

The Rulers' Choice

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I

Plato undertook in the *Republic* to show that "it is in every way better to be just than unjust" (Book II, 357b1–2). What did he mean by this? I would like to focus on two relevant questions. 1) Did he believe that invariably the more just a person is, the better it is for him? We should prefer this way of putting the important question to asking, as is commonly done, simply whether being just is good for one. A philosopher might reply to this question affirmatively, meaning thereby that a person who is just is better off than a person who is unjust. But that would still not answer the question that I am posing, which is whether Plato held that each and every increase in one's degree of justice is good for one or, as we might say,¹ in one's interest. 2) Did Plato hold in the *Republic* that its being good for one is the only basic reason, or the only overriding basic reason, for doing any particular thing or being any particular way? In the case of justice, the question is whether he held that its being in one's interest to be just is the only basic reason, or overriding basic reason, for being just.

To these questions I shall defend an answer that is somewhat unorthodox though by no means unheard-of, that according to Plato in the *Republic*, there is one highly unusual but philosophically important case in which, in a certain circumscribed sense, being more just is less good for a person than being less just is, and, second, that in that case there is another reason beside self-interest, and overriding it, for being more just rather than less so. So my answer to both questions as I posed them is negative, though only for the one case in question. In this paper, I shall give this answer a defense restricted to a discussion of the *Republic* itself.²

¹ I shall use "is in one's interest" as equivalent to "is good for one" even though the former, modern phrase reveals Plato's thought less clearly, because it obscures the connection between "good for one" and "good *simpliciter*", to be discussed.

² A discussion of other dialogues (notably, in my view, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Theaetetus*) would not only show whether any

This case arises, I believe, for nobody that you or I will ever meet or need to persuade to be just, but only for the rulers of Plato's ideal city, who are also philosophers, when they arrive at the end of their education. According to Plato they will then suspend their purely philosophical activity and work for a time at governing the city, even though it would be more in their interest to continue philosophizing. Their reason for doing this — to put it very roughly at first — is that having become philosophers and having gained full knowledge and understanding of the Good, they realize that although this course of action would not be good *for them*, by comparison to continuing to philosophize, a) it is good *simpliciter*, and b) its being good *simpliciter* in a certain way overrides, as a reason for action, its not being good for them. Since they have no other motivation more efficacious than that reason in determining their action, they govern the city.

II

I say that this interpretation is unorthodox primarily because of its negative answer to my second question above.³ Most commentators take Plato to think that ultimately one's own interest is the only reason for doing or being anything.⁴ So they answer the second question

like conclusion could be defended outside of the *Republic*, but would also test the conclusion for the *Republic* itself. Unfortunately, such a discussion would be too extensive for the confines of this paper.

³ This interpretation, however, or something like it has not lacked advocates, including recently Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford 1981. I defended it, in less detail than here, in my *Companion to Plato's Republic*, Indianapolis 1979, hereinafter *CPR*. Observations that seem to me essentially similar are to be found, for example, in Gregory Vlastos, "The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's *Republic*", Helen F. North, ed., *Interpretation of Plato*, Leiden 1977, pp. 21 and perhaps 33; and an account that is difficult for me to characterize but that seems to me to bear important affinities is given by John M. Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice in Plato", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977), 151–157 (cf. *CPR*, p. 196). I regard my account as going back to Moore (cf. *infra*, n. 31) and beyond, and indeed I would argue that it is present, in its essentials, in some of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato in *Eudemian Ethics* I, 7–8.

⁴ Among recent interpreters see, e.g., H. A. Prichard, *Duty and Interest*, Oxford 1929, reprinted in Prichard, *Moral Obligation, and Duty and Interest*, Oxford 1968; A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, Oxford 1960; Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, Oxford 1977; Hans Reiner, "Platons Begründung der Ethik", *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, 35 (1981), 223–229. This general

affirmatively. Since they think that Plato is trying to persuade people rationally to be just without exception, they think also that he must believe he can show that being more just is always in one's interest. So they think that the answer to the first question must be affirmative too. Here, although some of them think the affirmative answer is supported independently by the text, others hold – rightly in my opinion – that Plato's words on this subject indicate that in the case described above, the rulers do act justly against their own interest. But then they must think that Plato is inconsistent, in suggesting that reason always follows self-interest, but that in that case, if the rulers are following reason, reason opposes self-interest to follow justice.⁵ I myself think that they are right about the text, but wrong about the inconsistency. On the account I am defending, Plato thinks that in this one case, reason must follow what is good *simpliciter* over what is good for oneself, and so follows justice.

To begin with, in Book VII, and especially in 519–521 and 540–541, Plato sets us a comparison that the rulers make having to do with the relative choiceworthiness of the activities of philosophizing and governing the city.⁶ The questions are what this choice is a choice

view goes back at least to Kant's claim that all Greek ethics was "eudaimonistic". I think that it is adopted by George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates*, London 1888, vol. IV, p. 106 (but p. 70 makes me less sure). The same view, but with an important extra twist, is also adopted by Richard Kraut (see *infra*. n. 16).

⁵ For example, Adkins thinks that Plato is caught in a conflict here, from which he is unable to extricate himself (*op. cit.*, pp. 290–293).

⁶ I am willing to dismiss the idea that is sometimes held (e.g., by W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. VI, Cambridge (England) 1975, p. 502) that the rulers are actually *forced*, presumably by their colleagues, to govern the city. This bizarre eventuality would obviously require a substantial mechanism far beyond anything that Plato comes close to describing or even hinting at. It proves nothing that at 539e3–4 Plato expresses the requirement that the rulers govern the city by the phrase ἀναγκαστέοι ἄρχειν. No one doubts that the Greek word ἀναγκαστέοι can mean something other than actual compulsion, as by their colleagues. That it does mean something other than that is made clear by several facts. First, the agents of the "compulsion" mentioned in the passage are clearly not their fellow-rulers, but "we" the founders of the city, who are discussing the matter, who are laying on them the requirement that they govern (520a8, ... ἐροῦμεν προσαναγκάζοντες ...; 521b7, ἀναγκάσεις; 519c8–9, ἡμέτερον δὴ ἔργον ... ἀναγκάσαι; cf. 519d2–7, 8–9). Second, the notion of ἀνάγκη is used to express, in the same breath with the requirement that the rulers govern, the requirement that they look to the Form of the Good (519c8–d2, 540a6–b1), which no one could think was literally something to be compelled by their colleagues. Third, the indications of "unwillingness" to govern on the part of the

between, and what the grounds are on which it is made. To take the first question first, so far as I can see, the choice is clearly pictured as being made between two alternative continuations of their lives to the point at which the choice is made. The whole matter is brought up in the context of the statement that this is the time at which, if Plato's scheme is to be fulfilled, they must return to the city (519d4–7 ff., 520c1 ff.) and the question is whether at that point they will consent (520d6–8). The issue is then cast as one of how ruling will be regarded by those who are about to rule (520d2–3, οἱ μέλλοντες ἄρξαι, and 521a1, τοῖς μέλλουσιν ἄρξαι). So it seems clear that even if the rulers are making other comparisons too, they are at least making this one between two options they have about how to continue their lives to date.

