

II—OWNERSHIP, PROPERTY AND BELONGING: SOME LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THINKERS OF ANTIQUITY ABOUT ECONOMICS AND SUCCESS

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I explore some enlightening alternative economic theories in Plato's *Republic* which help to cast doubt on standard models of rationality in economics. Starting from Socrates' suggestion that things work best if everyone says 'mine' about the same things, I discuss a kind of 'belonging' which merits more attention in political and economic theory. This kind of belonging is not about owning property, but it can (better) explain the desire to do things for others and for the collective good. But did Socrates forget to invoke it when addressing the puzzle about why the philosopher would willingly return to the cave?

I

Introduction. In this paper I consider a series of interventions in Plato's *Republic* where the interlocutors (Thrasymachus, Glaucon, Adeimantus) challenge the conditions and rewards proposed for rulers of his imaginary state. I am particularly interested in their protests about the lack of material goods, the prohibition of private property and the compulsory 'return to the cave'. The *Republic* takes the reader on a journey from initially supposing that monetary rewards would motivate someone to undertake the task of ruling, towards discovering that (for rulers with no interest in such gains) some other motivation is needed. Or, if no such motivation can be found, then the system must resort to compulsion and penalties, if the task remains unattractive.

But is the task unattractive, and if so why? Perhaps the answer that Socrates should have given, to explain why the philosophers would return to the cave, was already laid out for us in his famous idea that everyone should say 'mine' about the same things, which lies at the intersection of his proposals for the abolition of the family and the elimination of private property. Should he not have returned

to that idea to explain why the philosophers would be happy to undertake altruistic duties in the service of the place that is dear to them?

I start by taking seriously (and literally) Plato's exposition of the importance of saying 'mine' in unison about the same things. I shall suggest that Aristotle (and generations after him) may have misunderstood what this is about, in reading the text as if it were recommending common or shared property. There is, I shall suggest, a kind of belonging that is nothing to do with property, and the use of 'mine' for such belonging is crucially different from the use of 'ours' for common or shared property, and from the use of 'mine' for private property. Understanding this special (and very familiar) use of the word 'mine' can (I suggest) also help us to understand why economic theories that work with rational choice theory misunderstand what is rational for human beings. For human beings in real social situations have myriad non-material commitments to things that they hold dear, and friendships based on their shared love of those things to which they belong. For such things we willingly (and rationally) give of our own time and resources.

I start with Aristotle's response to the idea that we should all say 'mine' in unison.

II

Plato and Aristotle on the Proposal that We Should Say 'Mine' in Unison.

[T1] 'Can we find any worse evil for a city than that which splits the city and makes it many instead of one? Or any greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one?'

'We can't.'

'Doesn't the common sharing of pleasure and pain bind it together, whenever pretty well all of the citizens rejoice or grieve equally when the same things occur or are lost?'

'Definitely,' he said.

'But the privatization of these kinds of things loosens the bonds, when some are in despair and others are overjoyed in response to things that happen to the city or those in the city.'

‘Sure.’

‘And this kind of thing happens, don’t you think, whenever words like this are not pronounced in unison in the city: the word “mine” and “not mine”? And the same for “someone else’s”.’

‘Indeed so.’

‘In any city where the majority say “mine” about the same thing in the same circumstances, and “not mine”, this city is the best run city.’

‘By far.’ (Plato, *Republic* 462a9–c8)

In this famous text, Plato has Socrates say that what causes conflict and unease in a community is when one person is pleased and another is displeased about the same thing, when one suffers and another gains from a particular measure, and when one group is rejoicing at something that is destructive to another group. The remedy, says Socrates in the *Republic*, is that all the people should share the same joy and the same pleasure, and this will be delivered if everyone says ‘mine’ about the same things and lives by the saying that ‘friends have things in common’.¹

Aristotle took T1 to be a proposal to abolish private property in favour of common or shared property. This, he reckoned, was a stupid idea.

[T2] Having dealt with this we need to consider property: how we should equip those who are going to run the best constitution, whether property should be common or not common. We can consider this separately from the provisions for the children and women ...

In general living together and sharing is always difficult, in all human affairs, and especially so in these kinds of cases [sc. distributing the fruits of agricultural work]. This is evident from cases where people travel abroad together. Pretty well all of them fall out, quarrelling with each other over trivial things that get in the way. Again, in respect of our servants, we get

¹ The phrase may be borrowed from Pythagorean political theory (see Rowett 2014, p. 115 n.17).

most angry with those we have to deal with most closely in our daily round.

