

CHAPTER 4

*Ethics and politics in Socrates' defense of justice**Rachana Kamtekar*I. ETHICS AND POLITICS IN SOCRATES'
DEFENSE OF JUSTICE

In the *Republic*, Socrates argues that justice ought to be valued both for its own sake and for the sake of its consequences (358a1–3). His interlocutors Glaucon and Adeimantus have reported a number of arguments to the effect that the value of justice lies purely in the rewards and reputation that are the usual consequence of being seen to be just, and have asked Socrates to say what justice is and to show that justice is always intrinsically better than is acting contrary to justice when doing so would win you more non-moral goods. Glaucon presents these arguments as renewing Thrasymachus' Book 1 position that justice is "another's good" (358b–c, cf. 343c), which Thrasymachus had associated with the claim that the rulers in any constitution frame laws to their own advantage and call these laws' prescriptions "justice" (338d–339e); Glaucon picks up this claim in his account of the founding of the terms of justice by social contract (359a–b). In reply, on the assumption that the justice in the soul is the same sort of thing as the (more abundant or at any rate more visible) justice in the city (368e–369a), a claim he will later justify in the Book 4 argument for the tripartition of the soul, Socrates first describes a city based on need and specialization (369b–372d), then introduces and elaborates the musical and physical education of the citizens (376c–402a, 403c–412b), and then identifies the four virtues, which he assumes he will find in such a city (427e). (Socrates assumes that justice is a virtue, a good-making feature, of a city;¹ however, this leaves open the question of the goodness of justice for the agent who acts justly.) According to Socrates, the city's wisdom consists in the rulers' knowledge of what is good for the whole, its courage in the military's preservation of true beliefs about what is to be feared and what is not, its moderation in the classes' agreement that the rulers should rule; and so its justice – the remaining virtue – in the fact that in it, each class does its

own job (433c).² After arguing that the individual soul is relevantly like the city in the number and character of their parts (435c–441c), Socrates concludes that the wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice of the individual soul are analogous in structure to those of the city; in particular, individual justice is the condition in which each part of the soul does its own job: reason ruling with knowledge of what is best for each part and the whole, and spirit obeying and allying with reason in the rule over appetite (441c–442b). This condition of justice turns out to be the healthy condition of the soul, which is intrinsically valuable, sufficient for the non-performance of unjust actions, and brought about by the performance of just actions; conversely, injustice is the soul's ill-health, a condition brought about by the performance of unjust actions (442e–443b, 444c–445b).

This summary of *Republic* 2–4's ambitious and elaborate argument in defense of justice may mask how much of that defense is devoted to politics, to describing the city and its coming-to-be: its origins in mutual need and the division of labor for efficient production of necessities, the expansion of this simple city to cater to the desire for luxuries, and especially the education of its guardians to purge these unnecessary desires, together occupy 61 out of a total 85 Stephanus pages of text. Why are these political proposals so extensive if Plato is only interested in the city as an analogue for the individual soul? And how does Socrates' definition of political justice as obtaining when each class performs its own function engage Thrasymachus' and Glaucon's specifically political claims about justice (that the laws that define justice in any constitution serve the interests of the rulers, that justice is the result of a social contract among the weak to neither harm nor be harmed)? Or if it does not engage these claims, then why not?

Scholars divide over the importance of politics in the *Republic*. To take only a few recent examples,³ Annas (1999, p. 88) reasons that while the ideal city is supposed to illuminate virtue, the overall argument's conclusion, that virtue is sufficient for happiness, does not depend on the city, "since the conditions of the ideal state do not form part of what the virtuous person needs to be happy." She concludes that the city's political details are "imaginative constructions rather than . . . serious matter for political discussion, never mind practical proposals" (p. 91). It seems true that if the account of the ideal city is to deserve the space Plato devotes to it in the *Republic*, it must play another role in the overall argument than that of claiming that the ideal city would facilitate the happiness of the just.

On the other side, Schofield's *Plato: Political Philosophy* (2006) takes the *Republic* as its central political text on the grounds that 'the dialogue contains most of Plato's most striking ideas in political philosophy' (p. 9),

which are taken seriously by Plato's later writings and by subsequent writers on politics, ancient as well as modern (pp. 9–13). Menn (2006) argues that the very title of the *Republic*, *Politeia* (already used by Aristotle), puts it in an established genre for describing the ideal constitution (or *polis'* way of life), and points out that the challenge to justice that sets the stage for Socrates' defense is Thrasymachus' claim that constitutions always serve the interests of the rulers,⁴ a claim with roots in the sophistic thought (voiced by Glaucon) that justice is society-relative or conventional. But we can grant all these points and observe that *Socrates* explicitly subordinates the political to the ethical argument when he gives as his reason for introducing the city that they will see justice more easily in the city and then be able to say what it is in the individual (368e–369a).⁵ Similarly, the tempting thought that individual and society shape one another,⁶ while clearly something Plato believed in (the account of the degeneration of societies and individual characters in Books 8 and 9 attests to this), does little to explain the particular use to which Plato puts the city in the argument of the *Republic*.

