HOBBES AND PLATO ON THE MOTIVATION TO BE JUST

by

GREGORY A. McBRAYER

(Under the Direction of Eugene F. Miller)

ABSTRACT

This thesis will treat Plato's and Hobbes' views on justice, paying particular attention to the reasons that each thinker gives for choosing the just life. For Hobbes, fear is the ultimate motivation for our desire to act justly. Plato, by contrast, anchors our quest for justice in the desire for excellence in the city and in the human soul. Hobbes, in the *Leviathan*, answers an attack on justice made by the "fool," and Plato, in the *Republic*, has Glaucon make the case against the just life. I intend to judge Plato and Hobbes partly by how successfully they respond to their respective challengers. This will require that we give attention to the deeper question of how the two philosophers define justice and what differences may be present in their respective definitions. I will ultimately argue that Plato provides a better argument as to why we should choose the just life.

INDEX WORDS: Plato, Hobbes, The "fool", Justice, Nature, political philosophy.

HOBBES AND PLATO ON THE MOTIVTION TO BE JUST

by

GREGORY A. McBRAYER

B.A., Emory University, 2001

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2004

HOBBES AND PLATO ON THE MOTIVTION TO BE JUST

by

GREGORY A. McBRAYER

Major Professor:	Eugene F. Miller
Committee:	Charles L. Platter Alexander H. Kaufman

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank especially Dr. Eugene Miller. Dr. Miller has worked extremely hard to help me through every step of this project. Dr. Miller has provided extensive revisions and has always offered thoughtful comments. He spent a great deal of time working with me on this thesis, and I am very grateful. I would like additionally to thank my other committee members, Dr. Kaufman and Dr. Platter, who have helped me with my studies of Hobbes and Plato, respectively. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Robert C. Bartlett at Emory University for his part in my turn toward the study of political philosophy.

Lastly, many friends and loved ones have supported me at many stages along the way; there are too many to mention. I will limit myself to thanking Pat, Bev, Eunice, and Stephanie.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will treat Plato and Hobbes and their respective views on justice. Hobbes intended to improve upon, or replace, the classical understanding of justice, and this thesis will ask whether his effort was successful. Not only will I pay attention to each philosopher's account of justice, but I will also pay attention to how each explains our attachment to justice. For Hobbes, fear is the motivation for our desire to act justly; Hobbes thought that fear was a solid foundation upon which to build his entire political project. Plato, by contrast, anchored the quest for justice not in the passions, but in the desire for the right ordering of the city and the human soul. In attempting to decide which thinker better understands our motivation to be just, I will consider the adequacy of their responses to attacks on justice. Both writers frame an attack on justice, ascribe it to a character whom they invent, and then proceed to answer it. Hobbes' reply to the attack on justice by the "fool" appears in Chapter 15 of his *Leviathan*, and Socrates' response to an attack by Glaucon and others takes up the bulk of the *Republic*. Whatever differences there might be in the viewpoints that Hobbes and Socrates oppose, they have this much in common: both argue that there is greater incentive to be unjust than to be just. I intend to judge Plato and Hobbes at least in part by how successfully they respond to their respective challengers. This will require that we give attention to the deeper question of how the two philosophers define justice and what differences are present in their respective definitions.

Why Prefer the Just Life?

Contemporary political thinkers fail to pay due attention to the motivation for just action. John Rawls' theory of justice, which is certainly the dominant influence in American political thought today, presumes that the question of the best regime is settled and that a liberal democratic regime is the answer. It mandates that justice requires some form of egalitarianism; we just have to figure out which form is the right one. But John Rawls and those who follow the path he has cleared view justice largely in terms of political institutions. Very little attention is paid to justice at the individual level. The question "Why should I be just?" is seldom explored. Rawlsian thought takes it as a given that a person ought to be just. Rawls begins by assuming that we want to be just and then proceeds to determine what justice would look like for people who share this desire. Rawls relies on individuals' intuitions; he asserts that we all want to be just. This is not to say that Rawls pays no attention to the motivation to be just. Rather, he fails to give it the proper amount of attention. He asserts that we all have a capacity for a sense of justice. We all have a reasonable moral psychology, with "a readiness to propose and abide by fair terms of cooperation."[1] We would all be willing to act justly provided others do so as well.

Rawls' claims are more asserted than proven. He does not take seriously the strength of the unjust argument. He presumes that justice is in no need of a defense. To point to but one flaw with this assumption, let us examine one aspect of his "original position." The "original position" is a device used by Rawls as a context for choosing a theory of justice. In this context, persons are under a veil of ignorance; they are not allowed to have any knowledge of their position in life. Rawls uses the device of the "original position" to insure impartiality. Rawls holds that self-interested persons in the "original position" would establish the sort of society he

[1] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*: Lecture II § 7.

envisions out of a fear of being the least advantaged member of that society. In other words, Rawls relies on perfect self interest to produce an agreement that his sort of society is just. But what about the argument, which Plato and Hobbes take up, that self-interest dictates an embrace of injustice? Rawls does not address the question of motivation to abide by just rules once the veil is lifted. He would have to show that complying with the demands of justice is perfectly in accord with the demands of self-interest, and this is not immediately clear. If justice and interest do not demand the same things, how does the friend of justice check selfish desires in actual society? Why, for example, would the strong be willing to help the weak rather than exploiting them? Instead of showing the harmony of interest and justice, Rawls relies on our moral intuition. He evades the question of what motivates individuals to forsake their own interest for the sake of others. Rawls relies on self-interest as the motivating factor in his hypothetical states of nature, but then fails to consider the complexities of self-interest and how they would play out in actual society. The question of motivation does not seem to be pertinent in Rawls; his theoretical interests lie elsewhere. Rawls addresses the question of what form of government would be just, but pays little attention to why the individual should be just, should self-interest dictate otherwise.

Whereas Rawls simply assumes that justice is good for the individual, earlier philosophers had undertaken to show why this is the case by confronting forthrightly the case for injustice. The question of the best regime is closely connected to justice, but so is the question: "How ought I to live?" Asking this question presupposes that one does not yet know whether the virtuous or just life should be chosen. Both the just and the unjust life are possibilities, and a substantial case can be made for each side of this debate. In the *Republic*, for example, Plato acknowledges that justice is problematic by having his Socrates defend justice from the attacks

of Socrates' interlocutors, most notably Thrasymachus and the brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus. These interlocutors assert the superiority of injustice to justice, arguing that it is rational to act unjustly, provided, of course, that one can get away with it.[2] By having Socrates defend justice as good for its own sake, Plato acknowledges the strength of the unjust speech; in fact, he has Socrates claim twice that he is unable to defend justice from his interlocutors' attacks. In other words, Plato acknowledges that justice is problematic and difficult to defend.

Hobbes and Plato on the Motivation to Justice

In the present study, I will first turn to Thomas Hobbes. My primary reason for examining Hobbes is philosophical, but his influence on the development of modern liberalism's account of justice is another reason to examine his thought carefully.[3] If we are the children of modern liberalism, it behooves us to understand those thinkers who have shaped the way we think about politics, and we must try to understand both the classical position and Hobbes' critique of it. To understand Hobbes, we must understand the thought that he saw to be defective and the change he hoped to effect. In other words, Hobbes' account of politics was set forth in opposition to the classical way of thinking about politics. While Hobbes was perhaps not first to break with the ancients, he is certainly representative of a modern effort to supplant classical political philosophy. Hobbes' embrace of this modern project is evidenced by his claim that civil or political philosophy is no older than his book *De Cive*.[4] Hobbes must have known, however, "that the great honor which he claimed for himself was awarded, by almost universal consent, to Socrates."[5] If we are to take this claim seriously and get to its truth, we must contrast Hobbes' thought with that of Socrates. The enormity of Hobbes' claim justifies such a comparison.

[2] Cf. Story of Gyges' ring, *Republic*: 359c-361d. Hereafter cited as *R.*
[3] Strauss and Cropsey, 401.
[4] Hobbes, 2 *English Works*, supra note 109, at 8.
[5] *Natural Right and History*, 166.

Discovering what justice is for each of these thinkers and why one should prefer it to injustice will be crucial to this task.

As noted above, both Hobbes and Plato address the claim that the unjust life is better by nature than the just life. Both Glaucon, in Plato's *Republic*, and the "fool", in Chapter XV of the *Leviathan*, attack justice as something that rests merely on opinion or convention. Comparing their different responses to this challenge will help us to understand the different accounts of justice given by Hobbes and Plato. Plato's Glaucon argues—and Hobbes' "fool" implies—that people naturally prefer to be unjust and only agree to be just as a convention. Better to be unjust, they argue, and get away with it, than to be just. While Rawls argues that we are guided by a moral sense, Glaucon points to a more fundamental desire: all would be unjust, if only they could get away with it. Glaucon uses the myth of the Ring of Gyges to illustrate his point. Because a ring made him invisible, Gyges was able to get away with all sorts of injustices. Glaucon's point is that everyone—just and unjust alike—would commit great acts of injustice if they possessed this ring, because all naturally pursue their own advantage. If we are willing to take Glaucon's argument seriously, as Plato certainly did, the motivation to act justly requires a defense. For Glaucon, the rationale for acting unjustly rests on the belief that justice is merely conforming to a convention that runs contrary to our true nature. If justice is not good by nature for human beings, then Glaucon wants nothing to do with it. This is important for today's students of political philosophy, because contemporary conceptions of justice look remarkably conventional in character. Do those conceptions adequately answer the case for injustice?

In Chapter 15 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes addresses an attack on justice put forth by someone whom he calls the "fool". Hobbes has just finished laying down his third law of nature regarding justice, and he has defined justice as the keeping of covenants. His "fool" says in his heart, and

sometimes with his tongue, that we should keep or break covenants according to our benefit. In other words, the "fool" implies that it is sometimes rational to act unjustly. In my view, the position of the "fool" stands in stark contrast with Hobbes' own position, which holds that reason requires us *never* to act unjustly.

Currently in the literature on Hobbes, there is some debate concerning his actual teaching about justice. Some have argued that Hobbes' reply to the "fool" is logically flawed, and that the weakness of his response can be seen as his silent nod of agreement with the "fool". Kinch Hoekstra, for example, has taken up the question of whether Hobbes might think that it is sometimes reasonable to commit injustice. Hoekstra reasons that Hobbes' reply to the "fool" in Chapter 15 is only a reply to an explicit "fool"; that is, Hobbes' reply is only to a "fool" who openly declares his unjust actions. With respect to the silent "fool", argues Hoekstra, Hobbes is silent. The foolishness with respect to committing injustice lies not in the actual deed, but in making the deed known. The explicit "fool" is imprudent, and Hoekstra likens him to Thrasymachus. The charge against Thrasymachus is that if he is correct, he should keep quiet: Better to let others believe in justice in order to fleece them. Peter Hayes takes issue with Hoekstra's reading of Hobbes.[6] Hobbes is not simply responding to the explicit "fool", because the explicit "fool", Hayes argues, does not even warrant a reply. "The only fool worth arguing against," Hayes claims, "is the silent one."[7] To make this point clearer, Hayes draws an analogy from the *Republic*:

> Hoekstra suggests that Hobbes's explicit fool is somewhat like Thrasymachus. If, as has been argued here, the fool is silent, a better analogy is with Glaucon's Gyges. Plato's

[6] Hayes, Peter. "Hobbes's Silent Fool: A Response to Hoekstra," *Political Theory*, Vol. 27 No. 2, April 1999. Hereafter referred to as Hayes.
[7] Hayes, 225.

