which the three classes of the city, namely the producers, guardians, and rulers, are each performing their proper tasks (434 C-D). Whether this is an acceptable definition of political justice, the kind which acts as a regulatory principle in the citizens' affairs, is uncertain. G. Vlastos thinks that this state of affairs where each person is "doing one's own", i.e., performing his proper task, will ensure that each person shall "have one's own". He thinks this is an unstated premise which Plato relies on.<sup>55</sup> However, Vlastos does not say why there should be a link between doing and having one's own. He simply states that this link does indeed hold.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps Vlastos assumes that if people do their own, in the sense that they keep to their naturally suited tasks, they will not attempt to acquire more than is due to them. For by doing their own, they will help build a healthy city that will provide for their needs. As a result, they will "have their own", meaning

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<sup>55</sup> Vlastos, Gregory, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*", in *Plato II*, edited by Gregory Vlastos, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company inc., 1971, p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

they will only have their proper allotment of things, and not more than what they justly deserve.

If each person has his own, Vlastos feels this would bring about a state where there is no *pleonexia* (having more than what is rightfully one's own), which is what the common political conception of justice was for the Greeks. Thus, for Vlastos, this definition of political justice, where each of the citizens keeps to his proper task, captures the common Greek conception of justice. Is Vlastos correct in holding this view? The justification for this view is presumably as follows. A person refrains from *pleonexia* if his needs are met. If keeping to their tasks enables the citizens' needs to be met, then there ought to be a corresponding reduction in *pleonexia*. For there would be less of a reason for people to resort to dishonest and criminal means to get what they want, for most of what they want would already be available to them, through their adherence to the Principle of Specialization.

However, there is a problem with this justification. The premise which Vlastos' argument seems to depend upon is that people will be satisfied if their needs are met, and will therefore not resort to *pleonexia*. This assumption, however, is not reflective of the Greeks' conception of value. Adkins discusses the fact that in Homeric society, people placed more value on competitive excellences than on co-operative ones:

"Thus, Homeric society does value most highly the class it needs most: men who are well-armed, strong, fleet of foot and skilled in war, counsel, and strategy. Naturally, too, it values most highly in these men just those qualities which it recognizes as being essential to the security of society. In comparison with the competitive excellences, the quieter co-operative excellences must take an inferior position; for it is not evident at this time that the security of the group depends to any large extent upon these excellences."<sup>57</sup>

This way of thinking, where the competitive excellences were seen as primary, was the traditional value system of Plato's time. If people tended to value such competitive excellences as being strong and skilled in war, it calls into question the assumption that they would refrain from *pleonexia* just because their needs would be met through their adherence to the Principle of Specialization. Given such a value system, people might want to compete and strive for more property and wealth because that is the kind of excellence which they value most. Therefore it is not clear that people would indeed

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<sup>57</sup> Adkins, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

refrain from engaging in *pleonexia* even if their needs were being met through keeping to their proper tasks.

Does this criticism of the link Vlastos wants to make between “doing one’s own” and “having one’s own” mean that Plato has failed to define political justice in a way that matches the common Greek conception of justice? If so, perhaps Plato is mistaken in thinking that adherence to the Principle of Specialization will keep people from engaging in *pleonexia*. However, despite the existence of this traditional value system, where the competitive excellences were seen as primary, the quieter co-operative excellences, such as justice, were gradually being recognized as being important elements in the success of a city. Adkins suggests the following role that the quieter co-operative excellences play in Plato’s *Republic*:

“[Plato] delineates in considerable detail a type of man and a type of state which- he believes- will be agreed to be *eudaimon*, and then claims that *dikaiosune* (justice) and the other co-operative *aretai* (excellences or virtues) are essential to the *eudaimonia* of both.”<sup>58</sup>

What Plato recognizes in his definition of political justice is that co-operation is necessary in order for the city to become one that is happy (*eudaimon*).<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that he wants to discount completely the influence of the competitive excellences. To do so would be to neglect the influence of traditional values. However, Plato, as we have seen, believes that people are not self-sufficient, and therefore they require the aid of others in order to successfully meet their needs. Thus at some level, people will need to co-operate in order to meet one another’s needs successfully. Perhaps once this basic level of co-operation is in place, people can pursue the competitive excellences, because they no longer need to worry about their most basic needs being met. In this sense, the co-operative excellences like justice are more primary than the competitive excellences.

Let us now make a final evaluation of Plato’s account of political justice. By saying that political justice is the condition under which people keep to their own tasks, Plato emphasizes the importance of co-operation. His reasoning is that if people can agree to keep to their own tasks, they will meet one another’s needs. When this definition is

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., *op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>59</sup> There is a difference between the happiness of the city and the happiness of its individuals. For instance, a city can be happy even though many of its citizens may not be happy at all. Still, if the city is happy, I take it that the many if not most of the citizens are to be considered happy. For a discussion of this issue, see Donald Morrison’s article: “The Happiness of the City and the Happiness of the Individual in Plato’s *Republic*”, *Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 21 (1), Spring 01, pp. 1-24.

compared to the Greek conception of justice as being a limit on *pleonexia*, one might say that there is no clear connection. If there is a connection, it is through the link between doing and having one's own, which Vlastos argues for. Yet as we have seen, even if people keep to their tasks, this does not mean they will necessarily refrain from engaging in *pleonexia*. However, Plato has made an attempt to discover what sets the stage for any justice to be applied as a means for resolving disputes and so on. What sets the stage is a basis of co-operation which takes care of society's fundamentals, one could say. By looking at justice within the city, Plato has shown how, when it comes right down to it, justice is much more basic than one might otherwise have thought. Perhaps this is why he has tried to define the egoistic conception of justice by first looking for it in the city. It is necessary to show the transition in a gradual way: by describing justice in its more specific application as being a means for resolving disputes and so forth, he must show the basis of co-operation which allows this application to be made in the first place. Then he will go on to show how any co-operation which takes place in the city is only possible once a person's soul is just. Therefore, we can begin to see the shape of Plato's argument. Justice is beneficial to the individual because it allows him to make his contribution to the city, which is what allows the city to be successful. In turn, once the city is successful, the citizen himself benefits from the contributions of others.

#### 1.4 The just individual

Now that we have an idea of what political justice could be, we can return to the question which started all of this. Has the search for justice in the larger entity, namely the city, helped Plato in his attempt to define justice? We must remember that the reason for embarking on this search for justice within the larger entity was to help Plato find a definition of justice which shows how it is beneficial to the individual. This is what I have called the egoistic conception of justice. This motivation for the search explains why after defining justice in the city, Plato has Socrates go on to apply this definition to the individual. We now need to assess the transition from justice in the city to justice in the individual. If there are problems with this transition, then we may ask whether Plato has gone astray in trying to look for justice in the larger entity first. Let us now explore this issue.

First I will present the manner in which Plato argues for this transition, and afterward I will evaluate this argument. Plato defines the just individual as the man who ensures that the three parts of his soul keep to their own tasks and do not interfere with the tasks of the other parts (443 C- D):

“Justice, therefore, we may say, is a principle of this kind; its real concern is not with external actions, but with a man’s inward self, his true concern and interest. The just man will not allow the three elements which make up his inward self to trespass on each other’s functions or interfere with each other, but, by keeping all three in tune, like the notes of a scale (high, middle, and low, and any others there be), will in the truest sense set his house to rights, attain self-mastery and order, and live on good terms with himself.”

How does Plato justify this account of justice in the individual? He argues that justice should apply in the same way to an individual as it does to the city (435 A-C):

“ So there will be no difference between a just man and a just city, so far as the element of justice goes.’ ‘None.’ ‘But we agreed that a state was just when its three natural constituents were each doing their job, and that it was self-disciplined and brave and wise in virtue of certain other states and dispositions of those constituents.’ ‘That is so,’ he said. ‘Well, then, my dear Glaucon,’ I continued, ‘we shall expect to find that the individual has the same three elements in his soul and to be justified in using the same language of him because he is affected by the same conditions.’ ‘That must follow.’”

His argument for this assertion is that the same three elements which exist in the city also exist in the individual. This seems to be a rather strange assertion. How could the similarity between the city and the individual go so deep? Plato’s reasoning is that the characteristics which define the classes in the city (the producers, guardians, and rulers) could not have come from anywhere else except the citizens (435 E). Due to this emphasis on the origin of the classes, it seems that psychology is primary and that a just city only comes about based on the fact that its citizens are just.

Does this primacy of psychological justice explain how a city and a person are just in the same way? This is an issue which is debated by commentators. Vlastos argues that people are just towards one another, i.e., they engage in virtuous conduct toward one another and they refrain from *pleonexia*, in a way that is different from the justice of the city. He thinks that Plato is using a derivative sense of justice when he says that the city is just.<sup>60</sup> Since Vlastos understands just conduct on the part of a person in terms of refraining from *pleonexia*, it is natural, following his line of thought, to think that a just city should be defined in the same way. Given this account of justice, what makes a city just ought to be its refraining from *pleonexia* towards other cities. Yet this is not what it

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<sup>60</sup> Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

means to say that a city is just. It is not what Plato intends as the primary reason for why the city is just.

The problem with Vlastos' account is that he fails to isolate the essential feature of justice which enables a city and a person to be just in the same way. A city is just because its internal organization is a harmonious one. Not only do the classes keep to their proper tasks, but people agree about who should rule. This agreement is a kind of harmony for Plato (432 A). A person is just in the same way, when the three parts of his soul are in a harmonious relationship. The parts keep to their own tasks, and they all agree about which part should rule, namely the reasoning part. J. Wilson recognizes this point where Vlastos fails to do so. He argues that if a person's soul and the city have the same structural features, they are just in the same way. Wilson's argument proceeds as follows. If we find a person to be virtuous, this virtue comes from him having a particular characteristic. This characteristic Wilson describes as being a trait or a symptom, and it is not identical with the virtue itself.<sup>61</sup> Instead, having this characteristic or symptom indicates that one has a virtue. If this same characteristic is found in the city, then one can assume that the city also has this virtue.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, Wilson thinks this identity of structure can explain how the city and the individual are just in the same way. In opposition to this, B. Williams thinks that Plato has confused two ways of saying that a city is just, which leads to problems for the contention that a city and a person are just in the same way.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Wilson, J. R. S., "The Argument of *Republic IV*", *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 26, April 1976, p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, Bernard, "The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*", in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, edited by E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, R. M. Rorty, New York: Humanities Press, 1973, pp. 196-206. Due to the difficulty I have in understanding Williams' point, I have chosen not to delve into any specifics of his account. His point seems to be the following: Plato wants to say both (1) that the city is just because its men are and (2) that the city is just because the classes keep to their own tasks (p. 198). Williams argues that a city needs to have the three classes in order to be considered a just one. If it does have the three classes, then it must have people who are producers, since this is one of the classes. These people make up a majority of the population in fact. Yet such a person is not just, because the reasoning part is not ruling in his soul, it is rather the appetitive element which is most dominant in this type of person. Since the people who make up the majority of the population are not just, then the city will not be just. It seems that for Williams, these two senses in which Plato wants to say that a city is just contradict one another. However, I do not see that Plato ever insists on using sense (1), that the city is just because its men are. This is the reason why I have trouble understanding Williams' argument.

### 1.4.1 Vulgar vs. Platonic justice

Though there are some questions which remain unanswered, like the one we just looked at, we are nevertheless in a better position now to consider a common criticism of Plato's definition of justice in the *Republic*. Earlier on, I was saying how some commentators object that Plato redefines what justice means, such that he is not really arguing that justice as it is commonly understood by the Greeks is beneficial. Rather, the commentators would say, Plato changes the meaning of justice, with the result that his argument only shows how justice is beneficial to the individual, without retaining the usual meaning of justice as an altruistic virtue. We must address this issue, for if the commentators are correct that Plato's conception of justice is too egoistic, then it will not be the case that Plato's kind of justice will include a consideration for the interest of one's community.

D. Sachs and other commentators have argued that the definition of justice Plato has Socrates propose is too far from the definition he has Thrasymachus offer.<sup>64</sup> Sachs argues that Plato does not really provide an account of how it is beneficial to be just given the common understanding of justice, which is referred to as the "vulgar" conception of justice,<sup>65</sup> where one refrains from breaking the law and from wronging others. Instead, Sachs accuses Plato of creating a "Platonic" conception of justice, which has to do with the ordering of one's soul and has no obvious connection to the vulgar conception of justice. If Plato does in fact change the meaning of justice here and does not really argue that it is beneficial to be just in the way he has Thrasymachus present justice, then he is not really providing an argument as to why it is beneficial to be just in this commonly understood way.

One thing to mention in answer to this criticism is that Plato himself *does* think that the man who has a properly ordered soul will act justly in the way he has Thrasymachus present the meaning of justice. For Plato thinks that having a properly ordered soul will cause a man to refrain from such acts as sacrilege, theft, and betraying friends (443 A-B). Yet this is not enough to show that having a properly ordered soul will actually make a man refrain from such acts. What is called for is an explanation as to *why* a man who

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<sup>64</sup> Sachs, David, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*", in *Plato II*, edited by Gregory Vlastos, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company inc., 1971, p. 46.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

has a properly ordered soul will refrain from such acts. This *lacuna*, as R. Demos calls it,<sup>66</sup> in Plato's account, is what commentators have both criticized and tried to rectify by explaining why a man with an ordered soul will refrain from committing unjust acts in the so-called "vulgar" sense of the term. I will now present my own explanation of this link between the apparently opposed conceptions of justice.

For one thing, I think it is wrong to speak as though there are two conceptions of justice being discussed here. That there is a Platonic conception of justice which differs from the vulgar conception of justice seems to be a creation on the part of commentators. While it is true that Plato rejects the common view of justice, the definition he does offer is supposed to be a unifying explanation of the many instances of justice. Thus his new definition is not meant to conflict with the common beliefs about justice, rather it is intended to complement them, to incorporate them into a broader understanding of what it means to be just. This means that rather than rejecting outright such suggestions as justice being the returning of what one is owed, Plato's definition is meant to give a more complete definition, one which does not miss anything about the application of justice to situations. To say that Plato creates a separate conception of justice which needs to be linked up to the vulgar conception of justice creates an artificial division in Plato's account. It implies that work needs to be done in order to connect these two conceptions of justice. However, a better explanation of Plato's intention is that he wants to provide a definition of justice which accounts for its use both in a political and a psychological context. For those commentators who object to Plato's revisionary project, they must provide a justification for why a virtue such as justice cannot be explained by identifying its origin in one's soul or personality.

What needs to be explained then, is why Plato thinks a man who has a well-ordered soul will refrain from committing unjust acts. The explanation I propose is that a just man considers the achievement of harmony within his soul to be something of very high value, if not the highest value. Due to his not valuing wealth and the acquisition of external goods very highly, he no longer has the same motivation, and perhaps no motivation at all, to perform unjust acts which would make him richer. Once one starts

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<sup>66</sup> Demos, Raphaël, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*?", in *Plato II*, edited by Gregory Vlastos, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company inc., 1971, p. 52.

valuing the state of one's soul as the highest happiness (instead of external goods as would be the case for Thrasymachus), there appears to be no motivation to act unjustly. Or, if there is any motivation left at all to act unjustly, it does not appear to have the same force as it would have if external goods were valued to such a great extent. This is the kind of explanation which R. Kraut offers. For Kraut, the just man will pursue the goals of reason, which guides the actions of a just man, and the goals of reason have more to do with developing us as people than acquiring external goods.<sup>67</sup>

Now this explanation of the gap between Plato's definition of justice and the so-called vulgar conception of justice is limited in that it appeals to the value of having a properly ordered soul for explaining the link. For someone who holds the Thrasymachean view, one who values external goods more than a properly ordered soul, if he even values this at all, will not be convinced by this account. Notice though, that Plato's definition of justice appears to be the very thing he was looking for in trying to explain how one could benefit by being just. The crucial step has been to turn inwards, to value the state of one's soul. Once that is agreed upon as being a thing to be valued, then Plato's definition of justice turns inward as well. Thus the link, if indeed one insists on phrasing the matter in this way, is that the inner account of justice explains what is beneficial about acting justly. When one acts justly, one is able to achieve a harmonious soul. Hence instead of saying that there are two conceptions of justice which Plato needs to reconcile, I think it is more accurate to say that Plato's definition of justice shows how it is beneficial for the individual to act justly. Where the criticism ought to be directed, I suggest, is toward Plato's idea of value, such that having a properly ordered soul is a thing to be valued. If one disagrees with this idea of value, and instead values external goods, then the motivation to act unjustly remains strong.

We have discovered, through a consideration of this criticism, that achieving a harmonious soul will itself take away or at the very least reduce one's motivation for achieving external goods. Thus even though there are questions remaining regarding Plato's account of justice, he has nevertheless provided an account of how it is beneficial to the individual to be just. By achieving a harmonious inner state, which is Plato's

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<sup>67</sup> Kraut, Richard, "Reason and Justice in Plato's *Republic*", from *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, edited by E.N. Lee, A.P.D. Mourelatos, R.M. Rorty, New York, Humanities Press, 1973, pp. 222-223.

account of justice, the individual benefits by achieving a kind of good which is more valuable than the acquisition of external goods. Still, in the course of developing his account of justice, has Plato really provided a reason for someone who values external goods to change his idea of what will contribute most to a happy life? For the moment, we will have to delay answering this question until we have looked more closely into Plato's account of the good.

Let us at present summarize the argument of this first chapter, to see what results we have come up with. A person's happiness need not be primarily concerned with the acquisition of external goods. For there may be something of value which has nothing to do with these external goods. This kind of value, for Plato, is derived from having a good inner constitution, a soul which is properly-ordered. This kind of soul is described as being a just one. What it means to have such a just soul can be understood by looking at justice as it works within a city. If everyone in the city keeps to his naturally suited task, then the city will be a unified one. What makes this city unified is the fact that people are living within their intellectual means, so to speak, such that they do not try to extend themselves beyond the class to which they belong. Therefore, by accepting one's place in the city, one benefits both oneself and one's city. A more thorough evaluation of whether being just benefits the individual will await an assessment of the soul and its parts. If the Platonic psychology can be shown to be plausible, then perhaps Plato's argument that justice benefits the individual has some merit. If so, provided we accept that the kind of justice he is talking about is compatible with the usual Greek understanding of justice, he may be on the way to showing that one needs to consider the interest of one's community in order to be happy.