It might be argued that this cannot be their choice, on the ground that one of these options, that of continuing to philosophize, is not open to them. For it might be thought that only the smooth running of the city, for which their intervention is required, makes possible whatever philosophizing they have a chance to do. But this is not Plato's view. For one thing, Kraut has argued convincingly that Plato at this point (unlike, e.g., 445d) is thinking that there is a group of rulers, and does not suggest that the failure of any one of them to take on the task of governing must cause the city to collapse.⁷ Even more important, Plato makes clear that although a philosopher fears living in a city governed by people worse than he (Book I, 347b5–d8, esp. c5), nevertheless a life of philosophy is possible outside of the ideal city (*ibid.*, and 496a–499a). Moreover this point is emphasized in the present passage, where Plato stresses the necessity of not allowing philosophers to do what they do in other cities, namely, to refuse to return to "the Cave" to share the toils and honors, for better or worse, of other people (519d4–7, 520a9–b4).

It is also sometimes suggested that the rulers make their comparison between their own actual lives, which consist of (after preliminaries) first philosophizing and then ruling the city, and another sort of life, lived in a possible but not actual state of affairs, in which they inhabit the "isles of the blest" (540b) and can philosophize

rulers is not suggested to be the kind of unwillingness that is to be overcome by force, but, as 346e7–347a3 shows, by attention to the relevant considerations. These include "persuasion" (πειθῶ, 519e4) and also "necessity" (ἀνάγκη, *ibid.*), but the necessity there is imposed by the law (νόμος, 519e1), which "we" are establishing (520a8). The necessity, that is, is simply the legal *requirement* that we establish in explaining how the city is to be set up; and the rationale of the requirement is clearly something that the rulers are supposed to understand and follow, even though they do so, as I shall argue, because it is a requirement of justice, and through that indirectly of the Good (540a8–b1); (cf. *infra*. n. 39), not because it is good for themselves.

⁷ Richard Kraut, "Egoism, Love, and Political Office in Plato", *Philosophical Review*, 82 (1973), 330–344, esp. 332–333.

without the need to rule. This seems to be the suggestion of Murphy.⁸ It seems clear, however, that Plato's actual remarks about the "isles of the blest" have nothing to do with the rulers' choice, but rather are meant to describe their situation after they have finished ruling and indeed after they have died.

The idea motivating the foregoing suggestion can, however, be more effectively defended, once we see what is really at stake in determining the possibilities that the rulers are comparing. According to the interpretation that I am advocating, they are comparing their lives under the two options confronting them. One option is a life led as theirs has been to date, continued by taking their turn at governing; the other option is likewise a life led as theirs has been to date, continued by further philosophizing and no governing. In my view, they judge the former option less good *for themselves*, but better *simpliciter*, and they choose it because its being better *simpliciter* seems to them properly to override its being less good for themselves. But if one wishes to deny that they choose a course less good for themselves than another possibility open to them, it is possible to argue in one of two ways.⁹ (A) When they compare the value of the first option, it could be argued that they compare it not to that of the second option that I have given, but rather to a life (which cannot under the circumstances be theirs) in which they philosophize exclusively without ever coming under the necessity of ruling. Since (for reasons we shall examine) Plato disparages the life in which a philosopher lives under the rule of others who are less capable (347b–d), the supposition must be that the superior life of philosophizing is lived in circumstances not ever described in the *Republic*. But at any rate the point would be that in the rulers' judgment, such a life would be better than the life that is destined to be actually theirs. (B) The other possibility is to argue that the point of the comparison is to hold that a life devoted exclusively or primarily to ruling, *i.e.*, what one might call the political life, is the best life. On this interpretation, Plato's point in disparaging ruling is not to claim that the life of philosophizing and then ruling is worse for the rulers than the life of philosophizing alone, but rather simply to claim that the life of ruling is worse than the life of philosophizing and then ruling. This latter claim, of course, is compatible with saying that philosophizing and then ruling is better for a person than simply philosophizing, so again the conclusion that the rulers sacrifice their good when they rule would be avoided.

Although both of these interpretations incorporate contentions that Plato would undoubtedly accept, it does not seem to me that they could represent all of what he is saying about the comparison made by the rulers. Clearly he does think, as (A) maintains, that a life of pure philosophy is better for one than a life of philosophy followed by governing. Likewise he does think, as (B) maintains, that a life of philosophy followed by ruling is better for one than the purely political life. But

⁸ N. R. Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic*, Oxford 1951, p. 53, n. 2. See also Terence Irwin, review of my *CPR*, *Philosophical Review*, 89 (1980), 640–647, esp. 643.

⁹ I owe these suggestions respectively to Irwin, *ibid.*, supplemented by a private communication, and to an anonymous referee for this journal.

even if he does mean to express both of these views in this passage, it seems to me clear that he means to express in addition a comparison between the two options that I have described as continuations of the rulers' career to date, continuations that he seems to me plainly to be portraying the rulers as trying to evaluate.¹⁰ Unless he might thereby elucidate that evaluation, it is difficult to see what the point would be of the comparisons in either (A) or (B). As we have seen, one of his chief points in this passage is to show how his scheme avoids the deleterious effect on a city of having rulers who hope to gain by governing it and who therefore compete with each other to do so (520d1–4, e4–521a8). To show how rulers might in contrast be reluctant to rule, it would seem of little use to have them reflect *merely either* (with (B)) that a life of ruling alone, which in any event they cannot have since they have already been philosophers, would be worse for them, *or* (with (A)) that a life of philosophy with no obligation of justice to rule, which equally they cannot have in their circumstances, would be better for them. To be relevant to their choice, such reflections would have to be supplemented by some judgment about the relative values of the two alternatives that actually are open to them. I think we must therefore conclude that the two alternatives that the rulers assess must be, as continuations of their lives to that point, going down to the city to govern it, and continuing to philosophize.

That given, it is evident what the judgment of the rulers is held by Plato to be. It is that *for them* continuing to philosophize is better. This interpretation seems to me to be supported by 520e4–521a2 (especially by the word ἀμείνω, “better“, with the Dative, τοῖς μέλλουσιν ἄρξειν, “for those who are going to rule”). Here the contrast is made with rulers in ordinary cities, who unlike Plato's rulers approach their ruling “lacking their own private goods (ἀγαθῶν ἰδίων)” and thinking that they must “snatch the good (τὰγαθὸν ἀρπάζειν)” from the city (521a4–6; cf. 520d1). The same conclusion seems to me to be indicated by 519d8–9. After Socrates has said that the rulers must not be allowed to continue philosophizing indefinitely but must govern the city, Glaucon asks, “Shall we then not do them an injustice, and make them live a worse life when they could live a better one (ποιήσομεν χεῖρον ζῆν, δυνατόν αὐτοῖς ὄν ἀμείνον)?”. Socrates immediately replies to the charge of injustice, in the first clause, by saying that the requirement of governing is indeed just. But he says nothing to deny the presupposition underlying that charge, given in the second clause, that they are making the rulers live less well than they might.

