


4-24-1992

Character and Method in Plato's Republic

Mary Whitlock Blundell
University of Washington, blundell@u.washington.edu

Ruby Blondell
University of Washington, blundell@u.washington.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp>

 Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Ancient Philosophy Commons](#), and the [History of Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Blundell, Mary Whitlock and Blondell, Ruby, "Character and Method in Plato's Republic" (1992). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*. 323.
<https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/323>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Character and Method in Plato's Republic (DRAFT 2/19/92)

Mary Whitlock Blundell
University of Washington and Center for Hellenic Studies

SAGP Central Division, Louisville 1992

I. Character and elenchus in Republic I

It is obvious enough that Plato's literary style, including his use of dramatic form and character, alters drastically along with his philosophical method. It is most economical, though not essential, to attribute these parallel changes to Plato's own chronological development. As Guthrie puts it, "Plato began by giving vivid pictures of Socrates engaged on his mission, and as he went on became more concerned to develop positive doctrines. He retains the dialogue form, but it becomes less dramatic and pictorial and he allows Socrates to indulge in uncharacteristically long discourses only punctuated by expressions of assent from the others" (HGP iv.42). But why? Why does Plato use dramatic form to portray Socratic inquiry in the early dialogues? And why does he employ that form so differently when representing more "positive" ideas?

The Republic is a unique crucible for examining such questions, because of the marked alteration in literary and philosophical style after the first book. Book 1 resembles the "early" or "Socratic" or "elenctic" dialogues, and as such deploys dramatic form and character very differently from the remainder of the work. Since Books 2-10 are clearly intended as a continuation of Book 1 (whatever their relative dates), we may expect the stylistic shifts to tell us something about Plato's own shifting attitudes towards philosophical method and its literary expression. I shall therefore start by looking at the characters of Socrates' interlocutors in book 1 of the Republic, and trying to elucidate the relationship of characterization to the method that is portrayed there. I'll then turn to the radically different dramatic style of the rest of the work, and end by considering some possible reasons for this evolution.

[Discussion of Cephalus and Polemarchus has been omitted.]

I turn now to Thrasymachus, one of Plato's most vivid and memorable characters. As with Socrates' previous interlocutors, his personality, views and philosophical methods are represented as mutually reinforcing. The image of the sophist as a marauding wild beast, who preys on innocent victims (336b),²⁴ not only suggests an absence of rational control,²⁵ but prefigures Thrasymachus' own picture of the exploitative relationship between the shepherd--or ruler--and his flock (343ab). The champion of injustice, with his hostile and uncooperative manner, bears out, on the level of philosophical practice, Socrates' view that injustice generates hatred and quarrels (351d). As one who glorifies the successful strong-man, Thrasymachus has nothing but contempt for Socrates and his cooperative method.²⁶ Instead, he favors the confrontational method of opposed speeches (343b-44c; cf. 350de), relies on intimidating outbursts of abuse (336bc, 340d,

²⁴ For other beast imagery used to describe Thrasymachus cf. 336d, 341c, 358b. NOTE: in shortening this paper some of the footnotes have been cut, making the remaining numbers non-consecutive. This is the first footnote.

²⁵ Later the defender of injustice is said to feed the lion and the many-headed beast representing thumos and desire respectively (588b-90c; cf. also the reference to Thrasymachus at 590d). For the desires as animals cf. 572b, 573a, 573e. For Thrasymachus and thumos see below, n. 00.

²⁶ Cf. 336cd, 337a, e, 338b, d, 340d, 341ab.

343a), and views argument as a violent battle in which he asks no quarter (341a9-b2, b8-10; cf. 342d2-3). When these methods fail, he refuses to cooperate, and abandons both intellectual integrity and consistency rather than face defeat (cf. 345b). These qualities, so essential to effective rational argument, are as alien as courtesy to the admirer of tyrants. Even his didactic stance, which is both mercenary (337d), and authoritarian (345b), befits the autocratic values that he applauds. His character thus finds expression not only in his ethical views but also in his approach to rational argument, which disqualifies him both as an effective philosopher and as an appropriate guide for the young. This character is in turn a reflection of the very views that he proves unable to defend from the elenchus.

The extent to which Thrasymachus' views are constitutive of his identity emerges at a pivotal moment in the argument, when Socrates forces him to conclude that it is the just man, not the unjust, who is both good and wise (350cd). When he realizes he is losing the battle, Thrasymachus responds with intense physical symptoms of discomfiture. Socrates tells us, as narrator, that the sophist not only blushed--a remarkable occurrence in itself--but broke into an amazingly copious sweat (350cd). This visceral response to intellectual criticism, as if to an emotional assault or even a physical threat, vividly and concretely displays the sophist's dialectical inadequacy. For anyone so wedded by pride to his convictions will be unable to adapt to the search for truth without destroying his self-image and with it his sense of his own identity.²⁸ The subsequent course of the argument confirms this inability to learn and change. For it is from this point onwards that Thrasymachus refuses to cooperate with Socrates, except superficially, insincerely, or at best sporadically.²⁹ The moment of refutation, which should theoretically lead to *aporia* and then to new progress (as it did with Polemarchus), leads instead to a divorce between the interlocutor's convictions and his responses.

Thrasymachus' rigidity is further fuelled by his role as a professional teacher. As Plato carefully reminds us, he is receiving payment even for his contribution to this informal discussion (337d). Since his very livelihood depends on his persuasiveness and intellectual credibility, he literally cannot afford to admit defeat. Under the circumstances, evasion of an argument he cannot rebut is a prudent maneuver. But the silencing of his true voice constitutes a different kind of refutation, one which shows not so much the weakness of his arguments as the poverty of his intellectual skills, methods and achievements, and the corresponding inadequacy of his character for cooperative and fruitful rational inquiry. His effective withdrawal from the argument therefore helps to undermine further his credibility as a thinker and educator.

