

Plato's Defense of Justice in the *Republic*

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We have a strong intuition that considerations of moral rightness or justice play a central role in the good life – an intuition, that is, that it is always in our interest to be just. We fear, however, that there might be no justification for our intuition. This worry is only deepened when we attempt to substantiate the idea that it is always in our interest to be just and find that the most obvious and immediate justifications suggest that it is only in our interest to be just some of the time. For example, one justification for the claim that justice is always in my interest is that if I am just, I can reap the rewards of having a reputation for justice, and avoid the negative consequences associated with having a reputation for injustice. But clearly this response suggests that it is only in our interest to be just some of the time. What about those circumstances where I can engage in immoral behavior with out detection? Certainly I have plenty of opportunities to cheat or steal without getting caught. Or, what about circumstances where I think that the goods gained by engaging in immoral behavior outweigh the social disapprobation associated with that behavior? After all, I won't be shunned by an entire community for seducing someone else's partner, or for investing in a company with exploitive practices. Is there any reason for thinking that being just in these circumstances is in my interest?

Plato's aim in the *Republic* is to argue that we do have a reason to be just in all circumstances, for being just is always in our best interest. To accomplish this goal, Plato must show three things. First, he must put forth an account of justice, since we cannot evaluate whether or not justice is always in our interest without knowing what, at least in

large measure, justice is. Second, Plato must show that justice itself, and not merely having the reputation for justice, is beneficial. Finally, Plato must show that the intrinsic value of justice is so great that it is always and in every circumstance in our best interest to be just.

In section I of this essay, I explicate Plato's defense of justice; and in section II, I raise a standard objection that has been levied against his account.¹ In short, Plato defines justice as a state of an individual's soul or psyche where each part of the soul performs its proper function, with the result that the individual attains psychological harmony; Plato proceeds to argue that this state is essential to our happiness. The problem for Plato's defense of justice, however, is that his account of justice appears to have nothing to do with justice in the ordinary sense of the term, which at the least implies acting with some regard for the good of others. This is deeply problematic, since doubts about the value of justice in terms of our own happiness arise because we view justice as requiring that we act for the sake of the good of others, often at our own perceived expense. Thus, Plato cannot assuage our worries about justice by giving an account of it that ignores this essential other-regarding aspect of justice.

In sections III and IV of the essay, I present two broad strategies for trying to show that, despite the initial appearances, there is a connection between Plato's account of justice and justice in the ordinary sense of the term, and I point out the major weaknesses for each approach. In section V of the essay, I describe a third general

¹ In fact, Plato offers several defenses of justice in the *Republic*. The first defense spans from *Republic* IV to IX, and consists in a comparison between the lives of the supremely just and the supremely unjust individual. Following this, Plato provides two arguments for the claim that the life of the just individual is more pleasant than the life of the unjust individual (580d-588a). In this essay, I will focus on Plato's first and primary defense of justice – the one that compares the lives of the just and the unjust individuals.

strategy for drawing a connection between Plato's account of justice and justice in the ordinary sense of the term. Although this third general strategy is in broad outline defensible, it has so far not received its best formulation. I close the paper, then, by providing such a formulation, which I suggest is the most promising way of explicating Plato's defense of justice. Although my aim is not to establish this final interpretation conclusively, I do hope, having canvassed the main alternatives currently proposed, to highlight some of its advantages. In any event, I hope that once armed with an awareness of the main strategies for addressing Plato's defense of justice, students of Plato will want to return to the *Republic* in order to determine for themselves which approach, if any, should be endorsed.

I.

Prior to determining whether or not justice is always in our interest, Plato must provide an account of justice. Plato's strategy for providing an account of justice starts from his account of the relationship between functioning or doing well and virtue. In *Republic* I, Socrates, Plato's mouthpiece throughout the *Republic*, claims that each thing has a function, which he defines as that which only it can do or it can do best; for example, the function of the eyes is to see and the function of a pruning knife is to prune (352e-353b).² Socrates goes on to argue that a thing performs its function well by means of its own peculiar virtue and poorly by means of its own peculiar vice (353b-c). Accordingly, one way to discover the virtue of a particular thing is to imagine what it

² For the remainder of the essay, I will refer to the ideas expressed in the *Republic* as those of Socrates, since he is the main speaker. I do not mean to suggest by this that the *Republic* expresses the views of the historical Socrates.

would be for it to function well, or in other words, be good, and then find the condition that enables it to function well; this condition is the virtue appropriate to that thing.

Socrates holds that justice is a virtue appropriate to both cities and individuals, and the nature or form of justice is the same in both (435a). Accordingly, Socrates' strategy for finding the nature of justice is first to construct the perfectly functioning or perfectly good city. Since the city is perfectly good, and since it is by means of its own peculiar virtues that a thing is good, the city must contain all of the virtues appropriate to a city. By isolating those features of a city that enable it to be good, Socrates hopes to uncover the nature of the virtues of a city, including, most importantly, justice.

This account of justice is only provisional, however, until it is shown that the same account of justice applies to the individual. Thus, Socrates needs to show that the same account of justice explains our ascriptions of justice in the individual. If the same account of justice does apply to the individual, then the nature of justice will be revealed, and Socrates will be in a position to answer the question of the *Republic*, namely, whether or not it is in our interest to give considerations of justice a central place in our deliberations.