But even if the points so far considered seem to support the present interpretation, it might still be argued that the interpretation forces Plato into a contradiction that

¹⁰ One might think that the word βίος, “life”, at 520e4 and 521b1, suggests a comparison of complete lives rather than continuation of their lives, but it is clear that the word need not mean a complete life (see, e.g., *Laws* 732e–733a).

he could scarcely have tolerated.¹¹ For he explicitly says that it is just for the rulers to return to govern the city (520e1, a6–c1), and he must presumably mean to imply by this that it would be unjust for them to refuse to do so. But in Book IV, at 443e–444a, he had held that an unjust action is one that upsets the harmonious and just condition of soul under which each of its parts performs its own function and none encroaches on the role of any other (443c–d). From these two passages taken together, it would seem to follow that a refusal to govern the city would necessarily upset the justice and the harmony of their souls. But if, as seems plausible, the harmonious condition of soul is identified or closely associated by Plato with happiness or well-being, as we shall see later, then it would seem to follow that the refusal to govern would necessarily make a ruler less well off. So if Plato held that the rulers, their situation being as it is, would be better off if they philosophized rather than governed, then he would seem to be contradicting the conclusion of this implication of his other statements.¹² Consequently, it might be argued, we have a powerful reason for not attributing to Plato the view that it would be better for the rulers that they continue to philosophize.

But the reasoning leading to the contradiction is by no means secure. There is in fact in Plato's account of justice and harmony in the soul a clear reason why he would not have to accept the conclusion that the rulers' souls would be made less harmonious, in the relevant sense specified in Book IV, by philosophizing rather than ruling. Unlike all of the psychological conflicts which in Book IV lead Plato to postulate the various "parts" of the soul (435c–441c), the deliberation over whether to philosophize or to govern would have to involve considerations and aims arising from within a *single* part of the soul. For Plato clearly assigns to reason both the desire to philosophize and the desire to order and manage other things, including the city, in accordance with what it apprehends about the Good.¹³ Perhaps Plato *ought* to have postulated a distinction within reason between a part that wishes to philosophize and a part that wishes to govern and order the city, but he did not do so.¹⁴ Accordingly, any conflict that there might be between these two desires could not be manifested, in his psychology, as a lack of harmony among parts of the soul, and consequently there appears to be no way in which a decision to act in accordance with one desire or the other could give rise to the sort of disharmony that Book IV associates with injustice of soul. This conclusion may seem surprising, but it can be made more understandable by considering it in another way. The

¹¹ For sharpening this issue I am again indebted to Irwin and the referee.

¹² There is a variant of this argument according to which unjustly refusing to rule would be, not a cause of a less good condition of soul, but a symptom of it. This variant can be met by a response analogous to the one given.

¹³ See, e.g., Raphael Demos, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*?", *Philosophical Review*, 73 (1964), 395–398, reprinted in Vlastos, ed., *Plato II*, Garden City 1971, pp. 52–56; Vlastos, "The Theory of Social Justice", p. 33; and my *CPR*, pp. 23–24, 47–48, 55–56, 191–196.

¹⁴ The distinction would of course be similar to the one formulated by Aristotle between theoretical and practical wisdom, and to the Kantian one between theoretical and practical reason.

harmony of soul that is in question in Book IV involved, as seemingly both a necessary and a sufficient condition (443e6–7, 442c5–d3), the governing and ordering of the other parts of the soul by the reason. What we now see in Book VII, however, is a question about what the rule of the soul by reason actually *consists in*, given that there is the possibility, which the case of the rulers alone introduces, of two conflicting aims that reason might have. That is, the rule of the soul by reason might consist in the soul's being so ordered that the person philosophizes as much as possible; or rule of the soul by reason might consist in the soul's being so ordered that the person engages in wise and philosophically enlightened ruling of the city. But both of these things would be consistent with harmony of the soul *as specified within Book IV*.

For this reason, I think that it is important that in Book VII when Plato explains why it is just for the rulers to govern (520a6–c1), he says nothing about the harmony of the soul, but rests his argument entirely on the claim that the rulers owe recompense to the city for the education they have received. I take this to be substantial evidence that he did not think that he could invoke the notion of justice in the soul from Book IV to play a role in his argument. Of course, *we* might think that he *ought* to have extended his notion of harmony of the soul to take account of the conflict between philosophizing and governing, and that he ought to have said that refusing to govern would, and governing would not, introduce disharmony into the soul by producing disharmony within reason. But on closer consideration, it seems to me by no means obvious that Plato could have justified such a line of thought. For given only that reason contains desires both to philosophize and to order things in accordance with the good, it is by no means clear why acting on the one desire should produce any more disharmony within the soul than acting on the other. The mere fact that the two desires coexist and cannot both be equally satisfied does not make either one of them any more or less disharmony-provoking than the other. If it be argued that not governing would be unjust, and that we have it from Book IV that an unjust act causes disharmony in the soul, then the rejoinder is that, as already observed, the disharmony explained in Book IV is a disharmony among the parts of the soul, and the unjust acts there in question are the sort that will produce that disharmony (see 443a, where the examples given are thefts, temple-robberies, and public and private betrayals). The extension of this idea in the suggested way to the situation in Book VII is not automatic. It requires argument, it seems to me, and not merely an unargued assumption, that disharmony would in fact be produced in a ruler's soul by a failure to govern. And Plato gives no such argument. On the contrary, he maintains quite clearly, as I think we have seen, that philosophizing is a better activity than governing. If it be asked where he got this assumption, then the answer seems clear enough: it is a constant theme in his doctrine that philosophizing is the best and most pleasant activity there can be. So I conclude that as far as Plato's psychology is concerned, we have no reason to think that he is committed to holding that the rulers' souls would suffer disharmony, and hence decreased happiness, by their continuing to philosophize rather than governing the city.

This conclusion is strengthened, I think, if we look at the matter from the viewpoint of the ruler who is at the point of deciding whether to philosophize or

govern. If we do not assume in advance that his or her decision must be made on the basis of self-interest, and ask what the relevant considerations would on Plato's view plausibly be, I do not think that we find anything forcing us to say that governing, which is what Plato says they will do, must necessarily commend itself to them on grounds of their own good. We have ruled out the idea that failure to govern would end the opportunity to philosophize, or put an end to the city. We have also ruled out the idea that failure to govern would introduce disharmony into the soul. Still, it seems that in contemplating their decision, the rulers might well be dismayed at the thought of not aiding the city or repaying it for educating them. Fair enough. But the question is what the nature is of this dismay. I do not see that anything in Plato's remarks requires us to picture it as regret that *their own interests* will suffer. Instead, it seems to me more likely, given Plato's comparison of the activities of philosophizing and governing for the rulers themselves, as explained above, that their regret would be for the interests of the city and its other citizens rather than their own.¹⁵

Moreover, some of Plato's language seems to me materially to support this conclusion. In 540b, he says that the rulers will think of ruling as necessary but not "fine" (καλόν): By itself this phrase seems to me ambiguous. But he also says that the rulers will rule "for the sake of the city (τῆς πόλεως ἕνεκα)", and although this might conceivably indicate a goal of the rulers that is an instrument for or a part of their own good, I cannot see anything in the passage to indicate such a thought. On the contrary, 540a9–b1 seems to me to tell against it. Here Plato says that using the Good as a paradigm, the rulers will "order both the city and its citizens and themselves (καὶ πόλιν καὶ ἰδιώτας καὶ ἑαυτοὺς κοσμεῖν)". If the word "order" here has reference to the ordering of a city or a soul as explained in Book IV, as I think it must (cf. 539d4), then we seem to be without any indication that the ordering of their own souls will take any kind of precedence, in the minds of the rulers, over the ordering of the city and the other people in it. Moreover I think the same thought is present in Plato's original introduction of this issue of a ruler's reason to rule, in Book I, 346e–347e. This is the passage where, as we saw above, Plato disparages the state of a philosopher who is forced to live under the rule of those who are less able (347b–d): This passage might appear at first sight to support the view that the ruler in Plato's city who refuses to govern would thereby be worse off. Closer inspection reveals, however, that the passage has precisely the contrary import. Plato says that good men engage in governing through fear of the "penalty" of otherwise being ruled by worse men (347b5–d2). So you might think that he means that any good man is himself worse off if he or she does not govern. But Plato immediately says that *if* a city of good men should arise, they would compete to avoid ruling as men now do to rule (d2–4). It is quite clear that under this supposition, the "penalty" for not ruling would not be in force. Even more important, Plato next says that in such a case it would be clear that the true ruler considers not his own advantage (συμφέρον) but that of the ruled (d4–6), and that "anyone

