

Taming the Savage Beast: On Justice and Eros in Plato's *Republic*

Raúl Rodríguez*

Michigan State University

Introduction

Throughout Plato's *Republic*, two central problems emerge: justice and *eros*. The problem of justice, as it first appears in the dialogue, is that its definition is surprisingly elusive. Moreover, the goodness of justice, of whether or not it is good for its own sake, is difficult to determine. Likewise, the goodness of *eros*, which Plato generally describes as desire or love, is provisionally put into question. *Eros* is presented as a savage beast, one that prevents us from living a just and happy life. From the very outset, then, one is left in perplexity. What is justice? Is justice good? Can justice and *eros* be reconciled? Rather than simply resolve these questions, Plato repeats them, and in so doing he brings to light the nature of politics and philosophy.

The preliminary problem of justice is that we are deeply confused about what it is. We all have different definitions of justice that we unknowingly inherit. When our conceptions of justice undergo philosophic examination, they are often found to be inadequate and flawed. In the *Republic*, philosophy slowly emerges as the answer to the problem of justice. Philosophy can help us see our inconsistencies and to know what is just for ourselves and others.

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The primary problem of justice is the question of its intrinsic goodness—of whether justice benefits our individual good. Stated differently, it is the conflict between the individual good and the common good. Sometimes the common good requires the sacrifice of our individual good, even the greatest sacrifice—our life. Our political community tells us that justice is good and that it requires dedication to the common good. We know, however, that this dedication may be detrimental to our own good. Justice understood as complete, or even partial, dedication to the common good may not be beneficial.¹ Justice as dedication to one's own good emerges as a solution. By tending to one's own good (philosophizing), one may benefit oneself and serve the common good. Philosophy again appears as the solution to the problem of justice. This answer, however, is problematic. Philosophy may be good for oneself, but it may also be harmful to, or even destroy, the political community. Philosophy, in other words, may be in tension with justice understood as dedication to the common good.

The first obvious problem of *eros* is that it makes us immoderately pursue what we perceive to be our own individual good at the expense of the common good. *Eros* drives us to have insatiable desires and to take more than what is fitting (i.e., to be unjust). *Eros* often produces a frenzied madness, usually expressed in sexual desire, that causes us to commit great injustices. Justice, therefore, appears to require the supervision, even suppression, of *eros*. Justice and *eros* are in tension. The political community, therefore, attempts to control and moderate *eros*. In the *Republic*, Socrates proposes radical political reforms to fundamentally transform *eros* from the insatiable love of one's own to the unflinching love of one's political community. This solution of suppressing or abstracting from *eros*, however, will be shown to be problematic, even inhumane.

An additional problem of *eros* is the desire for a complete form of happiness.² Erotic human beings may sometimes sacrifice themselves and their lustful desires for the common good in the hope that this self-abnegation will provide them with a complete and lasting happiness. The erotic man hopes to become whole through

noble self-sacrifice. In other words, *eros* can present two extremes: a radical disregard for the common good or a noble, albeit delusional, commitment to the common good. Through complete dedication to the common good, some want the highest and noblest form of satisfaction. This erotic longing places a great weight on justice—it must make men happy no matter the circumstances, even in the face of great misfortune. Socrates will show that neither the life of justice nor the life of tyranny can fully satisfy this erotic longing. Philosophy will be presented as the one thing needful to provide the closest proximation to complete happiness.

A deeper problem of *eros* is the eternal hope that it produces in men. Not only do we want to possess the good, but we want to have everlasting possession of the good.³ In other words, we hope to live forever with what we perceive to be good. We want eternal happiness. This desire to possess the good always makes us susceptible to delusional charms, such as the idea that we can fulfill our erotic void in the arms of a lover,⁴ or even by taking comfort in mythical tales about the afterlife. Socrates presents philosophy as the solution to discovering what is truly good for us and possessing it always. Despite the encomium to philosophy, it may not be able to fully satisfy the restless hearts of men. Our erotic nature longs for what may be impossible—immortal possession of the good and union with the divine.

Overall, philosophy is presented as *the* solution to the problems of *eros* and justice. Philosophy is said to be purified *eros* that allows us to determine what justice is and to resolve the conflict between the individual good and the common good. As this article will make clear, this answer is problematic. Philosophy helps us understand what justice is, but rather than bridge the chasm that lies between the individual good and the common good, it illuminates and expands the void that separates these two goods. Moreover, the extent to which philosophy is erotic is hotly contested. Is philosophy a channeling of *eros* or an overcoming of *eros*? By focusing on the problems of justice and *eros*, this study attempts to examine, in a preliminary way, the ultimate character of philosophy.

Reviving and Advancing Platonic Scholarship

Previous Plato scholars have focused on how the *Republic* underscores “the problem of justice,”⁵ as well as the “evil of *eros*,”⁶ but insufficient attention has been paid to this tension between justice and *eros* in the *Republic*. Although a philosopher and his students have pointed to the importance of these two interwoven themes in the *Republic*, it remains a subterranean and obscure interpretation that merits further excavation.⁷ The subdued claim of this previous interpretation is that the key to understanding the *Republic* is understanding why in the course of examining justice Plato abstracts from *eros*.⁸ This abstraction from *eros* is crucial for understanding the problem of justice and ultimately the nature of philosophy.

David Levy has provided one of the more profound interpretations of the problem of *eros* in several of Plato’s dialogues. He focuses less on the problem of justice and more on the link between *eros* and religious belief in the gods. According to Levy, Plato’s teaching is that “*eros* fills lovers with hope for a happiness that could be attained only with the assistance of gods, hope that may thus provide a basis for fully articulated beliefs in the gods.”⁹ I agree that a close reading of the *Republic* (and the *Symposium*) reveals a close relationship between *eros* and divine hopes. Levy, however, often emphasizes the “unerotic aspect of philosophy” and the “ultimate tension between *eros* and philosophy.”¹⁰ Levy argues that although “*eros* may offer tremendous help in a philosophic education,” it must ultimately be overcome. This fact points to “the immense demands that the philosophic life, as Socrates understands it, makes on the heart and on the mind.”¹¹ Levy is certainly correct that philosophy may need to overcome central aspects of *eros*, specifically the love of one’s own and the hope for immortal happiness. Nevertheless, one may wonder if this austere, almost Spartan, overcoming of *eros* goes too far.

Stanley Rosen and David Roochnik, in contrast, argue that there is a “strong connection between *Eros* and philosophy,”¹² and they also contend that “the lover of wisdom” is “the erotic man par excellence.”¹³ Thus, rather than describing the philosopher as overcoming *eros*, they depict him as embracing and purifying *eros*.

Rosen argues that Plato shows a commonsensical “distrust of *Eros*” in the *Republic* but that his *Symposium* also shows “that this distrust is not altogether reasonable.” The “unerotic” presentation of philosophy, he poetically remarks, is “unjust to human experience” and “reduces the color of light to a self-righteously uniform grey.”¹⁴ Roochnik advances Rosen’s erotic reading of philosophy and attempts to show how it is present in the *Republic*, not just the *Symposium*: “driven by the ‘savage master’ *Eros*, philosophers love and seek madly to obtain, to move forcefully toward, what is distinctly other than themselves and far beyond human reach.” Roochnik concludes that “philosophy is essentially erotic.”¹⁵

Through an examination of the entire *Republic*, and with particular focus on the question of justice, this article advances a middle position. Levy overemphasizes the need to vanquish *eros* and its inseparable link to religious faith. Rosen and Roochnik fail to adequately see the utopian character of philosophy as presented in the *Republic*, and thus the misleading description of philosophy that is presented to Glaucon and other interlocutors. I agree with Rosen and Roochnik that *eros* remains an important part of the philosophic life, but, following Levy and others, there is a part of *eros* that must be resisted—the part of *eros* that may settle for an illusory pleasure in its quest for complete happiness. In other words, the part of *eros* that pursues remains a fundamental part of philosophy, but a sobering realization that we may not be able to consummate our deepest longings chastens our *eros*.