These brief remarks point towards some of the ways in which dramatic characterization is internally related to the philosophical method represented in Book 1. In keeping with his practical ethical concerns, the elenctic Socrates refutes not just arguments but individual people,³¹ in ways which cast doubt not merely on their beliefs, but on the personality, way of life, and social roles that condition those beliefs and are in turn conditioned by them. Since the elenchus aims to transform its victims' whole way of life, by scrutinizing their particular views and assumptions, it is an intrinsically ad hominem form of argument of a peculiarly personal kind. If its force is to be fully appreciated, the particular character of each interlocutor, those aspects of their lives and personalities that make them respond as they do, must be made present to the reader. The resources of dramatic characterization enable Plato to accomplish this in a compelling way.

At the same time, dramatization of Socrates' interaction with the varied personalities of his interlocutors provides an economical and effective practical illustration of the principle that dialectic

²⁸ For the elenchus as a challenge to the ego cf. Vlastos *Elenchus* 37-8, Patterson 343-5. The seat of shame is *thumos*, which is closely related to self-image (cf. Annas *Republic* 128, Gill 8, Patterson 338-9).

²⁹ Cf. 350e, 351d, 352b, 353e, 354a.

³¹ Cf. *Apol.* 29e, *Laches* 187e-88a, *Gorg.* 472bc, 474a, 475e-476a, *Prot.* 331c, 333c; Vlastos *Elenchus* 36-7.

should be adapted to the personality and abilities of each respondent.³² Socrates flatters the rich old Cephalus (328de, 330bc), draws him out with a series of innocent inquiries (328e, 329de, 330a, d), and tactfully represents an objection as coming from "the many" whom Cephalus scorns (329de). He responds to Polemarchus' high spirits (327c, 331d), presses home his advantage in argument--since Polemarchus is clearly on his side (336a)--encourages him in a cooperative way (335e), and occasionally moderates the younger man's vigor (340c). He is conciliatory towards the angry Thrasymachus (336e), coaxes him to remain in the argument (350e, 351cd, 352b), and compliments him for doing so (351cd, 354a), yet presses him firmly when necessary (339e, 350d).³³

Dramatization thus serves to clarify certain aspects of the Socratic method. At the same time, it invites us to evaluate the philosophical potential of the characters themselves, with their personal qualities and circumstances, as well as their articulated beliefs. It therefore makes us a party to the Socratic search for someone with authentic philosophical talent, who may share his "wisdom" with us or serve as an effective partner in the search for truth. The pressure of elenctic scrutiny brings to light those qualities of character which determine the capacity of each interlocutor both to profit from Socrates and his method and to contribute to the success of the Socratic mission. The rich old Cephalus means well, but his accidental victory over the passions and easy philosophical conversion have come too late. His lack of mental and physical vigor, and of openness to new ideas, make him a dialectical non-starter. The talented and enthusiastic Polemarchus gives greater cause for hope, showing the conditions under which the Socratic method may succeed in clearing away unthinking assumptions and preparing the ground for progress, but his eager compliance does not offer Socrates much of an intellectual challenge. Thrasymachus is a more substantial opponent, but suffers from irredeemable dialectical failings. He is ruled by his passions,³⁴ including passionate convictions so intimately wedded to his personality that they remain unshaken by Socrates and his arguments, despite his inability to answer those arguments.

As these three interlocutors show, richness of characterization is not directly proportionate to the extent of a given speaker's role in the argument. Cephalus plays the smallest part, and Thrasymachus the largest, yet both are vividly and individually portrayed. What they do have in common, however--in contrast to the relatively bland and unmemorable Polemarchus--is that both are dialectical failures. Here, as elsewhere, Plato develops more or less individual portraits of Socrates' respondents in ways that demonstrate the many and varied human failings, whether moral, intellectual, or circumstantial, which interfere with the participants' ability to philosophize. The individual characterization of Cephalus and Thrasymachus provides a full and convincing explanatory picture of their personal inadequacy. Plato's dramatic art works here, as so often, to place the onus for dialectical failure on the interlocutors themselves, or on their circumstances, rather than on Socrates or his method.

II. Playing Devil's Advocate

Book 2 of the Republic presents us with an unequivocal shift in philosophical method accompanied by an equally radical change in dramatic style. This transition is marked, among other things, by a change of interlocutors. Socrates' respondents for the rest of the work will be two young men, Glaucon and Adeimantus, who also happen to be Plato's brothers. Glaucon is Socrates' primary interlocutor. He accompanies Socrates at the opening of the dialogue (327a), and is the explicit addressee of the myth of Er at its close (615a, 618b, 621c). In between, he both plays a larger role

³² Cf. Meno 75d and for a detailed discussion see Coventry.

³³ Cf. Patterson 342.

³⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that the real Thrasymachus seems to have specialized in swaying the emotions (DK 85 B 5-6).

than Adeimantus, and participates in many of the most crucial parts of the discussion.³⁵ Glaucon is lightly but clearly characterized. He is an Athenian aristocrat, who disparages Socrates' primitive city as a "city of pigs" (372cd), assumes that a citizen-army will be adequate (374a), is well educated in music (398e-99a, 400a), knows how to breed hunting dogs, birds and horses (), and takes an erotic interest in boys (474d-75a).

More importantly, Glaucon displays the virtues of character necessary for fruitful dialectical intercourse.³⁶ He is characterized from the opening of the work as good-natured, compliant and cooperative (327bc, 328b). He is the peacemaker who undertakes that the company will pay Thrasymachus' fee (337d), and the representative eager bystander who begs Thrasymachus and later Socrates to speak (338a, 368c). He takes Socrates' side against Thrasymachus (347e-48b), but is also willing to criticise Socrates when necessary (347ab, 358b). He is an attentive listener, who interrupts the argument even in book 1 when he does not understand (347a),³⁷ and remains unflaggingly alert. The vigor of his character is manifested in dialectical courage (357a) and a certain philosophical initiative (357bcd, 402de).³⁸ At the beginning of book 2 he even takes on the role of questioner, using typically Socratic examples which suggest that he may have learned from the kind of conversations reported in book 1,³⁹ and putting Socrates into the unaccustomed role of docile respondent (cf. e.g. 357b9).