This chapter argues that the account of the ideal city in Socrates' defense of justice plays the role of connecting justice as a structural condition of the soul and just behavior. Having just reviewed Socrates' defense of justice in Books 2–4, in section 2 I revisit a classic worry that the defense is irrelevant and show that a proper appreciation of the role of the ideal city in the defense allows us to reply to it; then, in section 3 I raise a new worry that the defense is question-begging and show why it is not. Finally, in section 4, I draw out some methodological implications relevant to the controversy in Plato scholarship about the relative roles of ethics and politics in the argument of the *Republic*.

2. THE FALLACY OF IRRELEVANCE

In his classic paper “A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*,” David Sachs (1963, pp. 152–54) argues that in response to Thrasymachus' and Glaucon's and Adeimantus' demand that Socrates show the intrinsic value of just action, Socrates gives the irrelevant reply that it is intrinsically valuable to have a harmonious soul, which he claims is a just soul, assuming without argument that having a just soul suffices for the performance of just and only just actions, and not even bothering to claim that the person who performs just actions has a just soul.

We may begin by observing that Socrates does not hold that the person who performs just actions thereby has a just soul, and that is why he doesn't bother to claim it – although he does claim that performing actions of a

certain character accrues that character to the soul, thereby giving an indirect and psychologically plausible reason why unjust actions are not preferable to just actions. Further, as Sachs acknowledges, Glaucon and Adeimantus don't only challenge Socrates to show that it's better to act justly than unjustly; they also express an interest in the value of being just, i.e., of having a just disposition (cf., e.g., 358b, 361e). Still, Sachs is owed an explanation of what licenses Socrates' assumption that the harmonious-souled person will perform just actions and not unjust ones, and most scholarly responses to Sachs in Plato's defense have attempted such an explanation.

One explanation appeals to the psychology of virtue developed in the *Republic*. Socrates claims that strong desires for one type of thing result in correspondingly weaker desires for other things; thus, the lover of knowledge has little desire for the bodily goods that might motivate unjust actions (485b–487a). To this may be added that the lover of knowledge, upon seeing the harmonious arrangement of the Forms, will desire to imitate that arrangement; this would give him a positive incentive to behave justly (rather than merely to refrain from unjust actions) – not only because he wishes to accrue justice to his soul, but also because one is moved to imitate and reproduce what one loves (500c–d) (Kraut 1992, p. 328). Or, drawing on the motivational account in the *Symposium*, one might argue that reproducing what one values is the way one pursues immortal possession of the good, and what a harmonious- or just-souled person reproduces is just actions.⁷

A second explanation appeals to the content of the education a just person must have had. On this view, a proper education, such as the sort provided by the city Socrates is constructing in the *Republic*, is both necessary for one's soul-parts each to do its own thing, and sufficient for one to behave justly – as prescribed by the law.⁸ However, this response to the Sachs fallacy fails, because having education (especially the pre-rational education of *Republic* 2–3, which is likened to stamping an impressionable soul with beliefs, 377a–b) be the guarantor that the just person doesn't commit unjust actions raises Glaucon and Adeimantus' challenge to the rational choiceworthiness of just actions all over again. Why wouldn't a just person looking back on the education that made her psychologically unable to break the law at least wish that such an inhibition had not been inculcated in her? It's also worth noticing that this response conflates the dialectical context – in which Socrates must answer the challenge about the intrinsic choiceworthiness of justice – and the political construction being used to examine the question. An upshot of this conflation seems to be that

justice is not available to those who are not citizens of Plato's ideal city, that is, to all of us. Yet Socrates' defense of justice does not take the form, "establish the ideal city that you or your children may finally acquire a just soul and thus happiness!" Instead, when he is asked to comment on the possibility of the just city's coming into being (471c–472a), he replies that they investigated justice in the city in order to discover what justice is like, and that we will be happy insofar as we are most like the just person (472b–c), adding at the conclusion of Book 9 that a person of understanding will direct his efforts to attaining a just state of soul, which includes pursuing justice-promoting studies, *avoiding* politics unless his city's constitution is like his or divine luck intervenes (591b–592b).

But explanation appealing to the developed psychology of virtue is not without difficulties either, for that says why the just-souled person has reason to act justly rather than unjustly, and that the just soul everyone has reason to acquire is acquired by engaging in just actions. Yet what about Thrasymachus' worry that the actions we call just are simply those in accordance with the laws established by the rulers to their own advantage? At the end of Book 4 Socrates adduces conventionally unjust actions (*ta phortika*) to confirm (*bebaiōsametha*) his account of psychic justice as one in which each part does its own; his claim is that the psychically just person will not steal from temples, commit adultery, and so on; this he takes to confirm that it is still justice that the account transferred from city to soul is an account of (442e–443b). But Socrates' appeal to such easy cases doesn't seem sufficient, and certainly not sufficient to address Thrasymachus' concern. What if the temples are used to store wealth the rulers have expropriated by force from citizens? What if the prohibition on adultery conflicts with marriage practices that would produce better offspring for the city?