Book I: The Initial Problem of Justice and the Death of *Eros*

The first and most obvious problem of justice is that it is surprisingly difficult to define. Does justice mean speaking the truth and paying back one’s debts (328c–331d)?¹⁶ Is justice helping friends and harming enemies (331d–336a)? And, perhaps the most radical question of all, is justice good (336b–354c)? Through his conversations, Socrates brings to light the problematic character of our confusion about justice. We presume to know what justice is, but in reality we are profoundly confused. Socrates, then, begins the problem of justice by teaching us a lesson in self-knowledge.

The problematic character of *eros* is first explicitly raised in Cephalus's discussion with Socrates. Cephalus proudly remarks that old age brings with it great relief from the savage desires of sex. He states that he once heard the poet Sophocles recount how he "joyfully escaped" this "frenzied and savage master" (329c). Bloom notes that "from the point of view of justice, *eros* is a terrible thing." Justice requires the "death of *eros*."¹⁷ Bloom appears to be correct—before a single definition of justice can be presented, *eros* must be slayed.

Cephalus's definition of justice—"speaking the truth and giving back what one takes" (331c–d)—is refuted by Socrates's example of an unstable friend who demands the return of his weapon. Cephalus's definition is defective, but it is not meaningless. There are important elements of genuine justice in his definition. It is generally just to tell the truth and give back what one owes. Likewise, giving back what is owed is a crucial part of justice most of the time. Leo Strauss notes that "the complete view after which he [Cephalus] gropes is none other than the one stated in the traditional definition of justice: justice consists in returning, leaving or giving to everyone what he is entitled to, what belongs to him."¹⁸ This more traditional definition of justice is rehabilitated but in a more radical way. Strauss shows how this definition of justice—giving back to everyone what is owed—can justify the later reforms in the *Republic*. Few make proper use of what belongs to them; therefore, "one might be compelled to demand that everyone own only what is 'fitting' for him, what is good for him and for as long as it is good for him."¹⁹ This could legitimate the abolition of private property and the family. Moreover, few people will be able to determine what is good or what truly belongs to each person. This could legitimate the absolute rule of a wise man, of a philosopher king. Strauss shows how this traditional definition of justice, philosophically interpreted, can legitimate radical reform. Socrates tears down traditional notions of justice, but it must not be forgotten that it will be rehabilitated in some fashion—once it has been baptized in the waters of philosophy.²⁰

Strauss states that this radical philosophic interpretation of justice that legitimates these reforms is "based on the disregard of,

or the abstraction from, a number of relevant things.” He claims that “if one wishes to understand the *Republic*, one must try to find out what these disregarded things are and why they are disregarded.”²¹ To fully understand the problem of justice as articulated in the *Republic*, we must understand how and why *eros* is abstracted—how it is deformed and for what purposes. This abstraction from *eros* becomes clearer as the dialogue advances.

This exchange with Cephalus raises important considerations about the problem of justice and the abstraction of *eros*. Intense desire can be problematic in relation to justice. Often our individual desires for wealth and bodily satisfaction prevent us from living justly. The interaction Socrates has with Cephalus also raises, in a preliminary way, one of the primary problems of justice: the conflict between the individual good and the common good. Cephalus suggests that early in his life erotic desires or a sole concern for his own good prevented him from always being just. By being concerned with his individual good at the expense of others, he was able to profit. Even in old age, he is concerned with his individual good—in avoiding punishment by paying back his debts to gods and men. Cephalus exemplifies the fact that there is a tension, perhaps an irresolvable tension, between one’s individual good and the common good. Lastly, Cephalus’s eroticism morphs into a pious belief in the gods. This shows, in a preliminary way, the link between *eros* and the desire for immortality as well as belief in the gods of the city.²²

Book II–IV: The Erotic Indictment of Justice and the Salutary Response

The indictment of justice, commenced by Thrasymachus in Book I, is expounded on by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II. Glaucon infuses an erotic twist to Thrasymachus’s praise of injustice and tyranny. In his attempt to show that no one practices justice willingly, he presents the famous Ring of Gyges story. A shepherd found the ring of invisibility, committed “adultery with the king’s wife and, along with her, set upon the king and killed him” (360a–b). This example is meant to show that if a “just” man or an “unjust”

man is given full license to do whatever he wants in private, he will always do the unjust thing. Private erotic desire appears to be one of the primary reasons why we want to be unjust. *Eros* must come under the supervision of the political authority and be made public. The rest of the *Republic* will hint toward this solution of making *eros* public.²³

Glaucon erotically desires justice to be the supreme good, even in the face of great pain and misfortune. As he indicates, his hope is that the just man can be happy no matter the circumstances. He wants the intrinsic goodness of justice to prevail even when a man is whipped, put on a rack, bound, and tortured (362a). His erotic longing places a great weight on justice. He wants justice to make a man complete and happy. This erotic longing for unending happiness is what attracts him to tyranny. The life of the tyrant, it seems, may be able to provide this complete happiness that *eros* drives us toward. Socrates will eventually show that neither the life of justice nor the life of tyranny can fully satisfy his erotic longing. Socrates will attempt to present philosophy as a solution, but even philosophy is incapable of giving him what he and his brother want. Socrates will ultimately have to make use of myths to assuage the erotic longings of both men.

Similar to his brother, Adeimantus wants to know that it is good to be just, irrespective of rewards. He focuses on the problem of the gods as they are depicted by Hesiod and Homer. His speech is one of the first obvious attacks on poetry, which will become a theme of the *Republic*.²⁴ This indictment of poetry is deeply connected to the abstraction or reduction of *eros*. The poets, in many ways, embody *eros* and sing praise to *eros*. Throughout the *Republic*, *eros* is associated with poets and tyrants. Adeimantus's speech focuses less on erotic desires and points toward the problem of the poets, of how they describe the gods as well as human interaction with the gods. The poets tell of how "misfortune and a bad life" (354b) can fall on the just and how the just life is filled with toil and sweat (364d). The poets also tell of how the gods can be bribed with sacrifices if one is unjust. What Adeimantus learns from this is that "there is no advantage in my being just" (365b).

It is better to be unjust and offer sacrifices from “unjust acquisitions” (365e). Here we see Adeimantus attempting to reconcile his individual good with the common (or cosmic) good, like Cephalus. Again, like Cephalus and Glaucon, Adeimantus has a certain erotic longing for complete and immortal happiness that only belief in the gods can fulfill.

So as to be truly persuaded of the goodness of justice, Plato’s brothers present Socrates with a damning indictment of justice; their hope, however, is that Socrates will be able to ultimately exonerate and uphold the cause of justice. Although Socrates states that he is “not capable” of adequately defending justice on the terms specified, he nonetheless feels compelled by a sense of piety to try his best (368b–c). This early admission by Socrates indicates that something other than justice will have to fill the void that their erotic longing creates.