Adeimantus is a paler version of his brother. He is introduced in book 1 as Glaucon's brother (327c), but says very little there (he speaks only at 328a). As the work continues, however, he displays the same philosophical virtues as his brother. Like Glaucon, he breaks vigorously into the conversation (362d), is willing to stand up to Socrates (362e1, 449b-50a),⁴¹ and cooperates in a good humored way without any sign of flagging. Both brothers are equally attentive, enthusiastic, brave, persevering, and committed to the argument.⁴² Socrates speaks of the "sons of Ariston" as a pair,⁴³ commending their lineage, their *phusis*, their courage (367e-68a; cf. 362d), and their "divine" ability to speak so eloquently without believing their own words (368ab).⁴⁴ It is tempting to detect oblique authorial self-reference here. Plato too is a "son of Ariston," who of course has the eloquence to create all these speeches and many others, but is not thereby committed to the views they promulgate.

Glaucon and Adeimantus thus possess the requisite character traits for dialectical success: courage, cooperation, intelligence, memory, initiative, good humor and stamina.⁴⁶ They also share one more feature that is crucial for philosophical progress. As we shall later discover, firmly grounded right opinion (*orthē doxa*) is a necessary preliminary for the study of dialectic (cf. e.g.

³⁵ He is the interlocutor for about two thirds of the constructive portion of the dialogue.

³⁶ Philosophy requires moral as well as intellectual qualities. See Patterson, and cf. the qualities needed by the guardians (455b, 485a-87a, 490c, 494b, 503c, 535a-36b).

³⁷ In a foreshadowing of their later relationship, Socrates' point here concerns the ideal state, and is explained positively and at some length (347b-e).

³⁸ For more evidence of a bold and impetuous character see J/C on 357a. Xenophon tells us how Socrates cured Glaucon of political ambition (*Mem.* 3.6). In the *Republic* he is carefully distinguished from the timocratic man whom he resembles in certain respects (548de).

³⁹ Compare the his examples (357c) with e.g. 341c-342e.

⁴¹ The two brothers use exactly the same phrase to contradict Socrates (362e1, 427d8).

⁴² For their philosophical spiritedness cf. Patterson 343, 348-9.

⁴³ No doubt a pun on the meaning of the name Ariston is intended.

⁴⁴ His language echoes the "divine phusis" to which Adeimantus attributes the rare ability to reject injustice (366c). Cf. also 492e-93a, 496c.

⁴⁶ Many of these qualities are exemplified at 449a-51b.

377b, 378d). This is first shown dramatically through the changing characterization of Socrates' interlocutors. Dialectic is intrinsically cooperative, and, as we saw in the case of Thrasymachus, a commitment to injustice undermines the will and ability to participate and learn from it. As Socrates forces Thrasymachus to admit, even two people--the number required for dialectic--need justice in order to cooperate (351e). Without the right moral convictions, such as a belief in the value of justice, dialectic will degenerate into eristic--competitive argument for the sake of victory rather than truth. Socrates therefore needs a different kind of interlocutor if he is to move towards a more fruitful kind of dialectic.

An admirable phusis coupled with a commitment to justice makes Glaucon and Adeimantus appropriate partners for the argument that lies ahead. In contrast to Thrasymachus, both of Plato's brothers share Socrates' firm belief in the superiority of justice over injustice.⁴⁷ Socrates' task, they all agree, is not to discover whether justice is better, but to "come to its aid" (368bc; cf. 362d) by showing that it is so. According to Socrates, the brothers' commitment to justice is displayed not just verbally but through their character (tropos) (368b). This character is dramatized in their cooperative attitude towards dialectic. Moreover their convictions are sufficiently "deeply dyed" to have passed the test of exposure to Thrasymachus and his arguments (cf. 429de). But right opinion alone is not enough for unshakable virtue. The words of Thrasymachus and others have left even Glaucon in a state of aporia (358c), and Adeimantus aligns himself with those young men who are in danger of learning that it is more important to seem than to be just (365b, 365d-66a; cf. 362a). Good character coupled with right opinion must still be fortified by "giving an account" of justice and its opposite (cf. 535b; Meno ref). Conversely such questions should not be addressed until right opinion has been indelibly established. Glaucon and Adeimantus are thus poised at a pivotal stage in their moral and philosophical development.

Plato's brothers have much in common with the philosophically promising Polemarchus. But they differ from him in certain important respects: their youth, their aristocratic lineage, their relative immunity to the "teaching" of the poets, the firmness of their prior convictions, their eloquence, their ability to defend a position, and the pressure they bring to bear on Socrates. Polemarchus starts from a more conventional outlook, and is more easily led by the nose--as we might expect from the son of Cephalus in contrast to the sons of Ariston. He thus represents a slightly earlier stage of intellectual development, as befits his earlier place in the dialogue. Overall, however, these three interlocutors share similar qualities of character, which overlap significantly with those of Socrates himself. Their common aptness for philosophy seems to impose a uniformity which militates against the kind of more colorful characterization that we saw in both Cephalus and Thrasymachus.

It should not surprise us if dialectically desirable qualities turn out to be less individual than the countless traits leading to failure. This is not merely a manifestation of the familiar literary phenomenon that it is much harder to breath life into virtuous characters than into flawed or villainous ones. In Plato's case, the possibility of portraying a wide range of idiosyncratic but virtuous people is ruled out not simply by the literary challenge this presents, but by a theory which views virtue as uniform and vice as variegated. As Socrates will subsequently declare, "there is one form of virtue, but the forms of vice are unlimited" (445c).⁵⁰ This means not only that there are many more ways of being bad than being good, but that within each individual, complexity and variation of character are frowned upon, in contrast to the simple and homogeneous. This theoretical perspective compounds the purely literary difficulties of portraying the virtuous. For as Socrates says in book 10, the simple and virtuous ethos is harder to represent than the complex and inferior one (604a).

