LECTURE

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An Ennobling Innocence: The Founding of Socrates' Republic

Wednesday, August 2
3:00 p.m.
Junior Common Room

AN ENNOBLING INNOCENCE [1]

The Founding of Socrates' Republic

"Even the wolf ... Phaedrus, has a right to an advocate, as they say."
Plato, Phaedrus

"... Practical wisdom makes provisions to secure theoretical wisdom."
Aristotle,
Nicomachean Ethics

"The Greeks were superficial ... out of profundity."
Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom

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Part I

1. With One Eye On ...: [2]

The choice of this topic was a big mistake.... Everyone here is familiar with Plato's Republic, indeed may have developed opinions about it. My situation, then, is to be likened to someone before hungry wolves.

I hesitate to speak also, because the way of reading the Republic exemplified here may be different from yours. The argument with Thrasymachus is often fallacious. Socrates, Glaucon, and Thrasymachus all admit this (I 337a, 340d, 341b, 354b, II 357a, 358b, III 413b). While you might be interested in exploring the character of particular arguments to determine if indeed they are fallacious, I, by contrast, am interested in the question why it is that they are so.

2. Assumptions:

Let me state briefly the principles of interpretation on which this reading rests:

i) The Republic is a work of political philosophy in form and content. Man is seen in the light of the political good. It is thus not a work of philosophy in the modern sense.

ii) Platonic dialogues are didactic "mimes," as Aristotle called them. The principle of mimetic instantiation is at work throughout: a dialogue about justice has also to be an instance of justice.[3]

iii) The premises of a dramatic argument are not confined to its logical presuppositions. Dramatic circumstances also provide "premises." Hence Platonic dialogues should not be seen as logical expositions simply. Logicism, in Plato's eyes, is a form of philosophical narrowness (cf. IX 582a). We must seek to understand a dialogue in its own broader terms.

iv) Logos has a broader meaning than "reason." It includes all forms of speech, not excluding fallacy, irony, and mime. There are extralogical functions of logos, rhetorical, psychological and political functions among them.

v) Irony is a deceptive notion (I 337a). Socratic self-depreciation often looks like irony but sometimes is not (I 354a-b).

vi) A section of a dialogue cannot be abstracted and understood in isolation (VII 504c). This is true of the present paper as well. Oops.

These prescriptions are intended to prevent us from committing certain interpretative, logical errors: above all hasty generalization and context. In this view, interpretations often import foreign philosophical preconceptions and principles of discrimination and are based on insufficient evidence. This is the result of certain methodological decisions that have predisposed us to select and regard as important only a part of the text. Method, when sedimented, conceals our prejudgments.

3. The Deed of Book I:

The Republic opens with an act of force. Socrates is prevented from returning to Athens, restrained by the others to remain below and join them in viewing a novel religious procession after dinner (I 327a-8b, V 450a, VII 514a-515c; cp. X 614e). He cannot prudently protest. He is outnumbered. But nor, they say, will they listen to him. Polemarchus challenges Socrates to prove stronger than they are (I 327c; cp. 341b, V 449b, 450a, 451b, 474a, VI 500d, 509c). The community of interlocutors here constituted is initially founded on force, the fundamental fact of politics.

Nevertheless Socrates will try to persuade them of an alternative course of action (I 327c, II 357af.). Otherwise he will have to pay the penalty of being ruled by lesser men than himself (I 347c). It is the task of the wise ruler to seek to transform the city based on force into one

based on speech (if only on myths and noble lies). This is no different for a founder of a community of discourse than for a founder of cities. The primary task of Book I of the Republic, then, is the foundation of a human mutuality based on an openness to speeches (logical moderation).[4] Socrates' efforts toward this end, however, are complex and, on the surface, quite puzzling.

4. Thrasymachean Justice:

Following the discussion of Polemarchus' common, partisan understanding of justice as "helping one's friends and harming one's enemies" (I 331d-336 a, IV 442e), Thrasymachus, no longer able to restrain himself (cp. I 352c), protests that Socrates' view makes one defenseless and vulnerable. Harming one's enemies, according to Socrates, was said to be incompatible with justice. Far from sometimes having to inflict harm, as Polemarchus thought, justice should seek to make us all better.

"Hunched up like a wild beast," Thrasymachus flings himself into the discussion ready "to tear [the interlocutors] to pieces" (I 336b). It would appear that Thrasymachus is himself an enemy of logos and Socrates up against a "wild beast" (cp. III 411d-e, VI 493b-c, 496d). But are Socrates and his city in fact as defenseless as Thrasymachus presumes? Socrates made it plain in the foregoing, moreover, that one sometimes misidentifies one's enemies (I 334cf.; cf. VI 498c-d). The question presents itself what fitting response there is to a Thrasymachus.

