

# Justice Restored: Plato's "Myths" of the Afterlife in the Republic and the Gorgias

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BOSTON COLLEGE

JUSTICE RESTORED:  
PLATO'S "MYTHS" OF THE AFTERLIFE  
IN THE *REPUBLIC* AND THE *GORGIAS*

A SENIOR HONORS THESIS

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If errors remain, in translation or otherwise: Αιτία γράψαντος· διδάσκαλος ἀναίτιος.

## Introduction

### Plato's Dialogues, Myth, and Political Science

Political scientists should be able to defend their serious study of a book with the decidedly political name of the *Republic*, and once they have mentioned that the subject of the *Gorgias* is rhetoric, or the “art” of persuasive speech, they might have little trouble showing the relevance of that dialogue. So long as Plato has Socrates and his interlocutors talking about the origins of political life, the constituent parts of the city, the cycle of regime change, and the persuasion of the assembly by the savvy, smooth-talking legislator, few would doubt that Plato has something worthwhile to say to the discipline. That political science should turn its eye to stories of the afterlife, however, seems strange. After all, once Plato has left the realm of the regime and the world of observable political phenomena, what has he to do with politics? What do we make of a story about Zeus and the judgment of souls? Does not a myth about a warrior who perishes in battle and travels with the dead to the River Lethe belong more to poetry or religion than to politics?

Indeed, it might be possible to study the tales of the afterlife in the dialogues of Plato as part of a study of literature or of the history of philosophy or even as comparative religion or theology.<sup>1</sup> Plato's eschatological accounts however, are essential to understanding the *political* teachings of the dialogues. They are not mere poetic addenda to the dialogues or departures from reasoned political education. At the core of these dialogues is disagreement over justice and the

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<sup>1</sup> For much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in fact, much ink was spilt over the precise origins of Plato's myths, whether they derived from the Pythagoreans, the Orphic religious tradition, or somewhere else. James Adam's commentary on the *Republic* treats such scholarly conflicts at great length, but their value for our present purposes is minimal.

best way of life for a human being and a city. It is the fundamental conflict between the individual and the community—that what is best for one might not be best for the other—that drives the dialogues.

Glaucon and Callicles—among the most important characters in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* apart from Socrates himself—are deeply upset, for different reasons and with different results, about the apparent injustice of the world. They desire some teaching that will, rather than denying a harsh political reality, let them be at peace with the way things are. They each want it to be *good* to be just and for the just to get what they deserve. Each is a shrewd observer of political life and neither one naïve. Both men desire a solution—the best one available, at least—to the political problem that the “just” will often get trampled and the “unjust” become the greatest and most successful tyrants. The tales of the afterlife that conclude both the *Republic* and the *Gorgias* are direct responses to this desire on the part of Glaucon and Callicles, in each case (we will argue) suited to the needs of those men.

This thesis will attempt to understand the concluding stories of the *Republic* and the *Gorgias* as fundamentally “political” and arising from the specific arguments and broad themes of the dialogues themselves. Three chapters deal with each dialogue: one that prepares the reader for the “myth,” one that presents a translation of the passage, and one that interprets the passage in light of the whole dialogue.

In Chapter 1, we introduce Callicles as seeking an answer about the best way of life both from Gorgias the rhetorician and from Socrates. Callicles believes justice to be the rule of the strongest and rejects any conventional understanding that conflicts with this “natural” one. While Gorgias offers Callicles great political power by claiming to teach one how to succeed in the city by learning rhetoric alone, Socrates proclaims what he calls his true political art.

Chapter 2 is a translation, with explanatory notes, of *Gorgias* 522c4 and following.

Chapter 3 treats the story of the afterlife found in the *Gorgias* as a response to Callicles' concerns. It is not a "myth" but a *logos*, as Socrates insists: a very noble account about the judgment of souls that will benefit Callicles in some way. Though touching the realm of the gods and the afterlife, Socrates' story grounds itself in a reasonable account of human action and its consequences. The *logos* offers Callicles a defense against Gorgias' *epideixis*<sup>2</sup> for his false rhetorical "art," by beginning to show him an alternative and true art. We explore the possibility of Callicles' being persuaded and the difficulty he has in accepting a "philosophical" over a "political" way of life.

Chapter 4 addresses the *Republic* in brief, in order to prepare the reader for the myth of Er. We present several definitions for justice from the dialogue. Justice as harmony and minding one's own business informs much of the myth. We examine Glaucon's classification of goods and his challenge to Socrates—that he prove justice to be good in itself without recourse to its "benefits." We attempt to provide an account of astronomy's place in the *Republic*, to begin to understand its prominence in the myth.

Chapter 5 is a translation, with notes, of *Republic* 613e5 and following.

Chapter 6 gives an account of the political significance of the myth of Er, especially in light of Glaucon's challenge to Socrates. The welcoming back of the rewards of justice poses a difficulty: how are we to understand Glaucon's sudden eagerness to hear about all the good things the just will receive, both in life and at death? Socrates' account of poetry in Book X can help us understand his goal in producing a myth not merely in imitation of unexamined opinion

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<sup>2</sup> ἐπίδειξις: demonstration, a show-off speech. A good rhetorician would have something prepared, to exhibit his oratorical skills.



but one grounded in philosophy and knowledge about the city and soul. The orderly universe presented in the myth tries to satisfy Glaucon's love of justice, while directing him, as much as possible, to the philosophic way of life.

In the conclusion, we reassess the importance of the stories of the afterlife in light of Socrates' goal to educate both Glaucon and Callicles. We look at how these disputes over justice and the good can really be called "political," even as they take up justice in the soul.

### ***Mythos and Logos***

To understand the "myths" in these dialogues, it is first necessary to understand certain nuances in language. The afterlife story in the *Gorgias* is explicitly called a *logos* and not a myth (*mythos*); the myth of Er is both an apologue (*apologos*) and a myth. Socrates' insistence in the *Gorgias* that his story is a *logos* should lead us to question the importance of the terms as distinct entities. Because of the connotations of "myth" in modern English, we might be quick to suggest an easy dichotomy of true and false to explain its relationship with *logos*. The basic meaning of *logos* and *mythos* is the same, referring first to something spoken (as opposed to done), then to a speech and the subject matter of a speech. *Logos* comes to mean "a reasonable account" and even "reason" itself. *Apologos*, which by the much later age of Cicero is simply "fable," is a more or less neutral word for "story" from Homer to Plato. *Mythos* has the further shade of meaning of a story or tale, either one without any connotation of being true or false, or one explicitly fictional.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I have consulted the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English dictionary (LSJ) throughout for the definitions of Greek words. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

Speaking of the definitions of words in general, however, will not give us a precise understanding of their definitions for Plato. Zaslavsky helpfully collates the appearance of “myth” in the dialogues. Myths, according to some interlocutors, are “*epideixeis* of true beings, pleasant and playful, perishable and productive of soul growth, persuasive, partially true and partially false.” In relation to *logos*, *mythos* is said to be “lacking a *logos*, opposed to *logos*, the same as *logos*, [and] the genus of which *logos* is a species.”<sup>4</sup> In short, the full panoply of meaning for both words appears in the dialogues, making it difficult to assess what Plato or Socrates precisely means when he insists upon one or the other.

For this reason, we must assess each instance of *mythos* or *logos* in light of its context. To study “Platonic myth” might indeed be a work for historians of philosophy, if they are interested in producing a general understanding of “stories” as they appear in the dialogue. Philologists might wish to know about the many shades of meaning in the words as they were used in fifth century Attica. Since our work, however, is essentially concerned with Plato’s political teaching, our approach is different. Whether a *logos* or a *mythos*, each “story” in the dialogues is grounded in the particular questions that Socrates and the rest of the interlocutors have raised.

Comparing the “myths” (whether *mythoi* or *logoi* in name) in Plato and commenting upon their similarities and differences is an interesting exercise but, it seems, one that often fails to capture their true nature. As Moors notes, with this kind of approach, “the commentator loses the perspective provided by the overall dialogical context in which Plato chooses to utilize

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Zaslavsky, *Platonic Myth and Platonic Writing* (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1981), 15. Zaslavsky emphasizes *mythos* as describing the origin or genesis of some phenomenon, but while this is true in several cases, the afterlife “myths” call into question such a distinction. In any event, Zaslavsky’s appendices give what seems to be a comprehensive listing of *mythos* and its related terms in the Platonic corpus.

specific mythical construction.”<sup>5</sup> Our work here is not meant to be a comprehensive account of myth in Plato, and we have limited our scope to two specific stories from the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*. Given the similarities between the myth of Er and the *logos* in the *Gorgias*, both in form and in subject, it is tempting to isolate them from their immediate and wider dialogic context. To counteract this tendency, we have taken pains to introduce the broad themes as well as the specific details in each of the two dialogues that lead to these concluding tales, attempting to adhere thoroughly to the text by producing careful translations.

### **Texts, Commentaries, and Translation**

The translation of the *Gorgias* passage is based on the editions of John Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903) and of E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias, A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959). Also consulted was James H. Nichols’ translation, *Plato: Gorgias* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For the *Republic*, the text used was that of James Adam, *The Republic of Plato, With Critical Notes, Commentary and Appendices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902). Also consulted was the translation of Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

In coupling translation and analysis of Plato, one meets with a twin set of problems. For translation, the difficulty is, quite simply, to say what Plato says. A faithful translation of a first-rate thinker from two and a half thousand years ago proves a challenge that, to be sure, is not met

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<sup>5</sup> Kent. F. Moors, *Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study* (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1982), ix. In Chapter 1 of the work, Moors provides an excellent survey of scholarly commentary on Platonic myth from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth century.

adequately here on all accounts. One scholar from the nineteenth century, who offered his own professedly “literal translation” of the *Gorgias*, defended his methods thus:

I have done my best to hold a middle course between the pedantic and servile adherence to the letter, by which grace, ease, and English grammar are sacrificed, and the looseness of a paraphrase, which may indeed faithfully reproduce the thoughts of the writer, but must needs fail to give any idea of the dress in which those thoughts are clothed.<sup>6</sup>

The same scholar was right to point out the problems of, among other things, rendering Greek particles and dealing with oaths and forms of address.<sup>7</sup> In this translation, one will find no “by heaven” for a “by Zeus,” no “dear Sir” for an ὦ βέλτιστε (“best one”), but neither must every γάρ, ἄρα, and οὖν be a “for,” “then,” and “so.” In this way, we seek to provide Plato’s thoughts in their own dress, as far as possible. It is precisely the problem we wish to overcome that no paraphrase may actually “faithfully reproduce the thoughts” of Plato. Little in the dialogues can or ought to be extracted from its context of characters and speeches and set on its own to speak for itself.

For analysis of the text, the difficulty is to say something that Plato does not say without saying something *that Plato does not intend to say*. Whatever is obvious, of course, need not be said again, but in trying to find some novel interpretation, in the attempt to say something *new*, we risk undoing all the careful, sober work of translation. One is not inclined to take liberties with interpretation. With the Greek text open, one almost wishes merely to point at the words on the page. After all, whatever one has to say apart from the text itself seems either superfluous or deficient. This too cautious approach is like that of Cratylus observing the motion of the world, “who at last thought that it was not at all necessary to speak but used to move his finger only.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E. M. Cope, trans., preface to *Plato’s Gorgias* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), v-vi.

<sup>7</sup> Cope viii-xv.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1010a.

This study, then, lies somewhere between merely pointing at the text and molding it for one's own purposes.

## Chapter 1

### The Competition for Callicles' Soul: Socrates and Gorgias on Avoiding Injustice

#### Introduction

The subject of the *Gorgias* is rhetoric,<sup>1</sup> the professed art or craft [*technē*] of the dialogue's namesake. Socrates says at the outset to Callicles, "I want to learn by inquiring of him, what the power of the art of the man is, and what it is that he both professes and teaches" (447c). As it turns out, the rhetoric of the sort that Gorgias teaches<sup>2</sup> is, in Socrates' opinion, not a true art but a sort of knack for flattery, a phantom part of politics employed in persuading the many [*hoi polloi*] for the sake of winning their favor and avoiding being robbed or killed. Though rhetoric promises power, something is lacking—*eudaimonia*.

Some other way of life than rhetoric will bring happiness for the human being in the city. Socrates lays out a true counterpart to Gorgias' rhetoric in his own "political" art, but as to how effective that art may be, practiced as it is by a private man,<sup>3</sup> by a ridiculous one at that, and what its consequences are, we must examine further. Why such an investigation of rhetoric and politics should lead to a tale of the afterlife, to that "very noble account," we will attempt to make as clear as possible (523a). That tale, in any case, presumes nothing less than to proclaim a true political art that is practiced *best* by the private man and the philosopher himself. Socrates

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<sup>1</sup> Diogenes Laertius and the medieval manuscripts affix a subtitle to the dialogue: ἡ περὶ ῥητορικῆς (Dodds 1).

<sup>2</sup> Whether Gorgias professes what he teaches, is a question for another study. Consider also the *Protagoras*, where a similar question might be asked about the sophist Protagoras.

<sup>3</sup> ἰδιώτης: a private person, i.e., one without office, or a layman.

attempts thereby to assuage the indignation of Callicles, who possesses some political ambition but rejects philosophy as a way of life.

As one of Plato's longest dialogues, the *Gorgias* will not admit of a full treatment in a study of this sort.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the final passage of the dialogue—the story of the afterlife—will serve as a way to examine some of the questions raised in the *Gorgias*. To that end, I have produced a translation of 522c4 and following, as part of a close reading of the text.<sup>5</sup> Since that passage is directed at Callicles, so too will much of this study focus on his concerns in particular, while at the same time noting how the passage acts as a conclusion to the whole dialogue.

Our concern is not with Platonic thought as such—whatever that may be in a comprehensive sense—but with the particular teaching of the *Gorgias*. In this we depart from certain scholars, like Josef Pieper, who speak about the apparent development in Plato's "convictions about life after death" from the writing of the *Gorgias*, for example, to that of the *Republic*.<sup>6</sup> Plato, through his teacher Socrates, may have one thing to say to one human being and another to another, and this need not be a "contradiction" or "development" in his thought. In comparing the eschatological accounts in the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Phaedo*, Pieper argues that the "myths," with some introduction of new doctrines, express a single truth "beyond the

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<sup>4</sup> For a truly comprehensive account of the *Gorgias*, one that seeks to find its unity despite all the "strange passages, questionable arguments, and confusing transitions," see Devin Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See "Chapter 2: *Gorgias* 522c4ff."

<sup>6</sup> Josef Pieper, *The Platonic Myths*, trans. Dan Farrelly (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2011) 21-24.

realm of our existence.”<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, at least, this will not be assumed, though it may, of course, turn out to be true.

It is indeed *possible* to focus on other-worldly truth that the *Gorgias* contains in its closing passage. From the starting point of Christianity, for instance, rather than from Plato himself, one might make such an argument. Nalin Rasasinghe, who argues in this respect for the supremacy of the *Gorgias* over the *Republic*, holds that the *Gorgias* “is unique among the Platonic works in offering us *inter alia* several positive statements of a Socratic worldview.” The account of the afterlife, by his argument, “turns out to be the crucial transition between the Homeric and Christian views of the meaning of life and death that lies at the birth of Humanism.” The *Gorgias*, then, “best conveys the Socratic vision of a morally governed cosmos that eventually provided both the language and concepts by which the sublime message of Christianity spread throughout the Hellenized world and gave birth to Western Civilization.”<sup>8</sup> To a jealous partisan of the *Gorgias* or to a Christian student of Plato, such an elevation in status is tempting—but seems to fly too quickly away from the text, to which, therefore, it is necessary to return.

The question of rhetoric, and what it has to do with the happiness of human beings, finds its fulfillment in the selected passage, but, as Dodds notes, the two themes of rhetoric and *eudaimonia* are interlaced throughout the dialogue. The movement of the conversations, he says, “is not that of a pendulum but that of an ascending spiral, where at each fresh turn of the road we can see further than before” (Dodds 3). So as not to dizzy ourselves by running too quickly up

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<sup>7</sup> Pieper 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Nalin Rasasinghe, *Socrates in the Underworld* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009), 6.



that spiral, we first provide some context for the dialogue’s puzzling conclusion. In a very real way, the dialogue begins and ends with Callicles.<sup>9</sup>

### **Callicles in the *Gorgias***

At the beginning of the dialogue, we find that Gorgias is visiting Athens. While in the city, he is staying at the house of Callicles (447b). This detail leads us to believe that Callicles has some particular concern for what Gorgias has to say. It is helpful, therefore, to look at what Gorgias professes to teach and what Callicles expects to learn from him.

Gorgias speaks of his art of rhetoric as the slavemaster’s art, through which all other arts are made subject by persuading the political men to do what the rhetor wishes (452e). It is this characteristic of rhetoric—its enslaving power—that seems to appeal most strongly to Callicles. The student of Gorgias’ rhetoric, even though he knows no other art, will come to possess, according to Gorgias, “much ease” and will be “not at all worsted<sup>10</sup> among the craftsmen [τῶν δημιουργῶν]” (459c). Socrates’ own definition of Gorgias’ rhetoric fits quite well with that for which Callicles is searching. Socrates says that rhetoric is “[an experience] in the completion [ἀπεργασίας] of some favor and pleasure” (462d). When these statements are taken together and applied to Callicles, it becomes clear that Callicles wishes to learn such an art of mastery, which uses as means flattery and currying favor with the *demos*, to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. Callicles has in mind the avoidance of the greatest pain—suffering injustice at the hands of

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<sup>9</sup> This is true on an obvious, if superficial, level: Callicles is the first to speak, and his name, spoken by Socrates, is the last word of the dialogue.

<sup>10</sup> ἐλαττοῦσθαι: become smaller, be lessened, suffer loss; (with a gen. object, as here) be at a disadvantage (with a person). “Worsted” tries to capture both senses.

another. More than shameful, this pain belongs not to a man [*aner*] but to a slave (483a-b). The rhetor is for Callicles both man and master.

Despite his clear preference for, or indeed absorption of, Gorgias' teaching, Callicles remains open to Socrates. To understand this, we need only compare him to Polus, the eager student of Gorgias. When Socrates makes the claim that the "successful," unpunished tyrant is more wretched than the one who is punished, Polus merely laughs (473a). Callicles, on the other hand, does not dismiss Socrates as though his arguments were ridiculous. Callicles remains open to Socrates. When the discussion between Socrates and Gorgias appears to be coming to an end, Callicles professes emphatically, "Though I myself have indeed been present for many arguments already, I do not know if I have ever yet been so pleased as just now, with the result that, as for me at least, even if you wish to converse for the whole day, you will gratify [*χαριεἶσθε*] me" (458d)<sup>11</sup>. Callicles relishes hearing from both Socrates and Gorgias, especially since he can hear them arguing with each other—giving him the best chance to see how their arguments will fare in competition. Thus the first two parts of the dialogue—Socrates' discussions with Gorgias and Polus—set up the final part, since they have prepared Callicles to articulate his own positions about justice and rhetoric in light of the inadequacies that Socrates has exposed in Gorgias' rhetoric and the continuing doubts Callicles has about Socrates' own position.

### **Problems of the Dialogue: Looking at the Afterlife Story in Context (521a-522c)**

Much of Socrates' conversation with Callicles centers on whether it is better to be just or unjust, given the state in which those of each sort find themselves. Callicles believes that,

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<sup>11</sup> Note how Callicles' concern for pleasure [*ἡδύς*] and favor [*χάρις*] is foreshadowed.

according to the conventional understanding of the terms, the just man will be steamrolled by the city and the unjust man may prosper. The stronger, he says, who are such by nature and not by convention, should rule, and rhetoric—though scorned as flattery by Socrates—is precisely the art by which this is accomplished. Rhetoric preserves a man, but the one without rhetoric, though he believes himself in some way good and noble, has in his refined morality something of mere pretense, something against nature, and, in a word, something worthless<sup>12</sup> (492c). Such a human being, according to Callicles, will not fail to suffer evil, and to suffer evil is painful and ignoble to such an extent that one should be amazed to hear anything to the contrary.

This opinion is not so strange. Here we have a character trying to reveal a certain (perceived) truth to Socrates. It is a truth known only to those with their eyes wide open, who, uncovering and discarding the conventions of morality, see the world as it *really* is. The argument is a familiar one, even to those wholly unfamiliar with Plato. A young man looks at political life and sees that people fare well or poorly in predictable ways. What the city says to do is often painful; what it forbids is often pleasant. The unscrupulous usually succeed, and the honest too often falter. The weak are overcome by the strong, and “virtue” be damned. What may become a source of great angst for the religious, who can tie themselves in knots trying to figure out why the gods send rain on the just and unjust alike or why indeed the wicked man prospers, is for such a young man quite straightforward. Nature, the true judge of the just and unjust, is opposed to the conventions of the city. In fact, the city itself hardly practices its own dictates. In the place of the city’s worthless, superficial morality, then, it is necessary to discover some new standard. Nature does not long prevent just such a discovery.

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<sup>12</sup> See note at 527e.

Callicles adopts, under Socrates' questioning at least, a certain hedonism.<sup>13</sup> It is the natural alternative to conventional morality. What is painful is bad, and what is pleasant is good. What is more painful is worse, and what is more pleasant is better. There could hardly be anything freer from arbitrary distinction or closer to the obvious and ready-to-hand.<sup>14</sup>

To this (natural) hedonism is added the natural, and naturally just, state of political association. As Callicles says, “*Nature herself*, I think, shows it, that it is just that the better has more than the worse and the more powerful than the less powerful, and it is clear that in many places these things are thus, both among the [other]<sup>15</sup> animals and among entire cities<sup>16</sup> and the races of human beings” (483c-d). No animal lays claim to what lies beyond its power. That other cities live in this natural state undermines all the more anyone in Athens who clings to mere convention. The just by nature—the only justice worth caring about—is the rule of the strong.

Callicles is not “amoral.” His desire to overturn or overlook the conventions of the city is born of a desire for justice. His observations of political life—that the strong always rule the weak—do not prompt a theodicy but the adoption of an extreme position—that the strong rule justly. Natural justice, as understood by Callicles, forces us to accept, for example, that the Nazi

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<sup>13</sup> It is “a certain hedonism” insofar as it is not the purest, most developed, most defensible form of that way of life in its presentation here.

<sup>14</sup> By what art of measurement pains and pleasures might really be compared satisfactorily, that is, with mathematical precision, it is difficult to say. For a discussion of this, see *Protagoras* 356c-357b.

<sup>15</sup> Callicles is not *necessarily* calling human beings a type of animal (ζῷον), as it is possible, for example, to speak in Greek of “my mother and the other slaves” without slighting one’s mother. Perhaps the lack of precise parallel structure also weakens the comparison, though the word order (... τοῖς ἄλλοις ζῷοις καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων...) tends to have the opposite effect.

<sup>16</sup> According to the LSJ, πόλεις ὅλαι (what is referred to here) are “*whole, entire cities, opp. to ὅλη ἢ πόλις, the whole city, the city as a whole.*”

invasion of Poland was *just* simply because if it was successful. Every victorious army, by the very act of defeating its enemies, shows itself to be stronger than and therefore deserving of rule over them. One takes such a view only to avoid having to believe that the just suffer.

