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## Reinvestigating the Political Position of the Citizen in Plato's *Republic*

**Abstract:** In this paper, I argue that in the *Republic* Plato justifies the political authority of the guardians in light of the principle of partnership—a principle which fits coherently with other Platonic principles which undergird his political theory, including optimum functionality, social justice and power. Therefore, I argue that, by their respective professions, there is a cooperative interaction between the guardians and the producers as partners within the political structure of the ideal polis towards attaining the eudaemonistic goals of both the individual and the polis. I contrast this with the orthodox interpretation that Plato justifies political authority using the idea of the Good—an interpretation which holds that since the citizens cannot grasp the Good, they assume an insignificant political position, including the allegations that they are cogs, slaves, morally obtuse, and politically inept.

**Keywords:** partnership, optimum, functionality, power, eudaemonistic, social justice

### I. Introduction

In the *Republic*, Plato's political solution to a degenerated polis is that political power should be the exclusive prerogative of philosophers who have acquired political knowledge (*Rep.* 473c8–e)<sup>1</sup>. This suggests that Plato goes<sup>2</sup> against what, for in-

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, I use Grube's translation of the *Republic* and *Meno*, Sprague's *Euthydemus*, and Zeyl's *Gorgias* all in *Plato: Complete Works*, J.M. Cooper (ed.), Indianapolis 1997. The Greek text used for the *Republic* is from *Platonis Opera*, J. Burnet (ed.), Oxford 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars think that we cannot impute any idea whatsoever to Plato as definitive of his stance on any issue. Hence, the locutions "Plato justifies," "Plato thinks," "Socrates says," etc. appear

stance, an Athenian considered to be the core of dignity and civic honour (*timē*): political participation and military service.<sup>3</sup> Again, Socrates<sup>4</sup> compares the relationship between the guardians and citizens to a shepherd and sheep (*Rep.* 416a). The myth of metal also suggests the natal superiority of the guardians (*Rep.* 415a; 416e4–6). Far more popular is Plato's open animadversion on democratic freedom and equality (*Rep.* 557b–558c). These passages, among others, suggest that Plato conceives of the guardian class to have a higher value over the rest of the citizenry. Therefore, it seems an easy hermeneutical conclusion that Plato's citizens<sup>5</sup> assume an insignificant "political position" (see below) in his political theory.

Some critics of Plato, notably R.H.S Crossman and Karl Popper, and some commentators have had reasons to oppose Plato's political theory.<sup>6</sup> From a libertarian perspective, Popper believes that Plato's citizens are mere cogs fixed in the totalitarian state machinery. Gregory Vlastos argues that the citizens are slaves in virtue of their possession of opinion (*doxa*) and not reason (*logos*).<sup>7</sup> C.C.W. Taylor attempts to defend Plato against Popper. In his showing, Taylor agrees with Popper that Plato's political theory is totalitarian, but not the "extreme" form of totalitarianism which Popper alleges. By extreme totalitarianism, Taylor means a political system in which the purposes and wellbeing of the individuals are *totally* subordinated to those of the state.

Taylor suggests an alternative by contending that the *Republic* bodes paternalistic form of totalitarianism, namely, that the "function and aim of the state is simply to promote the welfare of its citizens [...]."<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, "Citizens of this

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problematic to them. I do not subscribe to this position. I share the view of E. Perl, *Thinking Being: Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition*, Leiden-Boston 2014, p. 20, that it is true "Plato never speaks directly in his own voice, we may nonetheless justify the use of the convenient locution 'Plato says' in quoting the dialogues." To read Plato in this way is not to deny that he "has anything to tell us. Rather, it merely raises the hermeneutical question of how to arrive at his meaning."

<sup>3</sup> R.K. Balot, *Greek Political Thought*, Oxford 2006, pp. 79–80.

<sup>4</sup> Unless it is obvious based on the context that it is the historical Socrates, references to Socrates are to Plato's Socrates in the middle and late dialogues. For what constitutes Plato's early, middle, and late dialogues, see especially G. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 46–50.

<sup>5</sup> I use "producing class," "economic class," "individual citizens," "the people" and "citizens" interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> R.H.S. Crossman, "Plato and the Perfect State," [in:] *Plato: Totalitarian or Democratic?*, T.L. Thorson (ed.), New York 1963, pp. 15–40. K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies. Vol. 1: The Spell of Plato*, Princeton 1971. Cf. J. Wild, "Plato as an Enemy of Democracy: A Rejoinder," [in:] *Plato: Totalitarian or Democratic?*, T.L. Thorson (ed.), New York 1963, pp. 150–128; J.H. Hallowell, "Plato and the Moral Foundation of Democracy," [in:] *Plato: Totalitarian or Democratic?*, pp. 129–150; C. Murley, "Plato's 'Republic'. Totalitarian or Democratic?" *The Classical Quarterly* 36 (1941), pp. 413–420.

<sup>7</sup> And G. Vlastos, "Slavery in Plato's Thought," *The Philosophical Review* 50 (1941), p. 290, believes that "the absence of self-determination, so striking in the case of the slave, is normal in Platonic society. The fully enlightened aristocrats are a small minority of the whole population [...]. All the rest are in some degree *douloi* in Plato's sense of the word: they lack *logos*; they do not know the Good, and cannot know their own good or the good of the state; their only chance of doing the good is to obey implicitly the commands of their superiors."

<sup>8</sup> C.C.W. Taylor, "Plato's Totalitarianism," [in:] *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, R. Kraut (ed.), Maryland 1997, pp. 31–48.

state are subjected to totalitarian authority for their own good; the justification for that subjection is their inability to achieve the good for themselves, whether through intellectual incapacity, individual weakness of character or collective political ineptitude.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in virtue of the citizens' alleged moral weakness or intellectual incapacity, Taylor is in agreement with Vlastos that it is better for a citizen "to be a slave to a master who has the ultimate good at heart than be slaves to his own lower nature [...]."<sup>10</sup>

However, Cross and Woosley issue a precaution: "it must be acknowledged that Plato is not entirely consistent in his view of the individual as subordinate to the state."<sup>11</sup> I take this "precaution" as very instructive to reinvestigate the "political position" of the citizens in light of the triadic link between Platonic partnership, power and justice, which are among the principles of politics in the *Republic*. By political position, I mean I want to find out whether Plato's citizens are, say, Popperian cogs, or Vlastos's and Taylor's slaves, who are either morally weak, intellectually incapacitated or politically inept. Bearing in mind the triadic link, I shall argue, among others, that if Plato were to conceive the political position of the individual citizens in the manner these scholars allege, then his political system would not have been any different from the degenerated poleis, especially tyranny and oligarchy. My interpretation is in agreement with the works of Robert Hall and Gerald Cantu, among other scholars, who understand Plato's conception of the citizens in favourable terms, including their unanimous agreement that the citizens are capable of moral virtue.<sup>12</sup>