As the Greek proverb has it, Socrates has had his eye on the "wolf" all along (I 336d; cf. III 416a, VIII 565d-566a, IX 576d). One could even say that his "non-sensical" and "foolish" argument with Polemarchus was designed to incite this wolf. Socrates knows Thrasymachus.[5] He now appeals to him on the (false) grounds that they, Socrates and Polemarchus, must have been incompetent. They need rather to learn from someone who "knows." Correction and betterment is the fitting punishment for his mistreatment of arguments. Thrasymachus at first understands this to be yet another case of injustice on Socrates' part. Socrates is his usual self, deliberately evasice and disingenuous; he misleads the argument at will.[6] That's "the habitual irony of Socrates" (337a)! Thracymachus thinks he knows Socrates.

Surprisingly Socrates' insistance that the just punishment for ignorance is correction through learning is accepted by Thrasymachus (along with some added compensation). For all his supposed wildness, is Thrasymachus more moderate and tractable than the city of Athens that not only accused but convicted and sentenced to death this man who appears to shrink in the face of hurting anyone, even, it would seem, his real enemies?[7]

Thrasymachus is willing at least to teach the transgressor a lesson, if not of the sort that would make the deficient Socrates better. He says: "Now listen ... the just is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger" (I 338c; cf. III 412d, IV 442c). This rightly famous statement is definitive. But Socrates knows that it needs a closer look.

5. The Elicitation:

The manner of eliciting Thrasymachus' fuller understanding is however surprising. Socrates' method involves us in an unusual course of reasoning.

To begin with, he seems to insult Thrasymachus' and our intelligence by introducing an apparently inappropriate counter-example: Poulydamas the pancratist. Because the latter is strong and eats great quantities of meat, does this mean that we too, the weaklings, must eat large amounts of meat? An oblique example to be sure, but one that makes plain the distinction between equalitarian and distributive justice. Thrasymachus seeks unequal treatment.

In his defense Thrasymachus makes it first appear that he holds a common view, one shared by many: governments are the expressions of the strongest group (a theory of comparative legitimacy). However in such a view, all governments are equally legitimate. Were this his true opinion, Thrasymachus would be a defender of the legal and the status quo.

To make it clear that this is not so, Socrates reverts to the problem of mistakes (earlier raised in connection with Polemarchus' understanding of justice). Thrasymachus is no less prone to trip over this than Polemarchus, for neither considers adequately the role that knowledge must play. Thrasymachus is brought to make the extraordinary claim that he intends "the ruler in the precise sense" only (i.e. one who not only intends but achieves his self-benefit). Socrates is brought to wonder what is at the heart of this understanding of human excellence.

Indeed Thrasymachus now insists on this "precise" ruler. The presumption implicit in the notion of "the precise sense" is that of total mastery: the perfect ruler, infallible, simply does whatever he or she thinks. But taken in this way, the ideal of pure action, of acting out one's intentions faultlessly, is dangerously ambiguous.[8] Present in Thrasymachus' formulation are the ideals both of the philosopher-king (the knowledgeable ruler) and the tyrant (the knowledgeable exploiter) (I 336a, II 361b, III 409c-d, V 477e, VII 517c, 518d-e, 519a). Though abstracting from the problem of the imprecision of the world -- one of the fundamental political problems is precisely that people do not know their own good, their own advantage, with precision -- it yet requires that we consider our ambiguous thoughtfulness.

To bring the problem of Thrasymachean justice to a head, Socrates introduces the analogy of the arts. Now "art" might be seen as concerned with its object exclusively, other interests being inessential and ancillary. As such an art can be understood (ambiguously) to "rule over" its subject matter. This Thrasymachus readily concedes. But in so doing he does not realize that the notion of selfless dedication entailed in such a view leads to the opposite of his secret intention. Add to this Socrates' hasty generalization -- "... there is no kind of knowledge that considers or commands the advantage of the stronger, but rather the weaker and ruled by it" (I 342c) -- which in turn is hastily generalized still again as "... therefore ... there isn't ever anyone who holds any position of rule, insofar as he is ruler, who considers or commands his own advantage ..." (I 342e), and we have a conclusion that confounds more than Thrasymachus.

Unable to see his way clear of this thicket of tacit presuppositions and hasty generalizations, Thrasymachus resorts to defamation of character. The sniveling Socrates must have been overprotected by his wet-nurse (I 343a). Of all men, he would appear to be ignorant of what in Thrasymachus'

view -- and not only his -- is the most significant fact of life: the fundamental difference between the shepherd and the sheep. It is clear to everyone who has not lost his good sense (I 348d) and his way amidst the tangle of abstract arguments that the shepherd fattens his sheep for slaughter, for dinner and for his bank account, in short "for his own advantage."

While appearing blind, Socrates' obtuseness forces Thrasymachus to be more explicit. Indeed only now is the latter fully candid. As Socrates suspected all along, Thrasymachus here admits that it is rather injustice that leads to happiness; justice only leads to "getting less" (I 343d). Not the higher ground of comparative governments but the lower ground of acquisitiveness and "getting more" (pleonexia) recommends his view, then.