Callicles' contempt for conventional morality gives rise to his hedonism and his stated view of justice, as we have said. His initial interest in justice, however, does not readily present itself simply as a desire for pleasure. The "just" man's estate becomes obnoxious to Callicles in part because that man suffers evils, but that suffering seems *wrong* because, somehow, the "just" *deserve* better and should not be in such a sorry state. The just man is supposed to be noble, and it is manifestly ignoble to be trampled (cf. 522c). Callicles must believe his own sense of nobility to be better than the conventional understanding.

Callicles' understanding of the noble, however, is very imprecise. Callicles is not a student of philosophy, and his positions are not consistent. This, in fact, is the case by his own design. Callicles has decided that he is better off having imprecise, even contradictory, opinions than he is spending all his time in philosophy (487c-d). He has considered justice only as far as seems needful. He has plugged his ears, in effect, because he does not want to undermine his "solution" to the problem of justice. Whatever Socrates may say, Callicles *insists* that it is manifestly ignoble to be trampled—no matter what definitions of "noble" and "shameful" have been agreed upon under duress at the hands of Socrates.<sup>17</sup> More than painful, such treatment is *somehow* wrong. If ever we should wholly remove this concern of Callicles and inoculate ourselves against all scorn for the just and trampled man, we would fail to understand the

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<sup>17</sup> When we turn our attention to Glaucon in the *Republic* the problem becomes subtly but importantly different: Glaucon insists that Socrates show that it *is* noble to be trampled, so long as one is just.

seriousness of the argument.<sup>18</sup> It is by finally satisfying or by attempting to satisfy this desire for nobility that Socrates may teach Callicles his political art. This attachment to nobility, the very thing which enrages Callicles in the first place, presents a rhetorical opening that Socrates will not ignore.

Not wishing Socrates to suffer an undeserved, unjust fate, Callicles, himself a man of political ambition, recommends a course of action in the city. Callicles' politics reflect his understanding of natural justice (the rule of the strong), pleasure (the goal of the strong in so ruling), and nobility (the state of not suffering undeserved injustice). Socrates says that Callicles is exhorting him to a certain "service for the city"<sup>19</sup> but wonders whether that service means "to fight with the Athenians, that they will be as good as possible, as a doctor [would], or as one who will minister and consort with a view to [gaining] favor [*charis*]" (521a). When Callicles says the latter, repeating that one should "minister" but omitting the reference to "favor," Socrates calls it flatly an exhortation to flattery. Perhaps Callicles is ashamed to declare openly that he wishes to curry favor among the many. Call it what you please,<sup>20</sup> says Callicles, "unless you will do *these things...*" (521b). Either Socrates cuts him off midsentence, or Callicles remains reticent. In any case, Socrates claims not to wish to hear this argument again.

For our purposes, in fact, Socrates' restatement and summary are quite welcome. His conversation with himself goes like this. If Socrates fails to flatter the Athenians, he will be killed and his goods confiscated. If he is killed, however, he, being good, is killed by someone

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<sup>18</sup> Christian glorification of the Man of Sorrows particularly obscures this concern.

<sup>19</sup> Θεραπεία τῆς πόλεως. *Therapeia* is a service, a waiting on, a caring for; also, a (medical) treatment (a "service" to/for the sick).

<sup>20</sup> Lit., "if it is more pleasant for you to call it Mysian..." Note the appeal to pleasure. The Mysians were "proverbially feeble and effeminate," according to the LSJ. Cf. *Theaetetus* 209b.

wicked. If the wicked one takes away what Socrates has, having taken it unjustly, he will likewise use it unjustly, and if unjustly, shamefully, and if shamefully, badly (521b-c). Socrates assumes, since his interlocutors refuse to say otherwise, that the unjust is shameful and the shameful bad. Therefore, he says, it is worse to commit injustice than to suffer it. To this Socrates has already forced Callicles to agree, at least formally. The “proof” that this is so is a rather poor one, inasmuch as it relies on Callicles’ reluctance to disregard the definition of “the shameful” as a species of “the bad.” Socrates has purposefully confused the conventional and the natural: the “shameful” is not *naturally* bad, but it is embarrassing to declare such a thing in polite company. So Callicles, while he believes Socrates to be incorrect, cannot point to the flaw in the argument.

To see that Callicles has not yet been convinced, even of Socrates’ motives, we need only look at his response. Callicles does not directly refute Socrates: he makes no mention of shame or injustice. Socrates’ conception of the situation is so ridiculous that he must, to Callicles’ mind, have some other support, some ulterior cause, for his outrageous claims, which are, for all the world to see, false on their face. Socrates, says Callicles, is only so confident because he “seems to trust that [he] would not even suffer one of these things,” since he lives “out of the way”<sup>21</sup> and, therefore, no one “wretched and mean” would ever bring him to the law-court (521c). Callicles doubts Socrates’ honesty, a difficulty that surely influences his reception of the afterlife story. Socrates has taken to playing both parts of the conversation, and it seems that nothing further can be achieved. Between this point (521c) and the start of the “very noble account” (523a), Socrates and Callicles develop the problem of serving the city, with or without flattery, invoking finally

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<sup>21</sup> ἐκποδών (from ἐκ ποδῶν): lit., away from the feet; out of the way, away, removed, banished. Socrates cannot be trampled underfoot if he is *ekpodon*. Cf. ἐμποδών: “at the feet”; in the way, presenting an obstacle.

the idea of “the political art in truth”<sup>22</sup> (521d). This political art must be the counterpart to Gorgias’ rhetoric, as the other possible way in which Callicles might avoid suffering injustice.

That Socrates should profess any such political art may seem strange, for he tells Polus, disputing the happiness of “successful” tyrants, “I am not [one] of the political ones [*hoi politikoi*]” (473e). Yet, he says here, “I alone of those nowadays do the political things [*ta politika*]” (521d). Dodds remarks that, while a formal contradiction, these statements are nonetheless true insofar as “Socrates takes no part in politics, but in speaking always [with a view to the best] he is performing the statesman’s task so far as a private citizen can.”<sup>23</sup> Dodds is probably correct, and yet another explanation is possible, if we recognize the true scope of political life. Socrates begins his assertion by saying: “I think that, with a few Athenians—in order that I might not say ‘I alone’—I put my hand to the political art in truth, and I alone of those nowadays...” Even Socrates’ weakly polite statement that some other people share in this work is undermined by the fact that, while some may “put their hand to” or attempt true politics, he alone *does* the political things. Socrates turns on its head the common complaint that philosophers are not men of action. He is not counted (or does not count himself) among *hoi politikoi*, and he avoids such a name.

Socrates’ politics, then, is not politics ordinarily understood. In the first and most obvious place, Socrates does not hold office. He is a private man, and yet he is unique in doing *ta politika*. But secondly, Socrates is not one of the “political” types in the sense of those who hold conventional views about the city and what it takes to survive and prosper within it—that is, the sort whom Callicles himself and Polus are, despite their not holding any offices. Socrates rejects

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<sup>22</sup> ἢ ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικὴ τέχνη. Not quite “the true political art,” but close.

<sup>23</sup> Dodds on 521d6-8. He also suggests that one may doubt whether the “historical Socrates” ever made such a claim.



the “truth” Callicles shares about natural justice. This is precisely why Socrates denies that he is “[one] of the political ones,” for even when he was a member of the jury, he refused to act according to political “wisdom.”<sup>24</sup> *Hoi politikoi* of the sort that Callicles and Polus are hold the Great King, tyrant or not, as supremely happy, and they will succumb, in order to preserve themselves, to the wishes of *hoi polloi* and the rhetors.<sup>25</sup> Yet, Socrates does the truly political things by always speaking “with a view to the best” and by “bidding farewell to the many” (473e-474b). Socrates has what one might call an aristocratic or anti-democratic bent, but until the *content* of his politics is determined, such a condemnation is, at the very least, beside the point. Politics of this sort—politics in truth—is not a matter of pleasure and power, whether in the rule of the strong or the flattering of the many, but a way of aiding oneself, others, and, most of all, the city. Again, this politics bears hardly any resemblance to politics as it is normally understood.

It is this view of politics that Callicles continues to reject, and that rejection will prompt Socrates’ account of the afterlife. The inability of this new political art to preserve its practitioner’s life, a fact Socrates freely admits, presents a real problem that we can hardly blame Callicles for seeing. No matter what, the political man in truth is subject to the wicked one, who can drag him to court. He is also subject to the many, who will prefer the rhetorician as children prefer the cook and his sweets to the doctor and his “painful” remedies (521e-522a). No defense can stop this. This “political” man seems to surrender his individual security and whatever

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<sup>24</sup> See 473e-474a.

<sup>25</sup> With Nichols, I merely transliterate ῥήτωρ [*rhetor*] rather than translate it as “rhetorician,” so as not to beg the question of whether what they practice, i.e., rhetoric, is an art. That, unfortunately, is impossible in the case of “rhetoric” itself, which is closely tied to ἡ ῥητορικὴ τέχνη, the rhetorical art.

success he may wish to have in public life. Not Callicles but Socrates himself lays all this out, adding that the truth,<sup>26</sup> that “justly do I say and do all these things,” will not persuade those whom the other participants in the dialogue have called “men [and] judges”<sup>27</sup> (522b-c). Then comes the unacceptable conclusion: “As a result, perhaps, whatever befalls me, this I will suffer” (522c). Though Socrates does not spell out the consequences, they are clear: he will die at the hands of such people. If Callicles is to accept Socrates’ teaching instead of Gorgias’, Socrates must persuade Callicles that this death is not the worst result.

### **Transition and Prologue (522c-522e)**

Callicles’ entire view of the world—his attachment to natural justice instead of the merely “conventional” justice of the city—depends upon such a death being the greatest injustice. Thus Callicles is prompted, as our passage begins, to wonder whether such a state of affairs will let us consider the truly political man in any way noble. A fair question, certainly. If, after all, politics in truth means to aid oneself and ultimately the city, what good can it possibly serve if a man like Socrates is himself killed and thereby prevented from doing either? How does he help the city, if no one will hear anything, whether the truth or anything else? How does he help himself if he is imprisoned or even *dead*? How in the world is this politics an “aid” of any kind to anyone at all? Who is persuaded and to what end? At this bait—for we can call it nothing else—Callicles bites.

Just because Socrates seems to wish these questions to be asked, however, does not mean that he will give a straightforward answer to them. He does not accuse Callicles of having a

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<sup>26</sup> He adds—“nor any other thing”

<sup>27</sup> ἄνδρες δικασταί, translated by Nichols as “gentleman judges.” A hendiadys. See note on *dikastai* and *krines* at 523b.

wrong view of the just or the noble—in fact, he behaves as though there is no problem at all. Socrates responds as though Callicles could not possibly disagree with what he is saying. Indeed, Socrates immediately appeals to what “you have many times agreed about” over the course of the conversations of the *Gorgias* (522c). By hook or by crook, Callicles has “admitted” already what Socrates now presents as their shared view, that the political man in truth who suffers such things at the hands of the many will indeed be in a noble state, “if he should have come to his own aid by neither having said nor having done anything unjust, either concerning human beings or concerning gods” (522c). It nonetheless seems a poor sort of self-help that leaves one—good to such a degree as to have offended neither god nor man—in such a lowly state. There is simply no indication that Callicles accepts that the death of the “political” man can be noble at all.

At stake is nothing less than the political art in truth, the whole project that Socrates seems to be advocating—his *therapeia* for human beings, for the city, for the political men and the many that consists in a restoration of justice. This project has already revealed itself under a different name, philosophy, for Socrates and Callicles, in much the same language, have already been arguing about this very thing.<sup>28</sup> Socrates knows that the philosopher bears the reputation of idleness and that adding weakness in addition can only further spoil Callicles’ reception of his teaching. In short, Socrates’ solution seems to be to replace one title with another. Politics, this rose-by-another-name, is sweeter to Callicles than philosophy. In an appeal to Callicles’ attachment to politics, Socrates has reformulated the problem. However, this is no mere deception of an ignorant audience, and the ultimate aim of Socrates’ account is, not to prove the

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<sup>28</sup> For Callicles’ rather extensive discussion of the proper place of philosophy and what its practice has done to Socrates, see 482c-486d.

identity of philosophy and politics, but to demonstrate some other way of life than one lived according to “natural justice.”

To Callicles, politics is serious business, but philosophy, though fine to a point, is ultimately corrupting. For all his talk of speaking with “goodwill [*eunoia*]”<sup>29</sup> and as to a brother, Callicles is rather condescending to Socrates when the discussion is about philosophy. He begins with a reasonable observation: “For philosophy, let me tell you, Socrates, is a fine thing [*charien*]<sup>30</sup>—if someone lays hold of it moderately [and] in the [proper] age—but if he lingers further than what’s needed, it is the corruption of human beings” (484c). His complaint against philosophy lies in its enervating effects and the inability of its students to participate well in political life—a just charge if we permit ourselves to call by that name certain idlers and head-in-the-clouds sorts.<sup>31</sup> Callicles strengthens his criticism, however, if subtly or backhandedly. He does say that some philosophizing is needful, but he presents an analogy for those who pursue philosophy that appears rather more unflattering when stated succinctly: those who philosophize at a young age are like children who “babble and play,” while those who philosophize as old men are like old men who babble and play. Callicles says, “It is not shameful to philosophize when one is a lad [*meirakion*].”<sup>32</sup> After all, he says, “whenever I see a little child [*paidion*], who

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<sup>29</sup> Goodwill, kindness. A favorable disposition of the mind [*nous*] toward one.

<sup>30</sup> Graceful, elegant; refined, neat, pretty. “Fine” seems to convey the ambiguous nature of Callicles’ comment. When used of people, “men of refinement and taste.” Adj. form of *charis* (“favor”) above. For the ironic use of *charieis*, see *Republic* 602a, where the adjective is used as a substantive noun that Bloom translates as “charming chap” but which we might render as “fine [fellow].”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds*.

<sup>32</sup> A boy under twenty-one or thereabouts. The word actually derives from the diminutive form of *meirax*, “lass.”

babbles and plays [*paizon*, “play like a child”], it appears to be a fine [*charien*] and free thing and proper to the age of the little child (485a-b).” On the other hand, the child who talks like a man, like the man who philosophizes like a child, deserves a beating.<sup>33</sup>

This indeed is the reputation of philosophy both among the many and among the self-professedly political men, the complaint by the pleasure-seekers and the men of action against those of ideas. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates deals with this despised philosopher, who has been introduced too early to or has lingered too long in philosophy, whose “neighbor and countryman has escaped his notice, not only what he does, but almost even whether he is a human being or some other creature” (*Theaetetus* 174b). There, too, the philosopher as such is an object of mockery—partly undeserved, since he is lumped in with the astronomers who spend their days stargazing, and partly deserved, since he is indeed ridiculous when brought before a courtroom and the proceedings of everyday political life. We introduce this account from the *Theaetetus* to show that, no less than Callicles, Socrates shows himself to be a knower of the dangers of philosophy thus understood. Philosophy ill-practiced—which of course is not philosophy at all, in the same way that ship-building ill-practiced can hardly be called ship-building—nonetheless harms the reputation of philosophy and, more importantly, the soul of that would-be philosopher himself.

Philosophy, however, finds its defenders and detractors throughout the Platonic corpus. Our concern here must be to attempt to explain why such a discussion of philosophy is essential to understanding Callicles, the afterlife story, and the *Gorgias* as a whole. Far from harming political life, Socrates now boldly purports to bring about the improvement of the city. Far from

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<sup>33</sup> Somehow this sentiment does not prevent Callicles from being, “as is fitting, in a friendly state toward [Socrates]” (485e). Callicles certainly gets annoyed with Socrates for his “babbling and playing,” but Callicles’ “friendly state” tempers his reaction.

harming the souls of human beings, he purports to bring about their improvement. He seeks what is best in truth, and not the favor of *hoi polloi* or the influence of the rhetors. The very name of philosophy, which was a stumbling block to Callicles, is wisely dropped, not to reappear until the crucial conclusion of the tale. If there is a true art of rhetoric, Socrates doubtless uses it here, tailoring his speech to his listener—not for favor and flattery but “with a view to what’s best.”

No longer subject to the reputation of philosophy, Socrates may now set out to persuade Callicles on the basis of politics—at least, on the basis of politics as Socrates has been shown to understand the term. The story of the afterlife, in claiming to speak about the true fates of the just and unjust, is supposed to be more compelling than the vain speculation and withdrawal from the community that marked the *ekpodon* philosopher. At the same time, the story must correct the extremeness of Callicles’ ideas of natural justice and hedonism. Callicles must understand—or be sufficiently persuaded—why the powerful, whom he thinks most just and most pleased, are precisely the greatest sufferers, the most ignoble, and the most unhappy.

Discussing death, Socrates makes a final appeal particularly suited to Callicles. It is precisely the political art in truth that will be the best—the strongest [*kratistos*]<sup>34</sup>—aid to a man. If it were not, Socrates would indeed feel shame and indignation—the very things Callicles now feels as a result of his misguided opinions. He would feel them, not because of his audience, whether the vulgar many or the refined few, but because, if that aid should fail, he would be in an ignoble state. In this way Socrates voices Callicles’ own concerns about power and nobility—that it does not seem possible for one to exist without the other—and seeks to alleviate them.

It is not ignobility but death itself, it is intimated, that bothers Callicles. Thus Socrates says, “No one fears dying itself, whoever is not all in all irrational as well as unmanly” (522e).

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<sup>34</sup> See note at 522d.

Only an irrational, non-man—the old woman of 527a—would think it fearful to die under such circumstances (or so says Socrates). Here is a final provocation of Callicles. The only manly option that can possibly be true is laid out thus: “Doing injustice he does fear, since for the soul to arrive in the house of Hades when it is full of many injustices is the most extreme of all evils” (522e). The spirit of the *logos*, then, is this: neither be afraid nor irrational, for at death—even the death of the just at the hands of the unjust—things are *this* way and a man, body and soul, is in such a state as now described.

## Chapter 2

### *Gorgias 522c4ff (Burnet, Dodds)*

Callicles: [522c4] Is it your opinion, then, Socrates, that a human being is in a noble state, if he is so disposed in the city and powerless<sup>1</sup> to come to his own aid?

Socrates: If that one thing, at least, should belong to him, Callicles, which you have many times<sup>2</sup> agreed about: if he should have come to his own aid by neither having said nor having done anything unjust, either concerning human beings or concerning gods. [522d] This sort of aid<sup>3</sup> to oneself has often been agreed by us to be strongest<sup>4</sup>. If, then, someone should refute me, by showing that with respect to this aid I am powerless to come to my own aid and that of another, I would be ashamed if I were refuted, both among the many<sup>5</sup> and among the few, even singly by a

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<sup>1</sup> I have tried to keep the δύναμις / δύναμαι family of words with some reference to “power.” So what is translated “have the power to” might also be rendered “be able to;” “power” may be “capacity, faculty, or ability.” (In glossing Greek words, I will ordinarily use the lemma—the dictionary headword. One exception would be when it is important to note the number of a noun, e.g., to highlight a plural. Transliteration will likewise usually account for number but not necessarily grammatical case.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 509bc, 510a

<sup>3</sup> αὕτη τῆς βοήθειας (this [feminine antecedent (sc., aid)] of aid), with variant readings αὕτη τις βοήθεια (this some [sort] of aid) and αὕτη ἡ βοήθεια (this aid)

<sup>4</sup> Or “most excellent” or “best” (κράτιστος). The superlative of “good” (“best” or “most excellent”) may be supplied by three different adjectives: κράτιστος (best or strongest), ἄριστος (best usually with regard to ability or worth), and βέλτιστος (best morally).

<sup>5</sup> οἱ πολλοί (*hoi polloi*): the many or the majority, but in an aristocratic sense, the vulgar and the mean



single one, and if on account of this powerlessness I should die, I would be irritated<sup>6</sup>. If, on the other hand, by a lack of flattering rhetoric I, at least, should come to my end, I know well that you would see me bearing death *easily*<sup>7</sup>. [522e] For no one fears dying itself, whoever is not all in all irrational as well as unmanly, but doing injustice he does fear, since for the soul to arrive in the house of Hades when it is full of many injustices is the most extreme of all evils. And if you want, I am willing to state an argument<sup>8</sup> to you that this is so.

Cal.: But since in fact you have finished the other things, finish this also.

Soc.: [523a] Hear indeed, as they say, a very noble account<sup>9</sup>, which *you* will believe a myth<sup>10</sup>, as I think, but *I* a reasonable account<sup>11</sup>. For I will say the things that I am about to say to you as though they were true.<sup>12</sup> For just as Homer says<sup>13</sup>, Zeus and Poseidon and Pluto divided the rule

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<sup>6</sup> Or “be indignant” (ἀγανακτέω).

<sup>7</sup> The adverb is emphatically placed at the beginning of the clause.

<sup>8</sup> Literally, “speak a speech” (i.e., a λόγος). (A pleonasm not wholly foreign to English, as *Hamlet* III.ii.1) A *logos* may be simply “that which is spoken,” (hence, a word, saying, statement, speech, discourse, or conversation), or it may be an account or argument according to reason, or reason itself. This term, especially as it relates to μῦθος (myth), is a crucial one. See “Introduction: *Mythos* and *Logos*.”

<sup>9</sup> *Logos*.

<sup>10</sup> *Mythos*: a word or speech (as the basic meaning of *logos*); a tale or story (without distinction of true or false); a legend

<sup>11</sup> “Reasonable account” is simply *logos*.

<sup>12</sup> Either “as they are [allegedly] true” or “on the grounds that they are true.”

<sup>13</sup> *Iliad* 15.187ff.

among themselves, when they took it over<sup>14</sup> from their father. This, then, was the law about human beings in the time of Cronus, and always and still now is it among gods: whenever he among human beings who has gone through his life justly and piously comes to his end, he goes away to the islands of the blessed to dwell in all happiness beyond evils; [523b] but he [who has gone through his life] unjustly and godlessly, he goes to the prison of retribution<sup>15</sup> and judgment<sup>16</sup>, which indeed they call Tartarus. Of these [human beings] there were judges, living [judges] of the living, in the time of Cronus and still of late when Zeus held the rule, judging them on that day on which they were about to come to their end. So the judgments were tried badly.

So both Pluto<sup>17</sup> and the caretakers<sup>18</sup> from the islands of the blessed used to go and say<sup>19</sup> to Zeus that human beings, though undeserving<sup>20</sup>, were coming to them, to both places. [523c] Then

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<sup>14</sup> παραλαμβάνω, which partly euphemistically and partly literally refers to the story of their “taking over” or “inheritance” of power. In fact, Zeus and his brothers had revolted violently against their father.

<sup>15</sup> τίσις: compensatory payment, retribution, vengeance.