Let me stipulate the senses in which I will use these principles. Plato's notion of partnership is commensurable with the common notion of partnership as the cooperative interaction between individuals or groups who agree to share responsibility for achieving some collective goal. And in pursuit of the collective goal, each individual assumes a specific role. An individual assumes a specific role in which, by his education and training, can attain efficiency or function optimally, marked by the adverbial (*eu*). The principle of optimum functionality is consistent with Plato's craft-analogy, namely, that things have their peculiar virtue or excellence; for instance, the excellence of a knife is to be sharp. Socrates<sup>13</sup> consistently distinguishes between merely doing something on one hand, and doing it *well* on the other hand (*Rep.* 374a2; 353c-e). Therefore, I shall take the Platonic partnership as setting the basis of the communalistic framework of the ideal polis, and Platonic justice—doing exclusively what one is naturally capable of doing—as specifying individual roles within such a framework. In light of this, I shall argue that the ruling profession only partners other professions to attain the happiness of both the individual citizens and

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> R.C. Cross, A.D. Woosley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, London 1964, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> H. Robert, *Plato and the Individual*, The Hague 1963, and G.C. Cantu, *Plato's Moral and Political Philosophy: Individual and Polis in the Republic*, ProQuest 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Unless the context becomes obvious that it is the historical Socrates, references to Socrates are to Plato's Socrates in the middle. For what constitutes Plato's early, middle, and late dialogues, see especially G. Vlastos, *Socrates...*, pp. 46–50.

the polis. On the other hand, Plato conceives of power normatively as the capacity to do something (*Rep.* 477c). This implies that one's capacity to perform a particular task presupposes one's possession of a particular *kind* of power. From this perspective, I shall propose that the eudaemonistic goals of both the polis and the individual seem to supervene on the cooperative interaction between political and economic excellences and efficiencies. Contrary to the traditional interpretation, I join few other scholars, including Hall, to advance the thesis that the citizens, producing class, are significant constituent members of the ideal polis, such that the realizability of their eudaemonistic goals is not threatened by the political hierarchy.

## II. Political Authority and the Problem of Moral Justification

In this section, I critique the use of morality relative to grasping the Good as the justificatory basis of Plato's political theory in the *Republic*. Taylor argues that the political authority of the guardians is justified *solely* on morality. The moral centrepiece of this allegation is that the citizens lack self-moderation, a true sense of justice<sup>14</sup> and absolute truth<sup>15</sup>, guaranteed by grasping the Good. As a sequel to his claims above, Taylor trenchantly alleges:

The goal of the *polis* is the production of as much individual *eudaimonia* as possible. But the majority of people are not capable of *eudaimonia* on their own; since they are incapable of grasping the Good, they cannot provide for themselves that impetus towards it which is a necessary condition for psychic harmony. Left to themselves they will be a prey to their lawless lower impulses, and will therefore sink into an uncoordinated chaos of conflicting desires. The nearest they can get to *eudaimonia* is to submit to direction by the intellect of someone else. The best state for an individual is, of course, to be able to provide this direction for himself; but failing that (as it does fail in most people's case) it is better for him to submit to another's direction towards the good than to succumb to the tyranny of his own undisciplined desires.<sup>16</sup>

Taylor is in agreement with Vlastos, and many other scholars, that the citizens cannot grasp the Good, hence they must submit to the authority of the guardians, for their moral and political wellbeing. In this way, I think Taylor attributes a justification of political authority typical of the modern contractarians to Plato, especially the Hobbesian version. To state it briefly, Hobbes conceives of those in

<sup>14</sup> Cf. G. Vlastos, "Slavery...." p. 289: "anything like a contract theory of the state strikes Plato as a pernicious error. How can men who do not know the nature of justice establish a just state by common agreement? The only way to get justice is to recognize the fact that "some men are by nature fitted to embrace philosophy and lead in the state, while others are unfit to embrace it and must follow the leader."

<sup>15</sup> For Popper, absolute truth cannot be known, but anyone who thinks that he knows it will inevitably attempt to impose it on everyone else (see T.L. Thorson, "Introduction," [in:] *Plato: Totalitarian or Democratic?*, T.L. Thorson (ed.), New York 1963, pp. 1–12). On this principle, Popper finds Plato's metaphysical doctrine of grasping the Good almost wholly erroneous and their political consequence as altogether pernicious.

<sup>16</sup> C.C.W. Taylor, *Plato's Totalitarianism*, p. 42. Cf. C.D.C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*, Indianapolis 2006, pp. 176–177.

his state of nature as possessing prudential rationality<sup>17</sup> to pursue the object of their felicitous desires, on one hand, but they lack moral rationality (taken here to mean showing concern for the other) to ensure peaceful co-existence, on the other hand. Accordingly, since members in the state of nature cannot be moral themselves, the authority of the Leviathan is justified such that its purpose is to ensure social harmony. However, when we come to the *Republic* it is undeniable that morality is part of the justificatory bases of political authority, but Taylor exaggerates its political significance.

More crucially, there are substantive problems associated with Taylor's paternalistic thesis. Two of them are that, first, his claim that the polis exists only for the production of individual eudaimonia is inconsistent with Socrates's remark, at *Rep.* 421b3–c4, that their aim is not to make any single individual or class happy, but "to see that the city as a whole has the greatest happiness."<sup>18</sup> Second, the claim that the political authority of the guardians is justified on the basis of grasping the Good is highly suspicious. I argue that Taylor, including scholars who think like him, misunderstands the sense in which grasping the Good can be related to individual citizens eudaemonistic pursuits. I justify in what follows (designated alphabetically from A to D).

(A) When Socrates takes up the challenge to prove that justice is something good in itself, he uses both the individual and the polis as illustrative instruments, with the latter only serving the larger picture (*Rep.* 368c–e). Hence, to understand the wellbeing or happiness (eudaimonia) of the individual citizens relative to the Good, I propose we point out the three main strands of Plato's defence of justice:

- (1) justice as a normative concept (as something valuable in itself),
- (2) normative justice as evident in the individual, and
- (3) normative justice as evident in the polis.

The search for justice in (2) seems to be a search for moral justice, the same way the search for justice in (3) seems to be a search for social justice. For the rest of this section, I shall concentrate on (2). The individual in (2) is an object of study, namely, that it is within this individual that Socrates searches for justice in the sense of (1). This individual is conceived of as a just individual partly because he attains optimum functionality of his soul (what Vlastos calls "psychic harmony"), namely, that his rational element (*to logistikon*) controls both the spirited (*to thumoeides*) and appetitive (*ta epithumia*) elements of the soul (*Rep.* 442a), and partly because his actions and dispositions correspond with the desires of each element of the soul, namely, that he is wise, courageous and temperate (cf. *Rep.* 427e4–7). This implies that *being* just involves consistently *acting* justly, which en-

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<sup>17</sup> A kind of reasoning mainly aimed at maximising one's egoistic goals and aspirations; it is self-regarding. See T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, C.B. MacPherson (ed.), Penguin 1986, Chapter XLVI; also T. Hobbes, *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, Cambridge 1928, Chapter 4.10–11 and Chapter 6.4.