⁴⁷ Cf. 347e-48b, 358c, 367a, 392ab.

⁵⁰ This is echoed by Aristotle, who quotes a line of verse of unknown origin to the same effect (EN 1106b27-35).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Plato's portrait of his brothers is their shared detachment from the case they make with such vehemence. This separation between conviction and argument is foreshadowed in book 1. As Socrates' conversation with Thrasymachus proceeds, a wedge is driven more and more deeply between the interlocutor's convictions and his dialectical responses. Socrates insists here, as elsewhere, that the respondent should only say what he sincerely believes.⁵¹ But it becomes progressively clearer that Thrasymachus is not always doing so. Indeed it is often impossible to determine whether or not he is supposed to be giving his real opinion.

This kind of insincerity deprives the elenchus of one of its principal functions--the education of the interlocutor. Without serious commitment, there can be no real pedagogical progress. At the same time, the device of the insincere interlocutor underlines the fact that an inability to refute Socrates' arguments does not translate into intellectual or moral conviction that he is right. Thrasymachus cannot fault Socrates' logic, yet he remains as unconvinced by it as Socrates is by the sophist's lengthy speech (345a). His reactions graphically illustrate how the Socratic method may succeed only verbally, leaving the interlocutors unmoved even in defeat.⁵⁴ Indeed Plato rarely represents the elenchus as successful in winning people over to philosophy. It is more often a source of frustration and hostility towards both Socrates and his method--a fact that is captured and acknowledged in Socrates' own image of the gadfly (Apol. ref). Plato's characterization tends to blame the interlocutor for this state of affairs. At the same time, however, the frequent alienation of Socrates' victims suggests that the situation is more complicated. Socrates' pedagogical failure may result in part from his own method as well as his interlocutor's character flaws, for a method that cannot allow for and surmount such flaws is doomed to failure in practice. The irritating sting of the gadfly may be the best teacher for a rare few, but it was not destined to succeed in converting the varied inhabitants of classical Athens to wisdom and virtue.

The interlocutor's frustration often arises from the fact that an inability to rebut the argument does not eliminate the feeling that it is nonetheless flawed. One may respond to this sensation by admitting one's own deficiency, demanding further proofs, or accusing the other of cheating. The last of these is the path taken by Thrasymachus, who accuses Socrates of merely striving to defeat his respondent (336c), calls him a quibbler (340e2), repeatedly accuses him of wilful cheating (338d, 340d, 341a, 341b), and views his "irony" as dissembling (337a). Polemarchus, by contrast, yields happily to Socrates' more or less dubious arguments. Yet Socrates' success with him is equally disquieting in its own way. Such at least is the reaction of Thrasymachus, whose angry opening words are directed at the way in which Polemarchus has been "giving way" to Socrates (336c).⁵⁵ This kind of irritation is a natural and not uncommon response to Socrates' methods and the easy acquiescence of many of his opponents. Many have agreed with Thrasymachus that Socrates' irony is a kind of dissembling. Others have devoted much time and effort to analysing the flaws in his arguments, flaws which sometimes give the impression of ad hominem manipulation, if not outright dishonesty. Socrates is very careful to deny the charge that he cheats or deceives (341b3, c1-2; cf. 336e, 337c). But the fact that he is presented as sincerely believing in his own arguments does not mean that Plato viewed all of them as sound or persuasive, or intended us to do so.

Any skilful arguer may lead a less skilful one to agree with his conclusions, whether enthusiastically, like Polemarchus, or grudgingly, like Thrasymachus. Such agreement is obviously not enough to establish either argument or conclusion as sound. The elenchus, which

⁵¹ Cf. 346a, 349a, 350e, 337c. See further Vlastos Elenchus 34-8.

⁵⁴ Cf. Annas Republic 56-7.

⁵⁵ He actually reproaches Socrates and his interlocutors generally for yielding, but it is Polemarchus who has been doing so in the preceding argument.

depends on the scrutiny of one individual by another, is thus flawed by its personal character, its reliance on the sincere participation of particular persons. Of course any form of discourse is limited by the skills of the participants. But the elenchus is particularly vulnerable, in so far as Socrates' own moral and philosophical progress depends on the refutation of others.⁵⁸ If none of Socrates' opponents is a match for him, any insight he acquires by questioning them will be circumscribed by their comprehension and critical capacity. This problem is exacerbated by the requirement that the interlocutor say only what he believes. Since the elenchus aims to convince each individual of his inconsistencies or errors, it is constrained not only by his intellectual capacity but by his particular interests and convictions.

On the level of literary representation, Plato is free to endow Socrates' interlocutors with whatever interests he pleases, and thus give his protagonist access to a wide range of ideas. He may also give a particular refutation broader significance, by characterizing the interlocutor as representative of a larger class.⁵⁹ He may even take the argument far afield from what the interlocutor might in "real life" be expected to understand. But the fact remains that he portrays Socrates himself as committed to the refutation and/or improvement of one respondent at a time. This methodological restriction is reinforced by Plato's use of dialogue form to dramatize each conversation as a confrontation between Socrates and an individual interlocutor. The personal character of the elenchus is thus a serious limitation, unless of course Socrates can meet his match. That he fails to do so in book 1 of the *Republic* is clear from the end of the book, where everyone else has been silenced by Socrates' argument, and only he himself can find fault with it (354ab).

If Socrates is to escape these limitations, and gain access to a broader and more speculative intellectual canvas, he must be given the opportunity to scrutinize ideas not just because a particular interlocutor happens to hold them, but for their own sake. Defending a view for the sake of argument is usually viewed as a sophistic technique, and as such is generally frowned upon by Plato's Socrates.⁶⁰ But it may on occasion be necessary, if one is to give influential ideas full weight and a correspondingly convincing refutation. Vlastos called the elenchus "a two-in-one operation," which has a "double objective: to discover how every human being ought to live and to test that single human being that is doing the answering--to find out if he is living as one ought to live" (*Elenchus* 37; original emphasis). But there are times when the second function may interfere with the first. As Thrasymachus points out, the argument must be dealt with in its own right (349a), regardless of who does or does not believe it, or of whether or not a believer happens to be present.