On Sachs' report, and in much subsequent scholarship, the ordinary unjust actions of 442e appear to be some kind of *deus ex machina*. This appearance arises out of Sachs' diagnosis of Plato's strategy in the *Republic*, according to which Book 1 shows that any definition in terms of action-types fails in the face of counterexamples, following which, subsequent books take justice to be a character-trait – which, fatally for the defense, Plato fails to connect adequately to just actions (157–58).

However, on examination it turns out that the Book 1 definitions of justice do not all fail because of counterexamples. Some do: for example, justice cannot be returning what you have borrowed, because in the case that the friend who loaned you a weapon and is now asking for it back is insane, returning what you have borrowed will harm him – but it can't be

just to harm your friend (331e–332a). Similarly, justice cannot be helping friends and harming enemies, for in the case that your friends are people you mistakenly believe to be good and your enemies people you mistakenly believe to be bad, justice would have to be the cause of your helping unjust people and harming just people – but how could justice be the cause of helping unjust people or harming just people (334b–e)? But to the reformulated definition – justice is (knowingly) helping friends who are good and harming enemies who are bad – Socrates objects that the harming clause would make justice be the cause of harming someone, that is, of making him worse in terms of human virtue, in a word, unjust, whereas surely justice can't be the cause of injustice (335b–d). This is not a counterexample; rather, the definition has failed because of the wrongness of the harming clause. If that clause is dropped, then the remainder, “help friends, where friends both are and are seen by you to be good,” survives. There is no sign that this rule admits of exceptions; its deficiency rather seems to be that it provides no guidance with respect to non-friends, and that even towards friends, it is too abstract to guide action (a similar problem obtains for the action-type definition of civic justice proposed by Socrates himself, i.e., doing one's own). The lack of guidance problem could be addressed by going into the reasons why the just person acts as he does towards friends and non-friends. A final point about the allegation that Plato retreats from action-types to character-traits in order to avoid counterexamples: counterexamples may also be avoided by specifying the contexts in which action-types are just.

Sachs' explanation for Socrates' change in focus from action-types to character-traits in giving an account of justice (i.e., this allows him to avoid the counterexamples he believes any definition in terms of action-types must face) is unduly uncharitable. The change is well-motivated by the fact that that action-types leave out agents' reasons for action, which are crucial to whether their actions are virtuous or only compatible with virtue. Evidence of Socrates' view that virtuous actions must be performed for the right reasons is found at 430b–c, where he contrasts the motivations underlying the law-abiding behavior of slaves and animals, on the one hand, and the (politically) courageous guardians of the ideal city, on the other (cf. *Phaedo* 68c–69a). While the former obey the law out of fear of punishment, the latter do so as a result of their education. It is true that the final definition of individual justice is a condition of the soul that makes no reference to action-types. But that definition can have been shaped all along by the consideration of just and unjust action-types, for our judgments that such-and-such an act is just or unjust are likely to be less controversial and more accurate than our initial accounts of what justice is.⁹

When we read the pages of Socrates' defense of justice in the light of Sachs' account of it, we should be struck by how much Socrates has to say about which action-types are just and unjust, and in general virtuous and vicious. For example, Book 2–3's censored stories about gods and heroes say what actions are virtuous and vicious. Some of the stories of Homer, Hesiod and the other poets, such as Hesiod's account of the parricidal succession of Ouranos by Cronus and Cronus by Zeus, are rejected on the grounds that the image they give of the gods and heroes is false, i.e., not at all like god, who is entirely good and unchanging (377d–e, 378d–e, 379a, 380c, 383a). But Socrates also appeals directly to the stories' effects on citizens' beliefs about human virtue, including human justice: about Hesiod's succession story, he says: "it shouldn't be said to a young listener that he would surprise no-one by committing the worst injustices or by punishing his unjust father in every way, but he would only be doing what the first and greatest of the gods did" (378b). Again, he says that if young people think stories of gods lamenting are serious and do not ridicule them, they will not consider lamenting unworthy of themselves (388d); stories of heroes speaking impertinently to their superiors or overvaluing food will not encourage self-control in young people (390a–b); hearing about the misdeeds of gods and heroes will make young people excuse their own misdeeds (391e). These stories make up the greater part of civic education, the education that trains citizens to behave in ways that result in the city's virtues; so if the city's justice consists in each class doing its own work, we must suppose that the non-performance of ordinarily unjust actions (and perhaps the performance of ordinarily just actions) is not only the effect, but also the cause, of each doing his or her own.