<sup>18</sup> Here, I agree with scholars, including Cantu (see n. 12), who argue that the happiness of the polis is irreducible to the (collective) happiness of the individual citizens. Although the personal justice of the individual citizen is the primary aim of the state, I shall demonstrate in the next section that the good of the polis can properly be conceived in terms of its internal harmony and its security against external aggression or incursion.

compasses the disposition to behave justly towards one's fellows.<sup>19</sup> Let us call this individual the "paradigmatic" individual. For shorthand reference hereafter, let J subscript P ( $J_p$ ) represent this individual, where J is "just" and P is "paradigmatic." It is this  $J_p$  that Socrates juxtaposes against Thrasymachus' unjust individual, implying that the former is happier than the latter.<sup>20</sup>

The next issue is what constitutes the happiness of the  $J_p$ . According to Plato's psychology, the inherent conflict among the elements of the soul for dominance suggests that true happiness does not come to a passive rational part of the soul: some worthwhile activity is needed for the rational part to retain its dominance over the other parts of the soul<sup>21</sup>; grasping the Good is one such activity. However, it is difficult to find textual evidence which tells us that the  $J_p$ , to be happy, must grasp the Good itself (*to agathon auto*) in *the same sense* prescribed for the potential guardians. The most part of the proof of the psychic harmony of the  $J_p$  and his happiness is undertaken in Book IV (the conclusion drawn at *Rep* 441d10–e1) without the mention of the Good itself.<sup>22</sup> I think the proof that the  $J_p$  is happy seems to pick up a leitmotif in the Socratic eudaemonistic ethical thesis, namely, caring for the soul (*Apol.* 29e2–30a2) or more generally living the philosophic, examined life (*Apol.* 38a). *Rep.* 586e3–5 gives us a clue: "when the entire soul follows the philosophic part, and there is no civil war in it, each part does its own work exclusively and is just, and in particular, it enjoys its own pleasures, the best and truest pleasures possible for it."

The question then is: what *sense* of Good does the rational part pursue, at the individual level, to enjoy the "best and truest pleasures," or true happiness? When the idea of the Good is introduced at *Rep.* 505e1–5, it shares a conceptual structure with the Socratic eudaemonistic ethical thesis (see below):

**T1**<sup>23</sup>: Every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake. It divines that the good is something but it is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is or acquire the sort of stable beliefs it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give.

This passage can be understood from a Socratic perspective as follows: the pursuit of the Good is capable of generating the "best and truest pleasures," but the ideal it seeks to attain—moral wisdom—involves painful intellectual modus

<sup>19</sup> Cf. G. Vlastos, "The Argument in the 'Republic' that 'Justice Pays,'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968), p. 665. See an extended discussion of Platonic justice in G. Vlastos, "Justice and Psychic Harmony in the Republic," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), pp. 505–521.

<sup>20</sup> And also in Book VIII and IX of the *Republic*, this ideal individual is pitted against the individuals who correspond with the various degenerate individuals.

<sup>21</sup> Each of the three elements of the soul—the rational or reason, spirited, and appetitive—has its own desires and pleasures (580d); and any of them may govern a person's life (581b–c). Accordingly, reason is active even in a soul dominated by the appetitive or spirited parts. But the strength of reason depends on the competitive strength of the other elements. Where the appetitive part dominates, reason and the spirited part will be correspondingly weak and will serve appetitive desires. Where the spirited part dominates, reason and the appetitive part will be correspondingly weak and will serve spirited desires.

<sup>22</sup> The Good itself is profoundly defended in Book VI, beginning specifically at *Rep.* 508a.

<sup>23</sup> Let us, for convenience and ease of retrospective reference, identify indented quotations with **T** and a numerical index (**T1**, **T2**, etc.).

(the elenctic journey). For convenience, let us label this sense of the Good as the Socratic Good (moral wisdom). This interpretation is consistent with a recurrent theme in the Socratic eudaemonistic thesis, especially in the *Meno*, *Euthydemus*,<sup>24</sup> and *Gorgias*.<sup>25</sup> In these Socratic dialogues, the eudaemonistic *formula* is that we all endeavour to be happy, and in doing so we employ instrumental but variable goods, including wealth, walking, physical beauty, health, reputational goods like honour, fame, and physical activities like walking.<sup>26</sup> We are told that these variable goods, in themselves, are neither harmful nor beneficial. However, they become harmful when ignorance controls them, but if moral wisdom is in control, they are beneficial (*Euthyd.* 281d3–e2).<sup>27</sup> This suggests that it is only moral wisdom which is invariably beneficial. Accordingly, while acknowledging the conceptual difference between the monistic Socratic soul and the *Republic's* tripartite soul, I suggest that the “best and truest pleasure” which the philosophic part enjoys is *analogous* to the psychic happiness a Socratic soul enjoys—happiness which depends for its justification on the pursuit of moral wisdom.<sup>28</sup>

Now, as a sequel to **T1**, Socrates asks at *Rep.* 504e5–506a1: “Will we allow the best people [the guardians] in the city, to whom we entrust everything, to be so in the dark about something of this kind and of this importance?” After this passage, the Good assumes metaphysical (*Rep.* 507b–509c; 511b, 533d), theological (*Rep.* 585c), epistemological (508d8–e4), and political (*Rep.* 505d9–506a3) senses different from the simple Socratic ethical sense. For convenience, let us also label this multi-faceted sense of the Good as the Platonic Good.<sup>29</sup>

The important point to make here is that, at the individual level, the object of the philosophic life in the *Republic* and the pursuit of moral wisdom in Socratic dialogues seem to aim at the same goal: psychic happiness. If this can be accepted, then we can draw the following inference. I think the Platonic  $J_p$  is like the Socratic wise person who lives the examined or philosophic life. By pursuing moral wisdom, the  $J_p$ , like the Socratic wise, acquires the rational capacity to make

<sup>24</sup> *Euthydemus*, 278e–282d.

<sup>25</sup> *Gorgias*, 467c–468b.

<sup>26</sup> At *Gorg.* 468b1–2: “It’s because we pursue what’s good (*to agathon*) that we walk whenever we walk; we suppose that it’s better to walk. And conversely, whenever we stand still, we stand still for the sake of the same thing, what’s good.” *Gorg.* 499e12–13: “the good is the end of all our actions (*telos einai apasōn tōn praxeōn to agathon*).”

<sup>27</sup> *Meno.* 88c: “Therefore [...] all that the psyche undertakes and endures, if directed by wisdom, ends in happiness, but if directed by ignorance, it ends in the opposite.” See also *ibid.*, 87d–89c.

<sup>28</sup> According to the unity-of-the-virtues thesis, moral wisdom consists of the four cardinal virtues, namely, justice, piety, temperance, and courage. For our purpose, I shall have in mind “justice” when I speak about moral wisdom.