## Chapter 2

### The Value of Having a Just Soul

In the last chapter, we tried to get a grasp of what Plato's conception of justice is. For Plato, justice is an internal state of mind, which benefits the individual, and thus makes him happy, while at the same time it retains its usual meaning as being a social virtue, where one considers the good of others. Our results in Chapter 1 were inconclusive because much of Plato's argument depends on his theory of the soul. In this chapter, I shall first assess Plato's theory of the soul. Having made this assessment, I shall consider Plato's definition of justice as it applies to the soul. Thereafter, I shall examine why having a just soul is valuable, which will necessitate a discussion about the Good, which is the most valuable thing of all. It will turn out that having a just soul is a means toward knowing the Good. The problem I shall address is that it seems only a person with specific characteristics can contemplate the Good, namely a philosopher. Despite this elitist conception of those who are eligible to contemplate the Good, I shall argue that Plato still has an important insight into happiness which calls for our continued investigation. I shall discuss the possibility that having a just soul has value in itself, beyond its instrumental role in helping the philosopher contemplate the Good. Finally, I shall address the issue that the philosopher cannot be just by merely contemplating the Good and the other Forms, for this will cause him to neglect the lower parts of his soul, and thereby lose touch with virtue.

#### 2.1 The Parts of the Soul

What emerged from our examination in the last few sections of Chapter 1 is the following point. To fully assess Plato's argument for why justice is beneficial to the individual, it is necessary to examine his theory of the soul. For the theory of the soul provides the argumentative backdrop for the way in which Plato deals with justice. We have seen that justice is ultimately explained by turning inward for Plato. Although Plato wants to retain the usual Greek notion of justice, he attempts to explain what it means

fundamentally, and to do this, he explains it as a principle within a person's soul. Though we have considered some objections in the last two sections of Chapter 1, i.e., (1) that justice in the city and justice in the soul are not necessarily the same thing, and (2) that Plato's version of justice in the soul does not link up with common Greek notions of justice, we could not make a final assessment of these objections until dealing with the Platonic psychology. For if it can be shown (1) that the parts of the soul correspond to the parts of a city, and (2) that a just soul will ensure that a person shall refrain from engaging in unjust behavior such as breaking laws and stealing goods, then these objections will have been addressed. The results obtained in this section will help us address this first objection regarding the correspondence between the parts of the city and the parts of the soul. The second objection that Plato's inward account of justice does not link up with the common Greek notions of justice will have to wait until Chapter 3 for a full assessment.

The main point to consider, which will guide the argument of this section, is whether the soul does in fact have three parts to it. If Plato successfully argues for this point, then perhaps it will be legitimate to think that justice in the soul really does correspond to justice in the city. For in this case the three classes in the city, namely the rulers, guardians, and producers, would correspond to the three parts of the soul. If it is just for the three classes to keep to their own tasks, then perhaps one could accept that justice is the same on a personal level, i.e., in a person's soul.

Let us therefore assess this notion that there are three parts to the soul. The Principle which guides Plato's identification of different parts of the soul is what commentators call the Principle of Opposites, and sometimes the Principle of Conflict.<sup>1</sup> Right after asking the question about whether there are different parts of the soul or not, Plato makes the following statement: "the same thing cannot act or be affected in opposite ways at the same time, in the same part of it and in relation to the same object." (436 B). Now the first thing to understand about this statement is how vague the actual expressions are which in this case D. Lee has translated as "in the same part of it" and "in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Richard, "Plato's Separation of Reason from Desire", *Phronesis*, Vol. 26, 1971, p. 38; Stalley, R. F., "Plato's Argument for the Division of the Reasoning and Appetitive Elements within the Soul", *Phronesis*, Vol. 20, 1975, p. 110; Annas, Julia, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 137.

same object”.<sup>2</sup> All that the Greek has for these two expressions is “κατὰ ταυτόν” and “πρὸς ταυτόν”. Literally translated, these expressions mean nothing more than “according to the same” and “in relation to the same”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there are some initial difficulties in the translation.

Keeping in mind these difficulties, we shall now see what Plato is trying to do by bringing in the Principle of Opposites, and how the argument proceeds. Plato thinks that if one applies this Principle to an object, one can conclude that there are many things present, and not just one (436 B-C). By applying this Principle to the soul, the result would be that there is not one part to the soul, but many (or at least more than one). Let us look in some detail at this Principle, so that we can assess Plato’s argument which employs it. This Principle may look like an early version of the Principle of Non-contradiction, but J. Annas thinks it is a mistake to view Plato’s Principle in this way, because that Principle “concerns propositions and their logical relations”, while Plato’s Principle is concerned “with whether a certain thing can have certain properties”.<sup>4</sup> Whether it is helpful to distinguish the Principle of Opposites from the Principle of Non-contradiction is unclear. The point Annas seems to be making is that the Principle of Opposites is not concerned with the truth of our statements themselves, statements which describe the world, but rather with what actually holds in the world itself. This would explain why the examples Plato gives are about things and not the incompatibility of statements, or propositions.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that this Principle *is* to be taken in the spirit of the Principle of Non-contradiction. For Aristotle, in *Metaphysics*, Book IV, discusses a Principle which is similar to the one Plato is talking about (1005b19):

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, Desmond, *Plato, The Republic*, London: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> What is particularly vague is the noun Plato is talking about (when he talks about “the same”) and the meaning of the prepositions. One does not know what Plato is referring to when he says “according to the same” (κατὰ ταυτόν). R. Stalley points out that this expression is understood by most translators to mean “in the same part”,<sup>3</sup> but the word “part” is not in the Greek. Thus it is not clear exactly what is being referred to here with ταυτόν. Regarding the preposition κατὰ, it is not entirely clear what relationship the preposition has to the noun, since it is unclear what the noun is supposed to refer to. While commentators have assumed it means “in”, it is not clear why this should have to be the translation. As for the expression “in relation to the same” (πρὸς ταυτόν), it is again unclear what noun serves as the reference of ταυτόν, and what kind of relationship the preposition πρὸς has to the noun. Thus when one translates these expressions, one must realize that it is not obvious at all what Plato means.

<sup>4</sup> Annas, Julia, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 137.

“...it is impossible for the same thing both to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect (and let us assume we have drawn all the further distinctions that might be drawn to meet logical complaints).”

The use of the qualifiers “to the same thing” and “in the same respect” seems to parallel Plato’s use of qualifiers in his statement of the Principle of Opposites. Aristotle thinks that this Principle is foundational for having any knowledge at all when he says “what we must know in order to know anything at all is a principle we must already possess” (1005b17). This “principle we must already possess” is the Principle of Non-contradiction. So from Aristotle’s point of view this Principle seems to be so basic that it is not just about what actually holds in the world, but it provides the very foundation for having any knowledge at all. In this sense, the Principle as Aristotle presents it is not so clearly one which only refers to the conditions of objects in the world. For Aristotle, this Principle is both foundational for knowledge and is meant to apply to objects in the world. Whether this means that Annas is incorrect in making a distinction between the Principle of Non-contradiction and the Principle of Opposites depends (1) on how one interprets Aristotle’s formulation of the Principle, and (2) on whether Aristotle’s formulation of the Principle is meant to express what Plato means by the Principle of Opposites. I submit that there is good reason to think that Plato’s Principle of Opposites is closely linked to Aristotle’s Principle because of the similar use of qualifiers, and that Aristotle’s Principle is basic enough to be of the logical variety.

The fact that this Principle of Opposites is so foundational to knowledge, being a logical Principle as well as one that holds in the world, is important if one wants to understand why Plato has Socrates consider the following situations of apparent conflict (436 C-E):

“Let us be even more precise, to avoid ambiguities later on. If we were told that a man, who was standing still but moving his hands and his head, was simultaneously both at rest and in motion, we should not accept that as a proper statement of the case, but say that part of him was standing still and part of him in motion. Isn’t that so?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘We might have a still more ingenious case put to us. It might be argued as a further refinement that a top, spinning round a fixed axis, is both at rest and in motion as a whole, as indeed is any body in circular motion on the same spot. We should not agree, but argue that it is not the same parts of such bodies that are at rest and in motion; they have both an axis and a circumference, and their axis, as it has no inclination in any direction, is at rest, but their circumference is in motion. And further, if their axis inclines in any direction, right or left, forward or back, while they are still spinning, then they are not at rest at all.’ ‘That is quite correct,’ he agreed.”

I submit that Plato presents these examples to show that while some apparent cases of conflict can be explained and are not therefore subject to the Principle of Opposites, it is not the case that every case of conflict can be explained in this manner.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of a man moving his head and hands yet otherwise remaining still, it is not correct to say that he is both moving and still at the same time. For this description of what is going on is not precise enough. Instead, one must say that only the man's head and hands are moving, while otherwise he is stationary. So in this case the Principle of Opposites does not apply, because a human being is so constituted that parts of him may be in motion while he is otherwise stationary. The same kind of explanation holds for the spinning top. It is not precise enough to say that the top is both at rest and in motion at the same time. Circular bodies can move with respect to their circumference and their axis. Once one is aware of this fact about circular bodies, then such cases of apparent conflict are shown as not being subject to the Principle of Opposites. So the point in raising these examples is to be more precise about the application of this Principle of Opposites. When it comes to a person moving some parts of his body and a spinning top, one could be fooled into thinking that there is really a case of opposition which is contradicting the Principle of Opposites. These examples are not enough to refute such a foundational kind of Principle as this, which is how both Plato and Aristotle view this Principle, I contend.

This discussion of situations where the appearance of conflict can be explained away helps set the stage for the case Plato wants to concentrate on. He presents his own example, one which is supposed to fall within the scope of the Principle of Opposites. It is important to remember at this point that there are really two steps in Plato's argument

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<sup>5</sup> This appears to be the same thing that Aristotle is doing when he discusses the issue (1011a29-1011b2): "For we must reply to those who say, for reasons mentioned previously, that what appears is true, and hence that everything is equally true and false; for the same things, they say, do not always appear to everyone or even always to the same person, but contraries often appear at the same time- when the fingers are crossed, for instance, touch says there are two things, but sight says there is one. We reply that still, these contraries do not appear to the same sense in the same respect, in the same way, and at the same time; and hence this [the claim that contraries cannot be true, with the qualifications just mentioned] would be true." Here Aristotle is saying that the example of fingers being crossed, where touch says there are two fingers while sight says there is one, is not a real case of opposition. The reason is that the description is not precise enough one might say, for the opposition does not occur with the same sense. It may seem like there is a real case of opposition here, but what is really going on is that the human sense organs are such that they can present conflicting information. In the context in which Aristotle discusses the issue, he is saying that while people may point to such examples to show that the Principle is not true, it is true despite such attempts to refute it.

to establish that there are multiple parts to the soul. First, he presents an example involving the soul which shows that there truly is a case of conflict. We need to ask why the case he discusses truly is a case of conflict, whereas the examples we looked at above are just apparent cases of conflict. If there truly is a conflict involving the soul, one way of explaining the existence of this conflict is to argue that the soul must have more than one part. This is the second step Plato makes in his argument. It is not necessary that just because there is a conflict in the soul there must be more than one part to it.<sup>6</sup> However, if one accepts that there is indeed a conflict occurring, one way of accounting for this conflict is to argue that there are multiple parts to the soul. Let us see how Plato makes this argument.

Plato discusses the example of someone being thirsty, yet resisting this urge (439 B). We observe that a person who is thirsty is able to resist this urge to drink, he is able to control himself such that he does not immediately grab a drink. Whatever the motivation happens to be for not drinking, it seems to be correct to say that the person has both states of mind at the same time: being thirsty, and resisting this urge to drink. This situation, where a person seems to have opposing wishes or desires, does not seem that difficult to explain, because it appears to be nothing too far out of the ordinary. A person just happens to be able to restrain himself from drinking. However, once one accepts the Principle of Opposites, as Plato does, we can be a little more precise about what exactly is going on in the mind or soul of the person so affected. The person cannot both have the urge to drink and have this resistance to drinking in the same part of himself because these two states of mind are in opposition to one another, and as such they are subject to the Principle of Opposites. These two states of mind are in opposition to one another because one is a wish for something, while the other is a disinclination for something. For Plato, wishes belong in one class, while disinclinations belong in a class opposite from them. He has Socrates express the matter in this way (437 B-D):

“Then would you not class assent and dissent, impulse and aversion to something, attraction and repulsion and the like as opposite actions or states – no matter which?” “Yes”, he said, “I should.” “And what about hunger and thirst and the desires generally,” I went on, “or, again, willing and wishing, don’t they fall under one of the two classes of opposites just mentioned? When a man’s mind desires anything, don’t you either say that he has an impulse to what he desires or speak of his trying to attract anything he wishes to get? And again, if he wants to get possession of anything, is it not as a result of assent given by his mind to an

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<sup>6</sup> This is a common objection raised by commentators, as we shall see.

inward question prompted by his longing to get it?' 'I agree.' 'And what about disinclination, unwillingness and dislike? Shouldn't we put them in the opposite class, with repulsion and rejection?' 'Of course.'"

If a person has a wish and a disinclination for something, as he does in this case, his mind or soul must consist of parts, because otherwise the Principle of Opposites would be violated. This is the form of reasoning Plato's argument takes. Now here this talk of "parts" is less clear than it is when Plato talks about the parts of a person's body, namely the hands and the head, which a person can move while standing still (436 C). Here Plato is talking about the soul, and I suppose the idea he works with is that both the wish and the disinclination for a drink come from the same "part", so to speak, namely the soul. So once we understand that the "part" Plato is talking about is the soul, perhaps we can restate the conclusion which he comes to, for purposes of clarity. If a person has both a wish and a disinclination for something, his soul, which is the source of these desires, must have different parts, because otherwise the Principle of Opposites would be violated.

With this kind of explanation, Plato is now able to be more precise about what goes on in the soul of a person when he shows both a wish for a drink and a disinclination for a drink. The reason why a person is able to hold such incompatible states of mind is that there are different parts to his soul. One part, the appetitive part, has this urge for a drink, while the other part, the reasoning part, resists having a drink (439 D). The question has been raised, however, on the part of several commentators, as to just how acceptable this argument is.<sup>7</sup> One tack that some of them have taken is to say that wishing for something and having a disinclination for it are not incompatible states of mind. If this objection stands, then the thirst example is not an actual case of conflict, and it may be categorized along with the other examples we looked at as being merely a case of apparent conflict. R. Robinson points out that a person can have opposing states of mind at the same time, since such things can be said as "Catullus both loves and hates Lesbia".<sup>8</sup> This criticism helps to explain the kind of incompatibility Plato is trying to account for with this thirst example. Plato clearly agrees that a person can both want and not want to have a drink at

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Richard, *op. cit.*; Stalley, R. F., *op. cit.*; Penner, Terry, "Thought and Desire in Plato", in *Plato II*, edited by Gregory Vlastos, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company inc., 1971, pp. 96-118.; Woods, M. J., "Plato's Division of the Soul", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Volume 73, pp. 23-48.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

the same time. It seems to me that he would also accept Robinson's example. However, what Plato is trying to say is that the urge to drink is incompatible with the decision to resist drinking because of the nature of this urge to drink. This urge to drink is an instinctual drive toward the satisfaction of a lack, a lack of liquid in one's body. In the case of loving and hating Lesbia, the opposing feelings seem more centred around a person's assessment of Lesbia, of the value she brings to one's life. Perhaps she brings exceptional joy, yet at the same time she brings hurtfulness and sorrow. Thus there is cause to love her while at the same time there is cause to hate her. Catullus must decide how much to put up with, he must make a decision as to what is best for him to do given all of his options.

In the case of being thirsty, however, Plato is making the point that this thirst is in some way separate from one's consideration about what is best for oneself. Here the idea is that an instinctual urge such as the urge to drink has nothing to do with a person's conception of what is good for him to do.<sup>9</sup> The instinctual urge for drink is incompatible with our considered opinion that it is best to resist this urge. What makes this instinctual urge incompatible with our decision to resist drinking is that reason seems to have no effect on the instinctual urge. The nature of this desire for thirst does not seem to include any calculation about what is best for the person to do. The urge, though perhaps it could be controlled by reason, seems to have an origin all on its own. This is what I take the notion of incompatibility to be here. The resistance towards drinking is incompatible with the instinctual urge because they seem to be of different natures. The resistance to drinking seems to result from a reasoned calculation about what is best for a person, while the urge to drink seems to come about on its own.

This difference between what I have called the instinctual urge to drink and a reasoned calculation that it is best to resist drinking is something that commentators have discussed. M. Woods says the following about this issue:

"I now want to suggest that in fact Plato regarded the conclusion that the two impulses have distinct origins as depending on an application of the Principle of Opposites. It is taken for granted that the role of the rational part of the soul in such cases is to generate impulses that reflect calculations of the goodness or badness of alternative choices open to the agent. What is ruled out by the Principle of Opposites is that that

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<sup>9</sup> M. J. Woods talks about this in his article (*op. cit.*) on page 41. Charles H. Kahn also talks about this in his article "Plato's Theory of Desire", *Review of Metaphysics*, Volume 41, 1987, p. 85.

same element in the soul should also be the source of desires that do not depend upon any thought of the goodness of the object of the desire...<sup>10</sup>

The important point to take from Woods' discussion of the issue is what he says about the rational part of the soul. He thinks that the rational part of the soul allows a person to consider what is best overall for himself. With this in mind, when we look at the thirst example, the fact that the person resists drinking shows that the rational part of his soul is intervening on behalf of the person's overall good. Reason intervenes and makes a judgment, deciding that it is better for the person to resist this urge for drinking.

Otherwise, without the intervention of reason, the person would presumably fall victim to the desire to drink, which, characteristically of desires belonging to the appetitive part of the soul, has no conception of what is good for the person. The appetitive part of the soul, represented by this urge for drink, has no concern for the long-term, overall well-being of the person.<sup>11</sup>

This short-term, instinctual nature characterizes the appetitive part of the soul. It is the part with which we feel the instinctual desires, such as eating, drinking, and reproducing, while also being the part which desires wealth, because wealth enables one to satisfy such desires (580 E). This appetitive part Plato also has Socrates describe as being a many-headed beast (588 C- 589 B). The idea here is that the instincts described above (eating, drinking, reproducing), along with whatever other instincts there are, need to be controlled by the reasoning element within us, otherwise the many heads of the monster that is within us will grow too wild, and will overtake the other parts of the soul.