¹⁵ I do not here enter into Plato's view of the relation between the interest of "the city" and the interest of the people in it, as formulated, e.g., by Vlastos, *op. cit.*,

with knowledge would prefer to be benefited ($\omega\phi\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$) by someone else rather than take the trouble to benefit someone else" (d6–8). Even if Book I is agreed to stand somewhat apart from the rest of the *Republic*, I would say that the combined effect of this passage and those in Book VII, including those in 540a–b just discussed, weighs very heavily in favor of the view that Plato's rulers are not held to serve their own good by governing the city.

III

If we hold that in making their choice the rulers are not motivated to do what is good for themselves, then of course we would like to know what they are motivated by. As I said at the start, I think that they are motivated to do what is good *simpliciter*. I have not begun to explain what this means, but before I try to give any explanation, I must deal with yet other problems that may be raised against the interpretation of the rulers' situation that I am defending. These difficulties arise mainly from passages in Books III, IV, and V.

In Book III, 412d–414b, Plato might be taken to imply that the good of the ruler coincides exactly with the good of the city as a whole.¹⁶ Here, describing the selection of rulers from among the auxiliaries, Plato says that one must love ($\phi\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$) a thing if one thinks that the same things are advantageous ($\sigma\upsilon\mu\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\iota\nu$) to both it and oneself and that its faring well ($\epsilon\upsilon\ \pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\tau\epsilon\iota\nu$) coincides with one's own (412d); and for this reason the rulers must be people who will eagerly do only what they think is advantageous to the city (412d–e), and will retain the opinion that one must do ($\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\ \pi\omicron\iota\epsilon\iota\nu$) what is best for the city (412e, 413c): In Book V, 461e–465b, there is a somewhat different thought. The rulers are described as standing to each other somewhat as the parts of the body, and as not using the word "mine" to refer

¹⁶ Kraut, *op. cit.*, using these passages, argues that Plato in effect makes a distinction between a ruler's "proper" interest and his "extended" interest, which includes the interest of the city and his fellow citizens and fellow rulers. His claim is that although the rulers may sacrifice their proper interest in governing the city, they advance their extended interest. This is an attractive idea, but it seems to me to meet serious difficulties. First, it does not explain satisfactorily why a ruler ought rationally to pursue his extended rather than his proper interest. Kraut carefully gives Plato's description in Books III and V of the training that will make the prospective rulers think of the city's interest as coinciding with their own, but this, as I shall argue, comes before any conflict between the two breaks out, as it does in Book VII, and so does not help to explain why a ruler should think that when the conflict does break out, he will be pursuing his interest by pursuing his extended rather than his rational interest. Second, Kraut's account does not seem to me to square with what I have argued to be the indications in Book VII that the ruler choose the life that is less good for themselves.

to their own individual well-being or pleasure, but rather to regard the fortunes of each other as tantamount to their own. This idea involves a coincidence of the good of a ruler with that of the other rulers rather than that of the city, but at 465b8–10 the connection of the good of the city with that of the rulers as a group is made fairly clearly.

But there seem to me to be substantial reasons against taking these passages to be in conflict with the interpretation of Book VII that I have defended. The crucial fact is that Books III and V describe very different stages of both the rulers' careers from the one described in Book VII. Both of the former portray them as they are selected from among the whole group of guardians, including auxiliaries, before they have entered the intellectual phase of their training, and well before they have entered the philosophical part, when they first come to a full understanding of the Good. I take this to be important, because I take it that only at the philosophical stage of their training do the rulers come to comprehend the notion of what is good *simpliciter* and to regard it as overriding one's own good. In Book V, a step is taken toward the eventual understanding of the Good in Book VII, by the partial obliteration in each ruler's mind of the distinction between what is good for himself and what is good for the other rulers, but the rulers do not extend their notion of the good farther than to include their fellow rulers (465b8–10 is not an inference that the rulers themselves draw). At the stage, then, there is no reason to think that the rulers have the full grasp of the Good that is their final goal. Moreover, since they have not yet engaged in philosophy (not until they reach fifty, according to 540a), they are not yet in a position to realize that there is a sacrifice of their good involved in governing, and indeed, so far as they are concerned earlier, there is no such sacrifice yet. So before the final stage of the rulers' education, it is true both (a) that they are without the knowledge that would make them aware of a divergence between their good and that of the city, and (b) that as far as their condition to date is concerned, there is no such divergence. Accordingly there seems to me no reason to take Books III and V, placed in their proper context, to conflict with what is, as I take it, maintained in Book VII.

It is Book IV, however, that presents the most serious-seeming difficulties for the interpretation of Book VII that I am advocating. For it has been urged that in Book IV, Plato both holds that a person's self-interest is the only rational ground for action, and that he presents the conclusions of this book in such a way as to preclude, if he is to be at all consistent, any later suggestion that there might be good reason for a ruler to do anything detrimental to his or her self-interest. I shall attempt to show that these views are mistaken.

Although in Book IV and elsewhere Plato urges that reason should rule in the soul on grounds of self-interest, I do not think that he ever says anything to suggest that reason can never bring any other considerations to bear. Irwin says¹⁷ that in Book IV, "Plato identifies

¹⁷ Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 641.

the soul's best condition with the one that benefits it (cf. συμφέροντος, 442c7)". In Grube's translation, which seems to me accurate enough, the sentence runs:

And we shall call him wise because of that small part of himself which ruled in him and made those declarations, which possesses the knowledge of what is beneficial to each part, and what is to the common advantage of all three.¹⁸

I do not see here the identification of the soul's best condition that Irwin mentions, or any implication that "a choice of something against my interest could not be approved by a properly-working rational part".¹⁹ It seems to me that what Plato says here, which is perfectly consistent with the interpretation I am defending, is that to be wise is to be ruled by that part of the soul that declares what is fearful and what is not (the allusion is to c1–3), and knows what is in the interest of the parts of the soul both severally and collectively. It seems to me that, on Plato's view, the reason does indeed have this knowledge. What seems to me lacking here is any claim that this is *all* that the reason has, or that knowledge of what benefits it is the only ground for calling a soul wise. Likewise, when Irwin says that in 445a5–b4, "Glaucón agrees that an unjust life is not worth living (βιωτόν) when it lacks health",²⁰ it seems to me that this is both true and consistent with what we have seen in Book VII. For the notion of health in the soul here has just been explained simply in terms of which parts of the soul will dominate and be dominated (444b–d), without any implication, so far as I am able to see, that all considerations beside self-interest must either yield to it or be absent from reason. There is no reason to deny that the soul of the ruler who sacrifices self-interest by ruling rather than continuing to philosophize is indeed healthy in precisely the sense that he has in mind here.