In order to narrow in on the problem justice, Socrates proposes examining justice on a larger scale (368e–369a). Socrates begins by building a city in speech. One must immediately ask why Socrates commences this strange procedure. Why not give a logical definition of justice and explain why it makes one happy? Why take such a circuitous route? Strauss remarks that the young men Socrates is speaking to have a “secret desire to be tyrants.”²⁵ By constructing a city with Glaucon and Adeimantus, Socrates provides them with an antidote for the charms of tyranny—the life of a founder. The founder is superior to the tyrant. The founder, it appears, can be nobly dedicated to the common good, to the justice of all, and at the same time be dedicated to one’s individual good. All earthly and heavenly rewards belong to the founder. The tyrant represents a base form of *eros*—the licentious love of oneself—whereas the founder represents the noblest form of *eros*—the admirable love of the common good.

In discussing the education of the men who will inhabit and guard this city, Socrates first examines “the makers of tales,” the ones who speak to children in the beginning (377a–b). Socrates must attack the poets who shape our understanding of justice and *eros*. Hesiod, Homer, and the other poets “composed false tales for

human beings” about the gods (377b). They told the “biggest lie about the biggest things” (377e). The poets depict the gods acting in erotic madness and injustice. Hesiod depicts the gods fighting over sex and reproduction (378a), and Homer depicts the gods acting in unholy and immoderate sexual ways.²⁶ Zeus is depicted as having uncontrollable erotic desire for his wife (390c), and Theseus is described as committing “terrible rapes” (391d). *Eros*, again, is a savage master that prevents just action. The only solution is to censor the poets (387b) by ensuring that they present the gods, or “the god,” in a coherent way (379a). The poets must not give men like Adeimantus reason to believe that the gods do not exist and that one can happily live an unjust life.²⁷ The image of the gods must ultimately be remade—perhaps radically remade—by philosophers (508a–509c).²⁸

Not only do the poets need to be supervised, but so do other craftsman and musicians who imprint images on the soul. These makers of images and sounds must not be allowed to make us licentious and live immoderately when it comes to *eros*. Socrates and Glaucon agree that “excessive pleasure” puts “men out of their minds” (402e). This maddening and licentious *eros* does not “approach the right kind of love” (403a). Here we see a distinction between base and nobler forms of *eros*. Socrates blames *eros*, but he also attempts to refine *eros*, in so far as it is possible. Music can help refine *eros*: “musical matters should end in love matters (*erotika*) that concern the fair [beautiful]” (403c). Bloom rightly notes that this properly educated *eros* will help warriors love genuine beauty and be willing to sacrifice their own self-interest for the greater good (i.e., sacrifice their individual good for the common good).²⁹

To counter the poets, Socrates puts forward a few “noble lies” to reconcile the individual good and common good. Everyone must be told that the earth is their mother and that other citizens are their brothers who are also born of the earth (414d–e). Here we begin to see the attenuation of the family—that erotic union that separates us from our fellow citizens. This lie will help citizens associate their own good with the good of their community.³⁰

Moreover, citizens must be told that “the god,” or the father, mixed metals in at birth in order to place each in their natural class (415a). These two noble lies serve the function of teaching citizens the naturalness of their political community and the naturalness of a social hierarchy. Overall, they function to make the city one. Although these noble lies may serve as a uniting bond, they abstract from the natural love of one’s own. The erotic desire to generate and separate one’s own family is minimized. Likewise, the desire to favor one’s own is prohibited. Erotic and familial love is a barrier to achieving justice.³¹

Socrates begins to abolish not only the private family but privacy itself. The auxiliaries will possess no private property, will have no privacy, and will “live a life in common” (416a). This armed camp harkens back to the Ring of Gyges story, which symbolizes privacy or the private home.³² Both accounts speak of the danger of the ability to do whatever one wants without anyone else seeing. Erotic injustice is done in private. To ensure no injustice is done, private actions must be prohibited. Everything, even *eros*, must be made public: “no one will have any house or storeroom into which everyone who wishes cannot come” (416d). In passing, Socrates also states that “the possession of women, marriage, and procreation of children must as far as possible be arranged according to the proverb that friends have all things in common” (423e). This erotic matter will be taken up again at the start of Book V.

Dissatisfied by Socrates’s reply to Adeimantus, Glaucon curtly interjects: “[Y]ou’re talking nonsense,” and he demands that Socrates return to the question at hand: What is justice? And is it good (427d–e)? At Glaucon’s urging, Socrates proposes a hunt for justice in order to see how it is manifested in each individual (432b–c). Justice suddenly appears through the search for the function, or work, of each individual. Since nature makes each naturally fit for one function in the city, justice must be “the minding of one’s own business and not being a busybody” (433a–c). If each person or class does their work well, the common good will be served. While this definition allows for a perfect conversion of the common and individual good, this discussion relies on the myth of

metals (i.e., a noble lie). Doing one's own work, in one's own class, may not be good for the individual.

Even more problematic than the premise underlying Socrates's definition is his admission that the basis of their procedure is inadequate. Socrates and Glaucon "stumble upon" a "slight question of the soul" and whether or not it has "three forms" (435b–d). Socrates briefly, but unmistakably, admits that their method of analysis is inadequate (435d). He states that to get a full account of the soul, "another longer and further road" would be necessary (435d, 504b, 506d). Unable to understand the full implication of this, Glaucon urges Socrates to go on.

Because Glaucon cannot fully grasp the consequences of proceeding in this manner, Socrates attempts to give him and the cursory reader an edifying teaching. For those unperturbed by this inadequacy, Socrates goes on to develop the analogy of the tripartite soul to give his final definition of justice. Here, Socrates presents political justice (minding one's own business) as a "phantom of justice," properly speaking. True justice, Socrates argues, is not concerned with minding one's own external business alone; genuine justice is concerned with what is within, with setting one's "own house in good order" and ruling oneself. Only in arranging and harmonizing oneself can one genuinely become "[one's] own friend" (443c–e). This, and only this, is true justice. This definition moderates Glaucon and anyone else who might presume to know what justice is. By admonishing Glaucon and the reader to look within—to know oneself—first and foremost, Socrates moderates those who may unknowingly commit grave injustice in their misguided moral zeal to do what is right. For the more astute reader, however, Plato points to a difficulty.

The bifurcation of justice into political and individual justice appears to resolve the problem of justice; but, in reality, this division simply evades the all-important question: Is justice good?³³ Socrates's two definitions remind us that the majority of us are deeply attracted to an understanding of justice that allows us to be devoted to the well-being of others while simultaneously being devoted to ourselves. We want, in other words, our individual good

to be identical with the common good. But can these two senses of justice be put together? What if tending to one's own soul (philosophizing) requires the neglect of the common good? More importantly, what is the good?

Ultimately, the definition of justice provided at the end of Book IV is "a certain health, beauty and good condition of a soul" (444d-e). A healthy soul ruled by the calculating part of the soul appears as the solution (i.e., philosophy). As mentioned, this solution is problematic because the soul and its parts have not been adequately examined. But perhaps more problematic, a full account of what it would mean for the reasoning part of the soul to rule has not been given. Socrates states that the calculating part of the soul "possesses within it the knowledge of that which is beneficial for each part" and for the whole community (442c). This is reminiscent of the traditional definition of justice—of giving to each what is due or fitting. This conclusion prepares the way for a full presentation of philosopher-kings. Philosophy will emerge as *the* solution to the problems of justice and *eros*. At this point, however, what philosophy is and how it can resolve these intertwined problems has yet to be made manifest.