At this point, let us summarize Plato's argument, before going on to consider a possible objection with his account. The thirst example shows that there is a real conflict going on, unlike the example of the man moving his hands and head, and the example of the spinning top. Though some have argued, e.g. Robinson, that a person can have opposing states of mind, the point with Plato's example is that the urge to drink is not subject to a consideration of what is best overall for the agent. The person's resistance to drinking arises from a consideration as to what is best overall, and this consideration is what enables the person to resist the urge to drink. However, the urge to drink itself is

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<sup>10</sup> Woods, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Charles H. Kahn talks about this characteristic of the appetitive part of the soul in his article, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

something instinctual, which only aims to satisfy this particular desire to quench the person's thirst. Thus this is a true case of conflict because one cannot say that within the same part of one's soul, there is both the desire to drink and not to drink. With the apparent counter-examples we considered earlier, the Principle of Opposites is not applicable. For there is no real conflict in these cases. All that is needed is a more precise account of what is happening, in order to show that there is no real conflict. In the thirst example, however, one cannot say that the urge to drink and the resistance to drinking are occurring in the same part of a person's soul. For Plato argues that this urge to drink belongs to a class of desires which is instinctual, and as such has no conception for a person's ultimate good. The resistance to drinking, however, results from a consideration of the person's ultimate good, because it persuades the person to refrain from drinking in favor of a better outcome in the long run. The resistance to drinking thus cannot be of the same class as this urge to drink, since it *does* have this conception of a person's overall good. This is an actual case of conflict because the instinctual class of desire, which the urge to drink belongs to, cannot admit into its membership a desire which has a concern for the agent's overall good. However, since both desires occur within a person's soul, the best explanation for the fact that this conflict actually does occur is to say that a person has multiple parts within his soul. This resistance to drinking must come from a part other than the part from which this instinctual urge to drink originates.

That suffices for my explanation of Plato's argument. Now I shall evaluate this argument. One objection to Plato's argument is that it leads to innumerable parts of the soul.<sup>12</sup> For the argument seems to be that given a conflict, the way of accounting for its occurrence is to say that different parts of the soul are present. If this explanation holds for every case of conflict, then it seems there would be innumerable parts of the soul to account for every case of conflict that arises. Yet Plato does not appear to want such a conclusion. He wants instead to argue that there are three parts of the soul, corresponding to the classes in the city. M. Woods addresses this issue by making a distinction between contingent and non-contingent conflicts.<sup>13</sup> Contingent conflicts occur if it just so happens

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<sup>12</sup> Julia Annas presents this objection, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Woods, *op. cit.*, p. 38. Here Woods is using a distinction made by Bernard Williams in his article "Ethical Consistency", in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. xxxix (1965), pp. 103-24.

that two desires cannot be satisfied at the same time. The example Woods discusses is wanting to attend both an opera performance and a concert.<sup>14</sup> The fact that one cannot attend both of these events is due to their occurring at the same time. In this particular case, one's desires to attend both events are in conflict, but this is only due to a contingency, namely the fact that they occur at the same time. There is nothing about these two desires themselves that makes them necessarily incompatible. If the concert occurred after the opera performance, then both desires could be fulfilled. Woods suggests that Plato may not be talking about this kind of conflict when he points out conflicts that indicate there are multiple parts to the soul.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Woods suggests that Plato may only be talking about non-contingent conflicts in trying to establish multiple parts to the soul. A non-contingent conflict, according to Woods, is one where a desire is essentially opposed to another desire.<sup>16</sup> How this distinction plays out in the thirst example we will see in a moment. The point in making this distinction is to save Plato from the objection that any case of a conflict indicates there are multiple parts to the soul. If Plato is only considering this non-contingent kind of conflict, then he can allow that many contingent conflicts can occur within a person's soul. The occurrence of such contingent conflicts poses no problem of compatibility and therefore the Principle of Opposites does not apply, and there is no need to establish separate parts of the soul to explain such conflicts.

What makes the thirst example a non-contingent conflict, according to Woods, is that the two desires, namely the urge to drink and the resistance to drinking, are essentially opposed.<sup>17</sup> The urge to drink when it is not good for someone to do so, as in this case, is a morbid craving, according to Woods.<sup>18</sup> It is important to establish that this craving is a morbid one, according to Woods, because a morbid craving is one that a person thinks will not bring any pleasure, and thus will not be good.<sup>19</sup> It is the fact that this morbid craving has no connection with a person's good that makes it essentially opposed to the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> At p. 44 (*op. cit.*) Woods seems to present this thirst example as a case of non-contingent conflict because he says, when referring to the desire to drink "we have an impulse that is essentially opposed to reason because it leads to the pursuit of an object irrespective of its value."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

resistance to drinking. For the resistance to drinking does include a conception of a person's overall good. Woods thinks that Plato uses such *recherche*<sup>20</sup> examples to make it clear that there are instances where a person has an urge that is not seen as being good in any way.<sup>21</sup> So Woods' answer to the objection that every case of conflict leads to multiple parts of the soul is that Plato is only interested in conflicts where two desires are essentially opposed. What makes these two desires essentially opposed is that one of them, namely the urge to drink, is a morbid one (at least in this case) that is not seen as being pleasurable or good, while the other, the resistance to drinking, comes about because the person considers what is best overall for himself.

Woods thinks that the same kind of reasoning is going on when Plato has Socrates distinguish the spirited part from the appetitive part (439 E – 440 A):

“I rely on a story I once heard,’ I answered. ‘It’s about Leontius, son of Aglaion, who was on his way up from the Piraeus, under the outer side of the north wall, when he noticed some corpses lying on the ground with the executioner standing by them. He wanted to go and look at them, and yet at the same time held himself back in disgust. For a time he struggled with himself and covered his eyes, but at last his desire got the better of him and he ran up to the corpses, opening his eyes wide and saying to them, “There you are, curse you – a lovely sight! Have a real good look!””

This example of Leontius looking at corpses is another of the *recherche* examples which Woods thinks is indicative of a morbid craving to see corpses.<sup>22</sup> Leontius is disgusted with himself for looking at the corpses, presumably because he sees it as being in no way good<sup>23</sup> for himself to view these corpses. Here the urge to look at corpses is serving as the desire which has no conception for a person's good. It is not clear, however, that the feeling of disgust at viewing the corpses necessarily means that there is a spirited part. For it could be argued that in the person's overall conception of his good, he realizes that looking at corpses does not contribute to his aspiration to pursue the good. Given this explanation, it looks like this feeling of disgust could very easily come from the reasoning part of one's soul, with the result that this example does not help establish this third part, this spirited part, in the soul.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> In the sense that looking at corpses will not contribute to his overall well-being.

Yet another example where spirit is involved makes the same point that Plato seems to want to make about the appetitive part of the soul. He has Socrates say the following (441 B – C):

“There is further evidence in the passage from Homer we quoted before, where Odysseus “strikes himself on the chest and calls his heart to order”. It is clear enough that Homer here makes one element rebuke another, distinguishing the power to reflect about good and evil from unreasoning spirit.”

If we take the two examples together, Plato claims to have shown that spirit is distinct both from appetite, because it can evaluate the action of the appetite and be disgusted with it for looking at corpses, and from reason, because reason rebukes it. What is difficult about taking both examples together is that in the first case, spirit seems to have a conception of what is good for the person, and in the second case it does not. In the first case, it seems that spirit is disgusted because it does not think looking at corpses is good for the person. In the second case, “the power to reflect about good and evil” belongs to the reasoning part, not the spirited part, and it is this attribute which distinguishes the two. Thus it does not seem to be as clear in the case of spirit that it has no conception of the person’s overall good as it is in the case of appetite. There may be some other way of arguing that the spirited part is distinct from the other two parts. However, I do not think it can be done in the way Woods suggests, because spirit does not seem to be so essentially opposed to reason, as seems to be the case with appetite.

Spirit, for Plato, has affinities both with reason and with the more uncontrolled state of an individual. In Plato’s image of the soul, spirit takes on the role of a lion, which serves as the ally of the man, which is the reasoning part of the soul in Plato’s image (589 A-B). According to Plato, the spirited part’s natural role is to be the auxiliary of reason (441 A), and only bad upbringing will stop this natural relationship between reason and spirit from developing. Assuming that its needs are best fulfilled when in its natural condition, the spirited part needs to help reason in controlling the mass of appetitive desires (442 A). In order to perform this role most effectively, spirit needs to undergo an education program which “tones down and soothes” it “by harmony and rhythm” (441 E-442 A). This education program modifies the passion<sup>24</sup> within this spirited element in such a way that

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<sup>24</sup> Desmond Lee translates the spirited part (thumos) as passion at one point, which, if it is an accurate translation of what Plato means by thumos, expresses the idea that spirit (thumos) does not only consist of anger, but that it incorporates passion more generally. This idea is supported by the fact that Plato says

its emotion and anger are controlled. This control of its emotion and anger prepares the way for the spirit to aid reason in its quest to control the appetitive part of the soul. Yet spirit also has affinities with the appetitive part, in the sense that it has certain desires which are not associated with its role as reason's ally. It strives for success and reputation (581 A), and it is the source of anger, as when Plato first gives the example of Leontius being angry with himself for gazing at corpses lying along the wall to Athens (439 E- 440 A).

Therefore, both with the examples and with these descriptions of spirit's affinities with reason and appetite, Plato is not so clear that spirited desires form a distinct class. With anger and passion, it is not so clear that there is no conception of a person's overall good involved. For when a person is wronged, according to Plato, "his indignation boils over and fights obstinately for what he thinks is right..." (440 C). A person can only feel wronged if he has a conception of what is best overall for himself. Therefore, it is not so clear in the case of spirit that the desires belonging to this part of the soul are as unmixed as are the instinctual desires, where there seems to be no conception of a person's overall good involved in the desire.

This analysis of Plato's argument has some promise, while being somewhat inconclusive in the end. Let us recall the two-step process which Plato's argument follows. First, Plato argues that the thirst example is a case of actual conflict, and as such, the Principle of Opposites applies. If the Principle of Opposites applies, this means the two opposing desires in the thirst example cannot be present in the same part at the same time. The way to account for the occurrence of both desires in a person's soul, which is step two, is to say that the resistance to drinking must come from another part of the soul. We can determine the success of Plato's argument by evaluating these two steps. In step one, is it true that the thirst example shows an actual case of conflict whereas the examples of the man moving his head and arms, and the spinning top, are not cases of this type? Whether there is a real incompatibility here between the urge to drink and the resistance to drinking depends upon the interpretation that the instinctual urges, such as the urge to drink, include no conception of the person's overall good. This is the part of

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children are full of spirit as soon as they are born (441 A). For Plato presumably means that children have emotion and passion when he says they are full of spirit, and not merely that they have anger.

Plato's argument which has some promise. For it does seem to be an accurate description of instinctual urges (assuming this is what Plato means by the urge to drink) that they occur without any reference to what is actually good for the person. If this is the sense in which instinctual urges are incompatible with considerations of a person's overall good, which the resistance to drinking seems to be an example of, then there is some plausibility in separating the two desires in the thirst example into two distinct classes.

However, the problem with Plato's argument lies in step two. While it is plausible that the two desires could belong to distinct classes, it is not so clear why these classes need to correspond to separate parts of the soul. This separation into parts seems to illegitimately make reference to a spatial division. Whether this division is literal or metaphorical, this step in the argument seems problematic. The fact which step one in Plato's argument establishes, that there is an actual conflict here, is not enough to establish separate parts within the soul. For what step one establishes is that the instinctual urge to drink is not influenced by one's reason, at least not in any obvious way. This, as I have said, seems to be a good explanation of the difference between instinctual urges and desires which include the consideration of a person's overall good. Yet it is not clear why this difference necessitates a division within the soul along the lines of separate parts. It could be the case that Plato speaks of parts as a convenient way of describing the distinctness of the two classes of desire. However, the problem is that Plato seems to have a literal notion of parts, at least if one views this account of the soul as being analogous to the city.

This problem of speaking of the soul in terms of parts would then extend to Plato's argument that there is a spirited part as well. His example of Leontius looking at the corpses may indicate that there is a spirited part of the human personality which feels anger and shame, while his example of Odysseus may show that this spirited part does not necessarily have a conception of the person's overall good. However, the problem still remains that this division of the soul into parts does not seem to be the only way to explain the occurrence of conflict in the human soul. In fact, there seems no need to compartmentalize the different kinds of desires humans have. One can speak of the desires as belonging to distinct classes, and to this extent, separating the desires into appetitive, spirited, and reasoning desires may be a convenient way of speaking. These

distinctions may very well reflect significant conflicts in the human personality, such that it is helpful to speak of them separately. Yet when Plato takes the second step in his argument, arguing that conflict must lead to separate parts, if this is taken in a literal way, which I think it needs to be to correspond to the city, the argument seems to fail. For there seems to be no justification for speaking of the soul in this divided way, if this division is meant to be literal and not metaphorical.

However, one could respond to this analysis, saying that one must remember that the comparison of the city to the soul is an analogy. If one accepts that the objects of comparison are not the same in every respect, then the problem in step two of Plato's argument, that the soul does not consist of parts in any literal sense, is not so damaging. What is important, one could say, is that Plato has identified three kinds of desire which indicate different classifications within a person's soul. To this extent, the justice of one's soul has to do with controlling these three elements, just as civic justice has to do with having a harmonious arrangement of the three classes. The point of similarity would then be that justice needs to balance three elements, whether they exist on a large scale in the city, or on a smaller scale in the soul. Still, if one thinks the breakdown of the analogy is more serious, one could argue that Plato has not shown in any way that there are parts to the soul. Speaking in terms of parts is just a convenient way of capturing the distinctness of the soul's different kinds of desire. Here the objection would be that the Principle of Opposites only helps us capture this distinctness, it does not necessarily entail that the soul must have different parts based on the conflicts which arise within it.

## 2.2 Knowledge of the Good

The previous section has given us an idea as to the merit of Plato's argument that there are three parts to the soul. Our result from this section is that Plato has not conclusively argued that there are three parts to the soul. While he may have pointed out an important distinction between instinctual urges and reasoning about what is best for a person, this distinction is not enough to show that there must be separate parts to the soul. What does this analysis of Plato's argument mean for our attempt to understand what value there is in having a just soul? It means that Plato's account of justice may not be adequate to capture the balance that occurs within the soul. This in itself does not mean that justice

cannot be about balancing the soul. What it means is that the exact way in which justice accomplishes this balancing of the soul may not be accurately described, if one cannot rely with confidence on Plato's contention that the soul does have three parts. However, since Plato seems to have uncovered a significant difference between instinct and reasoning, it is worth pursuing his account of what value a just soul will give to the individual. If Plato is right in identifying the difference between instinct and reason, perhaps a balancing of these two distinct classes is a worthwhile thing to achieve. Given that balancing one's soul may be a worthwhile thing to achieve, we now need to ask what kind of value a person will derive from having a balanced, and therefore a just soul. Once we understand the kind of value that a just soul will bring about for a person, we will be in a better position to evaluate Plato's claim that a just soul is a kind of inner good that is to be valued above and beyond external goods.

Before looking at the value a just soul has for a person's life, we need to examine the most valuable thing of all. After examining this, we will see how a just soul leads to it. For Plato what is most valuable for a person, I submit, is to gain knowledge of the Form of the Good. The phrase "the Form of the Good" makes reference to Plato's theory of Forms, something which I do not have the scope to discuss in this thesis. The Forms serve as the basis of Plato's epistemology, they represent the eternal, unchangeable realities which provide a firm foundation for knowledge. Underlying every other Form is the Form of the Good. From this point, I will refer to the Form of the Good as simply "the Good". It is important to remember that while the Good is a Form, since it underlies all other Forms, it has a special status. According to Plato, the Good is the cause of knowledge and truth (508 E). As well as playing this epistemological role, the Good is also the ground of ethics for Plato, since "it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything" (517 C).

To understand how the same thing, namely the Good, could be at once the epistemological ground and the ethical ground for a system of beliefs and values, it is necessary to understand something about Greek thought. According to R. Nettleship, the Greek conception of man includes the idea that he lives with a goal in mind:

“In Greek philosophy and popular thought, it was a sort of ultimate truth that man is a being who lives for something, that is to say that he has a good. This is the most fundamental fact about man; he is always living for something, however much he tries not to do so.”<sup>25</sup>

When the Greeks would attribute rationality to man, they would do so *because* man acts with a final end in view.<sup>26</sup> According to Nettleship, it is this rationality which enables man to be a moral being.<sup>27</sup>

Though I do not have the space to delve into the relationship between rationality and morality in more detail, the fundamental point is the following. People are rational by nature, which means, from a Greek perspective, that they have a final end in view for their lives. When they seek knowledge, which is the result of being rational, this final end underlies their search. In other words, people do not just seek knowledge for the sake of knowing, but more fundamentally, they wish to know what their final end should be. In the process of gaining knowledge, people will at the same time discover what their final end should be.

I shall now say something about what kind of knowledge the Good provides. M. Dixsaut describes this special status of the Good by explaining how it helps one distinguish between appearance and reality:

“...l’Idée du Bien – non pas en tant qu’elle est une Idée mais en tant qu’elle est celle du Bien – possède le privilège de faire voir clairement, à n’importe qui, une distinction, celle de l’apparaître et de l’essence, même si l’on n’aperçoit pas clairement la vraie nature de chacun des deux termes de la distinction.”<sup>28</sup>

It is this special status which I would like to emphasize in describing the Good. As far as Dixsaut’s interpretation of Plato goes, the Good allows one to distinguish most clearly between reality and appearance. Thus when I say that the Good is a kind of knowledge, it should be understood as knowledge which can help one determine the difference between appearance and reality.<sup>29</sup> Now the question becomes: why is being able to distinguish between appearance and reality a valuable thing, and not just a valuable thing, but the most valuable thing of all?

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<sup>25</sup> Nettleship, Richard, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, London: Macmillan and Company Ltd.; New York: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1901, p. 219.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220. That man has a final end in view is something which the Greeks believed as a culture. The question as to whether man does have an end, or should have an end, is not something that would be questioned from the Greek point of view.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Dixsaut, Monique, *Le Naturel Philosophe: essai sur les Dialogues de Platon*, Paris: Vrin, 1985, p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> Assuming that Dixsaut is correct in her account of what knowledge of the good provides one with.