<sup>29</sup> This artificial division of the Good in the *Republic* will offend the developmentalists. Let me hasten to add that the *Republic* does not offer a plurality account of the Good or plurality of aspects of the Good. The distinction between Socratic and Platonic conceptions of the Good relative to the Good in the *Republic* is only for analytical purpose. What I attempt to argue here is that it is often taken for granted that the attainment of moral *epistēmē* is a result of grasping the Good. However, it is not clear whether political *epistēmē* can be identical with moral *epistēmē*; I think rather that knowledge of the Good is meant to serve political purpose—purpose which, as shall be seen in the next section, entails morality.

informed moral judgements and decisions, which are intrinsically valuable for his psychic wellbeing, and consequentially beneficial to those whom he relates with.<sup>30</sup> The crucial issue is whether happiness is provided by the pursuit or contemplation of moral wisdom “or” by acting according to this wisdom. A full exposition of this issue will sway us from our purpose. Nonetheless, I propose that the “or” should be understood conjunctively: contemplation and acting are equally essential to Platonic philosophy.<sup>31</sup>

How? We noted earlier that the  $J_p$  is happy because he is wise, which involves his capacity to consistently act justly, a disposition guaranteed by moral wisdom. Now, to act according to wisdom presupposes that one possesses that wisdom, implying a claim of epistemic certainty. However, this presupposition seems to be inconsistent with Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge, more technically Socratic epistemic pessimism. The disavowal is premised on the belief that although virtue is knowledge or wisdom,<sup>32</sup> that wisdom is not given but searched for (through the elenctic journey). While the elenctic journey does not guarantee epistemic certainty, the pursuer acquires elenctically certified moral principles, “held firm and bound with reasons of steel and adamant (*sidērois kai adamantinois logos*)” (*Gorg.* 508e) that are both necessary and sufficient for human decision making.<sup>33</sup> Illustratively, Socrates is considered wise not because he claims to possess complete knowledge of justice, but that by embarking on the elenctic journey, he acquires elenctic principles of justice, including his constant claim that “injustice is bad and shameful,” and “justice is beneficial and honourable”—principles which enable him to make what appears to him to be good decisions for his psychic wellbeing and those who would be affected by such decisions.

For instance, on these elenctic principles, Socrates declines to free from prison because he believes that “The really important thing is not to live, but to live well (*eu zēn*). And to live well is to live honourably (*kalōs*) and justly (*dikaiōs*)” (*Cri.* 48b4–8).<sup>34</sup> Therefore, as scholars have recurrently noticed, if epistemic certainty

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that this analogy does not affect Platonic justice as organic harmony. The issue at hand is what the rational part does to diligently perform its function of controlling the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Piechowiak, *Plato’s Conception of Justice and the Question of Human Dignity*, Berlin 2019, who reads this disjunctively and affirms the second disjunct, while rejecting the former, thinking that the best activity in Platonic ethics is not contemplation, but acting for the benefit of others.

<sup>32</sup> Which means that to be virtuous is to have a kind of knowledge that compels only good thoughts and actions and never their opposites.

<sup>33</sup> As K. Ackah, “Plato’s Euthyphro and Socratic Piety,” *Scholias: Studies in Classical Antiquity* 15 (2006), pp. 22–23 writes: these elenctically certified principles are “held by steel and adamantine arguments because it is certified by series of elenctic tests as satisfying a certain logical and social-psychological criteria of truth, [namely], it must never be inherently or, if more than one, mutually inconsistent or incoherent and must never lead to shameful or ridiculous consequences or consequences that are physically, social-psychologically or spiritually harmful.”

<sup>34</sup> On this same principle, Socrates refuses to make a pitiful appeal at the law court after his defence, a commonplace mode of appeal which was likely to mitigate the corresponding punishment to his alleged crime. He argues that pitiful appeal is dishonourable and unjust in that it makes foreigners look askance at the Athenian court, and also incites the jury to contravene the oaths they have sworn to protect the law (*Apol.* 34b6–35d).



is both a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness, then Socrates could never have been happy, because he would not accept that he attained epistemic certainty of, say, justice.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, aside from the elenctic principles it generates, the pursuit of moral wisdom itself produces happiness. For instance, Socrates speculates at his trial that death could bring him inconceivable happiness, if an after-world exists and he could continue to practice philosophy there (*Apol.* 40a–c8). On the other hand, Plato seems to believe in epistemic certainty, so that the  $J_p$  acts justly *in all situations* because he possesses sufficient knowledge, including knowledge of the full consequences and implications of the actions he undertakes. However, relative to the guardians, I shall show soon that Plato's (moral) epistemic optimism is questionable; it rather falls back on the Socratic epistemic pessimism.

(B) If my analogy between the Socratic and Platonic theses is reasonable, then I further make the following point. The individual in the polis, the citizen, must be distinguished from the  $J_p$ , in the sense that, as stated above, the latter is an illustrative instrument to understand justice in (1), on the one hand, while the former is a constituent member of the polis, on the other hand. The question then is: should the citizens become the  $J_p$  before they can become happy? In my opinion, the citizens do not *necessarily* have to be philosophical like  $J_p$  to be happy. Rather, a minimum degree of moral wisdom to guide them in the pursuit and usage of their material goods will suffice to constitute their happiness. Clear evidence to my interpretation is found at *Rep.* 586d4–e2, where it is recommended that:

**T2:** [T]hose desires of even the money-loving and honour-loving parts that follow knowledge and argument and pursue with their help those pleasures that reason approves will attain the truest pleasures possible for them, because they follow truth [...].

Now, it is apt to ask how the citizens can follow “knowledge and argument” in pursuit of their materialistic conception of happiness. Apparently, the context makes it clear that, like Socratic happiness, material acquisitiveness, or the pursuit of reputational goods, is not ruled out as constitutive of Platonic happiness. But the emphasis is on psychic harmony among the three parts of the soul guaranteed by care for the rational part whose function is fundamentally to ensure such state of equipoise. Thus, the predication of the tripartite soul to every one in the ideal polis clearly suggests that it is within the soul of every member of the ideal polis to be just, hence happy, without knowledge of the metaphysical Good. Hall articulates this position more forcefully:

Plato's theory of the individual emerges clearly here: any man by nature potentially can acquire justice. By living within the ideal polis of the *Republic* he himself can acquire his own perfection or arete. The philosopher ruler may help the individual by providing the proper environment and education, but the actual acquisition of justice is the individual's own task and responsibility [...]. Every man [...] in fact can acquire it without knowledge of the forms, and that such justice constitutes the true worth of every individual [...].<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See Vlastos's brilliant discussion of Socratic epistemic pessimism in G. Vlastos, “Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1985), pp. 1–31.

<sup>36</sup> R. Hall, *Plato and the Individual*, The Hague 1963, pp. 163–164.

From the foregoing, what we can draw so far is that although the respective professions of the producing do not in themselves entail moral knowledge, they do not necessarily have to rely on the moral guidance of the rulers for their moral wellbeing. Accordingly, I want to distinguish between three types of individuals in the *Republic*:

(a) the paradigmatic just individual ( $J_p$ ) who attains psychic harmony and happiness;

(b) the potential guardian who is morally required to become (a); and

(c) the other citizens who pursue their (material) happiness and need a minimum degree of moral wisdom to be truly happy.<sup>37</sup>

(C) If my analysis so far is reasonable, then the point of my criticism against Taylor and Vlastos, and scholars who think like them, is that Plato is inconsistent about his conception of the Good for the following reason. The Good is introduced at *Rep* 505e1 (**T1**) as the object of *everyone's* endeavour. But it later becomes an entity which only the potential guardians could grasp. My view on this inconsistency is that, for the most part, grasping the Platonic Good becomes valuable mainly for its political utility, namely, that it enables the guardians to rule efficiently (*Rep.* 505d9–506a3; 517c).<sup>38</sup> This, however, does not rule out the fact that the Platonic Good entails the Socratic Good; the Platonic Good possesses the capacity to develop moral character by virtue of it being the source of all good and beneficial things (*Rep.* 508d8–e4, 505e). Hence, one would expect that after grasping the Platonic Good, the guardians would attain complete moral epistemic certainty, just as they would for political competence.