Having property in common comes with these and other similar difficulties. The way things are at present, if somewhat enhanced with some sound ethical and regulatory provisions, has no small advantage. It would bring the advantages of both. (Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1262b36–1263a24)

Aristotle thinks that holding property in common fits badly with known facts about human nature and psychology. Common property really does not work, he suggests. T2 offers some examples from daily life to support this claim: when travelling together we argue over trifling things; workmates quarrel about daily tasks. Private property is better, he argues, because then people look after their own interests and get less annoyed by what others are doing with their own (1263a27–8).

Furthermore, Aristotle thinks self-love is ingrained in human nature. Hence, he says, ‘feeling that something is your own adds an indescribable and quite distinctive pleasure’ (1263a41–2). So, Aristotle concludes, Socrates is wrong to abolish private property, though we can still retain the ‘friends have things in common’ formula, because decent people voluntarily put their property at the disposal of their friends. People make their own *privately owned* property a resource that is *also common to their own friends*. Indeed, says Aristotle, providing for others, for friends or guests, out of one’s own resources, brings a unique kind of pleasure, which is lost if you have no private property, or if the giving is not voluntary.

[T3] But actually being kind and helping family, friends and visitors is the most delightful thing. And that depends on property being private. (Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1263b5–7)

Generations of political thinkers have echoed Aristotle’s critique of common property. His argument has a wide appeal for capitalists who want to maintain that society works *better* if people share their wealth only voluntarily. But rather than challenge Aristotle on this claim, let us first ask whether Aristotle understood Plato’s proposal. Was Socrates proposing common property? Shared property? Communism? I think not. Let us take a closer look at what he says and see how we might distinguish it from common or shared property, and also from the commons.

Notice that Socrates does not say, in $\tau\tau$, that everyone should say ‘ours’ about some common shared property. Rather his suggestion (462c2–4) is that ‘everyone should say “mine” about the same thing’. It is true that what he is rejecting is me saying ‘mine’ about one thing and you saying it about another, which happens when what is mine is not yours and what is yours is not mine. Conceivably that could include private property. However, Socrates makes similar moves about the family, so we should not automatically assume that the exclusive ‘mine’ that he has in mind is about possessions. Do we only say ‘mine’ or ‘not mine’ about property? The answer is clearly no, and in fact what Socrates says in $\tau\tau$, and in other passages about his imaginary community, makes little sense if we read it as about owning property, as I shall argue.²

III

The Grammar of ‘Mine’ and ‘Yours’ versus ‘Ours’ and ‘Theirs’. As I mentioned above, when we are referring to common or shared property, our normal expression would not be ‘mine’ but ‘ours’.³ This is particularly true for property that is common to a whole community, such as a village hall or recreation ground owned and run by the community, or the municipal facilities of a town or city, the streets, parks and other communal facilities. These assets are ‘ours’, at least when we consider who owns them or has access as a right because of ownership. They are not things of which I typically say ‘mine’, except as a joke.

For the traditional commons, it is even more true that we do not say ‘mine’ of such things, which are neither privately nor collectively owned. The sea is not mine, nor is the air, and I would not say that someone is taking ‘my’ water unless they are drawing water that I had already purchased as private property in some way. For all these things we would protest by saying that the sea, the air, the natural

² Schofield (2006, p. 305) correctly observes that these points are about filial relationships, not property.

³ There might seem to be counterexamples: I say ‘my house’, ‘my garden’, and so on, even though I own it jointly with someone else. But I think these cases relate not to ownership but to the communal belonging that I shall consider below.

resources belong to all of us, and are not ‘mine’ for anybody. They are neither bought nor sold nor owned, and no one can say ‘mine’.⁴

On the other hand, there are plenty of very familiar things where we do indeed say ‘mine’ about what is equally ‘mine’ for someone else—things where I sometimes say ‘mine’ in unison with others only remotely connected to me. These items are specifically *not* property, or not the property of any of the people who say ‘mine’ about them, and those who say ‘mine’ about them are not claiming to own them. What are they, then?