Socrates begins, then, by constructing the perfectly good city; according to Socrates, the perfectly good city is the city that provides the greatest possible happiness for all of its citizens (420b). Socrates argues that cities are formed when individuals come together as partners and helpers to provide each other with the many things that each needs (369b). Socrates goes on to argue that the needs of the individuals that make up a city are best fulfilled when each individual does that work for which he or she is best suited by nature (370a-c). Some individuals, for example, have natural tendencies

towards excellence in the traditional crafts, such as farming, building, selling, medical treatment and the like; these individuals should perform the role of provisioning the city in various ways (370c-373d). Other individuals are best at activities that demand physical strength and spirit; these individuals should constitute the auxiliary class of the city – the class that does the work of defending the city against internal and external enemies (374a-375b). Finally, some individuals are well suited for developing and living in accordance with their rational capacities and it is these individuals, the guardians, who ought to rule the city (412c-414b). Socrates believes that a city organized in such a fashion is possible if its citizens receive the proper early education, one that emphasizes both a love of one's fellow citizens (377d-379a, 386a) and a love and development of traditional ethical ideals such as courage (386a-388e) and moderation (388e-391c).³

Having constructed the perfectly functioning or good city, Socrates is able to define or identify the excellences or virtues of the city, or those qualities that enable the city to flourish; the virtues appropriate to a city are wisdom, bravery, moderation and justice. Socrates identifies the wisdom of the city with the guardians' knowledge of what is best for the city and of how to maintain good internal and external relations (428c-429a). Socrates identifies the bravery of the city with the auxiliaries' ability to preserve the correct beliefs about what ought and ought not be feared (429b-430c). The moderation of the city is identified with the fact that each class has the same belief about which individuals are naturally wise and so ought to rule and make decisions for the city (432a). Finally, Socrates thinks that the condition that most enables the city to flourish is

³ There is some controversy regarding whether or not the craftspeople receive the moral education that Plato describes in the *Republic*. See, for example, C.D.C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 186-191.

that each citizen does his or her own work and does not attempt to do the work of another; Socrates identifies this condition with the justice of the city (433a-d).

To confirm that this condition truly is justice, Socrates argues that this conception of justice has links with our ordinary understanding of justice. Thus, he notes that a predominant common sense notion of justice is that justice is doing one's own work and not meddling with what is not one's own (433a). He also notes that everyone would want the sole aim of the rulers in delivering just judgments to be that no citizen should have what belongs to another or be deprived of what is his own (433e). If what is most importantly a citizen's own is his work, and if when he does his work he is guaranteed to get what he deserves, then Socrates' account of justice, while distinctive, does have links with common-sense notions of justice.

Socrates says, though, that we cannot be secure in this account of justice until we are sure that the same account explains justice in the individual (434d). There is, however, an immediate problem for thinking that the same account of justice applies to the individual: if the same account is to apply, the individual, like the city, must have parts, each of which is best suited for playing a certain role in the individual's life. But is there any *independent* reason to think that an individual's soul or psyche has the same parts as the city?

Socrates thinks there is. Socrates notes that we often experience mental conflict; that is, we often have the experience of wanting something, for example, a drink, but at the same time fervently wishing that we did not want that drink (439a-c). Or, sometimes we desperately want to exact revenge on someone whom we believe has wronged us, and yet believe that acting on such anger is not appropriate (441b-c). In such cases, we

struggle against ourselves, and many times we take actions that we later regret.

According to Socrates, we can only explain this phenomenon by appealing to the idea that the psyche has ‘parts’ or distinct sources of motivation that can come into conflict. Socrates identifies at least three parts to the psyche: the appetitive part, the spirited part and the reasoning part.⁴

According to Socrates, the parts of the soul represent the values that motivate all of our actions. Thus, in *Republic IX*, Socrates characterizes each part of the soul as loving a certain object. For example, Socrates states that the appetitive part loves money, since this is the easiest means for satisfying whatever strong desires we happen to have (580d-e). We might conclude, then, that humans value acquiring things that simply occur as pleasant or desirable.⁵ Socrates characterizes the spirited part as loving honor (581a-b). Since we are honored when we live up to our own or others’ ideals, we can conclude that we value having a positive conception of ourselves by living up to those ideals.⁶ Finally, Socrates describes the reasoning part of the soul as loving learning and wisdom (580d-581c). Socrates is arguing, then, that we value both acquiring and acting on knowledge.⁷

Socrates thinks that all of our actions spring from these values, but that each of these values gives rise to specific actions in different ways. If, for example, we are motivated by the appetitive part of the soul, which values acquiring things that simply appear pleasant or desirable, then the particular ends of our actions are the result of mere perceptions of what appears good or worth pursuing, and not on any more sophisticated

⁴ At 443d-e Socrates suggests that there may be other, distinct sources of motivation in the soul as well.

⁵ See J. Cooper, “Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation,” for a defense of this interpretation of the appetitive part of the soul.

⁶ See J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 126-128, for a defense of this interpretation of the spirited part of the soul.

⁷ See J. Cooper, “Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation,” for more on this interpretation of the reasoning part of the soul.

form of reasoning; thus, Socrates sometimes characterizes the appetitive part as non-rational (439d). If we are motivated by the spirited part of the soul, which values having a positive conception of ourselves by living up to certain ideals, then our particular goals in action are the result of reasoning about whether certain actions are *consistent* with these ideals, regardless of how those ideals may have been acquired. Accordingly, Socrates compares the spirited part to a dog who obeys the commands of its ruler (440d). Finally, if we are motivated by the reasoning part of the soul, which values acting wisely, then our actions are the result of rational deliberation about what is *truly* advantageous for the soul as a whole (439c-d, 441e, 442c).

According to Socrates, these distinct and powerful sources of motivation explain mental conflict (436b-441c). We experience conflict because we can arrive at conclusions about what to do from the perspective of reason, spirit and appetite; since these conclusions are generated both from different conceptions of the ends that ought to be pursued and by more and less limited forms of reasoning, these conclusions can clash. We regret our actions when we fail to act from the perspective of reason, since only reason can determine what is truly best for each aspect of ourselves and for ourselves as a whole.