> response to the secret injustice that allowed Gyges to violently accede to the throne takes up the greater part of *The Republic*. If Hobbes's response to the fool is similarly interpreted as taking up a large part of *Leviathan*, rather than a few pages of a single chapter, then it might be possible to take him seriously.[8]

Following Hayes' suggestions, I will ask whether Hobbes' overall treatment of justice is a reply to the "fool". I intend to argue, in agreement with Hayes, that Hobbes does reply to the "fool"—especially the silent "fool". In other words, Hobbes thinks it is *never* reasonable to commit injustice. According to Hoekstra, Hayes fails adequately to support his interpretation of Hobbes:

> Hayes does not furnish any argument that Hobbes believes it is always unreasonable to violate an agreement, even when there is low risk of detection, low magnitude of punishment if detected, and high gain if not detected; nor does he address the evidence I adduce for Hobbes's disavowal of this view.[9]

I want to take up the task that Hayes may have failed to complete. In so doing, I plan to show that Hobbes was trying to make a strong argument against any "fool"—silent or otherwise—who prefers the unjust life, and that he succeeds to a certain degree. In looking to the *Leviathan* for responses to the "fool", I intend to show why Hoekstra's argument is unconvincing.

If Hoekstra's account were correct, then justice could not be a law of nature in any final sense. One could rationally commit injustice, but one should keep quiet about it. Hoekstra seems to imply that for Hobbes, justice is good only by convention, i.e., he attributes to Hobbes a conventional position. By this account, Hobbes holds a view of justice similar to the one advocated by Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic*, and by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book

[8] Hayes, 229.
[9] Hoekstra, 1999, p. 232.

II. Hobbes would thus be rejecting the classical view that justice is something that is good by nature.

I shall argue that Hoekstra's account of Hobbes is inaccurate, because it fails to recognize the strength of Hobbes' reply to the "fool" in Chapter 15 of the *Leviathan.* In my view, Hobbes' broad aim is to search out middle ground between Plato's way of grounding justice in nature and a purely conventional account. According to Hobbes, Plato's political philosophy was more like a dream than a science, especially because it was useless for demonstrating to sovereigns how to govern properly.[10] Plato's political philosophy was unrealistic, partly because of its way of understanding justice, and therefore some alternative understanding of justice is required.

At the same time, Hobbes was unwilling to embrace a conventional account of justice, because it is difficult, on a purely conventional basis, to respond to the question "Why should I be just?" In my view, Hobbes recognized that a strictly conventional way of understanding justice would be insufficient to motivate men to be just. Contrary to some Hobbes scholars, I will argue that Hobbes' response to the "fool" is a serious and, given his premises, a quite logical one.

Even though Hobbes tries to avoid in this manner the difficulties of a strict conventionalism, I think there is still reason to doubt Hobbes' account of justice. In order to identify the weaknesses in his account, I will turn to the *Republic* of Plato. Let us remember that both Hoekstra and Hayes, in their writings on Hobbes, point to similarities between Hobbes' Fool and Socrates' interlocutors in the *Republic*. Hobbes, too, points indirectly to Socrates by claiming himself to be the founder of political science. My thesis will explore more fully the comparison between Hobbes' "fool" and Socrates' interlocutors in the *Republic*. In so doing, I

[10] *Leviathan*: XLVI, 11; XXXI, 41. Ed. Edwin Curley. Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis: 1994. Hereafter cited as *L*.

first must arrive at a proper understanding of Hobbes' reply to the "fool". Also, I propose to show that Hobbes' defense of justice is lacking in that it does not rest on an adequate understanding of nature. In sum, I intend to make clear both Hobbes' failings, and the reasons why the Platonic account of our motivation to be just is superior.

The Structure of this Thesis

In order to understand Hobbes' account of justice, we must first understand the system of which it is a part. This means that we must understand the relevant parts of Hobbes' account of human nature and of man's natural condition. Chapter 2, "Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Man," will be devoted to this task. According to Hobbes, man's natural condition, or the "state of nature," is a perpetual war of each man with every other man, and justice cannot exist in such a state. We must start where Hobbes starts—from this state of injustice. Hobbes makes it clear that his depiction of the natural condition of man is an inference from the human passions. Thus, we must look to Hobbes' psychology and ask: What drives man? It will turn out that fear is the paramount motive that leads to the establishment of sovereignty and justice. Our fear of violent death leads us to establish the commonwealth. We establish this artifice through agreement or convention. Justice consists in keeping one's agreements or honoring one's covenants. Furthermore, it does not appear that justice exists independent of these agreements. It would appear, thus far, that Hobbes' account of politics is in line with conventionalism.

In Chapter 3, Justice as a Law of Nature, I will focus on Chapter 15 of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes addresses an attack on justice put forth by his "fool." I will lay out Hobbes' definition of justice and then consider the "fool's" attack on that definition. Finally, I will turn to Hobbes' reply to the "fool's" attack. Here, I will argue that Hobbes' reply to the "fool" provides a logically coherent account of justice that tries to avoid conventionalism, carving out a middle

ground between nature, as the ancients understood it, and convention. Hobbes intends, in some manner, to improve upon conventionalism. In so doing, he provides a logically valid response to the "fool". Hobbes' account is logically valid, given his own premises, but I intend to show that Hobbes' account contains shortcomings despite the formal coherence of his arguments. Since Hobbes intended his project as a replacement for classical political philosophy, it is appropriate that we turn to the classics in order better to understand the account of justice that he wanted to overturn.

In the pre-modern or classical tradition, one finds several varieties of the argument that justice is grounded in nature. I will devote Chapter 4, "Plato on the Goodness of Justice," to an examination of Plato's treatment of justice in the *Republic*. I do so in the belief that it provides not only the sharpest contrast with Hobbes, but also the most plausible alternative account. In this chapter, I will pay particular attention to the challenge issued by the brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II. Ultimately, I intend to judge Socrates by how well he responds to the young men's challenge. In the course of this inquiry, I will examine the definitions of justice by Socrates' interlocutors. Indeed, the first definition of justice given in the *Republic*, by Cephalus, is remarkably akin to Hobbes' definition. After examining the interlocutors' definitions, I will turn to the definition of justice that Socrates himself provides in Book IV and then go on to show why, in Socrates' view, justice is according to nature and not simply a convention. The question "Is the just or unjust life better by nature for a human being?" leads Socrates to the question "What is the best life for a human being by nature?" Unavoidably, we must explore Socrates' account of the good in order better to understand his answer to this question. By exploring Plato's treatment of these topics, we should be in a position to understand his overall argument about justice in the *Republic*.

In my concluding chapter, I will address the question of whether Plato or Hobbes provides the most compelling answer to the conventionalist account of justice that both philosophers opposed. While Hobbes' effort to provide a natural grounding for justice is well worth our attention, it does not, in my view, provide a satisfactory account of the best way of life for a human being. Plato, in contrast, paints a picture of what the good life is, in the person of Socrates. The philosophic way of life is the best life, and any other sort of individual is inferior. This is a bold statement, and harsh for those of us who do not claim to be philosophers. Plato shows, better than Hobbes, how the good life is related to the philosophic life.

CHAPTER 2

HOBBES ON THE NATURAL CONDITION OF MAN

Hobbes considers the question of justice in several places, most notably his *Leviathan*. Here as elsewhere, Hobbes takes his bearings from nature, and in this respect he follows the traditional works of political philosophy that preceded him. The commonwealth, however, is not part of nature. The commonwealth, and hence all politics, is artificial. By holding that politics involves an escape from man's simply natural condition, Hobbes rejects the view, held particularly by the Aristotelian tradition, that man is by nature political. In order better to understand the commonwealth, Hobbes thought it was necessary to explore its artificer, man. How would man appear naturally, Hobbes asks, without the artificial constraints of society? In order to get to man, we must discover man in his "natural condition," i.e., in the state of nature. Since Hobbes deduces man's natural condition from his passions, our study requires that we identify man's chief passions in order to understand both how he lives in his natural state and why he would be compelled to leave it. Moreover, we must examine Hobbes' account of the workings of man's mind and what role he ascribes to reason. Finally, we must consider the circumstances that produce the commonwealth—the means by which it comes into being, its purpose, and what individuals must give up in order to establish it. As we will see, Hobbes' exploration of these questions requires him to lay out a conception of natural right and natural law, and this we must survey. Attention to these matters should prepare the way for our examination, in the next chapter, of Hobbes' treatments of justice.

On Man

According to Hobbes, man lives in society only as a result of convention or artifice. He thus removes the artifices of society in order to show us man as he would exist naturally. From his account of the passions, Hobbes draws the inference that the state of nature is necessarily a state of war. The passions drive us into a war of all against all, and reason authorizes this course of action so long as no commonwealth exists. To understand man's actions, therefore, we must investigate his thinking and reasoning as well as his passions.

Hobbes begins his inquiry into man by describing the workings of the human mind, beginning with sensation and thinking. Sensation supplies the mind with those images on which the modes of imagination, including memory and thinking, depend. Imagination may be guided or unguided, depending on whether or not it is regulated by desire. When desire guides imagination, it may either seek the causes of a given effect or else imagine all of the effects that can be produced from a given cause. All of our thinking about the past and future is to be explained this way. Prudence, for example, is one's skill, based on past experience, in anticipating what consequences will follow from a particular event.

Thinking and acting are closely connected, since the imagination produces what Hobbes call "voluntary motion." Of man's bodily motion there are two types: vital and voluntary. The vital motions are those things like breathing and the circulation of the blood, and here imagination plays no part. Voluntary motions, however, take place as first fancied in our minds. All voluntary actions aim at satisfying the passions now or in the future. Hobbes boils all of man's passions down to two: appetite, which moves us toward an object, and aversion, which moves us away from it. All of the specific passions can be grouped under these two categories.

In the mental operations described thus far, man is very similar to beast. Both rather mechanistically follow their passions in accordance with imagination. Indeed, insofar as sensation and thinking are concerned, the human mind operates pretty much the same way as that of the beasts. Man's superiority lies in his capacity for speech and reason:

> For besides sense, and thoughts, and the train of thoughts, the mind of man has no other Motion, though by the help of speech and method the same faculties may be improved to such a height as to distinguish men from all other living creatures.[11]

Speech, then, is what separates man from beasts. Speech supplies the mind with general names or concepts, and reasoning is the capacity to draw inferences or "consequences" from them. Reasoning is nothing more than the proper reckoning of the consequences. Man is more efficient in his methods of satisfying his passion than other living creature, thanks to the constructions of speech and reasoning. Reason performs an instrumental task; the real impetus pushing man is his passions. Just as our ability to think prudentially about experience serves our passions, so too does our capacity to draw "consequences" from general names or concepts. Human reasoning, in its most highly developed form, is "science" or "philosophy," and the model for all science is geometry.

<u>The Natural Condition</u>

In the absence of a commonwealth, individuals left simply to follow their passions end up in a condition of war—a war that pits "every man, against every man." This at least is what Hobbes argues in Chapter 13 of *Leviathan,* which is entitled: "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery." Hobbes makes it clear that his account of man's natural condition is an "inference" from his description, in preceding chapters, of the

[11] *L*: III, 11.

human passions. Hobbes is engaging in what he calls "science." Using reason, he is drawing inferences or "consequences" that he thinks to be as certain as any geometrical proof.