Let us consider some examples. First, the football team that I support is ‘my team’. Here I belong to a large group of fans who cheer for the same team. In this case, we all say ‘mine’ together, and the joys and pains are shared, in just the way that Plato describes in *TI*. The shared joys and pains bring us together in unity: we share hopes and fears. We root for our club, we wear the scarf. The ‘mine’ of ‘my team’ is not an exclusive ‘mine’, nor is it ownership. If I pay to be a supporter, I am not purchasing even part of the football team. Rather, my payments are more like donations and tokens of support, such as I give to other causes that I am invested in.

Secondly, consider ‘my university’, ‘my school’, ‘my alma mater’. Here too our shared sense of belonging binds us to the institution and also to other alumni. We feel an affinity with others who share that allegiance, and a shared concern for the institution, its teachers and for current students. We may give time and money to supporting the school. We may fund scholarships for needy students. The ‘mine’ in ‘my alma mater’ is not ownership or possession. To suggest that I have bought the place would be nonsense. Nor does saying that it is mine imply that it is not yours.

Thirdly, consider our family members and relations. My brothers and I all call the same people ‘my mother’, ‘my father’, ‘my aunt’, ‘my cousin’. ‘My’ children say ‘my mother’ about me. They are not disputing over who owns her when each says ‘mine’. The appropriate expression, when you meet another who says ‘mine’ of the same person, is to say ‘mine too’, which is a uniting expression. By contrast, for private property we would say ‘No, not yours, mine’—which is a disuniting expression. So the ‘mine’ in these cases is not claiming

⁴ Not being owned applies to the examples that interest me too, but not saying ‘mine’ does not.

property, nor is it shared ownership. It has a different grammar, and it has different ethical implications.

When something is ‘mine’ in this way, it is not something that can be bought and sold. This is why it is so horrific for a parent to be forced to sell their child into slavery: because a child is not an item of property.⁵ Similarly my country is not my property. I may feel patriotic and sing about how much I am devoted to my country. If I sell it, I am a traitor.⁶

When we identify something as ‘mine’ in this way, we generally tend to care strongly and altruistically about it, putting effort into nurturing or funding it.⁷ In addition, we also care for each other, for fellow supporters concerned for the same thing. We are pleased, not offended, by finding another who says ‘mine’ about the same thing.

So two quite different relations can be expressed by the term ‘mine’, one of which is the exclusive ‘mine’ of property, where what is mine is not yours, and we are in competition. By contrast, in this other kind of belonging, where what is mine is also yours, the situation typically involves collaboration, friendship, mutual love for something to which we are unanimously committed.⁸ The two notions differ immensely in respect of their effects for cohesion, rivalry and dissent. And as we saw, the second kind of ‘mine’ differs not only from private property but also from common property, shared property, and the commons.⁹

⁵ This is not widely understood even among ordinary native language users. I have seen a parent, for example, say on social media that they avoid calling their child ‘my son’ because he is not their property.

⁶ The ‘mine’ relationship to one’s body is also a source of confusion. Even exclusive uses of ‘mine’ need not be ownership, and need not include buying and selling as a way of acquiring rights to it.

⁷ There is an interesting question as to whether we can also collectively hate or resent something that is ‘mine’ in this way. This also seems possible (for example, one’s corrupt country, the prison camp, the boarding school). Arguably this also yields a certain unifying camaraderie among those for whom it is in a similar sense ‘mine’. I thank Jessica Leech for raising this question.

⁸ This contrast has interesting intersections with the irrealist idea of the ‘self’, as a product of making things ‘mine’ and not yours, as in the Indian philosophers Āryadeva and Candrakīrti (see Ganeri 2004 and Sorabji 2006, pp. 286–7). Would eliminating private possessions eliminate the individual self, without removing the possibility of a communal ‘mine’ of belonging? I thank Jessica Leech for raising this issue in discussion, and for the reference to Ganeri.

⁹ It is worth comparing this distinction to Socrates’ suggestion that the Forms may be shared by particulars ‘like a single day’ (Plato, *Parmenides* 130b3). However, the way in which we all have the same day looks different, since my day may be painful and yours joyful. Furthermore, it is not mine in a sense that I care about. Perhaps this kind of commonality is more like the commons, in that we all have access to the day but none of us owns it.

As we have seen, this kind of belonging tends to draw us by the heartstrings, as it were. The collective love and commitment to something whose interests we share in the way that we share our own mother is a powerful force. It is surely right that Plato took it seriously as a motivating force in politics and in philosophy.¹⁰ Economics and rational choice theory has often assumed that emotional attachments such as love and friendship are irrational and detract from sensible decisions.¹¹ That is clearly a mistake. On the contrary, decisions made without attention to people's feelings or to what they hold dear are dangerously out of touch.