With this independently motivated picture of our moral psychology in place, Socrates can now see if the definition of justice in the city applies to the individual. According to Socrates, just as justice in the city occurs when each individual does the work for which he or she is best suited, justice in the individual occurs when each part of the soul does the work for which it is best suited. Thus, reason, since it alone is able to acquire knowledge of what is best for each part of the soul and the soul as a whole ought

to rule (441e, 442c). The spirited part of the soul, since it is capable of being emotionally forceful when it comes to making the individual live up to his or her ideals, ought to ally itself with reason, and endeavor to make sure that the individual lives up to rational ideals (441e, 442b). And finally, although Socrates does not explicitly characterize the proper function of the appetites, we may presume, based on the analogy between the soul and the city, that the appetitive part ought to provide the motivation for meeting the more basic needs of the individual.

Socrates confirms this account of justice by arguing that just as his account of justice in the city has links with common-sense notions of justice, his account of justice in the individual also has links with common-sense platitudes about justice. In particular, Socrates thinks that his definition of justice can account for our ordinary ascriptions of justice. Thus, he notes that we would never think that the individual with a just soul would engage in actions typically considered unjust, such as embezzling, temple robberies, thefts, betrayals of friends in private and public life, breaking promises, adultery, disrespect of parents and neglect of the gods (442e-443a). Socrates takes these observations, then, to secure the account.

Having uncovered the nature of justice, Socrates proceeds to describe and compare the lives of the individual with a just versus an unjust soul. The discussion culminates in *Republic IX*, where Socrates provides an image of the soul that is intended to illustrate the fact that having a just soul enables a person to flourish, for it is only in the just soul that the individual is friendly and at peace with herself (588a-e). The individual with the just soul has such inner harmony because she is ruled by reason, and only reason can engage in the sort of reasoning and reflection necessary to ensure that all parts of

ourselves are satisfied. In sum, it is only when acting wisely is the dominant value in our lives that *all* of our values are allowed their proper expression, and thus that we can achieve a state of inner harmony and friendship.

In a similar vein, Socrates argues that the unjust person is not happy, for injustice is a state of inner discord and enmity (588e-589a). Again, Socrates thinks that such discord occurs when reason fails to rule because only reason knows how to harmoniously realize all of our values. If we are motivated by spirited or appetitive values, then our actions will not be the result of rational reflection on what is best for the soul as a whole; rather, our actions will be the result of what appears desirable or of ungrounded opinions about ideals. But if we are guided simply by what appears to be pleasant or desirable or by ungrounded opinions about the proper ideals, then it will not be the case that all of our values are allowed expression. As such, we will feel deprived and incomplete and so resent those aspects of ourselves that are causing the deprivation; the result is a perpetual state of inner conflict and hostility towards oneself. Socrates concludes, then, that injustice, whether detected or not, is never in one's interest.

II.

Should we accept Socrates' defense of justice? Certainly we can agree with Socrates that if justice is a state of the soul where each part performs its proper function with the result that the individual achieves psychic harmony, then justice *is* beneficial in itself or independently of the rewards of having a reputation for justice. Some may even agree with the more controversial claim that if justice is such a state, then justice is more important than anything else in terms of our own happiness. But is Socrates' account of

justice correct? More specifically, can we be sure that an individual with a just soul will refrain from unjust actions?

It is precisely this point in Socrates' defense of justice that has drawn the bulk of attention in recent years, for many commentators think that Socrates has not given us any reason for thinking that the individual with a just soul will refrain from unjust actions.⁸ Socrates describes the individual with the just soul as having excellent inner relations, or relations with herself; accordingly, Socrates' account of the just soul makes no reference at all to our relations with other people. But it is our relationship with others that is the terrain of ordinary justice. Consequently, on Socrates' account it seems possible to have a good relationship with yourself, to act in accordance with what you rationally determine to be best for all aspects of yourself as whole, and yet fail to treat others rightly.

We should be clear that Socrates does not take himself to have to show that the just person will refrain from all of the actions typically considered unjust. After all, lying is typically considered unjust, but Socrates thinks that the just person will lie to the citizens of the ideal city when he or she believes it is for their own good (414c-415e; 459c-e). There need not, then, be a complete overlap between the actions of the individual with the just soul and actions typically considered unjust. At the very least, though, justice requires that we do not wantonly disregard the good of others. But again, what reason has Socrates' given us for thinking that the individual with a just soul will refrain from actions that display disregard for the good of others?

This question is pressing, because if Socrates has not shown us that the individual with the just soul will not violate the good of others - if, that is, there is a gap between

⁸ D. Sachs initiated the contemporary concern with this problem in his article, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*."

having a just soul and taking just actions - then Socrates has failed to answer the central question of the *Republic*, for while Socrates certainly has given us a reason to have a just or harmonious soul, he still has not given us a reason to give the good of others a central place in our deliberations. In sum, then, if the conception of justice on which Socrates' defense of justice relies bears no relation to the other-regarding elements of the ordinary conception of justice, then we will have to reject Socrates' defense of justice.

The resolution of this issue is the concern of the remainder of this essay. In the following two sections, I sketch and evaluate two predominant interpretive strategies for closing the gap between the just soul and just actions. I hope that by getting clear on the problems for each approach the criteria for a philosophically promising interpretation of Socrates' defense of justice will be brought to light.

III.

The first strategy that I consider for closing the gap between the just soul and just actions – which I call the indirect justice strategy – appeals to the fact that the individual with a just soul acts on certain values and desires the satisfaction of which happen to be incompatible with unjust actions.⁹ More precisely, the individual with a just soul is dedicated to acquiring and acting on her knowledge of what is truly best; according to the indirect justice approach, having the ability to act in this way requires that one lack the sorts of desires that typically lead to unjust actions. Thus, the individual with a just soul simply will not have an interest in committing unjust actions and the gap between the just individual and just action is closed.

⁹ R. Kraut, "Reason and Justice in Plato's *Republic*." E. Brown, "Minding the Gap in Plato's *Republic*," and R. Kraut, "Plato's Defense of Justice in the Republic," also appeal to the indirect justice approach to bolster different accounts of Socrates' defense of justice.