By leading Thrasymachus to think that justice understood as an art can only serve the good of that over which it is an art "in the precise sense," Socrates has forced him to come out with it and say what he really thinks but had been reluctant to put into words (cp. I 336c and 338b). Thrasymachus now declares: "as I have said from the beginning ..." -- that is, as he has secretly thought and intended from the beginning -- injustice "... is freer, mightier, and more masterful than justice" (I 344c). This is his last word. Having now made known his "better opinion" (I 337d) and without any further sense of obligation to the others (I 344e), he prepares to leave the community of discourse.

6. A Questionable Analysis:

The justice of Socrates and the others, however, prevents Thrasymachus from leaving (cp. I 327a-c). The question of injustice after all is not an indifferent one (cf. IX. 545f.). Tyranny is a deep human temptation (the dialogue proper is framed by the question of tyranny, cf. II 358-367, IX 571b-d, 592b, X 615a-6b, 618a, 619a, b-d). Behind our uncertain conviction that justice is a good lies our experience and doubts to the contrary, as well as the indiscriminateness of our desires (cf. I 347e, II 359bf., IX 572b, 588c-9a)[9] Socrates is especially concerned with the effect that such praise would have on Glaucon and the others (I 347e). He must do what he can.

Socrates begins his exposition by pointing up a contradiction that follows from Thrasymachus' newly stated view. The secret admiration of the unjust man clearly violates their earlier agreement to think of the artisan in Socrates' precise sense. Such "precise" speech divorces the other-concern of the arts from the accompanying self-concern of the artisan. Moreover, it makes it appear that the former cannot be a means to the latter but is exclusively an end in itself. By appearing blind to what in Thrasymachus' view is man's underlying essence -- his acquisitiveness and desire for more -- Socrates again flabbergasts his interlocutor.[10] He perplexes him still further when he makes it appear that the sought after offices of the rulers are not only not choiceworthy in themselves but actually onerous burdens, the precise opposite of what Thrasymachus holds. Socrates' arguments are stunning; the wild beast ceases to howl.

Yet the claims for injustice, though silenced for the moment, have not in fact been refuted (II 358-367). The question remains whether "... the

life of the unjust man is [indeed] stronger than that of the just man" (I 347e). Socrates therefore undertakes to counter this.

In Thrasymachus' view what we call justice is, quite frankly, a kind of "noble innocence." By contrast, injustice is "prudent counsel" (I 348c; cp. X 598d). The implicit equation here of the unjust with the good and wise needs to be put into question. Socrates does this by interpreting him to mean that "the unjust tries to get the better of the like and the unlike" (I 350b), therewith highlighting its implicit claims to domination. With the very questionable, indeed false, premise that "each is such as those of whom it is like" (I 349d) -- because this looks like a good argument surely does not mean that it is a good argument (cf. V 476c) -- along with the ambiguous use of the expression "to get the better of" (as in tuning [getting the better of?] one's musical instrument where there are natural limits, whereas in the case of the desires this remains to be seen), Socrates manages to invert the matter and conclude that "the just man is like the wise and the good and the unjust man like the bad and unlearned" (I 350c). Again the very opposite of what Thrasymachus holds is made to appear to be so.

Thrasymachus, silenced again, now sweats, indeed even blushes! [11] But the cause of the reddening is not logic, the victory not one of reason. He blushes because he has been defeated by rhetoric, that is by his own craft. Thrasymachus has been given a taste of his own justice and he doesn't like it. The "advantage of the stronger" doesn't feel like justice to him now. Nevertheless we witness a surprising reversal of aggression. Thrasymachus surrenders. From now on, he says, he'll just "nod" like an old woman listening to tales (I 350e). This is not the end of Socrates' logical rapaciousness, however.

Next he considers whether injustice is "more powerful and mightier" than justice (I 351a). Shunting the question of the injustice of others from view, Socrates points out that injustice seems to lead to "factions, hatreds and quarrels." In light of this it would appear that an unjust society is inherently unstable, indeed bent on self-destruction. Applying this to an individual, it would seem to follow that injustice renders one "not of one mind with himself" and "unable to accomplish anything" (I 351e-352a). History notwithstanding, the unjust seem to be intrinsically ineffective. Tyrants are not capable of the enslavement of whole peoples. Indeed it appears to be a logical impossibility.

Socrates' amazing resourcefulness -- his word wizardry -- proves too much for Thrasymachus (and us?). If Thrasymachus was compliant before, he is totally acquiesent now. The wolf bares his belly. Recognizing Socrates' logical ravinousness, Thrasymachus concedes yet again: "Feast yourself on the argument, for I won't oppose you ..." (I 352b). He is defenseless (an oblique proof that tyrants are inefficacious?). Yet he should oppose Socrates. That there is some measure of honor among thieves surely does not mean that there is justice among thieves. Socrates has only shown that it is not injustice in the "precise sense" that Thrasymachus imagines. This is hardly decisive (as Socrates admits at I 352b-c, II 361a).