<sup>16</sup> δίκη: legal term for a lawsuit (properly a private suit or action as opposed to a public suit or indictment); or, the trial itself; or, the punishment or penalty. Related to the word for “justice.” Personified, Dike was the daughter of Zeus and Themis (see note at 526d). Another legal term used is κρίσις, which may refer simply to a “separating” but especially to a “decision,” “judgment,” or “trial.” Both *krisis* and *dike* have related agent nouns that may refer to the judges in a trial. In Athens, the *dikastai* were the jurymen, while the *krites* was the presiding judge. Whether this distinction is maintained in Socrates’ account, is difficult to say: Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus are called *dikastai*, but they are said to try (*krinein*) and to judge (*dikadzein*) the souls.

<sup>17</sup> Himself the caretaker of the “house of Hades”

<sup>18</sup> Or overseers (ἐπιμελητής: governor, manager, curator, superintendent; literally, “those who take/have care over”)

Zeus spoke, “But I,” he said, “will stop this from coming about. For now indeed the judgments are judged badly. For those being tried,” he said, “are being tried while cloaked. For they are being tried while they live. So, many,” he said, “though they have wicked souls, have been cloaked in noble bodies and kin and riches, and, whenever the trial<sup>21</sup> occurs, many witnesses come forward for them, intending to bear witness that they have lived justly.<sup>22</sup> [523d] So the judges are dumbstruck by these witnesses, and at the same time they themselves also judge while being cloaked, since they have their own soul covered over in eyes and ears and the whole body. So these things all come to be in front of them, both their own clothes and those of the ones being tried. First, then,” he said, “that they foreknow their death must be stopped, for now they foreknow it. This, then, has been said also to Prometheus, in order that he may stop them. [523e] Second, they must be tried while stripped of quite all these things. For they must be tried while dead, and the trier must be stripped, [and] dead, with the soul itself observing the soul itself at the moment when each human being dies<sup>23</sup>, deprived of all his fellow-kin and having left behind on the earth all that ornamentation, in order that the trial may be just. So I for my part, since I have known these things earlier than you all, have made my own sons judges: two from Asia,

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<sup>19</sup> Or, “they would try to go to Zeus and say to him,” with the idea being that Zeus only responds after several entreaties.

<sup>20</sup> Lit., “unworthy” (ἀνάξιλος). That is, their destinations were “unworthy” of them, in light of the state of their souls. The judgments were botched.

<sup>21</sup> Or “decision” (κρίσις). Related to what is translated above as “to try” and “to be tried.”

<sup>22</sup> Possibly exclamatory: “intending to bear witness how justly they have lived!”

<sup>23</sup> Or, “has died.” The participle is not the perfect (which has an aspect of completion and if used here would mean “is dead”) but the aorist (which has simple aspect).

Minos and Rhadamanthys, one from Europe, Aeacus.<sup>24</sup> [524a] So these ones, whenever they come to their end,<sup>25</sup> will judge in the meadow, in the place of three roads from which the pair of roads bears away,<sup>26</sup> the one to the islands of the blessed, the other to Tartarus. And some from Asia Rhadamanthys will try, and others from Europe, Aeacus. But to Minos I will give seniority to try as an arbitrator,<sup>27</sup> if the other pair are at a loss in something, in order that the trial may be as just as possible concerning the journey for human beings.”

These, Callicles, are the things that I myself, since I have heard them, trust to be true. [524b] And from these accounts<sup>28</sup> I reason<sup>29</sup> that something of this sort follows. Death happens to be, as it seems to me, nothing other than the dissolution of a pair of things, the soul and the body, from each other; and whenever they are dissolved, therefore, from each other, each of the pair does not much less retain its own state—which very thing the human being had when he was living—both<sup>30</sup> the body its own nature, with respect both to the cares and the sufferings which

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<sup>24</sup> All three were famous as judges. Minos was the son of Zeus and Europa and ruled as king of Crete. Rhadamanthys was the brother of Minos and known for being exceedingly just. (So the “two from Asia” were also “two from Europa.”) Aeacus was the son of Zeus and Aegina, the daughter of a river-god, and ruled the island of Aegina. Most ancient geographers recognized only two continents, Asia and Europe.

<sup>25</sup> That is, Minos and Rhadamanthys and Aeacus, who at this point, presumably, are not yet dead, if they have been born at all.

<sup>26</sup> A fork in the road.

<sup>27</sup> Or, “judge as an overseeing judge” (“decide as an umpire” [ἐπιδιακρίνω])

<sup>28</sup> *Logoi*.

<sup>29</sup> Λογίζομαι: “I make an argument (a *logos*) for myself” (hence, “I reason, calculate, or reckon”)

<sup>30</sup> This “both” (a corresponsive τε) looks forward quite far ahead to the discussion of the soul at 524d. The passage almost gives one the sense of an *anacoluthon*.

are altogether visible [524c] (for example, if the body of someone were great by nature or by rearing or in both respects while he was alive, his corpse too, once he dies, would be great, and if stout, stout also when he has died, and so forth with the other things; and again, if he used to grow his hair long, long-haired also would be his corpse. Again, if someone while alive was in need of a whipping<sup>31</sup> and had scars on his body as traces of the blows, either from whips or from other wounds, when he is dead too it is possible to see that his body has these things; or, if someone's limbs were broken or twisted while he was living, when he has died these same things would be visible as well. [524d] But in a word<sup>32</sup>—whatever sort of body he has been provided with while he was alive, these things are visible also when he has come to his end, either altogether so or in many respects for some time.) [and] indeed, in my opinion, this same thing holds also concerning the soul, Callicles; all things are visible in the soul whenever it is stripped of the body, both the things of its nature and the sufferings that the human being has in his soul on account of the practice of each deed.<sup>33</sup>

So when they arrive at the judge, those from Asia at Rhadamanthys, [524e] Rhadamanthys has them stand, and he observes the soul of each, although he does not know whose it is. Instead, though often he is taking hold of the Great King<sup>34</sup> or some other king or potentate, he beholds nothing healthy in the soul, but a soul that has been thoroughly whipped and is full of scars at the hands of false oaths and injustice [525a]—the things which each action

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<sup>31</sup> μαστιγίας: one in need of a whipping; a rogue, knave.

<sup>32</sup> Lit., “with one *logos*.”

<sup>33</sup> Or, “matter, concern” (πρόλημα).

<sup>34</sup> If it is the Great King, it is a reference to the King of Persia, commonly held to be the pinnacle of happiness. Or, perhaps, “[some] great king.”

of his has imprinted onto his soul—and [a soul] all crooked by lie and pretense<sup>35</sup> and nothing straight, on account of its having been raised without truth. And by license and luxury and hubris and incontinence of actions, the soul, he sees, is full of asymmetry and ugliness. But when he sees this soul, he sends it away without honor straight to the place of the watch,<sup>36</sup> where, once it has come, it is to endure<sup>37</sup> the proper sufferings.

[525b] And it is proper for everyone who is in [a state of] vengeance<sup>38</sup>, when he is being avenged correctly by another, either to become better and be benefited or to become an example for others, in order that others, when they see him suffering whatever he suffers, may become better because they are afraid. And some, on the one hand, those whose errors are curable,<sup>39</sup> are aided and pay the penalty<sup>40</sup> at the hands of the gods and human beings, but nevertheless, through pains and distresses, they come to have aid both here and in the house of Hades. For it is not possible to be delivered from injustice in any other way. [525c] But as for those who commit the most extreme injustices and on account of these sorts of injustices become incurable, from among these the examples come about, and these themselves, on the one hand, are no longer benefited at all, since they are incurable, but others are benefited who see these on account of

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<sup>35</sup> Or, “false boastfulness” (ἀλαζονεία).

<sup>36</sup> For φρουρά I have used the basic definition of “watch” or “guard” (in the sense of “watchtower” or “guardhouse,” i.e., the place where watching or guarding takes place) rather than “prison,” which I use for δεσμοτήριον (a word more explicitly about bonds (*desmoi*) and imprisonment, for which “bond-place” is literal but unidiomatic).

<sup>37</sup> Or “will endure,” or “is about to endure.”

<sup>38</sup> Lit., “in vengeance.” Cf. “those in power” (*hoi en telei*), in which case the Greek idiom happens to match the English.

<sup>39</sup> Lit., “those who err curable errors.” The Greek verb is accompanied by its cognate noun. Cf. “indict an indictment,” “sacrifice a sacrifice.” A typical Platonic construction.

<sup>40</sup> *dike*

their errors suffering the greatest and most distressing and most fearsome sufferings for all time, simply hung up there in the house of Hades, in the prison, as spectacles and warnings for those of the unjust always arriving.

[525d] Of them, I assert, Archelaus will be one also, if what Polus says is true,<sup>41</sup> and any other who is a tyrant of this sort. And I think in fact that many<sup>42</sup> of these examples have come about from among the tyrants<sup>43</sup> and kings and potentates and those who have practiced the affairs of the cities; for these, on account of license, commit the greatest and most impious errors. And Homer too bears witness to these things, [525e] for he has made those being avenged in the house of Hades for all time kings and potentates, Tantalus and Sisyphus and Tityus<sup>44</sup>. But as for Thersites<sup>45</sup>—and if there was some other private man who was wicked—no one has depicted him being completely restrained, with great [acts of] vengeance, as though he were incurable. For I do not think he had license; therefore in fact he was happier<sup>46</sup> than those who had license. But certainly, Callicles, [526a] it is from among those who have power, in fact, that the exceedingly wicked human beings come about. However, nothing hinders good men from being born among

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<sup>41</sup> Lit., “if Polus says true things.” For this discussion, see 471a-c.

<sup>42</sup> Or the majority, or the vulgar. The sense is either that most of the examples of wicked men come about from among the rulers or that the vulgar among the rulers become the examples of wicked men.

<sup>43</sup> The tyrant has replaced the Great King in the second listing of the wicked souls.

<sup>44</sup> Tantalus killed and tried to feed his son Pelops to the gods. Sisyphus, known as a schemer, would kill strangers and guests. Tityus was a giant who tried to rape Leto, consort of Zeus and mother of Apollo and Artemis.

<sup>45</sup> Famously insolent to the Greek commanders. Struck by Odysseus.

<sup>46</sup> Dodds suggests “luckier” for εὐδαιμονέστερος, saying that Thersites was not “happy” in the Socratic sense. Yet, Thersites need not be “happy” to be “happier,” comparatively speaking, than these tyrants.

these also, and it is exceedingly worthy to admire those who do come about. For it is difficult, Callicles, and worthy of much praise when he, though coming to be amid great license to commit injustice, has gone through his life justly. But a few of this sort do come about, since both here and elsewhere they have come about, and, I think, there will be also those who are noble and good with respect to the virtue of justly managing<sup>47</sup> whatever someone entrusts to them. [526b] And one in fact has certainly come to be reputed<sup>48</sup> even as far as<sup>49</sup> the other Hellenes, Aristides the son of Lysimachus. But the majority, best one, of those who have power become bad.<sup>50</sup>

So the very thing which I was saying—whenever that [famous] Rhadamanthys<sup>51</sup> takes someone of this sort, he knows nothing else about him, neither whoever he may be nor from whomever he may be,<sup>52</sup> except that he is someone wicked. And because he beholds this, he sends him away to Tartarus, after he has set his mark upon him, as to whether he seems to be curable or incurable. And when [that someone] arrives there, he suffers the proper things. [526c] But sometimes, when [Rhadamanthys] looks upon another soul that has gone through life piously and with truth, the soul of a private man or of some other—most of all, as *I* assert, Callicles, that of a philosopher, since he has minded his own business and has not been a busybody in his life—he

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<sup>47</sup> Lit., “having in hand.”

<sup>48</sup> “Reputed” translates ἐλλόγιμος, which is related to logos and means someone “spoken [well] of.”

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps an uncommon use of the preposition εἰς, to express measure or limit.

<sup>50</sup> Or, “the vulgar, best one, among those who have power become bad.”

<sup>51</sup> ὁ Ῥαδάμανθους ἐκεῖνος: The definite article (ὁ) may be used to convey the sense of “the well-known” or “famous” so-and-so. The demonstrative (ἐκεῖνος) intensifies the effect. In this passage, Zeus, Poseidon, Pluto, and Prometheus have the article before their names. The three judges sometimes have a definite article; other human beings do not.

<sup>52</sup> That is, Rhadamanthys knows neither who the man himself is nor who his relatives are.



admires [the soul] and sends [it] away to the islands of the blessed. And Aeacus does these same things also. As he holds the staff, each<sup>53</sup> of these judges. And Minos sits as he keeps watch over them, since he alone holds a golden scepter, [526d] as Homer's Odysseus asserts he saw him, "holding the golden scepter, declaring law<sup>54</sup> to the corpses."

So I for my part, Callicles, have both been persuaded by these speeches and I examine how I will show myself to the judge, [showing] that my soul is most healthy. Bidding farewell to the honors of the majority<sup>55</sup> of human beings, then, by making a practice of the truth I will attempt both to live by really being as good as I have power<sup>56</sup> and, whenever I die, to die. [526e] And I exhort all other human beings also, as much as I have power, and in particular I exhort you in return to this life and struggle<sup>57</sup>, this one which I assert to be [set] against all struggles here. And I reproach you, because you will not be able to come to your own aid, whenever you have your judgment and your trial, which I was speaking of just now, but when you come to the judge, [527a] the son of Aegina<sup>58</sup>, whenever he takes hold of you and leads you away, you for your part will gape and become dizzy there no less than I do here. And perhaps someone will strike you also on the temple dishonorably and trample you in the mud completely.

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<sup>53</sup> Here specifically "each of two."

<sup>54</sup> Not *nomos* but *themis*, an older word for customs, laws, or decrees, especially those of divine origin.

<sup>55</sup> Or the many, or the vulgar.

<sup>56</sup> Or, "as I am able"; the same for the usage that follows. See note at 522c.

<sup>57</sup> ἀγών: contest at the games; any struggle or danger; action at law or trial (so, just as the English "trial," it may be either a hardship or actual court proceedings)

<sup>58</sup> That is, Aeacus, the son of Aegina and Zeus.

But maybe, then, these things seem to you to be spoken just as though they were an old woman's myth<sup>59</sup>, and you disdain them, and it would not be anything to wonder at to despise these things, if in some way from searching<sup>60</sup> we were able to find things better and truer than them. But now you see that though you are three, who are in fact wisest of the Hellenes nowadays, you and Polus and Gorgias, [527b] you are not able to show that someone must live another life than this, the very one, in fact, which is manifestly profitable in that place also. But among so many speeches of the others that have been refuted, this speech alone is at rest<sup>61</sup>: one must beware of doing injustice more than suffering injustice, and more than anything a man must make a practice, not of seeming to be good but of being it, both in private and in public. And if someone becomes bad in some way, he must be chastised, and this is the second good after being just: [527c] becoming so and, by being chastised, paying the penalty<sup>62</sup>. And when it comes to every flattery, concerning both oneself and others, concerning both few and many—[*this*] one must flee. And one must in this way always use rhetoric, and every other action, for the sake of the just.

So, if you are persuaded, follow me there where, when you arrive, you will be happy both while you live and when you have come to your end, as [*your*] speech<sup>63</sup> signifies. And let

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<sup>59</sup> See note at 523a.

<sup>60</sup> Or “inquiring”

<sup>61</sup> ἡρεμέω: be still, keep quiet, be at rest (opp. to κινέομαι, “be in motion,” cog. to *kinetic*)

<sup>62</sup> *dike*

<sup>63</sup> For the ὁ λόγος of one manuscript, three others have ὁ σὸς λόγος (“your speech”). Stauffer calls the latter “the most reliable manuscripts,” though Dodds follows the former. The second-person possessive adjective is not particularly common, though it appears at 486a (“with goodwill shall I speak, [namely,] yours,” i.e., with goodwill *for you* [εὐνοία τῆ σῆ]). If the word

someone disdain you as though you were thoughtless, let him trample you in the mud, if he wants, and yes, by Zeus, as for *you* at least, take heart and be struck this dishonorable blow! [527d] For you will not suffer anything terrible, if you really are noble and good, making a practice of virtue. And after thus having practiced it in common, then, if it seems we ought, we will put ourselves to the political things, or we will deliberate on whatever sort of thing seems good to us, when we are better than now. For it is a shameful thing when one is in such a state as we now appear to be, to act like a youth, as though being something, we who never have the same opinions concerning the same things, and these pertaining to the greatest things—to so great a lack of education have we come! [527e] So let us make use of the speech, the one that has now appeared alongside us, just like a guide<sup>64</sup>, which signifies to us that this way of life is best: both to live and to die while we practice both justice and the rest of virtue. So let us follow this speech—and let us exhort the others—not that one in which you trusted and so to which exhorted me. For it is worthy of nothing, Callicles.<sup>65</sup>

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belongs, that this *logos* should turn out in some way to be *Callicles'* is most perplexing, unless we consider that Socrates' arguments are particularly suited to his audience.

<sup>64</sup> ἡγεμόν (*hegemon*): guide; leader, commander, chief. The latter, more warlike meanings are particularly tempting given the opening words of the dialogue: “Of war and battle, they say, Socrates, one must obtain an allotted share thus” [πολέμου καὶ μάχης φασὶ χρῆναι, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὕτω μεταλαγχάνειν] (447a).

<sup>65</sup> A reversal of Callicles' assertion at 492c that what Socrates pursues is mere pretense, against nature, and worthy of nothing.

## Chapter 3

### Politics and Death: Examining *Gorgias* 522c4ff

#### Introduction

By the final section of the *Gorgias*, Socrates has come a long way in preparing Callicles to approach his questions about justice in a more satisfactory and philosophic way. Socrates has at least succeeded in forcing Callicles to articulate the extreme position that the latter has felt compelled to adopt—that the only justice one can take seriously is natural justice, and that this is the rule of the strong. While Socrates will not succeed, it seems, in effecting a complete change of heart in Callicles, much less a widespread political revolution, he nonetheless hopes that his “very noble account” about the judgment of souls will benefit Callicles in some way. The *logos* of the final passage is, explicitly, a reasoned and reasonable attempt to come to Callicles’ aid.

Before addressing the “very noble account” itself, we might step back to explain our approach. First, an examination of the structure of the passage, based on a close reading of the text, will reveal a number of subsections to this *logos*, with two major speculative passages nested within the main story (524b-524d; 525b-526b). We will show also how the story itself, after the first part explicitly said to be something Socrates heard, reveals itself as reasoned speculation. For this reason, it seems, Socrates insists on calling the passage a *logos* or *logoi* and not a myth, despite its fantastic, seemingly unphilosophic elements. From a broad overview we will move to comment on the details of the *logos* in light of that structure. Finally, we will look at Socrates’ concluding remarks and exhortations to Callicles, noting Socrates’ defense against the charge of mythmaking. This will shed light both on Callicles’ prospects for being persuaded as well as the adequacy of Socrates’ argument.

### **Framing the Passage: Reaching Callicles**

In constructing his final speech, Socrates must avoid two sources of Callicles' contempt. He must appear neither as the philosopher—corrupting and superfluous in his imaginings—nor as the old woman—foolish and unmanly in hers. Socrates thus relies on a mixture of claimed poetic authority and apparently commonsensical observations to avoid both accusations. In a first reading of the text, one is carried along by the argument and the tale, suspecting nothing of Socrates' craft. Like the *demos* before the rhetor, such a reader cannot help but be persuaded. If the same could be said of Callicles' reception of the *logos*, then in an examination of his character it would do little good to hunt for the difficulties that a close reading presents. Yet, Callicles, as one of *hoi politikoi*, understands the power of persuasion—even and especially that persuasion that is not itself a representation of things as they are but of things insofar as they may be understood by the listeners. Socrates' conclusion, in which he denies having told a “myth,” is evidence enough that Callicles is skeptical. If Callicles would not accept this *logos* uncritically, neither should we. For this reason it is important to note what Callicles himself might recognize in the speech before we begin to speculate on what he fails to recognize.

Like a trial attorney who tries to buttress the weak points in his case by addressing them himself before cross-examination, Socrates acknowledges that Callicles will think his story a myth—that is, a false if edifying tale. As soon as Socrates begins to speak of Zeus and Poseidon and Pluto, he knows that Callicles will have his doubts, that this man will not receive the speech with an uncritical or childlike ear. Callicles is, to all appearances, an atheist, and any talk of the gods will immediately seem mythical. The invoked authority of Homer prevents an immediate dismissal. True or not, Homer's poetry is at the very least respectable. It is more than the

ramblings of an old woman and more than the speculations of an astronomer. It treats of war, politics, and human beings in a way that, whether true in its details, carries none of philosophy's reputation for foolishness. Whether Homer himself has something philosophic to say is beside the point. He is, in the popular conception, the poet *par excellence*—a creature not necessarily political but certainly not foolish or laughable. Poetry, if only in its ambiguity, is rather more amenable to Callicles if he does not wish to think about things to the point of precision.

At the same time, Socrates' insistence that his story is a *logos*, and a "very noble" one at that, should appeal to Callicles' political sensibility. Socrates does not suggest at the outset, however, that Callicles will find the *logos* philosophic—the story is *logical* but has nothing in common with astronomical speculation and the "fine"<sup>1</sup> sorts of things Callicles associates with philosophy. The great revelation at the end of the story—that the soul of the philosopher is most of all to be admired (526c)—does not enter the mind of Callicles too soon, very much by the design of Socrates. Thus, even as the dialogue returns in its course to the question of the best way of life, rhetoric remains essential. We see no need to say, with Jenks, that the myth and final exhortation "suggest that Plato, as he writes the *Gorgias*, is beginning to have his doubts about some central Socratic themes [e.g., the uselessness of rhetoric]."<sup>2</sup> The inquiry into rhetoric that Socrates undertakes in the dialogue is a genuine inquiry into the professed art of Gorgias himself. Whatever Socrates has said about *that* supposed art, a true art of rhetoric reveals itself as a companion to philosophy and the political art in truth. These true arts are what may indeed help Callicles.

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<sup>1</sup> See note on *chareis*.

<sup>2</sup> Rod Jenks, "The Sounds of Silence: Rhetoric and Dialectic in the Refutation of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40:2 (2007: Nov.).

## The Structure of the Passage and Socrates' Sources

Socrates' "very noble account" consists of a narrative about the judgment of souls, interspersed with discussions about death and the punishment of wrongdoers. The mythic character of the narrative, treating as it does the immortal gods and their dealings with mortal man, contrasts with the logical character of the discussions embedded in it. The narrative more or less follows the didactic purpose that we expect to find in myth as it is ordinarily understood: the gods and men once interacted in such-and-such a way until *this* happened, after which time things became the way they are now. The latter *logoi* present themselves at first as extensions of this sort of "moral of the story" teaching. This indeed is the way that young people begin to learn what their community says about the gods, about justice, and about political life—not through myth merely, which is passively received in mothers' milk, but by turning one's mind to what those stories mean. The stories themselves encourage behaviors and opinions in a sort of natural way, but a degree of explication is required if *particular* behaviors and opinions must be adopted. Thus the myths join the promulgated laws to compose the *nomoi* of the city.