Socrates claims that the individual who lives in accordance with the value of acquiring and acting on her knowledge of what is best will live a life devoted to learning, since, first, an individual who values living in accordance with her conception of the truth about what is best is likely to have intellectual proclivities and to value intellectual pursuits (485a-d; 486c-487a). Second, and more importantly, Socrates thinks that acquiring knowledge of the good requires a dedication to intellectual pursuits, for in order to know the truth about what is best, one must have knowledge of the forms, and in particular, knowledge of the form of the good (504e-505b). I will have more to say about the form of the good later, but for now it is sufficient to note that Socrates thinks that arriving at knowledge of the form of the good requires fifteen years of study in highly abstract fields, such as mathematics (522d-529), astronomy (527d-530d), harmonics (530d-531c), and dialectic (532a-535a). Thus, according to Socrates' conception of goodness, satisfying the desire for knowledge of the good requires enormous intellectual effort.

In *Republic VI*, Socrates says that when one's desires flow towards one thing, such as learning, she has less desire for other things, such as the acquisition of objects or experiences that require a great deal of money, or living up to certain prevalent ideals, for example, having power over others. Since these excessive appetitive and spirited desires are the sorts of desires that typically lead to unjust actions, and since the individual with a just soul is not the type of person who has such desires, the individual with the just soul would never, according to Socrates, be unreliable or unjust (485d-486b). In short, then, Socrates thinks that the individual who is ruled by reason will have all of her desires

channeled towards the acquisition of knowledge, with the result that she simply will not have the sorts of unruly appetitive or spirited desires that motivate unjust acts.

In addition, this account of Socrates' defense of justice provides individuals who aspire to have a just soul with a reason for refraining from indulging the sorts of desires that typically lead to unjust actions, for such desires are incompatible with acquiring knowledge of the good. Indeed, even if we query Socrates' account of the sort of study that is required for attaining knowledge of the good, we ought to agree that knowledge of what's truly valuable and of what particular courses of action we ought to pursue, is hard to come by, both in terms of the effort required and the impediments, particularly strong desires and self-deception, to honestly attempting to discover what is best. Books VIII and IX of the *Republic* describe with remarkable psychological acuity how unruly spirited and appetitive desires ruin one's ability to think clearly about one's own good (see especially 559e-561c). If, then, we want to be the type of person that can acquire knowledge of what is truly good for us, we ought to avoid indulging the sorts of disorderly desires that detract from our ability to attain and act on this knowledge. But, again, it is precisely these disorderly desires that typically lead to unjust actions. Thus, the indirect justice interpretation of Socrates' defense of justice offers both an explanation of why the individual with the just soul will not engage in unjust actions, as well as a psychologically plausible reason for those of us who want just souls to avoid unjust actions.

Despite the psychological insights of the indirect justice interpretation, however, the account is problematic since it is open to counter-examples. The indirect justice approach holds that the individual with the just soul simply will not have the sorts of

desires that lead to unjust actions because these desires are incompatible with satisfying the desire to acquire and act on knowledge of what is best. But are all unjust actions motivated by desires that are incompatible with satisfying the desire to acquire and act on our knowledge of the good? It seems not. Suppose, for example, that in order to satisfy her desire for knowledge, an individual with a just soul needs to acquire money, equipment or time. Why should we think that an individual with a just soul, an individual, that is, who is ruled by the desire to acquire knowledge, would refrain from committing unjust acts, such as stealing or enslaving others, in order to satisfy this desire for knowledge?¹⁰

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, we must keep in mind that some injustice, as Socrates himself acknowledges, is by omission. In *Republic VII*, Socrates describes the philosophers, the individuals with just souls, as preferring pure intellectual pursuits to ruling the city; nonetheless, these philosophers take their turn ruling the city simply because they realize that failing to do so would be unjust (519c-521b). But, it is unclear why, on the indirect justice interpretation, the just individual would refrain from the unjust act of failing to rule the city, since failing to rule the city would not at all interfere with satisfying her desire for knowledge; indeed, it looks as if ruling the city would actually hinder the satisfaction of her desire for knowledge.¹¹

¹⁰See J. Annas, "Plato and Common Morality," 440-442; N. Dahl, "Plato's Defense of Justice in the *Republic*" 822-824, and R. Kraut, "Reason and Justice in Plato's *Republic*," 215, for discussions of possible counter-examples to the claim that the individual with a just soul will not commit unjust acts because he simply will not have any motivation to do so.

¹¹ According to Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 202-203 the just individual is motivated to rule the city because she realizes that this is the best way to ensure that she lives in the type of city that will allow her the rational activity that she desires. Thus, on this picture of the just individual's reason for ruling the city, the indirect justice approach could in fact explain the philosopher's motivation to rule. As R. Kraut, "Return to the Cave: *Republic* 519-521," 50-51 notes, however, this interpretation is based on the dubious empirical claim that the philosopher could more fully pursue knowledge by taking her turn ruling in the ideal city rather than leaving for another city. Additionally, this solution makes no appeal to the fact that Socrates

The indirect justice approach is susceptible to these kinds of problems because its explanation for the fact that the individual with a just soul refrains from unjust actions makes absolutely no reference to the idea that the individual with a just soul considers the good of others in her decision-making. The fact that the individual with a just soul refrains from unjust acts is simply a by-product of her interest in satisfying her own desire to attain and act on her knowledge. Not only, then, does this feature of the indirect justice approach leave Socrates' claim that the individual with the just soul will refrain from unjust actions open to counter-examples, it violates our intuition that the just individual's motivation for refraining from unjust acts should have something to do with regard for the good of others.

IV.