Notice that by placing these virtuous and vicious action-types in a narrative, Plato is placing them in a context, which facilitates judgment about what actions are just or unjust. Further, when Socrates specifies the arrangements in the city, he is specifying the contexts in which certain action-types are just and unjust. For example, it is required by justice for philosophers to rule in the city that has educated them – but not in cities where they have grown up "on their own" (520a–c). Again, in the city, it is just to do one's (socially-determined) job – but it does not follow that this is just outside the city. (What *would* one's job be outside the city?) Still more obviously, in the city Socrates is describing, it is just for citizens to share their spouses and children – but Socrates is not urging his interlocutors to mate with their neighbors' spouses and rear their neighbors' children. So it is not only in the confirmatory passage at the end of Book 4, but also in the course of city construction, that Socrates presupposes some things about

what actions are just. And of course, he must do so for city construction, since justice in the city has to involve laws and institutions that regulate the conduct of citizens.

It's worth noting, finally, that although Glaucon thinks (and seems to have been followed in this by Sachs) that the defense of justice is complete by the end of Book 4, Socrates does not. After arguing that justice is a harmonious condition of soul and that just actions promote this condition, Socrates says, "it remains, it seems, to inquire whether it is more profitable to act justly, live in a fine way, and be just, whether one is known to be or not, or to act unjustly and be unjust, provided that one doesn't pay the penalty and become better as a result of punishment" (444e–445a, tr. Grube–Reeve). When Glaucon protests that he has already shown this, Socrates says he will show it "most clearly" by examining the kinds of vice. The ranking of constitutions and characters from the least to the most vicious in Books 8 and 9 depicts many kinds of unjust actions. And the identification of the perfectly just person with the philosopher in Books 5–7 (which explains the just person's lack of incentive to commit acts of injustice by his absorption in the goods of intellect, 485d–486b) prepares for Book 9's rebuttal of Thrasymachus' claim that the just person is a dupe, in the argument that the philosopher's superiority in experience, reason, and argument guarantees that his judgments are authoritative (582a–e). Thus just actions will also turn out to be most pleasant.

My proposal, then, is at once a response on Socrates' behalf to the irrelevance charge and an explanation of why Socrates elaborates (in such detail!) the city when his topic is individual justice: the account of justice in the city ensures that the justice in the soul Socrates is going to describe remains connected to the justice of actions. In other words, while Socrates defines justice in the city and in the soul in terms of the internal harmonious relations of the parts, he does not leave behind just action-types. And as for the Thrasymachean point that the exemplary just and unjust actions used to guide the definition are so-called because it serves the interests of the rulers, as we shall see, this is addressed by Socrates' stipulation that the law in the ideal city aims at the good of the whole city rather than only at the good of the rulers (420b, 519e–520a).

3. BEGGING THE QUESTION: A NEW FALLACY?

In the course of constructing the ideal city, Socrates interrupts his description of the virtue-inculcating education citizens of the ideal city are to receive, and asks,

Now, isn't there a kind of story whose content we haven't yet discussed? So far, we've said how one should speak about gods, heroes, daemons, and things in Hades. . . . Then what's left is how to deal with stories about human beings. . . . But we can't settle that matter at present. . . . Because I think we'll say that what poets and prose-writers tell us about the most important matters concerning human beings is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another's good but one's own loss. I think we'll prohibit these stories and order the poets to compose the opposite kind of poetry and tell the opposite kind of tales. Don't you think so? . . . But if you agree that what I said is correct, couldn't I reply that you've agreed to the very point that is in question in our whole discussion? . . . Then we'll agree about what stories should be told about human beings only when we've discovered what sort of thing justice is and how by nature it profits the one who has it, whether he is believed to be just or not. (392a–c, translation Grube–Reeve)

In describing the stories that guardians may be told during education, Socrates is responding to Adeimantus' side of the brothers' challenge to justice: the poets and our other educators, when they speak in praise of justice, only tell us of the good consequences of being seen as just, thereby undermining our commitment to be rather than to appear just; you, Socrates, must tell us why justice is good for its own sake (362e–367e). Socrates, for his part, is in this passage pointing out that to earn the right to say what should be the content of stories about human justice – in particular about the goodness of justice for the agents that engage in just behavior – he must first explain how justice is intrinsically good for its possessor.

But has Socrates not already implicitly claimed that just actions are good for the agents that perform them in the course of describing the content of early education? For consider: the grounds for adopting or rejecting any given traditional story about the gods and heroes are its truth or compatibility with the truth and its effects on the beliefs of young citizens about what behavior is worthy or unworthy of them (377d–383a). It seems that the whole educational programme of Books 2 and 3 has been directed by the assumption that individual justice is a virtue – an excellence, and therefore good for its possessor. So what is the point now of refraining from discussing the admissible content of stories about human beings?