Books V–VII: Apparent Resolution of the Problems of Justice and *Eros*

Book V of the *Republic* is a new beginning, one that appears to commence the final resolution of the problem of justice. By proposing three radical reforms, Socrates experiments with the possibility of making a perfectly just society, one devoid of the problem of justice. In doing so, however, Socrates is forced to sacrifice or reduce what is distinctly human: our erotic nature. By reducing *eros* and making it subordinate to the needs of the city, Socrates ironically degrades human beings, making them equivalent to animals that are bred for the maximization of the common good. This minimization of *eros* is the key to understanding both the comic and the serious elements of these reforms.

The first reform Socrates proposes is for men and women to share all pursuits in common and thus to have the same education

(451d–457c). For the city to be perfectly just and accord with nature, not convention, women must be educated as men. Women must receive a Greek gymnastic education where they exercise “naked with the men” (452a–b). Even the old, “wrinkled” women, like the men, must exercise naked. Glaucon finds this laughable, but Socrates urges him to take the proposition seriously, despite its humorous quality. Socrates suggests that there is no substantial difference between men and women—similar to the negligible difference between the bald and long-haired (454c). Socrates is serious in that he sees that women are fit to do many of the same tasks as men. Nevertheless, one must wonder if Socrates overly minimizes the differences between men and women.³⁴ Are the differences reducible to bald and long-haired people? The example of men and women exercising together in the nude reveals that these reforms rely on an abstraction from *eros* that becomes more apparent in the subsequent reforms.³⁵

The second reform is that women and children are to belong to all the guardian men in common and that they will live in common with nothing being held in private (457d). This reform attempts to expose and change the serious problem that arises from the conflict between the common good and the love of one’s own (i.e., the problem of justice). With this reform, the city becomes one’s family—one no longer has to decide whether to help one’s own or the city. Despite this solution, there are several problems with this reform. By having women belong to all men in common, men and women will no longer be able to live together privately. This represses the erotic desire of the lover to possess his beloved and to share the beloved with no one. Socrates suggests that *eros* can be expressed in a communal way—a city can form “a community of pleasures and pains” (464a–b). This may be true to a certain extent, but there are also important elements of erotic union that are private, that are not easily shared. Furthermore, the city’s unerotic breeding of men and women for the purpose of producing the best offspring leaves little room for spontaneous or erotic unions. This truncated notion of human *eros* forgets—in a radical way—the universal desire to possess one’s beloved (464a).³⁶

Socrates seems to suggest, though in a rather ironic way, that as long as the love of one's own exists, perfect political justice will remain unobtainable.

Socrates returns to this erotic problem of exercising in the nude after introducing the second reform. Socrates states that "mixed together in gymnastic exercise and the rest of the training, they'll be led by an inner natural necessity to sexual mixing with one another." Glaucon confirms that these are "erotic necessities" that "are likely to be more stinging than the others when it comes to persuading and attracting the bulk of the people" (458d). Socrates reassures Glaucon, however, by saying that "irregular intercourse with one another, or anything else of the sort, isn't holy in a city of happy men nor will rulers allow it" (458e). Free love will be prohibited, and marriage will be made sacred. *Eros*, yet again, comes under the supervision of the governing authority.³⁷ One must immediately ask if law can completely conquer "erotic necessities." Socrates seems to minimize the power of *eros* and overemphasizes the power of law.

The control of *eros* is starkly visible when Socrates and Glaucon discuss the breeding of human beings. Socrates argues that breeding improves other animal species, so it must also do the same for humans. Socrates hints that our erotic desires and perhaps also our pride will make this breeding program difficult to implement. As a result, rulers will "have to use a throng of lies and deceptions for the benefit of the ruled" (459c). The need for such lies hints at the unnatural and problematic character of these laws.

These reforms, of course, are not devoid of erotic energy. After all, Socrates states that "there is a need for the best men to have intercourse as often as possible with the best women" (459d; 460b). These proceedings, he remarks, must go "unnoticed by anyone except the rulers" (459e). Some aspects of *eros* will remain private, even hidden. These rendezvous must remain hidden; otherwise, this system will create faction among the men. *Eros*, thus, will remain a problem in this city, but it will be channeled to create the best and strongest citizens. In this way Socrates chooses not to ignore *eros* but to communalize it, to make its private manifestations less

corrosive to the community. By channeling erotic desire, the community can become stronger and more cohesive. One wonders, however, the extent to which the policy of allowing the best men to secretly have intercourse with the best women will be possible. Other difficulties abound. No one will know who their biological parents or siblings are. This, of course, raises the possibility of incest (461c–d). These problems and others are not oversights by Plato—they are intended to elucidate the fundamental problems of justice and *eros* and to show that they may not be fully resolvable.

The third and final reform, the one upon which all the rest depend, is for “philosophers [to] rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize.” Socrates declares that unless “political power and philosophy coincide,” there will be “no rest from ills for the cities . . . [nor for] human kind” (473c–e). Glaucon immediately expresses an erotic and laughable response:

Socrates, what a phrase and argument you have let burst out. Now that it's said, you can believe that very many men, and not ordinary ones, will on the spot throw off their clothes, and stripped for action, taking hold of whatever weapon falls under the hand of each, run full speed at you to do wonderful deeds. (474a)

What are we to make of this erotic outburst? It is bizarre and humorous to think that naked men will attack Socrates for proposing that philosophers should rule. Roochnik aptly notes that “the long digression Socrates is about to take into the central books of the Republic begins with his need to explain to *the naked men attacking him* who the philosopher is.”³⁸

Socrates will explain to these naked men that the philosopher is like the “erotic man” who is in love with every aspect of his beloved. The philosopher is a lover or “desirer of wisdom, not, of one part and not another, but of all of it” (475b). He loves all aspects of wisdom, something far superior to the love of bodies or

honor. The philosopher, moreover, is “insatiable” in his pursuit of wisdom, like a mad lover (475e). This seems to confirm Strauss’s claim that “*eros* points to philosophy as to its highest form.”³⁹ Erotic insatiability appears to be a prominent feature of the philosophic quest.⁴⁰

What, we may ask, is the object of love that the philosopher insatiably pursues? Socrates states that philosophic natures “are always in love with [*erōsin*] that learning which discloses to them something of the being that *is* always and does not wander about, driven by generation and decay” (485b). Strauss notes that the highest form of *eros* is that of the philosopher’s “participation by knowledge in the things which are unchangeable in every respect.”⁴¹ This insatiable erotic drive to know the permanent things appears to be a defining characteristic of the philosopher.⁴² Socrates repeats this characteristic at 490b:

[I]t is the nature of the real lover of learning to strive for what *is*; and he does not tarry by each of the many things opined to *be* but goes forward and does not lose the keenness of his passionate love [*erōtos*] nor cease from it before he grasps the nature itself of each thing which *is* with the part of the soul fit to grasp a thing of that sort; and it is the part akin to it that is fit. And once near it and coupled with what really is, having begotten intelligence and truth, he knows and lives truly, is nourished and so ceases from his labor pains, but not before (490b).⁴³

Similar to a mad lover, the philosopher can rest only after possessing “intelligence and truth.” It will be important to reexamine this description of the philosopher who can attain wisdom. This description may, in short, present a utopian image of philosophy, despite revealing a crucial aspect of the philosophic life.⁴⁴

Socrates must explain to the naked men that it is just (i.e., “by nature fitting”) for the philosopher to “engage in philosophy and to lead a city” (474c). Here we see the traditional definition of justice—giving to each what is due or fitting—rehabilitated. The

right to rule is not a product of divine privilege, birth, wealth, sophistry, or force. Legitimate power to rule comes from wisdom. In Book VI, Socrates makes a more commonsensical explanation: Is it better to have blind guardians or sharp-sighted guardians? Nonphilosophers are like blind cave dwellers who “are really deprived of the knowledge of what each thing is” and therefore should not “give laws about what is fine, just, and good” (484c–d). Only philosophers, or those trained by philosophers, are fit to rule.