The problems for the indirect justice approach have prompted Plato's commentators to search for another way of closing the gap between the individual with a just soul and just actions, one that argues for a direct relation between the just individual's motives for action and the good of others. According to this approach - which I call the impartial justice approach - the individual with a just soul knows what is objectively good and is directly motivated to bring about the objective good in the world.¹²

claims that the philosophers rule *because* they recognize that it is just to do so in return for the education they receive from the city (520a-e).

¹² Adherents of this interpretive strategy include J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 260-271; J. Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice in Plato" (but see note 15); N. White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, 9-60, 189-196; and "The Ruler's Choice." S. Broadie, "The Good of Others in Plato's *Republic*," also argues that the just individual is directly concerned with the good of others. Her approach, however, does not emphasize the just individual's knowledge of the good, but the fact that the just individual is ruled by reason: as a rational person, the just individual realizes that her good is no different, and thus no more privileged, than the good of another.

Recall that the just individual, the one who is ruled by reason, aims to have and act on her knowledge of what is truly good. The object of such knowledge, according to Socrates, is the form of the good. Furthermore, this knowledge is impersonal: it is not knowledge of what is good for a particular individual, or of what is good in relation to a particular context or in reference to a particular desire; rather, it is knowledge of what is good *simpliciter* (479a-e). Defenders of the impartial justice approach argue that the just individual's knowledge of the good directly motivates her to bring about the good in the world. The primary evidence for this claim is that it explains why the philosopher, the paradigmatic just individual, is motivated to rule the city despite the fact that it will interfere with her intellectual pursuits: she realizes that by doing so she will bring about the objective good. Moreover, this interpretation explains the philosopher's activity in ruling the city: the philosopher aims not at his own personal good, but at instantiating goodness in the city (500b-501c). In sum, then, the impartial justice approach holds that the just individual is directly motivated to bring about the good; since actions motivated by the aim of creating such objective goodness in the world could not, according to Socrates, be unjust (505a), we have forged a connection between justice in the soul and just actions.¹³

This approach to Socrates' defense of justice in the *Republic* has the advantage that its explanation for the fact that the just individual takes just actions appeals to the fact that the just individual is directly motivated to bring about the good, including the good of others, and thus it is not open to the sorts of counter-examples and explanatory

¹³ Eric Brown, "Minding the Gap in Plato's *Republic*," has argued against such an interpretation of the link between the just soul and just actions on the grounds that there is insufficient evidence in the *Republic* for the claim that the philosopher's knowledge of the objective good motivates her to do anything other than get the good for herself.

problems that plagued the indirect justice approach. The impartial justice approach, however, faces at least one serious objection. Socrates set out to show that justice is in our own interest. He argued that justice is in our interest because it involves having a certain type of soul, one that is organized such that all of our values can be harmoniously realized, with the result that we are friendly and at peace with ourselves. But then Socrates argues that having such a soul – one ruled by reason – involves knowledge of the good and that having such knowledge entails that we are motivated to create goodness in the world, not goodness for ourselves, but simply, goodness. What, though, does creating goodness in the world have to do with having all of our own particular values realized? Indeed, couldn't the goals of creating goodness in the world, and meeting our own particular, individual needs come into conflict? If all this is true, then it looks like it is possible that the just individual might have to sacrifice her own particular self-interest in order to create goodness *simpliciter*.

Indeed, some commentators think that Socrates acknowledges such results in the *Republic* itself.¹⁴ As we have seen, Socrates describes the philosophers, the individuals with just souls, as preferring pure intellectual pursuits to ruling the city; nonetheless, these philosophers take their turn ruling the city simply because they realize that it is just to do so. It looks, then, as if the just individual does sacrifice her self-interest for the sake of the good. But this is a result that should give us serious pause, for the goal of the *Republic* is to show that justice is always in our best interest. In sum, the impartial justice approach appears to close the gap between the just soul and just actions only to re-open the gap between self-interest and just actions.

¹⁴ See N. White, "The Ruler's Choice," for the most explicit defense of the view that Plato thinks the rulers sacrifice their own self-interest for the sake of the good.

The dilemma that we are faced with thus far can be posed as follows: the indirect justice interpretation stressed the connection between having a just soul and being happy. The just individual knows what is good for her and is able to act on this knowledge. The just individual refrains from unjust actions because the desires that motivate such actions are incompatible with her ability to acquire and act on knowledge of what is good for her. The weakness of this interpretation, though, is that the just individual is not directly motivated to refrain from unjust actions – her reasons for refraining from injustice have nothing to do with concern for the good of others – with the result that we cannot be certain that the just individual will always refrain from unjust actions.

The impartial justice interpretation attempts to remedy this situation by showing that there is a direct connection between the just person's motives and regard for the good of others. On this account, the individual with a just soul is motivated to bring about the objective good and such actions could never involve treating others wrongly. This approach, however, faces the problem that it appears to allow for cases where an individual sacrifices her own self-interest for the sake of bringing about the objective good, and thus on this approach Socrates fails to explain why it is always in our best interest to be just.

The successful approach to Socrates' defense of justice, then, should resolve this dilemma. The obvious way to resolve this dilemma is to show that the just person has a very important desire or value, the realization of which requires that she consider the good of others. In other words, we must show that the just individual sees her good as realized in having regard for the good of others – I call this strategy the self-interested justice approach. In the next section, I consider and raise objections to one version of this

approach. In the following section, I suggest what I take to be a more promising, yet neglected formulation of the self-interested justice approach.

V.

What important value could the just individual have that requires that she consider the good of others in her deliberations? Many commentators have found the answer to this question in the just individual's – the philosopher's – love of the forms.¹⁵ Recall that the individual who is ruled by reason loves wisdom, and wants to discover and act in accordance with her knowledge of what is best. According to Socrates, this love of wisdom will transform into a love of the forms, since the forms are what make knowledge possible, and since Socrates thinks that if someone truly loves something, then they love everything akin to it (474c-475c, and 479e-480a).