To answer this question, we need to consider the point that knowledge can provide a benefit. Only after establishing this point can we go on to consider what particular value being able to distinguish between appearance and reality provides. Plato has Socrates make the following point about the relationship between knowledge and benefit (505 A – B):

“...the highest form of knowledge is knowledge of the Form of the Good, from which things that are just and so on derive their usefulness and value. You know pretty well that’s what I have to say, and that I’m going to add that our knowledge of it is inadequate, and that if we are ignorant of it the rest of our knowledge, however perfect, can be of no benefit to us, just as it’s no use possessing anything if you can’t get any good out of it. Or do you think there’s any point in possessing anything if it’s no good? Is there any point in having all other Forms of knowledge without that of the Good, and so lacking knowledge about what is fair and good?’ ‘I certainly don’t think there is.’”

Plato has Socrates argue that if a person does not have knowledge of the Good, his *knowledge* will not *benefit* him. One may wonder exactly what it is about knowledge that enables one to benefit from it. Though I do not have the scope to examine this relationship in detail, I submit that Plato is thinking along the lines of how one can make use of possessions. For right after saying that knowledge cannot be of any benefit to us if we are ignorant of the Good, he seems to explain what he means by saying “just as it’s no use possessing anything if you can’t get any good out of it” (505 A-B). The point seems to be that it is no use having anything, like the tools of a carpenter, a blacksmith, a weaver, or a farmer, without knowing how to use them. Once one has knowledge of how to use such tools, then one can benefit from them because they contribute to the completion of some task which is worthwhile for the successful functioning of the city. While it is clear enough in the case of possessions that knowledge of how to use them will provide a benefit, it is not so obvious what the relationship is between knowledge and benefit in all cases. However, this is not something we need to pursue in order to understand the kind of value which knowledge of the Good has.<sup>30</sup> It suffices to say that Plato thinks knowledge does provide a benefit, and perhaps the most sympathetic interpretation at this point would be to allow for the possibility that in other instances knowledge could be seen as beneficial.

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<sup>30</sup> We have seen that knowledge of the Good is the epistemological and ethical ground for the rest of one’s knowledge. Here, I am discussing the value that knowledge of the Good provides once one assumes that it is operating as the epistemological and ethical basis of knowledge.

If we accept that knowledge does provide a benefit, we can now repeat the question from above: why is knowledge of the Good, which allows one to distinguish between appearance and reality, the most valuable thing of all? Having this kind of foundational knowledge seems necessary, from Plato's point of view anyway, if one wants to benefit from any other kind of knowledge. It seems that there is something so fundamental about being able to distinguish appearance from reality that without this ability, one will not be able to benefit from any knowledge at all. This seems to be the point Plato is making when he says "...if we are ignorant of [the knowledge of the Good], the rest of our knowledge, however perfect, can be of no benefit to us..." (505 A). As to why it is necessary to have this firm foundation to be able to benefit from one's knowledge, this question exceeds the scope of my thesis. However, one possibility is that having the clearest knowledge possible of what is real will enable one to define not only objects, but actions as being just and so on. Some evidence that this is what Plato means is what he has Socrates say about the relationship between the Good and what is just: "...the highest form of knowledge is knowledge of the Form of the Good, from which things that are just and so on derive their usefulness and value." (505 A). Here it seems that the Good contributes to the usefulness and value that is derived from things that are just and so on. The point is that somehow knowing the difference between appearance and reality is going to help one derive usefulness and value from what is "just and so on". Being aware of the relationship between the Good and just things will contribute positively to one's life. *How* this link occurs is another question, one which as I said I do not have the scope to investigate. Yet *that* this link exists between the Good and the benefit it brings to the rest of one's knowledge is the important point for understanding what value the Good will bring to an individual's life.

So the reason why knowing the Good is the most valuable thing to possess is that it enables one to benefit from all the knowledge one has.<sup>31</sup> Whether Plato is correct in emphasizing the importance of knowledge in one's life is a question we shall have to leave unanswered. We must keep in mind that the strength of Plato's account of value rests on this contention that knowledge is of the most value in one's life. As long as we

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<sup>31</sup> Julia Annas describes how the good is "fundamental to all real explanation, and hence all understanding", *op. cit.*, p. 243. This idea continues the thought from earlier, that the good is the ethical as well as the epistemological ground of one's beliefs and values.

are aware of this contention, we will know where there is room to engage in further assessment and evaluation.

If we can accept that knowledge of the Good is the most valuable thing to possess, we must ask how one can best acquire this knowledge. It is at this point where the philosopher comes into the picture. It seems that the philosopher is the one who is most able to possess knowledge of the Good. In fact, he is the only one who can possess this knowledge. For it takes certain characteristics to be able to achieve a full enough knowledge of reality, according to Plato (486 E).<sup>32</sup> The characteristics required for achieving this knowledge are those which only a philosopher has. Let us take a look at these characteristics which enable the philosopher to achieve a full enough knowledge of reality, which, I contend, entails that he has knowledge of the Good. Plato thinks that the characteristics of a philosopher are the following: he will love the truth (485 B-C), take pleasure in the things purely of the mind (485 D-E), be well-balanced and just (486 B-C), have a good memory (486 C-D), and finally, he will have grace and a sense of proportion (486 D).

What makes a philosopher able to achieve knowledge of the Good is thus a combination of characteristics, epitomized by having the utmost level of rationality. Only a philosopher, whose rationality is foremost among the parts of his soul, will be able to have the proper characteristics necessary to know the Good. This condition of the philosopher's soul is a just one, since the three parts are in the proper relation to one another, with reason ruling, spirit helping, and appetite obeying. Thus the motivation for the philosopher to have just soul as opposed to acquiring external goods is that it will lead him to the most valuable thing of all, namely knowledge of the Good. If one can be convinced that knowing the Good truly is the source of ultimate value in a person's life, then perhaps Plato's argument that a just soul benefits the individual could be considered successful. Of course, it is questionable as to whether one can provide a convincing account as to why knowing the Good should be favourable to acquiring external goods, in response to the Thrasymachean challenge.

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<sup>32</sup> I assume that if one is able to distinguish reality from appearance, which knowledge of the good enables one to do, then this constitutes the most important step in being able to have a full enough knowledge of reality. I assume that without knowledge of the Good, one's knowledge of reality would not have any chance at being considered full.

Still, even if Plato has successfully argued that it is beneficial for the individual to have a just soul, one might object that this conception of happiness is exclusive and overly intellectual. For only a philosopher has a just soul, and therefore only he has the proper amount of rationality for acquiring a knowledge of the Good. What are the other citizens, namely the auxiliaries and the producers, supposed to do in order to achieve a happy life? Is Plato's account of justice as the primary means towards happiness unnecessarily exclusive and simply incorrect? Or is Plato merely being realistic about the limitations inherent in most human beings when it comes to living a happy life? If it is true, as Plato seems to think, that the majority of people do not have the proper rationality to achieve a just soul and therefore be happy, then perhaps his account of what is needed for happiness is simply realistic, if not depressing at the same time. For we would like to think that there is a way for most people to be happy. This goal is reflected in the constitutions of most modern democratic states, where the imposition of taxes and social welfare exist in order to equalize the prosperity of a country's citizens. Though happiness at this level seems more centred around the necessities of life, it may be argued that the philosophy behind modern democratic states is to provide for this minimal level of happiness, accepting that most people can never achieve a high level of happiness.

This is an issue over which debate could ensue indefinitely. What I contend, in the following section, is that Plato is not primarily concerned with the philosopher's happiness in his establishment of the ideal city. Though the main emphasis on this thesis is the relationship between justice and happiness, which necessitates an investigation into the philosopher's happiness, I contend that Plato is interested in maximizing the happiness of all the citizens. I submit that there is a way for the auxiliaries and the producers to be just (and therefore happy to an extent), even if they cannot achieve the same level of justice as the philosophers. At one point, Plato has Socrates talk about the kinds of characters which the guardians should be allowed to imitate (395 C-D):

“So we argued originally that our Guardians were to be freed from all forms of manual work; their function was to be the expert provision of freedom for our state, and that and nothing else not relevant to it was to be their sole business. They must neither do nor represent actions of any other kind. If they do take part in dramatic or other representations, they must from their earliest years act the part only of characters suitable to them – men of courage, self-control, piety, freedom of spirit and similar qualities. They should neither do a mean action, nor be clever at acting a mean or otherwise disgraceful part on the stage for fear

of catching the infection in real life. For have you not noticed how dramatic and similar representations, if indulgence in them is prolonged into adult life, establish habits of physical poise, intonation and thought which become second nature?'"

I would like to emphasize this last part of the quotation. Plato makes the point that whatever kind of character a person becomes accustomed to imitating, if this imitation is carried on long enough, the person acts in this way out of habit.<sup>33</sup> So in a sense the character takes over the person: he becomes the way the character is because he is so used to imitating him. At this point in the *Republic*, the class of guardians has not yet been divided into those who will be philosophers, and those who will remain as the city's military protection. Therefore, the exposure to good characters will develop a habitually just soul both in the philosophers and the guardians. To the extent that a guardian who remains in the military role is able to order his soul, he is also just to that same extent. As a result, he is capable of being happy in some mitigated way.

Does this development of a habitually just soul also apply to the producers? I contend that it does, since poets who represent all sorts of characters will not be allowed into the city at all (398 A). No one, including the producers, will be able to witness the many bad characters which these poets reproduce. This banishment of harmful poets from the city as a whole indicates that even the producers can be affected by hearing all kinds of bad characters. The censorship of poetry is meant to apply to the city as a whole, which indicates that Plato sees a benefit in exposing even the producers to examples of good poetry, i.e., poetry which represents good characters. Does this mean that for Plato the producers are able to achieve habitually just souls? It is not entirely clear where Plato stands on this issue. What is evident is that such a poet, according to Plato, is not suitable for their ideal city, because in this city one individual keeps to one task. Presumably the reason why such a poet is unsuitable for their city is that he will impact on the producers' ability to keep to their tasks. If the producers keep to their tasks, they are just on a civic level, which may be the only way in which they can be just. While admittedly this argument is not conclusive, I contend that the producers can be just to some extent, even

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<sup>33</sup> Though the emphasis on habit may sound Aristotelian, Plato speaks of habit as developing as a result of *mimesis*. If *mimesis* or imitation is repeated often enough, then this imitation turns into a habit (395 C-D).

if this justice remains on a civic level. Therefore, a producer is capable of being happy to the extent that he is capable of being just.<sup>34</sup>

That both the auxiliaries and the producers can be happy picks up on something we dealt with in Chapter 1, where I said that being just in one's soul will cause one to lose one's motivation for being *pleonectic*, i.e., for having more than one's share. The auxiliaries and the producers will not be able to abandon all motivation for being *pleonectic*, as the philosophers could do, for reason does not rule in their souls. Therefore, one should always expect that the reduction in *πλεονεξία* will be a limited one. However, if the auxiliaries and the producers are exposed to good characters, this will enable them to keep to their tasks, and once they keep to their tasks they will benefit from the overall efficiency that results in the city. This will create an environment in which they can expect to have their basic needs fulfilled, and perhaps they can even gain some level of happiness from practising their craft.<sup>35</sup> Thus, one could argue that Plato recognizes that only a select number of people, namely philosophers, are capable of being completely happy, for they are the only ones who can be completely just. Nevertheless, due to the ability of auxiliaries and producers to have some level of justice in their souls, I contend that Plato is concerned with making all of the citizens happy, and not only the philosophers.

### 2.3 The Value of Having a Just Soul

Let us now return to the philosopher's happiness. We have seen that knowing the Good is the most valuable thing of all. Once a philosopher is finally in possession of knowledge of the Good, after going through Plato's education program, another question arises. Why should the philosopher be concerned with the interest of his community? If knowing the Good is the ultimate source of value, in that it helps one benefit most from one's knowledge, it seems that the philosopher will have found his shangri-la when he

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<sup>34</sup> I will return to this issue later, when I will deal with the happiness of the auxiliaries and the producers.

<sup>35</sup> Richard D. Mohr, in his article "A Platonic Happiness", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 4, April 87, pp. 131-145, talks about the producer class being able to appreciate the true kind of pleasure that the philosopher can feel through the performance of their function. To this extent, they must have the ability to at least approximate a just soul, if they can appreciate a pleasure that comes from the reasoning part of one's soul. Thus it seems that Mohr's position assumes some level of justice in the souls of the producers (p. 138).

comes to know the Good. He would have no obvious reason to act in the interest of his community. Instead, he would be engaged in differentiating reality from appearance, so that his knowledge would be well-founded. While having a just soul would benefit him by allowing him to reach this stage, there is no clear connection between egoistic and altruistic justice here. Yet I am arguing that this egoistic conception of justice does not disregard the usual Greek conception of justice as being an other-regarding virtue, one that is more or less altruistic.

I shall argue that there is a point to having a just soul beyond its instrumental role in helping one achieve knowledge of the Good. This is seen in what Plato has to say about the connection between the Good and justice. As we have seen, for Plato “things that are just and so on derive their usefulness and value” from the Good (505 A). Once the philosopher knows the Good, he can then use this knowledge to derive usefulness and value from “things that are just and so on”. He can use his knowledge of the relationship between the Good and things that are just to improve his own life. The point is that now he can use his knowledge of the Good to become just in a more complete, a more developed way, one which is supported by a firm foundation of knowledge. This reference to how the Good contributes to being just shows that justice does not merely have an instrumental value. For if there were no value in having a just soul beyond its instrumental value, I assume that the philosopher would not be concerned with using his knowledge of the Good to derive usefulness and value from “things that are just and so on”. So Plato *does* seem to think there is another reason for having a just soul, even when the philosopher has attained the thing of ultimate value, knowledge of the Good. This value which remains in having a just soul is what enables Plato to retain the other-regarding conception of justice, which is the usual Greek conception of justice.

The fact that a just soul has value beyond its instrumental role in helping the philosopher know the Good is what makes Plato’s account of justice more than an egoistic one. Otherwise, justice would be nothing more than a tool for the philosopher’s egoistic end to attain that which has the most value, namely the Good. In what follows, I will explain why the philosopher’s soul would not be just in the altruistic sense if he only concerned himself with contemplating the Forms. The fact that having a just soul has value in itself gives the philosopher a motivation to depart from his continual

contemplation of the Forms and pay closer attention to the harmonious arrangement of his soul. In so doing, the philosopher will not abandon his fellow citizens. He will act virtuously towards them.

Let us see why the philosopher needs to abandon contemplating the Forms in order to have a soul that is truly just. Contemplating the Forms would seem to be the preferred activity of the philosopher once he has knowledge of the Good. This is seen in the following conversation Plato presents between Glaucon and Socrates (519 C-D):

“Then our job as lawgivers is to compel the best minds to attain what we have called the highest form of knowledge, and to ascend to the vision of the Good as we have described, and when they have achieved this and see well enough, prevent them behaving as they are now allowed to.’ ‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘Remaining in the upper world, and refusing to return again to the prisoners in the cave below and share their labours and rewards, whether trivial or serious.’ ‘But surely,’ he protested, ‘that will not be fair. We shall be compelling them to live a poorer life than they might live.’”

If the philosopher is compelled to return to the cave, he will be living a poorer life, according to Glaucon. This indicates that the philosopher would prefer to contemplate the Forms, if he had the choice. In the next chapter I will address this point as well. What I would like to show for now is that the philosopher needs to return to the cave. In other words, he needs to refrain from continually contemplating the Forms because if this is all he does, he will not have a completely just soul. While it is true that the philosopher does not have the choice and must return to the cave, I am trying to establish the reasoning behind this move back into the cave. My contention is that the philosopher himself will be better off by returning to the cave, even though he may think the best life for him is to contemplate the Forms. What he cannot achieve while contemplating the Forms is a completely just soul. As we have seen, having this just soul has value in itself, beyond its instrumental role in helping the philosopher possess knowledge of the Good.

What we have to consider now is why the philosopher cannot achieve a just soul by only contemplating the Forms. We will see that such a one-dimensional, highly intellectual and egoistic lifestyle devalues the other parts of the philosopher’s soul too much for him to develop a completely just soul. To have a just soul, one must ensure that the three parts to one’s soul keep to their proper tasks. Though we have seen that Plato’s argument for there being multiple parts to the soul is questionable, I have said that there is some plausibility in thinking that there are instinctual urges to control. A possible response of the philosopher could be that all he needs is knowledge of the Good to keep

his soul just. However, I contend that if the philosopher only spends time contemplating the Forms, he will not have a just soul. The reason is that the philosopher would be overwhelmed by constantly exposing himself to the realm of Forms, by constantly concerning himself with unchanging, eternal reality. In this intelligible realm, “all is reason and order”, according to Plato (500 C). Thus, while the reasoning part of the philosopher’s soul would be for the most part keeping to its own task when the philosopher contemplates the Forms, the spirit and appetite would be neglected, because they are furthest removed from philosophy and reason (587 A). This is what I mean by saying the philosopher would be overwhelmed by only contemplating the Forms. Furthermore, reason is not only supposed to rule the other parts of the soul, but it is supposed to have a concern for what is best for the soul as a whole (442 C):

“‘And we call [an individual] wise in virtue of that small part of him which is in control and issues the orders, knowing as it does what is best for each of the three elements and for the whole made up of them.’”

If the other parts are indeed being neglected, then it does not appear that reason is performing its task of doing what is best for the soul as a whole.

I submit that the philosopher needs to refrain from continually contemplating the Forms if he is to address the needs of his spirited and appetitive parts. Thus, he cannot achieve a just soul if he contemplates the Forms all of the time. Here is what would happen if the philosopher were to do this. A philosopher who concentrates solely on the Forms would no longer be able to address the needs of his appetitive and spirited parts. For, according to Plato, if someone concentrates his desires strongly in one direction, they become less strong in other directions. If a man decides to pursue knowledge, he will take pleasure solely in intellectual pursuits, and “physical pleasures will pass him by” (485 D-E).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, if a philosopher is preoccupied with contemplating the Forms at all times, it seems that he will not concern himself with physical pleasures, which I think are primarily associated with the appetitive part of the soul. Whether the desires of the spirited part are to be included here is not so clear, yet to the extent that such desires are non-intellectual, since new-born babies and animals have this spirited part (441 A-B), it seems the philosopher will not concern himself with his desires that tend in this direction either. So the tendency of the philosopher to concentrate on the Forms will

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<sup>36</sup> As I interpret the Greek, this does not mean that the philosopher no longer has these lower pleasures, but only that he will not concern himself with them anymore.

cause him to neglect the needs of his appetitive and spirited parts. Thus, the answer to the question as to whether the philosopher can address the needs of these parts of the soul while contemplating the Forms is that he cannot. For by contemplating the Forms, he is limiting the influence of these desires on his soul. If he does not concern himself with these lower pleasures, I contend that he cannot fulfill the needs of the two lower parts of the soul.