The tales of Zeus and Rhadamanthys and the rest, which Socrates claims to have heard, are therefore complemented by his own reason. He expands upon the tale of judgment. The less fantastic parts of his speech are merely "something of the sort" that, to him at least, seem to follow logically from the things heard (524b). Socrates hints at this manifold character of his speech in passing, setting up his closing exhortation of Callicles by saying that he himself "[has] been persuaded by these speeches [pl. *logoi*]" (526b). We must note the distinction between that

which Socrates claims to have heard and now relates as a *logos*—the stories of Zeus and the afterlife—and that which he has reasoned for himself [*logizomai*]<sup>3</sup>.

We can divide the entire passage into three sections: the tale of the afterlife (523a-524a, 524d-525a, 526b-526d), a discussion about the nature of death (524b-524d), and a discussion of paying the penalty for wrongdoing (525b-526b). The first and “mythic” part of the speech is itself broken up into three parts, with an introduction detailing the initial problem of the judgment of souls (523a-524a), a middle section on Rhadamanthys’ method of judgment, especially of tyrannical souls (524d-525a), and a conclusion describing the judgment of all souls, whether healthy, curable, or incurable (526b-526d). The subsections of this section are demarcated by Socrates.<sup>4</sup> The discussion of death consists of an account of the nature of the body and soul upon being separated from each other—that is, at the moment of and after death. The second discussion treats punishment in a general way, with regard to its benefits for the punished and for others, and the special case of the exceedingly wicked and the tyrants.

The *heard* and the *reasoned* portions of Socrates’ speech, however, begin to coalesce. The story—the myth in all but name—is a product of Socrates’ own reason, at least in large part. Of the introduction (523a-524a) Socrates says, “These, Callicles, are the things that I myself, since I have heard them, trust to be true” (524a). From here on out, is it the case that *everything*

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<sup>3</sup> This verb is a deponent and lacks an active form, but the middle (“do for one’s own benefit”) meaning is nonetheless present in its usage. To “reckon” or to “calculate” is to “cause a *logos* to be made for oneself [concerning a thing]”.

<sup>4</sup> He begins the first part with, “Hear indeed, as they say...” [*ἄκουε δὴ, φασί*], which Dodds notes is a traditional way of calling attention to what follows. Cf. *Theaetetus* 201d, *Timaeus* 20d. The second makes use of *οὖν*, as does the third: “So when...” and “So the very thing which I was saying...” *Oun* may be used to continue a narrative *or* to express an inference (about which more in a moment), just as the English “so” may do.



Socrates says falls under his reasoning that “something of this sort follows” (524b)? The middle section of the non-myth (524d-525a) and the conclusion (526b-526d) follow the logic of the preceding passages explicitly said to be Socrates’ own conjecture. It is *because* he has reasoned about the natures of the “naked” soul and body that Socrates can speak about Rhadamanthys’ judgments. It is *because* he has determined the different types of offenders and the possibility of their being healed that Socrates can speak about Rhadamanthys’ determination of the same. If these passages are based on what he has reasoned for himself, how can they be anything other than his own invention? Rather than being resumptions of a reported story, what follows becomes inference from the *logoi*. Perhaps in front of a different audience Socrates might have named the authority for his tale—maybe the divine voice he speaks of elsewhere—but not so with Callicles.

### **Details of the Non-Myth**

#### The Afterlife: Part I

At the heart of the Socrates’ speech is the law concerning the judgment of human beings at their deaths. The story, as we have said, begins with an invocation of Homer on the inheritance of power by the three brother-gods, Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto. Socrates immediately returns, however, to the primordial reign of Cronus. The law itself is unchanging, regardless of the ruler. It exists “always [*aei*] and still now” (523a). Of what consequence are the gods, then, if the law remains? Every kingly or tyrannical human being, after all, bends the law to himself, and yet the gods do not. They, it seems, have no need of political or legislative power—though they posses

*power* nonetheless.<sup>5</sup> This law exists independently of what the gods say; that is, it seems to be the necessary operation of the universe that the just and the unjust fare as the law commands.

Without a precise definition of piety and justice, this law might be accepted by Callicles as well as Socrates. People get what they deserve—but this is a formal law only and without content. Both Callicles and Socrates are concerned with what people deserve. Callicles believes he has a true opinion—that the just and hence deserving are the strong. If the gods are strongest, then they should be the most just. Yet, it is the apparent injustice of the gods, in Socrates' story at least, that poses the problem Callicles has in the first place. That is, Callicles wants to reckon those who do not suffer evil, regardless of what they do, as just. He does not wish to throw out the labels of “just” and “unjust,” because, just as if it were the law of the gods (which Callicles certainly does not believe), human beings want to avoid suffering evils. In his *logos*, therefore, Socrates shows that he sympathizes with this fundamental desire not to suffer. He does grant to common experience that suffering injustice is bad, but he sets out to show that doing injustice is still worse. Thus, the divine law in his story makes concern for justice possible while showing that the world as it is, both “in the time of Cronus” and now, falls short of our desire for that justice.

Socrates presents the problem of this law as lying in its execution. That is, it has no fundamental defect that prevents the proper outcomes for human beings. Socrates has already said that to *arrive* at the house of Hades is the most extreme evil (522e)—what more can await

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<sup>5</sup> It is the strangeness of this situation, perhaps, that leads Fussi to say wrongly, it seems, that “according to Socrates, when Zeus took over his reign from his father, Kronos, *he decided* to put an end to the injustice that had characterized judgments in that age” (emphasis added).

Alessandra Fussi, “The Myth of the Last Judgment in the *Gorgias*,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 54:3 (2001: Mar.) 530.

the wicked? (Is it also the most extreme good really to *arrive* at the islands of the blessed?) This has been the law since the time of Cronus, and for all that time, living judges have judged the lives of living human beings. The law, then, has been circumvented since the judges do not simply separate the just from the unjust and the pious from the godless<sup>6</sup>. The beauty of the body, the nobility of one's birth, and the extent of one's wealth obscure the justice or injustice of the soul. Like Callicles in this respect (at least when brought to his extreme position), the living judges assume that these apparently good and noble things attend the truly good and noble human beings and them *only*.<sup>7</sup> Nature shows that this is just, as Callicles says, for what *is*, the implied argument goes, *ought* to be. Natural justice—the rule of the strong—cannot be frustrated. And yet, Pluto and the caretakers of the islands of the blessed recognize the souls' true worth immediately.

Finally, Zeus responds that he knows quite well what has gone wrong. He goes into some detail in describing the ways that wicked souls have hidden themselves (he omits what the good souls have *failed* to do—which is to flatter the judges). His twofold solution, which Zeus gives

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<sup>6</sup> We might expect “impious” [ἀνόσιος] here, but while the law contrasts those living “justly” [δικαίως] with those living “unjustly” [ἀδίκως], it contrasts those living “piously” [όσίως] with those living “godlessly” [ἀθέως] (523a-b).

<sup>7</sup> Fussi argues that “those trapped in the age of Kronos”—those who judge and are judged clothed—“are prey to appearance, always dependent on others, and fundamentally hostile to authentic questioning because truth, like death, is beyond their control, and they do all they can to deny it.” Fussi 536. This is true enough, but it seems that Callicles' position is more serious. His view of the good and just may be wrong, but the pleasant and the strong are not merely *appearances*.

only when prompted by the caretakers<sup>8</sup>, is nakedness and human beings' ignorance of death, but Zeus speaks as though he has *already* taken care of the problem. Prometheus ("Forethought"), the son of Themis ("Law")<sup>9</sup>, has been charged with preventing people from knowing the time of their death. Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus have been made judges. This strange, proleptic solution to the unjust judgments captures something of the paradox that comes with discussing the gods—they are eternal and yet act in time. More than posing a theological problem, however, Socrates is touching on the simultaneity of his solution and Callicles' problem.

One wonders why, if Zeus has "known these things earlier than you all," the embassy of Pluto and the caretakers should have been necessary (523e). It is, perhaps, a way of acknowledging Callicles' concerns: there is indeed something wrong when people do not get what they deserve. At the same time, Socrates shows Callicles what is wrong with Callicles' solution to this problem of justice.<sup>10</sup> He sets up a universe in which justice and injustice are *not* appreciated and *not* duly rewarded. The law itself has always existed, however, that ought to have served each sort its rewards. But Zeus himself does not quite promise perfect judgment: his solutions will ensure only that the trial of the souls "may be as just as possible [*hos dikaiotate*]"

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<sup>8</sup> This fact seems often to be obscured by some commentators, who give greater agency to Zeus himself in enacting new laws and transitioning from the "Age of Cronus" to the "Age of Zeus." Cf. Fussi, quoted above. Where this problem does not exist, Zeus' *foreknowledge* might still be overlooked. Cf. Stauffer 170.

<sup>9</sup> See note at 526d.

<sup>10</sup> Ranasinghe argues, "Going far beyond changes in judging the dead, [Socrates'] *logos* signals the end of a piety-based economy (based on Homer's wilfull power-hungry gods) and its replacement by a moral cosmic order." Nalin Ranasinghe, *Socrates in the Underworld* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 152. Yet, in the *logos*, it is not displays of piety that cause unworthy souls to be sent to improper destinations. Cf. Cephalus' view of the underworld in Book I of the *Republic* as something to be staved off with sacrifices and the repayment of debts.

(524a). In this way, Socrates promises Callicles only a partial—but the best possible—solution to the injustice of the world. It is not that the just really do not suffer at all—which simply fails to be of any comfort to the sufferer. Rather, Socrates asks Callicles to weigh the lives of human beings by a different, more precise, perhaps more philosophical, standard.

### Logos on Death

Thus Socrates makes a transition to his description of the phenomenon of death (524b-524d). This section of the speech relies on the close analogy of the body and the soul and on Socrates' opinion that "whenever they are dissolved from each other, each of the pair does not much less [than before] retain its own state" (524b). Socrates "proves" that human beings are the same in death as they are in life and that, accordingly, the fates they are said to suffer in death they truly do suffer in life. The argument makes a kind of intuitive sense: death does not immediately make the body something other than it was in life. Why, then, should the soul be any different? As Socrates says, height and weight and hair and scars are visible no less in death than in life—"for some time" [*epi tina chronon*] (524d). This "for some time," however, presents grave problems when one begins to speak of the soul.

The body decays. The body withers away. The soul may indeed be stripped naked in death, but why it should have an immortal, separate existence from the body, Socrates does not attempt to say. Again, we must note that corruption is an obvious feature of death. The point here is to see the soul stripped of the not-soul. The point is then to judge that soul only on the basis of its true justice, and all this is so that we may speak to what way of life would produce such a soul in a human being. The life of a human being is Socrates' concern and not its death. Just as scars do not change when the body dies, remaining a testament to the life of the body, so too the characteristics of the soul, Socrates says, do not change. The immortality of the soul becomes not

an true solution to the problem of justice, e.g., by giving good things to the truly just to make up for their suffering in this life and by giving bad things to the truly unjust to make up for their infliction of suffering. Instead, the afterlife provides an opportunity for a psychic autopsy.

### The Afterlife: Part II

The second part of the story treats the new order of the world, once Zeus has instituted his sons as judges of the dead. Socrates contradicts here each of Callicles' definitions of the just, the noble, and the happy. Callicles had thought a certain political life, in the rule of the strong over the weak, represented justice. Socrates here shows that the souls of kings and rulers and even of the Great King of Persia himself are not at all healthy. Callicles the hedonist had praised license and luxury as the source of the pleasant. Socrates calls such things the very producers of ugliness and pain. The falsity of Callicles' politics—most of all found in the professedly beneficial art of rhetoric—far from giving aid, results in a dishonorable departure to Tartarus.

Once more Socrates relays the message to Callicles: the soul is stamped with what it deserves, and this comes from its own actions. When Socrates claims that it is worse to suffer injustice than to do it, he does so for this reason. Just as that claim seems contrary to ordinary opinion, so too does the presentation of the souls appear as a reversal of common experience. It is not the sufferer but the doer who is imprinted with injustice—the maltreatment of the body notwithstanding. It is he who *lands* the unjust blow who finds himself battered and bruised. Despite Socrates' *logoi*, it remains for him to persuade Callicles of this strange doctrine, at least as far as Callicles is willing to listen.

### Logos on Punishment

If it were not sufficiently clear already, the next part of Socrates' speech (526b-526d) shows that his primary concern is to discuss the unjust and the punishments they suffer, rather

than the just and their rewards. Socrates tells Callicles what it is fitting or proper for the unjust to suffer. This, he says, is what such souls deserve. Vengeance [*timoria*] is tied directly to particular acts. Socrates speaks of the errors one commits.<sup>11</sup> He reinforces, by this kind of repetition (an internal accusative), common in Plato and easily overlooked, that it is each action that imprints a soul. A soul is unjust with respect to its unjust acts. Its punishment, therefore, is meant to address these specific acts, whether by “curing” them or by making them examples for others. Those souls “whose errors are curable” receive “aid” for themselves by paying the penalty for injustices against the gods and other human beings (525b).

Socrates says nothing of what this penalty is, except that it comes about “through pains and distresses.” Souls pay that penalty such that “they come to have aid both here and in the house of Hades” (525b). Socrates means either to introduce reincarnation—a possibility given the account of the afterlife in the *Republic* but one not otherwise discussed here—or to suggest that souls need not wait until death to be cured. If it is indeed the most extreme injustice to go down to Tartarus with an unjust soul, then surely there must be recourse here and now for the curable souls. Otherwise, what precisely is Socrates’ project? His *therapeia* for the city, if it is to be any aid at all, must help cure unjust souls. Socrates is not the watchman in the house of Hades but a citizen in the city.

To this same end, Socrates presents his account of those who become incurable. In the account itself, we notice that the curable souls who arrive in Tartarus are supposed to be benefited by the example of the incurables. Stauffer rightly acknowledges the problem with the incurables’ punishment: “Haven’t the souls for whom they are supposed to provide deterrent

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. 525b, “those whose errors are curable”—lit., “those who err [with] curable errors” [οὔτοι οἱ ἄν ἰάσιμα ἀμαρτήματα ἀμάσσωσιν]. See note at 525b.

examples already lived their mortal lives[?]" Stauffer calls this element of the *logos* "a concession to non-Socratic grounds, or, more specifically, to the view that calls for eternal punishment as 'fitting' even in cases in which it benefits no one."<sup>12</sup> Yet it is precisely Socrates' moderation of this view that leads him to say, even in spite of the logical difficulty, that no soul is punished without benefit.

If the doctrine of the curable souls can teach Callicles what Socrates' political project is, the doctrine of the incurable souls can teach Callicles what it is *not*. Socrates must refute the happiness of tyrants—the strong rulers who supposedly possess a share of Callicles' "natural justice." Far from being examples of happiness, such tyrants are the worst of the worst. Callicles himself becomes one of those "others [who] are benefited who see these [souls] on account of their errors suffering the greatest and most distressing and most fearsome sufferings for all time" (525c). In fact, Socrates waits to name the greatest errors, dramatically revealing them as coming, for the most part, "from among the tyrants and kings and potentates and those who have practiced the affairs of the cities" (525d). Socrates again invokes Homer, here because some respected authority is needed to persuade Callicles that tyrannical types are not, in fact, all that well-off.

If Callicles thinks natural strength is the basis of natural justice, he is surely rebuked when Socrates mentions how Homer has made a son of Zeus, a king, and a giant—Tantalus, Sisyphus, and Tityus—to be "avenged in the house of Hades for all time." There are hardly any stronger than they. Even buffoonish Thersites, who had no power at all and whom Odysseus struck with the royal scepter of Agamemnon, "lord of men," was "happier than those who had

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<sup>12</sup> Stauffer 173.



license” (525e).<sup>13</sup> It is here that Socrates addresses himself again to his audience, not named since his account of the soul in *logos* β: “But certainly, Callicles, it is from among those who have power, in fact, that the exceedingly wicked human beings come about. However,” says Socrates, “nothing hinders good men from being born among these also, and it is exceedingly worthy to admire those who do come about” (526a).

After this, Socrates addresses Callicles by name again. So far from admiring tyrants, one ought to admire the political men who, though they have great license, nonetheless go through life justly. Socrates’ main point is not to praise such human beings, since this would probably only encourage Callicles to pursue politics (ordinarily understood) on the basis of wanting what such men had. The only named example, therefore, of such a man is Aristides the son of Lysimachus—someone “reputed” [*ellogimos*] for justice by the *rest* of Hellas but who, as Dodds notes, was ostracized by the city of Athens.<sup>14</sup> If the fate of Aristides is known to Callicles, nothing is said about it. Socrates conceals from Callicles that even the political men we are to admire nonetheless will not have the sort of unrestricted power that Callicles ascribes to *his* political men.

### The Afterlife: Part III

Finally, then, Socrates completes his account of the afterlife, with the third part of the story. Socrates purports to resume the story he has heard—though this conclusion depends upon the logic of the previous passage. To the judge Rhadamanthys, the true nature of the soul is apparent, though he knows “neither whoever he may be nor from whoever he may be” (526b).

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<sup>13</sup> “Lord of Men” [*anax andron*] is the standard epithet for Agamemnon. The legendary ugliness of Thersites, and his treatment at the hands of *hoi politikoi*, places him in not too different a camp from that of Socrates himself.

<sup>14</sup> See note at 526b for note on *ellogimos*. For Aristides, Dodds on 526b2.

Just as one's actions imprint the soul with the signs of injustice, Rhadamanthys marks the souls himself. The emphasis here, as we expect, is on the proper judgment of souls. Of what happens when the curable and incurable souls reach Tartarus, Socrates says nothing. The error of the "law concerning human beings" lies not in itself—since it is right that people get what is "fitting" or "proper"—but in how it is applied. Calicles must be taught first that his natural justice is injustice not by convention only but injustice in truth. Then and only then will it be at all possible for him to learn what sort of a soul is just. Calicles, however, may not be capable of learning such a thing.

This soul that "has gone through life piously and with truth" is "the soul of a private man or of some other" and that of a philosopher most of all. Again, Socrates calls Calicles by name at this crucial moment. The interjection of his own opinion is also clearest here: the soul is, "I assert" [*egoge phemi*], that of a philosopher.<sup>15</sup> The soul of the philosopher has "minded his own business and has not been a busybody in his life" [*ta hautou praxantos kai ou polupragmanesantos*] (526c). He has attended to his own *pragmata* and not to *polla pragmata*. He is no student of Gorgias.

The tyrant, the rhetor, and Calicles' political man, on the other hand, pride themselves on being able to speak and act on any matter that comes before them, for which reason Socrates has disputed whether rhetoric is an art at all. Philosophy, then, must have a unitary aim and one which belongs properly to the philosopher himself. The philosopher "minds his own business" and yet remains (apparently) political, a restatement of Socrates' earlier claim that he is not of *hoi politikoi* and yet does *ta politika*. For a final time, Socrates covers over his political claims

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<sup>15</sup> Another private man might also live piously and with truth, and yet Socrates is not as clear here as he was before that "there will be also those who are noble and good with respect to the virtue of justly managing whatever someone entrusts to them" (526a).

about philosophy by making an appeal to Homer, suggesting that the poet agrees with this account while only citing a general statement that Odysseus saw Minos “holding the golden scepter, declaring law [*themisteuonta*] to the corpses” (526d). We still have much reason to doubt whether Socrates’ politics bears any resemblance to our ordinary experience.

### **Persuasion of Callicles: Exhortation and the Defense against Myth**

After being subjected to Socrates’ grand speech, one might forget Callicles’ original question that prompted it. Callicles did not ask, with the catechist, “What benefits do the righteous receive at death, and what punishments the wicked?” His concern is not with the mechanics of the afterlife. He does not even mention the soul. His concerns are this-worldly: the deserving do not seem to get what they deserve here and now. Callicles has heard Socrates’ “political art in truth” and finds it wanting. While this art purports to aid the city and oneself, it seems to result in one’s death and no improvement in the many. It is Socrates himself who first mentions the house of Hades, that for the unjust soul to arrive there is the most extreme evil. The majority of Socrates’ speech, then, seeks to “prove” this point to Callicles. Socrates provides a teaching on the true nature of his political art, which, as it happens, is nothing other than philosophy. In the eyes of *hoi politikoi*—and anyone with an ordinary conception of politics—Socrates in effect declares that his art is not that of politics at all.

Just as the *logos* treated the judgment of souls and not their ultimate fates in a precise sense, so the final exhortation is especially concerned with living well, and with dying well (only) as the culmination of a good life. Socrates examines how he will show the judge that his soul is healthy; he does not contemplate the rewards on the islands of the blessed. Callicles does not need to hear that the just will get nice things after death, only that in this life it is not the

tyrant and the powerful who live well but the just. The trial and not the punishment is important to Callicles. Socrates makes a final threat to Callicles on the basis of what Rhadamanthys will do to him when his *judgment* comes—not how he might be strung up in Tartarus. The rejection and maltreatment at the hands of the *demos*, which the political man in truth may indeed still suffer, is nothing compared to the stupefaction and trampling that the unjust will suffer both during life and “whenever you have your judgment and trial” (526e). Still, this is a difficult thing for Callicles to accept.

All this talk of Rhadamanthys and the world beyond may still seem to Callicles “to be spoken just as though [it] were an old woman’s myth” (527a). And yet, Socrates does not simply say that such a reaction is ridiculous and that his *logoi* ought to be accepted on account of their manifest truth and provability. Callicles’ disdain, in fact, is understandable, “and it would not be anything to wonder at to despise these things, *if* in some way from searching we were able to find things better and truer than them” (527a, emphasis added). Socrates’ teaching, then, is only provisional. It is the best possible teaching that the three men and he were able to discover together. It is a teaching directed toward the self-professed wise men, toward those who believe they have discovered the “true” and “natural” counterpart to conventional justice. Rhetoric comes back into the discussion. Rhetoric, “and every other action,” ought to be used “for the sake of the just.” Thus Socrates must use this art to aid the souls he finds before him. Callicles has indeed “become bad in some way,” and he “must be chastised” (527c). The indeterminate “pains and distresses” that attend punishment must be something of this sort: Socrates has refused to flatter Callicles but forces him to confront the injustice in his soul. All the rhetorical skill of Socrates has been brought to bear on persuading Callicles of his error, by showing Callicles a true, and painful, picture of his own soul.

In one last flourish of rhetoric, Socrates turns the world on its head once more. He promises happiness, but not the happiness of tyrants: “And let someone disdain you as though you were thoughtless, let him trample you in the mud, if he wants, and yes, by Zeus, as for *you* at least, take heart and be struck this dishonorable blow!” (527c). Let them call you wise, for you will be truly wise. Let them cause you to suffer in the body, for your soul will not suffer. Let them strike you down, for this indeed is true courage. These things are true nobility and true goodness—the practice of true virtue. Virtue practiced in common is the basis for true politics. Thus Socrates’ “political art in truth” becomes unrecognizable as any sort of ordinary politics. Socrates impresses upon Callicles the utmost necessity of further investigation. Noting the violence that Socrates glosses over in his account of Cronus and Zeus, Fussi says, “In the myth of last judgment Plato is not advocating political revolution.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in the sense of a violent seizing of power, Socrates calls for no such thing. If by “political revolution,” however, we mean an overturning of the order of the *individual* according to the political art in truth (i.e., philosophy), then surely it is to such an end that Socrates exhorts Callicles.

