PLATONISM, MORAL NOSTALGIA, AND THE 'CITY OF PIGS'

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I. *Ethical Reconstructionism*

Open an introductory book on Plato from the nineteen thirties, and you are likely to see something like the following:

> What makes ancient Greece important for us is that it was faced by essentially the same political, philosophic, and religious problems as ourselves..... our age, like theirs, is one in which all the foundations are breaking down.... I speak here not only, or chiefly, of political shocks, but of what underlies them, the overturn of ideas. Everything is now being questioned, right and wrong, religion, philosophy, marriage, property, government. So was it also in the Greece of Plato; and that is how and why he came to write as he did..... He was trying at once to uproot and to resettle. So that he is in some respects the greatest of revolutionaries, in others the greatest of reactionaries. (Dickinson 1947, viii-x)

The author here is Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson; the book, *Plato and His Dialogues*, was first published in 1931 after having been written for BBC radio. Or consider Richard Crossman's 1937 *Plato Today*, likewise derived from a series of radio talks:

> It is no exaggeration say that it is world war that has made Plato intelligible to us. For us, too, the old traditions are breaking down; art has lost touch with the life of the people, democracy is in danger. We, too, are standing on the edge of the abyss, and philosophy has become a matter of life and death instead of a matter for polite discussion.... Now, when our civilization has reached a crisis similar to that in which he lived, we are able to see him as he really was... a revolutionary reformer who could find no political basis for his reforms. (Crossman 1959, 14-15)

This phrase 'revolutionary reformer' is somewhat misleading, for Crossman holds that Plato's aristocratic outlook gave his project a 'counter-revolutionary' twist. Thus "the political programme of the *Republic* is rooted in the past and is at bottom the rationalization and justification of Reaction" (Crossman 1959, 170-2).

I will refer to this general line of interpretation as the *reconstructionist* reading of Plato. To abstract a bit from particular authors, I take the essential premise of this reading to be that Plato sees his time as one of profound moral and political disorder. More precisely, he sees it as an After contrasted with a more virtuous Before. Back in the good old days—back when when the center still held—religious tradition, moral unreflectiveness and austere economic conditions all helped to sustain a more decent and upright society. I will refer to this view as *moral nostalgia*. A key corollary to it in the reconstructionist reading is that

Plato diagnoses the collapse of the old morality as having had at least partially *intellectual* causes. The ideas of scientists and sophists have brought moral corruption as the price of intellectual progress—a charge reminiscent of that presented, at least on a naïve reading, by Aristophanes in the *Clouds*. In the face of this crisis, Plato's agenda is twofold. In ethics, he seeks to establish the reality of objective moral truths against the trendy immoralist or moral sceptic, via the theory of Forms; in politics, he provides the blueprint for a virtuous society with a stable system of moral education. Both projects involve much that is new—if the old ways had been *entirely* right, they would not have been vulnerable to corruption—and in the *Republic*, where they are largely carried out, they turn out to involve radical innovation.

Reading Dickinson and Crossman, one might guess that reconstructionism belonged strictly to the generation traumatized by World War I and the upheavals which followed. But in fact the reconstructionist reading seems to have emerged from late-nineteenth-century readings of Plato as a Hegelian conservative (cf. Barker 1959, vii-viii, 85-6). Its influence in turn has extended far beyond popularizers like Dickinson and Crossman; and it is far from dead today.[1] Among more recent interpreters Julia Annas shows some sympathy for the view that Plato a conservative was concerned with "the erosion of confidence in familiar moral values" and rise of moral scepticism (Annas 1981, 8). At the same time Annas insists that "If he reinstates ordinary moral views, it is on a new basis which is remote from anything that the ordinary person would dream of. When we look at the proposals for society that made the *Republic* notorious, it is hard not to think of him as *revolutionary*" (Annas 1981, 9).

This analysis of Plato's thought as an amalgam of 'conservative' and 'revolutionary' (or 'reactionary' and 'revolutionary,' or 'Conservative' and 'Radical') is the hallmark of the reconstructionist readings which interest me. My concern, I should emphasise, is not with what *proportions* of the two we should see at work in Plato's thought; that I take to be a question about which version of reconstructionism to prefer. Rather, I want to ask in a more general way whether it is helpful to view Plato in terms of this framework *at all*. Arnold Schoenberg once said, "I am a conservative who was forced to become a radical": the question I want to consider is whether Plato is even the kind of conservative Schoenberg was.