However, in spite of their elaborate education, Plato does not take it for granted that the guardians are immune to moral and political corruption. A significant part of their primary and secondary education is moral education. And, even after their education, there are *post facto* laws to check the potential abuse of power. For instance, the guardians, among others, are not allowed to touch gold or silver, lest their desire degenerates into material acquisitiveness (*Rep.* 420d4–421a; 466b),<sup>39</sup> which will drive them to interfere in the economic activities of the people<sup>40</sup>. They are not required to have any sexual engagements, except the periods permitted

<sup>37</sup> See *Rep.* 419a–420a for the description of their happiness

<sup>38</sup> In a very pragmatic sense, Socrates tells Glaucon at 540a4–5: “And once [the guardians have] seen the Good itself, they must each in turn put the city, its citizens, and themselves in order, using it as their model (*paradeigmati*).”

<sup>39</sup> “For [the guardians] alone among the city’s population, it is unlawful to touch or handle gold or silver. They mustn’t be under the same roof as it, wear it as jewellery, or drink from gold or silver goblets. In this way, they’d save both themselves and the city. But if they acquire private land, houses, and currency themselves, they’ll be household managers and farmers instead of guardians—hostile masters of the other citizens instead of their allies. They’ll spend their whole lives hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against, more afraid of internal than of external enemies, and they’ll hasten both themselves and the whole city to almost immediate ruin” (*Rep.* 417a–b4; also *Rep.* 422d1–2). Plato rightly believes that economic polarization in politics creates conflicts, tensions, and hatred (*ibid.*, 422e–423a; cf. 520e9–21a3).

<sup>40</sup> See *Rep.* 431d–432a for a discussion of why “moderation spreads throughout the whole [city].”

by the constitution, indicating that it takes legislative supplements to check the appetitive desires of the guardians, lest it takes control of the rational part.

This, in my view, suggests that, relative to morality, the guardians must strive even after grasping the Platonic Good to become, and consistently act as, the *J<sub>p</sub>*. This explains why I believe Plato's moral epistemic certainty is questionable: cognition of the Platonic Good eventually makes the guardians politically adept but does not guarantee moral epistemic certainty. This means that as far as grasping the Good is concerned Plato shares the Socratic moral epistemic pessimism. Accordingly, I believe strongly that the guardians are vested with power not *necessarily* because they are morally superior to the rest of the citizenry, but because by their education they are able to attain efficiency or perform optimally in governance.<sup>41</sup> In essence, even if it can be granted that the rest of the citizens lack self-determination, as Vlastos alleges, it is questionable to use morality as the *only* justificatory basis of political authority and the polis, precisely because the guardians are not immune to moral corruption; far more unwarranted is to use grasping the Platonic Good as a basis of justification.

(D) Two criticisms can be raised against my interpretation so far. First, one may object that I have not distinguished between the guardians' capacity to be moral and their capacity to develop morality. The plausible answer is that it cannot be argued otherwise that for Plato the quality of moral decisions one can make depends on the quality of one's moral capacity to make those decisions. Second, *Rep.* 590c9–d5 is usually appealed to as the moral basis of a master-slave relationship theory, where Socrates says that a manual labourer must submit, as a slave, to divine wisdom or intelligence. But in this context, Socrates uses slavery *metaphorically*. In the same passage, Socrates draws a clear distinction between his usage of slave and that of Thrasymachus:

**T3:** It isn't to harm the slave that we say he must be ruled, which is what Thrasymachus thought to be true of all subjects, but because it is better for *everyone* to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without, so that as far as possible all will be alike and friends, governed by the *same thing* (*Rep.* 590c9–d5) (my emphasis).

Here, Socrates plausibly suggests that a manual labourer can be morally virtuous. But when he develops questionable moral character, then he must need the intervention of the divine reason. Equally, the divine reason is a necessary ethical agency for a guardian whose moral character degenerates. Interestingly, what Socrates identifies as *the same thing* and the *divine reason* is the *law*. Socrates follows

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<sup>41</sup> In Book I, Socrates has argued that governance is a kind of profession with its own standards of achievement that can be assessed (*Rep.* 346e2–347a6). In Book IV, we are told that the object of political expertise is the attainment of good governance, and Socrates identifies good governance with the exercise of good judgement (*euboulos*). Socrates declares that “this very thing, good judgement, is clearly some kind of knowledge (*epistēmē*) for it's through knowledge, not ignorance (*amathiai*), that people judge well (*eu bouleuontai*)” (*Rep.* 428c6–7). The philosophers knowledge, Socrates tells us, “doesn't judge about any particular matter but about the city as a whole and the maintenance of good relations, both internally and with other cities.” Accordingly, I shall argue that functions of the rulers, given their political *epistēmē*, go beyond ensuring internal social harmony (morality) to include taking practical political decisions to ensure good international relations.

**T3** with the assertion at *Rep.* 590d7 that: “This clearly is the aim of the law (*ho nomois*), which is the ally of everyone.” Logically, therefore, this indicates that the law is different from, and superior to, the wishes of any person in the polis. This means that all the citizens, including the guardians, could potentially become slaves to the law *if* they cannot, by their own, live the morally virtuous life. This, however, does not invite the absurd conclusion that the citizens are slaves; otherwise, the rulers are equally slaves as far as the law is concerned. This raises the crucial issue as to whether Plato believes in the law to produce political health or the wisdom of the guardians, or both. I shall, however, not pursue this issue here.

To conclude this section, nothing said so far should be taken to mean that I am undermining the guardians’ political authority. What I have argued so far is that morality cannot be the sole justificatory basis of political authority: the citizens are capable of moral virtue.<sup>42</sup> Why must this argument matter? I think to use morality as the sole justificatory basis has many implications, including the fact that (i) it creates a moral and political dependency culture which exposes the citizens to victimisation. By this I mean that the rulers can legislate any noxious law on the basis of ethical purification of the citizens; (ii) it is inconsistent with Plato’s naturalistic conception of the polis (*Rep.* 423d1–4; 429b7–c3) in that it presents the polis as an artificial, conventional entity like the contractarian civil states, which depend on a supposed contract. How then does Plato justify political authority? Let us explore in the next section.