Hobbes identifies three principal causes of war in the state of nature: competition, diffidence (or distrust), and glory. By looking at these causes, we can identify the main passions that push individuals necessarily into war when there is no commonwealth to restrain them. Let us begin, as Hobbes does, with competition. If the individuals are to compete, they must have a motive as well as a reasonable hope of success. Hope arises from equality—this is the key point of the opening paragraphs of Chapter 13. To be sure, some men are stronger than others, but as Hobbes observes, even "the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself." [12] In fact, men are even more equal in their minds than in their bodies, the proof of which is that each one is more of less content with his share of wit. Fear of death and desire for gain are the passions that fuel competition. We compete in the first instance for those things that we need now to stay alive. Hobbes makes it clear, however, that our desires extend not merely to what satisfies our immediate needs, but to everything that might serve as insurance against the satisfaction of future needs. Since we cannot predict the extent of our future needs, the reasonable thing to do is acquire anything we can that might have a future use. Things of this sort, e.g., knowledge, friends, and money, Hobbes describes by the general term, "power." As he explains, "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."[13] Power, according to Hobbes, is a man's present ability to satisfy his future desires. In sum, individuals in the state of nature, thinking of themselves as roughly equal to each other, enter into competition with each other for those things that can satisfy both

[12] *L*: XIII, 1.
[13] *L*: XI, 2.

immediate and future desires. When there is nothing beyond each individual's own force to restrain this competition, the inevitable result is a war that endangers each one's life, liberty, and possessions.

In a condition where there is dire shortage and ruthless competition, but with no one to protect them, men are necessarily distrustful of one another. This "diffidence," or distrust, is another cause of violence, since it is perfectly reasonable, under these conditions, for each one, "by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him."[14] Hobbes calls this "anticipation"—what we today would call a preemptive first strike against those whom we distrust. The driving passion here is fear of violent death at the hands of our enemies.

The third cause of war which Hobbes identifies is "Glory." What Hobbes says here must be understood against the background of his earlier discussion of pride. Pride arises from our inclination to place a high esteem on our own worth, relative to that of other persons, and to expect that others will value us as we value ourselves. When one's companions undervalue him by insults or other signs of contempt or disrespect, he "naturally endeavors, as far as he dares," to inflict damage on them. Quite independent of physical needs, injured pride is a very powerful motive to war in the state of nature.

Hobbes anticipates that his inferential reasoning will fail to convince some readers that nature "dissociates" men and renders them "apt to invade, and destroy one another." Such readers will "desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience," and Hobbes is happy to comply. He proceeds to offer four examples from experience to confirm that his theoretical inference from the passions is correct. Hobbes beseeches the one who disagrees, "Let him

[14] *L*: XIII, 4.

therefore consider himself—when taking a journey, he arms himself, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep he locks his doors; when even in his house, he locks his chests…"[15] Anyone who takes these precautions, Hobbes argues, accuses men as much in deed as Hobbes has done in speech. As other examples of how warfare develops in the absence of civil government, Hobbes points to reports of constant warfare among American savages, to the internecine results of civil war, and to the hostility that sovereign nations, who recognize no common superior, show towards each other.

When men live in this state of war, there is always the possibility of death, or, to speak more accurately, of violent death. The state of war is horrible. Men can only live by their own power. Every man is the enemy to every other man. Hobbes tells us that, "In such a condition there is no place for industry, because, the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor building… no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[16] The costs of unrestrained warfare, Hobbes tells us, are great, and the greatest of these costs is death. Man's fear of violent death is his primary inclination to peace. Indeed, to the extent that man is not blinded by pride or superstition, fear of violent death is his strongest passion. The very awfulness of this state of war compels man to seek peace with others. This course of action is dictated, says Hobbes, by the "law of nature," one of which requires justice. To gain peace individuals must, in some measure, give up what Hobbes calls their "right of nature." To understand what Hobbes means by justice and how justice is connected to nature, we must now examine his conceptions of natural right and natural law.

[15] *L*: XIII, 10.
[16] *L*: XIII, 9.

The Right of Nature and the Laws of Nature

Hobbes' conception of natural right is fundamental to his account of man. What Hobbes means by it has been suggested already by his insistence that "anticipation"—the preemptive destruction of anyone deemed untrustworthy and dangerous before that person can strike—is a perfectly reasonable course of action in the state of nature. The right of nature is rooted in man's strong desire for self-preservation. The "right" in question is a kind of "liberty" or freedom, namely, the liberty that each man has to do anything in his power to preserve himself. The point is that nature sets no limits to what one might rightly do to preserve himself. Any means to this end that an individual thinks reasonable are permitted. Of course, nature sets physical limits to what we can do to preserve ourselves, but not normal limits. In principle, all is permitted if it conduces to self-preservation.

The right of nature is a liberty or freedom to do anything in one's power to preserve oneself. The law of nature is an obligation that one has to oneself. This obligation arises when we survey the possible means to self-preservation. The right of nature authorizes us to use any means, but reason obligates us to choose the best means. The law of nature, then, is

> A precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.[17]

All animals are driven by the desire to preserve themselves, but only man can rationally formulate precepts or rules about how best to avoid it.

[17] *L*: XIV, 3.

Let us note that Hobbes' understanding of natural right and natural law differs from the way these concepts were understood by classical political philosophers. The classical tradition had understood "right" not as a liberty—something that we are free to do—but as a substantive virtue or norm. Right, in this sense, encompasses justice. Natural law, as it came to be understood by Aristotelians such as Thomas Aquinas, was tied closely to the idea that there is a natural hierarchy or ordering of the human soul. The natural law arises from man's inclination to do that which satisfies the soul's needs and perfects it. Preserving oneself is one of these natural inclinations, but it lies at the bottom of the hierarchy of human needs. In Hobbes' view, this tradition of political thought was an utter failure, especially insofar as it failed to see the primacy of the passions in determining the ends of action. Reason is not to be understood as the soul's ruler, shaping the passions by its own standards, but as an instrument or servant of the passions, showing them how best to obtain their objectives.

After defining "right of nature" and "law of nature," Hobbes proceeds to enumerate nineteen specific laws of nature. The number isn't crucial, for as Hobbes explains, all laws of nature are implicit in the first one. The first and fundamental law of nature is to seek peace. To show why it is reasonable to seek peace, Hobbes reminds us of the consequences of every man's having a natural right to everything, "even to one another's body."[18] In the state of nature, where everyone is a threat to everyone else, the right of nature leaves each man at liberty to destroy every other man. Thus Hobbes insists that "so long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be) of living out the time, which nature ordinarily alloweth men to live."[19] As we shall see, the second law of nature makes explicit the inconsistency between having peace and permitting everyone to

[18] *L*: XIV, 4.
[19] *L*: XIV, 4

exercise an unlimited right of nature. The point of the first law, however, is that seeking and obtaining peace is the best and most rational means to preserving oneself. The obligation to seek peace implies that the state of nature, and its attendant condition of war, be ended. Nonetheless, the first law of nature recognizes that seeking peace in the state of nature can be dangerous. The peacemaker is in a vulnerable position if other individuals fail to recognize their self-interested obligation to join in the search for peace. Thus Hobbes formulates the first law so that it has two "branches": seek peace, insofar as there is hope of attaining it, but be prepared to use "all helps, and advantages of war."[20] In other words, seeking peace and making war can be equally reasonable as a means to self-preservation, depending on the circumstances and the inclination of others.

The second law of nature follows necessarily from the first. It implies that some sort of covenant is required to make peace—a crucial point that is developed in connection with the third law. The second law states that, "a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself."[21] Why would man be willing to give up this right? Hobbes states that the second law of nature demands the laying down of our natural right because there is no refuge for man until every man does this. Man is willing to trade freedom for security. A contract or covenant, of course, would be the means by which this mutual laying down of rights is executed. Note that the individual lays down his right of nature only to the extent that "himself he shall think it necessary." Later in Chapter 15, Hobbes will make it clear that while a man can agree to live in peace with others and lay down his right to destroy them arbitrarily, he can never surrender his

[20] *L*: XIV, 4.
[21] *L*: XIV, 5.

basic right to defend himself if attacked. As Hobbes puts it, "a covenant not to defend my self from force, by force, is always void." The right of nature is the inviolable right to preserve oneself, and one can surrender it only conditionally, as a means to peace. The basic right of self-defense, along with all the means it requires, is reactivated if one's life is threatened, even by the sovereign ruler of the commonwealth. In Chapter 21, Hobbes will refer to this reserved right of nature as the as "the true Liberty of the Subject." Even a criminal, though justly condemned by the sovereign, has a natural right to defend his life by any means.

Covenants

Hobbes' third law of nature stipulates that man is to honor his contracts. It is important for our purposes to note that this third law of nature is also Hobbes' definition of justice.[22] While justice consists of honoring one's covenants, the failure to do so is injustice. Since Hobbes is meticulous in his usage of particular words, we should pay attention to the difference between a covenant and a contract. Justice involves performing covenants made, and not simply contracts. A covenant is a particular type of contract where one party has already performed his part and is waiting on the other party to make good on his end. Hobbes addresses the question of whether one should follow through with one's covenant in such a situation, and determines that one should do so provided there is no fear of non-performance on the other part.

We are permitted to wonder, therefore, if these laws are obligatory in the state of nature or only after an enforcing power, the sovereign, has been established. Hobbes suggests, in fact, that the performance of justice is not required in the state of nature:

> But because covenants of mutual trust where there is a fear of not performance on either part (as has been said in the former chapter) are invalid, though the original of justice be in the making of covenants, yet injustice actually there can be none till the cause of such

> fear be taken away, which, while men are in the natural condition of war, cannot be done."[23]

In Chapter 13, Hobbes had made this same argument even more strongly. In the state of nature, he writes,

> "Nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there [in the state of nature] no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice."[24]

Hobbes' remarks point clearly to an indispensable requirement for justice: a coercive power. Where there is no coercive power to enforce agreements, there is no justice or injustice.

Men must be compelled to honor their contracts and covenants, for covenants without swords are but words. As Hobbes explains, there are two motives for living up to one's contracts: fear and glory.[25] Glory, or the pride one takes in keeping one's word, is too rarely found in men. Fear must be relied upon as the principle means of enforcing contracts. Here again, we see again the need for a common power or sovereign. The only way for individuals to erect a common power that can protect them from foreign enemies *and each other* "is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or one assembly of men," who is authorized to "bear the person" of each party to the covenant, or to represent him in all things.[26] The sovereign "person", whether one man or an assembly of men, acts in the name of the subjects and on their behalf to keep the peace. Hobbes identifies this singularly powerful "person" as "Leviathan," or the governor of the commonwealth.

---

[22] *L:* XV, 1.
[23] *L:* XV, 3.
[24] *L:* XIII, 13.
[25] *L*: XIV, 31.
[26] *L*: XVII, 13.

Hobbes grounds the need for the Leviathan or commonwealth on man's self interest, as determined by his passions. Avoiding death is man's strongest passion and greatest good, but once our lives are secure, the desire to live comfortably through the acquisition of "power" in its various forms, including wealth, comes to the forefront. As Hobbes observes, the sovereign is obliged by the law of nature, or reason, to use the power entrusted to him to procure "the safety of the people." He goes on to explain that:

> By safety here, is not meant a bare preservation, but also all other contentments of life, which every man by his lawful industry, without danger, or hurt to the commonwealth, shall acquire to himself.[27]

By grounding the commonwealth on the passions—on the way men do behave rather than on the classical virtues—Hobbes expects to make his Leviathan much more useful than the imaginary republics that classical political philosophy put forward.[28] The all-powerful Leviathan is better able than were the classical utopias to secure what men actually want—"safety," in the sense of peace and prosperity—because it is grounded in fear, a much more reliable basis than appeals to duty or virtue.