Reconstructionism as I have defined it is of course a very sweeping interpretive framework. It is hard to know how to argue for or against it with precision, which is perhaps why interpreters have tended either to assume reconstructionism or ignore it. A full assessment would have to tackle the

[1] For other varieties of reconstructionism, see Field (1930, 91), Dodds (1937, 1959), Cherniss (1936, 446; cf. Grube 1935, 3) and, for an extreme and idiosyncratic version, Popper (1945), vol. 1. Cf. also Rist (1999): this paper was my starting point for considering the question of reconstructionism, and my comments on it (Barney 1998 (2)) deal with some related issues.

complex question of Plato's attitude to the sophistic movement, the story of his personal political engagements in Syracuse, and his views on topics as large and varied as religion and education. In this paper, I can only take a sharply limited approach. My focus will be on the attribution to Plato of moral nostalgia: and instead of asking whether he views his own age as a corrupted After I will raise some questions about the implied Before. Does Plato believe in a 'good old days,' morally and politically—a state of grace in relation to which his own time came after the Fall? My strategy for answering that question will in turn be, of necessity, selective. I will examine several candidates for such a Before; and it will emerge, I believe, not only that none really fits the reconstructionist bill, but that, for Plato, no society could.

II. *Before and After in the Fifth Century*

A plausible candidate for a Platonic Before would be the early part of the fifth century: arguably the Athenians' finest hour, marked by the heroic defeat of the Persians, before the twin evils of sophistic enlightenment and imperial wealth had exerted their corrupting influence. In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the great boast of the reactionary Just Speech is to have educated the men who fought the battle of Marathon (985-6).

One place we might see nostalgia for this era is in Plato's portrait of Cephalus in Book I of the *Republic*. Cephalus is probably not quite of the Marathon generation, and anyway he is a metic, a non-citizen resident in Athens for business purposes. But he is as close as Plato could have come to that older culture: the dramatic date of the dialogue is somewhat unclear, but Plato's older brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, take part as young men, and Cephalus is already very old. And the character of Cephalus seems to be all that reconstructionism could ask for. He is characterized (by himself anyway) as moderate in his money-making and his pleasures: he praises 'decency,' and is pleased to have escaped from the demands of sexual desire (329c-31a). For his moral views he relies on the poets and his leading fellow-citizens, citing Sophocles, Themistocles and Pindar in a brief space (329b-31a). The 'definition' of justice which Socrates elicits from him, as paying your debts and telling the truth, is quickly shown to be untenable (331c-d); but it looks like the simple and practical code of the honest businessman.

So Cephalus is often taken to represent a sturdy old-fashioned morality: pious, honest, and moderate, though lacking any insight into questions of moral principle and therefore unable to pass on his virtues to the next generation. However, I think that we should not be too quick to take Cephalus as a Before figure. As Annas notes, "there are enough malicious touches in Plato's picture of Cephalus to show us that we are being presented with a limited and complacent man" (Annas 1981, 19). One touch which she does not mention

seems to me particularly telling, namely the brief example with which Socrates refutes Cephalus' 'definition.' Questioning whether justice consists simply in truthfulness and paying one's debts, Socrates notes that "if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he is out of his mind, the friend shouldn't return them, and wouldn't be acting justly if he did" (331c5-8).[2] By assenting to this counterexample, Cephalus admits that his account of justice will not do.

Now Cephalus is repeatedly characterized in Book I as a money-maker, but we are never told how he made his money—the prominence of the family in Athens would perhaps have made any elaboration unnecessary. In an oration by his son Lysias, however, we are told that when the tyrannical regime of the Thirty raided the family estate they seized *seven hundred* shields, as well as one hundred and twenty slaves (*Against Eratosthenes* 19). The family business, then, was the manufacture of arms—which would help to explain why, as Lysias also claims, Cephalus was invited to reside in Athens by Pericles (*Erat.* 4). But if Cephalus has made his money by arming the doomed adventurism of the Athenian empire, then his whole career must be, in Plato's view, something pretty close to one of handing over arms to the dangerously insane. That Cephalus remains unruffled by Socrates' questioning only confirms his perilous degree of unreflectiveness.

