

Ethics and Politics in Socrates' Defense of Justice

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Although Glaucon's challenge to Socrates to show the intrinsic value of justice for its possessor and Socrates' defense both concern *individual* justice, 61 out of a total of 85 Stephanus pages in Republic II-IV are devoted to politics, to describing the city and its coming-to-be: its origins in mutual need and the division of labor for efficient production of necessities, the expansion of this simple city to cater to the desire for luxuries, and especially the education of its guardians to purge these unnecessary desires. Why are these political proposals so extensive if Plato is only interested in the city as an analogue for the individual soul? And how does Socrates' definition of political justice as obtaining when each class performs its own function engage Thrasymachus' and Glaucon's specifically political claims about justice (that the laws that define justice in any constitution serve the interests of the rulers, that justice is the result of a social contract among the weak to neither harm nor be harmed)? Or if it does not engage these claims, then why not?

I argue that the account of the ideal city in Socrates' defense of justice plays the role of connecting justice as a structural condition of the soul and just behavior. I show that a proper appreciation of the role of the ideal city in the defense allows us to reply to Sachs' famous charge that Socrates' defense of justice is irrelevant; then, I raise a new worry that the defense is question-begging and show why it is not. Finally, I draw attention to the methodology of Socrates' defense and its relevance to the controversy in Plato scholarship about the relative roles of ethics and politics in the argument of the Republic.

(I would prefer to present this paper in a 40-minute 'plenary' session but can present a shortened version in a 20-minute 'panel' if necessary)