With respect to contracts and covenants, the Leviathan guarantees that the punishment for violating a contract is greater than any benefit from breaking them. If, therefore, the Leviathan is sufficiently powerful, it can never be beneficial for subjects to break covenants. Moreover, Hobbes tells us that no covenant is valid unless there is a sufficiently powerful civil authority to compel justice, i.e., the performance of covenants.[29]

---

[27] *L*: XXX, 1.
[28] Consider *L*: XXXI, 41.
[29] *L*: XV, 3.

Hobbes' approach to the problem of justice marks a sharp departure from that of the classical political philosophers. Justice is an obligation or duty, but only insofar as it furthers the ultimate purpose of all covenants, which is self-preservation. Justice is no longer a standard of excellence to which men should aspire, but a conformity with rules that can be demanded of everyone. Such conformity is indeed a duty, but the source of that duty is very clearly self-interest. Justice, like the Leviathan itself, is something artificial or man-made. Moreover, as we have noted, justice does not exist until the creation of the commonwealth; natural man knows neither justice nor injustice. This points, however, to a difficulty. Hobbes speaks of justice as a "law of nature," but in what sense can justice be "natural" if it is contingent on artifice? It is to this problem that I will now turn.

CHAPTER 3

JUSTICE AS A LAW OF NATURE

Justice for Hobbes is a natural law. As Richard Tuck observes, "There has… been a great deal of argument among commentators on Hobbes about the status of the laws of nature; indeed, this is the *fundamental argument* about Hobbes's moral and political thought."[30] This confirms our belief that we are dealing with a fundamental topic, although to be sure a very difficult one. Does justice, for Hobbes, exist only by convention, or is it in some important sense natural? And if justice exists by nature, is this true in the sense that the classical political philosophers had taught?

A helpful way to approach the issue is to see how Hobbes responds, in Chapter 15 of the Leviathan, to a challenge from the "fool." In this chapter Hobbes continues his enumeration of the laws of nature, beginning with justice, which is the third law. In the course of this discussion, the "fool" challenges Hobbes' account of justice. In Hobbes' lengthy account of the laws of nature, justice is the only law that is explicitly attacked and defended. This should call our attention to the particular importance of justice. Perhaps justice is more problematic for Hobbes than the other laws of nature.

No sooner has Hobbes defined justice as the keeping of covenants, when the "fool" contradicts Hobbes, saying that we should keep or break covenants according to our benefit. In other words, the "fool" argues in his heart—and sometimes also with his tongue—that it can be rational to act unjustly. Hobbes' opinion on the "fool" is open to much debate. Kinch Hoekstra,

[30] Sorell, 190. Emphasis mine.

for example, argues that Hobbes created two "fools," not one. There is the "fool" who says there is no justice in his heart and the "fool" who says it with his tongue. In Hoekstra's language, there is both a silent and an explicit "fool". Hoekstra argues that Hobbes derides the explicit "fool", but never addresses the silent "fool". In other words, Hoekstra interprets Hobbes as thinking that it is foolish to be openly unjust. If one can be silent about one's injustice and get away with it, so much the better, according to Hoekstra's interpretation Hobbes'.[31] While I find Hoekstra's argument compelling in some respects, my argument here will be that his understanding of Hobbes is incorrect. I have come to the view that the "fool's" arguments stand directly opposed to Hobbes' own position. My argument will be that for Hobbes, committing injustice is always unreasonable. In order to support this assertion, I will examine Hobbes' reply to the "fool". I will look for the strengths and weakness of his response. I will argue that Hobbes provides a logically coherent account of justice that tries to avoid conventionalism by carving out a middle ground between nature, as the ancients understood it, and convention. Hobbes' reply to the "fool" is valid, given his own premises, but logical consistency does not suffice to make his case. Toward the end of the present chapter I will elucidate what I take to be the shortcomings of Hobbes' account of justice, and I will explore the issue more fully and treat it more critically in the course of the following chapter on Plato.

The Objection of the "Fool"

Having defined justice as keeping one's covenants or contracts, Hobbes anticipates a fairly straightforward objection, which he puts in the mouth of an unnamed "fool". "The fool," Hobbes avers,

> hath said in his heart: 'there is no such thing as justice'; and sometimes also with his tongue, seriously alleging that: 'every man's conservation and contentment being

[31] Kinch Hoekstra, "Hobbes and the Foole" *Political Theory* Vol. 25, No. 5. (Oct., 1997).

committed to his own care, there could be no reason why every man might not do what he thought conduced thereunto, and therefore also to make or not make, keep or not keep, covenants was not against reason, when it conduced to one's benefit."[32]

To repeat, justice for Hobbes is the keeping of covenants. His "fool"

> does not therein deny that there be covenants, and that they are sometimes broken, sometimes kept, and that such breach of them may be called injustice, and the observance of them justice; but he questioneth whether injustice, taking away fear of God (for the same fool has said in his heart there is no God), may not sometimes stand with that reason which dictateth to every man his own good…[33]

As we see, the "fool" asserts that it is sometimes good to be unjust, i.e., good for oneself. By saying that it is sometimes good to be unjust, the "fool" is telling us that breaking covenants is warranted. Presumably the "fool" is assuming that the unjust man will be able to avoid detection and punishment. The "fool" could have made this explicit and gone on to hold, as does Plato's Glaucon, that it is best to be unjust with the reputation of justice. There appears to be some basis in Hobbes' *Leviathan* for such a position. In Chapter 10, in discussing the various forms of power, Hobbes notes having power doesn't require that one actually have a given faculty; in many cases, merely having the reputation for that faculty is sufficient. The "fool" could thus argue that the reputation for justice is sufficient, without actually having to be just.

More importantly, the "fool" challenges Hobbes' logic by contending that it is not only good, but also reasonable to act unjustly. The "fool" begins as Hobbes does from each man's natural right to self-preservation—a right which leaves an individual free to preserve himself by such means as he deems reasonable. Given this premise, the "fool" argues that a man may

[32] *L*: XV, 4.
[33] *L*:: XV, 4.

reasonably break his covenants if it is to his benefit. In particular, it is reasonable to break covenants when such an action would best further one's own preservation.[34]

Hobbes' Reply

Hobbes and the "fool" agree on many points. Both agree that one ought to make covenants when it is conducive to one's benefit, and not to make them when it is not. They also agree that on the most profound point: it is unreasonable to do that which is against one's benefit.[35] Hobbes sums up his disagreement with the "fool" in the following way. The "fool" argues that breaking covenants can be in accord with reason and hence beneficial. Hobbes, by contrast, holds that performing one's covenants is never against reason. He will show that it is neither reasonable nor beneficial to break covenants; this point is central to his defense. Hobbes is willing to concede that it is not always reasonable to perform one's promises. In fact, where there is a fear of non-performance, one is fully justified in not performing one's promises, because such a promise is no covenant. Such instances of non-performance are not acts of injustice, according to Hobbes, because "the nature of justice consisteth in keeping of *valid* covenants."[36] Furthermore, there are no valid covenants absent an effective coercive power. Preliminarily, this would seem to be rule out the possibility of justice or injustice in the state of nature for Hobbes, since there is no coercive power in that state. This point is not of central importance, however, since the thrust of the "fool's" argument is that it is reasonable and beneficial to break covenants even where a power has already been established to compel performance. This is precisely where Hobbes argues that it is necessary to perform one's covenants. Hobbes' central defense will deal with justice where there is an established power to

[34] *L*.: XV, 4.
[35] Consider XV, 5. Here Hobbes collapses what is reasonable with what is beneficial.
[36] *L*: XV, 3.

make the "fool" perform. However, justice derives its strength from an *effective* visible power to keep men in awe. If the commonwealth is insufficiently powerful, then reason may dictate not following the demands of justice. The third law of nature is only binding where there is an effective power. With an effective power, one can be reasonably confident that others will honor their contracts and covenants. If one doubts the effectiveness of the sovereign's enforcement powers, one is no longer obliged to honor one's covenants. The point here is that an individual may not be obligated to follow through on a covenant that he has made, but this is not the same thing as breaking a covenant and thus committing an act of injustice. In this case the duty itself is removed by the absence of an effective enforcing power.

Before concluding that Hobbes has refuted the "fool," however, we should briefly turn our attention back to the state of nature. There is an ambiguous case in the state of nature where Hobbes seems to argue that covenants ought to be performed. Hobbes argues that there are two distinct cases where performing one's covenants, or justice, are required by reason. One such situation is where there is an effective sovereign with enforcement powers is in place, as was just discussed. The other case requiring justice is where the other party has already performed his part of the bargain. Hobbes argues that if the other party has already performed, it is not against reason to follow through with the covenant. Such a situation, e.g., an economic exchange, could surely arise in the state of nature. It is true that the person who complies first opens himself up to injury. This, however, is not the issue. Hobbes says that we are justified in breaking covenants when we have a fear that the other party may not perform. However, in the aforementioned example, the other party has already performed. All fear of non-performance has thus disappeared. In such a situation, one would have no Hobbesian grounds for lack of reciprocity or non-performance.

We have before us a state of nature example where the demands of justice seem unclear. Hobbes has already told us that there is no injustice in the state of nature. Yet in the situation we are discussing, there appears to be no grounds for non-performance. A solution to this puzzle can be found near the end of Chapter 15, where Hobbes seeks to clarify one's obligations under the laws of nature. These laws are always binding, Hobbes explains, but not necessarily binding in the same way. As Hobbes puts it, the laws of nature bind always *in foro interno*, but *in foro externo*, only where there is "sufficient security that others shall observe the same laws towards him."[37] Hobbes is making a distinction here between what we are obligated to desire or will and what we are obligated to do in practice. The laws of nature always bind us in conscience. We must will that these laws be followed by everyone, ourselves included. Thus we are obligated to *seek* peace, and to lay down our right to all things if others are willing also to do this, and to comply with our contractual obligations if others do likewise. Yet if we cannot be confident that the other party will live up to his obligations, we are not obliged actually to act peaceably, or surrender our natural right, or follow through on contracts. We must be mindful also of the twofold character of the first and most basic law of nature: seek peace, but be prepared to use all the helps and advantages of war. In the state of nature, making peace and making war are both reasonable courses of action, depending on the willingness of others to reciprocate. Thus while we are obligated to follow the law of nature even when other parties don't comply, this may be nothing more than an obligation to make war by the most effective means, including force and fraud.