### III. Justification of Political Authority

Plato is not a contractarian, at least in the Hobbesian sense. Nonetheless, he justifies the ideal polis, I claim, on the basis of a partnership (I distinguish partnership from contract below).<sup>43</sup> In stark contrast to the Hobbesian state of nature, Plato constructs a simple society which subsequently expands to become the ideal polis. At *Rep.* 369b–c Socrates states two foundational principles of every society: (i) mutual needs and (ii) difference of aptitudes. Socrates agrees with Glaucon that “a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient (*ouk autarkēs*), but we all need many things. Do you think that a city is founded on any other principle?” Socrates follows with the claim that:

**T4:** And because people need many things, and because one person calls on a second out of one need and on a third need out of a different need, many people gather in a single place to live together as partners (*koinōnous*) and helpers (*boēthous*). And this settlement is called a city (*Rep.* 369b–c).

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<sup>42</sup> R. Hall, op. cit., pp. 185–186: “It may be feasible to say that the philosophers have more inward happiness than others because they have knowledge of the forms. But if we emphasize such happiness as dependent on the attainment of the inwardly just condition of soul rather than on how such a condition was obtained, there would seem grounds for assuming a like degree of inward happiness among all just citizens.

<sup>43</sup> G.C. Cantu, *Plato’s Moral and Political Philosophy*, p. 56: “Socrates conceives of partnership of the primitive polis as involving more than just a self-interested reciprocal economy. It is a partnership with a communal, not merely self-interested, goal.” Vlastos and Taylor do not mention “partnership” at all.

Insufficiency (*ouk autarkēs*) drives men to partner with each other to socialise their natural talents and aptitudes for mutual benefit. Out of this results a simple agrarian polis. This polis features economic activities like farming, seafaring, wholesaling, retailing, and manual labour. The economic result is efficiency and better quality of consumables (*Rep.* 370c). The principles of division of labour and specialisation are introduced right from the beginning. Thus, each man specialises in one profession and brings the excess of his produce to a common market to exchange for other producer's goods of which he has need. We can say, then, that the good of the agrarian polis is the provision of material satisfaction for its members. This leads Socrates to say that:

**T5:** And if they *share* (*matadidōsi*)<sup>44</sup> things with one another, giving and taking, they do so because *each believes that this is better for himself* (*oimomenos hautōi omeionon einai*). And how will those in the city itself share the things that each produces? It was for the sake of this that we made their partnership and founded their city" (*Rep.* 369c5–8) (my emphasis).

I will return to the principle of partnership soon. Meantime, the expression "*better for himself*" in **T5** indicates that the individual has the rational capacity to believe that a particular course of action generates consequence which is better for himself: cooperating with others for the survival security a communal life could afford. Passages **T4** and **T5** give us a fair idea that, for Plato, the existence of society minimally suggests a human natural tendency to commune and live a shared life, predicated on the assumption that humans possess different talents and capacities, which generate assets that can, nevertheless, be considered common to be collectively shared. To the extent that the members in the agrarian polis have a sense of "sharing," relative to the Hobbesian members, we can grant them a minimum sense of moral capacity. Now, when Glaucon rejects the agrarian polis as only befitting a city of pigs, it is, however, not abandoned but subsumed under the luxurious, but fevered polis (*Rep.* 372e–374e). In light of this, I want to argue further that Taylor is wrong to have suggested that the good of the ideal polis is the production of individual eudaemonia. To argue thus, let us first consider how Plato justifies political authority.

When Glaucon rejects the agrarian polis as only befitting a city of pigs, Socrates proposes an expansion of the first polis, which results in a luxurious but fevered polis (*Rep.* 372e–374e). Consequently, the fevered polis comes along with its managerial demands. Thus, following the expansion of the polis, (I), it becomes imperative to protect the territory of the luxurious but fevered polis from external aggressions and incursions (an assertion of the polis' sovereignty), while engaging in warfare (*polemos*) to secure other neighbouring lands to accommodate the growing population, indicating the offensive capacity of the polis.<sup>45</sup> (II) There is the need to ensure social harmony and peaceful co-existence internally, in anticipation of conflict (*stasis*) that may ensue amid scarcity of resources. For, we are told that war "comes from those same desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happen to cities and the individuals in them," namely, overstepping

<sup>44</sup> See also *Rep.* 371b; 503d; 519e; 539d; 557a.

<sup>45</sup> For instances of "war" see *ibid.*, 373d; 373e–374a2; 404b5–7; 422b; 539e.

basic needs (ibid., 373e4–7). Thus, overstepping basic needs is the source of both domestic and international conflicts. Accordingly, both the fevered polis and its citizens begin to make claims to conditions which will promote their happiness, including the likelihood to act unjustly as a means to achieving that end. From this perspective, I suppose that the truly “political” aspect of Plato’s political theory is fundamentally expressed in functions (I) and (II).<sup>46</sup> After identifying the managerial needs of the fevered polis, the other main concern is to suggest how such functions can be performed *efficiently* or *optimally* (*eu*). Socrates interrogates Glaucon at *Rep.* 374c2–d5:

**T6:** Now, isn’t it of the greatest importance that warfare be practised *well* (*eu*)? And is fighting a war so easy that a farmer or a cobbler or any other craftsman can be a soldier at the same time? Or can someone pick up a shield or any other weapon or tool of war and immediately perform *adequately* in an infantry battle or any other kind? No other tool makes anyone who picks it up a craftsman or champion unless he has acquired the requisite knowledge and has had sufficient practice. The *to the degree* that the work of the guardians is most important, it requires most freedom from other things and the *greatest* skill and devotion (my emphasis).

We can see the relative tone of the italicised words in **T6**. The guardians are given the mandate to rule precisely because they can do that *well* (*eu*): attain optimum functionality in performing functions (I) and (II), relative to others.<sup>47</sup> As hinted above, it is crucial to note that political authority of the guardians is justified in Book II before the idea of the Platonic Good is introduced in Book VI, suggesting that philosophy only becomes an instrumental means of attaining efficiency in politics.<sup>48</sup> Now, to the question why are the people excluded from politics, Plato’s plausible defence for the exclusion could be that the citizens are excluded from politics not necessarily because they are politically inept, but that while their natural aptitudes and education enable them to attain excellence in their professions, those of the guardians equally enable them to obtain optimum functionality in governance.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, it is misleading to infer, as Taylor has done, that the polis exists only for the sake of the citizens’ good. Corresponding to the functions of the guardians, the good of the fevered polis is mainly its *desire* for stability and permanence and internal harmony. It is only a desire until the guardians can execute their given functions. It becomes ideal because it is “really wise. And that’s because it has good judgement” (*Rep.* 428b3–4). Accordingly, it is my view that even though the fevered polis evolves naturally from the natural desires of the individuals in the agrarian polis, it assumes an essence of its own, once it comes into being, which is irreducible to the good of any single individual. By this statement, I mean that

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Neu 1971, “Plato’s Analogy of State and Individual: The Republic and the Organic Theory of the State,” *Philosophy* 46 (1971), p. 239, who erroneously think that Plato is, here, not interested in international issues. We will now agree that Plato is not only interested in the internal ordering of the fevered polis but also in the polis as an agent in international affairs.

<sup>47</sup> See also *Rep.* 374b5–9.