The banquet and the feasting are not quite over, though. "Come ... fill out the rest of the banquet for me ... ," is all the word weary Thrasymachus can now muster. His innermost thoughts have been made a meal

of. The last argument in this three course meal concerns the question whether the unjust "live better." "They look as though they [do] ...," Socrates grants (I 352d; cf. II 358-367, III 379c, X 613a). His reply turns on the meaning of the middle term aretê or excellence. Socrates would have it that each species, indeed each functioning being, has a special "work" (ergon) that "one can only do with it or best with it." Indeed the soul has its excellence as well. The good life, then, is not possible without it. Therefore the life of injustice cannot be better than that of justice. Clearly the argument rests on ambiguity: the ambiguity of "the good life" and of excellence itself.[12]

After such a dizzying argument, Thrasymachus can only hope that Socrates' logical indulgence is at its end, that he has had , as he says, "... his fill at the festival of Bendis" (I 354a). Socrates' eagerness has led him to gluttony, however. Indeed Socrates himself regrets what he has done:

> "I am like the gluttons who grab at whatever is set before them to get a taste of it, before they have in proper measure enjoyed what went before ... I have not had a fine banquet, ... it's my own fault ..." (I 354b).

Above all, the question of the superiority of justice to injustice remains. The claims for injustice are further accented by Socrates' own actions. Hasn't Socrates unjustly treated the arguments, unjustly treated Thrasymachus?

Part II

7. Socrates' Self-indictment:

What is one to conclude from this strange business? Socrates was indiscriminate, Thrasymachus undiscriminating. Socrates' own self-assessment is categorical: "as a result of the discussion, I know nothing" (I 354c). This is neither modesty nor irony. Indeed the fearful prospect presents itself that we are in an even worse position with respect to the question of injustice than when we began (as Glaucon and Adeimantus see well, II 357a).

Thrasymachus was right: Socrates feasted himself on the arguments. And although it was the case that he saw what Socrates had done to the other interlocutors better than he was able to see what Socrates did to himself, still it was true, as Thrasymachus observed, Socrates did not come out from behind his questions (cf. I 338b). And if one can infer the intention from the result, one might suspect with Thrasymachus that Socrates was bent on victory and advantage after all. This supports the popular suspicion of Socrates' dialectic as essentially dissembling and destructive. But do Thrasymachus and the populace know Socrates?

This master of the logos and of question and answer astonished us with his numerous fallacies and paralogisms, yet he was victorious. (If we could offer an casual list, it would include: oblique examples, deflecting abstractions, rampant ambiguity, obtuseness, evasion of the issue, and for want of a better phrase, preposterous counterfactualism.) Despite elements of his arguments being defective, they proved overwhelming as a whole (cp.

VI 487b-c). We cannot avoid the conclusion that not only does Socrates know rhetoric in the abstract, but he also knows how to persuade rhetorically in practice.[13] Horrible to think, he knows how "to make the weaker argument the stronger." This disappoints our modern expectations and rationalist heritage. We would rather have seen Thrasymachus defenseless before the onslaught of a rapier and trenchant logic.[14] This wasn't what happened. Thrasymachus "was torn to pieces" (cf. I 336b) to be sure, but he is a victim of his own sophisticated trade.

This is potentially disillusioning. We are made to wonder about this figure, Socrates, before us. Was the respect we had for him not based on careful insight into who he is? Word wizardry was used; logical rules violated. The question is what he does with this ambiguous knowledge. Has he committed an act of injustice? If so, should we not join with the people of Athens and indict Socrates for ... sophistry? But "like" is not the same as "is," no matter what Socrates may have said earlier to the contrary (cf. V 476c, X 596e, 598a. 601b. 607a).

8. Prelogical Prologue:

Indeed before we condemn him, let us recall the circumstances and context of the discussion. At the very outset of the dialogue, we encountered the basic fact of political life: force. There it was made clear that unless people are willing to listen, force rules unchallenged. In this way we were brought to realize too that a community of discourse should not be taken as a given, for it is not "by nature" but is a human accomplishment and as such is precarious. A community of speech is always vulnerable to deterioring into a community of force. Logos, then, is not the uncontested ruler of human affairs. There are preconditions to its holding sway. Socrates has first to attempt to lay the foundations of an alternative, juster community.