Many commentators argue that Socrates thinks that the love of forms inspires in the just individual not just a desire to contemplate the forms, but also a desire to imitate them (500b-d; also *Symposium* 209a-b; 212a-b), for if someone loves something, particularly an ideal, she deeply wants to act in ways that are consistent with that ideal, and thus she sees failing to act in ways that are consistent with the ideal as against her self-interest. Moreover, the philosopher sees the forms as the greatest possible good. Since happiness consists in 'possessing' good things (*Symposium* 204e-205a), it follows that the philosopher will take her relationship with the forms to be the greatest good, and

¹⁵ See, for example, R. Demos, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*?"; Dahl, "Plato's Defense of Justice"; Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 298-317; R. Kraut, "Plato's Defense of Justice in the *Republic*"; and "Return to the Cave: *Republic* 519-521." Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice," appears to go back and forth between the impartial justice approach and the self-interested justice approach. The first part of this section of the paper relies most heavily on Kraut's formulation of the self-interested justice approach.

her desire to act in accordance with the forms as essential to her self-interest or happiness.

Accordingly, adherents of the self-interested justice approach argue that Socrates *does* think that it is in the philosopher's interest to rule, despite the fact that it conflicts with her desire to pursue purely intellectual activities, for by ruling the philosopher is imitating the forms. Socrates states that the forms themselves constitute a just order (500b-c); thus, to imitate the forms we must be just. Since Socrates says that it is just for the philosophers to rule, the philosophers must perform the just act of ruling in order to imitate the forms and so act in their own self-interest.

Despite the fact that this attempt at articulating the self-interested justice approach nicely solves the dilemma that we posed at the end of the last section, this interpretation of Socrates' defense is open to a serious objection, namely, the ideal of the just person that Socrates encourages us to aspire to is unattainable for most individuals. Socrates began with the idea that to be a just person one must care for the truth and for being the kind of person who leads her life in accordance with wisdom. But then he argues that in order to be such a person one must be devoted to highly theoretical intellectual pursuits. He argues in addition that one who loves such intellectual pursuits will also love the objects of such pursuits, the forms, and thus will be loath to do anything that contradicts them, and this is the just individual's reason to act justly. As Socrates himself admits, however, the knowledge required for attaining this ideal is possible for only a very select few.

This observation poses a serious challenge for Socrates' defense of justice, for Socrates' aim is to show that, despite the appearances, we do have a reason to be just.

His model of the just person, though, turns out to be unattainable (and perhaps even unappealing) to many. But if Socrates' model of the just person is unattainable for us, then we no longer have a reason to be just; that is, while the fact that the ideal of the just person is unattainable for many does not necessarily make the ideal false, it does make the ideal inappropriate to the task at hand, namely, to show that everyone has a reason to be just.

One might argue, however, that we can save Socrates' defense of justice by focusing on the spirit of his defense, and not on the details. The spirit of this interpretation of Socrates' defense of justice is that we have a love of abstract ideals, such as justice and goodness, and so we value acting in accordance with them. But loving such ideals need not involve a devotion to intellectual pursuits or knowledge of the forms; it is certainly possible to love such ideals, and to try to bring them about, without being able to give a philosophical account of their nature.

Indeed, this is how Socrates envisions the non-philosophers in the ideal society. Recall that the aim of the ideal education is to instill in the citizens a love of ethical ideals (386a-391c).¹⁶ Once an individual loves such ideals, she sees acting in accordance with the ideals as in her self-interest for the same reasons that the philosopher see it as in her own interest to act in accordance with the forms. On this approach, then, the ideal of the just person does not depend on acquiring knowledge of the forms and is thus not in principle unattainable for many.

This approach assumes, though, that we love ideals such as justice and goodness. But what if we do not already love these ethical ideals? Socrates might respond that all

¹⁶ See E. Brown, "Minding the Gap in Plato's *Republic*," for a much fuller defense of the notion that Plato's theory of education plays a key role in his defense of justice.

of us, due to acculturation, have an attachment to ethical ideals, and thus, we do have a reason to act in accordance with these ideals. If, however, we are asking the question of why be moral at all, then we are questioning the value of our attachment to these ethical ideals. Why should we aspire to be the kind of person that has a devotion to ethical ideals? Why shouldn't we, as Thrasymachus recommends, throw off the shackles of such an attachment and unabashedly pursue our own self-interest? To answer this question, Socrates needs to give us a reason to endorse, as opposed to shake off, our attachment to ethical ideals.

Socrates could respond that we should endorse our attachment to ethical ideals because loving such ideals helps us attain the psychic harmony that we all desire. Loving justice prevents us from acting on our unruly spirited and appetitive desires, and thus prevents us from strengthening those parts of the soul that jeopardize our psychic harmony. On this picture an individual values justice not because she sees something worthwhile in considering the good of others, but because loving justice is a means to psychic harmony. Now, however, we are back to an approach similar to the indirect justice approach, where the reason for being just has nothing to do with concern for the good of others.

In sum, then, the first articulation of the self-interested justice approach faces the following problem: if we have the sort of nature that is amenable to and capable of knowing and loving the forms, then we have a self-interested reason to consider the good of others. If, however, we are not amenable to or capable of knowing and loving the forms, then at most we have an indirect reason to be just. But then, for the majority of individuals, the reason to be just has nothing to do with concern for the good of others.

And, again, this violates our intuition that the justification for being moral ought to make some reference to concern for the good of others. Does Socrates have the resources to give everyone a self-interested justification for being moral that makes some reference to having concern for the good of others? In what follows, I will suggest that he does.

VI.

In this section, I suggest an alternative but neglected way of understanding Socrates' defense of justice. On my interpretation, the *Republic* does provide us with the tools to argue that the just individual has a self-interested reason to be concerned with the good of others; moreover, the ideal on which Socrates' defense relies is available and appealing to everyone. On my view, Socrates thinks that we have a reason to behave justly because behaving justly is necessary for fulfilling a deeply important need that we all as social creatures have, namely, the need to be connected or unified with other people.