Hobbes uses an example from the state of nature to demonstrate to the "fool" the reasonableness of honoring one's contracts. Hobbes begins his counter-argument with a definition of unreasonable actions. It is unreasonable, Hobbes argues, to do that which tends to

[37] *L*: XV, 36.

one's own destruction; it is unreasonable to do that which is not in fact beneficial. The laws of nature, we should remember, are precepts of reason that forbid him from destroying his own life. Beginning from this premise, Hobbes discusses the lot of an individual in the state of nature. No man can hope to protect himself in the state of nature without the help of confederates. Furthermore, no one would willingly join into confederation with a known covenant breaker. The covenant breaker is therefore not admitted into civil society, and he is left to fend for himself. Hobbes has just told us that it is impossible to defend oneself in the state of nature without the help of others. Without such help, the covenant breaker opens himself up to destruction, and it is irrational to do that which tends to one's own destruction. Even in the unlikely case of successful injustice one could suffer disastrous consequences, because it would set an example for others to follow. The one who set the example of committing injustice may end up being the victim of injustice in the future, and he would have his own past successful injustices to blame. In both cases, injustice leads to one's own destruction. Since in both situations, one's injustice leads to one's destruction, this injustice cannot be reasonable.

Hobbes offers another account of why we should honor our covenants. Under the law of nature, reason imposes restrictions on what man can contract or covenant. In other words, one is precluded from making a covenant that conflicts with one's own self-interest. Ultimately, all covenants serve the purpose of better preserving my life. Suppose, for example, that I should agree to a covenant which I later find leads to my destruction. There is no injustice in breaking such a covenant because it was invalid in the first place. Any covenant, therefore, that tends to my destruction is void.[38] I always retain my right to preserve my life. Any action aimed at preserving my life is reasonable, and therefore not unjust.

[38] *L*: XIV, 29.

Hobbes' Reply Reconsidered

The overriding question concerning justice is whether or not it is something good, and Hobbes answers this question in the affirmative. Hobbes has given a logically valid response to the fool. However, I would like to raise two objections to Hobbes' account of justice, both of which stem from the Hobbesian synthesis of interest and justice. The first objection has to do with the subjective content of justice. We have seen that for Hobbes men have a natural right to self-preservation and are entitled to pursue this end by whatever manner they deem best. Indeed even a criminal who is justly convicted by the sovereign may reasonably resist punishments, flee imprisonment, lie in court, resist agents of the sovereign, and steal food and medicine, provided he deems it necessary for his self-preservation.[39] In other words, *anything* one does in the belief that it serves to preserve his life is reasonable, and therefore never unjust. This way of looking at justice has far-reaching consequences as to what actions can properly be called just. As Strauss observes, "If everyone, however foolish, is by nature the judge of what is required for his self-preservation, everything may legitimately be regarded as required for self-preservation: everything is by nature just."[40] When construed in this broad fashion, justice loses all meaning.

My second objection also arises from the apparently perfect union between the demands of justice and those of self-interest. If men are obligated to commit only to those covenants that are in their self-interest, it follows that it is unreasonable to commit to covenants which are not in one's self-interest. All acts of justice are driven, therefore, by an overriding concern for one's own interest. Hobbes' definition of justice holds only if we concede that political duty requires

[39] *L:* XXI, 11-13; XIV, 29.
[40] Strauss, 186.

exactly the same things as does self-interest, or that we are never obligated to comply with the political community's demand that I sacrifice my own good.

To put the point another way, there is an aspect of our common sense understanding of justice that is mysteriously absent in Hobbesian justice, i.e., self-sacrifice. We often respect and even admire those who sacrifice their own self-interest in the name of justice, especially those willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of their country. This, at any rate, is the way people commonly think about justice. For Hobbes, however, the element of self-sacrifice is missing entirely from justice; there is only self-interest. How, then, can the commonwealth demand self-sacrifice from its citizens? How can it require them even to risk their lives in its defense? Here, Hobbes falls back on the motive of fear. The sovereign makes the penalty for avoiding military service and for desertion so great that his subjects, out of fear, decide to take their chances in battle. Such a way of understanding our obligation to the commonwealth seems to run counter, however, to our ordinary understanding of civic obligation.

Hobbes seems to have solved the problem of justice at the expense of any requirement of personal sacrifice. Perhaps, however, the problem of justice is precisely that, a problem. This seems to be the lesson of classical political philosophy. In the *Republic*, the problem of justice comes to light as a conflict between one's own happiness and the happiness of others, i.e. between self-interest and self-sacrifice. Indeed, in Book II, Socrates begins to attempt to resolve this tension at the request of the brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon. It is a question worth asking whether or how successfully Socrates resolved this tension. The classics may have failed here, but we must remember that Hobbes viewed his political solution as superior to theirs; in other words, Hobbes claims to have solved all the problems remaining from classical political philosophy. Indeed, as Strauss points out, "Thomas Hobbes regarded himself as the founder of

political philosophy or political science. He knew, of course, that the great honor which he claimed for himself was awarded, by almost universal consent, to Socrates."[41] To see whether or not Hobbes deserved the honor that he claimed for himself, we must see whether or not his distinctly modern understanding of justice is superior to that of the classics. To this end we turn now to Plato's treatment of justice in the *Republic*.

[41] Strauss, 166.

CHAPTER 4

PLATO ON THE GOODNESS OF JUSTICE

In the pre-modern or classical tradition, one finds several varieties of the argument that justice is grounded in nature. I will be examining Plato's treatment of justice in the *Republic*, because I believe that it provides not only the sharpest contrast with Hobbes, but also the most plausible alternative account. In the course of this inquiry, I will examine the attack made on justice by the brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II and Socrates' response to that attack. I ultimately intend to judge Socrates by how well he responds to the young men's challenge to show that justice is something good for its own sake. Part of Socrates' response is the definition of justice that he himself provides in Book IV. In this book, Socrates asserts that since justice is the health of the soul, it is good by nature for its possessor. The definition of justice that Socrates here affirms rests upon a distinct understanding of the human soul which is very different from that of Hobbes. I will explore Socrates' definition of justice in Book IV and the corresponding psychology upon which his definition of justice depends. I intend to show the limitations of this account and to argue that Socrates does not mean for Book IV to be his last word about the soul. Book IV culminates in the assertion that the best man is the just man, and provides us with a picture of the soul of the just man. However, in Books V-VII it becomes clear that the best human being is the philosopher, and we must now revise our picture of the soul to accommodate this highest human type. To state this point differently, Socrates gives us a definition of justice in Book IV, but its meaning is not fully revealed until the philosopher is introduced. Only then can we see how justice fits with the good or happy life and the healthy

soul. In sum, I will proceed now to explore Plato's depiction, in the *Republic*, of justice as it relates to the good life and the healthy soul. In the course of my discussion I will return frequently to Hobbes as a point of contrast.

Glaucon's Attack on Justice

Glaucon and Adeimantus attack justice only to force Socrates to extol it more convincingly. In other words, they were dissatisfied with Socrates' rebuttal of Thrasymachus in Book I and his subsequent proof that the just life is better than the unjust life. In their hearts of hearts Glaucon and his brother—unlike Hobbes' "fool"—believe or at least want to believe that justice is something good. Both want to believe that the just life is also the good life, or that the just man is also happy, but they are at a loss whenever they hear Thrasymachus or some other rhetorician extol the life of injustice. Indeed, the brothers recognize that the arguments in favor of injustice are powerful ones. Glaucon says that he has been talked deaf by those who argue in favor of the unjust life. The young men want to believe that the just life is better by nature, but they are compelled to admit that from what they have heard thus far, the argument for injustice is stronger.

Glaucon begins his argument with Socrates by dividing the good things into three classes. The three classes are as follows: the first class is a kind of good that we delight in for its own sake; secondly, a kind of good that we like both for its own sake and for what comes of it; and thirdly, a kind of good that we like only for the effects. The third kind of good we would in no way choose if it were not for the beneficial effects that it brings about. Glaucon then asks Socrates into which of the three classes of goods would he put justice. Socrates responds that he would put justice into the second camp, which he also calls the finest class of goods. Justice, according to Socrates' initial view, is good both in itself and for its effects. Glaucon then

explains that in the opinion of the many justice is a form of drudgery, akin to exercise. Justice, in this popular view, is good only for its effects and not to be chosen for its own sake. Perhaps Glaucon, and we ourselves, have forgotten where Socrates had placed justice, because Glaucon makes a difficult request of Socrates. Glaucon wants Socrates to praise justice as something good for its own sake alone and independent of any good consequences that it might have. He wishes to hear from Socrates a speech on justice and injustice that shows "what each is and what power it has all alone by itself when it is in the soul—dismissing its wages and consequences." Glaucon says to Socrates, "I want to hear it [justice] extolled all by itself."[42] In other words, Glaucon wants to hear justice praised as a kind of good that falls into the first class, namely, goods that are choiceworthy simply for their own sake. He implores Socrates to prove that justice is something other than what he has already opined it to be.

It is useful here to return briefly to Hobbes. We should try, as best we can, to figure out where Hobbes' account of justice fits into this three-fold division of the good.[43] Preliminarily, I would like to suggest that justice falls into the third class of goods for Hobbes. Glaucon wants to count justice among the first type of goods, Socrates the second, and Hobbes, I believe, would count justice among the third type. For Hobbes, justice is instrumentally good. Justice is good for the things it brings us, peace and commodious living. In the state of nature, for example, being just could actually prove harmful, since the just person makes himself vulnerable to others. In such a case, it would be foolish to follow justice. Justice should oblige us *in foro interno*, i.e., we should wish that conditions were such as to permit us to be just, but not *in foro externo*, i.e., in our actual behavior. Hobbes' project, I believe, was to show that justice, understood instrumentally, could be rooted in nature.

[42] *R*: 358b-d.
[43] Cf. *L*: VI, 8.

Glaucon makes it clear that he will not accept an account of justice that proves its goodness merely by instrumentalist arguments. Glaucon associates an instrumental account with a conventional account. If justice is simply conventional, if it rests merely on artifice or opinion, then Glaucon will be warranted in concluding that nature is on the side of injustice. This is in fact what most people assume—that we are naturally unjust and behave just only because the law requires it. Glaucon, however, wants to hear justice extolled all by itself. He refuses to accept a case for justice that praises it for its effects. His attack on justice is designed to elicit a convincing argument that justice is good for its own sake, regardless of its consequences. Socrates' argument for justice must be as strong as possible. In this regard, nature is Glaucon's touchstone. He has heard that the naturally good life is the life of injustice. He wants to hear instead that the just life is naturally good.

At this point, Glaucon goes on to give develop a powerful case for injustice, drawing on opinions that he has so often heard. In building his case, Glaucon describes the emergence of justice in a way that resembles what Hobbes says about the transition from the state of nature to civil society.[44] One must take note, however, of a fundamental difference between what Hobbes says about this transition and Glaucon's account of why men submit to laws. Hobbes begins from the assumption that all men are roughly equal and that it is to their mutual advantage to subject themselves to law. Glaucon argues, in effect, that submission to law is only to the advantage of weaklings who lack the strength to fend for themselves. Out of weakness the many forsake the unjust life that they would prefer to lead and submit instead to law, hoping thereby to protect themselves from the injustice of others. According to Glaucon, the strong person would never abide by such a convention, but instead would choose the life according to nature, which is

[44] *R*: 358e-359b.

the unjust life. Such a person would calculate that he is strong enough to take advantage of others and get away with it. In other words, Glaucon begins not from Hobbesian equality, but from the assumption that justice is a panacea for the weak that strong men would never assent to. For Hobbes, no one is strong enough to prevail in the state of nature, since even the weakest can kill the strongest.