And it was the figure of Thrasymachus, more than any of the others, that threatened the openness and mutuality necessary for discussion. Thus, before Socrates could persuade Thrasymachus of any truths -- and before logic in its refined and schematic forms could have any appropriateness and reasonable effectiveness -- the "wild beast" either had to be done away with (cp. the treatment of Cephalus) or "tamed" (cf. I 354b, V 470e). Socrates chose the less violent, alternative course. He knows Thrasymachus (cf.I 327c, VI 498c-d). But even so, one does not, indeed cannot, tame with logic those who do not listen. In this political sense, logic, then, is not an independent science, nor is it first in the order of human things. Even it presupposes the political arts.[15]

We need, then, to acknowledge the political function of speech, the founding function of speech above all. Without it there exists no arena for dialogue or for thought. It is thus a very great reduction to think that logos can be properly translated by "reason" or "logic." There is more to logos than in our overly abstract and reductively narrowed sense of philosophy.

Otherwise, we will not be able to see that, despite the "blunders," what is enacted here is in deed a just logos. Book One of the Republic is precisely what it is, the first and preparatory book to that which follows. As such it is also an indispensible primer in political founding.

9. The Logos of Force:

One may object that Socrates has gone too far in his forceful "taming" of the "wild beast." Even accepting the necessity of moderating and taming that which, if given enough rein, would overthrow the very basis of the life of dialogue, we might yet regret that the vital Thrasymachus has not only been logically reproached but, further, denatured and incapacitated (cf. VII 519e, IX 590c-d).

Such a view rests on an underestimate of opinion. Despite the fact that Socrates everywhere insists on a distinction between opinion and knowledge, it is yet a misunderstanding to think that for him opinions are ever "mere opinions." Although knowledge has "a greater reality" (V 477e-8a), opinions should not be discounted to the point that we no longer see their consequential natures and human or political significance. Above all, they are not a thing of the "mind" alone, confined to some restricted sphere of self-relation called "subjectivity" and thus a matter of "personal perspective" with no bearing on life and action. The medium of the *polis* and human life is opinion.

Opinions, then, are not disengaged abstractions but first of all expressions of a particular *opiner*. Truly candid opinions (those not interposed to camouflage our secret thoughts), once elicited, are revelations of the *being* of the speaker, who he or she *is*. We choose what we think; we act out what we think; we live what we think; we are what we think (the multple difficulties therewith notwithstanding). Opinions define the person, then. They are *formative* -- preforming, informing, transforming, deforming -- and thus they bespeak (perform) a life (IX 574d). Socratic discussion seeks to go to the quick and expose the deeper "logic" beneath: the defining *logos* of a specific soul (and thus constitute a philosophical psychoanalysis ["the art of creeping into souls": IX 576a-7b, 578d, 579e; cp. VI 500d]).

Thus it is not a matter of abstracted definitions, but the life they bespeak -- here the secret admiration for the tyrant -- that needs to be our principal focus. And it is this "opinion," given its potential for immoderation and anti-political "getting more" (a more serious form of ravenousness) that has to be called up short, not for Socrates' "advantage," but for the community of those around him, especially the young Glaucon. Beneath the appearance of a defense of what is properly "one's own," the city, is hidden Thrasymachus' profound longing for that which would ravish the city, an offensive and gluttonous self-assertion (a more serious form of dissembling). It is thus just punishment and necessary corrective therapy that such persons be stunned, deflated, and despirited, at best as a preliminary step toward their improvement, but if not as a way of preventing harm to others. And this is what Socrates seeks to do at every turn by demonstating that not only is Thrasymachus wrong but the very *opposite* of what he says is true.

Despite the fallacies, can such a *therapeutic logos*[16] be considered illicit, indeed unjust? At the very least, it is dedicated to the well-being of "that toward which the art is directed" and thus epitomizes the true art of the guardian "in the precise sense."[17] The just guardian, we learn later, cares for the city as a whole (VII 519d-e, IX 586d-e). Is this the "foolish shepherd's art" of which Thrasymachus was so contemptuous?

10. Socrates' Contrariness:

Socrates then is not simply being contrary. True, every time Thrasymachus asserted something, Socrates sought to "prove" the very opposite[18] and this even if it meant "proving" the contrary of what everyone knows to be true, to the point that the term "contentious" fails to describe his activity. Socrates appeared to deny the importance of such central issues as self-defense, human error, and self-interest for this discussion of justice (and by extension for political philosophy).

He began by appearing to deny the right of self-defense. He seemed to deny the traditional conviction that the city must protect itself and restrain, indeed punish, wrongdoers. The ever-present threat of external enemies did not ever seem to warrant doing them harm. From this it appeared that there was no such thing as a just restraint. This rightly infuriated Thrasymachus' sense of order (if only that of the rule of the stronger), for such a view undermines the security of any city.

Then Socrates proceeded to deny the political importance of human error (despite I 334cf and 339bf, VI and VII). The discussion of the arts "in the precise sense" eclipsed the matter of misjudgment and errancy. Would that errors were not a serious problem and we did not have to pay for the consequences of people's mistakes!