Yet one could argue that this is not what the philosopher is trying to do at all. One could argue, as Plato seems to, that the point of contemplating the Forms is that it shows the philosopher how to become completely just, how to address the needs of these other parts of the soul. For it is necessary that reason should rule over these other parts of the soul. If the philosopher contemplates the Forms all of the time, it seems that reason is ruling, and that the spirited and appetitive parts are in their appropriate roles. However, this answer is not entirely satisfactory for the following reason. If my interpretation of Plato from earlier is correct, then it seems that balancing the soul has value in itself. Thus, although it seems clear that for Plato contemplating the Good is the ultimate goal of the philosopher, and the best way to understand what is of ultimate value, there is nevertheless some value in having a just soul. If one's soul is in a just state, then each part is performing its naturally suited task. If, however, the philosopher contemplates the Forms to the extent that the desires of the appetitive and spirited parts are significantly reduced, why should it be necessary to balance one's soul, to have a just soul? Why should one want to address the needs of parts which no longer seem to have much of an influence on the philosopher's life? The point is that if there is value in having a balanced and therefore a just soul, there ought to be value in addressing the needs of the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul. If the philosopher no longer has much of an interest in satisfying these desires, as I think would happen if he were to contemplate the Forms continually, then it seems he need no longer care about having a just soul. Yet as long as there is value in having a just soul, there should be a point to considering the desires and needs of the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Julia Annas makes the point that justice allows a person to be fully realized when his soul is just, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 132. Following this explanation of the value of justice, one could say that a person is not fully realized until his soul is just, and therefore being just allows a person to reach his potential.

If my interpretation is correct that the philosopher cannot have a just soul by contemplating the Forms alone, then this has implications for the criticism that Plato's account of virtue is too theoretical.<sup>38</sup> The point is that no matter how much theoretical knowledge a person has, this will not help him in becoming virtuous, at least not in any significant way, because this kind of knowledge is not applicable to practical matters.

Some commentators have attempted to explain why Plato's emphasis on theoretical knowledge causes him to lose touch with virtue.<sup>39</sup> J. Peters expresses the matter like this:

"Thus one might easily suppose that, as Plato introduces the theory of Forms in book 5, his model of reason shifts from the desire to rule and create order to the purely individualistic aspiration merely to contemplate the source of all order. On this interpretation, the rational part of the psyche would receive training in practical activity only to find its later fulfillment in the transcendence of both fellowship in society and concern for practical activity. In other words, the true philosopher, on this view, outgrows her former interests in maintaining temporal order and wants only to be left alone for abstract contemplation."<sup>40</sup>

What happens to the philosopher is that once he gains knowledge of the Good, he no longer has any concern for his fellow citizens and for practical activity. If the philosopher does not have these concerns anymore, then he is no longer concerned with being virtuous in terms of considering the interest of his community. Perhaps this way of explaining the matter is a way of understanding Aristotle's criticism. When a person is engaged in philosophy, he cannot become an excellent person because he is not concerned with the interest of others. Instead, he is concerned with more fundamental questions about the nature of reality. Contemplating the Forms would seem to be an exercise such as this. When a philosopher busies himself with such questions, he loses touch with virtue, because he loses touch with his fellow citizens. In order to understand

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<sup>38</sup> This criticism is one that Aristotle points out in the following way, in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1105b13): "The many, however, do not do [just actions] but take refuge in arguments, thinking that they are doing philosophy, and that this is the way to become excellent people." The point is that for Aristotle, a person becomes virtuous by performing just actions frequently, while the knowledge component of being virtuous "counts for nothing, or for only a little." (1105b3). Thus Aristotle expresses the view that one becomes virtuous through practice, not through engaging in philosophy. For Aristotle, there is a difference between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge and presumably Plato's emphasis on contemplating the Forms falls within the scope of theoretical knowledge. I assume that however perfect one's knowledge of the Good and the other Forms would be, this would not help a person become more virtuous in any significant way, as far as Aristotle understands the matter. For Aristotle stresses the importance of performing just actions in order to become virtuous. The knowledge gained from performing such actions would be a practical knowledge, which for Aristotle is independent of theoretical knowledge.

<sup>39</sup> Irwin, Terence H., *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 242-243; Adkins, Arthur W. H., *Merit and Responsibility, A Study in Greek Values*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 292.

<sup>40</sup> Peters, James Robert, "Reason and Passion in Plato's *Republic*", *Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 9 (2), Fall 1989, p. 175.

the nature of reality, it seems he must abandon human affairs and concentrate on something more fundamental. I contend that this is what Peters means when he says that the “rational part of the psyche would receive training in practical activity only to find its later fulfillment in the transcendence of both fellowship in society and concern for practical activity”.<sup>41</sup> The whole purpose of the philosopher’s education is to transcend the everyday world such that it no longer remains something he is concerned about, on this view. Once the Good becomes the main and perhaps the only object of the philosopher’s concern, he loses touch with his fellow citizens, and thereby he loses touch with virtue.

As I have argued the point, the philosopher will not be just in an altruistic way if he spends all of his time contemplating the Forms. He will only be just in Plato’s egoistic way, in that being just has helped him come to know the Good. Therefore, to answer the criticism that Plato’s account of virtue is too theoretical, I would say that this is only true if one neglects the importance of having a just soul in Plato’s account of virtue. My contention is that knowing the Good, though it is the ultimate source of value, is not the only thing of value for a philosopher. We have seen that having a just soul has a non-instrumental value, since the philosopher can use his knowledge of the Good to help derive benefit from that which is just. Consequently, the philosopher needs to engage in both contemplating the Forms and in establishing a just soul if he wants to derive the most value out of life. So a philosopher cannot be virtuous by contemplating the Forms alone. He must work on having a completely just soul, one that benefits from his knowledge of the Good and one which addresses the needs of the appetitive and spirited parts of his soul. In the next chapter, we will see how this concern for the lower two parts of his soul will ensure that the philosopher is virtuous.

A consequence of saying that the philosopher cannot be virtuous by contemplating the Forms is that Plato seems to be abandoning his thesis that virtue is knowledge. C. C. W. Taylor makes the claim that Plato abandons the virtue = knowledge doctrine in the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

*Republic*, in his article, “Platonic Ethics”.<sup>42</sup> Taylor argues that Plato’s tri-partite psychology is the reason for this abandonment:

“Hence what makes the difference between the virtuous and the non-virtuous agent is not simply the possession by the former of a cognitive state which the latter lacks, but the possession by the former of a psychological structure lacking in the latter, in which the specific desires are appropriately responsive to the direction of the intellect.”<sup>43</sup>

According to this view, knowledge is not enough to make one virtuous, even though it still remains as an important element of virtue. For the philosopher uses his knowledge of the relationship between the Good and justice in order to contribute to his community. Yet what is different in the *Republic* from earlier Platonic dialogues is this more complex account of human psychology. One could argue that Plato has recognized that a human being inevitably has desires which he must address, otherwise they will eventually come to haunt even the most rational of human beings. For a person to have a just soul and therefore to be virtuous, he must address the needs of his lower desires. Otherwise, he will suffer from an unjust soul, where the needs of the spirited and appetitive parts are not properly addressed. By neglecting the needs of these lower parts, the philosopher will not be able to live virtuously, because they will influence the order within his soul. Since Plato’s account of the soul takes into account these lower influences, I agree with Taylor that Plato has abandoned the virtue = knowledge doctrine in the *Republic*.

What we can now say, after looking at the value of having a just soul is the following. Though there are some difficulties with Plato’s argument as to there being multiple parts to the soul, it is at least plausible that there are instinctual urges one needs to control. The value in controlling these urges is that it sets up a person for being able to achieve the most valuable thing, knowledge of the Good. This is the work that Plato’s interior account of justice would do. While it is true that only philosophers can have knowledge of the Good, there may be important insights in Plato’s account of value. This possibility justifies our continued investigation into Plato’s account of value. Once the philosopher acquires this knowledge of the Good, it seems he still has an interest in having a just soul, for there is a non-instrumental value in having a just soul. So the philosopher, though in

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<sup>42</sup> From *Companions to Ancient Thought vol. 4, Ethics*, edited by Stephen Everson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

possession of this knowledge of the Good, still needs to address the needs of his soul. Due to the soul's nature, as Plato sees it, there are three parts whose needs must be addressed. I have argued that if the philosopher neglects the needs of the lower parts of the soul by contemplating the Forms, he will not acquire a just soul, because he will be abandoning these parts of the soul.

My next task, which shall begin in Chapter 3, is to show how having a just soul is the connection which brings in the altruistic side of justice. A just soul keeps the philosopher in touch with the community of which he forms a part, and in this way he benefits others while they benefit him. Consequently, the philosopher will be happier because he will be able to contemplate the Good while also addressing the needs of his soul, which in itself is an altruistic action as well as an egoistic one. We shall see this argument expanded upon and clarified in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### The Philosopher as Ruler

In the last chapter, we saw that the philosopher cannot achieve a just soul by continually contemplating the Forms, because the appetitive and spirited parts of his soul cannot have their needs properly addressed under such a condition. In this chapter, I will explain how the necessity for addressing the appetitive and spirited parts of his soul ensures that the philosopher considers the interest of his community along the way towards being happy himself. As we shall see, Plato's contention that individuals are not self-sufficient plays a part in making the link between the philosopher's happiness and that of his community. The philosopher provides the opportunity for justice to be present in the city, which in turn enables the citizens to be just and therefore happy, which eventually enables the philosopher to be just and therefore happy himself.

#### 3.1 The philosopher is overwhelmed by the Good

If it really is best for the philosopher to stop contemplating the Forms at some point, one question that arises is why he does not realize this fact. For the philosopher, due to his knowledge of the Good, would presumably be in the best position to know what is best for himself. Yet if it is really best for him to have an active role within the city and not to continually contemplate the Forms, why is he not aware of this fact? For instead of jumping at the chance to become a ruler of the city, the philosopher appears reluctant to rule. That the philosopher is reluctant to rule is inferred from the fact that he needs to be compelled to rule over the city. Plato has Socrates express the matter in this way (520 A-B):

“‘You see, then, Glaucon,’ I went on, ‘we shan’t be unfair to our philosophers, but shall be quite fair in what we say when we *compel* them to have some care and responsibility for others.’”

This statement follows as an answer to Glaucon's objection that in making the philosophers rule over the city, they are being compelled to live a worse life than they would live if they could continually contemplate the Forms. In response, Plato has Socrates repeat the answer he gives earlier (421 B-C): The object of the establishment of the ideal city is to make the entire city happy, and not to maximize the happiness of any

particular class within it. In order to accomplish this goal, it seems that compulsion is necessary. Yet if compulsion is necessary, can one not infer that the philosopher would prefer the intellectual life where he need not concern himself with the care and responsibility of others? For why else would compulsion be necessary? The underlying assumption here is that compelling someone to do something is against his interest.<sup>1</sup> If ruling over the city needs to be accomplished through compulsion, then one may infer that it is against the philosopher's interest to rule over the city. This appears to be how the philosopher feels towards the prospect of ruling. Moreover, the idea that he is unaware of what is in his best interest is difficult to accept. For he is the one who has knowledge of the Good, and this knowledge, it would seem, should enable him to know what kind of life is best for himself.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the philosopher's apparent reluctance to rule, coupled with his supposed knowledge of what is best, results in a paradoxical situation when brought against my contention that it is best for him to rule. He is reluctant to rule while also being in a position to know what is best for him to do. To contend, as I am, that despite all of this it is better for him to rule, is paradoxical, because it amounts to saying that he does not know what is best for him in this particular case. Yet knowledge of the Good presumably gives him the knowledge of what is best for him, so the paradox is that he both does know and does not know what is best for him when it comes to ruling over the city. How are we to address this apparent paradox?

There are some commentators who feel that this account of the situation is not the only plausible one. P. Vernezze contends that just because the philosopher needs to be compelled to rule over the city does not in itself indicate that ruling is not in his interest. Thus Vernezze would block the road to the paradox by questioning the inference that compulsion indicates something is against one's interest. Vernezze points to the fact that the philosophers are also compelled to study the Good, as Plato has Socrates say (519 C-D):

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Vernezze notes this point on p. 334 of his article, "The Philosopher's Interest", *Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 12 (2), Fall 92, pp. 331-349.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this point is not completely obvious. However, if we understand knowledge of the Good as allowing the philosopher to distinguish between appearance and reality, it seems that this would enable the philosopher to distinguish between the life that is truly just and the life that only exhibits the appearance of justice. If it is truly just for the philosopher to stop contemplating the Forms continually, since this will give him a just soul, then the philosopher ought to recognize this fact.

“Then our job as lawgivers is to *compel* (ἀναγκάσαι) the best minds to attain what we have called the highest form of knowledge, and to ascend to the vision of the Good as we have described, and when they have achieved this and see well enough, prevent them behaving as they are now allowed to.”

The point Vernezze makes is that if being compelled to do something indicates that it is against a person’s interest, then contemplating the Good is also against the philosopher’s interest. For the philosophers are compelled to contemplate the Good.<sup>3</sup> This conclusion seems drastically incorrect, since studying the Forms, which includes contemplating the Good, is the very thing the philosopher wants to keep doing (517 C-D). What results from this line of reasoning is that the philosopher is being compelled to do something which is nonetheless in his interest. The existence of this instance of compulsion which does not run counter to the philosopher’s interest, opens the door to the idea that compulsion need not always be against one’s interest. If we consider this possibility when it comes to the philosopher being compelled to rule over the city, we can view the situation in a new light. Perhaps it is not against the philosopher’s interest to rule just because he needs to be compelled to do so.

In order to explain how compelling the philosopher to rule could be consistent with what is in his interest, some commentators have interpreted the word ἀνάγκη as not being a legal or physical compulsion, but rather one that comes out of the philosopher’s observance of the demands of justice.<sup>4</sup> Is this interpretation of ἀνάγκη one that is plausible? F. E. Peters translates ἀνάγκη as “necessity”, and perhaps this translation better expresses the idea of ἀνάγκη, at least as Parmenides uses it, as something which “governs all things in an almost providential manner”.<sup>5</sup> Peters notes how this use of ἀνάγκη is close to Plato’s meaning when he personifies it in the Myth of Er.<sup>6</sup> Another meaning of ἀνάγκη describes a more pedestrian kind of necessity, one that applies to

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<sup>3</sup> Vernezze, *op. cit.*, p. 334; Dale Hall makes this point in his article “The *Republic* and the ‘Limits of Politics’”, *Political Theory*, Vol. 5, August 77, pp. 293-313; Richard Kraut notes this same reference to compelling in his article “Egoism, Love, and Political Office in Plato”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXXXII, 1973, pp. 330-344.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin, Terence H., *Plato’s Ethics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 299; Kraut, Richard, “Return to the Cave: *Republic* 519-521”, in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, edited by John J. Cleary, Vol. 7, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993, pp. 46-47; Brickhouse, Thomas C., “The Paradox of the Philosopher’s Rule”, *Apeiron*, Vol. 15, June 81, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Peters, F. E., *Greek Philosophical Terms, A Historical Lexicon*, New York: New York University Press, 1967, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

practical concerns of humanity rather than to universal matters. This use of ἀνάγκη is seen in the following excerpts from Isocrates, Lysias, and Demosthenes<sup>7</sup>:

Isocrates, *Banking Case*, 18: “He covered his face and wept and declared that he had been *compelled* through destitution to deny (*sc. the misappropriation*), but would try to repay the money within a short time.”

Lysias, *On the Sacred Olive Tree*, 13f: “Anyone who commits such an act does so for the sake of gain, not as *hybris*... But my opponent cannot show that I was *compelled* by poverty to commit such an offence, nor that my land was suffering any ill-effects...”

Demosthenes, *Third Olynthiac*, 34: “And when he stays at home, he is a better man, freed from the commission of any shameful act under the *compulsion* of want.”

In the foregoing examples, compulsion comes as a result of poverty, in the sense that poverty can compel someone to act illegally. These meanings of ἀνάγκη show that compulsion is something that can come from nature and from one’s circumstances. Therefore, there is a precedent in Greek thought for compulsion being due to the circumstances one finds oneself in, and not necessarily something imposed by the force of others either through physical or legal means. From the philosopher’s point of view, he may find that he is compelled by his sense of justice to rule over the city. Due to the strength of his conviction, he may have no other choice than to respect the demands of justice and accept his role as ruler of the city. In this case the compulsion comes from the strength of his conviction that the demands of justice need to be respected.

If this interpretation of ἀνάγκη is acceptable, then it is plausible to argue that the compulsion originates from the philosopher’s beliefs and is not imposed by others. Once the compulsion is related to the philosopher’s sense of justice, then the idea that ruling is in his interest becomes more palatable. For when he acts according to the demands of justice, he is acting in his own interest, since acting in this way ensures that his soul will be just. So when Plato uses the term ἀνάγκη, it signifies not any coercion being practised upon the philosophers, but rather that philosophers are principled individuals who understand that acting in accordance with a principle of justice is in their interest. E. Brown explains the issue by concentrating on the philosopher’s recognition of the laws which the founders of the city (Socrates and his interlocutors) have put into place.<sup>8</sup> One

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Dover, K. J., *Greek Popular Morality In the time of Plato and Aristotle*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1994, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, Eric A., “Justice and Compulsion for Plato’s Philosopher-Rulers”, *Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 20 (1), Spring 2000, p. 9.

of these laws is that the philosophers must rule over the city, and once this law is put into place, the philosophers respect it and obey it due to their sense of justice. Brown suggests that the philosophers would prefer not to have this law in place, since this situation would allow them to contemplate the Forms continually. However, once the law *is* in place, the philosophers have such a reverence for justice that they will obey it. Brown puts the matter in the following way:

“If the founders were not to legislate that the philosophers must rule, the philosophers would not rule. Justice would not compel them to give anything back to the city, nor would they seek to express or imitate the Forms by ruling. Rather, they would act on their preference for the philosophical life. But since the founders command them to rule, things are different. The law itself is just, for the philosophers have received enormous benefits from the city and reciprocity justifies the city’s demand for some return. Since the philosophers know this and know that justice obliges them to obey just laws, they choose to rule.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Brown, there are two principles of justice which Plato is operating with, and these principles ensure that the philosophers will reciprocate for the “enormous benefits” they have received from the city and that they will obey just laws.<sup>10</sup> Brown’s point is that while the philosophers would be happier if they did not have to rule, once ruling becomes the just thing for them to do, they will do so.