The problem is that the many in the city will not accept the philosopher. Through the image of the true pilot, Socrates explains that the philosopher will be seen as an abstract “stargazer” by the many (487b–489e). Rather than allow the philosopher to rule, the many will try to kill him or corrupt potential philosophers (491b–493c). The solution of enlightening the many and making the “multitude be philosophic” is declared to be “impossible” (494a). Moreover, the “small band” of philosophers “have seen sufficiently the madness of the many.” As a result, the philosopher “keeps quiet and minds his own business—as a man in a storm, when dust and rain are blown about by the wind, stands aside under a little wall” (496d). Harkening back to the definition of justice given in Book IV (433a–b), Socrates states that it is just for the philosopher to “mind his own business”—that is, to stay out of politics. This is because there is “not one city” that is “in a condition worthy of the philosophic nature” (497b).

Not only will the city try to kill or corrupt the philosopher, but the city itself may be destroyed or radically changed by the philosopher. Socrates wonders “how a city can take philosophy in hand without being destroyed.” He explains that “great things carry with them the risk of a fall” and that “fine things are hard” (497d). What Socrates is pointing to is a fundamental tension between philosophy and the city—one that is relevant, or coeval, to the inquiry regarding *eros* and justice. The highest form of *eros* has come to light as philosophy. Likewise, the completion of justice is sought in the founding of a city. The peak of *eros* requires a liberation from the bondage of the city, and the peak of justice will require a channeling, or reorientation, of *eros*. Just as there is a tension between

philosophy and the city, there is a tension between *eros* and justice.⁴⁵

The only way to resolve the tension between philosophy and the city, or between *eros* and justice, is to “constrain those few philosophers who aren’t vicious, those now called useless, to take charge of a city, whether they want to or not, and the city to obey” (499b). The only other solution is a hope that “a true *erotic* passion for true philosophy flows from some divine inspiration into the sons of those who hold power” (499b–c, emphasis added). As unlikely as these solutions may sound, Socrates denies that “either or both of these things is impossible” (499c). We quickly learn, however, that accomplishing this task will be no easy feat because it will require a radical change to the people who will be ruled. In a quick, though menacing, fashion, Socrates states that philosophers will have to “wipe clean” the tablet of human society (501a). Those inhabiting the city will have to be remade. The city may, in a fundamental sense, have to be destroyed and rebuilt.⁴⁶

Despite the radical change that would be required in the populace of a city, there is a further problem, an erotic problem related to the philosophic enterprise. Earlier Socrates had discussed how the philosopher is solely concerned with learning and the “pleasure of the soul itself with respect to itself.” The philosopher will channel all his energy toward thinking and “forsake those pleasures that come through the body.” Socrates asks Glaucon, “To an understanding endowed with magnificence and the contemplation of all time and all being, do you think it possible that human life seem anything great?” Glaucon responds, “[I]mpossible” (485d–486a). In comparison to philosophy, the erotic pursuit of truth, of what *is*, all other activities, including ruling, seem insignificant. As Socrates states later, the philosophers “won’t be willing to act, believing they have emigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive” (519c). Yet again the problems of justice and *eros* reappear: the lover of truth will be concerned with his own good, not the good of the city. And here we see the problem of the rehabilitated traditional definition of justice being strained—it is both fitting for the philosopher to rule and to not rule (to erotically

pursue the truth and neglect all else). From the perspective of the city, it is fitting that the philosopher rule; from the perspective of the philosopher, it is fitting that he not rule.

Socrates tells Glaucon that their job as founders is to “compel the best natures” to return to the cave—philosophers must be forced to rule. Glaucon clearly sees the problem: “Are we to do them an injustice, and make them live a worse life when a better is possible for them?” (519d). Socrates tells Glaucon that he has forgotten that it is “not the concern of law that any one class in the city fare exceptionally well, but it contrives to bring this about in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, making them share with one another the benefit that each is able to bring to the common-wealth” (519e–520a). In other words, the concern of the city, the justice of the city, is the common good—even if it comes at the expense of the individual good. Socrates assures Glaucon that they “won’t be doing an injustice to the philosophers.” The founders will “say just things to them while compelling them . . . to care for and guard others” (520a). They will say to them that “in the other cities it is fitting for them not to participate in the labors of those cities,” for they “grow up spontaneously against the will of the regime.” In these regimes, the philosophers owe nothing. In the regime they are building, however, philosophers are cultivated and “perfectly educated.” As a result, they owe a debt to the city—it is fitting that they repay the city by going “down, each in his turn,” to the cave to rule (520b–c).

Although it seems it is not an injustice to force philosophers to rule in the cave if they have been educated by the city,⁴⁷ there remains an irreconcilable problem in this solution.⁴⁸ Strauss notes that philosophers are unwilling to rule because “being dominated by the desire, the *eros*, for knowledge as the one thing needful, or knowing that philosophy is the most pleasant and blessed possession, the philosophers have no leisure for looking down at human affairs, let alone for taking care of them.”⁴⁹ The erotic drive to know directs them away from political rule. This interpretation is grounded in the text, for Socrates states that the philosophic life “despises political offices” more than any other life. Philosophers “aren’t lovers of ruling” (521b).

In addition to the unwillingness of philosophers to rule is the more fundamental problem of philosophy itself. Strauss notes in his 1957 lecture course on the *Republic* that “the rule of the men of the cave by men from outside the cave, depends on the philosophers having completed the tasks of philosophy.” What this would require, he states, is seeing the good itself—that is, escaping the cave completely (517b–c). If this were possible, philosophers would stop being lovers and pursuers of wisdom “but [be] truly wise men.”⁵⁰ In his 1961 course on Plato’s *Republic*, Strauss states, “I think that Socrates means it when he says no human being is wise. Yes, we cannot be more than lovers of wisdom, i.e., philosophers.”⁵¹ In other words, philosophers cannot grasp a complete vision of the good. Strauss tentatively proposes that “if full knowledge of the idea of the good as it would be needed [for the completion of philosophy] is not available, then the rule of philosophy will not be possible.” Strauss concludes that “aside from the great problem of philosophers and rule, there is the intrinsic problem of the incompleteness of philosophy.”⁵² This incompleteness is key to understanding why philosophy remains a quest, an erotic pursuit that cannot be fully satisfied.

The political utopia that Socrates builds is dependent on philosophy, but because philosophy is incomplete, the political project cannot be completed. Strauss summarizes his interpretation as follows: “The beauty of the *Republic* is this: the *Republic* is not only a political utopia but at the same time a philosophical utopia.” Strauss goes so far as to say, “I think this is the deepest nerve of the argument of the *Republic*.”⁵³ The *Republic* is a philosophical utopia because the image of philosophy that is presented is misleading. Glaucon and those around him hear that one can fully escape the cave and complete the philosophic quest (i.e., vision of the good). If the cave simply stands for the political community, the authoritative opinions and beliefs held by all, then escape from the cave appears to be possible. Strauss, however, seems to suggest that escape from the cave means something more—it means a complete grasp of the good, an attainment of wisdom. Thus, the *Republic* is a political utopia because of the commonsensical erotic problems

raised by the two previous reforms, but most deeply because of the third reform that presents a philosophical utopia.