I would agree that *if* all we had of the *Republic* were Books I–IV, then if we attempted to pin Plato down on what considerations operate within the reason, we would have no evidence for anything but some kind of self-interest, and so would not know about any rational consideration weighing against self-interest. But then too we would not know all he thinks there is to know about self-interest either, since we would not know much about his view of the pleasures of philosophizing and a number of other important things. But given that we do have the books after Book IV, and given that there is a clear reason why

¹⁸ Plato: *The Republic*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis 1974.

¹⁹ Irwin, *ibid.*

²⁰ Irwin, *ibid.*

Plato would wish to wait until them to explain the notion of goodness that can override considerations of self-interest, I do not think that from the absence of that notion from Book IV, we can infer that there he thinks that a properly working reason must always choose according to self-interest. The point is that by the end of Book IV we still are lacking important parts of his view about what reason does and how it works.

But there is a further argument that might be advanced for saying that Book IV rules out the present interpretation of Book VII. For many commentators believe both that at the end of Book IV, Plato purports to have given a complete argument that being just is in one's interest, and also that just before the end of the book, in 444a–e, Plato does present an argument that he would regard as sound for that conclusion. If these things were true, then although they might not absolutely preclude his going on in Book VII to cite one case in which acting justly was not in one's interest they would still make that eventuality far less likely.

It seems to me, however, that the aforementioned account of the end of Book IV can be seen, in spite of its currency, to be incorrect. I think that it can be shown that Plato there neither *claims* to have given a complete argument that it is good for a person to be just (nor indeed a complete argument of *any* kind for being just), nor *gives* an argument for that conclusion. Let me now try at some length to show this.

As it happens, 444e7–445b8, the passage crucial to determining what Plato claims to have shown in Book IV, is in need of discussion anyway, apart from present concerns, because different translators give quite different ideas of what it means, apparently noticing only rarely that it is problematical. Some give the impression that Plato says that he has now shown that it is better for a person to be just than unjust, while others give the impression that, having treated certain vital preliminary issues, he is now about to begin the main task of showing this. It seems to me that the latter view can be shown to be right.

At first sight, the case might seem straightforward. The text seems to present us with Socrates saying that we must consider whether it profits one “to act justly, to engage in fine pursuits and be just” (Grube's translation), Glaucon replying that the issue seems laughable, given that justice is a kind of health (444d–e), and Socrates then saying that although it is indeed laughable, we must not give up the effort to show that justice does indeed profit. That is in fact in rough outline what I think the passage does say, and I think therefore that it does imply that the investigation into whether justice profits is in a

sense only now being launched in earnest. But certain difficulties have to be cleared up before we may rest assured about the matter.

The most severe difficulty arises from 445b5–7. One possible reason for Glaucon's saying, just before, that it is laughable to investigate the matter might be that this has already been proved, and interpreters adopting the opposite interpretation to mine have taken these lines to confirm that view. Grube's translation typifies this way of taking them:

Ridiculous indeed, I said, but as we have reached the point from which we can see the state of these things most clearly, we must not give up.

If the idea is in fact that we can already "see the state of these things most clearly", (οἷόν τε σαφέστατα), then it suggests that the demonstration has already been given, and if this is so, then of course there must be room for doubt that we are only now on the point of beginning the demonstration. But there are two obstacles to taking the passage in this way. The first lies in the words ἀλλ' ὁμως. Clearly they have adversative force. Given that Socrates has already said that we must investigate whether justice profits the just person (e7–a4), and Glaucon has replied that this investigation seems to be laughable (a5–b4), it seems hard not to take the adversative phrase, following the admission that it is (or perhaps seems) laughable, and introducing the statement that they must not give up, to indicate that they really *are* going to engage in just the investigation, laughable or not, that Socrates mentioned. But if they are going to engage in that investigation, and if furthermore they must not give or become tired, then it would be very odd, to say the least, if they were gathering their strength for an investigation into an issue that they have already settled. Such a situation would seem to call instead for a remark like, "Well, yes, it is ridiculous, but remember that we only have one demonstration, and our adversaries may require another, stronger one".

I think that the foregoing consideration is decisive, but only if we can also explain what is meant by the words that Grube and others take to mean, "we have reached the point from which we can see the state of these things most clearly". Here there are two possible responses. The first is that even if this translation would be correct, it needs not mean that we have already got a demonstration of the profitability of justice. It can equally well mean that we have reached a point from which we are *able* to see the state of things, *i.e.*, able to gain a demonstration on the matter, though we have not yet done so. Even on this way of translating the lines, this way of taking them is recommended by the argument of the previous paragraph, and es-

pecially the exhortation not to become weary. But it seems to me impossible even that this would be the correct translation, or the correct way of construing the grammar of the passage. Shorey's correct translation reads,

"Yes, it is absurd", said I, "but nevertheless, now that we have won to this height, we must not grow weary in endeavoring to discover with the utmost possible clearness that these things are so."

Shorey appends the remark, "ὄσον ... κατιδεῖν is generally taken as exegetic of ἐνταῦθα. It is rather felt with οὐ χρῆ ἀποκάμνειν."²¹ From Burnet's punctuation, with a comma after ἐληλύθαμεν and none after ἔχει, it appears to me that he construed the sentence in the same way. Grammatically it is far the easier way. There is nothing abnormal about ὄσον as adverbial after οὐ χρῆ ἀποκάμνειν, nor about οἷόν τε (*sc.* εἶναι) as exegetic of ὄσον.²² On the other hand, ὄσον as exegetic of ἐνταῦθα is grammatically very peculiar, and has understandably called forth efforts to alter the text — though unnecessary ones, given the obvious other interpretation of ὄσον.²³ Under the most straightforward construal, therefore, the text says, not that we must avoid weariness *because* we can see the state of things as clearly as possible, but that we must avoid weariness *until* the point of being able to see the state of things as clearly as possible.

To clinch the point, just consider the impact of the phrase οἷόν τε σαφέστατα on the opposing interpretation. Why must we avoid weariness? On that interpretation, it can only be because, although we have our demonstration of the profitability of justice, we need another one or a better one or at the very least a clarification of the one we already have. Where could we, on such a view, now have arrived? Perhaps to a point where we can see the state of things clearly, or even very clearly indeed. But to a point where we can see it οἷόν τε σαφέστατα, as clearly as possible? That seems clearly impossible.²⁴ So

²¹ Paul Shorey, trans., *Republic*, vol. I, rev. ed., London 1937, vol. II, London 1935; see vol. I, p. 420, n.d.

²² On the infinitive with ὄσον see Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. ed., Cambridge/Mass. 1956, secs. 2003, 2497 (not, by the way, 1086–1087, 1091, which are irrelevant, contrary to what one might suppose from the note *ad loc.* by John Adam, ed., *The Republic of Plato*, ed. 2, Cambridge (England) 1963), and LSJ s. v. ὄσος, IV. 1.

²³ See Adam *ad loc.*, who keeps ὄσον, and holds without any argument or parallel that ἐνταῦθα here can mean ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον.