The result of this analysis of the compulsion issue can now be stated. The mere fact that the philosopher is compelled to rule may not be enough to conclude that ruling is against his interest. Provided that one accepts the interpretation of ἀνάγκη as being a compulsion based on one’s principles, there is a sense in which the philosopher can be compelled to rule due to his sense of justice. If this is what compels him to rule, then it is not necessarily against his interest to rule, for he is only behaving justly by doing so. By behaving justly, he is acting in accordance with his interest, because such behavior will ensure the proper balance of his soul, which is important if he wants to attain the most valuable good of all, which is this internal good of having a just soul.

While this analysis may be successful in showing a way for compulsion not to run counter to the philosopher’s interest, there is still a problem with the philosopher’s attitude toward ruling over the city. For the fact remains that the philosopher is reluctant to rule over the city (520 D). This fact can be accounted for, I contend, by saying that he is overwhelmed by his comprehension of the Good once he reaches this point in his

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

ascent toward this foundational knowledge. This way of explaining the philosopher's reluctance to rule is made by R. Kraut and P. Vernezze.<sup>11</sup> There is some evidence to support this reaction to an overabundance of one thing in a person's life, when Plato has Socrates talk about what happens when a person concentrates too much on intellectual activities (485 D-E):

“But we know that if a man's desires set strongly in one direction, they are correspondingly less strong in other directions, like a stream whose water has been diverted into another channel.’ ‘Surely.’ ‘So when the current of a man's desires flows towards the acquisition of knowledge and similar activities, his pleasure will be in things purely of the mind, and physical pleasures will pass him by – that is if he is a genuine philosopher and not a sham.’”

When the philosopher first reaches knowledge of the Good, I contend that his pleasure will in fact be “in things purely of the mind”. He is reluctant to rule over the city because he knows that engaging in such a political activity will not satisfy his desire to contemplate the Good. All he is concerned with when having reached this stage of intellectual completion is to satisfy his desire to know the Good and to perfect his knowledge. He is so infatuated with the Good that he forgets the importance of addressing the needs of the appetitive and spirited parts of his soul. By forgetting to address these needs, his soul becomes out of balance, and is therefore not just.

S. Aronson, however, does not accept such an explanation of the philosopher's reluctance to rule. His point is that the philosopher already knows what is in his interest because of his knowledge of the Good. After having achieved this knowledge, he decides not to return to the city but to remain contemplating the Forms.<sup>12</sup> Aronson's assumption is that once the philosopher has knowledge of the Good he will not be mistaken about what is in his interest. My contention, however, is that the philosopher would not be able to achieve a just soul if he over-emphasizes this one aspect of his life. By concentrating too much on the reasoning element of his soul, the philosopher neglects the needs of the appetitive and spirited parts of his soul. As we have seen in the quote above (485 D-E), when the philosopher concentrates on the acquisition of knowledge, “physical pleasures will pass him by”. If the philosopher is no longer concerned with these physical pleasures, which I assume are connected to the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul,

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<sup>11</sup> Kraut, *op. cit.*, (1973), p. 342; Vernezze, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>12</sup> Aronson, Simon H., “The Happy Philosopher – A counter-example to Plato's Proof”, *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. X, 1974, p. 394.

then it is unclear how he can address the needs of these parts of his soul. For a person to have a just soul, the needs of these parts cannot be neglected, and this is what would happen, I contend, if the philosopher were to only concern himself with contemplating the Forms. In Book IX, Plato has Socrates make a point supporting the idea that these parts of the soul must not be neglected (571 D-E):

“But a man of sound and disciplined character, before he goes to sleep, has wakened his reason and given it its fill of intellectual argument and inquiry; his desires he has neither *starved nor indulged*, so that they sink to rest and don't plague the highest part of him with their joys and sorrows, but leave it to pursue its investigations unhampered and on its own, and to its endeavours to apprehend things still unknown to it, whether past, present or future...”

These desires must not be “starved or indulged”, meaning that while they should not be given free reign to do what they will, they nevertheless must not be neglected, they must not be starved to the point where they do not receive fulfillment. I assume that were they to be starved, they would perhaps exercise undue influence on the reasoning part of the philosopher's soul and not allow him to contemplate the Forms in the way that he wants, with the amount of concentration that he needs. For Plato is suggesting that if the desires are starved or indulged, they would plague the highest part of a man (571 E).

Keeping this possibility in mind that the philosopher may be plagued by his desires if he starves them, Aronson's contention can be addressed. If the philosopher forgets to satisfy the desires of his spirited and appetitive parts, they may affect his ability to contemplate the Good. What may happen is that after a while, the influence from these starved desires may plague him to such an extent that he can no longer enjoy contemplating the Good and the intellectual pleasures associated with this activity. So although neglecting the needs of the spirited and appetitive parts may seem to be the best course of action, it could turn out that doing so makes the philosopher worse off eventually. Therefore, the decision that the philosopher makes to contemplate the Good exclusively could be seen as running counter to his interest if one considers the possibility of starved desires exercising their influence. Given that such a possibility exists, it is not necessarily the case that the philosopher's continual contemplation of the Forms is the best course of action, even if he thinks so at first.

### 3.2 Why the philosopher needs to rule over the city

Assuming that the philosopher's reluctance to rule can be accounted for by his being overwhelmed by the Good, the question that now comes to mind is why he needs to have a political position within his city. Granted that the philosopher may have to be involved in the city in order to address the appetitive and spirited needs of his soul, why is there this further requirement that his position be that of the city's ruler? One might think that the best state of affairs for the philosopher would be to have a role within the city which matches the kind of intellectual contemplation he performs while studying the Forms. This would allow him to both practise a kind of activity which resembles contemplating the Forms, assuming such a thing could be achieved, and to achieve a just soul by ensuring that he does not overemphasize the contemplative aspect of his life. However, the reason why the philosopher must have a political role and not become a withdrawn intellectual within the city is that he himself benefits from the political contribution he makes to his city. Before I expand on this point, I shall consider some of the commentators' explanations for why the philosopher needs to rule over the city. The purpose of going through these explanations is to show that they do not account adequately for the importance of the philosopher's rule of the city. After looking at these explanations, I will explain why the philosopher needs to rule not merely out of a sense of duty, but for his own benefit as well.

One answer which commentators have given to the question of why the philosopher needs to rule is that ruling prevents him from being ruled by those who are worse than he is.<sup>13</sup> Though the philosopher would prefer contemplating the Forms, if he allows people who are worse than he is to rule, then the kind of political system which supports the lifestyle he wants will be in danger of deteriorating. Though T. Brickhouse notes that this reason for ruling is something Plato has Socrates suggest (347 C-D), he thinks it does not hold up as a reason for having the philosopher rule.<sup>14</sup> For Brickhouse, like some other commentators, points out that there is a group of philosophers, and each member of the

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<sup>13</sup> Cross, R. C., and Woolley, A. D., *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1964, p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Brickhouse does not explain why Plato has Socrates offer this reason for ruling earlier on in Book I. I suppose Brickhouse is thinking that at this stage in the *Republic*, Plato is talking about the reluctance that good men have for ruling, and the ideal city, in which a group of philosophers take turns ruling, has not been established yet.

group takes turns ruling, so that when a particular philosopher is not ruling over the city, there are other philosophers who can rule in his place. These philosophers each take their turn in making their contribution to the city.<sup>15</sup> Since there is a group of people, namely philosophers, who share the responsibility of ruling, the city would not fall apart if one individual philosopher were to neglect his role as a ruler.

Though Brickhouse is not explicit about the point, I think he is saying that for any individual philosopher, he does not have to rule in order to be happy, because he can depend upon the other philosophers when it comes to ensuring that the ideal city persists. The idea is that an individual philosopher does not need to worry about this practical aspect of maintaining the best conditions within which he can have a maximally happy life. With a whole group of philosophers sharing the responsibility of ruling, an individual philosopher can depend on the others for maintaining the viability of the city while he concentrates solely on intellectual matters, i.e., contemplating the Forms. Thus Brickhouse stresses the fact that an individual philosopher does not need to rule in order to maintain the conditions in which he can live the best life possible for himself. So it is not enough to say that the philosopher rules to maintain the best conditions for living a happy life. The other philosophers who do not abandon the task of ruling ensure that the city functions well. Any individual philosopher can rely on this state of affairs, taking advantage of the other philosophers' efforts to maintain the health of the city. As long as this group of philosophers continues to take care of the administration of the city, from an individual philosopher's point of view, he need not sacrifice his happiness in order to rule.

The problem with this line of thinking is that it fails to get at the crux of the issue. It certainly seems to be a consequence of Plato's description of the ideal city that an individual philosopher could get away without ruling. As long as there is this group of philosophers willing to perform the task of ruling, it seems reasonable to assume that one or perhaps even several philosophers could avoid performing this task. In accordance with this thinking, Brickhouse assumes that it is better for the philosopher to contemplate the Forms continually, and that ruling is only a practical necessity that enables the philosopher to have the best living situation for contemplating the Forms as much as

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<sup>15</sup> Brickhouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4; Kraut, *op. cit.*, (1973), p. 332; Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

possible. This assumption appears to be based on the contention that the philosopher prefers not to rule and that this preference coincides with what is in his interest. However, as I have argued, the philosopher, being so overwhelmed by his exposure to the Good, is not in a position to know what is best for himself. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that the philosopher is better off contemplating the Forms all of the time, even though in his overwhelmed condition, he may think this to be the case. Consequently, when Brickhouse makes the point that one individual philosopher may be able to avoid ruling, it is not necessarily true that avoiding ruling is the better choice for him. The point could be made in the following way. One philosopher among the group of philosophers ruling over the city could probably avoid ruling. Yet ruling contributes to his happiness instead of detracting from it, and the philosopher's position on the subject, in his overwhelmed condition, is not enough reason to think that avoiding ruling is the better choice.

Another way of explaining the requirement that philosophers rule over the city is suggested by R. Kraut and E. Brown.<sup>16</sup> Kraut makes the point that though philosophizing is a better activity than politics, this fact alone does not mean that it is always better for the philosopher to engage in philosophizing.<sup>17</sup> For there may be cases where continuing to philosophize would be unjust, so that instead of benefiting from such an activity, one would be worse off for continuing to do something that is unjust. Kraut is not explicit about what would make philosophizing unjust, but I assume that he must be relying upon what Plato has Socrates call a "just demand" that is made upon the philosophers (520 E): "They cannot refuse [ruling over the city], for we are making a just demand of just men." Under such circumstances, where the philosopher would be just in paying back his debt to the city, it is better for him to engage in politics some of the time, even though philosophy is the better activity. By engaging in politics, he is acting in a just way, which preserves the proper condition of his soul. This is the same point Brown is making when he talks about the law that the philosophers must rule, which has the effect of "altering how much happiness is available".<sup>18</sup> Both Kraut and Brown assume that the best activity is philosophizing, yet since the philosophers respect the demands of justice and need to have just souls to be happy, it is necessary that they rule over the city, which is a just

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<sup>16</sup> Kraut, *op. cit.*, (1993), p. 49; Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Kraut, *op. cit.*, (1993), p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

demand placed upon them. If it were possible for the philosophers to contemplate the Forms and for this to be the just thing to do in all circumstances, then they would live a happier life than one which is interrupted by periods of political activity, i.e., ruling. However, since the circumstances of the philosophers are such that they must rule in order to obey the demands of justice, it is actually better that they combine both philosophizing and political activity in their lives.

This way of explaining why the philosopher must rule over the city is a step towards my solution. For Kraut and Brown view the philosopher's position as ruler as contributing to his happiness, and not just a necessity for preserving the constitution of the city. However, these commentators make the assumption that philosophizing is the best activity, and that the philosophers are right in preferring it to ruling over the city. The fact that philosophizing may be the best activity is not the point which needs to be addressed. For one thing, it is not clear exactly what is meant by saying that philosophizing is the best activity. Is it the best in the sense that philosophizing will lead to a happier life for the individual who is able to philosophize? This is the sense in which both Kraut and Brown take philosophizing to be the best activity. For Kraut stresses the point that it is only *unjust* philosophical activity which makes the philosopher worse off, and presumably if he could engage in *just* philosophical activity, he would not be worse off.<sup>19</sup> In other words, he would be happier if he could philosophize while not ruling and if this were always the just thing to do. For Brown, when the philosopher obeys the law that he must rule, the happiness which is available is altered.<sup>20</sup> I assume for Brown as well that there is less happiness available for the philosopher who rules over the city than there would be if it were just for the philosopher to philosophize all the time. In the end, Kraut and Brown both take a practical approach to the question of the philosopher's rule over the city. In an ideal world, the philosopher would be happier if he did not have to rule. Yet due to the demands of justice placed upon him, the amount of happiness available<sup>21</sup> is

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<sup>19</sup> Though Kraut is not explicit on this point (pp. 49-50), his point is that unjust philosophical activity is not better than taking time out from philosophizing to meet the just requirement to hold office. I assume that unjust philosophical activity would be that kind which causes one to neglect the demands of justice, such as the just demand for the philosopher to rule over the city. I assume that for Kraut, if philosophical activity could always be just, since it is the best activity, the philosopher would be happier while continually philosophizing, i.e., contemplating the Forms.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> To phrase the matter the way that Brown does.

lessened, and he must agree to rule over the city in order not to further diminish his happiness by having an unjust soul.

In opposition to these ways of looking at the philosopher's rule over the city, I contend that the philosopher can only maximize his happiness by ruling. It is not as though there is less happiness available for the philosopher because he has to respect the just demand that he rule over the city. When he engages in politics, it is not necessarily the case that he lives a worse life, even though this position is something Plato has Glaucon hold (519 D).<sup>22</sup> Such a position, that it is best for the philosopher to rule and not to continually contemplate the Forms, is something which can be inferred from the following words which Plato has Socrates express (499 A-C):

“‘It was for these reasons and with all this in view,’ I said, ‘that we felt bound in all honesty, though with some trepidation, to say that there would never be a perfect city or constitution or individual until some chance compelled this minority of uncorrupted philosophers, now called useless, to take a hand in politics, willy-nilly, and compelled society to listen to them; or else until providence inspired some of our present rulers and kings, or their sons, with a genuine love of true philosophy.’”

What is important to realize when considering this passage is that not only will a city and a constitution not be perfect until philosophers rule (or until current rulers start to love true philosophy), but the same goes for individuals. Until philosophers rule or current rulers start to love true philosophy, there will never be a perfect individual. Assuming that the group of individuals Plato is talking about includes the philosophers of his ideal city, the point is that philosophers need to be engaged in a political role for an individual, any individual, to reach perfection. If an individual reaches perfection, he has reached his end, his goal, as the Greek word τέλειος indicates, which is the word being translated as “perfect” in the quote above. In Greek ethics, an individual's final end is usually thought to be happiness.<sup>23</sup> Thus if one reaches one's final end, presumably one is going to be happy upon reaching this stage, for happiness is the very description of this final end. Therefore for a philosopher, the situation in which he can reach his final end and thereby be optimally happy is one in which he is ruling over the city.<sup>24</sup> Though he may believe that studying the Forms continually is the way to be optimally happy, he is mistaken in

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<sup>22</sup> Vernezze argues that the philosophers do not necessarily sacrifice their happiness just because the aim is to make the city maximally happy, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-333.

<sup>23</sup> Annas, Julia, *The Morality of Happiness*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> It cannot be said that the philosopher's end in the sense of his *telos* or goal is reached when he contemplates the Good, and that when he rules he only does so out of necessity. For I am arguing that the philosopher's true end is to rule over the city, as that will benefit himself and the other citizens.

this belief, despite his knowledge of the Good. As I contend, he is overwhelmed by his exposure to the Good and must be directed towards his happiness.

We have considered the possibility that the philosopher is happiest while ruling, and the passage quoted above supports such a notion, if we accept the link between perfection and happiness. What we have not yet covered is *why* the philosopher should be more happy when he is engaged in politics. What is it about engaging in politics which makes the philosopher more able to reach perfection, and thereby to become optimally happy? It is at this point where Plato's description of the ideal city's origin can be brought into the picture.

Plato contends that people are not self-sufficient, and as we saw in Chapter 1, if this contention is interpreted as meaning that people cannot flourish without the contributions of others, it is quite plausible. The other contention Plato makes is the one embodied by the Principle of Specialization, that the citizens' needs will be more successfully met if every citizen keeps to his naturally suited task. Though this contention, as we saw, has some plausibility, it could suffer from being too rigidly based on there being types of people to which the tasks in the city naturally correspond. Despite this problem, I shall consider how these two contentions operate within Plato's argument that philosophers should rule over the city.<sup>25</sup> Plato is here incorporating both of these contentions into his overall scheme of the role which the philosopher plays in the city. As we saw when evaluating Plato's ideal city in Chapter 1, if a craftsman keeps to one task, he may be able to develop efficient methods of performing his craft, and to make improvements through the course of time. If he has a talent for this craft, presumably his chances of making a product which meets the needs of his fellow citizens are better, because he will learn how to perform his task with ease and he will be able to work independently at it.<sup>26</sup> If all of the citizens are performing their tasks in a co-operative environment, such that everyone benefits from one another, then the needs of the citizens will be met most successfully. Since the citizens cannot flourish on their own, this kind of co-operative city where each person concentrates on one task brings about a better life for the citizens as a whole. Life

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<sup>25</sup> The argument which builds upon this assumption must in the end suffer from whatever problems there are with the assumption itself. However, I think there is still a point in showing how Plato builds upon these assumptions as they stand in his overall argument.

<sup>26</sup> This is based on Plato's account of natural ability (455 B-C).

is better because each person is given the chance to excel at that which he naturally does well, and the result is a well-run city with products that are of high quality with high efficiency.