This reading is, I think, confirmed by Plato's portrayal of Gorgias in the *Gorgias*. The *Gorgias* and Book I of the *Republic* are of course close kin in many complex ways: here I want only to draw attention to the fact that Gorgias, like Cephalus, is likely to impress the reader as a decent if somewhat pompous old gentleman, who avows a commitment to justice but cannot defend his views. But it can hardly be right to say that Gorgias of all people is for Plato representative of a moral innocence destroyed by the sophists; and once again it may be wrong to take at face value a character's presentation of self. Here a telling passage to note is the one in which Gorgias, who has been boasting of the almost superhuman powers of rhetoric, adds hurriedly that it should be used with discretion, like any other agonistic skill: "Imagine someone who after attending wrestling school, getting his body into good shape and becoming a boxer, went on to strike his father and mother or any other family member or friend" (456d5-8). Gorgias dissociates himself from any such outcome, and he stipulates that teachers must be exempted from blame: "For these people imparted their skills to be used justly against enemies and wrongdoers, and in defense, not aggression, but their pupils pervert their strength and skill and misuse them" (456e2-7a1).

This defence, with its admission that some rhetoricians *do* use their skills unjustly, provides Socrates with a key proposition for his elenchus of Gorgias;

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[2] All translations from Plato's dialogues are from Cooper and Hutchinson (eds.) 1997, by various hands; the *Republic* translation is by G. M. A. Grube as revised by C. D. C. Reeve, in some cases with changes.

and it already shows Gorgias' moral confidence to be unfounded. In reality, the abusers of agonistic skills are not a negligible minority; and since Gorgias has also boasted that rhetoric enables its adepts to 'enslave' their fellow citizens (452e4-8), it is clear that he is in fact trading on the regularity of such abuse. He is the precise equivalent of the arms dealer who makes a professional point of ignoring the uses to which his wares will be put.

If this reading is on the right track, then Cephalus and Gorgias are neither of them decent if unreflective old gentlemen: they are successful, morally irresponsible entrepreneurs who *believe* themselves to be decent old gentlemen. They play out the cultural stereotype so skillfully that they have convinced themselves; but we should not assume that they have also convinced Plato. For Plato, the unreflectiveness of Gorgias and Cephalus expresses not the sound tradition which moral nostalgia would invoke, but a smug and dangerous complacency.

This is not to deny that in the *Gorgias* and *Republic* I alike, Socrates' interlocutors seem to represent a 'genealogy of morals' in which the last stage, represented by Callicles and Thrasymachus respectively, is markedly worse than the first. My claim is that this is nevertheless not quite the expression of moral nostalgia we might assume.[3] That Plato indeed rejects any such nostalgia is made clear near the end of the *Gorgias* when, notoriously, Socrates claims to be the only practitioner of the art of politics. The real goal of politics, he insists, is to make better the souls of one's fellow citizens: and *none* of the people who have passed for statesmen in Athens have done that (503a-d, 515d-19b). Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, Pericles—all merely pandered to the public, leaving them more unmanageable than before; they are ultimately responsible for the bloated, festering condition of the city today (517b-9b). The condemnation is sweeping and, to a Greek audience, deeply upsetting: what is particularly scandalous is that, as Dodds notes, Plato's critique "applies not only to Pericles and Themistocles but to the 'grand old men' of the conservatives, Miltiades and Cimon" (Dodds 1959, 357). The latter would be the *heroes* of any Just Speech-style reconstructionist: the warriors of Marathon were commanded by Miltiades.