As we see, Glaucon starts from the common opinion that doing injustice is good, while suffering injustice is bad. Even the weaklings who submit to the laws would prefer to behave unjustly if they could get away with it. To illustrate this point, Glaucon relates a version of the Myth of Gyges, which involves the discovery of a ring that makes its wearer invisible. Predictably, the shepherd who discovers the magic ring proceeds to commit acts of great injustice, but rises in wealth, power, and public acclaim while escaping any punishment for his unjust deeds. From this story Glaucon concludes that no one who possessed such a ring "would be so adamant as to stick by justice and bring himself to keep away from what belongs to others and not lay hold of it [if he possessed this ring]… this is a great proof that no one is willingly just but only when compelled to be so."[45]

Finally, to force Socrates to make the case for justice quite independently of its consequences, Glaucon insists on divorcing justice entirely from the reputation for it. Let us imagine, he says, that an unjust man has the reputation for justice and enjoys all the benefits that accompany such a reputation, while a truly just man has the opposite reputation and suffers all the harms and punishments that an unjust man could be expected to endure. Glaucon then presses Socrates to show that even under these circumstances, the just man would still prefer justice. As Glaucon puts it, "Let him [the just man] go unchanged till death, seeming throughout

[45] *R*: 360b.

life to be unjust although he is just, so that when each has come to the extreme—the one of justice , the other of injustice—they can be judged as to which of the two is happier (*eudaimonesteros*)." One should note the odd twist in Glaucon's request to Socrates. Previously, he had wanted to hear justice extolled all by itself, but now wants to hear justice extolled by reference to happiness. Glaucon's demand on Socrates appears to be confused. On the one hand, he wants to hear justice extolled independent of any beneficial effects, but on the other hand, he wants to hear that justice is the one thing needful to make a person completely happy, even if he live his life with the reputation of an unjust man. Glaucon's apparent confusion does open the door, however, for Socrates' later demonstration that the truly just man is also supremely happy because he follows a way of life that is good for its own sake.

Let us pause to consider the implications of the Myth of Gyges for our present study. Suppose—anachronistically—that it had been Glaucon, and not the "fool," who addressed Hobbes in Chapter 15 of *Leviathan*. First, we would have Glaucon, whom Socrates calls most courageous at one point, instead of an interlocutor whom Hobbes deridingly refers to as the "fool".[46] Secondly, we must recognize that Glaucon really wants to be convinced of the goodness of justice. He attacks justice only to hear it sufficiently praised. Plato offers us an account of a very impressive young man who is not satisfied with the speeches about justice he has heard and demands that Socrates give him a better defense of justice. Glaucon may let us down in places, but he is nonetheless impressive.[47] The "fool" speaks only once. We are not shown his reaction, we have no reason to think that he disbelieves his own argument, and we do not know if Hobbes' rebuttal would have convinced him. At any rate, suppose that Glaucon, or else the "fool," had confronted Hobbes with the example of the Gyges' Ring, which implies that

[46] *R*: 357a
[47] *R*: 435d, for an instance where Glaucon lets us down.

everyone would choose the unjust life if assured that their deeds would go undetected. Hobbes admits, after all, that our passions naturally lead us toward injustice.[48] Glaucon argues that the reason most people refrain from injustice is because they are afraid of getting caught. For Hobbes, catching and punishing lawbreakers is one of the sovereign's highest duties. Glaucon could stipulate, however, that the lawbreaker who possessed Gyges' ring one could escape the sovereign's notice and thus get away with acts of injustice. This person could at once escape punishment for injustice but reap all its benefits. In such a situation, should one still be just? Hobbes would be hard pressed to answer this challenge.

I surmise that Hobbes would take a hard-line realist position in replying to such an argument. The Myth of Gyges is precisely that, he would argue—a myth that presumes the impossible. To take our bearings in the world of politics, we should not deal in hypotheticals that are divorced so completely from nature. Invisibility of the sort posited by Glaucon is impossible. No one's actions can for long escape detection by one's companions or by the sovereign. In both the natural condition and in the commonwealth, as opposed to Glaucon's hypothetical world, harming others has painful consequences. Aside from the retaliation that such a person would suffer, no fellow subject would come to the aid of a known covenant breaker. In effect, the unjust person is thrust back into the state of nature and can justly be destroyed by the sovereign as well as by those whom he has harmed.

We must ask, however, if Glaucon would have been convinced by this Hobbesian response. Glaucon wants to know whether justice should be chosen independent of any consequences, but Hobbes' account of justice does depends on the predictable consequences of unjust actions. Glaucon gives the example of the Ring of Gyges in order to show the need for a distinction between the external and internal effects of justice. Glaucon wants to know whether

[48] *L*: XVII, 2.

the unjust man with a reputation for justice is miserable, and whether the just man with the reputation for injustice is still happy. Glaucon wants to know the just man, even if required to suffer the ills that ordinarily befall injustice, would still prefer his course of life. He desires to be shown that justice is worthy of choice even if attended by no external benefits or by external harms. I would like to suggest that Glaucon would not have been convinced by Hobbes' account of justice, because Hobbes' account makes no distinction between the internal and external effects of justice. The only reason to choose justice and avoid injustice, for Hobbes, lies in the external effects of our choice. Additionally, Hobbes concedes that nature inclines us toward injustice. Glaucon, with the Myth of Gyges, points us inward toward the well-ordered or healthy soul. Hobbes begins from the soul, but locates its good externally in the material world. To get to the soul as it is, Socrates' route proves superior. This is a compelling reason to turn our attention to Socrates' response to Glaucon, for it culminates in the assertion that justice is the health of the soul. The question of justice deserves our serious attention, for as Socrates tells Thrasymachus, "We are, after all, not discussing just any question, but about the way one should live."[49]

Justice in Book IV

Glaucon presses Socrates and pleads with him to defend justice against the objections that he and others, including his brother Adeimantus, have raised. Socrates, recognizing the difficulty of complying with Glaucon's demand, twice professes that he is unable to come to justice's defense.[50] Nonetheless, Socrates takes it upon himself to vindicate justice. He does so, however, in a strange way. Socrates says that before he can demonstrate that the just life is good for a human being by nature, he and his comrades must first locate justice. Since it is always

[49] *R*: 352d.
[50] *R*: 362d, 368b.

easier to find a quality that resides in something bigger, Socrates proposes to his interlocutors that they should search for justice in the city before turning to justice in the human soul. Those present find this argument persuasive enough, and Socrates proceeds to construct a city in speech, since justice cannot be found in existing cities.

Our present inquiry does not require us to go over all of the details of Socrates' city in speech. It suffices to give a general outline of the city as it stands in Book IV when Socrates and his companions begin looking there for justice. By 427d, after the construction of the city seems to be complete, Socrates gets his interlocutors to agree that the city, "if it has been correctly founded—is perfectly good."[51] A good city, he then asserts, will contain all of the virtues, which he lists as wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. If he can find wisdom, moderation, and courage in the city, justice will then be the remaining virtue. Earlier, Socrates had divided the city into three parts (the rulers, the auxiliaries, and the artisans), and now proceeds to show that one of the virtues is distinctive to each of these parts. The wisdom in the city, which Socrates equates with good counsel (*eubalon*) is found in the smallest class, the rulers. Courage belongs especially to the guardian class, which preserves the opinions of the laws of the city in the face of danger. He notes in passing that the auxiliaries, who guard the city, do not possess courage simply, but only *political* courage.[52] When Socrates tries to skip out on discovering moderation and move straight to justice, Glaucon will have none of it. It turns out that moderation resides not in one part or class, like wisdom and courage, but extends throughout the city as a kind of harmony or accord between its different parts.

Now that the first three virtues have been located, justice should be easy to spot, says Socrates, but the search runs into unanticipated difficulties. Socrates and Glaucon appear to have

[51] *R*: 427e.
[52] *R*: 430c.

reached an impasse when Socrates finally happens upon justice, asserting that all along it had been rolling around at their feet. The just man, according to common opinion, is the one who "minds his own business." Applying this principle to the city (and reversing somewhat the plan to understand the soul by analogy to the city), Socrates claims that the just city is one in which each part—the artisans or money-makers, the auxiliaries, and the rulers—minds its own business, i.e., performs well the particular job that has been assigned to it, according to its nature. The case is also made that justice, in this sense, sustains the city and thus is good for it.

Having found the virtues as they exhibit themselves in the city, Socrates and his companions are now permitted to look for the virtues in man's soul. Having made the dubious assumption that a city differs from a man only with respect to size, Socrates leads his interlocutors to agree that "the just man will not be any different from the just city with respect to the form itself of justice, but will be like it."[53] He next show that the soul parallels the city, inasmuch as it consists of three parts—reason, a spirited part, and the desires. Wisdom is the virtue appropriate to reason, and courage belongs to the spirited part. Moderation is a harmony of the parts that comes about when reason, with the assistance of spiritedness, masters the desires or passions. But where is justice in the soul? Noting the parallels between the city and the soul, Socrates asks Glaucon if he thinks that justice should be one thing for a city and something different for a man. When Glaucon agrees that it will be the same in both, Socrates proceeds to argue that the soul's justice arises when each of its three parts minds its own business or does its proper work. We note that by defining justice this way, Socrates has opened the door to his later contention that the philosophic life is best for man, since it will turn out that only in the philosophic soul is the work of reason fully accomplished. Another implication of Socrates'

[53] *R*: 435b

definition is that the philosopher alone is just, since only the philosopher possesses wisdom, properly understood. In this sense the *Republic* answers the charge, brought against Socrates by the city of Athens, that he was an unjust man.

Socrates is now in a position to address the big question that had led to his examination of the city and the soul, i.e., is justice good? Is it naturally good for its own sake and not merely a conventional good with beneficial consequences? Is the just life superior to the unjust life by nature and not merely because of an agreement that men make to follow the law? Socrates proceeds to make his case by using another analogy, this time between the soul and the body. Each is an harmonious ordering of parts: justice is the right order of the soul, just as health is the right order of the body. Everyone agrees that health is naturally good for the body, quite apart from whether or not a person has the reputation for being healthy. Justice, by analogy, is the health of the soul and for that reason is naturally good for it. Glaucon finds this analogical argument sufficient as proof that justice is good for its own sake. No further inquiry on this point is required, for if "life doesn't seem livable with the body's nature corrupted, not even with every sort of food and drink and every sort of wealth and every sort of rule, will it then be livable when the nature of that very thing by which we live [the soul] is confused and corrupted?"[54] At this point, one may wonder why the dialogue continues. Socrates has just pronounced, and Glaucon has agreed, that justice is good.

It appears that our investigation is completed. It must continue because the investigation of justice requires it. Since the just man must also be a wise man, i.e., one in whom the rational part of the soul works well, we must discover what true wisdom is before we can understand the nature of justice. This investigation leads, of course, to Socrates' account of the philosophic life.

[54]*R*: 445a-b.

One might also say that the account of the soul itself, on which Socrates' definition of justice rests, is thus far inadequate. In my view, the entire section of the *Republic* where Socrates argues that the soul has three parts (435c-441c) is intentionally flawed. Socrates first finds justice in the city and then applies that definition of justice to the individual soul. In order for this definition to carry over, there must be a perfect parallel between the city and the soul. There are, however, difficulties in understanding the human soul this way. In fact, Socrates tells us later (Book VI) what we might have suspected all along—that the earlier arguments about justice and the soul were insufficient. "The statements made at that time," Socrates concedes, "were, as it seems to me, deficient in precision."[55] But Socrates now intimates what a more precise understanding of the soul, and therefore justice, would be. The good, he tells us, "Is what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything."[56] If we take seriously Socrates' claim that every soul pursues the good in everything that it does, then we can begin to speak of the unity of the soul. If, however, the soul has a unity, then our tripartite division begins to look faulty. This reliance on an inaccurate understanding of the soul is one reason, I believe, why Socrates grants that his earlier arguments were imprecise.