Keeping this co-operative structure in mind, I contend that the same line of thinking extends to the philosopher. His task is to rule over the city (428 E). If we consider this task in the light of Plato's account of the ideal city, it should be the case that by ruling, the philosopher contributes to the well-being of the city. For each citizen contributes to the city's well-being by adhering to his naturally suited task, and the same reasoning holds for the philosopher. Moreover, the philosopher ought to benefit from others just as they benefit from his contribution to the city. For Plato contends that no one is self-sufficient, and presumably this lack of self-sufficiency extends to the philosopher. Thus the philosopher stands in the same dual relation as the other citizens of the city: he benefits them from adhering to his naturally suited task, and the other citizens benefit him from adhering to their own. It is through joining this co-operative network that the philosopher becomes part of the whole and thereby gains the opportunity to benefit the other citizens and to benefit himself at the same time. So the reason why the philosopher is happier when ruling over the city is that his inherent lack of self-sufficiency, which is a fact of human nature for Plato, is best addressed by having him adhere to his naturally suited task in a co-operative venture with others.

Now the task before us is to see exactly how the philosopher's contribution benefits the other citizens, and why he benefits himself in turn. When it comes to the philosopher's contribution, it should come as no surprise that he uses his knowledge of the Good to contribute to the well-being of the other citizens. Exactly how his knowledge benefits the other citizens is a point that has come up in Chapter 2, and we saw there that Plato is not explicit about how knowledge of the Good provides a benefit. We made an attempt to understand what kind of benefit it could provide by viewing it as a knowledge of reality as distinguished from appearance. Perhaps having such a knowledge in a political context will enable the philosopher to identify what constitutes the healthy condition of a city, to prevent it from degenerating into an unharmonious, non-unified city that is ripe with *stasis*. That this is the kind of role which the philosopher's knowledge of the Good will play is supported by what Plato has Socrates say when

talking about the return of the philosophers to the cave, which is the realm of everyday life where politics is practised. Here Plato has Socrates address the future rulers of the ideal city (520 B-C):

“We have bred you both for your own sake and that of the whole community to act as leaders and king-bees in a hive; you are better and more fully educated than the rest and better qualified to combine the practice of philosophy and politics. You must therefore each descend in turn and live with your fellows in the cave and get used to seeing in the dark; once you get used to it you will see a thousand times better than they do and will distinguish the various shadows, and know what they are shadows of, because you have seen the truth about things admirable and just and good.”

When the philosopher returns into the cave, he uses his knowledge of the Good to identify that which is real and that which is only a shadow of what is real. One of the things which he has “seen the truth about”, as Plato puts it, is what is just. It is this point which I would like develop when explaining the kind of contribution that the philosopher makes to the city in keeping to his naturally suited task as its ruler. By establishing a city in which justice is present, the philosopher creates a society in which the stage is set for people to co-operate together, and it is this co-operation which is the key both for the happiness of the citizens and the philosopher’s happiness.

### 3.3 The philosopher activates the Good by ruling

My task in this section is to describe the kind of contribution which the philosopher makes towards the overall success of the city. The basis of the philosopher’s contribution to the city is his knowledge of the Good, which gives him the intellectual skills to establish a city that is based on justice, and to provide the population with a stable basis of co-operation, a springboard from which they can carry forth their activities such that everyone benefits maximally. Since the philosopher’s contribution is based on his knowledge of the Good, I shall refer to the philosopher’s contribution as an activation of the Good. By this I mean that he implements his knowledge of the Good in such a way that it has an effect on the everyday world which he rules over. It is his political role as ruler of the city which enables him to use the Good as an active source in the decision-making that goes along with ruling over the city. I refer to the Good as being activated because its value is used to improve the state of affairs for the citizens of the ideal city. The Good is not kept locked up in the intelligible realm, with all of its potential to benefit

the citizens remaining untapped.<sup>27</sup> When the philosopher extracts value from the Good by using it to differentiate between what is real and what is not, he is activating it in the city, and giving it the chance to serve as the basis for the healthy functioning of the city. What is of utmost value in establishing this healthy city and thereby meeting the needs of its citizens, is the just condition that results from the philosopher's activation of the Good. What we now need to see is how this activation of the Good brings about a just condition for the city, and why this just condition is going to contribute towards the happiness of the citizens and in the end, the philosopher's as well.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the city is just if its citizens are each keeping to their naturally suited tasks (434 C-D). In order for this condition to be realized, the souls of the citizens must be kept in order to the extent that is necessary for them to perform their tasks efficiently and without undue distractions. In the organization of the city, it is at the level of individual development where the philosopher's activation of the Good steps in and provides the basis for an effective city, one which meets the needs of its citizens successfully. The way in which the philosopher accomplishes this political task, I submit, is through an education program which creates the proper composition within their souls, a composition which allows them to be just. Plato has Socrates describe the education which the rulers will impart on the citizens in the following way (412 A):

“And so we may venture to assert that anyone who can produce the perfect blend of the physical and intellectual sides of education and apply them to the training of the soul, is producing music and harmony of far more importance than any mere musician tuning strings.’ ‘A very reasonable assertion, Socrates.’ ‘We must therefore ensure, my dear Glaucon,’ I said, ‘that there is always someone like this in charge of education in our state, if its constitution is to be preserved.’”

A condition for ensuring that the constitution of the city is to be preserved is that someone who can educate the soul properly be in charge of education. I submit that the philosopher, after having contemplated the Good, can use his knowledge to identify the best education program, the one that produces a soul which approaches true justice as much as possible.

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<sup>27</sup> That the Good does have this potential of benefiting the citizens is something we have looked at in Chapter 2. There we looked at a possible way in which knowledge could provide a benefit, and this is a possible way of understanding how knowledge of the Good could provide a benefit.

I shall now elaborate upon this education program.<sup>28</sup> The education of the citizens will begin when they are young, when they are being cared for by mothers and nurses (377 C). At this early stage, before physical training, they will hear fictional stories that describe “the highest excellence of character” (378 E). Poets should not be allowed to give a “gloomy account of the after-life”, because that will not be conducive for developing citizens who are brave (386 B-C). In the same vein, lamentations by famous men should be banned (387 E-388 A). These fictional stories for children should also make reference to certain positive characteristics. For one, they should provide examples of people who are self-controlled (389 D-E), and they should describe “endurance against odds by famous men” (390 D). However, what is perhaps most important, the stories must describe justice as being a good thing, something which leads to happiness: (392 A-B):

“Because I am afraid that we shall find that poets and story-tellers are in error in matters of the greatest human importance. They have said that unjust men are often happy, and just men wretched, that wrongdoing pays if you can avoid being found out, and that justice is what is good for someone else but is to your own disadvantage. We must forbid them to say this sort of thing, and require their poems and stories to have quite the opposite moral.”

Following upon this early introduction to fictional poems and stories, the citizens, but in particular the guardians, must undergo physical training as part of their education program.<sup>29</sup> This training should prepare the guardians for their work as soldiers, as Plato has Socrates say (404 A-B):

“They must be as wakeful as watchdogs, their sight and hearing must be of the keenest, and their health must not be too delicate to endure the many changes in the water they drink and in the rest of their diet and the varieties of temperature that campaigning entails.”

The purpose of this physical training is to ensure that the spirited part of the guardians’ souls will be properly trained, so that the reasoning and spirited parts of their souls can work together to produce an individual who is self-controlled and brave (411 A). As with

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<sup>28</sup> I am describing the education which Plato discusses in Books II and III of the *Republic*, rather than describing the education which is meant specifically for the philosophers in Book VII. The latter is not meant for the citizens as a whole and does not form part of what the citizens contribute to the philosopher’s happiness.

<sup>29</sup> That this aspect of education includes the lowest class, namely the producer class, is less clear, and perhaps it could be said that it most specifically does not include this lowest class. Still, Plato places more importance on the education of the mind, when he has Socrates say (403 D): “In my view physical excellence does not of itself produce a good mind and character: on the other hand, excellence of mind and character will make the best of the physique it is given.” That the producer class is included even in the education of the mind, in the early stages of childhood is a point I shall make in due course.

the education of the mind, this physical training is introduced so that the guardians will develop characters that can contribute to the overall well-being of the city.

We can see that Plato's education program stresses the development of a good character, both when it comes to the education of the mind and the body. Among the features which are to be included in the poems and stories is the idea that justice is for one's own advantage.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, part of the philosopher's role, as ruler of the city and as the one who makes decisions about what education to give the citizens, is to develop just souls in his city. One needs to remember, however, that this development of justice in the souls of the citizens will not be a complete one. As we saw in Chapter 2, the rest of the citizens, namely the auxiliaries and the producers, cannot have the same level of justice in their souls due to the way their souls are constituted. However, they can still benefit from education, if one accepts that they can be just in a less complete form, in a habitual way.

If activating the Good is understood in this way, as implementing an education program based on the philosopher's knowledge of the Good, we can begin to see the results for Plato's ideal city. The philosopher must play an active political role in the city in order to ensure that the citizens develop just souls. This is accomplished by an education program which starts from early childhood and exposes the citizens to examples of people not fearing death, not engaging in violent laughter, not lamenting at the loss of friends, people who are self-controlled, and who view justice as advantageous to themselves, and as not conflicting with happiness. Once the citizens have been exposed to this education, they have the psychological preparedness to adhere to their naturally suited tasks, thus upholding the Principle of Specialization. The result of this psychological preparation is that the city as a whole is well run, with everyone keeping to their proper tasks. By this means, *stasis* is minimized, if not totally eradicated, and the city is unified. Thus the philosopher's political contribution serves to maintain the unity of the city, through the education program he institutes.

What the philosopher also helps build by educating the citizens is a city where people treat one another in a just way, in the sense that they obey the city's laws and do not

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engage in πλεονεξία. This is a loose end which I left from before, which I will take this opportunity to address. In Chapter 1, I considered the possibility that having a city in which people's needs are satisfied will limit the need for people to contravene the tenets of justice. This is not to say that there will be no conflicts and no people who break the law in order to acquire more goods or to seek more pleasure. It would be unrealistic to expect that all conflicts would disappear just because people's needs are being fulfilled. However, there is still reason to believe that given a city in which everyone's needs are met, there would be less reason for people to seek illegal means to acquire goods. What accounts for the city being this way is the just condition of the citizens' souls. This allows people to concentrate on their tasks more, which in turn means that their needs can be met successfully. What Plato has isolated in his psychological account of justice is the importance of an individual's inner state for ensuring that he will refrain from breaking the law, i.e., from acting unjustly in standard ways, such as embezzling money, committing sacrilege or theft, and betraying one's friends or country (442 E). Plato has shed the excess foliage of the concept of justice and discovered its deep roots in the souls of individuals. By explaining justice at the level of the soul, Plato is able to identify what conditions are necessary in order to ensure that citizens uphold the principles of justice that are expressed in the laws and common beliefs of a city.

Thus, the philosopher's activation of the Good produces one result which is accompanied by a second one. First, he educates the citizens so that they keep to their tasks, and second, their adherence to their tasks helps ensure that they will behave justly toward one another and respect the rules of justice. To the extent that the citizens need to respect the rules of justice in order to get things done in their city, this is an important consequence of the just condition of their souls. The philosopher helps the citizens become obedient to the rules of justice as well as educating them to have habitually just souls. This establishment of a citizenry with just souls is one way, and perhaps the main way, in which the philosopher's activation of the Good becomes a benefit to the citizens. By identifying the education that will bring about justice as he understands it, which is in the most perfect way possible for a human being, the philosopher enables the citizens to have souls which prepare them for making the most beneficial contribution to their city that it is possible for them to make.

Another result of the philosopher's activation of the Good is that it enables him to organize the city most effectively. Since the philosopher has knowledge of the Good and of the Forms, he is able to have the city approximate the harmony that pervades the realm of Forms. Due to having this knowledge, the philosopher knows how to relate the parts of the city together in order to ensure a healthy and unified whole. He has the knowledge necessary to assign tasks to the citizens, and he knows how to deal with any eventualities the city may encounter.<sup>31</sup> He activates the Good when engaged in his political role because he uses his knowledge of the Good in order to ensure the city remains unified and healthy. The question which we must now take up, which follows from this account of the philosopher's activation of the Good, is why bringing about a city with citizens who have habitually just souls and who have been organized in the best way, will contribute to the overall healthy functioning of the city.

### 3.4 How the citizens benefit from having habitually just souls

The education program which the philosopher as ruler of the city initiates will set the stage for the successful functioning of the city. The relationship between the education of the citizens and the health of the city is as follows. If the citizens are exposed to poems which portray a variety of characters, they will not be able to complete their tasks as effectively. This is the kind of thinking which Plato seems to be presenting us with when he talks about certain poets needing to be banned from the city, as we have seen above. Perhaps the selection of appropriate material for the citizens to be exposed to strengthens the reasoning part of their souls. When it comes to the explanation of how exposure to the proper material has a positive impact on the citizens, it is necessary to speculate, since Plato does not provide explicit information about how this happens. However, given the fact that the tri-partite soul is something which all human beings do have (581 B-C), I assume that education through exposure to that which is good and just will establish some

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<sup>31</sup> One could object that the philosopher imposes his rule upon the citizens, and that this very fact makes his rule undesirable. Though this is an important objection, all I can say towards it for now is that the philosopher rules in an altruistic way, unlike a dictator leading a totalitarian regime. In such a case, the dictator does not rule for the well-being of the citizens, whereas with the philosopher ruling, the goal is to make people as happy as possible. This point of view differs from the Enlightenment ideal of people being able to decide what is best on their own. From Plato's perspective, it is simply a reality that most people do not know what is best for themselves, and therefore the philosopher needs to intervene on their behalf.

sort of control in the soul of even the producers, in whom the appetitive part of the soul dominates (581 B-D). This control, I submit, will help the members of the producer class limit the influence of the otherwise dominant appetitive element in their souls, which seeks only to satisfy its desires without any thought for what is good for the individual as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Though the appetitive part will still be dominant in the producers, for this is what constitutes their nature, the influence which their education has on their overall soul will be to limit the influence of their appetitive desires. The influence of these desires will be limited because the education the producers are exposed to will allow the reasoning part of their souls to assert itself enough to ensure that they focus on their naturally suited tasks. Without this influence from their education, I assume that the appetitive part of their souls would be so strong that it would not allow them to concentrate effectively on one task. So the result of their education is to provide them with the ability to concentrate on their naturally suited tasks. Once such a state of affairs is established, then the Principle of Specialization will be followed, and the citizens will benefit from one another's talents. If such a state of affairs exists, then the city will be a healthy one that meets the needs of its citizens successfully.

What the philosopher brings about by educating the citizens is the underlying structure which needs to exist if the city is to be a healthy one. As we saw in Chapter 1, part of Plato's contribution to the revisionary point of view regarding the co-operative virtues and their role in a community is that they exercise more of an influence over human affairs than may have been realized at the time. Despite the presence of the competitive virtues as an influence in ancient Greek society, the co-operative virtues such as justice play an essential role in contributing to the unity of society. The self-restraint exercised by the citizens in regard to the demands of appetite is an important pre-requisite for having a city which meets the needs of its citizens successfully. This self-restraint is brought about by the education program instituted by the philosophers who rule over the city. Their education program develops a habitual kind of justice in the souls of the producers and the auxiliaries, through exposure to poems about people who are self-controlled and who value justice. This allows the citizens to achieve some degree of

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<sup>32</sup> This is how I have understood Plato's example of thirst. The desire itself has no concern for a particular kind of drink or for the good of the agent as a whole. The desire itself only wants to be satiated (439 A).

control over their appetitive part, albeit an incomplete kind of control, since it is not supported by knowledge of the Good. This control that the citizens gain through their education is the basis for the unity of the city, because it enables them to concentrate on their naturally suited tasks, which in turn enables their needs to be met more successfully, and thereby creates a sense of co-operation and harmony in the city.

We can now ask whether such a state of affairs will ensure that the citizens of Plato's ideal city are happy. At first glance, it may seem that they are indeed happy, for they are just, at least habitually so. That Plato has this notion of a habitual kind of justice is something I have discussed earlier on in Chapter 2. Another quote in support of my contention occurs later on in the *Republic*, in the Myth of Er. There Plato has Socrates relate the story of Er, who has been allowed to witness what happens to souls after they die. At one point, when the souls are choosing the lives they shall lead, the following description ensues (619 B-C):

“When he (sc. the Interpreter) had spoken, the man with the first lot came forward and chose the greatest tyranny he could find. In his folly and greed he chose it without examining it fully, and so did not see that it was his fate to eat his children and suffer other horrors; when he examined it at leisure, he beat his breast and bewailed his choice, ignored the Interpreter's warning, and forgot that his misfortunes were his own fault, blaming fate and heaven and anything but himself. He was one of the souls who had come from heaven, having lived his previous life in a well-governed state, but having owed his goodness to habit and custom and not to philosophy...”

In this example, the soul's inability to choose the best kind of life results from its incomplete understanding of justice. Whatever goodness this soul has, which I assume includes some partial grasp of justice, is based on habit and custom.

If one accepts the possibility of the citizens having habitually just souls, we can ask again whether the citizens are happy as a result of being habitually just. That being just is the way to live happily is the conclusion that Plato has Socrates pronounce at this late stage in the argument (580 B-C):

“Then shall we hire a herald,’ I asked, ‘or shall I proclaim the judgment of the son of Ariston myself – that the supremely happy man is the one who is justest and the best, that is, the philosopher king who is sovereign over himself, and that the supremely wretched man is the one who is unjustest and worst, that is, again, the man who is most tyrannical and who tyrannizes completely both over himself and over his own country?’”

When it comes to the ordinary citizens, meaning the producer and the auxiliary classes, they do not have the same chance to be as just as the philosophers, since they do not have the intellectual ability to contemplate the Good. As a result they cannot be as happy as

the philosopher, if justice is needed for happiness. Yet despite this reality when it comes to the ordinary citizens' happiness, there is still a possibility that they can be happy if one accepts that both justice and happiness admit of degrees. That justice admits of degrees is a result of my contention that there is a habitual kind of justice. The question which remains, however, is whether happiness admits of degrees as well.

There is an indication of this when Plato has Socrates rank the five kinds of life in order of happiness (580 A-B):

“‘Come on, then,’ I said, ‘you must act as final judge for us, and give us your verdict how these five types – the philosopher king, the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic and the tyrannical man – stand in order of happiness.’”