²⁴ And because it is clearly impossible, Grube, like other translators who interpret the passage as he does, tries to soften and alter the force of οἷόν τε σαφέστατα, by translating it "most clearly" instead of "as clearly as possible".

again we are evidently far better off taking ὄσον ... ἀποκάμνειν as Shorey does, and recognizing that we have not yet had our demonstration of the profitability of justice.

But at this point we have to deal with two problems. One is to explain what is laughable about the attempt to show that justice is profitable (445a5 with b5), if it is not that the demonstration has already been given. The other is to make clear that what was already offered in 444a–e is not the very demonstration in question. Let us take the latter problem first.

The usual construal of this argument holds that it is based on an alleged parallel between justice and health, of the type that Plato sometimes appeals to elsewhere (e.g., at *Gorgias* 504a–505b). On this account, the argument really amounts to nothing beyond saying that justice is like health and health is good for one, so justice must be good for one.²⁵ This is such a poor argument that one might well hope fervently that Plato did not advance it, at least not as his main demonstration that justice is beneficial. And in fact there is no such argument in the passage, nor indeed any other to the conclusion that justice is good for the person who has it. This fact is difficult to accept when one has the common interpretation firmly fixed in one's mind, but it seems to me that a careful examination of the passage makes the point clear.

In fact, the line of thought in 444a–e is this. Starting with conclusions already reached about what justice is, it attempts to derive characterizations of injustice (a10–b9) and of just and unjust action (c1–e5). Nowhere in the argument, and in particular not at its conclusion in 445e, is it explicitly said, let alone concluded, that being just or acting justly is good for a person. Indeed, words like ἀμείνων and λυσιτελεῖν, which would be required to make such a point, are absent from the passage altogether, and do not appear until 445a1, at the start of the passage just examined, which asks whether it profits a person to act justly, but does not conclude yet that it does. Instead, after saying that we now have discovered the just man, the just city,

²⁵ See, e.g., J. D. Mabbott, "Is Plato's *Republic* Utilitarian?", *Mind*, N.S. 46 (1937), 468–474, revised and reprinted in Vlastos, ed., *Plato II*, pp. 57–65, esp. pp. 61–62; Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*", Vlastos, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 66–95, esp. p. 69; Anthony Kenny "Mental Health in Plato's *Republic*", *The Anatomy of the Soul*, New York 1973, pp. 1–27, esp. 8 (though p. 9 suggests that the argument is only adumbrated rather than actually advanced); Annas, *op. cit.*, pp. 168–169.

and justice, Plato says that we must next examine injustice (a10–11):²⁶ This he does (b1–9), concluding that it is a condition of soul (contrary to what he has characterized justice as being) in which parts of the soul perform various functions not their own, and the natural roles of ruling and ruled parts are not observed (note φύσει in b4). Next he says that now that justice and injustice are clear, just and unjust action should be so too (c1–3). But Glaucon asks, “How so?” (c4), and in answer to this question the last phase of the argument is given (c5–e6).

Here, then, is how the argument of 444c5–e6 goes. (A) Socrates is made to say that just and unjust actions stand to the soul exactly as healthful and unhealthful things stand to the body. But Glaucon again expresses puzzlement (c5–7), and this fact indicates that, as is quickly confirmed, the parallel between justice and health is not simply being assumed as a premise of the argument, as is sometimes thought. (B) It is agreed as obvious that healthful things implant health and unhealthful things implant sickness (c8–9). (C) Accordingly, Socrates says, doing just things implants justice, and doing unjust things implants injustice (c10–d2). This again is not based on an assumed parallel of justice and health, but rather a thesis already maintained at 443e4–444a2.²⁷ (D) Socrates then says, drawing on a medical commonplace, that to produce health is to produce a state in which constituents of the body rule and are ruled in accordance with nature, and that to produce sickness is the reverse (d3–7). (E) Socrates then says that to implant justice is to bring about a state in which the constituents of the soul rule and are ruled in accordance with nature, and that to produce injustice is the reverse (d8–11): Once again, this is not derived from a parallel between justice and health, but is taken as a point argued for earlier, independently of any analogy with health (441e4–5, 443dc5, 444b4–5): (F) It is then *inferred* on this basis (ἔρα, d13) that virtue is a kind of health and beauty and good condition, and badness (κακία) is sickness and ugliness and weakness (d13–e3): Thus Plato argues for the analogy between virtue and health, on the ground that they are both conditions produced by things maintaining a natural order among constituents, respectively, of the soul and the body. (G) From this the conclusion is finally inferred, that because

²⁶ Why? Because all along the issue has concerned a comparison of justice and injustice, not merely an assessment of justice (357b1ff.).

²⁷ For present purposes it does not matter whether or not the explanation of just action there is intended as a stipulation about the use of expressions for “just action”; cf. I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, New York 1962, vol. I, pp. 282–283.

virtue has just been shown to be a kind of beauty, beautiful activities are conducive to virtue, and correspondingly base or ugly activities are conducive to badness.

Although it is clear what the conclusion of this argument is, there is some room to quarrel with the way in which Plato makes it. He has already said that a just person will consider "just and beautiful" (δικαίαν καὶ καλήν) that action that maintains the just condition of his soul (443e4–6): In 444a–e he is partly explaining the basis of that usage. But he also, in 444e4–6, seems to be advancing a further step, which is that beautiful (καλά) activities are conducive to virtue, and that all base or ugly activities are conducive to badness (κακία) of soul. This is part of his attempt to square his usage of the terms "just" and "unjust", in their primary application to a person's soul, with the ordinary usage that applies them primarily to actions — an attempt that has been criticized by Grote and Sachs.²⁸ But whether the attempt is at all successful or not, it is clear that this is what 444a–e is directly concerned with, not the effort to show that one is better off if one is just.

If, then, Plato does not after all give a full argument at the end of Book IV for saying that one benefits by being just, and likewise does not claim to have given such an argument, we can once again ask why he says (445a5 with b5) that the coming attempt to show that justice is profitable is laughable, if not because a demonstration of its conclusion has already been given. But in a sense the investigation obviously *is* laughable. Although the discussion of health has no probative force by itself, we can see as well as Glaucon did the kind of thing it plainly suggests, given Plato's account before it of what justice in the soul involves. It is evident that, on reasonable, though as yet unarticulated, Platonic assumptions, there is *something* good for a person about having a soul whose parts rule and are ruled — *i.e.*, whose motivations dominate and are dominated — in the way Plato has specified in his description of justice. Glaucon is made to share enough of Plato's outlook to be able to see that. But what neither Glaucon nor we can claim to see solely on the basis of the discussion to this point is exactly *what* is good about having a soul in this condition. That will not be possible until, first, the state of the just soul is more fully described in Books V–VII, together with the importance to that state of the

²⁸ Grote, *ibid.*, pp. 99–110, and David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*", *Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963), 141–158.

knowledge of the Good, and, second, until the state of the unjust soul is more fully described in Books VIII–IX (and also, I think, X).