<u>On the Likeness of the City and the Soul</u>

The broad argument of my thesis is that Plato's account of justice, in the *Republic*, is superior to that of Hobbes. This cannot be true, however, if Socrates relies on faulty reasoning in defining justice and in showing that it is good. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I want to examine some apparent flaws in Socrates' reasoning, as presented in Books II-IV, and go on to suggest that they are designed intentionally to lead us to a deeper understanding of justice and its relation to the good. In the present section I will examine Socrates' flawed argument for

[55] *R*: 504b.
[56] *R*: 505e.

thinking that the soul has three parts. In the section that follows, I will discuss the problem of self-sacrifice, as it relates to justice.

Upon building his city in speech, Socrates turns to the task of finding justice. Following the method he initially proposed, he locates justice first in the city and only afterwards defines what justice is in the individual man. As for the city, Socrates asserts—and Glaucon agrees—that "The money-making, auxiliary, and guardian classes doing what's appropriate, each of them minding its own business in a city—would be justice and would make the city just."[57] Justice for the individual is defined in similar way: "The one within whom each of the parts minds its own business will be just and mind his own business."[58] But the validity of this definition of individual justice depends completely upon the symmetry between the city and the man. I submit that Socrates' initial definition of justice in man is flawed because of this faulty assumption.

Socrates and his companions presuppose the likeness of the city and the man when they begin building the city in speech. Socrates and Adeimantus expect justice to be similar in each case; the only difference lies in the city's greater size.[59] Socrates does not take up the similarity of the city and man until the fourth book, after he has already set down what justice is in the city.

Justice for the city, as has already been noted, consists of each of the three parts of the city minding its own business. In order for the analogy to hold, Socrates must demonstrate that there are three corresponding parts to man. In the city, there is the ruling class, the auxiliaries, and the money-makers. Wisdom resides in the rulers, courage in the auxiliaries, and moderation

[57] *R*: 434c.
[58] *R*: 441e.
[59] Consider *R*: 368e.

permeates all three parts. Socrates' task is to show that the same tripartite division is found in the human soul.

It is worth pointing out that Socrates quickly moves from a city-man parallel to a city-soul parallel.[60] Socrates' parallel, and thus his definition of individual justice, is thus flawed because it forgets about the body. Before Socrates establishes that man—or rather man's soul—consists of three parts, Socrates takes up the issue of non-contradiction. The basic idea is that one thing cannot be something as well as its opposite. Socrates gives the example of a top. Someone may try and convince another that a top is both moving and not moving at the same time. We are not to be fooled by such an argument. Instead, we should realize that one part of a top is moving, while another part remains stationary. In this case, we would say that the circumference moves, but that the axis remains still. Someone could not persuade us, therefore, "that something that is the same, at the same time, with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing, could ever suffer, be or do opposites."[61]

Socrates then enumerates some of these opposites. Acceptance opposes refusal, longing opposes rejecting, and taking opposes thrusting away.[62] Socrates draws the necessary conclusions for the soul: The same part of the soul cannot both want and not want something simultaneously. To put the point another way, if the soul both wants and does not want something, then the soul must consist of more than one part. Socrates must give an example where the soul both wants and does not want something in order to show that the soul has more than one part.

[60] Cf. *R*: 435b-c.
[61] *R*: 437a.
[62] *R*: 437b.

Giving the example of thirst, Socrates attempts to demonstrate the division of the soul. Thirst, according to Socrates, is a desire, and "thirsting will never be a desire for anything other than that of which it naturally is a desire—for drink alone."[63] One caveat remains, however. Socrates warns us that someone may take issue with this, claiming, "That no one desires drink, but good drink, nor food, but good food." Socrates, for his part, agrees with this. In fact, he goes even further, stating, "*Everyone*, after all, desires good things; if, then, thirst is a desire, it would be for good drink or whatever good it is, and similarly with the other desires."[64]

Socrates asserts, however, that not everyone who thirsts drinks. Speaking of such a person, Socrates asks, "Isn't there something in their soul bidding them to drink and something forbidding them to do so, something different that masters that which bids?"[65] Glaucon agrees that something of this sort exists, and Socrates goes on to identify it as calculation. Calculation is thus separate from and superior to desire.

Socrates thus concludes that there are at least two parts to the soul, calculation and desire, of which thirst is an example. To complete his analogy with the city, Socrates must also show that there also exists a third part analogous to the auxiliaries. In order to show this, Socrates tells the tale of Leontius. Leontius, as Socrates tells it, was walking past the public executioner and noticed all of the corpses lying all around. Leontius desired to look at the corpses, but at the same time was disgusted with himself for having this desire. Out of this self-disgust he then sought to punish himself. Leontius rushed to look at the corpses and angrily cursed his eyes,

[63] *R*: 437e.
[64] *R*: 438a. Italics mine.
[65] *R*: 439c.

telling them to "Look you damned wretches, take your fill of the fair sight."[66] From this strange example, Socrates concludes, "Anger sometimes makes war against the desires…"[67]

From this example, Socrates gets Glaucon to agree that spiritedness—the part of the soul that gets angry of indignant—is different from desire. In the case of the city, this middle part—the auxiliaries—assist the rulers in controlling the artisans or money-makers. Socrates must show that spiritedness is different from both the calculating and the desiring parts of the soul, but can assist the former in mastering the latter. Glaucon, for his part, is eager to embrace this claim, and he adds his own proof that calculation is distinct from spiritedness. Little children, he notes, "are full of spirit straight from birth, while, as for calculating, some seem to me never to get a share of it, and the many do quite late."[68] Socrates asserts, and Glaucon agrees, that there are three parts to the soul: the calculating part, the spirited part, and the desiring part. These parts of the soul, they agree, are analogous to the parts of the city. The calculating part of the soul is analogous to the rulers, spiritedness is analogous to the auxiliaries, and desire is analogous to the money-makers. The argument even preserves the hierarchical nature of the city in the relationship of the parts of the soul.[69]

Socrates' argument, which Glaucon readily assents to, is based on faulty reasoning, as we see when we return to the question Socrates raised at the outset. Does man have three parts corresponding to those of the city? At least according to Socrates' official argument, the soul does consist of these three corresponding parts. But the comparison of the just man and the just city quickly became a comparison of the city and the soul. Socrates asks, "Does it [the soul]

[66] *R*: 440a.
[67] *R*: 440a.
[68] *R*: 441a.
[69] Consider *R*: 439a-441a. Calculation rules the soul, in Socrates' argument, bidding spiritedness to control the desires.

have these three forms in it or not?"[70] This transition from the man to the soul should already raise doubts about the adequacy of the analogy of the city and man, specifically due to the notable absence of the body.

Upon asking Glaucon whether or not he thinks the soul has three parts, Socrates heightens our suspicions. Socrates warns,

> But know well, Glaucon, that in my opinion, we'll never get a precise grasp of it on the basis of procedures such as we are now using in the argument. *There is another longer and further road leading to it.*"[71]

It would appear that Socrates' argument, which states that the soul consists of three parts, follows a shorter and fundamentally defective route.

In addition, in order to isolate desire as a singular part of the soul, Socrates argues, "Thirst itself is neither for much nor little, *good nor bad*, nor, in a word, for any particular kind, but thirst itself is naturally only for drink."[72] This stands in contradiction with what Socrates had said earlier. Earlier, he had asserted that thirst is always for good drink; in fact, everyone *always* desires good things.[73] What, then, are we to infer from Socrates' contradiction?

Two questions immediately come to light. On the one hand, what is this longer and further road which leads to a more precise understanding of the soul? On the other hand, what—if anything—does Socrates' earlier contradiction have to do with the longer and further road?

Socrates provides some insight into what he may mean. He goes on to ask, "Do we act in each of these ways as a result of the same part of ourselves, or are there three parts and with a different one we act in each of the different ways? Do we learn with one, become spirited with

---

[70] *R*: 435c.
[71] *R*: 435d.
[72] *R*: 439a.
[73] *R*: 438a.

another of the parts within us, and desire the pleasures of nourishment and generation and all their kin with a third; *or, do we act as a whole in each of them once we are started?*"[74] Socrates raises—and drops—the question of the unity of the soul. He then goes on to demonstrate the three-part nature of the soul. This demonstration is not, Socrates tells us, the long road to a precise understanding of the soul. We can rightly infer that Socrates led Glaucon, and us, down the short road to an imprecise understanding of the soul, according to which it consists of three distinct parts.

It is possible, then, that the longer road leads to a different understanding of the soul. In fact, Socrates suggests what this alternative understanding could be by proposing the idea of the unity of the soul. In what manner could we speak of the unity of the soul? Socrates' very contradiction points to an answer to this question.

In order to proceed with his division of the soul, Socrates had asserted that thirst, a desire, is for drink alone. But Socrates had claimed earlier that thirst desires good drink. In fact, all of the desires desire good things.[75] We must re-ask, then, why the thirsting man does not drink. If Socrates truly believes that all men desire good things, then the thirsting man who does not drink must refrain from doing so because he believes such abstinence to be good. To put the question another way, with a view to what does the calculating part harness the desire for drink? Socrates implies that it is with a view to the good. Surely the thirsting man would not drink a drink which he knows to be bad for him. Moreover, according to Socrates, no one ever willingly chooses bad things.[76] Desire and calculation are united at least insofar as they both want good things.

[74] *R*: 436b, italics mine.
[75] *R*: 438a.
[76] Consider *R*: 336e. Also, *Protagoras*, 345e.

If the soul has this overarching goal, it would make sense to speak of its unity. Socrates confirms our doubts about the three-part nature of the soul in Book VI. "We were, I believe, saying that in order to get the finest possible look at these things another and longer road around would be required, and to the man who took it they would become evident… And so, you see, the statements made at that time were, as it looks to me, deficient in precision."[77] By this comment Socrates concedes the deficiency of his analogy, in Book IV, between the city and the soul. The strict division of the soul into three parts is flawed. If this tripartite structure is rejected, however, Socrates' definition of justice in the soul, which presupposes this structure, would seem to be in jeopardy. In fact, Socrates scolds Glaucon for accepting the earlier understanding of the soul and of justice.[78] His deficient definition of justice points towards something greater than justice.[79] Fortunately, Socrates provides direction down the longer road to towards this thing which is greater than justice. The longer road—or the greatest study—is of the idea of the good. Furthermore, Socrates tells us that he has hinted at this before.[80] Socrates also reintroduces the possibility of the unity of the soul. The soul is united at least with respect to its desire for the good; Socrates tells us that the good, "is what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does *everything.*"[81]

If my suggestions are correct, then Socrates intentionally gives us a flawed definition of justice in Book IV. Does this flaw call into question my thesis that Plato provides a better account of justice than Hobbes? If justice is the health of the soul, and Socrates has just given us a faulty analysis of the healthy soul, where does that leave us?

---

[77] *R*: 504b.
[78] *R*: 504b.
[79] *R*: 504d-e.
[80] *R*: 505a.
[81] *R*: 505e. Italics mine.