Sociologists sometimes suggest that there are limits to the size of the group that can feel shared belonging while still maintaining an energetic and self-sacrificial level of commitment. There is also the risk that it depends on, or generates, an excluded group, that is, the people who do not belong. But the familiar motif of 'mother earth', which is an ancient way of thinking about the planet and a poignant one now for the environmental movement, deploys something like this same kind of loyalty-generating belonging with an apparently universal and inclusive scope. By regarding the planet as mother earth, we come to feel individual as well as collective responsibility for this mother figure: she is my mother and also mother to all other creatures and plant life. The same motif appears in Plato's own invocation of a myth of the earth as mother for motivating the young citizens in the *Republic*.¹² This motif may also underpin the ancient tradition of hospitality that treats any human traveller as a member of the human family—a unifying impulse that survives, in attenuated form, in declarations of universal human rights (on which see Osborne 2007).

This phenomenon of collective belonging and care provides a counterexample to the popular idea, regularly reiterated from Aristotle onwards, that only private ownership can motivate us to commitment and enthusiasm. In fact, the institutions to which we feel this kind of loyalty, such as a team or a school or a parent, are not owned at all by those who regard them as 'mine'. And the same goes for 'my country' and 'my religion'. Yet they are typically things

¹⁰ On the 'love of one's mother' loyalty, promoted in the *Republic* via the Noble Lie myth (*Republic* 413e), see §IX below and Rowett (2016).

¹¹ See further discussion below, §IV.

¹² See footnote 10.

into which people are willing to put some, or indeed all, of their private wealth, and for which they would even risk their life.

IV

The Irrationality of Caring About Things You Care About? For some decades it has been common—perhaps increasingly common—in the capitalist world to evaluate proposed policies or political decisions primarily in terms of their economic consequences. Similarly, and possibly connected, economists typically assume that monetary incentives, or economic considerations, are always sufficient to motivate rational agents in their choices, if they have adequate information and can do the maths.¹³ So, for example, politicians might imagine that, faced with a choice of energy suppliers, people would choose the one with the cheapest tariff, if they can work out which is cheapest. When it turns out that people do not do that, but stay with a more expensive tariff, or choose one that offers a higher price, this is considered to be some kind of mistake.¹⁴ Theorists sometimes conclude that the people act irrationally, due to something being wrong with their thought processes.¹⁵ These examples conflict with rational choice theory, and for those who assume that rational choice theory is normative, the conclusion is that there is something wrong with the human brain—that it operates on some faulty reasoning—for reasons to do with psychology or evolution (such as ways of thinking under stress to ensure survival in emergency circumstances), and hence fails to make the rational choice.¹⁶ Yet there are many factors that a rational person might weigh up in calculating whether a particular choice fits with her values and ethical commitments. Saving money need not be the only rational and appropriate consideration.

Similarly with voting in elections or referenda. Here too one might place a higher priority on alignment with one's values and commitments than on any monetary advantages for oneself. In the Brexit referendum, in 2016, many who voted for Britain to leave the EU

¹³ This is the basis for traditional rational choice theory models in economics; see, for example, Sugden (1992) in Hargreaves Heap et al. (1992).

¹⁴ See, for example, Anon (2022).

¹⁵ For example, the idea of 'bounded rationality' (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

¹⁶ For example, we operate with 'quick fix' responses that don't produce the best results, and so on. The classic work is Kahneman (2012).

were from regions that had been blessed with considerable funding from the EU. Their towns, and they themselves in many cases, stood to lose income, jobs, medicines, and so on. Was it surprising that people might choose something that damages their own private economic interests and prospects? Was that ‘irrational behaviour’?¹⁷

Certainly, choosing something that fails to align with your values could be an error or irrational. But having values and caring about things that have negative consequences for your personal wealth and prosperity is not irrational. Caring about your country, or about equality or fairness, or about the need to support those who are struggling for what is right and good—any of these concerns might lead you to choose actions that reduce your own wealth and prosperity. Surely it is the economists who limit rationality to self-interest and describe other kinds of economic behaviour as ‘misbehaviour’ (Thaler 2016) who are ignorant and missing the point.