Plato tacitly acknowledges this by representing Socrates as uncharacteristically willing to continue the argument without the sincere cooperation of his interlocutor. Though he would obviously prefer to have Thrasymachus say only what he believes, he is willing to concede that it does not matter to him whether he refutes the speaker or simply the *logos* (349ab).⁶¹ He ignores the respondent's manifest disengagement in order to press on with the argument. He does not even protest when Thrasymachus turns the tables on standard elenctic procedure by agreeing only "according to your argument" (*kata ton son logon*)--one of the standard phrases used elsewhere by Socrates to emphasise that the interlocutor himself is both committed to and refuted by the

⁵⁸ Cf. e.g. *Apol.* 28e, *Charm.* 166cd, and see further Vlastos *SIMP* 134-5.

⁵⁹ Cf. Blundell 165-6.

⁶⁰ Cf. e.g. *Euthyd.* 272a and passim, *Prot.* 331c. See also Vlastos *Elenchus* 35-6.

⁶¹ Cf. also 350e, 351d, 352b, 354ab, *Gorg.* ref. *Prot.* 333c is only an apparent parallel, since Socrates warns Protagoras that examining the views of the many will lead to scrutiny of themselves (see Vlastos *Elenchus* 38-9). Vlastos *Elenchus* 35 calls Socrates' acquiescence at 350e a *pis aller* to which Socrates resigns himself, but the very fact that he is willing to continue the argument under these conditions shows that its value does not depend on the interlocutor's sincerity.

argument (353e; cf. 389a).⁶² Although this disengagement vitiates the educational function of the elenchus, it frees Socrates to take the argument wherever he wishes, winning Thrasymachus' "agreement", for example, to the proposition that justice is the excellence of the soul (353e).

At the beginning of book 2, Plato dissociates the arguments to be refuted from the personal character and beliefs of the interlocutors in a different way, by giving Glaucon and Adeimantus the role of devil's advocates.⁶³ Unlike Thrasymachus, who claimed to care about the question at issue (344e), but withdrew from sincere participation in the argument, Plato's brothers are committed to the argument, but not to the views under scrutiny.⁶⁴ By making an eloquent case for a position they do not believe in, they illustrate the positive value of intellectual disengagement. Socrates confesses that his *aporia*, caused by the brothers' dissatisfaction with his elenctic arguments, is exacerbated by their own detachment from the views they have put forward for his refutation (368ab). Since these are not their own views, he cannot use the elenchus to pick them apart and prove them inconsistent with the brothers' other convictions. He cannot refute the interlocutors themselves, in the elenctic manner, but must show what is wrong with these views regardless of who holds them. As Socrates says to Phaedrus in the *Phaedrus*, "To you perhaps it makes a difference who the speaker is and where he is from. For you do not consider this alone, whether what he says is or is not the case." "A justifiable rebuke," says Phaedrus (*Phdr.* 275bc).

Glaucon and Adeimantus' philosophical talents equip them to serve as effective devil's advocates, who can not only criticize a point of view but defend one as persuasively as possible, in order to give it a fair hearing. In this role they restate Thrasymachus' most serious charges against Socrates and his method. They do not accuse him of dishonesty. They understand that his irony is not, as Thrasymachus thinks (337a), a form of dissembling (cf. 362e1). Yet they are no more convinced than Thrasymachus is by his arguments (358b, 368b). When Glaucon complains that Thrasymachus was silenced prematurely (358b), he implies that Socrates might have fared less successfully with a different interlocutor. Though Plato's brothers never accuse Socrates of cheating, their restatement of Thrasymachus' views implies that Socrates' focus on a particular interlocutor has allowed him to get away with arguments which might not survive more rigorous scrutiny. As late as book 6, Adeimantus will recall the discomfort experienced by those respondents who cannot gainsay Socrates' arguments yet feel they have been led astray by them (487bc). To prevent such discontent, the case for justice must be made not just in a way that silences the interlocutor, but in the most convincing manner possible. This includes refuting not merely the interlocutor's arguments but the best arguments by the best speakers. Socrates obliquely acknowledges this when he claims to be defeated by Glaucon's case for injustice (362d), applauds the brothers' eloquence (368a), and confesses the magnitude of his task in face of their dissatisfaction with his previous arguments (368bc).

Glaucon and Adeimantus also restate Thrasymachus' other main complaint--that Socrates refuses to give a positive account of his own views. Of the three interlocutors scrutinized in book 1, only Thrasymachus tries to make Socrates in turn examine his ideas and assumptions about the subject under discussion. He points out that it is easier to ask questions than to answer them (336c; cf. 337e), demands a positive definition of justice (336cd), and sneers at Socrates' "wisdom" for its lack of positive teaching (338b). At one point, he declares that he dislikes the argument and could answer it, but that Socrates would call his argument demagoguery (350d). In other words, he remains unconvinced not only by the argument but by a method which eschews substantial speeches. His own positive statements, including a long oration, are presented only to be picked apart by the elenchus. But whatever his faults, he does at least put forward substantive

⁶² Cf. Blundell 147 n. 74.

⁶³ Socrates explicitly distinguishes their character (*tropos*) from their *logoi* (368b).

⁶⁴ Throughout his speech Glaucon makes it clear that he does not agree with the views he is expressing (e.g. 358c, 359b, 360c5, 360c8, 360d2, 360d4, 361e). Adeimantus does likewise (367a).

ideas about justice. Socrates' brand of argument in book 1 is essentially critical and negative, and as such is not a successful source of positive moral conviction. Even Polemarchus learns only to criticize (cf. 335e).