Does this ranking of the happiness involved in the five kinds of life also mean that each life will have its corresponding amount of justice? There is the possibility that happiness has many constituents to it, and that only the philosopher's complete kind of happiness is endowed with justice. In fact, one could say that what makes the philosopher's happiness the most complete kind is the fact that it is accompanied by a complete kind of justice based on knowledge of the Good. Perhaps the timocratic man and the other kinds of men have more or less of the other components of happiness without having the most important one, which is having a just soul. Now it is not clear whether happiness has parts to it for Plato, such that one could say that people leading the kinds of lives which are inferior to the philosophical life have some but not the most important part of happiness, which is justice.

This issue of happiness having parts is something J. Butler criticizes T. Irwin for.<sup>33</sup> According to Butler, Irwin's position is that “justice is the dominant *component* of happiness”.<sup>34</sup> However, Butler claims that Irwin is unable to make a reference to any part of the text where Plato speaks of happiness as having parts.<sup>35</sup> Although I do not have the scope to tackle this issue, for the purposes of my argument, I hope the following point will suffice. It seems accurate to say that the citizens' souls are not just in any way that approaches how just the philosopher's soul is. What is more important when it comes to the citizens' happiness, I contend, is that by keeping to their naturally suited tasks they

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<sup>33</sup> Butler, James, “Justice and the Fundamental Question of Plato's *Republic*”, *Apeiron*, Volume 35 (1), March 2002, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

are at least able to ensure that their basic needs are met. This state of affairs would seem to be a precondition for anyone to have the chance at becoming happy. So while the citizens may not have a very sophisticated kind of justice in their souls, by keeping to their tasks they can help create a healthy city which provides the necessary background for living a life full of value. I therefore contend that the citizens will at the very least achieve a preliminary, undeveloped level of happiness, assuming that happiness consists partly in having one's basic needs addressed.

### 3.5 How the philosopher benefits from the happiness of the citizens

The overall health and justice of the city sets the stage for the philosopher to live most happily. What is responsible for the overall health and justice of the city is the habitually just condition of the citizens, which means that the citizens are happy, at least to a certain degree. Thus we have finally reached the stage where Plato's communal conception of happiness can be explained. What we shall have to see in this section is the precise link between the happiness of the citizens and the happiness of the philosopher. Before presenting my own account of how the philosopher benefits from the citizens' happiness, I shall deal with some accounts from commentators regarding what benefit the philosopher derives out of ruling over the city. These accounts do not go far enough in relating the act of ruling itself to the happiness of the philosopher.

R. Kraut's position is that ruling is in the philosopher's extended interest, not his proper interest.<sup>36</sup> Kraut gives the example of a man's relation to his child to explain the difference between proper and extended interest.<sup>37</sup> If a man loves his child, then whatever is in the interest of his child is also in his own interest. There may be a case where the interests of a father and his child conflict. In such a case, the interest of the father will not necessarily take precedence, presumably because he cares so much about his child. Thus whatever is in the interest of the father is called his proper interest, and whatever is in the interest of the child is in the father's extended interest. Yet the bond between the father and his child is so strong that the father will willingly sacrifice his proper interest for the extended interest he has in his child. In the philosopher's case, according to Kraut, his

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<sup>36</sup> Kraut, *op. cit.*, (1973), p. 338.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

bond of love extends to the whole city.<sup>38</sup> When the philosopher rules over the city, he sacrifices his proper interest because contemplating the Forms is what he primarily wants to do.<sup>39</sup> However, since he loves the city, he acts in accordance with what is in his extended interest when he rules over it.<sup>40</sup>

In opposition to Kraut's account, Vernezze argues that by ruling, the philosopher is more able to satisfy his love of the Forms than by merely contemplating.<sup>41</sup> Vernezze argues that the philosopher's *eros* is only completely satisfied when he brings forth virtue in others.<sup>42</sup> While the philosopher could bring forth virtue in some others even in a non-political role, Vernezze argues that by ruling, the philosopher is able to "leave behind an entire state educated in virtue".<sup>43</sup> Thus, while Vernezze accepts Kraut's distinction between one's proper and extended interest, his position is that ruling is not in one's extended interest, but one's proper interest.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, Vernezze argues that the philosopher rules because he feels obligated to do so.<sup>45</sup> His sense of justice is such that he recognizes the just demand that he repay his debt to the city for the education he has received. Even though this is the reason why the philosopher rules, this does not mean that the philosopher will not benefit from ruling, according to Vernezze.<sup>46</sup> Given Vernezze's argument, the reason why the philosopher will benefit from ruling is that this will enable him to create virtue in the entire city, and thereby fulfill the demands of his *eros*. The reason why the philosopher does not realize this, according to Vernezze, is due to his being overwhelmed by his love of the Forms.<sup>47</sup>

Kraut's account of how the philosopher benefits does not adequately account for the value that ruling brings about for the philosopher's soul. Ruling does not lie within the philosopher's extended interest (if one uses Kraut's language) because the act of ruling itself helps the philosopher achieve a just soul. Therefore, since having a just soul is something that is in the philosopher's proper interest, there is no sacrifice of his proper

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Vernezze, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 346, footnote 24.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

interest while he is ruling. For Kraut, the vehicle by which something becomes part of one's extended interest is the bond of love. In the case of a child, a father considers the child's interest as the extension of his own because he loves him. In the case of a city, the philosopher considers the city's interest as the extension of his own because he loves it. For Kraut, this bond of love needs to be in place before someone can consider something as being part of his extended interest. This bond of love is what enables the philosopher to include the city among those things that form part of his interest. Yet I contend that a more basic connection exists between the philosopher's interest and his rule over the city. This connection is seen in how his soul is balanced by establishing an educational program which creates just citizens.

Vernezze's account of the philosopher's benefit from ruling lies closer to my own. Still, Vernezze does not account for the benefit that ruling brings about for the philosopher's soul. For Vernezze, the philosopher is able to satisfy his *eros* by creating virtue in the entire state which he rules over. However, what I contend is more fundamental as a benefit to the philosopher is that he creates virtue in himself by ruling over the city. For by ruling he is able to establish a citizen base with just souls. Once the citizens have just souls, the city will become a healthy one, which, as we shall see, sets the stage for the philosopher to have a just soul. If the philosopher has a just soul, he is virtuous. Thus Vernezze misses the more fundamental requirement that the philosopher needs to be virtuous himself before he can bring about virtue in the citizens' souls. Therefore his emphasis on the satisfaction of the philosopher's *eros*, while being a potential benefit for the philosopher, can only occur once a healthy city is in place, whereby he has sufficient means for becoming virtuous.

I shall now present my own account of the benefit the philosopher receives from ruling. Here, Plato's communal conception of happiness comes out, in that the philosopher's happiness is dependent upon the citizens' happiness. It will be helpful to consider the point where Plato discusses the importance for the philosopher to perform a political role in the ideal city (499 A-C):

“‘It was for these reasons and with all this in view,’ I said, ‘that we felt bound in all honesty, though with some trepidation, to say that there would never be a perfect city or constitution or individual until some chance compelled this minority of uncorrupted philosophers, now called useless, to take a hand in politics, willy-nilly, and compelled society to listen to them; or else until providence inspired some of our present rulers and kings, or their sons, with a genuine love of true philosophy.’”

The importance of this quote for our present purposes is the following. The philosopher needs to rule in order for the city to be successful. The city will never reach its perfection, and therefore its happiest condition, until philosophers rule or until present rulers start to love philosophy. By describing the best condition of the city as being one in which the philosopher rules, Plato virtually joins the concepts of egoism and altruism together. For when the philosopher rules, he makes it possible for the city to be a healthy one, which means that it is unified and not fraught with *stasis*. The citizens are happy when the city is healthy because this condition ensures that their needs are met. Therefore, through his political contribution to the city, the philosopher contributes to the well-being of others, and thus acts in an altruistic way. Once this healthy city is brought into being, the citizens benefit because people will behave in a way that is conducive toward the general happiness. They will refrain from *pleonexia*, or at least they will engage in less of it, because their needs will be met.<sup>48</sup> They will also refrain from *pleonexia* because their souls will be balanced (to the extent that this is possible for them), and consequently they will not value external goods as highly. They will not have the same desire to gain more than their share, i.e., to be *pleonectic*, because reason will have enough of an influence to temper their thirst for appetitive and spirited goods. When the citizens refrain from *pleonexia*, the general population benefits because the lives of all human beings are intricately woven to the lives of those around them. If the people murder, rape, and betray one another, these acts will have a negative impact on their ability to live a happy life. If, however, the citizens are happy, they will refrain from such activity. The less murdering, raping, and criminal activity in general which occurs, the more people can live in comfort and security. The philosopher's altruistic activity as ruler enables this secure and co-operative city to come into being in the first place.

There is another way in which Plato's communal conception of happiness stands out in the philosopher's rule over the city. As we saw in chapter 1 (section 1.3.3), Plato emphasizes the importance of co-operation for the establishment of a healthy city. All of the citizens of the city must keep to their naturally suited tasks in order to fulfill one another's needs, which leads to a healthy city. Standing apart from the other citizens, the

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<sup>48</sup> We saw before (section 3.3) that having one's needs met should cause one to have less reason to engage in *pleonexia*.

philosopher holds a pre-eminent place when it comes to the assignment of tasks. As the quote above indicates, the philosopher needs to rule in order for the city to be a perfect one. Therefore, more than anyone else, the philosopher must apply himself to his task, since the health of the city depends on him.<sup>49</sup> If the life of the city is seen as a wheel that moves in a steady, uniform way, then the philosopher is the one who stands behind this wheel and spins it according to the rhythm of the Good. The philosopher provides the backdrop for the city's success, spreading his knowledge by activating the Good throughout the city. It is his initiative as ruler which creates the wheel of co-operation, which spins out the Good in all directions, so that each citizen can benefit from his knowledge. When the philosopher activates the Good in his political role, this is what turns his egoistic contemplation into an altruistic activity. His activity is altruistic because the Good, as it spins its way through the city, influences each citizen so that he acquiesces in his task and co-operates in order to create a healthy, unified city. Yet the movement from egoism to altruism is not a one-way journey. What starts off as an egoistic contemplation of the Forms,<sup>50</sup> and then turns into an altruistic act, returns to the philosopher as an egoistic benefit. For he too needs the co-operation of others in order to live a happy life, since he, like the rest of humanity, is not self-sufficient (according to Plato). Again, we see that Plato's conception of happiness is communal, since the philosopher's happiness relies on the happiness of the community. Happiness for Plato always has this echo, this underlying idea that one's actions are not considered in isolation, but in relation to the community as a whole.

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<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that the contribution of the other citizens is not important, yet the importance of their contribution does not compare with the importance of the philosopher's contribution.

<sup>50</sup> Although some, like Cooper, claim that when he contemplates the Forms, especially the Good, the philosopher no longer cares about his own good. See Cooper, John M., *op. cit.*, p. 155.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Plato holds a communal conception of happiness in the *Republic*. This means that a person's happiness is brought about by considering the interest of his community. In the following paragraphs, I will give a summary of the argument that establishes this position.

In order to frame Plato's conception of happiness within the context of justice, I began Chapter 1 by considering the Thrasymachean position. I argued that underlying this position is a conception of value having to do with the acquisition of external goods, without any concern for justice. Under such a conception of value, justice is not seen as contributing to a person's happiness because it does not contribute to the acquisition of external goods. In response to this immoralist position, I argued that Plato presents a conception of value that turns inward, making justice something that does not conflict with happiness, but something that is going to bring about the most value for a human being. That is why Plato's discussion of justice takes a turn from the common conception of justice as being an altruistic virtue to one that has an egoistic side. Otherwise, he would not sufficiently address the point that a person's happiness is from the beginning an individual question, even if afterwards it can include the happiness of one's community as a condition. Accordingly, I extended the altruistic confines of justice and brought in Plato's egoistic conception of justice. Once having explored this conception, it became clear that justice is something which has to do with a person's soul, and that this is the focal point for Plato in his attempt to show how justice leads to happiness.

The argument then extended toward the city. For an examination of justice within the city shows how one and the same altruistic virtue can have an egoistic cousin on the individual level. The result of looking at justice within the city was that two of Plato's central contentions revealed themselves, namely that people are not self-sufficient and that life is better for them if they keep to one task, i.e., if they follow the Principle of Specialization. With these contentions guiding the way, we saw that the most important feature for making a city good is unity, and that this unity is established when people keep to their naturally suited tasks. When it comes time to identify justice in the city, this co-operative atmosphere where everyone keeps to his naturally suited task is the essential

element for determining whether the city is just or not. From this point, we turned back to the individual to determine whether justice on a large scale could be applied to the individual. When we started looking closely at the individual, it turned out that the internalization of justice within a person's soul was not necessarily an exact match with justice in the city.

Nevertheless, the internalization of justice opened up the possibility that a just soul might lead to a more stable and unified society. For those who have such a just soul would not be so ready to rebel against the city's government, since they are capable, through having a just soul, of keeping to their tasks and thereby meeting their needs. Although the progress towards a re-valuation of justice was well on its way, we dealt with a potential stumbling block. Some commentators argue that the egoistic justice which Plato discusses loses contact with the usual Greek understanding of justice as an altruistic notion, dealing with regulations among people and punishment. We examined this issue in some detail, and I mentioned the possibility that one who values a just soul will not have the same need to engage in *πλεονεξία*. We did not pursue a more thorough investigation until we could have a better appraisal of Plato's theory of the soul, and its role in his overall argument.

We discussed Plato's theory of the soul in Chapter 2. There we examined the idea that the soul has three parts. We considered the fact that there is a kind of desire which is instinctual, and which has no conception of what is good for the person. This seemed to indicate that there is a separate category of desire, namely appetite, which has no connection with the reasoning part of the soul, which does have a conception of a person's overall good. We also considered Plato's argument that there is a third part of the soul, namely the spirited part, that is distinct from both appetite and reason. We found that while Plato's identification of the different categories of desire has some plausibility, perhaps the sharp divisions between the parts of the soul is not so perfectly analogous to the division of the city into three classes.

Despite any lingering problems with Plato's account of the soul, I continued with the investigation of his internalization of justice. After looking at the parts of the soul, we had more of an idea of what needed to be done in order to achieve the value of justice in its internal form. I then looked at what value having a just soul brings, and it turned out

that it allows one to know the form of the Good, which is the most valuable knowledge of all. I discussed what value the form of the Good would bring, and I presented it as the foundation of ethics and knowledge. At this point, a shift occurs in Plato's account, for the philosopher is the only one with the ability to acquire knowledge of the Good. Following this shift, our exploration of Plato's conception of happiness centred around the philosopher's happiness. Though at the same time, I argued that Plato is interested in the happiness of all the citizens, and I provided an explanation as to how the rest of the citizens could be habitually just, and to this extent, happiness is available to them, although in a less complete way.

I then returned to the happiness of the philosopher. I pointed out that having a just soul has value in itself. This gives the philosopher a further goal to keep in mind beyond his contemplation of the Good. Because he has this further goal in mind, the philosopher does not become withdrawn from his community, trapped in an egoistic paradise of Forms. In line with this picture, I argued that the philosopher cannot achieve a just soul while contemplating the Forms, for this would cause him to neglect the appetitive and spirited parts of his soul, which cannot find satisfaction from pure intellectual contemplation.

As Chapter 3 began, I dealt with the problem that the philosopher wants to contemplate the Forms, and given his knowledge of the Good, he should know that this is best. However, I argued that he is overwhelmed by the Good when he first acquires knowledge of it, and his preference for contemplating the Forms cannot be trusted at this point, due to this overwhelmed state of mind. Having dealt with this problem, I explained that the philosopher finds the happiest life for himself by ruling over the city. Through making this point, I brought in Plato's contentions regarding a person's lack of self-sufficiency and the Principle of Specialization. These contentions emphasize the co-operative environment which must be in place for the citizens to have their needs satisfied. After re-introducing these contentions, I applied this idea of co-operation to the philosopher's case, arguing that just like the other citizens, he is not self-sufficient and benefits from the contribution of his fellow citizens.

At this point, I focussed on the philosopher's contribution to the city. He implements an education program which aims at developing just souls among the citizens. As a result

of having habitually just souls, I argued that the citizens would be less likely to act unjustly toward one another under the usual Greek conception of justice. This means that they will respect the laws of their city which limit the acquisition of goods and assign punishments to those who commit crimes. The reason for their obedience is that they have habitually just souls, and this condition helps ensure that they keep to their naturally suited tasks and thereby help create a city which meets everyone's needs. I proceeded to argue that the citizens benefit from their education because it allows them to have the psychological preparedness necessary to provide for their own needs. Since their needs are provided for, I argued that the citizens are happy, at least in a minimal way, since the satisfaction of basic needs appears to be an important aspect of happiness.

The communal conception of happiness could finally be described, once the citizens' happiness was established. I argued that the philosopher's altruistic actions enable the city to develop and grow in a unified way, with the support and co-operation of its citizens. The reason why the philosopher needs to rule over this city is so that he can initiate this whole co-operative structure, which would not get off the ground without his leadership. The philosopher spreads his knowledge of the Good throughout the city, which urges the citizens to keep to their naturally suited tasks. This altruistic activity on the part of the philosopher reflects back towards him, as though his activation of the Good were one great altruistic mirror, with his own image being part of the overall benefit the city receives from his rule.

Plato's insight into what constitutes happiness can perhaps best be explained by the communal nature of his whole project. By emphasizing the importance of co-operation in a city, Plato has identified the reliance we have on one another for ensuring that our needs are satisfied. It is therefore in one's own interest that other people be allowed the opportunity to contribute to the overall health of a city. The fundamental insight Plato isolates is that we depend on one another for our own well-being. With this insight in mind, we can understand why his conception of happiness is a communal one. If one acts for the sake of one's community, one contributes to the health of the community as a whole. Each individual within a community has something to contribute to the overall healthy functioning of the community. If an individual keeps to his task, then he will receive the amount of happiness that he is capable of acquiring. In the case of the

philosopher, his task is to contribute to the community as a whole, and that is why his happiness is dependent upon a communal contribution. For the rest of the citizens, as long as they keep to their tasks, they are helping the city provide for the needs of all its citizens, and hence they will be happy to the extent that such a condition is possible for them.

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