In what follows, I will argue first that Socrates thinks that our happiness resides, at least in part, in being unified with other people. I will then argue that Socrates thinks that being unified with others requires that we consider their own good in our decision-making; specifically, it requires that we see their good as our own good. Accordingly, behaving unjustly, which at the very least involves disregarding the good of another, is incompatible with being unified with others, and thus, incompatible with our own happiness.

What evidence is there for thinking that Socrates holds that being unified with others is essential to our happiness? Since Socrates thinks that we all want the good

(505d-e), and that happiness consists in having good things (*Symposium* 204e-205a), the best place to look for Socrates' conception of happiness is in his conception of the form of the good. While Socrates' account of the good is not fully developed, most commentators agree that the good is unity or harmony. The primary evidence for this interpretation is the fact that the claim that the good is unity or harmony explains a number of metaphysical, epistemological, political and ethical claims in the *Republic*.¹⁷ For example, the claim that the good is unity or harmony accounts for Socrates' assertion that the good explains the nature of the forms, for the forms, both individually and as a whole, are characterized as unified and harmonious (475a; 479a-e; 500c-e). The assertion that the good is unity or harmony also explains Socrates' claim that the good is responsible for the knowability of the forms, for the forms are knowable because they never exhibit contradictory features and as such are unified and harmonious (479a-e). The contention that the good is unity also explains Socrates' claim that the greatest good for a city is that which "binds it together and makes it one," and the greatest evil that which "tears it apart and makes it many instead of one" (462a-b). And finally, the thought that the good is unity explains Socrates' claim that the most desirable soul is the soul that is "entirely one, moderate and harmonious" (443e), and the most undesirable souls are those that lack unity (see especially 554d-e, 560a, 573a-577e).

¹⁷ Different commentators call the property that Plato is trying to isolate by different names, such as 'order,' 'harmony' and 'unity'; despite the slight variation in language all of these commentators are pointing to the same thing. See, for example, E. Brown, "Minding the Gap in Plato's *Republic*," N. Dahl, "Plato's Defense of Justice in the *Republic*," 828; J. Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice," 144; G. Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V"; D. Hitchcock, "The Good in Plato's *Republic*," T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 272-3; C.D.C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 81-95; N. White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, 35-43. For an alternative, although not, in my view, incompatible account of the form of the good, see G. Santas, *Goodness and Justice*, Chapter 5.

If happiness consists in having good things, and if the good is unity, then it follows that happiness consists in having unity and harmony in our lives. The desire for a unified soul is an important illustration of the general desire to possess unity and harmony. Another important example of the desirability of unity and harmony that Socrates emphasizes in the *Republic*, and one that I think has been neglected in discussions of Socrates' defense of justice, is the desirability of being unified with and having harmonious relationships with others.

One might object, however, to the claim that Socrates thinks that unity with others is essential for our happiness by arguing that there are two senses of having unity: according to the first sense, having unity simply means being unified yourself, and according to the second sense, having unity also involves being part of instances of unity, for example, being part of unified relationships. The objector might continue that while there is evidence that Socrates thinks that unity in the first sense is integral to happiness, there is no evidence that unity in the second sense is part of Socrates' conception of happiness. This objection fails, however, since there *is* evidence that Socrates thinks that being part of unified relationships is an essential part of our happiness.

First, Socrates' critique of the tyrannical individual is largely dependent on an appeal to the poor quality of his relationships with others. The tyrant is surrounded by individuals that he does not trust and who do not trust and even hate him (567a-580a). In attempting to convince us that the tyrant, the supremely unjust individual, is not happy, Socrates describes his life as follows: "So someone with a tyrannical nature lives his whole life without being friends with anyone, always a master to one man or slave to another and never getting a taste of either true freedom or true friendship" (576a). Thus,

just as there is war, conflict, servitude and enmity within the parts of the tyrant's soul, there is war, conflict, enmity and servitude in the tyrant's external community. The tyrant lacks both internal and external unity, and Socrates characterizes *both* deficiencies as contributing to his unhappiness.

Second, Socrates describes the tyrannical city as unhappy due to the conflict between the individuals in the city (566d-569c), and he characterizes the ideal city as happy due to the unity found between the individuals in the city (462a-465b). One might object here that Socrates is saying that the happiness of *the city* is due to unity, and by this he is not making any claims about the happiness of the citizens. It is clear, however, that in calling the city happy, Socrates is referring to the happiness of the citizens, for he repeatedly says that in fashioning the happy city, the goal is not to make one group happy, but all of the citizens happy (420b-c; 466a); thus Socrates thinks that the happiness of the city is due to the happiness of the citizens. If, then, Socrates argues that the city is happy because of the unified relationships between its citizens, and if the city's happiness is due to the citizen's happiness, then it follows that the citizen's happiness, at least qua citizen, is due to the fact that they have unified relationships with one another. Thus, there is evidence in the *Republic* that Socrates thinks that our happiness crucially involves having unified relationships with the members of our community.

But what reason do we have for thinking that Socrates holds that considering the good of others is necessary for having unified and harmonious relationships? While I cannot give a full account of what it is for something to be unified, Socrates' discussion of the unified city in *Republic V* does provide us with some sense of what unity between individuals involves and some minimal conditions for unity. In *Republic V*, Socrates

argues that when people are unified they share in each other's successes and failures and pleasures and pains (462b-e, 463e-464d). Socrates goes on to argue that this is possible when individuals do not see their own concerns as separate or distinct from the concerns of others (462c; 463e-464d). Conversely, when individuals are not unified their pleasures and pains are privatized – that is, the welfare of one citizen or group of citizens does not affect the welfare of any other citizen or groups of citizens (462b); this privatization occurs when individuals do not see the concerns of others as having anything to do with their own concerns (462c). We can conclude, then, that a necessary condition of being unified with others is seeing their good as your own good.