The city in speech appears to be impossible despite what Socrates claims (502c). The conclusion of Book VII adds greater difficulty to the establishment of the just city. Everyone above the age of 10, we learn, will be sent “out to the country,” a euphemism for extermination (540e–541a). Here again, though in a less obvious way, we see the problem of *eros*—human beings are strongly attached to their families and friends, not to mention their own lives. This measure would be fiercely fought.⁵⁴ Only by abstracting from *eros* can the city-in-speech come into existence.

Books VIII–IX: *Eros* as Tyrant

Socrates tells Glaucon that “for everything that has come into being there is decay” (546a). Despite the fact that the men they have educated to rule the city are supposedly “wise,” they will nonetheless fail to properly control procreation (i.e., *eros*). They will “at some time beget children when they should not” (546b).⁵⁵ As a result of the chaotic mixing of classes, faction will arise. This decay of Kallipolis will occur through a cycle of inferior regimes, ending with tyranny. *Eros* is faulted for the initial departure from the best city and for the establishment of the worst.

Throughout the cycle of regimes, *eros* is one of the primary culprits. With each subsequent regime, *eros* becomes more and more unleashed. The timocratic love of honor and abnegation of pleasures is replaced by the love of money and immoderation (i.e., oligarchy). Democracy arises when the poor want to be like the oligarchs and have complete freedom—erotic freedom. Pleasure is unleashed and moderation is thrown to the wayside (560c–561e). Individuals becomes solely concerned with gratifying their desires. This concern for the freedom to gratify their desires eventually leads them into the hands of a tyrant (562c). Socrates tells Adeimantus that “too much freedom seems to change into nothing but too much slavery.” The desire to live without law leads to the rule of a lawless man. By their focusing on their own individual good, the common good is lost.

The examination of the tyrant at the end of Book VIII and in Book IX is meant to be a direct response to *the* question of which life is best—the just or unjust life. To resolve this question, Socrates continuously attacks *eros*. It is again described as a savage master that puts men out of their minds. To elucidate this fact, he returns to the examination of “the kinds and number of the desires.” In particular, he discusses the “terrible, savage, and lawless form of desires” that are “in every man” (572b). Here we see the reemergence of *eros* and its tension with justice and law. Everyone has this lawless erotic impulse, and it must be suppressed or controlled. If it is not disciplined, it leads to enslavement to base desires—to the life of tyranny. Socrates states that “love has from old been called a tyrant” (573b). *Eros* drives a man mad and makes him think that he can rule over men and gods (573c).⁵⁶

Socrates rehabilitates *eros* by linking it with philosophy and attempts to show why philosophic *eros* is greater than tyrannical *eros*. The philosopher, or the just man, pursues a purer form of pleasure. The unjust man pursues “erotic and tyrannic desires” that are phantoms of true pleasure (586a–587b). Most fundamentally, the tyrant becomes enslaved to base erotic desires and unleashes the monster within himself; the philosopher, in contrast, nourishes the human part of himself and starves the beastly part (588b–589e).⁵⁷

At the end of Book IX, it appears that Socrates has adequately answered the problem of justice. Socrates shows that the philosopher’s justice is choiceworthy for its own sake and in need of nothing else. The philosopher’s life is humorously said to be 729 times more pleasurable than that of the tyrants (587e). The philosopher, moreover, lives a truly human life, while the tyrant becomes a monster. Justice, we learn, is good, for it is intrinsically rewarding, and one’s own good can be reconciled with the common good. By caring for one’s own soul, one builds a city within oneself.

Although the heavy-handed arguments in favor of philosophy and against tyranny are persuasive to Socrates’s interlocutors and most readers, a careful reading reveals that the problems of justice and *eros* reappear. Glaucon states that the philosopher “won’t be willing to mind the political things.” Socrates responds that he will

care first and foremost for his “own city” within himself and that he will not care for “his fatherland unless some divine chance coincidentally comes to pass” (592a). Here again we have the problem of justice remerge—the philosopher will care for his own good, not the common good. The *eros* of the philosopher ultimately transcends the political community. The city that they have worked so hard to establish doesn’t exist “anywhere on earth,” only “in heaven.” Socrates admonishes Glaucon to “found a city within himself” (592b). Socrates’s arguments are persuasive and charming, but they alert the attentive reader to unresolved problems. As a result, the *Republic* must continue for one more book. Glaucon’s deepest erotic hopes and longings have not yet been adequately addressed.

Book X: Repetition of the Problems of Justice and *Eros*

Book IX ends with a repetition of Book IV’s exhortation—tend to your own soul! This, to be sure, is a definition of justice that is choiceworthy for its own sake and identical with philosophy. At first blush, this resolves the problem of justice by making the individual good harmonious with the common good. But is this really a resolution? Dedication to the common good, it must be remembered, sometimes requires a willingness to sacrifice one’s own good for the sake of justice. Socrates is aware of this problem and therefore tells Glaucon the Myth of Er. Although this myth fulfills Glaucon’s noble concerns, it nonetheless reiterates, though in a subtle way, the enduring problems of justice and *eros*.

Book X comprises two parts, one on poetry and the other on a myth of the afterlife. It can be argued that both sections center on the question of death and ultimately the need for some divine hope. In other words, it deals with the erotic hope to conquer death and to be immortal. Book III of the *Republic*, in its rather harsh criticism of the poets, discussed the importance of censoring the divine tales about men weeping at the loss of a son or a loved one. There it was argued that “being dead is not a terrible thing” and that a “decent man” should not be depicted as “crying and lamenting” because for him “it is least terrible to be deprived of

a son" (387d–388c). Book X, in contrast, implies that it "is closer to the truth" to admit that losing a son is a great pain and that grieving in private is an appropriate and sensible thing (603e–604d).⁵⁸ Although we are still admonished to bear up as best we can against the misfortunes of chance, Socrates appears to be aware of the profound problem of death, especially as it relates to nonphilosophers such as Glaucon. The majority of us, in other words, are in need of some form of consolation for our deepest erotic longings for justice and happiness—a consolation that can be found only in belief in the afterlife.⁵⁹

Glaucon, like many of us, remains profoundly attached to an idea of justice that allows one to sacrifice one's own good for the good of others. Glaucon, to be sure, has a longing to be a good man. But he also remains deeply attracted to an idea of justice that rewards—in this life or the next—the noble sacrifices that we undergo. For many, a world without a cosmic support for justice and a hope for happiness after death is unbearable. While the philosopher may claim to be able to live without this hope,⁶⁰ the ordinary man is in need of some final resolution to the problems of justice and *eros*. Book X, therefore, is both an answer for men like Glaucon and a reiteration of the profound problems philosophers must live with.

To definitively satisfy Glaucon's erotic longings, Socrates gives Glaucon a proof of the immortality of the soul. While Socrates tells Glaucon he has proved that the soul is immortal and that justice is best for it, the attentive reader will notice that Socrates has failed to adequately define what the soul is (611a–612a). As he explains through the story of the sea-god Glaucus, we ultimately have an insufficient view of the soul. This, of course, is an important problem but one that Socrates will not dwell on for the sake of Glaucon. Socrates is aware that Glaucon's concern for the resolution of the problems of justice and *eros* requires a belief in the immortality of the soul.