And in any case, why would rational people be motivated by a desire for money? For, after all, what is money for? And why would you want more of it?

V

Socrates and Thrasymachus: The Moneymaking Art. In his discussion with Thrasymachus, in *Republic* Book I, Socrates observes that when a person works at some productive activity, and that productive activity is also a means of making money, that person is exercising two separate activities, with two separate goals or intentions (346a6–c12). Take a doctor, for instance (341c5–9, 346b1–13). The goal of medical treatment, as Socrates and Thrasymachus both agree, is making people healthy. That is the aim of anyone who genuinely practises the art of medicine. Meanwhile, the doctor may also be trying to make a living. This is a separate concern, which has its own goals quite distinct from the aims of the medical art. So there is no contradiction if we find someone who practises medicine simply for the sake of their patients, on a charitable basis, without asking for money. So we say, *qua doctor*, this person is concerned with improving people’s health. *Qua wage-earner*, she is concerned with

¹⁷ Pfeiffer (2016), citing an interview by Richard Thaler.

improving her bank balance. The second activity is not essential to the first, nor the first to the second.

The same goes for driving trains, teaching, or any other profession. The craft is always aiming to achieve something good, and the true craftsman cares about achieving that good outcome.

Is money-making itself directed to achieving something good, worth having for its own sake? Can one engage in money-making just in order to have money, or is that an irrational choice? It seems rational to want things to be better or to prevent something bad happening. But just wanting more money seems to make no sense, because money is only valuable as a means to something else.

While Socrates does note that good people are not driven by a love of money or status (T₄), he does not say in so many words that money is not a choiceworthy good in itself. Rather, he implies that people do want to get money for themselves and that they need wages to persuade them to undertake their profession. No one would willingly become a ruler, he says, because ruling is for the good of others and in itself brings no reward for the agent, so the ruler needs to be paid a wage, whether in money or prestige, or it might be under threat of a penalty for refusing the duty:

[T₄] ‘It’s for this reason’, I said, ‘that good people don’t want to take up office for the sake of money or honour. And clearly they don’t want to be called mercenary for governing in return for monetary rewards, nor do they want to steal any monetary gains secretly from their privileged position. Nor will they rule for the sake of honour, for they are not honour-seekers.

‘So it has to be that there is some punishment for them. That’s the only way they will willingly take office. ... But the greatest punishment is to be governed by someone worse, if one is unwilling to take office. That, I reckon, is what makes the most suitable people take up office, when they do.’ (Plato, *Republic* 347b6–c7)

Here Socrates implies that one needs a self-interested reason to do something that is good. He appears to assume that no one is motivated by achieving the good end as such, which is odd, given how often he takes the goal-directedness of crafts as an analogy for understanding the virtues. Nevertheless, his argument works as an *ad hominem* point against Thrasymachus, to show that ruling is not itself a practice directed at the agent’s own benefit. We might also

have expected him to say that money-making is not really a craft or profession in the proper sense, because it does not aim at an end that has value in itself.

VI

Socrates and Adeimantus: The Rewards for the Guardians. Towards the end of *Republic* Book III, Socrates (describing his imaginary ideal city) insists that the Guardians and public servants must be maintained at state expense and have no access to any private property.

[T5] First, private property: none of them should own anything of their own, except what is unavoidable. Second, no house or storeroom or anything like that should be provided for any of them that isn't a place that anyone can go into at will. Third, the rations, such as would be needed by sober and dedicated men trained for war: these—sufficient for a year, with no surplus or shortfall—should be provided out of a tax levy on the rest of the citizens, in return for the protection that the Guardians provide; they'll live a communal life like soldiers, eating together in the refectory. (Plato, *Republic* 416d4–e4)

As yet, Socrates has not distinguished between defence guardians and the rulers: that will come later when he shows that 'philosophers must be kings'. But even here, he is already providing safeguards against corruption by removing the Guardians generally from any contact with money. He continues as follows:

[T6] And we'll advise them that they have from the gods all the divine gold and silver that they need, permanently in their own souls, and they have no additional need of the human kind—indeed it is offensive for them to defile the possession of that gold with an admixture of possession of the mortal kind, because many unholy things result from the currency of *hoi polloi*, but the gold that they do have is not debased. (Plato, *Republic* 416e4–417a1)