Socrates’ presentation of politics and philosophy in the *Gorgias* is not complete. Rather, for Callicles and his political kin, the dialogue presents a certain guiding *logos* that “signifies to us that this way of life is best: both to live and to die while we practice both justice and the rest of virtue” (527e). Socrates is able to come to his own aid by thus living justly and coming to his end justly. He takes up a serious political work as soon as he tries to come to the aid of others in order to allow them to do the same. Callicles’ ambition, his love of the *demos*, coupled with his willingness to hear, if not to listen completely, to Socrates makes him suited for a part of that political work. Thus the finale of the dialogue is once more directed specifically at Callicles,

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<sup>16</sup> Fussi 541.

whose name is the very last word. The *logos* is, as Socrates says, “your *logos*”—the one *he* needs to hear.<sup>17</sup> Socrates asks Callicles to join him in this political *therapeia* as a joint laborer. Thus Socrates redirects Callicles’ ambition, whether for tyranny or for the flattery of the *demos*, to a different end—that of a true and truly defensible justice in the soul. Though the way of life Callicles once led is based on a *logos* “worthy of nothing,” his soul, full of injustice, is still curable. This, of course, does not mean that he *will* be cured.

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<sup>17</sup> See note at 527c.

## Chapter 4

### Justice in the *Republic*: Preparing Glaucon for the Myth of Er

#### Introduction

Known as the *Republic* in English, the dialogue to which we now turn bears the name Πολιτεία, a Greek word which means “regime,” “government,” or “constitution.”<sup>1</sup> Like the *Gorgias*, the *Republic* also has a subtitle, probably added by a later writer: “On the Just.” Allan Bloom calls the dialogue “the true *Apology* of Socrates”—a defense of the philosophic way of life to the political community.<sup>2</sup> The *Republic* is undoubtedly about diverse subjects, from politics to philosophy to poetry to astronomy to music and many things besides. In each case, however, the common thread is *politeia* and justice. The dialogue asks what the right ordering—the just government—of a human being is with respect both to his city and his own soul. It does so by inquiring of human beings, both the interlocutors themselves and readers, what sort of opinions they hold about justice. The *Republic* takes one’s opinion about a serious subject and forces one to confront its consequences. The *Republic* is indeed a defense of philosophy, but as a teacher Socrates does not require all his students to philosophize. They must have their opinions tested as much as possible or as much as is prudent, whether in preparation for a life of philosophy or not.

Just as the *Gorgias* begins and ends with Callicles, so the *Republic* begins and ends with Glaucon. It is with Glaucon that Socrates has “gone down” to the Piraeus (327a), and it is to

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<sup>1</sup> Common usage prevents our changing the translation of the title, much as it prevents us from making other, more pedantic choices. Thus, for example, we are left to call the two brothers Γλαύκων and Πλάτων, Glaucon and Plato, rather than to insist upon a consistent transliteration.

<sup>2</sup> Bloom 307.

Glaucon that Socrates tells the myth of Er, addressing him by name at three crucial points during that story (cf. 615a, 618b, 621b). Of the eleven “characters” of the dialogue, Glaucon stands out, not least because, as Socrates says at the opening of Book II, “[he] indeed always happens to be manliest [or, most courageous] in quite all things” (357a). Glaucon, with his brother Adeimantus, has taken an extreme but compelling position: the just man should be just for its own sake and be happy even and especially while suffering the bad reputation and punishments of the unjust (cf. 360e-361d). He provides a better defense of the unjust life than Thrasymachus himself, in order to force Socrates to prove the goodness of justice. In the opinion of the many, the picture of the life that awaits the just man if he is stripped of all “wages” and “rewards” seems grim indeed, since such a man suffers all sorts of torture and finally dies at the hands of the unjust (361e-362a). Glaucon does not shy away from challenging his love of justice with the strongest argument he can muster.

So successful is Glaucon’s praise of injustice that it can be difficult to distinguish his own view from that of *hoi polloi*.<sup>3</sup> In interpreting Glaucon as a possible tyrant or “authoritarian,” one probably misses the mark. His love of justice does demand a definition and defense of justice from Socrates, but the apparent inability of Socrates to provide one does not mean that Glaucon will now turn toward injustice. It is not even clear that Glaucon’s aims are political as “political” is normally understood. Insofar as he seeks the goodness of justice, he seeks it for the individual *despite* the injustice of his surroundings. Glaucon does not present the plight of a just city in an unjust world, but that of the just man among unjust men. The danger Glaucon poses is not to the

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<sup>3</sup> One scholar describes Glaucon in this way: “He wants autonomy, certain political answers, and plans to implement them; thus, many commentators read Glaucon as a threat to be contained.” Elizabeth Markovitz, *The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech, and Democratic Government*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008) 162.



political community but to the soul of Glaucon himself, whether he will know how to choose the best way of life available to him or not (cf. 618b-619b).

To examine all of what the *Republic* has to teach about justice in the city and in the soul would be a mammoth task. Like the *Gorgias*, the *Republic* is one of Plato's longest dialogues. We limit ourselves here to a discussion of the state of justice in the individual's soul and in the soul of Glaucon in particular. This discussion will ultimately turn upon the relation of the individual to the city, and especially the situation of the just man among an unjust people, thus returning an individual, psychic<sup>4</sup> question to this "political" one. Socrates concludes the conversation of the dialogue by telling the myth of Er, a story of a warrior who dies in battle, sees what the afterlife is like, and revives nearly at the moment of his own funeral. This is Socrates' answer to Glaucon: what the myth describes are the things that truly await the just and the unjust.

In order to better understand this myth and answer, I have prepared a translation of 613e5 and following, which covers the entirety of the myth along with the immediate exchange that brings it about.<sup>5</sup> We will turn to a close reading of the myth itself once we have laid out the primary problems of the dialogue and prepared for some interpretive difficulties in the text. A brief overview of the different definitions of justice that the interlocutors put forward will help to place Glaucon's opinion on a certain spectrum. Finally, we include a discussion of astronomy in the *Republic*, in order to begin to clarify its prominence in the myth. With this, the rewards and wages of justice may be allowed to return and our study of the myth to proceed.

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<sup>4</sup> By *psychic*, I only mean to refer to the soul [ψυχική].

<sup>5</sup> See "Chapter 5: *Republic* 613e5ff."

## Different Definitions of Justice

To know whether justice is good, one would assume that it is necessary first to know what justice is. It is clear from the *Republic* and its several interlocutors that there is no shortage of opinions about justice—and that everyone is quite sure that he has hit upon the correct one. After all, one would least of all wish to be wrong about justice, since whatever it is, the rewards and punishments associated with it are great. On the one hand, this wealth of opinion demonstrates how varied human beings in general are in their conceptions of justice. Some follow the sayings of wise men or poets, some the laws of the city, and some their own observations of the world. On the other hand, that the dialogue examines each definition only tentatively demonstrates the well-known feature of Socrates' teaching, that he does not (usually) pronounce doctrines to his students.

Thus we see, just in Book I, a whole train of definitions for justice. Cephalus believes, in effect, that justice is paying back (out of one's wealth) what one owes those against whom he has committed injustices, thereby avoiding the frightful penalties of the house of Hades (330d-331b). Being, as he is, on the "threshold of old age," Cephalus has no desire to seriously question his opinions—even though he adds "telling the truth" to his definition. Polemarchus quotes the poet Simonides' statement that justice is "giving to each what is owed," adding that this means to give good things to friends and bad things to enemies, especially in battle (331e, 332b, 332e). Thrasymachus asserts that justice is the law and as such what the ruler, whether a man or the many, finds to be to his advantage and what he lays down for the weak and foolish to follow (338e).<sup>6</sup> Glaucon says that the many *believe* that they "see through" the ruse that Thrasymachus

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<sup>6</sup> I am eliding the dispute over whether the law *is* to the advantage of the ruler or only what is *believed* to be to his advantage. Cf. 338e-341b.

describes, *believing* the law to be something against nature and merely conventional. Each of these definitions is thoroughly political—justice then becomes only a matter of one’s relation to the city. Cephalus alone, even in his self-serving way, appears to be concerned with the justice in one’s own soul, but he too adopts a political definition of justice. He has merely transferred one of the fundamental political concerns of human beings—fear of punishment—to the “next life.”

All of this comes in Book I, at the end of which (an ironic) Socrates declares that he has been distracted by all the talk about the profitability of justice and injustice and has forgotten all about what justice *is*. He says, “For as long as I do not know what justice is, I will scarcely know whether it happens to be some virtue or, in fact, not, or whether he who has it is unhappy or happy” (354c). The rest of the *Republic* is indeed engaged in remedying this problem. Perhaps in response to the overwhelmingly political concern of his interlocutors, Socrates will not attempt to locate justice in the soul alone but in the city as well. The other men need to hear such an argument, but Glaucon in particular requires an account of justice that will make justice choice-worthy above all else, as an individual and in community with others. Glaucon already *believes* this about justice, but even in his zeal, he has not been able to account for it fully.

### **Glaucon on the Just and Good**

Since Glaucon wishes justice to be good by itself, we must consider what this means. At the beginning of Book II, he provides Socrates with a three-fold classification of goods, in response to the speeches of Thrasymachus and Socrates. In fact, Glaucon seems to turn the tables on Socrates, by asking a series of questions to which Socrates first offers short responses and then his own opinion. In this Socratic style, Glaucon “asks” whether goods are classified thus: harmless pleasures, things good in themselves and for their consequences, and things good only

for their outcomes (357b-d). As Allen notes: “Glaucón uses this division to locate the difference between Socrates and Thrasymachus over the nature of justice.”<sup>7</sup> Most human beings, in any case, says Glaucon, conceive of justice as the third sort of good—at best a sort of unpleasant medicine. We find a difficulty, however, when we try to place Glaucon’s own position on justice in the structure he has provided.

The most obvious problem in Glaucon’s position is that he must necessarily place justice, which he believes to be the greatest of all goods, among the *harmless pleasures*. It is even difficult to produce examples of the first type of good—pleasant smells are perhaps the best example, since nothing else comes as a consequence. If justice, the good *par excellence*, is in the same class of goods as the aroma of a spring day, it hardly seems worth all the fuss. At the same time, Glaucon wants to find, in justice, a sort of good the possession of which one would desire even at the cost of abandoning all other goods and one that cannot itself be lost. In this way, perhaps, justice is not a matter of self-sacrifice, since the just man thereby gains the *greatest* good.

Glaucon seems to believe in the goodness of justice even if he does not possess an argument to counteract those of the many in their praise of injustice. So, as we have said, Glaucon wants Socrates to praise justice without reference to its benefits. In this way he grants to the many their central contention, that the unjust man will come to possess what they believe to be a whole host of goods. These supposed benefits actually arise not from injustice alone but also from one’s (false) reputation for justice. Because the many *believe* justice to be a certain thing, that reputation produces benefits that would not arise simply from the prosecution of crimes.

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<sup>7</sup> R.E. Allen, “The Speech of Glaucon in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25:1 (1987:Jan.) 4.

With this argument, Glaucon practically accuses men like himself who would praise justice of doing wrong—since by that very praise they strengthen the opinion of the many that justice is “good” and add to the rewards of the unjust who appear just. Without a guide, Glaucon’s enthusiasm for justice serves only to fortify the position he opposes.

Thus we have the difficulty that Glaucon uses the benefits of being unjust to “praise” injustice while forbidding Socrates from responding in kind. No defense, it seems, is left for justice. A number of scholars have tried to reconcile what seems to be Glaucon’s “stacking the deck” against justice. As Payne writes, one solution has been to distinguish between natural and artificial production of benefits, which, he notes rightly, is absent from the text. Payne himself tries to solve this problem by distinguishing between “criterial” (the consequences by which we provide a standard for judgment) and “fringe” benefits, saying that the rule Glaucon is following is this: “When we praise an activity for itself, we must focus on the valuable activity and its criterial benefits.”<sup>8</sup> This solution does not immediately appear different from the natural-artificial division of benefits. Rather than look for complete consistency in Glaucon’s approach, however, we might examine it in light of what we know about him.

That Glaucon should want to hear the argument against the most robust, even unfair, defense of injustice is not surprising. It is no use to defeat a flagging Thrasymachus when there are more persistent praisers of injustice to be had. On the other hand, Glaucon is trying to get Socrates to say that all the good things that he has said the unjust possess are not actually good at all—or at least not good enough to warrant the pursuit of injustice. This is the easiest solution to

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Payne, “The Division of Goods and Praising Justice for Itself in *Republic II*,” *Phronesis* 56 (2011) 77-78. For the natural-artificial thesis, Payne points the reader to Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 66-68 and M.B. Foster, “A Mistake of Plato’s in the Republic,” *Mind* 46 (1937), 387-8.

the difficulty, and one that does not require a more nuanced account of different types of benefits. Glaucon wants Socrates to state flatly that the many are wrong when they say such things are good. No concessions are to be made to the commonplace opinion that these benefits actually *are* good for those who possess them.

The story of the ring of Gyges serves this very purpose. The ring grants the wearer invisibility—and thus the license to commit injustice without the possibility of punishment. The power it grants is godlike, coming as it does from the hand of a corpse of superhuman size in a chasm of the earth opened by a thunderstorm and earthquake (359c-d). Markovitz says that the myth of Er is a direct response to this story of the ring, that it is “a story to counter another story.”<sup>9</sup> Glaucon’s story presents the opinion of the many, Socrates’ that of the philosopher. At this point, however, the ring of Gyges represents the most dangerous threat to the opinion that justice is good or choice-worthy: if two men came to possess such a ring, says Glaucon for the vulgar, the “just” man would be indistinguishable in appearance and deed from the “unjust.” Against this view, Socrates must show what justice actually looks like when it comes into being, whether in an individual or the city.

### **Justice as Minding One’s Own Business**

To understand the myth of Er, we must trace the next development in the argument about justice, from the variety of opinion with which the dialogue opens to the account of justice as harmony and minding one’s own business. Socrates returns to the political concerns we have discussed previously by giving an account of the city and soul as analogues to each other (434d-442b). Just as the soul has reason, spiritedness, and desires, so the city has rulers, auxiliaries, and

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<sup>9</sup> Markovitz 151.

craftsmen. Just as the soul has virtues, so does the city. In order to understand justice in the soul, Socrates argues, we can look at injustice in the city, and since the city is larger, we can see justice better. To remove the clearly problematic visual metaphor, we might say that we have more direct, verifiable experience of the city and what happens in the city than we do of the soul and what happens within it. The analogy is problematic (and explicitly so), but insofar as justice has *something* to do with the relationship between the individual and his community, the comparison at least forces us to consider both sides of that relationship.

Socrates takes up other virtues—wisdom, courage, and moderation—in his examination of the city-soul analogy, but our concern here is with justice. In both the city and the soul, justice is a matter of “minding one’s own business and not being a busybody” (433a).<sup>10</sup> This amounts to the right ordering of the constituent parts of both the city and soul. Justice in the city, however, turns out to be a “phantom”<sup>11</sup> of justice in the soul (443c). True justice is harmonization, not of external things, but of the internal (443d-e). Glaucon is in whole-hearted agreement with Socrates on this point.<sup>12</sup>

Here we might begin to understand Glaucon’s challenge better. When he speaks of “benefits” and everything else that he wishes to exclude from the praise of justice, he speaks of what he considers to be external. For him, justice is something internal, something unable to be

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Gorgias* 526c.

<sup>11</sup> εἶδωλον: phantom, image (whether in the mind or, e.g., as a reflection). Related to *eidōs* (form).

<sup>12</sup> Glaucon’s responses in this part of the dialogue are emphatic. When Socrates asks whether justice is something other than the parts of one’s soul minding their own business, Glaucon swears (“No, by Zeus!”) (443b). When Socrates elaborates on the harmony of the soul, Glaucon calls the speech “all in all [παντάπασιν] true” (444a). See *Gorgias* 522e for another appearance of *pantapasin*.

overcome by whatever evils the body may suffer, whether at the hands of unjust individuals or cities. This sort of justice cannot be lost, and perhaps this security is what attracts Glaucon. When the benefits of justice are finally allowed back into the argument, Glaucon calls them “very noble and sure” (614a). He does not want merely a healthy soul but wants Socrates to assure him first that his soul will indeed be healthy.

The question that remains, and the question that is avoided in Book IV, is what way of life will produce harmony and therefore justice in the soul. The just soul, we ask, is healthy by *what* means and for *what*? Again the conflict between the political and the individual arises. The best life for an individual does not necessarily seem to be that of the best ruler, which would appear to be of the greatest benefit to the city. The life of philosophy is one candidate for the best way of life. At the same time, behind the *Republic* looms the execution by democratic Athens of Socrates the philosopher. Most of all, the philosopher will “mind his own business,” but this can and does often come in direct conflict with the political community. Between Books IV and X, Socrates attempts to square this circle, to give an account of the city that unites at the highest level the philosophic and political ways of life. That discussion is too vast for our purposes, but its goal, and not its lack of success, is important to note here. Socrates has shown Glaucon that justice is the health of the soul, but he will be able to reintroduce the soul’s *wherefore* in the course of educating him further. That education, as we have said, culminates in the myth of Er, within which we find both a survey of different ways of life and the assurance that the healthy soul possesses its good securely and the unhealthy its punishments.

### **Astronomy and Education**



To conclude, we would turn to a part of that education. In preparing the reader for the myth of Er, this chapter must address what is a conspicuous and mysterious part of the myth—astronomy. To the modern reader, the sections of the myth that deal with the ordering of the universe can be especially challenging. Plato of course predates the great astronomer Ptolemy, who would develop a complicated model of the universe based on observations of heavenly bodies as well as the philosophic tradition, but the system Socrates describes according to Er’s observations is much closer to the Ptolemaic than the familiar Copernican conception of the heavens. Since the order, configuration, and qualities of the spheres apparently take on some meaning other than description of the literal truth about the stars and planets, there appears to be something of astrology in the myth. Without a way of understanding its purpose, one finds that the very precise detail that Plato has Socrates include can serve to obscure rather than to clarify.

Astronomy is the art that, according to its etymology, purports to order the stars. The astronomer (ὁ ἀστρονόμος, “the star-arranger”) is at the very least he who seeks out and discovers the *nomos* that governs the heavens.<sup>13</sup> Astronomy becomes an impious and even atheistic science, however, when one grants a more active agency to the astronomer. This man, after all, perhaps imprints a certain *nomos* on the heavens, on the planets and stars—the very things that are closest to the gods and are often indeed considered gods themselves. It is one thing to see *that* the stars are arranged in just such a way but quite another to devise an account of that perceived order. Astronomy takes up the tools of arithmetic and the rest of mathematics in order to make statements that, in the absence of a wise teacher, might do more harm than its antecedent sciences. The art of calculation in the service of generalship, of course, can be used as

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<sup>13</sup> The verb νέμω means “deal out, dispense, or distribute.” The related νόμος usually means “law” but can refer to anything “assigned,” a “usage,” or a “custom.” For “heavens” (*ouranos*), see note at 614c.

much for criminal activity and tyranny as for a rightful ruler's prosecution of a good war.

Astronomy, however, can directly undermine piety by making belief in the gods less necessary or less tenable, either by constructing a cosmos that operates without the gods or one which excludes the possibility of their existence.

At the same time, astronomy tends to produce two distinct groups of people: some practitioners who reduce it to its "useful" effects and others who occupy themselves in apparently "useless" pursuits (cf. 527e-528a). In light of this division, astronomy might not seem to be integral to a political or moral education. In Socrates and Glaucon's "city," however, astronomy forms the core of the six subjects to be taught to youths. Socrates tells Glaucon that astronomy is to be the third (later amended to be the fourth) subject of study. Astronomy is the first "applied science," so to speak, that the youths will learn, after they have mastered arithmetic, plane and solid geometry.

One of the first problems that we notice with respect to astronomy is its reliance on a knowledge of solid geometry—an art that Socrates and Glaucon agree has not been able to develop as of yet in any city (528b-c). When Socrates presents a vision of the heavens in the myth of Er, therefore, we must wonder how he has overcome this difficulty. In interpreting that passage, then, we should not look for a strict, literal presentation of the heavens—since such an account would have to rely on better knowledge than Socrates claims to possess or claims that anyone possesses. Even where the *nomoi* of the heavens seem very particular (e.g., this or that sphere turns at such and such a speed in relation to another), we should remember that such laws, inasmuch as they rely on a professedly defective art, are not meant to give a literal account of the material heavens.

Still, the first four subjects, from arithmetic to astronomy, do not seem especially important for inculcating virtue, and justice in particular, in the soul and in the city. To what end, then, will Socrates and Glaucon's city teach its youth astronomy? And more importantly, to what end does Socrates include such an account in his concluding myth? As with the other courses of study, Glaucon is quick to point out the practical benefits of astronomy: "For being better perceptive concerning seasons<sup>14</sup>, both of months and of years, is proper not only for farming and for seafaring, but not less for generalship also" (527d). In other words, astronomy is useful for living, both for the individual and the political community. This is true enough and a good account of astronomy, if in fact that subject is limited to the literal examination of the heavens. In his second attempt, Glaucon praises astronomy on the basis that it turns one's eyes upward, toward the heavens (529a). Adam rightly points out that Glaucon means by "heavens," not some other realm but the material skies, and "he thinks the soul looks upwards if the bodily eye is turned aloft!"<sup>15</sup> Socrates lightly mocks Glaucon, saying that if someone tries to understand what he can perceive with his eyes through his eyes alone, his soul will never look upward, "even if he learns while swimming supine on land or on sea" (529c). The mere observation of the heavens by the body is not enough to make the soul consider "heavenly"—high and noble—things.

If not for its practical use, why then do we learn astronomy? Socrates first implies and then says outright that there are other benefits. The art is somehow "useful" for more than mere life—it allows one to live well. Though it will seem useless to the many, astronomy forms a part

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<sup>14</sup> With Adam, I take "seasons" (any time period, whether of the year or the day or a life) [ὥρας] as the accusative (plural) object of the preposition and take "[of] months and [of] years" as modifying "seasons." The alternative translation is "concerning season [sing.] and months and years."

<sup>15</sup> Adam on 528e-529a.

of those studies by which “some organ<sup>16</sup> of the soul of each is thoroughly purified<sup>17</sup> and rekindled” (527d-e). The myth of Er, therefore, when it teaches about the heavens, must serve this purpose: to purify and rekindle some part of Glaucon’s soul. Some organ or instrument of Glaucon’s soul is therefore deficient in some respect. That is to say, this part is not simply absent. Rather it is something to be “cleaned out” and something to be redirected and renewed.