Although I think that we can safely conclude that Book IV neither attempts to prove nor claims to have proved that justice benefits its possessor, and therefore we can also rest secure in the interpretation of Book VII expounded earlier, it will corroborate the point if we very briefly consider what Plato adds in later books, particularly Books VIII–IX, to what he has said in Book IV; in order to show that being just does make one better off. Book IV presents justice in the soul as the condition in which each of its parts performs its own natural function or task, and shows how it can be seen as an aspect of a kind of unity and harmony and lack of strife. But this kind of harmony among parts performing their functions is not all there is to happiness as it is construed by the end of Book IX. Nor ought it to be. What is added in Books VIII–IX is the idea that each part of the soul has, in addition to its proper function, also its own desires and its own pleasures that are largely consequent on the satisfaction of those desires. What Books VIII–IX argue for is not merely a connection between justice, as the performance by each part of its function, and some generalized harmony of functioning parts, which is all that Book IV gives us, but a connection between justice, as performance by each part of its function, and a certain kind of balance of *desires and pleasures*, under which the desires of one part will not block those of another part from their natural fulfillment, and the pleasures of one part will neither be squelched nor allowed to grow beyond their natural levels so as to interfere with those of other parts.²⁹ Whether one agrees or not with Plato's general approach to the concept of happiness or well-being, one can easily appreciate that what Books VIII–IX add to it is essential, and that what Book IV says about it is incomplete. Certainly it seems more reasonable to hold that happiness is a balance or harmony of desires and pleasures than to hold that it is, more abstractly, simply a harmony of functioning parts of whatever sort.³⁰ Thus, Books VIII–IX do add something substantial to Book IV on

²⁹ See *CPR*, pp. 213, 221, 223–224, 233. When I wrote *CPR*, however, I did not see the difference between VI and VIII–IX that I am not pointing out.

³⁰ I do think, however, that Plato closely connects, and comes close to identifying, the *goodness* of a person (or a city, or indeed virtually anything else) with a quite abstract kind of unity, or harmony among parts (see *CPR*, pp. 39–40, 110–111). This is of course something that Moore, to whom I compare Plato's views on goodness *infra*, does not do.

this topic, and something that on philosophical grounds is much needed.

I think that it is reasonable to conclude from this discussion of Book IV, therefore, that that book contains no obstacle to saying, as I have tried to give some grounds for doing, that later parts of the *Republic* introduce another consideration beside self-interest into the sphere of considerations entertained by reason.

But there is finally another objection to the present interpretation of Book VII, arising not so much from any particular passage in any particular book, but from the general impression given throughout the *Republic* that Plato is trying to persuade us all to be just by showing us that it is in our interest to be so. Surely, it may be objected, the pressure of the exception exemplified by the rulers would undercut that effort. But it seems to me that this objection loses its force when it is considered clearly. For remember that according to the present interpretation, the exception is the only one that Plato admits to the general rule that one benefits by being just, and moreover it can apply only to those people who are philosopher-rulers in an ideal city, at the stage of having comprehended the good at the end of their training. But they, if such there be, would be aware of the exception without reading the *Republic*, and would according to Plato decide to govern the city; whereas any people for whom the *Republic* would be a useful persuasion could hardly be in a position where the exception would apply to them. For all of these other people, even if they were incapable of appreciating the fact, Plato thinks it holds true that the more just they are the better off they are. So there seems to be no call to say that the exception constituted by the rulers undercuts the aim of the work at all.

IV

I shall conclude with a short discussion, inevitably incomplete and also fairly conjectural, of the notion that I have attributed to Plato under the label of the "good *simpliciter*", and of his views of the relations of that notion to that of what is good *for* some person.

A first approximation of the notion can be gained for contemporary readers by recalling some views of Moore, who evidently thought (rightly, in my opinion) that he owed them to Plato.³¹ Moore contends

³¹ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge (England) 1903, pp. 96–105, and esp. p. 98. For a helpful discussion of some relevant aspects of Plato's notion of the

that the relative notion of a thing's being good *for* so-and-so, as opposed to the non-relative notion of a thing's being good (*simpliciter*, as I have put it), really makes no sense. The only sense he will grant to saying that something, such as the pleasure experienced by so-and-so, is good for so-and-so is that it is good *and* is *in* so-and-so, or in so-and-so's mind, which really dispenses with the relative notion of goodness, and keeps only the relativity expressed by the word "in". Moore's reason for holding this position seems to be based on his concept of what it is to have a reason for something, and his connection of goodness to that concept. He thinks that if so-and-so's pleasure can legitimately be said to be good, then *anyone* must equally have reason to promote it. If we could say that a thing was good for X in the sense usually intended, Moore thinks, then we would be implying that it was reasonable only for X to promote it, without implying that everyone equally had reason to promote it. But Moore clearly thinks that it cannot strictly be reasonable for one person to promote something without its being equally reasonable for anyone to promote it. In effect, Moore is denying that the notion of reasonableness can properly be relativized to individuals, and is insisting that the notion of goodness should be tied to a non-relative notion of reasonableness. So he concludes that the idea of something's being good for one person but not for another, strictly taken, makes no sense.³²

good, see G. Santas, "The Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic*", *Philosophical Inquiry*, 2 (1980), 374–403.

³² Moore was criticized for these views by C. D. Broad, "Certain Features in Moore's Ethical Doctrines", P. A. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, LaSalle 1942, pp. 43–67; see esp. pp. 43–57, with Moore's reply, *ibid.*, pp. 611–615, and also Broad, "G. E. Moore's Latest Published Views on Ethics", *Mind*, N.S., Vol. LXX (1961), 435–457, esp. 455–457. Related issues were discussed more recently by W. D. Falk, "Morality, Self, and Others", Hector Castaneda and George Nakhnikian, eds., *Morality and the Language of Conduct*, Detroit 1963, pp. 25–66, and in William K. Frankena, "Recent Conceptions of Morality", *ibid.*, pp. 1–21, esp. pp. 8–11, 11–12, and still more recently again in such writings as Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, Oxford 1970, and Bernard Williams, "Criticism of Utilitarianism", in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Cambridge (England) 1973. Discussion of Moore's views about goodness has shown signs of coming back into fashion, especially in connection with related problems about objectivity, subjectivity, and points of view; see, e.g., the defense of a version of the Platonic-Moorean type by Donald H. Regan, "Against Evaluator Relativity: A Response to Sen", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12 (1983), 93–112, and the response by Amartya Sen, *ibid.*, 113–132. In Platonic discussions it has also appeared in Sarah Waterlow, "The Good of Others in Plato's *Republic*", *Proceedings of the Aristotel-*

It seems to me that Plato's notion of the good has in common with Moore's the idea that goodness, in the strict sense (as will be explained shortly), is not a relative notion, as that of what is good for so-and-so is, but absolute, and is likewise reasonable equally for everyone to promote. In Plato's view, I think, a full understanding of the notion involves an understanding of this non-relative notion, and a recognition of the way in which it overrides (as will also be explained shortly) what is merely good for a particular person, such as oneself. It must be admitted that the central parts of the *Republic*, notably Books VI and VII, do not spell out this idea, and so one must be cautious in using what evidence there is. One might appeal, as an explanation of his not expounding it more clearly, to the fact that he says that the notion is very difficult to grasp (505d–e), and rather than simply laying out his views of it in plain terms, insists that even his rulers can comprehend it only after a long course of preparation and philosophical training. But of course one can hardly defend a particular interpretation of the notion simply by saying that Plato found the notion too difficult to expound clearly. Some more positive evidence is obviously required.