This attack shows that Plato sets the moral bar far higher than any normal reactionary or reconstructionist. Generations may vary, and Socrates' critique implies that Athens was even worse after Pericles and his ilk than before. But Plato is adamant that only the cultivation of virtue is the proper concern of a citizen; and this is a good which, as the *Republic* will show, can be provided only by a radically un-Athenian system of education. From this point of view, the political differences which distinguish a Miltiades from a Pericles or even a Cleon are insignificant. All undertake in their own ways to serve the appetites of

[3] For one thing, it is far from clear that Callicles should be read, along reconstructionist lines, as a product of the new thought: cf. Grote 1865 (vol. 2, 113-4).

the city rather than correcting them; and it is to this basic project that Plato objects. For Plato, the rot goes back as far as the eye can see. [4]

The readings I have offered here are of course open to dispute; and there is far more to be said about these texts and the attitudes to past and present which they express. But I think it is fair to say that we have good *prima facie* reason to look elsewhere for a Platonic Before.

III. *The First City*

An alternative for reconstructionism would be to locate a morally pristine Before in the remote past. And the most interesting text for this strategy is Plato's depiction of the 'City of Pigs' in Book II of the *Republic*—or, to use Aristotle's less fraught term, the 'First City' (*Politics* IV 4, 1291a11ff). This is occasioned when, taking up the challenge of showing that justice is more beneficial than injustice to its possessor, Socrates proposes to depict justice in a city, so as to identify the same property in the individual soul. Thus he turns to the city's origins: "If we could watch a city coming to be in theory, wouldn't we also see its justice coming to be, and its injustice as well?" (369a5-7).

Socrates' account of the First City is more complex than it might seem. Its starting-point is a claim about the origin of city life: "I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient, but we all are needy for many things" (369b5-7). People settle together in order to trade "because each believes that this is better for himself" (369b6-c7). It is not immediately clear whether Socrates intends the strong claim that individual self-sufficiency is *impossible* or the weak one that it is less desirable than cooperation. But the latter idea is probably to the fore: cooperation is advantageous because it provides more efficiently for our wants than autarky.[5] This economic perspective in turn prepares us for

[4] Interestingly, at 526a-b Socrates praises Aristides; it is unclear how to reconcile this with his otherwise global condemnation of politicians, but it poses no particular problem for my reading, which can certainly allow that *some* past (or present) politicians may have been decent.

[5] Plato's first readers would have been familiar with Homer's famous depiction of the Cyclopes, who live in scattered and independent households (*Odyssey* IX.112-15). Likewise in Protagoras' 'Great Speech' in the *Protagoras*, the first humans manage economically without cooperation: they "lived in scattered isolation; there were no cities... and although their technology was adequate to obtain food, it was deficient when it came to fighting wild animals" (322b). Aristotle too treats the household as the basic social unit, apparently sufficient for everyday economic needs; next comes the village, an assocation of several related households under patriarchal rule (*Politics* I.2). And the mythic 'archeology' in Book III of Plato's *Laws* also begins with independent households (cf. section IV). In sum, the standard view seems to have been that self-sufficiency, in autarkic kinship groups or households, is perfectly viable economically; where it falls short is in leaving us vulnerable to attack—and more deeply, of course, in failing to express the social

Socrates' 'principle of specialization,' first introduced as a principle of economic efficiency. It will be preferable for the people of the City to specialize and trade the results of their labour: for we vary in our suitability to different tasks, and devotion to a single job results in more skilled and attentive work (370a8-b2).

Socrates' assumption that the city will develop along lines which maximize economic efficiency confirms that the City has been founded on the search for what is 'better' for us, so that the normative and descriptive are here blurred from the start. (This normativity will become more explicit later on, in Glaucon's objections to the First City and in Socrates' undertaking to 'purge' the luxurious city.) And this principle of specialization is of course the real *archê* or founding principle of the City: that each person does the job for which he is naturally suited, and no other, will turn out to be the justice which sustains the Kallipolis (as I will refer to the Just City depicted in Books IV-VIII) (*Rep.* IV, 432d-434d).