One might reply on Socrates' behalf that he is assuming that the other virtues of an individual (courage, moderation, etc.) are good for their possessors, but leaving open the question whether *justice* is; perhaps he has introduced the stories about the gods *as* affecting citizens' courage-, moderation-, and piety-related beliefs, not their justice-related beliefs. But this is not plausible, given how closely the beliefs about courage,

moderation, and piety are related to the beliefs about justice. Take for instance the beliefs about piety. In addition to Hesiod's succession story, Socrates censors stories about the gods fighting their family and friends on the grounds that this is necessary if citizens are to believe that it is most shameful to hate fellow-citizens (378c). Although these stories are censored as antithetical to piety, it's clear that they also violate at least a couple of common conceptions of justice: helping rather than harming your friends, and not injuring those who have not injured you. Socrates says that the censored line "Gifts persuade gods; gifts persuade revered kings" (390d–e) attributes a lack of moderation to gods and kings, but surely giving and taking bribes is also unjust (later on, Socrates discloses that loving money is itself a condition of injustice and leads to unjust actions). Yet again, consider Achilles' words to Apollo: "You hurt me, far-shooting, most destructive of all, | And I would pay you back, if I had the power" (391a). Although officially banned as impious, these words are also indicative of injustice, as not observing the proper hierarchy between gods and heroes.

To make matters worse, the *Republic* does not include piety in its list of the virtues of city and individual, which would suggest that it somehow folds piety into one of the other virtues, and the most likely candidate for piety to be folded into is justice. The *Euthyphro* suggests taking piety to be that part of justice that pertains to our relations with the gods (11e–12e, cf. *Protagoras* 331a–b). If the stories permitted and prohibited in early education introduce the content of justice, only by another name, then Socrates' worry about begging the question of the value of justice by determining which stories about human justice may and may not be told applies to the whole account of early education – in particular, to the stories about gods and heroes.

Has Socrates, after all, begged the question of whether or not justice is intrinsically valuable to its possessor? I do not think so, but determining how he might avoid begging the question illuminates his defense of justice.

One way for Socrates to avoid short-circuiting the process for defining and evaluating justice first in the city and then by analogy in the soul is by maintaining that just action is strictly distinct from pious action, moderate action, etc. This can only become clear once Socrates has defined justice as "doing one's own" – as long as this is not taken too loosely – for the stories considered and banned are not about the violation of this principle. The banned stories may show violations of justice as that is commonly conceived, but not on Socrates' "doing one's own" account. This proposal requires us to understand the *Republic's* various claims that such-and-such is "just" in terms of doing one's own job. So, for example, when Glaucon says

that the philosophers will agree to rule the city because Socrates' speech urging them to rule is saying just things to just people (520d–e), we should read this to mean: ruling is their job, and they are just-souled people, whose soul-parts each do their job, so they will do their job of ruling.¹⁰

Here is another way of putting the proposal. In the first two chapters of *Nicomachean Ethics* 5, Aristotle distinguishes two closely related senses of justice and injustice: in the general sense, justice is the lawful, comprising the whole of virtue in relations with others, and injustice is the unlawful; in the specific sense, justice is the equal or fair, comprising one part of virtue distinct from courage, moderation, and wisdom, and injustice is the unequal or unfair.¹¹ According to the strategy being explored here, political justice in the *Republic* would be restricted not only to Aristotle's specific, distributive, sense, but to the fair distribution of citizens' jobs; justice would be silent on the fair distribution of social benefits.

Is this restriction of the sense of "justice" plausible? On the one hand, it is striking that throughout his description of the ideal city, Socrates does not use the term "just" to characterize either the laws governing its social organization, or obedience to these laws, or even the principle guiding the construction of the city, namely that the founders and the law aim to make the city as a whole and not only one particular class as happy as possible. Instead, he says that making the city as a whole as happy as possible is "what we were looking to in establishing the city (*touto blepontes tēn polin oikizomen*)."

On the other hand, rescuing Socrates' defense of justice from the fallacy of begging the question by narrowing the content of justice comes at the cost of indicting it of a Sachs-style fallacy of irrelevance, this time in the case of political justice. For while in the individual case, each part doing its own *is* a harmonious, hence intrinsically valuable, condition of the individual, surely "doing one's own" understood as narrowly as I have taken it is deeply disappointing as an account of political justice. Above all, political justice should include the distribution not only of society's work but also of society's goods, but "doing one's own" ignores the latter.¹² In the city, each class's doing its own seems to stand in need of further social arrangements that would distribute the social product (e.g., education) according to some principle such as, "to each according to his capacity for benefit." One might suppose that Plato intends rulers doing their own job to entail such distribution, because he says that the rulers will ensure that each has his or her own (433e–434a); however, the mention of lawsuits (*dikas*) in this passage suggests that what Plato has in mind here is corrective, rather than distributive, justice. Further, "doing one's own," "*ta hautou prattein*,"

is a partisan conception of justice, an aristocrat's slogan expressing opposition to political participation by non-aristocrats¹³ – participation that is commended, e.g., in Pericles' Funeral Oration. Would a democrat agree that "doing one's own" is justice? And, since "doing one's own" turns out to require depriving the ruling class of private property, would an oligarch agree that this is justice? Finally, the narrowing strategy is in tension with the elaboration of the city giving behavioral content to justice, for it would seem that actions that are not job-related may be just or unjust, but "doing one's own" would be silent about them. These difficulties seem to me to be serious enough that we should seek out another strategy for avoiding question-begging.