Glaucon’s most conspicuous characteristic is his manliness (or courage) (cf. 357a). This quality gives birth to, or indeed finds its culmination in, his desire for justice and especially justice in the face of suffering and pain. Socrates therefore puts to use the education that he and Glaucon have been discussing, in order to moderate that desire for justice by satisfying it as much as possible. The figure of Necessity and the orderliness of the universe reinforce the surety of the justice of the world. Souls get and keep and control what they deserve. The myth of Er, and its the astronomical details in particular, helps to persuade Glaucon of what he wishes Socrates to prove—namely, that justice is good in itself. How precisely this is done, we will examine further in our discussion of the myth.

Astronomy is not the final subject that Socrates and Glaucon plan to teach the youth of their city. Instead it prepares its students for further study. The true astronomer, says Socrates, will see the work of the *demiurge*<sup>18</sup> of the heavens and appreciate it much as he appreciates the beauty of all the works of the craftsmen (530a). (Socrates does not take this opportunity to assure

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<sup>16</sup> ὄργανον: organ (in Plato, especially that of sense), instrument, tool. Related to ἔργον (*work*, deed).

<sup>17</sup> For “thoroughly purified” [ἐκκαθαίρεται], one might well translate the verb as “cleaned out,” since the Greek idiom matches the English (ἐκ- is an intensifier but also means “out”). Verbal form of καθαρός, “pure.” See 614d and 616b.

<sup>18</sup> δημιουργός: one who works for the public (cf., *demos* and *ergon*), a skilled craftsman.

the piety of astronomers and does not suggest they will be overawed by the *demiurge*'s work.<sup>19</sup>)

The passing of the seasons, the precise movements of the stars, and everything that we ordinarily associate with astronomy turn out to be—to borrow the language of the *Gorgias* and of Book IV—a phantom part of the true art (530b). True astronomy—the subject that will be taught to the youths in the city and to Glaucon in the myth—consists in leaving aside “the things in the heavens.” With Glaucon, the reader must say to Socrates, “Surely, the work that you assign is many times greater than what is done in astronomy now” (530c). This “astronomy” of Socrates is something new.

We finally get a clearer picture of this work once Socrates has completed his enumeration of the six subjects the youths of the city are to learn. With astronomy, we find harmonics and dialectics—what we might call music theory and argumentation. In both these cases, there is some “organ” to be purified and some material concern to be redirected toward the things of the soul. Just as astronomy turns the “eyes” of the soul to what is lofty, harmonics apparently turn its “ears.”<sup>20</sup> We find the “usefulness” of harmonics, just like the usefulness of astronomy, only in the pursuit of the “noble and good” (531c). Dialectics, as the peak of one’s education, helps to give an account of the good by arranging the “intelligible” things in much the same way that astronomy arranges the “visible” (532a-b). As the peak of the dialogue and the culmination of

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<sup>19</sup> Piety is in fact noticeably absent both from the four cardinal virtues and the eleven qualities of the philosopher.

<sup>20</sup> A much deeper knowledge of Greek music theory and mathematics would be required to assess Adam’s remark that “Plato’s conception of Harmonics is in all respects analogous to his view of Astronomy.” See Adam on 530c-531c, especially his note on 530cff. Adam was a bold interpreter of Plato’s mathematics—he wrote an entire book on the extremely difficult passage from Book VIII that deals with marriage (546b), entitled *The Nuptial Number: Its Solution and Significance* (1891).

Glaucou's education at Socrates' hands, the myth of Er uses astronomy, harmonics, and dialectics only and ever to purify and rekindle the soul in its pursuit of the noble and the good.

### **The Afterlife and the Rewards for Justice**

The most striking part about the conversation that precedes the myth of Er is Glaucon's reversal on the rewards and prizes of virtue and of justice in particular. Glaucon had explicitly charged Socrates with the praise of justice irrespective of its external rewards. Now, however, just before the myth, Socrates gives back such rewards to justice—with the encouragement of Glaucon. G.R.F. Ferrari calls the myth of Er "the tailpiece to [the] massive argument in which justice is shown to be choice worthy for its own sake." It is about the "system of reward for justice" (emphasis added), and "not only is the myth addressed to Glaucon, it is adapted to his character and horizon."<sup>21</sup> We have shown something of Glaucon's character and horizon of soul, and it remains to judge the myth against them. Glaucon's apparent surrender—his acceptance of justice's rewards—can only be understood in light of the final arguments of Book X. After presenting our translation, we will turn to the conclusion of the *Republic* in attempt to understand this strange development and Socrates' final teaching to Glaucon contained within the myth of Er. We will find that the dialogue's discussions of *politeia* and justice come to fruition, not in any city of human beings real or imagined, but in one to be founded in the soul of man, patterned on the things of the heavens and to be cared for above all else (592b).

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<sup>21</sup> G.R.F. Ferrari, "Glaucon's reward, philosophy's debt: the myth of Er," *Plato's Myths*, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 116.

## Chapter 5

### Republic 613e5ff (Adam)

“Therefore,” I said, “the things that the just person, while he is alive, comes to have from gods and human beings—[614a] namely, the prizes and wages and gifts, in addition to those good things which justice itself supplied—would be of this sort.”

“And,” [Glaucon] said, “they are very noble and sure<sup>1</sup>.”

“These things, moreover,” I said, “are nothing in multitude or in greatness compared to those things which await each one when he has come to his end. But one must hear them<sup>2</sup>, in order that each of them<sup>3</sup> may have perfectly recovered<sup>4</sup> the things which are owed by the argument to be heard<sup>5</sup>.”

“You would speak<sup>6</sup>,” he said, “since there are not many other things more pleasant to him who hears.”

[614b] “But I will not, however,” I said, “tell you an apologue of Alcinous at any rate, but, for my part, one of a valiant man<sup>7</sup>, Er the son of Armenius, by race of Pamphylos<sup>8</sup>. Once<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> βέβαιος: firm, steady, steadfast, durable; sure, certain, secure

<sup>2</sup> i.e., the things which await everyone

<sup>3</sup> i.e., everyone coming to his end

<sup>4</sup> ἀπολαμβάνω: take back; receive back; regain, recover. “Recover” is sufficiently ambiguous to cover both “taking” (something one seems to do) and “receiving” (something one seems to have done to one).

<sup>5</sup> The Greek verb is active (“to hear”). Cf. “beautiful to see” → “beautiful to be seen”

<sup>6</sup> An imperative (“speak”) might be expected, but Glaucon uses a more courteous formulation (a potential optative). (Smyth 1830) But for the presence of the particle ἄν, the construction could have been an optative of wish (“would that you speak”), with a somewhat more forceful tone.

after he had come to his end in war, when the corpses, ten-days old, were being taken up, having already become quite decayed, *he* was taken up sound<sup>10</sup>, but though he was conveyed homeward so as to be buried—though he lay twelve-days old upon the pyre—he revived, and when he had revived he began saying<sup>11</sup> the things which he saw there.

“And he said that when his soul departed from him, it journeyed amid many souls, [614c] and they arrived at some place, a daemonic one, in which there were two chasms<sup>12</sup> of the earth, a pair holding fast to each other, and others of the heavens<sup>13</sup>, in turn, in the place above, directly

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<sup>7</sup> An *apologos*, related to *logos* (see note at *Gorgias* 522e), is a story or tale, here translated “apologue” to retain the alliteration of the Greek. Alcinous (*Alkinoos*) is the father of Nausicaa and king of the Phaeacians. Books IX to XII of the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus recounts his journeys to the king, were known as “the tales of Alcinous,” which became a proverbial name for long and tedious stories. “Valiant” (*alkimos*: strong, stout, valiant, brave) is morphologically similar to *Alkinoos* (and in the genitive case that appears here, they only differ in their nu and mu (Ἀλκίνου / ἀλκίμου). The root *alki-* means strength, while *noos* is mind. The tale, then, is of one not “strong of mind” but of one “strong.” As Adam notes, *Alkinoos-alkimos* is paronomasia—a pun.

<sup>8</sup> πᾶμφυλος: “every-tribe.” The name of the founder of the clan (i.e., Pamphylos son of Aigimos). Pamphylia was in Anatolia, on the Mediterranean coast just north of Cyprus. Cf. 615c, where the region itself is named.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. “Once upon a time...”

<sup>10</sup> ὑγιής: healthy; sound, as in “safe and sound.” Here, “uncorrupted.”

<sup>11</sup> An inchoative imperfect (ἔλεγεν). Lit. “was saying.”

<sup>12</sup> Χάσμα: *chasm*, gulf; any wide expanse

<sup>13</sup> οὐρανός: the sky, the “vault or firmament of heaven.” In English, “sky” does not capture the cosmic scale of the Greek, while “heaven” evokes particular religious sentiments. “Heavens” will translate the singular *ouranos* throughout.



opposite. And in the midst of these, [he said that]<sup>14</sup> judges were seated, who, whenever they had rendered judgment, commanded the just, on the one hand, to journey to the right and upward through the heavens, when they had fixed round before them signs of those who had been judged; the unjust, on the other hand, [they commanded to journey] to the left and downward, [614d] once these ones also had behind them signs of all the things which they had done.

“But when he himself came forth, [he said that] they said that he would need to become a messenger to human beings of the things there, and they exhorted him both to hear and to observe all things in the place. And indeed [he said that] he saw, in the following way, the souls as they went away—throughout each chasm, both the one of the heavens and of the earth, when judgment had been rendered to them—and [that he saw], throughout the other pair [of chasms], from the one those souls coming up out of the earth, full of squalor and dust, and from the other, others coming down from the heavens, pure.

[614e] “And [he said that] the souls, which would always be arriving, appeared as though to have come from a long journey, and as they went away into the meadow, glad, as at a festival<sup>15</sup> they encamped and embraced each other, as many as were acquaintances. And [he said that] the souls who had come out of the earth inquired of the other souls about the things in that place, and those out of the heavens inquired of the things from those souls [who came from the earth]. And [he said that] they described [those things] for each other, some [souls] who lamented and cried, [615a] since they remembered again how many and what sort of things they had suffered and had seen in their journey under the earth—and [he said that] the journey was a

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<sup>14</sup> In the Greek, it is clear that the account from 614c-621b (with an interlude from 618c-619b) is reported speech, and we ought to supply “he said that” to render the effect in English.

<sup>15</sup> Πανήγυρις: general assembly or festival, esp. in honor of a god

thousand years long—and others, in turn, from the heavens described the enjoyments<sup>16</sup> and spectacles, inconceivable in beauty.

“So, [he said,] Glaucon, they described many things for a long time. But this, he said, was the heart<sup>17</sup> of it: how many injustices they had ever yet committed against someone and against how many each [of them had done it], on behalf of quite all [that] they had paid the penalty in turn, ten times over on behalf of each. That is, [he said,] once for every hundred-year period [615b] (since human life is just so long), in order that they might repay in full ten-fold the full repayment of the injustice. And, for example, if some were to blame<sup>18</sup> for many deaths, either by betraying cities or armies, and by having thrown them into slavery or being guilty by accessory of some other evil conduct, pain ten times all these would they get back for themselves on behalf of each. And, in turn, if they should have done well in doing some good deeds and should have become just and pious, they would get back for themselves their due<sup>19</sup> according to the same. [615c] But concerning the ‘as soon as they came about’ and ‘living for a short time,’<sup>20</sup> he was saying other things, things not worthy of remembrance.

“And for irreverence and reverence toward gods and parents and for murder by one’s own hand he described wages greater still. For he said, in fact, that he came to be beside one being asked by another, ‘Where was Ardiaeus the Great?’ And this Ardiaeus had become tyrant in some city of Pamphylia, already the thousandth year [thence] by that time, [615d] when he

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<sup>16</sup> εὐπάθεια: enjoyment, luxury (something good one “suffers” or “experiences”)

<sup>17</sup> Lit., “this [was] the head”

<sup>18</sup> αἴτιος: to blame, blameworthy, culpable; the cause or thing responsible for something

<sup>19</sup> ἄξια: worth, value, price, amount, one’s due or desserts. The adjective form appears at 615c, translated “worthy.” See note at G 523b.

<sup>20</sup> Adam sees these as two recognized categories of the “untimely born:” those who died as soon as they were born and those who lived only for a short time.

killed his old father and elder brother and had done many other impious things besides, as was said.

“So he said that the one being asked said, ‘He has not come,’ he said, ‘nor will he have come here. For indeed we observed, then, the following thing among the terrible sights. When, near the mouth, we were about to go up and had suffered all the other things, *him* we suddenly beheld, and others, most of them, probably, tyrants [615e] (but some of them who had committed the greatest errors were private men), whom, when they thought that now they would go up, the mouth did not receive, but it bellowed<sup>21</sup> whenever someone of those in such an incurable state for wickedness or who had insufficiently paid the penalty would attempt to go up. At that very time, then, men,’ he said, ‘savage, ablaze to see, as they were standing by and considering the voice, arrested some and carried them away, [616a] but as for Aridiaeus and others, when they had bound them together, hand and foot and head, had thrown them down, and had skinned them, they dragged them out alongside the road as they bent them over thorns and signified to those who were always nearby those things for the sake of which and why they would be carried away, to be made to fall into Tartarus.’ Then indeed he said that though they came to have many fears of all sorts, this one exceeded [them], that the voice might come about for each when he would go up, and [he said that] if [the voice] kept silent, most gladly did each go up.

[616b] “And [he<sup>22</sup> said that] both the judgments and vengeance, on the one hand, were something of that sort and these good deeds, in turn, were their counterparts<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Μυζάομαι: low, bellow, roar (used of oxen); creak, grate (of things)

<sup>22</sup> A return to the speech of Er himself, whereas the previous passage of reported speech is that of the one who was asked about Ardiaeus at 615c. This sums up the section begun at 615a.

<sup>23</sup> *Antistrophoi*. A lyrical term, but also merely that which is turned to face something else; hence, “correlative” or “counterpart.”

“But when seven days had passed for those in the meadow, [he said that] on the eighth day, once they stood up, they had to make their journey, and they arrived in four days at a [place] from where they beheld a light extended from above through all the heavens and earth, straight as a pillar, most of all resembling the rainbow, but brighter and purer. [He said that] they arrived at it, [616c] after going forward for a day’s journey<sup>24</sup>, and they saw in that very place, in the midst of the light, the extremities of its bonds extended from the heavens. For [he said that] this light was [*the*<sup>25</sup>] unifying bond of the heavens, just like the undergirders of triremes<sup>26</sup>, since thus it would hold together all the revolution<sup>27</sup>.

“And from the extremities [he said that they observed] extended [*the*] spindle of Necessity, through which [he said] all the revolutions were continually being turned. [He said that] both its distaff and hook were of adamant, and the whorl, which was mixed, was both of this and other kinds [of materials]. And the nature of the whorl [he said] was of the following sort. [616d] The shape, on the one hand, was of the very sort as [a whorl is] here, but, on the other hand, one must conceive, from the things which he said, that it was of the following sort: just as if in one great whorl, hollow and scooped out through and through, another, lesser one of this sort should be set, fitting just as jars which fit into each other—and thus another one, a third, and a fourth and four others. For [he said that] eight were the whorls altogether, set in each other,

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<sup>24</sup> Lit., “for [the extent of] an of-the-day road”

<sup>25</sup> No article included. Cf. John 1:1, “In [the] beginning was the word” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος). Greek has no indefinite article, so the absence of a definite article will often require us to supply one. Here, however, the lack of an article denotes something unique.

<sup>26</sup> Adam treats the undergirders of these warships extensively. It suffices to say that particular to triremes were support girdles that ran “round the hull from stern to stem [(the connection at the bow of the two sides of the ship)] outside the vessel.”

<sup>27</sup> περιφορά: revolution, rotatory motion.

showing the rims from above as circles, [616e] completed around the distaff as a continuous surface<sup>28</sup> of one whorl. And [he said that] that distaff had been driven through the middle of the eighth whorl through and through.

“So, [he said,] the first and outermost whorl had the broadest circle of the rim, that of the second whorl the sixth broadest, of the third the fourth, of the fourth the eighth, of the fifth the seventh, of the sixth the fifth, of the seventh the third, and of the eighth the second. And the [circle of the rim] of the greatest whorl was many-colored<sup>29</sup>, that of the seventh was brightest, that of the eighth had its complexion from the seventh as it shone forth brightly, [617a] that of the second and fifth nearly resembled each other, yellower than those [others], the third had a whiter complexion, the fourth was reddish, and second in whiteness was the sixth.

“And [he said that] in fact, the spindle as a whole, as it twisted about, was turning in a circle in the same heading, and within the whole, as it was revolving, the seven circles within were, for their part, revolving gently in the opposite [heading] to the whole, [617b] and of them the eighth [circle] went most swiftly of these, and next—and together with each other—the seventh and sixth and fifth, and third in motion, as [he said that] it was manifest to them, the fourth was turning in a retrograde circle. And fourth [in swiftness] was the third and fifth the second. And [he said that the spindle] twisted about the knees of Necessity.

“And upon its circles, from above, [he said that] a Siren was perched upon each, revolving together<sup>30</sup> with each, sending forth one sound, one pitch<sup>31</sup>. And from all eight that were

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<sup>28</sup> Νῶτον: back, rear; any wide surface. Refers to the upper side in this case.

<sup>29</sup> For ποικίλος, Adam recommends “spangled” (i.e., glittering or sparkling) rather than “exhibiting a variety of colors,” referring to the commentary of Proclus, who says it is called *poikilos* on account of the wandering stars within it.

<sup>30</sup> Lit., “being carried around together” (συμπεριφερομένην)

[there], one harmony sounded together. And [he said that] three other [women], seated all around equally, each on a throne, [617c] daughters of Necessity, Fates, clad in white, having garlands upon their heads—Lachesis and Clotho and Atropos—they were singing to the harmony of the Sirens, Lachesis [singing] the things that had been, Clotho the things that were, and Atropos the things that were to be.<sup>32</sup> And [he said that] Clotho, reaching out with her right hand, was twisting at the same time the outer revolution of the spindle, though she would cease from time to time, [617d] and again Atropos, twisting with her left hand the inner revolutions, would do likewise. And Lachesis in turn would reach out with one hand for the one and with the other hand for the other.

“So [he said that the souls], for their part, when they arrived, needed to go directly to Lachesis. So some prophet<sup>33</sup> first separated them in order, and then, after he took from the knees of Lachesis lots<sup>34</sup> and examples of lives, he went up upon some lofty step and said, ‘Word<sup>35</sup> of

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<sup>31</sup> τόνος: that by which a thing is stretched: rope, cord; straining or raising (of the voice), pitch; (pl.) (musical) modes or keys. Adam notes that the whorls form an octave (because of the different velocities needed for the seventh, sixth, and fifth whorls to have the same period, each whorl and Siren will have a different note or pitch).

<sup>32</sup> Perhaps muddled in English indirect speech in the past tense, but Lachesis sings of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of the future. Their names mean Lot, Spinster, and Unturnable (unbending, unchangeable, eternal).

<sup>33</sup> Προφήτης: one who speaks for a god, prophet, interpreter, declarer

<sup>34</sup> κλήρος: lot. Not the “lot” in Lachesis or what is translated “obtain by lot.” Perhaps the distinction is that *kleroi* are the actual objects by which lots are drawn (as when straws are drawn).

<sup>35</sup> *Logos*. There is a solitary article in this speech, and Adam notes, “The omission of articles...adds dignity and impressiveness.”

Lachesis, maiden-daughter of Necessity. O ephemeral<sup>36</sup> souls, beginning of another death-bringing period for mortal race. [617e] Daemon will not be obtained for you by lot, but you will choose daemon.<sup>37</sup> But the one who obtains first lot, let him make first choice of life, to which he will be linked by Necessity. And masterless is virtue, of whom, as he honors or dishonors [her], each will have more or less of her. Blame belongs to him who chooses; god[dess] is blameless.<sup>38</sup>

“After he said these things, [Er said that the prophet] cast lots for all, and each would pick them up for himself<sup>39</sup> when they fell beside him, except [Er] (and [he said that] he was not permitted). And it was clear to him who had picked up [a lot] what number he had obtained. [618a] And moreover, after this, [he said that the prophet] set the examples of the lives on the earth in front of them—though there were far more examples than those present. And [he said that] there were all sorts. For there were lives both of animals, all of them, and indeed quite all human lives also. For among them [he said] were both tyrannies—some which continued to the end, and others which were utterly destroyed even in the middle, ending at both poverty and exile and at beggary—and lives of reputable men also—some which were reputable for

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<sup>36</sup> ἐφήμερος: living for a day, short-lived

<sup>37</sup> Not, as I think, Bloom’s translation: “A demon will not select you, but you will choose a demon.” Λαγχάνω and αἰδέομαι contrast selection by lot and selection by choice, as in the lots by which the order of selection is established and the subsequent choosing of lives.

<sup>38</sup> Or, “the cause is of him [i.e., belongs to him] who chooses; god is not a cause.” See note at 615b. What god the prophet is referring to, is unclear. In fact, *theos* can be “god” or “goddess,” and the adjective *anaitios* (blameless) can be masculine or feminine in this case. An alternative, though perhaps unlikely, translation would be, “goddess is blameless,” referring to Necessity or Lachesis or perhaps Virtue (*Arete*) herself.

<sup>39</sup> Related to “choose” above, lit. “take for oneself.” Here: “take up for oneself.”

appearances<sup>40</sup> and on account of beauty, [618b] and with respect both to other [kinds of] strength and that in contests, and others which were reputable for the races<sup>41</sup> and virtues of ancestors— and of men disreputable for the same things. And likewise also [were the lives] of women.

“But [he said that they] were not in order of soul, on account of it being so by necessity that if a soul chose one life it became one sort [but] if a soul chose another life it became another sort. But as for the other things, they were mixed with each other and with riches<sup>42</sup> and poverties, and some with sicknesses, and some with health<sup>43</sup>, and some which were between these things.

“There indeed, as is likely, dear Glaucon, is the whole danger<sup>44</sup> for a human being, and one must most of all take care on account of these things, [618c] that each of us, though failing to care for his other learning<sup>45</sup>, will be both a seeker and a learner of this learning, if from some place or other he is able to learn and to find out: who<sup>46</sup> will make him able<sup>47</sup> and knowing<sup>48</sup>, when distinguishing a useful and a wicked life, always and everywhere to choose the better one from among those possible<sup>49</sup>—by reckoning up all the things that have been said just now and, when they are put together with each other and are divided, what state they are in with a view to the

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<sup>40</sup> Pl. of εἶδος: form

<sup>41</sup> Or tribes or clans.

<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere translated “wealth.” Here and at 619a, a plural.

<sup>43</sup> Plural.

<sup>44</sup> Or “risk.”

<sup>45</sup> Plural.

<sup>46</sup> Or “what.”

<sup>47</sup> Δυνατός: strong, mighty, able; (neut., in pass. sense) possible

<sup>48</sup> Refers to one possessing the know-how to do something.