Next, Socrates reintroduces the rewards that await the just by stating that the gods take notice of our actions. Whether in this life or the next, Socrates states, the just will receive the wages they are

due. Although he neglects the problem of the righteous suffering, Socrates hedges his bets by affirming the unimaginable rewards that await the just in the next life (613d–614a). Socrates, therefore, reestablishes the cosmic support for justice that is needed for ordinary human beings. He then memorably embarks on his account of the Myth of Er.⁶¹

The Myth of Er tells of the rewards and punishments that await the just and unjust in the afterlife. According to this myth, men who have tended to their own souls are able to sober-mindedly choose their next life. The wicked, in contrast, are ill prepared for their choice. What is tragic, therefore, is not death but the inability to know what the best life is. To choose correctly, Glaucon should dedicate his life to distinguishing good from bad (618c). Glaucon, in other words, should not worry about death, but should instead care for his own soul and thus prepare himself for the thousand-year journey that lies ahead (621d). By heeding this admonition, Glaucon can resolve the problem of justice in his life and eagerly await the fulfillment of his deepest desires.

While this appears to be an elegant solution to the problems of justice and *eros*, some difficulties remain. The choice, we learn, is contingent on an ability to philosophize, something that is not accessible to most people, including Glaucon (619d–e). Given their lack of education, memory, and erotic desire, many are unable to philosophize. Although the myth is meant to give all men an equal opportunity to choose, it appears that the choice depends on something that is unequally distributed. While the myth seeks to make individuals responsible for the choices they make, it subtly suggests that we cannot fully conquer chance. We can bear up against the vicissitudes of life as best we can, but ultimately we “must accept the fall of the dice and settle [our] affairs accordingly—in whatever way argument declares would be best” (604d). By tending to our own souls, we come as close as possible to attaining our erotic desire for complete happiness, but our search for happiness is not immune to the possibility of great misfortune.⁶²

What, we may ask, is the ultimate significance of this myth as it relates to the problems of justice and *eros*? Primarily, we want

cosmic support for justice—we want to know that justice will be served, either for good or bad. Moreover, this myth touches on the overall theme of Book X: death. Our erotic longing makes us hope for immortal life. We fear death and realize that death awaits us all. We want to find some solution to this problem. This fear of death and hope of immortal life easily induces us to have some form of religious belief. It appears that the philosopher must not only overcome this fear of death and hope for immortality but also actively promote a quasi-religious teaching that will ease the restless hearts of his students. In other words, an important part of *eros* must be conquered if the philosopher is to be clear-sighted. Our erotic nature longs for what may be unrealistic—immortal possession of the good with some form of divine assurance. Socrates makes us aware of this difficulty and the great demands of philosophy—to be able to live without fear and hope.

Conclusion

The task of this article has been to elucidate the problems of justice and *eros*. Through an examination of the *Republic*, I have argued that Plato presents the reader with apparent resolutions to these problems. At the conclusion of the dialogue, justice is shown to be good as well as intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. Moreover, there is no conflict between the individual good and the common good, for by tending to our own soul through philosophy we can simultaneously benefit others and ourselves. Similarly, the problem of *eros* is apparently resolved. We can conquer erotic necessities and radically modify, or transfer, our erotic attachments. By purifying and channeling erotic desire, we can serve our community and ourselves.

Below this surface-level teaching, however, it becomes apparent that these resolutions are inadequate. Plato reveals that there will always remain a fundamental tension between our individual good and the common good (i.e., the problem of justice). Despite Glaucon's demands, Socrates cannot prove that the just man will be happy no matter the circumstances. As Aristotle reminds us, no one would call a man undergoing great misfortune happy unless he

was defending some thesis.⁶³ The just man, like the philosopher, is not immune to the problems of death and misfortune. Only a mythical teaching on the immortality of the soul and a belief in the gods can fully reconcile the individual good and the common good. Moreover, the individual good of the philosopher cannot be fully reconciled with the common good. The erotic pursuit of wisdom ultimately puts the common good in danger. Philosophy can, at times, be edifying, but it always remains a dangerous endeavor for individuals and communities.

Plato also reveals that the problem of *eros* is irresolvable. *Eros* cannot simply be conquered, radically transformed, or channeled for the sake of the political community. Our great desire to possess the good things for ourselves and the persistent love of our own prevent us from being wholly committed to the common good. Erotic desire, therefore, will always remain in conflict with the city. Moreover, *eros* makes us long for a complete and unending happiness. We want to possess the good always and to conquer death. Philosophy is presented as the solution—it can fulfill our deepest desires. As suggested, however, philosophy cannot fully bridge the chasm that lies between our desires and reality. Our erotic nature longs for what may be impossible. Philosophy may make us happy, in so far as it is humanly possible, but it cannot fully satisfy our erotic hopes.

Philosophy is presented as the fullest manifestation of *eros*. Several key junctures in the dialogue, however, raise important questions related to this link between *eros* and philosophy. Ultimately, the philosopher must be on guard against several aspects of *eros*—the love of pleasure, the love of one's own, the reciprocal love of other human beings, and the love, or need, for complete happiness, which manifests itself as hope for eternal happiness. The philosopher, one could say, is purged of his greatest hopes. In an important sense, the philosopher is unerotic—he must resist the many erotic desires and attachments that lead one away from philosophy. In so far as he is an embodied human soul, however, he will retain certain erotic desires that can facilitate and even spur philosophic reflection.⁶⁴ A genuine philosophic

impartiality, moreover, requires that the philosopher be open to the possibility of erotic fulfillment—in this life or the next. The philosopher must not be consumed by erotic attachments or hopes, but he is open to them—open to the slight chance that they reveal some aspect of the truth. In another fundamental sense, the philosopher is erotic because he loves, in a relentless way, wisdom.⁶⁵ The philosopher is no longer a blind and frenzied lover, but he is a lover nonetheless. He must courageously confront the deluding charms of *eros*, and yet his enterprise is “sustained and elevated by *eros*.”⁶⁶ So long as philosophy is incomplete, so long as perfect wisdom is unattainable, the philosopher remains a lover in search of the one thing needful.

Notes

1. Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 317. Bloom states, “The relation between justice conceived as one’s own good and justice conceived as the common good is the abiding concern of the *Republic*.”
2. Allan Bloom, *Plato’s “Symposium,”* trans. Seth Benardete, with commentaries by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001), 205d.
3. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima states, “[I]n sum . . . eros is of the good’s being one’s own always” (206a).
4. *Ibid.*, 191a–b.
5. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 317; B. M. Laing, “The Problem of Justice in Plato’s Republic,” *Philosophy* 8, no. 32 (1933): 412–21; Erjus Mezini, “The Problem of Justice in Plato’s Republic,” *Philosophical Inquiry* 40, no. 3/4 (2016): 178–91; Devin Stauffer, *Plato’s Introduction to the Question of Justice* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 53, 118, 123.
6. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 313; David Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 13–53; Ramon Lopez, “The Political Tragedy of Eros: Wine, Warfare and Women in Plato’s Laws,” *History of Political Thought* 41, no. 3 (2020): 349–74; David N. McNeill, “Human Discourse, *Eros*, and Madness in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 55 no. 2 (2001): 235–68; David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s “Republic”* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 51–77; Stanley Rosen, *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 102–18; Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 66.