This metaphor of the *gold and silver in the soul* is not trivial. Ordinary gold and silver are not the real riches, Socrates suggests. In fact, money destroys some of the most important things, such as trust, honesty and integrity. These things are not for sale. The risk,

as Socrates indicates, is that those who were to be Guardians might instead become oppressors, as if we reared dogs to protect our sheep but taught them to attack the sheep like wolves (416a2–7). To avoid this, Socrates says, they are to have no private possessions at all:

[17] ‘[I]f the Guardians acquire private land, houses and money, they’ll become managers and farmers instead of guardians, hostile dictators instead of allies of the people. They’ll live their whole life hating and being hated, plotting and targeted by plotters, far more afraid of the enemies at home than of the enemies abroad, and running themselves and the whole city to the verge of ruin immediately.’ (Plato, *Republic* 417a6–b6)

Adeimantus’ response to this provision anticipates Aristotle’s response (above, 13). In 18 he protests that it is unfair that while ordinary working folk can give dinner parties and enjoy life, the rulers cannot:

[18] Responding to this, Adeimantus said, ‘What defence will you have if someone says you’re not making these men very happy? It’s really their city! But they get to reap nothing good from it, unlike the others who own farms and build big beautiful houses, and buy fancy furniture for them, and offer their own privately funded sacrifices to the gods, and welcome guests into their homes, and indeed all the things you just said, having loads of gold and silver possessions and all the things that are considered to be what makes you a lucky person.’ (Plato, *Republic* 419a1–420a1)

He considers it unfair for the city’s rulers to have fewer benefits than their subjects, since ‘it’s their city’, which he thinks should mean that they enjoy the proceeds—as though running a city was like running a company. The unfairness is his first worry. He also thinks that the Guardians are missing out on good things, such as farmland, a nice house, fancy furnishings, private religious sacrifices, entertaining guests, some family silver, and so on. He thinks these are essential for a good life and that the Guardians are being treated like low-status policemen.

Socrates seems at first to concede Adeimantus’ point (420a3–8). Yes, they are missing out on those things, and a whole lot more besides. He adds that they can’t go on foreign holidays, or pay for

courtesans. They have no money to spend on a whole raft of things, besides the ones Adeimantus had listed. But Socrates is only helping Adeimantus to make his case, not endorsing it. Indeed, these Guardians will have *none of those things*. That is the proposal.

Socrates' defence of his proposal comes next, in three stages. First, he comments that it would cause no surprise should we find, eventually, that these arrangements would make these the happiest people there are (420b3–5). This first answer seems to me to be the right one, and is perhaps what Plato particularly wants us to understand. We shall find reason to endorse this view later in the *Republic*.¹⁸ But instead of explaining that now, Socrates takes a different tack. Instead of challenging Adeimantus' assumption that the Guardians are deprived, he tries to justify that deprivation by appealing to the wider good of the community (420b5–421c5). This argument has two parts.

In the first, Socrates identifies disadvantages, were you to give the rulers privileges of the kind Adeimantus had imagined. If the Guardians were mired in corruption or seeking material gain for themselves, that would undermine their role as Guardians within the constitution. The point was not to make one group especially happy at the cost of destroying the whole. This argument implies that the Guardians are indeed making a sacrifice—that they might not be as happy in this scenario as they would be in a scenario where they had private property—but this misery on the part of one group is required to save the community as a whole (420b5–c3). Socrates is suggesting that 'running a successful and perfect city' and 'having private wealth while doing so' are incompatible. There is no possible world in which they can co-exist. In making this point he also gives a forward reference to his plan to consider what goes wrong in cities that do give their rulers wealth and privileges. This refers forward to the treatment of debased constitutions in *Republic* Book VIII.

The second part of Socrates' argument for distributing rewards and happiness holistically, rather than to one class alone, invokes a comparison with a work of art, in this case a statue (420c). The artist aims to produce a work that is beautiful as a whole, with each part painted in the right colour. Although the eyes are (*ex hypothesi*) the best part of the body, and hence of the statue, it does not follow

¹⁸ see §VII.

that they deserve purple paint—purple here symbolizing wealth and luxury—which would make them hideous instead of beautiful. Here the holistic response is couched in aesthetic terms: to create the finest, most elegant constitution, the rulers must not get all the purple.