<sup>48</sup> For a contrary view see G.M. Mara, “Politics and Action in Plato’s ‘Republic,’” *The Western Political Quarterly* 36 (1983), pp. 596–618.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. K. Balot, *Greek Political Thought*, Oxford 2006, p. 201.

the fevered polis' good, specified above, is independent of the individual citizens' good. In this way, the polis, like the individual citizens, becomes an object of care for the guardians. But by saying that the citizens become the object of care for the guardians, are we not affirming metaphysical justification? This question invites us to put the political position of the citizens in perspective. We have already seen the relationship between the principle of optimum functionality and partnership. In the rest of the paper, I shall do so by considering the relationship among the principle of Platonic partnership, social justice, and power.

First, let us return to partnership. If the agrarian polis is not abandoned but subsumed under the fevered polis, then I wish to vindicate the claim that the principle of partnership did not emasculate following the expansion. Granted, I propose that partnership, for Plato, is one of the social cohesive principles which grounds the ideal polis. For the moral and political significance Plato attaches to a partnership, the *Gorgias* provides us with forceful evidence. Socrates tells Callicles that:

**T7:** [An] undisciplined man could not be dear to another man or to a god, for he cannot be a partner (*koinōnein*), and where there's no partnership there's no friendship (*hotoōi de mē eni koinōnia, philia ouk an eiē*) [...] wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call the universe a *world order* [...] and not an undisciplined world-disorder. (*Gorg.* 507e–8a)

Partnership, for Plato, seems to be a normative principle that grounds all associations or aggregations. It appears many times in the *Republic*, usually used in tandem with “contract” (*sumbolia*) (*Rep.* 333a–d; 343d; 362b).<sup>50</sup> But I think there is a difference between the sense of partnership and contract here. Individuals or corporate entities form formal partnerships to share benefits and liabilities. Usually, formal partnership relates well with a contract in all its legalistic agreements and bindings. A partner to a formal contract is compelled to live up to the legal demands of the contract, failure of which may necessitate legal action. On the other hand, it is difficult to establish that a legal contract, enforceable by law, would have dictated the relationship between people who are solely driven by natural desires to cooperate to offset survival and an existential threat, like what the members in the agrarian polis did. Besides, it is not for an aridly polemical reason that Plato identifies the partnership with other essential communal values like friendship (see *Rep.* 424a).<sup>51</sup> Socrates, at *Rep.* 547b, criticizes timarchic rulers because they “distribute the land and houses as private property, enslave and hold as serfs and servants those whom they previously guarded as free friends and providers of upkeep [...]”

To summarize, it may well be asked why I think partnership matters for Plato's political theory. I propose that part of the reason is that the non-philosophic citizen is neither a Popperian cog, a slave to a master, nor a moral patient, but a partner, a significant constituent member of the society. The polis is organically

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 343d.

<sup>51</sup> On friendship and modern politics, cf. M. Schofield, *Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms*, London 1999, p. 72.

systematised so much so that “whenever anything good or bad happens to a single one of its citizens, such a city above all others will say that the affected part is its own and will share in the pleasure or pain as a whole” (*Rep.* 462d7–e1). We are told also at *Rep.* 463b that while in other cities the rulers call their citizens slaves, the guardians are to call the people “free friends and providers of upkeep,” on the one hand, and the people are to call the guardians their “preservers and auxiliaries.” Put in this way, I think it cannot be argued otherwise that all professions sanctioned in the expanded polis are to partner with each for the benefit of both the individual and the polis.

#### IV. Plato’s Political Theory and Power

We have hopefully realised that the profession of the guardians class only partners other professions for the realisation of the happiness of both the individual and the polis. In this section, I argue to strengthen this argument by looking at the dyadic link between the principle of optimum functionality and power.

Socrates defines power simply as the capacity to do something. At *Rep.* 477c, we are told that “Powers (*dunameis*) are a class of the things that enable us—or anything else for that matter—to do whatever we are capable of doing.” It is, however, not a descriptive concept but a normative and conative force. Socrates tells us: “A power has neither colour nor shape nor any feature of the sort that many other things have.” Rather, it is evident in “only what it is set over and what it does.” The normativity of power, as construed, enables Socrates to apply the concept to a broad range of things, including perceptual instrumentals like sight, hearing, and abstract concepts like justice, knowledge and opinion. For instance, at *Rep.* 433b–c, we are told that justice “is the power that makes it possible for the moderation, courage and wisdom to grow in the city and that preserves them when they’ve grown for as long as it remains there itself.” Also, there is a clear distinction between knowledge and opinion as species of power: “knowledge is power (*dunamin*),” and it is the greatest of all powers, but opinion “is a power as well, for it is what enables us to opine” (*Rep.* 477d6). This clearly brings into sharp focus the apparent fact that there is a strong link between Platonic justice and power, namely, that the capacity to do what one is naturally fitted to do presupposes the possession of a sort of power to do that thing.

If we may be permitted to integrate into our discussion Plato’s epistemology, hinted at with the above examples, we can make the following analysis. If an agent possesses the capacity (power) to do something and is able to do it best, it is indicative of the agent’s possession of a kind of superior knowledge. And perhaps, this suggests the agent’s ability to make better judgements than those who only possess opinion.<sup>52</sup> On this basis, the cobbler possesses some kind of epistemic power different from the doctor, just as the knowledge of the doctor is different from the

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<sup>52</sup> For instance, in the *Apology*, Socrates, after turning to the skilled craftsmen and cross-examining them, genuinely admits that “I knew quite well that I had practically no understanding myself, and I was sure that I should find them full of impressive knowledge. In this I was not disappointed; they



guardians. This further suggests that we can qualify the dyadic link between Platonic justice and power as follows: the capacity to do what one is naturally suited to do translates into the possession of a kind of epistemic power to undertake that thing. And if the professions of the cobbler and doctor fall under the producing class, then we can assert generally that the producing class possesses a kind of epistemic power. Plato is certain of the *political* power of the rulers (*Rep.* 473c), and the *defensive* power of the auxiliary (429b, 430b). Since defensive power is meant to corroborate the “convictions” of the rulers (414b4–5), it is appropriate to subsume it under political power. But will Plato admit that the people possess any kind of power? An affirmative answer is not readily given in the *Republic*. But the following exposition will give us a plausible answer.

In **T7**, we are told that merely picking tools does not make one a champion or craftsman unless one has acquired the requisite knowledge and practical experience. At *Rep.* 456d7–8, Socrates asks and it is answered in favour of the guardians: “in the city we’re establishing, who do you think will prove to be better men, the guardians, who receive the education we’ve described or the cobblers, who are educated in cobblery?” Also, we noted in the previous section that Socrates asserts says the polis is really wise because it has a good judgement (*Rep.* 428b3–4). As a sequel to this, Socrates agrees with Glaucon on the following:

**T8:** Now, this very thing, good judgement, is clearly some kind of knowledge (*epistēmē*), for it’s through knowledge, not ignorance, that people judge well (*eu*)...But there are many kinds of knowledge in the city (*pollai de ge kai pantodapai epistēmai en tēi polei eisin*) [...]. [It is not] because of the knowledge possessed by its carpenters, then, that the city is to be called wise and sound in judgement [...]. [But] some knowledge possessed by some of the citizens in the city we just founded that doesn’t judge about any particular matter but about the whole and the maintenance of good relations, both internally and with other cities [...].