7. Many of the scholars cited above were influenced by Leo Strauss's interpretation but did not make use of Strauss's posthumously published lectures on Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium*. Leo Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1957, <https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/plato-republic-spring-1957/1957>; Leo Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1961, <https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/plato-republic-autumn-1961/>; Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Plato's "Symposium"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
8. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 62, 69: "Each dialogue deals with one part; it reveals the truth about that part. But the truth about a part is a partial truth, a half-truth. Each dialogue, we venture to say, abstracts from something that is most important to the subject to matter of the dialogue."
9. Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy*, 153.
10. *Ibid.*, 9, 152.
11. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
12. Roochnik, *Beautiful City*, 62.
13. Rosen, *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry*, 115.
14. *Ibid.*, 117–18.
15. Roochnik, *Beautiful City*, 64, 69.
16. Hereafter all in-text citations are to Bloom's translation of the *Republic*.
17. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 313.
18. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 68.
19. *Ibid.*, 69.
20. In his 1957 lecture course, Strauss states that Plato commences a "dialectical destruction of the common notion of justice" but that he will "eventually restore the conventional or traditional definition of justice. This is very important to know." See Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1957, 26.
21. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 69.
22. The link between *eros* and immortality is explored in greater depth in Plato's *Symposium* (207a–208e). For an illuminating interpretation of this link and how it relates to belief in the gods, see Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Plato's "Symposium,"* 207–10; Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy*, 153.
23. Strauss argues that the erotic life is fundamentally private and that political life is necessarily public. Because *eros* can never become fully public, there is "a fundamental tension between the two." See Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Plato's "Symposium,"* 59.
24. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 91.
25. Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1957, 79–80.

26. Roochnik notes that Socrates focuses on the conflict of Hesiod's tale rather than the erotic elements. He states that "Socrates expunges this version of Eros from Kallipolis" for political reasons (Roochnik, *Beautiful City*, 52). I agree with Roochnik, though I think the focus is more on the savage character of *eros*, especially in the later attack on Homer.
27. Socrates's new theology is important to the problems of justice and *eros*. A god is necessary for the reconciliation of the individual good and the common good. There must be a god that sees what we do in private. Moreover, only a god can ultimately fulfill our deepest erotic longings.
28. Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic: A Study of Plato's "Protagoras," "Charmides," and "Republic"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 351–53. Strauss states that "Plato's ideas are really meant to take the place of the gods" (Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1957, 153). In contrast to Lampert, however, I do not think that creating a new religion was one of Plato's primary objectives.
29. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 361.
30. Bloom states that "the noble lie is designed to give men grounds for resisting, in the name of the common good, their powerful desires" (*ibid.*, 368).
31. Strauss notes that the *Republic* does not fully transcend the love of one's own because what is one's own is "transferred to the polis." The love of one's own "is radically modified in the *Republic*, it is not transcended" (Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Plato's "Symposium,"* 243).
32. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 103.
33. I am thankful to Robert Bartlett for bringing this to my attention.
34. For the importance of the equality principle and the abstraction from the question of procreation, see Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy*, 15–18. For a similar examination, see Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 126.
35. Bloom and Zuckert emphasize the similarity with the play *Ecclesiazua*, by Aristophanes, and note the problematic attempt to make *eros* completely public. See Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 381–83; Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 353.
36. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, states that there are "two things above all which make human beings cherish and feel affection—what is one's own and what is dear; and neither of these can be available to those who govern themselves in this way" (1262b21–24). Aristotle, citing Plato's *Symposium*, is pointing to the same erotic problem that is minimized by Socrates. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

37. Strauss rightly declares that “the claims of eros are simply silenced” (Strauss, *The City and Man*, 117). Following Strauss, Rosen observes that “sexual intercourse and reproduction in the just city are subjected to the most careful regulation” (Rosen, *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry*, 462).
38. Roochnik, *The Beautiful City*, 62.
39. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 113.
40. Levy dismisses this erotic description of philosophy as being misleading (Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy*, 25–26). Similarly, Peter Ahrensdorf argues that Socrates describes the philosopher as a passionate lover in order to appeal to Glaucon’s erotic nature. In reality, “the philosophers’ passion for the truth effectively renders them dispassionate.” See Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Homer and the Tradition of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 186n230.
41. *Ibid.*, 110.
42. Timothy Burns also depicts philosophy as unerotic. He states that the philosopher is not “moved by an erotic love of truth.” Focusing on Strauss’s “Restatement” in *On Tyranny*, Burns argues that Strauss has an “argument against the existence of eros in the philosopher.” I agree with Burns that Strauss sees the philosopher not being consumed by the erotic love for all of humanity, for reciprocal love from other human beings and God, and by the “desire for some eternal human good.” See Timothy Burns. *Brill’s Companion to Leo Strauss’ Writings on Classical Political Thought* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 24–25. In contrast to Burns, however, I maintain that *eros*, albeit in a purified form, remains a central part of the philosophic life.
43. Roochnik, *The Beautiful City*, 63.
44. In this section, *eros* does not appear to be minimized; on the contrary, *eros* seems to be heightened in the description of the philosopher. This is one moment where Strauss’s general interpretation of *eros* being reduced in the *Republic* is strained. One might even argue that *eros* is unrealistically depicted for the sake of Glaucon.
45. Strauss states that “there is a tension between philosophy and the city; on the level of this tension, the tension between *eros* and justice recurs” (Strauss, *The City and Man*, 112).
46. Hannah Arendt sees this as a prime example of “the traditional substitution of making for acting,” of philosophers trying to become godlike sculptures who legitimate later “murderous consequences.” See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 227–29.

47. M. F. Burnyeat, "Sphinx without a Secret," *New York Review of Books*, May 30, 1985, p. 34.
48. Burnyeat argues that philosophers are "devotees of pure reason" and are "compelled to rule by the force of the reasoned argument which is put to them." Philosophers "will rule for justice's sake and that alone, to requite a debt rather than because they think it is a great good to be in charge of the city" (*ibid.*, 34). Burnyeat has an understanding of justice that is overly focused on duties and insufficiently takes into account *eros*.
I agree with Roochnik and Strauss in arguing that there is an irreconcilable tension between the city and philosophy (Strauss, *The City and Man*, 124–25; Roochnik, *The Beautiful City*, 75–76). No owed duty can resolve this conflict.
49. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 125.
50. Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1957, 131.
51. Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1961, 315; Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 151.
52. Strauss, "Plato's *Republic*," 1957, 131.
53. *Ibid.*
54. David Levy makes a similar point but focuses on the erotic bond parents have for their children. It seems to be the opposite. It would be parents, not children, who would be taken away (Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy*, 41).
55. This is another clue that the completion of philosophy is exaggerated by Socrates.
56. McNeill rightly observes that "the assessment of eros as a tyrant is in direct contradiction to Socrates's claim in the *Phaedrus* that eros is 'a god, or something divine'" (McNeill, "Human Discourse," 235).
57. Despite the problems with the arguments Socrates makes against tyranny, I think that Bloom goes too far when he states that "if philosophy did not exist, tyranny would be the desideratum which only a lack of vigor would cause one to reject" (Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 425).
58. This is an acknowledgment that earlier *eros*—the love of one's own—was severely curtailed.
59. I am thankful to Robert Bartlett for bringing the substance of this paragraph to my attention. See also Levy, *Eros and Socratic Political Philosophy*, 28–41.
60. "[C]he sanza speme vivemo in disio" (Dante, *Inferno*, Canto IV).
61. Dorter observes that the name Er resembles the word *eros* and may be indication of the importance of *eros* for this section. Kenneth Dorter, "Free Will, Luck, and Happiness in the Myth of Er," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 28 (2003): 131.

62. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b30–35. See also Dorter, “Free Will, Luck, and Happiness in the Myth of Er,” 139.
63. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a.
64. For a comparable interpretation, see Bloom, *Plato’s “Symposium,”* 153.
65. Bloom argues that “the love of wisdom is a form of *eros*, and that the hostility to *eros* is limited to the kind which precludes the development of philosophic *eros*” (Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 423).
66. Strauss, “Plato’s *Republic*,” 1957, 368; cf. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 119.