Like Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus demand a substantial exposition of Socrates' own views on justice. A convincing defence of justice requires some positive substitute for Thrasymachus' position, some substantive advice on "how to live the most profitable life" (344e, cf. 352d). The brothers make the case for injustice as vehemently as possible in order to elicit this kind of response (358bcd, 367ab). Glaucon wants to hear such an account from Socrates in particular (358d), and Adeimantus regards him as having a special responsibility to provide one, because he (Socrates) has devoted his life to this question (367d, 506b). Adeimantus even links Socrates with other self-styled "praisers of justice", all of whom have failed to provide young men like himself with a satisfactory account of justice and its consequences (366d-67a). The brothers are thus challenging not only the arguments of book 1, but the efficacy of Socrates' method generally as a means of discovering and teaching moral truth. The elenctic Socrates is accustomed to scrutinizing the lives of others, but now his own way of life is on trial. This time the jury is composed not of hostile or indifferent fellow-citizens, but of men who share his philosophical concerns, including several talented and impressionable youths whose own lives may hang in the balance.

Book 1 concludes with Socrates declaring that they must find out what justice is before investigating what it is like (354b). The question and the methodological stricture are both typical of the elenctic dialogues. But after Glaucon and Adeimantus have issued their challenge at the beginning of book 2, the question is pursued quite differently, and the methodological stricture abandoned.⁶⁵ Plato makes Socrates voice positive and sustained ideas concerning the nature of justice, thus tacitly granting some legitimacy not only to Glaucon and Adeimantus' dissatisfaction, but to Thrasymachus' complaints about the negativity of the elenchus. Once Socrates turns to a new method, and starts to develop his own substantial theories, Thrasymachus is converted into an attentive, interested and even friendly listener (450a; cf. 498cd).⁶⁶ Positive and successful dialectic requires cooperative interlocutors, but conversely, an intransigent interlocutor is more likely to cooperate when his own legitimate concerns are addressed. In book 1 Socrates adapted his manner, but not his method, to each respondent. Now he has conformed much more drastically and successfully to Thrasymachus' needs.

In their challenge to Socrates, then, Glaucon and Adeimantus not only question the adequacy of his arguments, but cast doubt on certain aspects of his method. Just as their speeches purport to restate Thrasymachus' philosophical position, their dissatisfaction with book 1 endorses some of his complaints against the Socratic method, in particular its negativity and its exploitation of the interlocutor's philosophical weaknesses. Their admirable *phusis* and firm convictions enhance the significance of this dissatisfaction. That such philosophically talented interlocutors take Thrasymachus' ideas seriously shows the extent of the threat he poses. That they find Socrates' refutation inadequate poses serious questions about the efficacy of his method. That they adopt Thrasymachus' own method--the long rhetorical discourse--suggests that Socrates' rejection of such methods was at best premature. The gadfly turns out to be an inadequate teacher not only for the ill-tempered sophist, but for Plato's brothers as well.

Glaucon and Adeimantus' dissatisfaction with Socrates' methods, combined with Plato's own change of tactics, also suggests another kind of criticism of book 1. In that book, Plato represents Thrasymachus' response to the slipperiness of Socrates' arguments not as a legitimate

⁶⁵ Cf. *Annas Republic* 39.

⁶⁶ This may be in part attributed to Socrates' gentleness and good will (so Patterson 341-2), but his gentleness accomplishes little in book 1, where Thrasymachus remains harshly sarcastic to the end (354a).

uneasiness, but as crass and offensive rudeness which discredits the sophist personally. He allows Socrates to exploit his role as narrator to portray Thrasymachus as a contemptible beast, while at the same time subjecting him to an editorial mockery which belittles his objections (e.g. 336b, d, 344d).⁶⁷ Socrates also interprets his interlocutor's motives for us, telling us, for example, that Thrasymachus has been "made angry by the logos" (336d)--when otherwise we might be forgiven for supposing that he had been made angry by Socrates. Later he informs us that Thrasymachus' reluctance to speak was a pretence, when he "clearly" wanted to show off (338a). This kind of interpretation of the sophist's motives undermines the legitimacy of his rage at what he experiences as philosophical sharp practice.

In response to Thrasymachus' other main charge, that his method is too negative, Socrates intimates that he would have given a positive definition of justice if he could, but that Thrasymachus prevented him (337abc, 337e, 339ab). Plato thus deploys Thrasymachus in such a way as to suggest that Socrates does have a positive account to give, even though this sits uneasily with his habitual claim to know nothing (cf. 337e, 354c). Once again Plato uses literary means (a blocking character) to evade a serious methodological challenge. In both cases, the resources of dramatic characterization rather than philosophical argument are mobilized to exonerate Socrates by belittling and discrediting his opponent.

But the intervention of Glaucon and Adeimantus suggests that any such criticisms of Socrates should be evaluated independently of the character of those who utter them. By introducing his brothers as talented, eloquent and good-natured spokesmen for injustice, Plato implicitly criticizes not only Socratic practice, but his own literary practice in representing it. Socrates himself may not be guilty of dialectical dishonesty, but Plato may still be guilty of allowing him too easy a victory. It is equally unfair to give Socrates a respondent who caves in too easily, like Polemarchus (cf. 336c), and a feisty but dialectically incompetent opponent like Thrasymachus. As Glaucon puts it, the silencing of Thrasymachus is merely an appearance of persuasion (357ab), for Plato has allowed him to be prematurely "charmed like a snake" (358b).

It is also unfair to counter unpalatable ideas by discrediting the personality of the messenger. The literary strategy of book 1 suggested that Thrasymachus' peculiarly offensive character is inseparable from his ethics. But according to Plato's brothers, it is not just Thrasymachus who holds such views, but all kinds of ordinary people as well. They link Thrasymachus and his ideas (358b, 367a, 367c) with the anonymous multitude of those who value justice only for its consequences (358a, 358c2, c6, 358c, 361e, 366b), including fathers and guardians (362e), ordinary people and their leaders (366b), begging priests (364b-e) and poets (363e etc), ancient heroes and even Socrates himself (366de). The brothers blur the distinctions between a range of different ethical positions, but by doing so they link Thrasymachus with the consequentialism of ordinary inoffensive people such as Cephalus.⁶⁹ Such views therefore cannot be impugned by focusing on the personal unpleasantness of this particular spokesman. Moreover this technique is unsuccessful. The presence of Cleitophon shows that Thrasymachus has admirers despite his deplorable manners (cf. *Cleit.* 410c), and even Glaucon and Adeimantus are subject to his influence. Plato therefore offers us retrospectively a new way of reading book 1, one which resists his own prejudicial use of characterization. He makes Glaucon and Adeimantus re-present Thrasymachus' views as powerfully as possible, without ridicule, abuse, or any other attempt to discredit personally those who hold them. Only if the sophist's views are successfully refuted under these conditions can we be sure that his anger at Socrates--as opposed to the argument--is not well founded.