Consequently, Socrates concludes at *Rep.* 428e6–429a2:

**T9:** Then, a whole city established according to nature would be wise because of the smallest class and part in it, namely, the governing or ruling one. And to this class, which seems to be by nature the smallest, belongs a *share of the knowledge* (*tēs epistēmēs metalanganein*) that alone among all the other kinds of knowledge is to be called wisdom (my emphasis).

Socrates admits in **T8** that there are kinds of knowledge in the polis, and in **T9** the guardians are said to *share* (*metalanganein*) in the manifold knowledge. In spite of the snobbish tone in both **T8** and **T9** to make the profession of the guardians seem superior, the fact remains that the cobblers, farmers, doctors, carpenters, and in general the producing class, are educated but not in like manner as the guardians, precisely because their professions do not demand such *kind* of education. Accordingly, it is clear that if doctors, lawyers and cobblers are said to be knowledgeable in their professional fields than the guardians, it simply means that they possess the requisite knowledge relevant to their profession, and are experts in doing what they do. Therefore, it is my ardent belief that if the guardians are better than, say, a doctor, it is precisely a *comparison in terms of*

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understood things which I did not” (*Apol.* 22c11–d3). By this, Socrates is saying that the craftsmen possess a kind of epistemic power he lacks.

who possesses what kind of epistemic power.<sup>53</sup> This leads me to conclude that while Plato's concept of social justice takes the people completely out of political power, his normative concept of power *a fortiori* commits him to the view that the productive capacities of the people translate collectively as epistemic power. This conclusion further defines the political position of the citizens: they are not intellectually handicapped, at least with respect to what their natural aptitude and education enable them to be good at. The following logical implication should be conspicuous: if Plato intended to conceive of the citizenry as intellectually handicapped, then he failed miserably; otherwise, the citizens play a crucial role in his political theory.

## V. Plato's Political Theory and Social Justice

From the last two sections, we have hopefully understood that Plato's citizens are not cogs nor slaves, but partners, and one's profession presupposes one's possession of epistemic power in performing optimally in that profession. But there is a crucial question. On one hand, Platonic social justice seems to bode a sense of individualism: each citizen performs one exclusive function, which he is naturally suited to do, and possesses the epistemic power to do. And on the other hand, Platonic partnership creates a communalistic framework for cooperative interactions. How do we reconcile Platonic partnership and social justice? Here, I shall respond to the implied allegation of Popper that the citizenry exists only to serve the interest of the polis.

Plato's search for justice in the polis is a search for social justice. Thus, justice as doing one's own (*tōn oikeiōn*) intimates social justice, namely, the distribution of burdens and privileges within a society. However, much of what Plato defends is the distribution of burdens, but for privileges, he proposes that "we must leave it to nature to provide each group with its share of happiness" (*Rep.* 421b3–c4). So, what does Plato mean by the formula "doing one's own?" Vlastos rightly says that "to do one's own" is an obligation one has to one's polis and to the other persons with whom one has to deal. Platonic social justice as doing one's own is somehow conceptually related to the traditional understanding of social justice, in the context of one's obligation to the polis. For instance, when Pericles said that in Athens each individual is not only interested in his own affairs (*tōn oikeiōn*) but in the affairs of the state as well, he was intimating Plato's social justice. Pericles thinks that "we do not say a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say he has no business here at all." According to Pericles, the Athenian political system—democracy—requires that all adult male citizens contribute to the discussions in court and in the assembly; one weakens the system if one neglects such important duty.

However, Plato's justice *prima facie* bodes individualism, given that each individual should exclusively perform only one function which one is naturally suited to do. Moreover, Platonic justice entails the principle of non-interference. The

<sup>53</sup> G. Vlastos, "Slavery..." p. 289.

principle of non-interference makes it easy to respond to the second question: strictly speaking, it does not fall within the domain of any individual citizen's profession to care for the fevered polis' good, in the sense specified above; it is strictly the mandate of the guardians. The *only* way the citizens are said to care for the polis is that they will pay taxes for the upkeep of the guardians (*Rep.* 416d7–e3). Accordingly, it is my view that the individual citizen's profession is, first and foremost, meant to advance their own good (*Rep.* 420e). But a literal understanding of this principle will make it difficult to appreciate Platonic partnership. Instead, it is a reasonable submission that what the individual does (his/her function) has an automatic relevance for the polis.

How? Since the polis evolves from the individual's natural desires, I suppose that each citizen's care for the polis is inextricably intertwined with his natural desire to attend to their survival needs. We can appeal to de Tocqueville's "enlightened egoism" to assert that the domain of one's own, in the Platonic sense, involves due consideration for the "other"—the other here including the polis. To put it in Heideggerian terms, the individual is a *Dasein*-in-the-World who interprets his political setting as part of his existence, rather than an external object, towards the actualisation of his beingness. Accordingly, the individual citizen, in pursuit of his own, invariably regards his profession as partnering others to develop the polis, without neglecting his own good. However, we should not limit the citizens' care for the polis to only their taxes, but the friendship and other social interactions like feasting together (*Rep.* 420e). The polis grows steadily under the good governance of the guardians and the impulsion it receives from individual citizens' harmonious interactions. It is in this sense that we can intelligibly assert that the citizens regard the polis, like a typical Greek polis, as an arena within which they can realise their potential. In light of this, I wish to assert that the citizens do not exist to serve only the interest of the polis, as Popper alleges, nor does the polis exist exclusively to serve the interest of the citizens, as Taylor alleges; it is difficult to get any textual evidence arguing to any of that effects.

If my account is right, then I think it is dangerous to pin down Plato's political theory as fitting exclusively into either libertarian or communitarian political moulds. For obvious reasons, Plato's political theory is definitely not democratic. But it does not also fit into any radical sense of communitarianism. We have seen that it is not true that the people are to be used to advance the interest of the polis at their own expense, as Popper alleges. Otherwise, the position of the citizens will not be any better than under timarchy or oligarchy. The best we can do, I suggest, is to value Plato's political theory in its own right.

## VI. Conclusion

We have seen the indefensibility of the claim that citizens of the ideal polis assume an insignificant political position. We have hopefully realised that the political authority of the guardians is justified in Book II before the idea of the Good is introduced in Book VI. On my reading, the philosophers become rulers precisely

because their natural aptitude and education, it is believed, will enable them to attain greater efficiency in governance than, say, a doctor; this in way no suggests that the doctor or cobbler is unintelligent and tacky. In the same light, claims of knowledge are relative such that the doctor can attain excellence in practising medicine more efficiently than a philosopher, and that is precisely why he is a doctor. Contrary to the orthodox view, I think, therefore, that the good of both the individual and the polis can be said to supervene on the cooperative interaction between political and productive excellences and efficiencies: the guardians can prevent the occurrence of *polemos* and *stasis* when their material needs are provided by the producing class; in return, the people are able to realise their potential within the polis when the political milieu is enabling. I believe also that Plato's proposal that philosophers should rule, as a solution to end the evils of society, can only be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition; the economic powers of the citizens is equally important. But Plato's silence on the citizens' efforts gives his critics arsenal to unjustly assess him.

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