With all due hesitation, I would say that support is forthcoming from the following consideration (I hesitate not least because a full treatment of this matter would require attention to other works, and I am here confining myself to the *Republic*). First, it seems undeniable that the rulers are said to govern using the Good as a paradigm, and that this consists in trying to make the city as good as possible, not, as we have seen, in trying to produce as much good for themselves as they can. But we must remember that for Plato the Form of the Good is meant to be the property exemplified by all cases of goodness, not only those expressed in terms of profit, advantage, interest and the like, which seem to us manifestly relative notions, but also those cases consisting in the possession of virtue or virtues, as when such a thing as a city is said to be good (e.g., 427e, 433c–d). This seems strange to us, who are accustomed to regarding these two sorts of case as exhibiting different uses of the term "good", but that is plainly not how Plato saw the matter.³³ So it seems most likely that trying to cause the Good to be exemplified means primarily trying to produce things that are good, not for oneself or in that sense from one's own point of view, but in a non-relative way, or, as it were, not from a particular

ian Society, LXXIII (1972–1973), 19–36, esp. p. 31–35, and Annas, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 322–334.

³³ See *CPR*, pp. 46–47, 176–177, 191–195.

perspective.³⁴ And if this is so, then it seems that the Good which is thus being exemplified is most likely to be a non-relative sort of goodness.

The question next arises how we are to understand the connection in Plato's view between relative uses of the word "good" and the non-relative use in which it is associated with the Form of the Good. Although I can discuss this issue by no means fully, I think that the most plausible account involves using a certain general interpretation of Plato's theory of Forms which has been elaborated in recent times by Owen and Vlastos, according to which the Form *F* bears the predicate "*F*" without "qualification", including particularly certain relational qualifications, whereas sensible objects that are *F* bear the predicate only with a qualification.³⁵ On this account, for example, the Form of the Beautiful is beautiful without qualification, whereas beautiful sensible objects are beautiful only with certain qualifications, e.g., in certain circumstances or relations or at certain times or places. The analogous claim would hold for the Good. But it is part of Plato's theory that an understanding of the use of a predicate in application to sensible objects is dependent on the understanding of the predicate as applied to the Form.³⁶ At the same time, he maintains that something to which the predicate "*F*" applies unqualifiedly can be said to be "really" (ὄντως) and "strictly" (ἀκριβῶς) *F*, whereas the sensible objects that are qualified *F* are not so (see esp. 476d–477a, 478b–479e): It is not hard to see in these ideas the suggestion that — to be quite impressionistic — the notion of something's being good *for* so-and-so is a sort of vague version of the notion of a thing's being good *simpliciter*, which is (and would seem to us if we could grasp it fully) a clear and precise notion. This is quite different from Moore's view, that the former notion really makes no sense (cf. n. 31): It is not, on the other hand, a very clear suggestion, and I doubt that we can

³⁴ For a contrasting view, see esp. Reiner, *op. cit.*, who holds that Plato's view of goodness is fundamentally perspectival (in my rough sense), in spite of its close links with the notion of καλόν, which Reiner argues is a non-perspectival notion in Plato (rightly, I think, in view of *Smypp.* 210e *sqq.*).

³⁵ See Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed., London 1901, pp. 193–194. More recently see, e.g., G. E. L. Owen, "A Proof in the Περὶ Ἰδεῶν", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1957, Pt. 1, 103–111; Gregory Vlastos, "Degree of Reality in Plato", R. Bambrough, ed., *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, New York 1965, pp. 1–19; Alexander Nehamas, "Plato on the Imperfection of the Sensible World", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12 (1975), 105–117.

³⁶ See esp. *Phaedo* 72–76 with *Rep.* 523–525.

make it clear without a full understanding of Plato's view of the relation between Forms and sensibles. For although the contrast between a qualified and an unqualified application of a predicate certainly seems to represent something that he had in mind, much more would have to be said to show with real clarity how it would illuminate the relation between the two uses of "good".³⁷

Still we can have a rough sense of why Plato thought that the exemplification of the Good by the city and what benefits it is somehow more important and more worthy of pursuit than the exemplification of the Good in what benefits a particular ruler. For certainly something seems right about the idea that a "wider" perspective judges what is good for the city as a whole than judges what is good for an individual or group within it. And I think one can see how it could be thought that what is judged from this "wider" perspective is somehow closer to what is judged to attach to the Form of the Good when it is judged good *simpliciter*. The notion is roughly that the more "broadly" the Good is exemplified, the closer one comes to an unqualified exemplification of it such as one finds in the Form.³⁸ Now given that the more unqualified exemplification is the more "real" or "genuine" one, and given too that (as Plato clearly held³⁹), the more genuine exemplification of something itself rationally desirable is more worthy of promotion than a less genuine exemplification, it follows well enough that promoting what is good for the city will be more worthy of being promoted than what is merely good for an individual in it.⁴⁰ Obviously

³⁷ The crucial question is whether he thought that the introduction of "qualifications" to the application of a predicate changed the meaning of the predicate, and if so, how the relation between the two meanings should be explained. It is clear that this was a controversial matter in the Academy: see G. E. L. Owen, "Logic and Metaphysics in Some Early Works of Aristotle", I. Düring and G. E. L. Owen, eds., *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*, Göteborg 1960, pp. 163–190. I believe that this issue, and related issues about the way in which predicates apply to Forms unqualifiedly — which I think Plato equates to their applying non-perspectively — is importantly elucidated by the results of E. N. Lee, in W. H. Werkmeister, ed., *Patterns in Plato's Thought*, Assen 1976.

³⁸ The notion that "broader" exemplifications are more desirable, *ceteris paribus*, than "narrower" ones is in effect relied on by Demos, *op. cit.*, and Kraut, *op. cit.*, pp. 339, 341–342. The question I am raising is what this notion of breadth really comes to, and how it could be related to what it is rational to promote.

³⁹ See *Rep.* 585a–e with *CPR*, pp. 230–231.

⁴⁰ I take it that in Plato's view, exemplifying the Good in anything wider than a city would be far beyond human capacities especially given the human material that one would have to work with (*CPR*, pp. 83–84, 151–152). The demiurge of the *Timaeus*, on the other hand, could set his sights higher (29e–34b), and

all of these steps are in need of further elucidation,⁴¹ but their Platonic character seems clear enough, and they allow us to see how Plato might well hold the rulers would think that it was better, *simpliciter*, to govern the city than to do anything else that was good for themselves. It is not that they would think that asking what was good for oneself made no sense, as Moore maintained, but that posing *that* question, as opposed to the question what is good *simpliciter*, and making *it* the basis of one's decisions about what to do, involved employing a dim version of a concept that was both clearer, once one came to understand it, and more rationally important to see exemplified in the world, than the dim version that one previously focused on.

I need hardly reemphasize that this account of course must be partially conjectural, and arises from the need to piece together the sort of view that would have a chance of making sense of the things that Plato says. Still, it seems to me plausible and well supported as these things go. But what it sets out to explain seems to me more firmly established, and that is the idea that in *Republic VII*, with no contradiction from other parts of the work, Plato does describe his rulers as sacrificing their own good by their willingness to govern the city.

could produce something that more fully exemplified (and resembled) the Forms, at least collectively, than a human being could.

⁴¹ An important further task would be to explain how Plato might hope to make the transition, remarked on at the end of n. 6, *supra*, from the "attractive" notion of goodness to the "imperative" element of the notion of justice that he sometimes makes use of.