Let's return again to the passage about education in which Socrates cautions against begging the question about the value of just behavior to the just agent. He excludes, not stories about justice, but "stories about *human beings*" (392a, my emphasis). So the answer to the fallacy-threatening question (i.e., don't the stories about divine and heroic virtue and its benefits determine, on grounds of truth and desirable behavioral consequences, what beliefs the citizens in the ideal city should have, and how they should behave, and thereby settle the content of human virtue, including justice?) may be: yes, the stories told so far do determine the content of human justice, but Socrates is leaving it open whether the results of this shaping are *good for the citizens* who have been shaped, or merely good for the city. He *has* to leave this open to avoid begging the question of his defense of justice – and if the virtues are inter-entailing, he has to leave open the value-to-the-possessor for all the human virtues.¹⁴

When Socrates deprives the guardians of the city of private property, Adeimantus protests that he is depriving them of happiness (419–20a). Socrates replies that although he wouldn't be surprised if they turn out to be happiest in this condition, he isn't aiming to make any group in the city outstandingly happy, but to make the whole city as happy as possible. He goes on to compare his construction of the city to the painting of a statue, and says that just as a painter who painted the eyes purple (the most beautiful color) wouldn't be painting eyes at all, so too, if he gave the guardians the kind of happiness Adeimantus is talking about, he would make them other than guardians. Students of Plato's political thought have asked: what is Socrates saying about the relationship between this happiness of the city and the happiness of the citizens? Does the happiness of the city consist in the happiness of its citizens?¹⁵ Or does the happiness of the city float free of the happiness of its citizens?¹⁶ Or is the happiness of the city related in some more complex way to the happiness of its citizens?¹⁷

But Socrates follows his statement that he is aiming to make not one group, but the city as a whole, as happy as possible, with the explanation that he is doing this *for the reason that*¹⁸ he expects to find justice most easily in such a city (*ōiēthēmen gar en tēi toiautēi malista an heurein dikaiosunēn*, 420b–c, cf. 369a, 371e, 372e, 376d). We now have an explanation for why the text of the *Republic* is so elusive on the question of whether the often-mentioned happiness of the city is independent of, or constituted by, or causally related to, the happiness of all, most, or the dominant citizens. It is not because only the guardians are really happy, and Plato wants to bury this politically embarrassing point, nor is it because he simply assumes that the happiness of the city consists in the happiness of citizens. Rather, Plato has given Socrates two dialectical constraints: first, in response to Thrasymachus he has to display justice in a city where the laws are not designed to serve the interests of the rulers (as he repeatedly reminds Glaucon and Adeimantus), and second, in response to Glaucon and Adeimantus, he has first to say what justice is and then to show that it is good for the just person. But saying what justice is – not just as a harmonious condition of city or soul, but also what sorts of actions are just – requires spelling out many details of the city, and it would beg the second question, of justice's value, to say that these just citizens are happy.

These two dialectical constraints explain features of the two other passages in which Socrates discusses the happiness of the guardians. First, at 465e–466b, referring back to the passage I've just discussed, Socrates says that *then* their concern had been to make the guardians true guardians and the city the happiest they could, rather than to make any group particularly happy; now, however, he is free to add that the guardians'/auxiliaries' (*epikourōn*) life is better (*kalliōn kai ameinōn*) even than an Olympic victor's. He is free to do so now because the case for the intrinsic goodness of justice for its possessor has been made at the end of Book 4. (The case for the superiority of the just life to the unjust no matter what the external circumstances will not be complete until the end of Book 9, but in this passage, Socrates is comparing the specific external circumstances of guardians and Olympic victors.) Second, in response to Glaucon's complaint that he is doing the philosophers an injustice by requiring them to rule when they do not want to (519d), Socrates repeats that the aim of the law is not to make any class in the city outstandingly happy but to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with one another by persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefits that each can confer on the community (519e–520a). Recalling Thrasymachus' claim that everywhere in cities rulers establish laws that

serve their own interests helps us understand Socrates' reference to "law" in this passage: Socrates has been designing a city in which the law's goal is the city's happiness rather than the rulers'.

4. THE STATUS OF SOCRATES' DEFENSE

I have argued that the role played by the city in Socrates' defense of justice is that of illustrating not only the structure of justice in the individual soul, but also what actions are just and unjust. In this respect, Plato clearly subordinates the politics of the ideal city to the ethical argument for the preferability of the just life to the unjust. However, what Socrates tells us in the *Republic* about the correct method for investigating a question suggests that for the city to play this illustrative role, he must be relatively strongly committed to his political claims. Of course, as we saw in section 3, Socrates has to observe the dialectical constraints he has set up on what political claims he can make, given that what is up for examination is the value of justice. Still, the political claims have at least the status of a most plausible hypothesis, with the ethical claims being their consequences. This calls for some explanation.