⁶⁷ Contrast 336b with the way Polemarchus breaks into the argument (331d). The difference is conveyed largely by editorial description. Cf. also e.g. 337a.

⁶⁹ For the similarity between Cephalus and Thrasymachus cf. Murphy 2.

III. Nodding Mandarins

Having said their say at the beginning of book 2, Glaucon and Adeimantus quickly lapse into their familiar roles as the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of ancient philosophy. There is a marked shift away from Plato's earlier dramatic style, with its full and lively characterization. Despite the occasional touch of color, none of the speakers is richly or idiosyncratically characterized. Glaucon and Adeimantus become for the most part indistinguishable yes-men. Socrates himself becomes less ironic, elusive and provocative in manner. Though he remains committed to cooperative dialectic, he also becomes more paternalistic, didactic and uniformly earnest in tone. He no longer attacks the unfounded wisdom of others, but presents himself, despite protestations of personal uncertainty, as a teacher trying to demonstrate his ideas (e.g. 392d, 595c5). He lays claim to "keener vision" than his interlocutors, and they in turn are happy to acknowledge his intellectual superiority (595c-96a; cf. 533a). All three of them agree that the task of defending justice belongs to Socrates.⁷¹ The enterprise has become unabashedly hierarchical, and this is reflected in Plato's use of literary form. Socrates' style becomes largely expository, punctuated by expressions of formulaic agreement from his respondents.

Despite this asymmetry, however, the atmosphere remains collaborative. Since all the participants are now committed to the same methods and goals, their dialectical interaction is no longer agonistic, in contrast to Socrates' conversation with Thrasymachus in book 1 (cf. 474ab).⁷² Glaucon and Adeimantus share Socrates' interests and convictions, they do not get affronted, and they never seem to weary of hearing him talk. Their own positive contribution is slight, but Socrates still treats them as full collaborators in the argument, eliciting their agreement at every step, and attributing even the most outlandish ideas to them as well as himself. The brothers accept this, with only the occasional trace of hesitation or self-consciousness.⁷⁵ Even at their most passive, then, Socrates' respondents remain implicated in the argument by their acquiescence.

This is an important survival from the earlier Socratic method, but it imposes little restriction on Socrates' creativity, now that he is exploring his own ideas with the help of sympathetic and intelligent interlocutors. Rather than hampering Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus play the role of cheer-leaders, encouraging him in his daunting task, drawing him out on obscure points, and preventing him from getting away with things.⁷⁶ The question is no longer how Socrates can best aid the interlocutor by clarifying his ideas, but how the interlocutor can best aid Socrates by answering, as Glaucon puts it, "more harmoniously than another" (474a; cf. 475e, 595b).⁷⁷ It is this kind of sympathetic support that enables Socrates to run the risk of the exposure entailed by positive discourse (cf. 473e-74b, 450a-51b), the same risk that Thrasymachus jeered at him for avoiding (336c, 337e, 338b). His highly speculative and controversial ideas are greeted with support and admiration rather than the sceptical questioning of the elenchus.

But Glaucon and Adeimantus are not entirely uncritical. From time to time they slip into their earlier role of devil's advocate (e.g. 419a, 487bcd). This enables them to voice the objections

⁷¹ Cf. 358d, 367d, 368bc, 427de, 449b-50a, 506b.

⁷² Cf. Annas Republic 59.

⁷³ E.g. 371c, 372a, 381c, 394d, 398e-99a, 400a, 402d.

⁷⁵ Cf. 389a, 396b10/c4, 432d, 475a, 597a8-9.

⁷⁶ E.g. 369b, 374e, 376cd, 427de, 449b-51b, 471c-72b, 473ab.

⁷⁷ Cf. Meno 57de, Euthyd. 282c, Th. 185e, Parm. 137b.

of ordinary people without personal commitment, and so ensure that their habitual agreement does not allow Socrates to evade the larger challenge posed at the beginning of book 2. Only in book 9 does Glaucon finally surrender on behalf of the champion of injustice (590a). The brothers also voice occasional objections of their own (e.g. 372cd), but never in a hostile or personally offensive manner. Such friendly objections are entirely proper to the dialectical character, suggesting as they do close engagement and intellectual vigor. Plato uses these moments to facilitate the development of the argument. Glaucon's objection to the "city of pigs" (372cd), for example, is not really an obstacle, but prompts the necessary further development of the ideal state. And after making such objections, the brothers always accept Socrates' further explanations. Their more frequent--and often well justified--failures to catch the drift of his argument show that they have been paying attention, while obliging Socrates to clarify and develop his ideas.

These simultaneous changes in Plato's dramatic style and Socrates' dialectical method may be viewed as a response to the limitations of the elenchus, some of which emerged from book 1. One of the most serious of these problems with the earlier method was its negativity. As Guthrie and many others have suggested, the move towards positive exposition prompted Plato to provide Socrates with a broader canvas on which to develop his ideas. But this alone is not enough to account for the stylistic changes. The construction of the ideal state could have been a lively, cooperative venture, with real objections raised and discussed, and real contributions from several individualized characters. Instead, Plato makes little effort to differentiate the interlocutors and seems to willfully bypass opportunities for them to shine (e.g. 375d).