But above all, the discussion of the arts and their total dedication to that toward which they are directed, eclipsed the fundamental question of self-interest. The result was that human acquisitiveness and pleonexia were rendered secondary in this a discussion of political philosophy. The human being was equated with the artisan and thus confined to a single, selfless interest in the good of his subject matter alone. There are numerous consequences of such a simplification of human intentions (IX 571b, 572b, 573a, 588b-589b), but by far the most significant was the apparent denial of any human desire for mastery (cf. X 615bf. and 619bf). He denied, on the one hand, that rule could ever be to anyone's advantage and thus was not choiceworthy, and on the other hand, that rule, if ever secured, could ever be harmful. Sheep are not ever the victims, in short, of anyone's self-interest. As such he totally obscures what in Thrasymachus' view, and not only his, is the fundamental fact of politics. Such, then, were Socrates' arguments.

The matter is such that the question emerges, why anyone interested in political philosophy would ever want to consult the Republic? Why such political innocence, if not blindness?[19] The answer is not simple. Formally this is the price one has to pay to have premises that demonstrate that injustice is not simply to be equated with worldly wisdom or human excellence of any sort, that human history and experience notwithstanding, injustice is not mightier than justice but is the opposite, impotent and incapable of wreaking havoc on us all (II 358b, 367d-e, III 392b, V 472e, VI 497c, X 612c). This is a comforting thought, one worth hanging one's hopes on (II 368b). The overall effect of this section, then, is to quiet our concerns about the injustice of the world and temper our political ambitions to get for ourselves what we would not, in our unjust world, otherwise receive. Is this not an act of justice in its noblest (if innocent) sense?

Our first impressions of a logos may not be the same as its full significance, however. Upon reflection we see this to be true. For if we look at the dramatic argument as a whole, and not simply at some abstracted segment, we see that Socrates, far from denying these things, has in fact defended himself quite well (V 464e), that he has ensured that his greater self-interest not be denied, all in his overall attempt to forestall the destructiveness of human error.

To illustrate how the deed may well be different from the word, let us recall the logos that seemed to argue against any restraint, even a just restraint. Was not its effect an exemplification of the proper exercise of such just restraint? Wasn't its intent to logically restrain Thrasymachus' excessive readiness to inflict harm on others and dominate the discussion? Indeed its effect was the total suppression of his dialogic ambition or thumos. Thus only on the surface did the logos make it appear that political life is to be disarmed and rendered vulnerable. The deed makes manifest what the words shrink from overemphasizing for fear of fanning the indiscrimate fires of righteous indignation.[20] The argument at its core and taken as a whole is fully cognizant of the need for just restraint but aware also of the possible abuse to which such a conviction could lead in the hands of some. Justice is more than right arguments or over-generalized principles.

11. Friendship and Community:

Socrates knows Thracymachus. Above all he knows that he is not an irreconcilable opponent (V 470e, VI 498c-d). Thrasymachus, a professional rhetorician, is open to, indeed vulnerable to logos. Socrates has thus sought to tame him with words. Once confuted, the beast grew gentle. Thrasymachus is thus susceptible to a persuasion of a higher sort than brute force, susceptible therefore to an act of helping and moderating justice (V 471a, X 599c-600e, 604c-d).

Because of this, Socrates could defend himself without hurting others (cf. VII 525b). Justice, then, is not a matter of the extremes "helping one's friends and harming one's enemies." Socrates demonstrates a third possibility (I 327 c): he turns a potential adversary into a friend (VI 498c-d). Sophists are not always the unalterable enemy of the city they are sometimes made out to be (cp. VI 492a). In some cases there is an alternative.

The capacity of the speech to influence others is broad and manifold. As we saw, it is not the trenchant cutting of an incisive logic but that of his own craft that brings about the reversal. Though quite self-conscious, Thrasymachus is not fully self-knowing. Despite his profession, he does not realize the full potency of logos and his own craft. Above all, he does not realize that questions can be as devastating as any authoritative declaration: they may not have the face of wolfish boldness yet they can go for the jugular.

What is undeniable about Socrates' peculiar manner of speech and argumentation is that it opens up opinions and reveals their innermost intentions. He brings the interlocutors to say what they think but would not otherwise say and to say what they did not think but only harbored deep within. He pries open what is sealed with embarrassment, lack of candor,

self-ignorance, or our numerous mechanisms for not facing ourselves or the truth. His irony, his feigned obtuseness, his purported incompetence, his exaggerated self-depreciation, all serve as negative pressure, so to speak, to force into the open those cherished and protected opinions that we would prefer remain behind the scenes. Such a diagnostic logos is worth our attention.

Such an exposition, then, is undertaken by Socrates, not for the sake of his own advantage but in the interests of friendship or justice (I 351d, x 621c). This is not sufficiently appreciated. The most unexpected and significant event of the whole of the Republic is Thrasymachus' staying and growing involvement in the common task of disclosing this complex thing called justice. Logos has had a moderating effect on him and has made him a participating member of the very community that he earlier sought to abandon, if not also dominate (cp. I 336d, V 450b, VII 521a, X 600d). This is both good for him and for those around him. For now this city won't have this wolf threatening its fold (III 415e-6a, V 450c).