In the middle books of the *Republic*, Socrates lays out the very intellectually demanding conditions for knowledge of what justice is – which involve knowledge of the Good itself, a knowledge he himself lacks (504b–c, 506c). Despite his lack of knowledge, he is able to give three images of what the Good itself is like (it is, like the sun, a source of illumination as well as the cause of the things illuminated), what are the grades of cognition (in the divided line), and how education affects the soul (it frees those who did not even know they were imprisoned in a cave). Socrates' remarkable ability to illustrate what he does not know is likened, by the divided line, to the practice of geometers, who use drawn images in order to prove theorems about intelligible objects they hypothesize without fully knowing them (510b–511a). Throughout his defense of justice, Socrates has been sketching, or constructing, an image of justice in the city.

The divided line also says what are the limitations of this kind of reasoning: the consequences are only as good as the hypotheses on which they are based, and this kind of reasoning is not capable of going on not to prove the hypotheses themselves. Doing that – and doing that finally on the basis of knowledge of the Good itself – is a very necessary task, but it is left to dialectic.¹⁹ It is not Socrates' task in the *Republic* to investigate the sort of object dialectic investigates, i.e., "the being itself of each thing" (532a, cf. 402c). First, the defense of justice involves no claims about what

Justice itself is: the accounts of the city's and soul's justice Socrates provides in *Republic* 4, namely "each part doing its own job" (433a–b, 441d–e), are not presented even as approximate answers to the question "what is justice?" (although presumably they might inform such an inquiry) but instead to the more modest questions, "what is justice in a city?" and "what is justice in the individual soul?" Given Socrates' view that it is necessary to know the Just itself to know as accurately as possible justice in its various instantiations (cf. 520c, 402c), it is not surprising that he should remind us that the treatment of justice he has been able to give is only relatively adequate (504a–b). On the other hand, the defense makes it clear that knowledge of Justice itself is not necessary for an adequate enough grasp of individual justice to prove it more beneficial to its possessor than individual injustice.

Second, even when it comes to investigating justice in the individual by way of its civic analogue, Socrates says little to justify his assumption that the city that he has constructed is an ideally happy and virtuous city. He starts out simply constructing *a* city on the bases of mutual need and specialization of labor, and it gradually becomes "the good and correct constitution" (449a). But it is only because Thrasymachus implicitly agrees that this city's laws have been established to make the whole city happy that it is a better city than the tyrannies, democracies, and oligarchies that Thrasymachus says establish laws to serve their rulers' interest.

Perhaps the ranking of constitutions in Books 8 and 9 goes some distance towards justifying the claim of the city of Socrates' defense to be an ideal city. Or perhaps it is the better-than-Laconizing arrangements (educating women, abolishing the biological family, rule by philosophers) showcased in Book 5. Or perhaps Plato does not try too hard because Socrates' dialectical situation has kept him from giving the true justification: that it is the best city because its citizens are the happiest (*Laws* 743c). In any event, he will consider the merits of the political arrangements proposed for the *Republic's* ideal city in other works.²⁰

NOTES

1. The assumption may seem reasonable on the grounds that from the perspective of any individual – whether that individual himself conforms to the norms of justice or not – it is good to live in a just city on the grounds that the general upholding of the norms of justice affords the individual security against becoming the victim of others' injustice. (Irwin 1995, p. 184, suggests that Glaucon overlooks this point in favor of justice.) But such reasoning is not uncontroversial: Glaucon (or the *Gorgias's* Callicles) might argue that a super-strong individual would prefer to live without the norms of justice being generally upheld;

Thrasymachus might object that “justice” creates systematic disadvantages for the ruled that are far worse than any security it provides. As we shall see, Socrates’ assumption is innocent because he blocks direct inferences from “good for the city” to “good for the individual.”

2. Although Socrates supposes that cities get their characters from the characters of the individuals that make them up (435d–436a, 544d–e), this relationship is not always straightforward, since he is also clear that for a city to possess a given virtue, it is not necessary for all or most of the individuals in the city to possess that virtue. Thus the wisdom of the tiny ruling class suffices for the city to be wise, and the military’s obedience to rational pronouncements concerning what is fearful and what is not suffices for the city to be courageous. The cases of moderation and justice are more complicated: these virtues belong to the city in virtue of certain relations among the classes, i.e., the classes each doing their own job of ruling, guarding, and producing, and agreeing that the rulers of the city ought to rule. For all that the accounts of civic virtue tell us, a city may be moderate and just without any of its citizens being moderate and just.
3. This division among readers of Plato’s *Republic* was already noted by the Neoplatonist Proclus, according to Schofield 2006, p. 30.
4. Strictly speaking, Thrasymachus begins with an exposé of what is called “justice” in cities, but concludes that prudence commends a policy of *individual* “injustice” (343c–344a).
5. Ferrari 2003, p. 92, suggests that the reason is that the individual is capable of philosophy, whereas the city is at most capable of having its superior members rule the inferior. But I don’t see how the relative greatness of individual excellence explains the subordination of city to individual in the argumentative structure of the *Republic*.
6. Argued for in Lear 1992 and against in Ferrari 2003, pp. 52–53 and 65–75.
7. Irwin 1995, pp. 298–317. Irwin’s particular concern is with the just-souled person’s acting for the sake of the good of others.
8. This is argued in Brown 2004.
9. Burnyeat 1977 observes that in Socratic dialectic, examples are brought up after, and as tests of, definitions rather than before, and as guides to, these definitions – as I am claiming. While this is correct as an account of what Plato makes explicit in elenctic contexts (and Burnyeat himself so restricts his account, p. 384), Plato also shows a keen awareness in the *Statesman* that examples guide the process of definition whether we are explicitly aware of it or not (267c–275c). Burnyeat also points out that in Socratic dialectic examples are not the last word because definitions are supposed to settle questions about whether a given example (of, e.g., piety) is indeed a real example (p. 386). In light of this, I find it interesting that the cases of just and unjust behavior considered in Books 2–4 are relatively uncontroversial, but once Socrates has given his definition of justice he is able to unveil highly controversial behavior legislated by the ideal city such as the holding of women and children in common.