<sup>49</sup> *Dunatos*, here in passive sense.



virtue<sup>50</sup> of a life—[618d] and to know what beauty is if mixed with poverty or wealth and by means of what sort of state of soul it accomplishes good or evil deeds and, when it comes to being of good birth and bad birth and private lives and ruling offices and strengths and weaknesses and good learning and bad learning, and all the things of this sort of the things which are concerning the soul by nature and of the things acquired besides, what [these things] work when they are mingled with each other, so as for him to be able, when he has calculated them together, to choose from among quite all of them, since, by looking to the nature of the soul, [618e] with respect to the worse and the better life he calls the one worse which will lead the soul to that place—to becoming more unjust—and the other better which [will lead him to becoming] more just. But as for the other things, all of them, he will bid farewell. For we have seen that for him, both when he lives and when he has come to his end, this is the most excellent<sup>51</sup> choice. [619a] Even as he holds this opinion adamantly indeed must he go to the house of Hades, in order that he may not be dumbstruck there both by riches and the evils of that sort, and that, by not falling into tyrannies and other actions of that sort, he may not do many deeds which are irreparable evils and suffer himself things greater still, but may always know to choose the middle life of these sorts [of lives] and to flee the things which exceed in either direction, both in *this* life, according to what is possible, [619b] and in every next life. For in this way a human being becomes happiest.

“And so indeed, at that very time, the messenger from that place gave the message that the prophet, for his part, spoke thus: ‘Even for him who comes up last, if he chooses with

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<sup>50</sup> Or “excellence,” i.e., “with a view to the excellence that characterizes an excellent life”

<sup>51</sup> *Kratistos*: see note at G 522d

intelligence<sup>52</sup> and lives<sup>53</sup> intensely<sup>54</sup>, a life is laid down with which to be content, one not evil. Let neither him who begins fail to take care for the choice nor him who finishes be spiritless.’

“But after [the prophet] said these things, he said, the one with the first lot went directly up to the greatest tyranny and chose it, and he chose it since both by imprudence and gluttony he did not sufficiently examine everything beforehand, [619c] but it escaped his notice that there was fated within it eating of his own children and other evils. And when he examined it at his leisure, he was beating his breast and weeping over his choice, because of not abiding by the things prophesied by the prophet. For he did not blame *himself* for the evils, but rather fortune and daemons and all things instead of himself. And he was of those who had come from the heavens, after having gone through life in an ordered regime<sup>55</sup> in his earlier life, when he had had a share of virtue by habit, without philosophy. [619d] And, as it is said, not the least of those who were convicted and condemned<sup>56</sup> in things of this sort were those who had come from the heavens, since they were unexercised<sup>57</sup> in toils. But among those from the earth, the majority, both because they themselves had toiled and because they had seen others [toil], were not making their choices [as though] on a raid<sup>58</sup>. On account of this, in fact, there came about an exchange of the evils and the goods for the majority of the souls, and on account of the fortune of the lot. Although, if ever someone, when he should arrive for the life here, should philosophize

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<sup>52</sup> νοῦς (νόος): mind, perception, sense, wit

<sup>53</sup> An alternate manuscript reading would yield “seeks” or “investigates.”

<sup>54</sup> σύντονος: strained tight: intense, impetuous; earnest, serious, severe, vehement

<sup>55</sup> *Politeia*.

<sup>56</sup> An Attic legal term, “convicted and condemned” translates a single word, ἀλίσκομαι, that may simply mean “be caught” or “be detected.”

<sup>57</sup> Or, “ungymnastic.”

<sup>58</sup> Or, “on the sudden” or “off-hand.” The connotation is of speed, not violence.

in a sound way, [619e] and the lot of his choice should not fall to him among the last ones, it may be that, on the basis of the things which have been reported back from that place as messages, not only would he be happy here, but also that as for the journey hence to that place and hither again, he would not make a journey underground and rugged but one both smooth and heavenly.<sup>59</sup>

“For this indeed, he said, was a sight worthy to see, [620a] how each<sup>60</sup> of the souls in turn were choosing their lives. For it was pitiable to see, and laughable and wondrous. For it was in accordance with the custom of its earlier life, for the most part, [he said, that each soul] chose. For, he said, he saw a soul, which at one time became that of Orpheus<sup>61</sup>, choosing a life of a swan, with hatred against the womanly race on account of dying by their hands, refusing to come to be by having been brought forth<sup>62</sup> in a woman. And [he said that] he saw the soul of Thamyras<sup>63</sup> choose [the life of] a nightingale<sup>64</sup>, and [that] he saw also a swan changing to the choice of a human life, and other animals, musical ones, did likewise. [620b] But the soul which obtained the twentieth lot chose a life of a lion, and [he said that] it was that of Telamonian Ajax<sup>65</sup> fleeing becoming a human being, since it had remembered the trial of the arms. And after

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<sup>59</sup> This construction is a nice example of

<sup>60</sup> Plural.

<sup>61</sup> Orpheus was a singer-poet who was killed by Thracian women.

<sup>62</sup> The feminine equivalent of the masculine action of “begetting,” which contemporary English does not really supply. Cf. *Macbeth* I.7.72-74, where Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth, “Bring forth men-children only; / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males.”

<sup>63</sup> Another singer. Rivalled the Muses themselves—and was therefore punished.

<sup>64</sup> Lit., “the songstress.”

<sup>65</sup> One of the principal warriors on the Greek side in the Trojan War. The “trial of the arms” refers to the contest, following the death of Achilles, between Ajax and Odysseus over Achilles’

this one was the soul of Agamemnon<sup>66</sup>, and [he said that] this soul, also with enmity for the human race on account of its sufferings, exchanged [its life] for a life of an eagle. And when the soul of Atalanta<sup>67</sup> obtained a lot among the middle ones<sup>68</sup>, and when it beheld that the honors of the athletic man were great, [620c] [he said that] it was powerless to pass by but took them. And after this soul, [he said that] he saw that of Epeius<sup>69</sup>, the son of Panopeus, going into a form<sup>70</sup> of a woman possessed of an art, but afar off, among the last, he saw that of buffoonish Thersites<sup>71</sup> clothing itself as an ape. And according to fortune, the soul of Odysseus, since it had drawn the last lot of all, went in order to choose, but since by memory of the earlier toils it had recovered from love of honor, it sought, as it went around for a long time, the life of a private man, and no busybody, and with difficulty found one lying somewhere, disregarded by the others, [620d] and it said, when the soul saw it, that even if it had drawn the first lot, it would have done the same things, and with delight it chose. And from among the other beasts, in fact, they likewise went into human beings and into each other, the unjust, on the one hand, into the savage ones, the just, on the other hand, changing into the tame ones, and in fact all mixtures were mixed.<sup>72</sup>

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god-made armor. Ajax recounts all that he has done for the Greeks. Despite this, Odysseus is given the armor, and Ajax kills himself. Dramatized by Sophocles (*Ajax*).

<sup>66</sup> Among the many things suffered by Agamemnon, lord of men, were the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia and his murder at the hands of Clytemnestra his wife.

<sup>67</sup> Known for her love of the hunt and the chase.

<sup>68</sup> The soul either received a lot numerically in the middle, i.e., not first or last, or one of the “mixed” lots (or both).

<sup>69</sup> Built the Trojan Horse. A reputed coward.

<sup>70</sup> Not *eidos* (see note at 618a) but *physis*, elsewhere translated as “nature.” The *natural* form.

<sup>71</sup> See note at *Gorgias* 525e.

<sup>72</sup> A typical Platonic pleonasm: “all [sorts of] mixtures occurred.” Cf., “see a sight.”

“So, [he said that] after all the souls chose their lives, just as they had obtained lots, so in that order they went forth to Lachesis, [620e] and she sent with each a daemon which each chose, this as a guardian of his life and fulfiller of the things chosen. [He said that the daemon] first would lead each to Clotho herself, beneath her hand and the twisting of the whorl of her spindle, ratifying the fate which he, after obtaining the lot, chose. [He said that the daemon,] after it had grasped this one, [that is, Clotho,] it would lead him in turn to the spinning of Atropos, making unalterable the things spun.<sup>73</sup> And from there, in fact, [he said that] without turning each would go beneath the throne of Necessity, [621a] and when he came out through it, when the others also came through, quite all journeyed to the plain of Lethe<sup>74</sup>, through both burning and terrible, stifling heat. For [he said] also [that] it was both empty of fruit-bearing trees and as many things as the earth makes grow.

“Then, [he said,] since it was already becoming evening they made camp beside the river Ameletus<sup>75</sup>, whose water no vessel contains. Moreover, it was necessary for everyone to drink some measure of the water, but those who were not saved by prudence drank more than the measure. [621b] And anyone who ever drank was made to forget all things. But when they had fallen asleep and it came to be the middle [hours of the] night, there was both thunder and earthquake, and from there they were borne up suddenly to their births, one one way and another another way, shooting just like stars. But [Er] himself was for his part prevented from drinking the water; however, by what way and how he arrived into his body, he [said that] he did not know, but [that] suddenly, once he recovered his sight, he saw, at dawn, that he himself was laid upon the pyre.

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<sup>73</sup> “Unalterable” is related to the meaning of Atropos, “the things spun” to that of Clotho.

<sup>74</sup> Forgetting, forgetfulness, oblivion.

<sup>75</sup> Carelessness.

“And thus, Glaucon, a myth<sup>76</sup> was saved and did not perish, [621c] and it would save us, if we were persuaded by it, and we will make a good crossing of the river of Lethe and will not be defiled in our soul. But if we are persuaded by me—if we believe the soul immortal and able to undergo all evils and all goods—we will always take for ourselves the road above and make a practice of justice with prudence in every way, in order that we may be friends both to ourselves and to the gods, both while we remain here [621d] and whenever we gain the prizes of it, just as the victors do when they go around collecting prizes for themselves, and in order that both here and in the thousand-year journey, which we have gone through<sup>77</sup>, we may fare well<sup>78</sup>.”

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<sup>76</sup> See note at *Gorgias* 522e.

<sup>77</sup> διεληλύθαμεν. Adam notes that two commentators have thought there is “a suggestion of our having made the pilgrimage ourselves.” He himself does “not believe Plato means more than merely ‘we have described.’” The word is ambiguous at the very least, meaning in the basic sense “go through” and only by extension “tell all through.” At *Republic* 365b, for example, the verb appears with the object τὸν βίον to mean “go through life.” At 362e, however, Plato uses the verb in the second sense (“We must also *go through* the opposite arguments...”). A cursory examination shows no less than seventy appearances of the verb in the *Republic* alone and that Plato uses it more often than not to describe “going through” an argument (“Word frequency information for διέρχομαι,” *Perseus Digital Library*).

<sup>78</sup> Εὖ πράττειν means both to do well and to fare well.

## Chapter 6

### Purifying Glaucon: Examining *Republic* 613e5ff

#### Introduction

Despite his challenge to Socrates, to prove justice to be good in itself, Glaucon allows the discussion to return in the end to rewards and prizes. Glaucon's reversal does not come without cause, however jarring it seems at first. Over the course of Book X of the *Republic*, Socrates succeeds in tempering Glaucon's zeal for the nearly impossible defense of justice he has demanded. The two sections of Book X, dealing with poetry and the immortality of the soul, are the keys to understanding this change of heart in Glaucon. Socrates "dethrone[s]...the great educator of Greece," as Adam says concerning the passages on Homer,<sup>1</sup> and he offers "proof" for the soul's indestructibility. Socrates seeks thereby to assure Glaucon that justice in the soul is of the greatest importance and that his own poetic composition, arising from philosophy, can prove that this is so.

Armed with such a defense of justice, Glaucon may yet find himself satisfied and ready to give (or, at least, have in mind for his own sake) a response to *hoi polloi* and their praise of injustice. Of even greater significance, however, is Glaucon's improved ability to search for the best way of life—for the sake of his own soul. The myth of Er is Socrates' vehicle for truth. It is an "image" of the truth, but because it rests on philosophy, this image educates rather than corrupts. After looking at the context of the myth in Book X, we will attempt a study of that myth that seeks to tie its account of the afterlife to the wider issues of the *Republic* and to

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<sup>1</sup> Adam on 595aff. Cf. 606e.

Glaucon's view of justice. Having described the myth, we will look back in order to make sense of the whole.

### **Book X: Imitative Poetry**

The final book of the *Republic* is perhaps most famous for its perceived attack on poetry and poets. The censure and censorship of poetry contained in Books II and III find their culmination here. What precisely, though, does this section of the book have to do with the rest of the dialogue? Dividing Book X into two sections, one on poetry and the other on immortality and the rewards of justice, Adam remarks: "The second half of the book forms a welcome supplement to Plato's treatment of the main thesis of the *Republic*...; but the first division is of the nature of an episode, and might have been omitted without injury to the artistic unity of the dialogue."<sup>2</sup> Setting aside for the moment the diminution of the myth of Er to a mere supplement, we must dispute Adam's claim about the poetry section. Whatever concern he has for "artistic unity," Socrates drives the conversation toward this discussion of imitation and takes great pains here to show Glaucon the relationship among different degrees of appearance and truth. He provides Glaucon with the interpretive principle for understanding the myth of Er, which presents a certain "image" of the universe and of justice that can be understood to a greater or lesser degree depending on one's ability to recognize its philosophic source.

The attack on poetry is the very thing that prepares one to receive true poetry. Socrates does indeed praise himself and Glaucon for many things in the founding of their city, "not least, I

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<sup>2</sup> Adam on 595a ff.



say, when we were taking [things] to heart<sup>3</sup> concerning poetry”—namely, “[our] not even in one way admitting it, as much [of it] as is imitative”<sup>4</sup> (595a). (In fact, Adeimantus had wanted to admit “the unblended imitator of the seemly,”<sup>5</sup> but Socrates never quite seems to agree (397d).) Socrates makes a specific complaint against imitative poetry: it corrupts people (605c-d). Because it is so far, in its knowledge, from the truth, this type of poetry can only produce “offspring” that is far from the truth (603b). Both tragedy and comedy, acting against good habits and good education, lead the soul to enjoy the suffering of others and to debase itself (606a-c). Thus, this imitative poetry prepares one to choose a worse and unhappier life (606d). Socrates’ own “poetry,” therefore, must be directed toward the opposite end and must have a surer basis in truth. He must combat all the bad education and bad habit that Glaucon has acquired.

The myth that concludes the *Republic* is a piece of true poetry: it is not imitative like the poetry that has been banned from the city and shown to be corrupted by its being two or three times removed from true knowledge (cf. 394b-398b). Socrates surely does not think Glaucon will believe the myth to be literally true in its details—though it is *true*.<sup>6</sup> Instead, because Socrates derives his “poetry” not secondhand but from philosophy itself, Glaucon will be able to learn about justice. It is only in the myth of Er that Socrates can show Glaucon the order and

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<sup>3</sup> ἐνθυμέομαι: think deeply about, ponder. Cf. θυμός: soul, spirit, heart, mind, temper, etc. Hence “take to heart” (“have in one’s *thymos*”) here.

<sup>4</sup> μιμητική: *mimetic*

<sup>5</sup> ἐπιεικής: fitting, meet, good. From εἰκός: like the truth; likely, probable. Though this translation does not appear in the LSJ, I find the English “seemly” to capture nicely both the sense derived from appearance and the sense of fitness or appropriateness.

<sup>6</sup> Even if it is not to be “an apologue of Alcinous,” the tale has a teller no less wily than Odysseus. See note at 614b.

justice—the righteousness<sup>7</sup>—of the heavens and earth, even without initiating him fully into the life of philosophy. This vision of the afterlife turns the “eyes” of Glaucon’s soul upward, bringing him to a greater contemplation of the truly “heavenly” things.

### **Book X: Immortality and Glaucon’s Turn to the Rewards of Justice**

The final piece to put in place before the myth of Er is Glaucon’s reversal—his apparent willingness to accept the rewards of virtue as part of a defense of the virtuous, and especially the just, life. The discussion of imitative poetry has impressed upon Glaucon the necessity to avoid the bad sort of education the “tragedians,” Homer included, can provide. Socrates, we argue, has convinced Glaucon that he is serious about the “regime in oneself” and thoroughly rejects the infatuation *hoi polloi* feel for injustice (cf. 607e-608b). Socrates has shown himself a true comrade to Glaucon: he is concerned about the justice of his soul and not about all the temptations that might lead one to neglect it. Glaucon emphatically agrees.<sup>8</sup> Glaucon’s concern in wanting justice proved good by itself was to have, not merely an adequate argument against *hoi polloi*, but an account of justice as *the* good, sufficient in itself for happiness; Socrates’ response is to show that none of the things that the unjust pursue are great enough to compare with those that the just pursue. Greater by far than the “rewards” of injustice would be the health and justice of an immortal soul.

Socrates “proves” the soul to be immortal by the following set of statements (cf. 608e-611a). Only particular evils destroy something (e.g., food rots, the eye gets ophthalmia). The

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<sup>7</sup> Another way to translate δικαιοσύνη (justice). “Justice” as harmony is rather close to what is meant by “righteousness,” a kind of straightness and right ordering of things.

<sup>8</sup> Just as at 444a, where Socrates introduces justice as harmonization, Glaucon agrees “all in all [παντάπασιν]” that one must fear for the regime in himself.

evils of the soul do not destroy the soul—no one ever died of injustice or became more unjust because he died. If the evils of the soul do not destroy the soul, then no evils can. The death of the body will not mean the death of the soul.

The proof is not a good one, not least because it assumes that the soul can exist (or has a recognizable existence) apart from the body. Still, the point of Socrates' argument is not to evoke "belief" in eternal life as an end in itself. Socrates makes clear to Glaucon (in an "image" of the truth) that part of what makes the just life so much greater than the unjust is the permanence of the goods it grants to him who leads it. In truth, Socrates aims to show justice in an immortal soul for much the same reason he wanted to show it in the city, that is, in order to see it more clearly. Even if the city-soul analogy has its difficulties, and the proof of the immortality of the soul its flaws, these and similar modes of inquiry allow one to see justice in its true form. Socrates admits that such inquiry might overturn his initial observations. With philosophy, "someone might see the true nature of [the soul], whether many in form or single in form or what it is and how" (612a).

The myth of Er, to which we now turn, takes up this task of examining the soul. Socrates, as he says to Glaucon, has not allowed the wages of justice—at least those described by Hesiod and Homer—to obscure their view of the just soul (612b). However, having cleared away these things like so much brush, Socrates and Glaucon can *now* allow the true rewards of justice to return. These are the rewards of justice in the *soul*. Despite the "official" teaching that justice is health in the soul, it must be something more—just as a "good" body is not merely a healthy one but one healthy for some end. Socrates at first appears to say, however, that the just really do succeed as individuals *and* in the city. Since the just man does not escape the notice of the gods, says Socrates, he gets the best possible things (612e-613a). The many, however, would probably

not recognize these good things as such, since Socrates declares that poverty, disease, and other bad things will still befall the just (613a). Socrates claims that the just, “whenever they become older,” will rule in “*their own city*” and that it is the unjust who will be tortured (613d-e, emphasis added). This would be a stunning development—and no one at all familiar with political life would believe it. Socrates has not actually decided, against common sense, to declare the just always to be the rulers and the unjust always to be punished. In the soul *alone*—the regime within oneself and one’s own true city—justice is good by itself, and in the soul alone does it produce a whole host of magnificent rewards. The myth of Er, by separating the soul from the body, makes this point abundantly clear to Glaucon.

### **Structure of the Passage**

Having now reached the apex of the dialogue in this resounding defense of the just soul, we move to a careful exposition of the myth of Er. Our attempt to delineate its sections should help address its subject in manageable pieces without needlessly destroying the unity of the whole. We have here divided the passage into ten sections, though other commentators have done otherwise. After a short prologue (614b), there are four sections of narrative (614b-618b), then a speech by Socrates (618b-619b), three more sections of narrative (619b-621b), and finally Socrates’ conclusion and exhortation to Glaucon (621b-621d). As was said of imitative poetry, the myth of Er reaches us at a few degrees removed from the truth: almost the entire story is told in reported speech, as something Er supposedly relayed upon returning.<sup>9</sup> Behind this story, however, is not a passing knowledge of the things described but a sure anchor in philosophy.

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<sup>9</sup> See note at 614c.

## The Apologue and Myth of Er: In Detail

### Prologue (614b)

The myth of Er repays all of the arguments about justice contained in the *Republic*— repayment owed to each believer in one false opinion or another (cf. 614a). Each of the definitions of justice presented in Book I is purified and restored in some way. Everyone in this afterlife gets what is owed, beginning with Er the warrior.<sup>10</sup> Even Cephalus, who is absent for nearly the entire dialogue, has his opinion remedied, in the principle of retributive justice and the precise repayment of evils in the house of Hades. Thrasymachus and Glaucon’s “many” find that justice is not conventional but natural, something that might possibly be recognized by the individual soul even when that soul is stripped, by death in this case, of any political community. This story is a story for everyone: a tale of Er of Pamphylia, “[land] of every tribe.”<sup>11</sup>

Most of all, however, this final defense of justice is owed to him who has sought the truth most courageously: the myth is for Glaucon. Er might be a Pamphylian, and thus come to the aid of a variety of human beings, but he is distinct in being “strong.” The myth is the story not of one who is “strong of mind” [*Alkinou*] but of and for one who is “strong” [*alkimou*].<sup>12</sup> Glaucon is not himself a philosopher—and thus not (altogether) “strong of mind.” While zealous for justice and an unabashed pursuer of answers about it, he tends to miss the loftiest of Socrates’ points. Glaucon’s is a mind [*nous*] that eagerly grabs hold of something without really understanding it. He still requires an astronomical education, that is, one that can turn his eyes upward.

### Chasms of the earth and heavens (614b-615c)

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Polemarchus’ quotation of Simonides (justice is giving to each what is owed) and his concern about justice in war at 332e.

<sup>11</sup> See note at 614b.

<sup>12</sup> See note at 614b.

Socrates has established for Glaucon that the internal state of the just is better by far than that of the unjust. Justice is harmony and order in the soul (443d-e). It is recognizable and unaffected by ornamentation. Compared to all the trouble surrounding the judgment of souls in the *logos* of the *Gorgias*, the ease with which souls are sorted in the myth of Er is striking. Unnamed judges give unambiguous commands: the just souls are to go rightward and upward, the unjust downward and leftward (614c). No son of Zeus must be appointed, no god called for aid. The *only* distinction that the judges consider is the justness of one's soul—not piety, courage, moderation, or wisdom and not “virtue” broadly understood. Glaucon's concern for justice above all is to be sated, even at the expense of that particular virtue seeming to overwhelm the rest.

The justness of the “trial” of souls, then, is not in question. We get the first sense of the wonderful orderliness of the universe in this scene. Everything is balanced, and there are no unsure cases. The place to which the souls depart is “daemonic”—a place of division and separation, one between the earthly and heavenly realms (614c).<sup>13</sup> The soul is decisively separated from the body before any judgment takes place, so there is no concern about the deceiving the judges.<sup>14</sup> Here we begin to go beyond the *logos* of the *Gorgias*, if only in the sense of seeing another aspect of the “afterlife.” Besides the souls departing one way or the other, we see souls *coming back* from their allotted destinations, no longer bearing, it seems, the signs of

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<sup>13</sup> A daemon is a divine or semi-divine being, either a god itself or something between the gods and human beings. The apparent root of the word is, according to the LSJ, perhaps δαίω (“divide” or “distribute,” especially of “destinies”).