12. Socratic Justice:

It is thus the case that throughout the discussion Socrates' justice is more outstanding than his truthfulness. The reasons begin to emerge.

Above all we recall the lesson of the Cephalus dialectic. There it becomes plain that simple truthfulness fails to fulfill the greater demands of human responsibility. Simple truthfulness can be indiscriminate and lead to harm (V 459c-d). Opinions too can be harmful, as we saw from the exposition of Thrasymachus' secret intention. Above all, Socrates' argument was at pains to conceal wherein danger was to be found. The action of the conversation thus exemplifies the broader notion of justice and responsibility implicit in Socrates' criticism of Cephalus' traditional view. Justice is surely not something that can be indifferent to human consequences.

So too, we see that the careful notion of justice implicit in Socrates' actions is imbued with the positive element of Polemarchus' definition of justice. Socrates seeks to help his friends and not let them harm themselves (nor does he precipitously and falsely judge as an enemy one who isn't [III 414b, V 450 a-b, 451a, 470b-c, IX 589e, X 621c]). It was for their well-being that Socrates obscured the problems of human nature and power (or in the modern sense, of politics as such). He has sought to prevent the excesses of an unreflective self-interest and partisanship, that is to make them and us better, not worse.

And, lastly, in seeking the true advantage of those over whom he rules in speech (and not his own advantage narrowly conceived), he is the just ruler "in the precise sense" (cf. VI 503b). Thus he even fulfills the unintented truth of Thrasymachus' definition. In every way that the discussion considered, in short, Socrates' logos is a just speech.

The price of such justice, however, is not small; his cause for dissatisfaction genuine. The gain is not small either. His salutary distortions allow those present to think of politics, not in its most reduced form as a matter simply of self-preservation (cf. VIII 547e) -- a negative and defensive form of politics (real politique) -- but in a positive and

formative way, as the precondition of human excellence. By obscuring the threat from without and from within, we can now look undistracted to ourselves and consider what is necessary, not simply for survival, but for higher human accomplishments. Socrates' discussion with Thrasymachus thus shows that, while he is not blind to the truth, neither is he blind to the good.

Book One of the Republic is thus an act of political justice as well as political founding. Socrates has laid the foundations for a community of speech and human excellence (VI 540a-b, X 613d). Polemarchus, in contrast to his father, has stayed, and so has, to our great surprise, Thrasymachus. Though perhaps not disposed to at first, people have been openned up and are listening. They have become participating citizens of this community (i.e. properly politicized). We are in the company, after all, of the sons of the Best (VI 500d).[21]

But even more than that has been accomplished. By eclipsing certain issues for now, Socrates has simplified and moderated the participating reader's thumos; by pricking our logical interest, he has at the same time engaged our thumos (IX 581a, 586d). We too are now committed to the perpetuation of this community of speech (cf. V 450a-b). The high art of the guardian, psychegogia or the leading of souls, works its powers on us as well (VI 500d, VII 519c-d, X 599c-600e, 604c-d).[22]

Thank you

ENDNOTES

[1] Cf. Republic I 348c; also II 377d et passim, 378d, III 409a and VII 539b. All quotations are from The Republic of Plato, translated by Allan Bloom, New York, Basic Books, 1968.

[2] Originally presented as part of a series of faculty colloquia to my former colleagues at Oklahoma State University (1984), this paper sought to introduce those familiar with the prevailing modes of interpretation (logical and linquistic analysis, historicist classicism etc.) to the dramatic interpretation of the Platonic dialogue. The premise: to follow the commentators in the dialogue itself, here Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus and even Thrasymachus.

[3] Aristotle, Poetics, 1447b9-10. Cf. Jacob Klein, A Commentary of Plato's Meno, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1965, pp. 3-31; David Levine, "The Arithmological Ordering of Being," The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy, XI Summer 1980, pp. 109-128.

[4] This community at the very least needs to be one that will free Socrates from the restraints of others and at its best do justice to his and our natures (VI 497b).

[5] By contrast, Charmides and Critias, far less dedicated to speeches, are not so resistable. See Charmides 157c, 176d.

[6] Cp. Republic III 394d where Socrates says misleadingly that he is following wherever the argument, compared to a wind, leads. But an unpredicatable wind can in no way serve as an image of logical necessity or of prudential guidance.

[7] Apology of Socrates 18a-19a.

[8] That this is an overresponse, Glaucon makes plain at II 361a.

[9] Cf. Republic X 619b-d.

[10] The distinction between a self-interested and a selfless or other-directed art is odd (I 345d-7b). How can one serve one's own interest without doing something in particular? Thus while it is distinguishable in speech, is it separable in being?