By arguing initially that justice is the health of the soul, Socrates opens the door to introducing the truly healthy soul. I believe that Socrates' picture of the healthy soul in Book IV is defective, and I believe that I have shown this to be the case. What, then, does the truly healthy soul look like? The answer has a lot to do with the nature of the good and the good life. Socrates has sharpened and refocused the question of justice. Instead of looking for justice, we are now looking for the truly healthy soul. In Books I-IV, we were trying to demonstrate that the best man is the just man. In Books V-VII, by contrast, the best human being comes to light as the philosopher. This comes about through an argument demonstrating that the soul of the philosopher is truly healthy and that all the other types of souls are in some way defective.

Moral Virtue

Before we can investigate the nature of the truly healthy soul, we must mention yet another difficulty with justice as we find it in Book IV. This difficulty centers around the issue of self-sacrifice. For Hobbes, justice does not require self-sacrifice. Indeed, the sole aim of justice is to promote man's comfortable self-preservation. To understand how Plato treats the issue of self-sacrifice, it is helpful to examine his discussion of the philosopher-kings. In Book VII of the *Republic*, Plato shows us that the true philosophers are unwilling to sacrifice their own good, the contemplative life, for the good of the city; the philosophers must be compelled to rule. "Have you," Socrates asks Glaucon, "any other life that despises political offices other than that of true philosophy?"[82] Socrates reemphasizes this point, stating that even in the best regime the philosophers must be compelled to rule.[83] Even the best human beings, the philosophers, cannot willingly place the interest of the community ahead of their own good. The best regime, which requires the rule of philosophers, is possible only if the philosophers are compelled to rule. They

[82] *R*: 521b.
[83] Ibid.

do not willingly assume responsibility to care for the good of the community. As we have seen, Socrates' way of defining justice implies that philosophers are supremely just, because they alone reason well and display wisdom. But can this be true if philosophers shirk their civic responsibility? If justice is missing, are we justified in calling philosophers the best of human beings?

In Book VI, when discussing the kind of nature we should look for in choosing young people to receive a philosophic education, Socrates suggests that such persons naturally exhibit a broad range of virtues that lesser natures must acquire only through proper habituation. Thus, for example, young persons with a philosophic nature take delight in learning, and they desire to know the truth about the most important things. Concerned as they are with intellectual pleasures, they are naturally moderate. They are disinterested in bodily pleasures and the acquisition of wealth. Since in their lofty view death is not a terrible thing, they are naturally courageous. They are naturally just, because they don't try to take advantage of others. We should remember, however, that early on in the *Republic*, a distinction is drawn between appearances and reality. The philosopher appears to possess the moral virtues, but this is not a result of self-sacrifice. Rather, it appears to result naturally from an indifference to the things of the body. The philosophic nature is drawn toward the pursuit of truth and wisdom.

By this argument Socrates seems to depreciate the moral virtues. True virtue lies in the philosophic search for wisdom, and everything else is derivative or secondary. What appear to be moral faults may only be a deficiency of knowledge. I believe, however, that Socrates can defend himself against the claim that he undercuts moral life. Remember that Socrates had earlier said, "Now this [the good] is what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does

everything."[84] This statement, if taken seriously, has serious implications for moral responsibility; indeed it renders moral responsibility impossible. This argument that everyone pursues the good is just another way of stating a point that Socrates makes in several other places. According to this argument, no one willingly does wrong. Socrates insists upon this point in his conversation with Callicles in the *Gorgias*. There, he asks Callicles,

> Why haven't you answered me this very thing, Callicles? Were Polus and I in your opinion correctly compelled in the earlier speeches to agree, or were we not, when we agreed that no one does injustice wishing to do so, but all doers of injustice do so involuntarily?[85]

If all human beings seek what appears to them to be good by necessity, how can they be blamed? Moreover, all seek what is truly good, so wrong actions must be due to error. No one would rest content with an erroneous view of the good.[86] Socrates points toward this conclusion early in the *Republic* in a conversation with Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus is dissatisfied with Socrates' arguments about justice, and, thinking Socrates is merely pretending not to know that justice is, he flings himself at Socrates as if to tear him to pieces. Thrasymachus is upset with Socrates for speaking about justice like a fool. Socrates replies, "Thrasymachus, don't be hard on us. If we are making any mistake in the consideration of the arguments, Polemarchus and I, know well that we're making an unwilling mistake." Socrates then goes on to tell us the appropriate response to someone who has made a mistake. "So it's surely far more fitting," Socrates tells Thrasymachus, "for us to be pitied by you clever men than to be treated harshly."[87] Pity, Socrates tells us, is the appropriate response to someone who is vicious, because it is done

[84] *R*: 505e.
[85] *Gorgias*, 509e; See also *Protagoras*, 345d-e.
[86] *R*: 505d.
[87] *R*: 336e.

involuntarily. Perhaps this helps to explain why Plato never shows Socrates getting angry. If all vicious acts are done involuntarily and out of an ignorance of what the good really is, then anger—especially in the form of moral indignation that seeks to punish the offender—is absurd. The only remedy for vice is knowledge; only the enlightened person can pursue virtue purposively. Wisdom, therefore, comes to light as the only virtue recognized by Socrates.[88] There really are no moral virtues, only intellectual ones. The healthy soul is the soul that pursues wisdom, the only virtue of the soul. All other souls are in some way defective, clinging to opinion instead of pursuing knowledge. Since wisdom comes to light as the only virtue that we can reasonably pursue, Socrates' pursuit of it no longer appears dubious. If virtue is the health of the soul, Socrates' famous quip that knowledge is virtue makes sense. Only the soul that pursues knowledge, or wisdom, would be healthy. In fact, this argument reinforces the declaration that the only healthy soul is the soul of the philosopher. In the conclusion, I will make it clear why I believe such an account is compelling.

[88] *R*: 518d-e.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I have made the argument that Plato, by pursuing the question of the good life, has furnished an account of justice that is superior to the Hobbesian account. Hobbes explains justice by reference to nature, but separates it from any notion of the good life, understood as excellence or virtue or the well-ordered soul. This is not the first time that someone has leveled such a charge against Hobbes. Bernard Gert observes, "Many philosophers do not seem to like Hobbes' view of human nature, because, unlike Aristotle, Mill, and many other philosophers, he not only does not put forward the life of the philosopher as the best life; he does not put forward any view of the best life."[89] While I agree with this criticism, I believe that Hobbes' unconcern with the good life is only symptomatic of another problem: His account of justice fails to make a distinction between the internal and external effects of justice. Indeed, his emphasis on the primacy of the passions makes it difficult for him to formulate a conception of the just soul. By contrast, Plato's example of the highest human type—the philosopher—serves the purpose of showing how justice relates to a well-ordered soul whose parts, especially reason, perform their proper work. Additionally, Hobbes concedes that nature inclines us toward injustice.[90] For Hobbes, nature pulls us down into war; for Plato, it guides us upward towards human excellence and the good life. Hobbes' account would not have convinced young Glaucon to live a just life and I would venture to say that many others of us remain unconvinced as well.

[89] Sorrel p. 170.
[90] *L*: XVII, 2.

Socrates' account of justice, on the other hand, is compelling for the following reasons. First, Socrates shows us that we are confused about the nature of justice. For Hobbes, justice is unproblematic; justice consists of honoring one's covenants. Socrates, on the other hand, brings to light the confusing and even contradictory demands that we make of justice. Indeed, even Glaucon's initial request is confused. On the one hand, Glaucon wants to hear justice praised independent of any external rewards; on the other hand, he wants justice to be the one external reward that makes an individual completely happy. I believe Glaucon's situation is similar to our own. We want to hear that the man who sacrifices his own good for the sake of others is happy. Yet this demand is confused. If the just man is rewarded with happiness, we lose the disinterested or sacrificial aspect. Understanding the *problem* of justice, I think, is essential to understanding anything else about justice. Justice is problematic, and once we begin to see this, we are in a position to gain some degree of insight into its true character.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Socrates quietly and continuously encourages us to view justice in light of the good life, and, indeed, the *eidos* of the good, or the good as such. A conscientious reader becomes aware that our concern for justice may actually be the seeds of a broader concern for the something higher and greater than justice, namely, the good itself. Socrates has this in mind when he refers to "the greatest study," one greater even than the study of justice. By this means he transforms our inquiry into justice into an inquiry into the good. We learn that everyone, even the man who prefers to live unjustly, acts in accordance with some conception of the good. Early in the *Republic*, in conversing with Thrasymachus, Socrates begins to shift from the question, "What is justice?" to the question, "Is justice good?" At the beginning of Book II, Glaucon and Adeimantus pick up on this new direction and press Socrates to show that justice is something good—indeed, something good for its own sake and not for its

consequences. Whether or not Socrates ever complies with this demand is open to doubt. After all, his analogy between justice and health suggests that justice belongs to the middle category of things good both in themselves and for their consequences. Even so, with our attention now directed toward the good, Socrates can develop his case that "the good" is the highest form in the intelligible world and that the best life for a human being is one devoted to the quest for knowledge of the *eidos* of the good.

By changing the focus from the just to the good, Socrates sheds light on the soul's highest motivation—one that Hobbes' account of the soul cannot accommodate. Everyone may not want to be just, but everyone wants the good things. As Socrates explains:

> Isn't it clear that many men would choose to do, possess, and enjoy the reputation for things that are opined to be just and fair, even if they aren't, while, when it comes to good things, no one is satisfied with what is opined to be so but each seeks the things that *are*, and from here on out everyone despises the opinion?[91]

We have been moved from an inquiry about the just life to an inquiry concerning the good life, and this is appropriate. For ultimately, the question of justice is really the question of: "How ought I to live?" as Socrates tells us in Book I.[92]. There is a way of life that is best-suited for humans by nature, and that life is the philosophic life. Many have noted the aporetic nature of the *Republic*, but surely this teaching is its most constructive part. By providing an account of the best life for a human being by nature, Socrates answers our poorly asked question.

[91] *R*: 505d.
[92] *R*: Book I, 352d.

REFERENCES

Bates, Stanley. "The Motivation to be Just," Ethics, Vol. 85 No. 1. (Oct, 1974), pp1-17.

Bloom, Allan. "Justice: John Rawls versus the Tradition of Political Philosophy." *American Political Science Review* 69: 642-662. 1975.

Hayes, Peter. "Hobbes's Silent Fool: A Response to Hoekstra," *Political Theory*, Vol. 27, No. 2. (Apr., 1999), pp. 225-229.

Hobbes, Thomas. *De Cive*. Edited and translated by Richard Tuck, Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1998.

- - - - - - , *Leviathan*. Ed. Edwin Curley. Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis: 1994.

Hoekstra, Kinch. "Hobbes and the Foole," *Political Theory*, Vol. 25, No. 5. (Oct., 1997), pp. 620-654.

- - - - - - , "Nothing to Declare? Hobbes and the Advocate of Injustice," *Political Theory*, Vol. 27, No. 2. (Apr., 1999), pp.230-235.

Oakeshott, Michael. *Rationalism in Politics, and Other Essays*. Basic Books, New York: 1962.

Plato. *Gorgias*. Translated with introduction, notes, and interpretive essays by James H. Nichols**,** Jr. Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1998.

Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. Translated with notes and an interpretive essay by Allan Bloom**,** Second Edition. Basic Books, New York: 1991.

Sorell, Tom, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1996.

Strauss, Leo. *Natural Right and History*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1953

- - - - - - , *City and Man*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1978.

Strauss, Leo and Joseph Cropsey, editors. *History of Political Philosophy*, Third Edition. University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1987.