<sup>14</sup> The description of Er's death underscores this point vividly: “And he said that when his soul departed from him...” (614b). The “soul” is somehow distinct from the “him” it leaves behind. Throughout the myth, Socrates' Er puts great emphasis on the *souls* of the dead as opposed to the deceased people themselves.

what they had done (cf. 614c-d) but the signs of where they have been (614d). Judges place a sign around the souls when they first come to the daemonic place, but those destinations “place” another sign—purity or squalor. The returning souls bear the signs of their punishments and their rewards—the wages of justice and injustice.

While he observes, it is said, the chasms and the souls traveling to and fro, Er does *not* journey under the earth or into the heavens. His depiction of both those places can therefore be secondhand only. In this way, the punishments and rewards that he relates are an image one degree more removed from the truth. Indeed, the souls themselves are in precisely the same situation: they must ask the other souls about what happens in the “other” place (614e-615a).<sup>15</sup> The thousand years of suffering or of inconceivable beauty is only a reported story (615a). The precise details do not seem to matter much—at least to Glaucon as Socrates sees him.

It is here (615a) that Socrates readdresses himself to Glaucon by name, in order to have Er say, as it were, the “head” of the matter. For every injustice, Er says, every soul pays a tenfold penalty. For every person wronged, every soul pays a tenfold penalty. If “ordinary” injustice were in view—minor offences against one or a few—such a system of retribution might be overly vindictive. Socrates, however, seems to steer our attention to the tyrant and other political actors and their particular injustices. Such are the object of *hoi polloi*’s praise when they praise injustice, and for this reason, Glaucon’s defense against them must be sure. Er’s examples are exclusively of political injustices. These souls are guilty of *many* deaths, having betrayed their cities at home or in war. Not only the leaders but the *accessories* of such actions too face punishment for their injustice (615b). Just as the “immortality” of the soul gives greater weight

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<sup>15</sup> Benardete asserts that neither group of souls puts much stock in what the other says. Seth Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing: On Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 227.

to the rewards of justice (cf. 608b-c), so the thousand-year period of punishment gives the weight of ten lifetimes to acts of injustice (cf. 615a-b).<sup>16</sup> Socrates magnifies the injustice of the unjust to let Glaucon see it more clearly. The greatest injustices, however, are yet to come.

“Wages greater still”: Ardiaeus the Great (615c-616b)

Before Socrates begins the discussion of Ardiaeus the Great at 615c, it seems as though he will finally describe some of the “wages” for justice in addition to those for injustice. “For irreverence and reverence toward gods and parents,” he says, “and for murder by one’s own hand [Er] described wages greater still” (615c). We expect to hear something from souls that have passed through heavens *and* those from the earth. But of “reverence toward gods and parents” we hear nothing. Instead, a soul asks one of the souls that Er finds himself near, “Where is Ardiaeus the Great?” (615c). Thus Socrates launches into the story of how the tyrant fares in the afterlife, leaving aside the pious man, just as piety remained absent in the earlier account of virtue.

Ardiaeus is precisely the kind of successful tyrant that *hoi polloi* praise. We do not know whether he himself is “by race of Pamphylos” like Er, but Ardiaeus ruled in “some city” in that region. He is not an Everyman but the ruler of the men of Everywhere. He “killed his old father and elder brother and had done many other impious things besides” (615d), but he is still ὁ μέγας—“the great one” (615c). Enough time has passed, perhaps, such that the reputation for his unjust deeds has faded somewhat, letting him be known simply as a ruler of a city. Socrates must show that the soul of such a tyrant is not at all great or worthy to be praised.

Tyrants—and *some* private men<sup>17</sup>—fare worst in the punishments they suffer. It seems that they begin their time under the earth by paying the penalty for their deeds. Thus such souls,

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<sup>16</sup> It is no wonder, then, that “concerning the ‘as soon as they came about’ and ‘living for a short time,’ he was saying other things, things not worthy of remembrance” (615c). Without having *done* anything, those who die prematurely have nothing to be made more important.



after a time, believe that they can go up to the “mouth” of the earth in order to leave. Having paid the tenfold repayment, they should, on the basis of what Er says at first, be able to leave. Instead, “savage” men, “when they had bound [the souls] together, hand and foot and head, had thrown them down, and had skinned them, they dragged them out alongside the road as they bent them over thorns and signified to those who were always nearby those things for the sake of which and why they would be carried away, to be made to fall into Tartarus” (616a). These suddenly embodied souls (for how one can do such things to a soul is a mystery) stop paying their own penalty and start serving as warnings to others. This, finally, is another “wage” of injustice, painful for the tyrants but a “good deed”<sup>18</sup> for those who observe them. For Glaucon, *hoi polloi* are rebuked, and the souls of the unjust are as they should be.

#### The pillar of light and spindle of Necessity (616b-617d)

Although we do not get a precise picture of the rewards of the just in the heavens, the description of the cosmos we do find could be no less wonderful than such an account. As we tried to establish in our discussion of astronomy in Chapter 4, the usefulness of astronomy comes only in the pursuit of the noble and good (cf. 531c). We will not, in that case, be able to make much of the precise details of this section (at least with respect to Socrates’ political and moral teaching). The “astronomy” of Socrates is not meant for a sailor on the sea or a farmer in the field. True astronomy leaves aside the literal heavens for the truly heavenly things.

In this way, the pillar of light and the spindle and whorls of Necessity point the eyes of Glaucon’s soul upward toward contemplation of justice: the universe, this myth tells him, is most assuredly just. The light that Socrates says that Er sees is “straight as a pillar” and like a rainbow

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<sup>17</sup> On the basis of 615c, presumably murderers and those who offend the gods and parents.

<sup>18</sup> εὐεργεσία: a good deed (cf. *ergon*). A “kindness” or even a “blessing.”

“but brighter and purer.” Like justice itself with respect to the individual (and the city), the light is “the unifying bond of the heavens”—keeping everything in its place (616c). Likewise the spindle of Necessity signifies the right operation of everything: all the interwoven, intermingled, hurly-burly stuff of the world moves as it should. Thus the distaff and the hook of the spindle are made of adamant, the unconquerable material,<sup>19</sup> and the whorls, as part of that steady whole but somewhat less sure, are mixed (616c). The whorls themselves fit into each other, spinning at different speeds and in one direction or the other, shining more or less brightly and with this or that color—and amid all this apparent confusion the spindle “twist[s] about the knees of Necessity,” and the cosmos is in harmony (615b).

Socrates through Er reinforces that image of harmony—that is, of justice—by finally presenting the Sirens and the Fates. The Sirens offer a literal kind of harmony, “sending forth one sound, one pitch” (617b). If the whorls represent, in a way, the parts of the soul or of the city, then the Sirens present a picture of how such things can be at once many and single in form (cf. 612a). Fates, in turn, sing to this harmony with their own song of the past, present, and future. Clotho, Fate of the present, spins the outer revolutions, just as what happens in the present is most obvious to us. Atropos, Fate of the future, spins the inner revolutions, just as our inner workings are directed toward some end. Lachesis, Fate of the past, spins both the outer and inner revolutions “in turn,”<sup>20</sup> just as the past informs both our present and our future. Thus all of time

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<sup>19</sup> ἀδαμάντινος: adamantine, a hard metal, (perhaps) steel. From ἀδάμας: untamed, unconquerable.

<sup>20</sup> ἐν μέρει: in proportion, in turn, in part.

and every situation, Socrates shows, operate according to this just and harmonious rule of Necessity and her daughters.<sup>21</sup>

The prophet and *logos* of Lachesis and the lots and lives (617d-618b)

With this astronomical image, Socrates has helped to turn Glaucon's eyes to the heavenly things. He must now return to human beings and show how this universal justice affects the individual and his moral and political life. Thus comes the prophet and word of Lachesis: it is time to choose a life. This is a mythical depiction of what every soul must do while alive (cf. 618b-619b). Socrates puts a great emphasis on choice ("Daemon will not be obtained for you by lot, but you will choose daemon," says the prophet) but he hints at the reliance that any choice made must have on the past (617e). After all, it is not from the Fate of the future but of the past that this message comes. The teaching of Lachesis' prophet may be that "blame belongs to him who chooses"—but "god" is not blameless for the past that lies outside of the control of human beings (617e).<sup>22</sup> Whether Zeus, Necessity, or Lachesis, the "god" (as a representative of things superhuman) is a cause of some part of the choice of life.

The system of lots does something to address the mixture of chance and choice that is responsible for what lives human beings lead. An early lot, of course, means a greater number of options, and it is not difficult to imagine the sort of person who has such a range of choices in life. At the same time, "there were far more examples [of lives] than those [souls] present"

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson puts it thus: "It is not in heaven, not in hell, but here, amid the inner workings of the cosmos, that one may find the clearest visible symbols of the meaning of life; it is here, rather than in the extreme pleasures or pains of heaven or hell, that one finds displayed the order and rationality behind all that is." Ronald R. Johnson, "Does Plato's 'Myth of Er' Contribute to the Argument of the *Republic*?" *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 32:1 (1999) 8.

<sup>22</sup> See note on 617e for the ambiguity in the prophet's statement.

(618a). Even after recounting the whole apparatus of Necessity's spindle, Socrates is unwilling to show Glaucon a deterministic world for human beings. Thus all *sorts* of lives, each with their own particular virtues and vices, are available, even if some particular human being cannot take up some particular one. No matter the degree that chance plays a role in living one kind of life or another, it is important that Glaucon understand the *choice-worthiness* of the just life. Those incapable of being just on account of circumstances are like the untimely born—their actions do not bear the same weight as those with a freer hand to do just or unjust deeds.

“The whole danger for a human being” (618b-619b)

Having surveyed the lives available to human beings, Socrates again addresses Glaucon by name. The choice of a life is, in no uncertain terms, “the whole danger for a human being” (618b). While they have by this point agreed many times that justice is harmonization and minding one's business, Socrates and Glaucon have not dealt with (on account of the impossibility of doing so) the infinite variety of human situations. Justice requires a certain learning, a way to “reckon up” every apparent virtue and vice in a life (618c). Only armed with such knowledge can someone judge the virtue of a life and thus choose *from among those available* “by looking to the nature of the soul” (618c-d).

In a way, Socrates has reopened the question of what Glaucon has assumed all along—what precisely constitutes the best way of life. Glaucon believes, without complete understanding, that this way of life is justice, but it turns out that justice requires this “learning” that allows one to judge what the just and unjust really *are*—not “perfect” justice and injustice as they appear in the ring of Gyges story or in Glaucon's “praise” of injustice but, as it truly is in the world, mixed with all sorts of other things. The myth of Er itself is a kind of “going down” to the house of Hades, showing Glaucon all the evils of injustice (619a, cf. 327a). Though his love

of justice by itself does not come into question, Glaucon must gain an adamant sense of the just even and especially when it is mixed with other things (619a).

The one with the first lot (619b-619c)

Without a proper understanding of justice, however, the soul risks everything. Despite the prophet's warning, to take care for his choice, the first soul is immediately attracted to "the greatest tyranny" (619b-c). The only thing that this soul sees in such a life is political power and the "good" that seems to stem from it. He is of *hoi polloi*, since even the wickedest crimes—even eating one's children—are not enough to make the "perks" of rule seem like nothing to be desired by comparison. Though he does not see the evil of this life at first (thus demonstrating his ignorance of true justice and injustice), the soul comes to recognize it in a limited way, weeping because the consequences of a bad life cannot fail to escape one who leads it. The first soul comes to blame "all things instead of himself" because he cannot make the connection between his choice of an apparent "good"—tyranny—and his being punished.

The first soul is said to have lived in "an ordered regime in his earlier life, when he had had a share of virtue by habit, without philosophy" (619c). Habit can prevent a soul from chasing certain evils, but without philosophy to give a proper account of how to weigh one way of life against another, it is difficult for a soul to resist the apparent "good" of unrestrained power. We might have been inclined to consider those coming down from the heavens unmistakably clean and those coming up from the earth unmistakably dirty. After all, we find in the first depiction of the chasms of the earth and heavens that Er sees "from the one those souls coming up out of the earth, full of squalor and dust, and from the other, others coming down from the heavens, pure" (614d). Yet it is precisely the "dust" of the formerly unjust that *may* ward off further injustice. *Some* of the heavenly ones—i.e., those without philosophy—are "unexercised in toils"; most of

the earthly ones, however, have “toiled” for themselves and have seen the examples of others (619d). From philosophy alone comes the surer way to “a journey [not] underground and rugged but one both smooth and heavenly” (619e).

#### The exchange of evils and goods (619d-620d)

Philosophy, however, is a rare thing among human beings, and the majority of people are unable to judge lives well. Thus, relying on habit and chance, most souls exchange evils and goods—just as the living vacillate in *this* life in their opinions about justice as they suffer punishments or enjoy “goods” (619d). Without philosophy to guide the choice, souls choose “in accordance with the custom of [their] earlier life, for the most part” (620a). No soul is purely unjust or purely just that acts only from habit: when faced with a whole host of goods and evils mixed together in one life, it is difficult for the unphilosophic soul to make a choice.

Socrates presents, then, a survey of several souls who in their “past lives” were remarkable but led “mixed” or otherwise ambiguous lives. The first five souls of which Er speaks trade their human lives for lives of animals. Orpheus and Thamyras,<sup>23</sup> two poets slain for their poetry, choose the life of birds, with Orpheus, at least, blaming women and not himself for his troubles. As if in response, “musical” animals turn back into human beings. Whatever else it says about poets, such an exchange underscores a lack of philosophy on their part, since the poet/musical-animal souls are only responding to the suffering or lack of pleasure they experience in one life or the other.<sup>24</sup> Likewise Telamonian Ajax and Agamemnon, great warriors

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<sup>23</sup> Throughout, we mean to say, e.g., “[the soul formerly known as that of] Orpheus.”

<sup>24</sup> Benardete points out that Orpheus does not “choose to be a worm so as to avoid injustice.” We grant this to Orpheus’ credit, but we would also remember that this soul once chose to be *Orpheus* and will probably, after a life as a nightingale, choose such a life again. This “Orpheus”

who nonetheless came to ignoble ends, choose animal lives out of spite, not true understanding. The lion and the eagle that their souls become represent their former warlike spirit, but neither will be capable of philosophy. The next three souls, Atalanta, Epeius, and Thersites, take on more human lives, but “middle ones”: the athletic man, the craftswoman, and the ape. The exchange for all three is a kind of revelation of their souls’ natures.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps it is the case for all the souls that appear here that, as Benardete puts it, “their similes are the truth for each hero’s good.”<sup>26</sup>

No philosopher actually appears during the choosing of lives, but the final soul at least represents the best possible alternative. McCoy calls Odysseus’ choice “clearly the culmination of the myth.”<sup>27</sup> The soul of Odysseus has drawn the last lot and thus has the fewest choices. Like the other souls, it has a memory of the toils it endured during life. However, unlike those souls, that of Odysseus *searches* for a life. No other soul is said to have had something in mind before his choice actually came. Odysseus takes great care to find “the life of a private man, and no busybody, and with difficulty found one lying somewhere, disregarded by the others” (620c). It appears, at first, that Odysseus has struck upon the justice for which Glaucon and Socrates have

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does not know why he ends up with such a life “and blames all things but himself...” Benardete 228.

<sup>25</sup> Thus Atalanta, the woman who loved the hunt and spurned a husband, becomes a man and an athletic one at that. Epeius, the coward who devised and built the Trojan Horse, becomes the unmanly (i.e., uncourageous) woman with an art. Thersites, the uppity buffoon, becomes the animal who tries to be like man (i.e., like an ἄνθρωπος) but merely shows himself to be foolish.

<sup>26</sup> Benardete 228.

<sup>27</sup> Marina Berzins McCoy, “Freedom and Responsibility in the Myth of Er,” *Ideas y Valores: Revista Colombiana de Filosofía*, 61:149 (2012).

searching—“minding one’s own business” (cf. 433a).<sup>28</sup> The soul even claims that it would have made such a choice even if it had been given the first lot (620d). Yet, the toil that has taught “Odysseus” to recover from the love of honor will not afflict his soul in the next life. Without philosophy, he may not “mind his own business” when he makes the choice again. Glaucon, it seems, is in just such a state: he agrees with Socrates about the definition of justice but lacks the full understanding required to choose always just such a life.

#### Ratifying the fate, journeying to the plain of Lethe (620d-621b)

In a return, it seems, to his broader drive to emphasize the justice of the cosmos, Socrates has Er talk about the “ratification” of the fates of souls. Again, choice *and* necessity are intertwined in a way that comports with our ordinary understanding of the world. Lachesis, Fate of the past, gives us our daemon, the “guardian of [our] life and fulfiller of the things chosen” (620e). The soul *decides* upon a certain way of life, but this decision cannot but be founded on the past. Clotho, Fate of the present, “ratifies” the choice, just as we must always *continue* to choose a life. Atropos, Fate of the future, makes our choice “unalterable,” inasmuch as she relies on what we ourselves have spun in the present. Necessity governs from her throne (620e), but the soul is quite responsible for itself.

Only on the plain of Lethe by the river Ameletus does this responsibility in the face of Necessity finally make sense. Each soul must “drink some measure of the water” (621a). That is, each soul must forget something of the goods in the lives he has not chosen and the evils in the

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<sup>28</sup> According to McCoy: “In certain ways Socrates is like Odysseus: relatively uninvolved in politics and the machinations of either rule or revolution. Yet Socrates is political in a way that Odysseus is not, in demanding that others care for their own souls, and attend to the importance of learning from their own mistakes, and learning about human limit. His political work is primarily directed to the care of his own and others' souls.” McCoy.



life he has. The imprudent drink “more than the measure,” forgetting too much and leaving themselves vulnerable to choosing a bad life the “next” time (621a). But at the same time, “anyone who ever drank was made to forget all things” (621b). How are we to understand this statement? Certainly, in the myth itself, it means that we forget about our previous lives and having gone through the heavens or under the earth. In truth, it seems, such a universal forgetting occurs whenever a soul chooses a life—few are aware that it is a process and a choice at all, merely falling into whatever habits exist in their regime. Just as Er *does* remember, so Glaucon and the reader are now informed about what it means to choose the best way of life.

### **Looking Back at the Thousand-Year Journey**

This myth, as Socrates says, “was saved and did not perish” (621b). Socrates has shown Glaucon, as he promised, all of the good things that come from justice in the soul, both while the just man lives and when he comes to his end. Made immortal, the soul gains infinite importance and infinite durability. Socrates has not yet brought Glaucon to the study of philosophy—even though that study is precisely what will preserve Glaucon in all cases whatever. The “good crossing of the river of Lethe” will come (621c), but only now that Socrates has persuaded Glaucon that justice really can produce good things in the soul without its being chosen for the sake of those things.

Socrates’ myth is a myth in imitation of philosophy—a poetic composition that can in fact be welcomed into the city *within oneself*. It offers to lead us to a way of life more sure than the one we now lead. Nowhere in the myth does Socrates offer a teaching that promotes what

Ferrari calls “civic virtue.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, the definition of justice that has been reached—minding one’s own business—seems to preclude an easy association of the philosopher with the city without. Glaucon, and all those who cannot view philosophy with the eyes of their own soul or hear its harmonious song, must yet rely on Socrates. Just as Er has revived, recovered his sight, and finds himself lying upon a pyre, so we too find ourselves newly invigorated, ready to see anew, but still attending, as yet, the funeral of our former lives.

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<sup>29</sup> Bloom, whom Ferrari cites, considers the possibility of philosophic happiness independent of “civic virtue.” Despite what Ferrari says, the philosopher might be “inescapably involved” with the *city*—in that he must live and die in it—but the myth of Er can hardly be said to be *fundamentally* about civic as opposed to individual virtue. Bloom 435-436. Ferrari 132-133.

## Conclusion

### Eschatology for Glaucon and Callicles

Glaucon and Callicles are seeking a way of life that will be able to alleviate their concerns about justice. For Callicles, it is something abominable that the “just,” those who would most of all deserve to be in a noble state, are precisely those who seem to suffer the most. *Let me protect myself from every blow*, he says, *and let that be justice*. Glaucon, hearing *hoi polloi* praise injustice, slams his fist on the table, demanding that Socrates praise justice despite all the suffering it brings. *Let me be tortured and killed*, he says, *but let me be just* still. Both men require aid—but of different sorts. Far from giving an unadulterated “philosophic” account of justice, Socrates must approach his students as they *are*. Callicles is thus far willing to follow Gorgias the rhetorician, seeking to gain power in the city and security for himself. Glaucon, ever concerned with the practical and earthly, does not yet have the purified “organ” of soul through which to view the truth. At the same time, Socrates does not offer something “unphilosophic,” as though he could depart radically from the truth and still offer something useful—his image [εἶδωλον] of the world matches the form [εἶδος] of the world as nearly as it can.

In the myth of the *Republic* and the *logos* of the *Gorgias*, Glaucon and Callicles’ views about justice are brought to their conclusion. If it is at all possible to reduce a dialogue to a single statement, we might offer this summary. The *Gorgias* says that it is worse to commit injustice than to suffer it, and the *Republic* says that justice is minding one’s own business and the harmony of one’s parts. In these stories of the afterlife—of the ultimate and most extreme things [τὰ ἔσχατα]—Socrates offers a healing salve for the two interlocutors that we have treated here. To Callicles, the great despiser of suffering and praiser of the natural, Socrates presents a world

in which the “natural” comes from a clear view of the soul apart from everything else. Socrates does not try to convince Callicles that the just do not suffer anything at all—no one would accept such a statement. Socrates must merely show that it is *worse* to be unjust, since that is the standard by which Callicles judges a life. On the other hand, Socrates must prove to Glaucon that it is *better* to be just—but that that determination is fraught with difficulty. No choice of life is obvious, not without *some* philosophic understanding, without a way of calculating an admixture of goods and evils. The “rewards” of justice must return, since it is necessary to understand *why* justice is good in the soul in order to choose the just life always.

### **Socrates’ “Political” Teaching**

We began this work by suggesting that the study of the *Republic* and the *Gorgias* belonged to the realm of political science. The *Republic*, it is true, purports to be about the *politeia*—the regime. The *Gorgias* grabs hold of rhetoric, the tool, as it were, of politicians the world over. Yet for all the discussion of the city in the *Republic*, despite the “political art in truth” preached to Callicles, it is the soul and not the city that gains the greatest weight. There is to be no political revolution. The Callipolis—the beautiful and noble city that Glaucon and Socrates have planned—will not be founded in any land of human beings. Harmony will not be reached through widespread philosophizing and a seizure of power by “philosopher-kings.”

The city and the soul compete for our attention in both dialogues. Both entities demand justice for itself. Socrates *cannot* resolve this fundamental conflict, that the just souls will always be a minority and will often come to their end in a way that seems unpalatable to us. Callicles may never be cured of his ambition; Glaucon may never become a philosopher. Nevertheless, Socrates has given to each man a *logos* and a myth—and a guide to the best way of life possible.

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