What made the earlier dramatic style uniquely appropriate to the Socratic method, however, was the personal character of the elenchus, its rootedness in the individual character of each interlocutor and their personal interactions with Socrates. As Plato moves away from this method, the lively characterization of the earlier style is no longer necessary. Since Socrates is no longer engaged in refuting ideas as held by particular persons, the proper representation of the argument no longer requires individual characterization of the respondents. Indeed, as Plato abandons the elenchus, the personal dramatic style becomes not only irrelevant but a positive liability. For individual characterization privileges the kind of personal idiosyncrasy that interferes with philosophical progress and undermines the universality of the argument.

It is the elenctic Socrates' preoccupation with the particular which causes at least some of his failures. His method is rooted in the scrutiny of the individual soul, in the optimistic hope that each in turn can be converted to the philosophic life. If he constantly fails, and succeeds primarily in alienating others, that is because his "testing" (a basic meaning of *elenchos*) is ironically one which shows up the particular weaknesses of character and intellect that incapacitate most people for such a life. His egalitarian search for the potential wisdom in respondents of all kinds seems doomed to failure.⁷⁹ It also distracts him from developing his own ideas and making the most of his unparalleled philosophical skill and creativity. The method of Plato's later Socrates thus becomes not only more impersonal, but more didactic, authoritarian and hierarchical. Socrates is no longer testing idiosyncratic individuals for their philosophical potential, but trying to construct a positive argument of his own. He has been wasting his time talking to just anyone he happens to meet. He needs as interlocutors not flawed individuals but talented and sympathetic philosophy students, whose characters will show under what circumstances such positive progress can take place.

This new kind of dialectic still calls in principle for a sympathetic response to the individual interlocutor. But in practice, as we have seen, positive and cooperative dialectic calls for qualities which militate against individuality. If Socrates' respondents have all the necessary qualities for success at dialectic, he no longer needs to tailor his method to their particular needs. We must

⁷⁹ For Socrates' willingness to tackle anyone indiscriminately cf. *Apol.* 29d, 30a.

therefore content ourselves with cardboard renditions of mutually interchangeable philosophy students. That is why Glaucon and Adeimantus are, as characters, virtually indistinguishable. What matters about them is not their idiosyncrasies, but their philosophical receptiveness, which is no longer a personal matter but appears identically in both of them. (Perhaps it was to make this point that Plato bothered to use two interlocutors at all.) If Glaucon and Adeimantus are uninteresting, it is not because Plato no longer cares about the qualities required for successful philosophizing, but because he has come to see those qualities as essentially uniform, and has become correspondingly suspicious of the kind of personal idiosyncrasies with which the elenctic Socrates wrestled in his opponents.

In speaking of Glaucon and Adeimantus' philosophical talents, however, I have neglected one important fact--their lack of intellectual flair and creativity. They have the necessary character traits to serve as useful interlocutors for the newly creative Socrates. They also display many of the intellectual qualities required for dialectic, such as quick comprehension and a good memory. But they are not yet ready for the higher reaches of dialectic.⁸⁷ As Socrates approaches the topic of the Good, he worries about misleading his interlocutors with inadequate explanations (506c-507a; cf. 504b-e). When he reaches a point where Glaucon will be able to follow him no further, he cuts his discourse short (533a; cf. 534b). Further dialectical progress requires rigorous propaedeutic studies in mathematics and astronomy (533a). Socrates' bland and receptive students have yet to graduate from cheer-leading to creative autonomy. They have reached the limits of their current comprehension, and in doing so have finally imposed some constraints upon Socrates' philosophizing.

The fact that Glaucon and Adeimantus have so little to contribute reflects Plato's pessimism about the natural, social and educational conditions which may succeed in fostering the growth of a true philosopher. They have made a promising start, but the argument of the Republic, as well as its form, indicates just how far they still have to go. Yet even if they have not yet gained access to the truth, they still exemplify the character needed by one who wishes to work towards it. As such, the reader can and should identify with them and emulate their philosophical virtues, including the determination to keep on striving for something that may lie forever beyond our reach. Glaucon and Adeimantus themselves may perhaps seem too acquiescent--too stuck at the primary stage of the guardians' education--ever to attain that goal. But even their most wooden responses invite resistance from the reader, by leaving us space to question what they unhesitatingly accept. Even in the later books, then, Plato's use of dramatic form helps to lure us beyond simple acquiescence to pedagogical authority. In doing so, it invites us to identify with our other character model, Socrates himself, who exemplifies a higher level of philosophical creativity and insight. By offering us both teacher and students as models, Plato displaces onto his dramatic characters the tension between authoritarian dogmatism and creative autonomy which pervades his work.

Glaucon and Adeimantus, then, play a more interesting role than is at first sight apparent. However much we may regret the replacement of the colorful interlocutors who inhabit book 1 with the bland yes-men of books 2-10, we must not underestimate the philosophical significance of Plato's changing cast of characters.

⁸⁷ Glaucon seems to be familiar with the theory of Forms (475e), but this does not mean he has glimpsed the Forms himself.

WORKS CITED

- Annas, J. An Introduction to Plato's Republic (Oxford 1981)
- Blundell, M.W. "Character and meaning in Plato's Hippias Minor," Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues, ed. J.C. Klagge and N.D. Smith, OSAP supplementary volume (1992) 131-72
- Coventry, L. 'The Role of the Interlocutor in Plato's Dialogues: Theory and Practice', Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature, ed. C. Pelling (Oxford 1990), 174-96
- Gill, C. "Plato and the education of character," Arch. für Gesch. der Phil. 67 (1985) 1-26
- Guthrie, W.K.C. A History of Greek Philosophy IV (Cambridge 1975)
- Jowett, B. and L. Campbell (eds), Plato's Republic (Oxford 1894) [= J/C]
- Murphy, N.R. The Interpretation of Plato's Republic (Oxford 1951)
- Patterson, R. "Plato on philosophic character," JHP 25 (1987) 325-50
- Vlastos, G. 'The Socratic elenchus', OSAP 1 (1983) 27-58
- Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher (Ithaca 1991)