Socrates' discussion of the happiness of the guardians in the ideal city in *Republic* IV provides further evidence for the claim that Socrates thinks that our happiness consists in being unified with others and that this involves seeing their good as our good. When Adeimantus asks Socrates why we should think that the guardians are happy, Socrates replies that the happiness of individuals in a city cannot be determined independently of their nature qua citizen or member of a community (420c-421a). One's nature qua citizen is determined by the role one best plays in making the city as a whole happy. Socrates seems to be suggesting, then, that the happiness of an individual citizen cannot be achieved independently of his fulfilling his role in making the community of which he is a part happy, or in other words, in making his fellow citizens happy (420d-421b). But why should Socrates think this?

One sensible answer is this: Socrates thinks that the happiness of individuals consists, at least in part, in being unified with other individuals, and that being unified with other individuals involves taking their own good into account, or seeing their good

as one's own good. Thus, if the good of an individual's fellow citizens requires that he does the work for which he is best suited in the city, then doing that work will enable him to be unified with the members of his community and thus will contribute to his happiness. And indeed, Socrates says that the concern of the ideal city is to "spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefit that each class can confer on the community" (519e).

It should be clear, then, that treating others unjustly is incompatible with being unified with them. Treating another unjustly involves, at the least, ignoring the other's good and this in turn involves seeing the other as separate from and unimportant to your own welfare, or as a tool to be used for your own ends. Moreover, once you have treated someone unjustly, or intentionally ignored his own good in your actions, you are likely to see the one you have wronged as a potential enemy, an individual who might want to avenge himself on you, and who will certainly ignore your own good. All of these attitudes are incompatible with being unified with others. Finally, those who act unjustly tend to view others in the world as having a similar disregard for the good of others, even those who have not given them reason to be suspicious, and thus, the unjust individual is likely to feel disconnected or estranged from others in this way as well. The lack of unity that the unjust individual cultivates between himself and others, as Socrates notes in his discussion of the unjust souls in *Republic* VIII and IX, results in feelings of isolation, suspicion and fear - experiences that are incompatible with happiness.

Furthermore, Socrates argues that when individuals are unified, they actually feel the pleasures and pains of those they are unified with; Socrates is pointing out by this that

being unified with others involves having empathy for them (462b-464d). Accordingly, in order to avoid feeling the pain of someone that you have wronged, you must psychologically separate yourself from that person; you must see them as utterly distinct and different than you – as an entity with radically different psychological responses than your own. Viewing others in this way results in thinking of yourself as fundamentally different and disconnected from those around you, and this in turn leads to feelings of alienation, which are, again, incompatible with happiness.

This interpretation of Socrates' defense of justice has the advantage of showing that the just individual sees it as in her interest to consider the good of others in her deliberations: it is in her interest because considering the good of others is necessary for being unified with others, and being unified with others is part of what constitutes her happiness. Accordingly, this view, like the first version of the self-interested justice strategy, can explain why the philosopher sees it as in her interest to rule the city: she realizes that her happiness requires that she is unified with her fellow citizens, and this in turn requires that she consider their good, which is for her to rule the city.

One might argue, however, that while my interpretation has the advantages of the last interpretation we considered, it is also subject to the same objection, namely, on my account, the ideal of the just individual is unattainable to many. On my view, the individual with a just soul knows the form of the good, and it is this knowledge that motivates her to act justly. But if having a just soul requires having knowledge of the good, and if I must have a just soul to have a reason to act justly, then, again, Socrates has failed to give the average individual a reason to be just, since the average individual simply does not have the willingness or the capacity to attain knowledge of the good.

I hope it is obvious, however, that this objection fails, since unity and connection with others is a fundamental and universal human value. The desirability of having unity with others is not something that only the just individual recognizes; rather, it is something that we all intuitively recognize and experience. This is why Socrates' description of the tyrant is so effective: we see the value in being genuinely connected with others, and we recoil from the thought of being surrounded by people with whom we lack this sort of connection. Thus, we all have a reason to be just.

I do not mean to suggest by this that Socrates thinks that the philosopher's motivation to take just actions is exactly the same as a non-philosopher's motivation to take just actions. We can see the difference by distinguishing two senses of being ruled by reason. According to the first sense, an individual is ruled by reason if she knows the form of the good; if an individual is ruled by reason in this sense then her motivation for acting justly will be based, among other things, on a very abstract comprehension of why unity, including unity with others, is part of the good life. According to the second sense of being ruled by reason, an individual is ruled by reason if she is free to deliberate and act on her determinations of what is best without interference from non-rational passions and impulses. Socrates could argue that one who is ruled by reason in this sense will be able to clearly intuit and act in accordance with the idea that unity with others is necessary for the good life. On this final interpretation, then, while the philosopher and the non-philosopher have clearer and dimmer apprehensions of the good, both are motivated by the idea that their interest is realized in acting out of concern for the good of others.

Obviously this interpretation of Socrates' defense of justice should not be accepted without a full consideration of both the textual evidence for and against it, as well as possible objections, which I do not consider here. I do hope, though, to have alerted readers of the *Republic* to an unexplored and potentially fruitful way of justifying Socrates' defense of justice. In addition, I hope that by canvassing the various approaches to Socrates' account of justice, I have left the reader not only with an awareness of the broad strategies for approaching the *Republic*, but of the possible routes for arguing more generally that justice is a central component of the good life.¹⁸

¹⁸ I would like to thank Eric Brown, William Larkin, Gerasimos Santas, Clerk Shaw, Christopher Shields, Paul Studtmann, Daniel Sturgis, Matt Warren, and Shelley Wilcox for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this article.

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