10. Rather than that they will rule because it is commanded by the law, as is argued by Brown 2000.
11. Vlastos 1971 holds that justice in the *Republic* is the whole of social virtue (p. 60) because “doing one’s own” applies to the whole of one’s life (pp. 80–81), and so to all one’s dealings with others. But just because the boundaries of “one’s own” are vague it doesn’t follow that the scope of “one’s own” is the whole of one’s life. Vlastos infers this from the absence of a private sphere unregulated by the state (pp. 77–78), but the inference from the state regulating the whole of life to justice regulating the whole of life is invalid.
12. In Kamtekar 2001 I argued that the *Republic* captures this aspect of justice under the rubric of “the happiness of the whole.” But I never found a satisfactory explanation of why he should carve up justice and happiness in this way.
13. For evidence, see Adkins 1971.
14. I think I am in agreement here with Ferrari 2003, p. 80, when he says that the account of the city enables Socrates to say more about justice and injustice understood conventionally than would seem to be allowed by Glaucon’s and Adeimantus’ exclusion of justice’s consequences. I also think that what I have to say here about avoiding question-begging justifies Ferrari’s insistence that the city–soul analogy be treated as an analogy rather than a psychodynamic account. However, I do not share Ferrari’s sense that we need to read away the two passages in which Socrates asserts that cities have the characters they do because of the characters of their citizens (435d–e, 544d–e). Socrates clearly believes this (otherwise, why would he suppose that the educational programme resulting in wise rulers and courageous guardians would make the city wise and courageous?) and clearly uses it to justify the city–soul analogy. Ferrari’s acute observations of Socrates’ elaboration of the analogy between city and soul rather than of the causal relations between them need to be taken into account. But I think I can do so and at the same time explain why Plato is writing in this way.
15. This view is taken by, for example, Vlastos 1977, p. 15; and Annas 1981, p. 179.
16. This view is taken by Popper 1962, p. 169; for Popper, this follows quite naturally from Plato’s thinking of the state as a “superorganism” which is something over and above and superior to its citizens (pp. 79–81). Williams 1973, p. 197, reasons that just as a statue may be beautiful without its components being beautiful, so too, a city may be happy without its citizens being happy.
17. In Kamtekar 2001 I suggested that the happiness of the city is the happiness of the citizens when the city’s institutions are the cause of the citizens’ happiness (pp. 205–06); similarly, Donald Morrison (2001) argues that the happiness of the city consists in the goodness of its structure, i.e., in its virtue, but that the goal of this structure is “to promote the greatest possible well-being of the individual citizens,” with the result that the “maximal happiness of the city is . . . definitionally dependent on the concept of the well-being of the citizens” and “the happiness of the city is . . . causally dependent on the happiness of the

- citizens, because unless many of the citizens possess a considerable degree of virtue, the overall structure of the city will be unsound” (p. 7).
18. The *gar*, 420b8, is not translated by Grube–Reeve or Griffith, but is by Shorey and Reeve.
 19. Benson 2006 argues that dialectic (by which he means Plato’s preferred method of investigation in any work) in the *Republic* (as in the *Phaedo* and *Meno*) is a two-stage process in which a hypothesis is introduced, its consequences worked out, and then the hypothesis itself is justified. According to Benson, Socrates only practices the first of these two stages in the *Republic*, but this is no reason to think that he is practicing *dianoia*, for two features of *dianoia* distinguish it from the first stage of dialectic: it uses sense-experience when dealing with hypotheses and supposes these hypotheses to be confirmed – whereas dialectic does neither (pp. 96, 98). But notice that the sun is very much a sensible image for the Good itself, and I would venture that the city is a sensible image for the soul. As for treating hypotheses as in need of confirmation or already confirmed, that seems to me to be up to the individuals doing the investigation – if it characterizes the practice itself, then both the first stage of dialectic and *dianoia* have the same deficiency, of not having justified their hypotheses by going all the way back to the unhypothetical first principle.
 20. For comments on previous drafts, I am grateful to audiences at the Arizona Ancient Philosophy Colloquium and the University of Chicago Ancient Philosophy Workshop, and especially to Eric Brown, commentator extraordinaire.