Finally, Socrates generalizes this point to others besides the rulers. Using purple paint (that is, a luxurious, leisured lifestyle) for farmers or any other group in the city would also spoil the whole, because the state needs farmers, and indeed every group, to do their work (420e1–421a3). Unequal or unjustified rewards undermine that balance, since the city is founded on the idea of fair and fitting division of labour.

These answers about fair distribution of labour and reward sit well with the practical side of Socrates' original project, to create a complex society that is a scaled-up version of the simple mutual-support community originally described in Book II. But Adeimantus' complaint that the rulers are missing out on valuable luxuries and delicacies echoes Glaucon's original complaint about the lack of luxuries in that simple city, that such a rustic life is fit only for pigs (372c–d).

It is not until later in the *Republic*, when Plato has progressed to thinking about the gold class—who are philosophers, not soldiers—that we can see that no monetary rewards or private property would ever be relevant or desirable for the philosopher rulers in the Callipolis, since their desire is oriented to something else altogether.

VII

Socrates and Glaucon: Why Go Back into the Cave? In Book VII of the *Republic*, things are both similar and different. In effect Adeimantus' question in Book IV, about whether it was fair for the rulers to be penniless, is now reformulated in the new values of the completed city. Now what motivates the rulers is not money and entertainment, but the intellectual life. And now Adeimantus is concerned that denying them access to that is a kind of injustice:¹⁹

¹⁹ Socrates complains that 'nowadays' philosophers get away with remaining in the ivory tower, and this needs to be stopped. It is unclear what examples from the time of Socrates could be intended, so perhaps it is self-referential on Plato's part.

[T9] ‘Then we’ll be doing them an injustice,’ he said. ‘We’ll be making them live a worse life when they could have had a better one.’ (Plato, *Republic* 519d4–7)

In response, Socrates falls back again on the holistic argument. His aim was not to make *one* class happy but to make the whole city work well, which is possible only if people contribute their respective benefits to the community (519e–520a). This appeals to the same utilitarian calculus as his response to Adeimantus about private property (§VI above). We also find a rather strange reference to the ‘law’ (or custom, *nomos*) having engendered these philosophers for a purpose, *in order that they should be useful* to the city (519e1–520a4).

Many have found this justification for forcing the philosophers back into the cave unsatisfying.²⁰ I shall return to that issue in §VIII. First let us explore the parallel between this puzzle, about depriving the rulers of intellectual rewards, and the earlier puzzle about depriving them of material rewards (§VI above). It reflects a corresponding progression across Plato’s *Republic*, from the assumption in Book IV that private property was a desirable good, to the realization in Book VII that an immaterial good, philosophical enquiry, is the most desirable good. Money and private property are by now irrelevant: the philosopher rulers have no interest in that. What they now resent is losing their opportunity to engage in pure thought. So between Book IV and Book VII Plato has transformed the value system, so that what earlier looked like a deprivation is plausibly ‘what they most desired’, as Socrates had initially suggested it might be (420b3–5). We no longer need a justification for depriving the rulers of money or private property, since those are not commodities that they desire. And because we have by now re-evaluated the norms of social status and rewards, even Glaucon, who once thought it important to add furniture and finery to the bare necessities in the city of pigs, is now protesting that the philosophers deserve more time to do philosophy.

²⁰ For the puzzle concerning justice and self-interest, and references to some existing literature, see Kraut (1999, p. 236 n. 2). For the idea that Plato has two conflicting ideals, see Irwin (1977, pp. 236–7, 242–3), and Irwin’s later treatment of this issue in Irwin (1995, pp. 313–17), which aims to extract a degree of other-regarding action on the basis of a perception that justice is, ultimately, also in the agent’s own interests. See also Reeve (1988, pp. 201–3).

In founding his city on the hypothesis that pure knowledge is the highest human goal, superior to all other values, Socrates has downgraded mere commodities and possessions to a purely instrumental role. He has set knowledge as the new gold, and made physical prowess and fitness a fine, but lesser, achievement, signified by silver. In a society where knowledge has the highest absolute value, it follows that one would be happy to exchange other things of value for what is of supreme value. So whereas it had seemed that lacking the money to do something else left the rulers deprived of things that others would hold dear, once we recognize that the pursuit of wisdom is preferable, and is obtained without need for money, there is no further reason to want money.