By distinguishing the art of moneymaking or the wage-earner's art, Socrates does acknowledge that there is at least one self-interested art. Moreover, as the city in speech is constructed, there is not a separate sub-class of moneymakers, but all artisans are "wage-earners." And given the extraordinary restrictions placed on the guardians (above all V 457d-471d), one comes to see that one of the foremost problems dealt with by the founders is the self-interest of all the citizens. The soul, uniquely self-relating, is an essentially self-referential, if not also a self-interested being. While a complicating factor, the issue is thus unavoid-

able (cf. III 409d-e, 411c, IV 430e-2b; Timaeus 98a, Phaedrus 245c-6d, Laws X 895e).

The introduction of the distinction does invert Thracymachus' self-priority, making what he thinks primary, self-interest, supplemental at best to the non-self-serving aspect of the arts, that for him are but the means to his securing his advantage.

11 Blushing might be thought the quinessential self-reflexive human act. Is it not Montaigne who gives us the epigram, "man is the animal that blushes?" (Nietzsche's Zarathustra also says that "man is the beast with red cheeks.") This moment of uncontrollable self-demonstration shows that Thrasymachus is no more than a man.

12 The latter pervades the Republic. The question from the very beginning has been the question of aretê: whether natural individual perfection is the same as moral or political excellence, especially conventional moral excellence.

13 By "persuade rhetorically" we do not mean "merely rhetorically," that is persuasion simply for the sake of victory, ornament or self-aggrandizement. Socrates' rhetoric is rather in the service of this community. Above all it doesn't refuse to consider the consequences of its speech (331c). His is a mode of political discourse that first seeks to establish the conditions on the basis of which something like a responsible "rational speech" can have a place in human affairs. One may object to such an instrumental (prelogical) use of speech. But does the means negate the end? And is a city of force preferable to a more refined community?

14 This hope has led to a scholarship of rationalization or an attempt to justify and validate invalid and uncogent arguments, a modern version of the sophisticated and ancient skill. Is not one of the principal functions of logic the identification of the weaker argument as weaker?

15 If changing a soul is not the same as refuting an argument, if Socrates is genuinely concerned with his interlocutors and not simply with their positions, and if those with whom he speaks aren't listening (I 327c) and aren't interested in "the choice of lives" (I 344e, X 608b), then "logical refutation" amounts to "smoke and non-sense" (IX 581d). Socrates' response, his elenchus, has to find a different mode of access, one that makes dialogue -- a community of speech -- possible in the first place. Cp. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, VI 1145a6.

16 On the therapeutic logos, see Republic II-III, X 608a. It is difficult for some to allow that Plato is practicing what he has his character Socrates recommend (cp. III 387c).

17 Compare the discussion of "the true political artist" at Gorgias 521cf.

18 Cf. Symposium 214d; Klein, J., Greek Mathematics and the Origin of Algebra, translated by E. Brann, MIT Press, 1968, p. 97 (also p. 95).

19 Cf. Callicles' criticism of philosophy as politically naïve (Gorgias 486f.).

20 To pacify the overly aggressive is not the same as passivism. Hence Socrates understands Thrasymachus' criticism of the dream of the latter as dangerous. He proceeds stepwise: first tame the wild, then enlist the moderated, and only thereafter can one prepare the judicious use of what otherwise would be reckless.

21 Everybody who will listen has remained. Those who were problematic have been tamed. A wonderful, if improbable, outcome. Justice based on a just rhetoric has brought about an uncommon harmony and friendship (I 351d, 369b, IV 443d). But a city based on friendship is not the typical political community. For this reason, it is emphasized, we are in the company of "the sons of the Best" (cf. II 368a, IV 427c, V 450d, 479a, IX 580b-c; also I 338d, 351d, II 381d, V 477d, VII 536e). Plato thus poses the prospect that one can be civilized without becoming slavish (cp. Nietzsche, Friedrich, Geneology of Morals, sect. 11.

22 Alexandre Kojeve's claim that "history" is the perfecting, i.e. moderating, influence on the tyrant thus appears dangerous wishful thinking ("Tyranny and Wisdom," in Leo Strauss, On Tyranny, New York, 1963, pp. 143-188). That the tyrant will not remain an island of self-seeking unto himself but will submit to others for "recognition" is a hopeful sentiment. It is optimistically rendered here but not born out by the rest of the dialogue. Thrasymachus does seek reputation and recognition. But were it not for Socrates' skill, it would only fuel his desire for mastery. A more extreme case is Kritias in Charmides. His "tyrannical proceedures" -- Kojeve's value-free euphemisim for the tyrant's cruelty -- are adopted without reservation precisely because others remain a means to his private advantage.

If history is allowed to judge for us, then we do not judge for ourselves. "Liberty is endangered when its power finds no obstacles which can retard its course, and give it time to moderate its own vehemence" (Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, New York, 1956, p. 115). Dialectically put: has it not been the sad history of those who have allowed the tyranny of the actual that it led ineluctably to the actuality of tyranny?