VIII

But Did Socrates Lose His Way at this Point? By this stage in the *Republic*, we have come to see that to recognize a real reward, or a real deprivation, we need to know what is truly worth having. We now see that lacking money or private possessions, but possessing the thing that does matter, is no hardship; so we have returned, in effect, to the second part of Socrates' response to Thrasymachus in *Republic* Book I.²¹ There (τ_4), Socrates had observed that no monetary rewards or honours could incentivize good people to rule. Instead, the motivation would need to be a threat of punishment. Now we find that the rulers in Callipolis have a further incentive for *not* ruling, namely, the desire to stay in the ivory tower.

Once again, disappointingly perhaps, Plato ignores the possibility that professionals can be internally motivated by the desire to achieve a good outcome for its own sake, especially when exercising a profession or craft, such that creating a political community that approximates perfection is an ambition our rulers would embrace. Certainly, Thrasymachus' idea that people would want to rule for the sake of self-interest has been debunked. But so also has the idea that rewards such as wages or honour would make the task worthwhile for them, as Socrates already noticed in τ_4 .

It is in this circumstance that we find Socrates scrabbling around in search of a notion of duty or reciprocal obligations to explain why

²¹ see §v.

the philosopher might be justly required to contribute (at some cost to themselves) to the success of the community. Yet this response seems to endorse Glaucon's idea that the obligation is a bad thing, something one would not rationally choose. Socrates and Glaucon turn to a vocabulary of compulsion, to notions of justice and obligation because, it seems, they cannot make the decision explicable as a free choice (520a–e).²² But surely if the task is a good thing to do and results in good outcomes for all involved, that would itself be a sound reason to choose it, and would be seen as such by those who know what is good.²³

IX

Rediscovering the Value of What Is 'Mine'. A second challenge to Plato can also be mounted. Although he builds his ideal society in the *Republic* on the basis that knowledge and wisdom are the currency of highest value, and that the secret of a truly just and happy society is securing wise rulers, our reflections in §§III and IV on situations where all say 'mine' of the same commitment suggest that the prize of ultimate value, and the secret of a happy society, might not in fact be wisdom, but this kind of belonging. For in Plato's republic, wisdom is the exclusive possession of the philosophers, and not something about which all can say 'mine', except perhaps in some attenuated sense. Indeed the philosopher's desire to remain outside the cave and have more time contemplating the forms seems to be a case of enjoying by oneself what is not also a joy to others, of keeping for 'mine' what is mine alone. By contrast, the things about which we typically say 'mine' in unison, as Socrates recommends in TI, are not those personal experiences, but the communal commitments and enthusiasms that generate other-regarding impulses of giving and self-giving—the sense that others are members of our own family, that their concerns are our concerns, that we have a team

²² As Schofield (2006, pp. 306–7) notes, Plato seems to invoke an alien (conventional) notion of justice, as paying back what you owe, and a motif of civic obligation to the city that educated you, to prompt the philosophers to do their duty. The argument is reminiscent (as Schofield notes) of the case made by the 'Laws of Athens' in Plato's *Crito*. I argue elsewhere (Rowett forthcoming) that Plato does not approve of the arguments presented there by the 'laws'.

²³ See Irwin (1995, pp. 299–300) for explorations in this area, and the connection with Thrasymachus.

identity that commands our love and self-sacrificial devotion. When Socrates seeks ways of generating those kinds of feelings among the citizens (in, for example, the Noble Lie and the myth of the metals—projects to ensure that each citizen, despite their radical differences in abilities and tasks, feels towards all their fellow citizens as one feels towards one's own family), he is acknowledging that what most matters to the city is that kind of love, trust and belonging whereby they all say 'mine' unanimously. That suggests to me that the pearl of great price is really not the wisdom that is sought exclusively by the philosophers, nor the silver or bronze that appeals to those in other classes, but those priceless goods like trust, love, honesty, sincerity and devotion, which cannot be bought or sold, and which are the real glue in a successful society. If economics ignores those things, it struggles to explain the choices made by rational individuals who value those commitments more than property or wealth. And when Socrates forgets that attitude, which he had carefully instilled into his ideal citizens, he struggles to explain why the rulers would willingly make the sacrifice and head back into the cave.

The better explanation would surely have been that the philosophers see those prisoners in the cave as their brothers and sisters. They see their brothers and sisters struggling and in ignorance, and for each such situation of misery, each of the philosophers will say 'mine' in unison, and seek to give what they can to ameliorate the situation, rejoicing together at what goes well and grieving together as one over what does not go well for them all.

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