The principle of specialization entails a broader range of occupations than had initially been noted: the City must also include carpenters, cowherds, and the like, as well as a merchant class for trade. Socrates now takes the City to be complete and asks "where justice and injustice are to be found in it" (371e12); but Adeimantus can only suggest that "it was somewhere in some need that these people have of each other" (372a1-2). Socrates responds with a portrait of the life of the City, as if by way of a hint:

> They'll produce bread, wine, clothes, and shoes... They'll build houses, work naked and barefoot in the summer, and wear adequate clothing and shoes in the winter. For food, they'll knead and cook the flour and meal they've made from wheat and barley. They'll put their honest cakes and loaves on reeds or clean leaves, and, reclining on beds strewn with yew and myrtle, they'll feast with their children, drink their wine, and, crowned with wreaths, hymn the gods. They'll enjoy sex with one another but bear no more children than their resources allow, lest they fall into either poverty or war. (372a6-c1)

This depiction of daily life renders the inhabitants of the First City vivid yet opaque, like figures in an Egyptian tomb painting or on the Shield of Achilles. And what daily life does *not* here include is most striking. There is here no military; no constitution, rulers, or political activity; no philosophy or intellectual inquiry. (The absence of these is evident not only *ex silentio* but from the way in which the military and the philosopher-rulers are later introduced, as new classes with distinctive pursuits.) Yet Glaucon now objects, not to these lacks, but to the City's level of material culture:

> It seems that you make your people feast without any relishes,[6] Glaucon interrupted.

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dimension of human nature. So if Socrates had intended to claim in *Rep.* II that human neediness makes autarky impossible, some supporting argument would surely have been required. (Cf. Schofield 1999, 73.)

[6] The term ὄψον can refer to any savoury bit of protein or vegetable eaten along with the basic staples. At 559b6, Socrates allows that "the desire for ὄψον is also

> True enough, I said, I was forgetting that they'll obviously need salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots... We'll give them desserts, too, of course—figs, chickpeas, and beans—and they'll roast myrtle and acorns before the fire, drinking moderately. And so they'll live in peace and good health, and when they die at a ripe old age, they'll bequeath a similar life to their children. (372c2-d2)

So Glaucon's objection is answered by an even stronger insistence on—and endorsement of—the austerity of the First City. In response he objects more vehemently than before: "If you were founding a city for pigs, Socrates, he replied, wouldn't you fatten *them* on the same diet?" (372d4-5). It is perhaps Socrates' mention of acorns, a symbol of primitive scarcity, which has irritated him so (cf. Lovejoy and Boas 1935 *s.v.*); and after all, given that the city has carpenters, why not couches and tables as well? In response, Socrates insists that the First City is the 'true' and 'healthy' one; yet he readily moves on to hypothesize its 'inflammation' with luxuries (372e2ff.).

Glaucon's objection and Socrates' concession are both ambiguous. On the face of it, Glaucon speaks here on behalf of appetite; yet his tone is one not of greedy complaint but indignation, and his demand is that the citizens have proper couches and tables, i.e., the apparatus of a civilized Athenian symposium.[7] This is the voice less of appetite than of *thumos*, 'spirit': the middle part of the soul, oriented to considerations of dignity and self-respect. Glaucon is consistently portrayed in the *Republic* as the sort of promising, *thumos*-driven young man who would be receiving training as an Auxiliary in the Kallipolis. And *thumos* is flexible in ways appetite is not: its characteristic responses of pride, shame, anger and admiration can be directed to very different objects. Part of Socrates' project in the *Republic* is to make Glaucon see that it is really the pursuit of appetitive pleasure which should be despised as shameful and sub-human (cf. *Rep.* IX, 586a1-b4, and also Aristotle, *EN* I 5, 1095b19-22).

But why does Socrates acquiesce in Glaucon's objection? If the First City *is* true and healthy, and embodies the principle of specialization in which justice will turn out to consist, how exactly is it insufficient? One answer is suggested by Socrates' remark, repeated at the start and the end of his account of the First City, that he is looking for justice and injustice both (369a6-7, 372e6-7): perhaps the First City is defective in having no scope for *injustice*. The general notion that justice is somehow dependent on its opposite is a familiar one: Heraclitus claimed that without injustices, 'the name of justice' would not be known (DK22B23), and some Stoics explained evils such as injustice as the necessary complements to goods (e.g., SVF 2.1169-70). In doing so, they may have been influenced by Plato's remark in the *Theaetetus* that in the human

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necessary to the extent that it's beneficial"; so Reeve's translation, 'delicacies,' is perhaps misleading. Jowett's 'relish' is preferable, if mildly archaic; it is still used with the sense of *opson*, translating the Shona *usavi*, in Zimbabwe.

[7] On the significance of this imagery see Burnyeat 1999, 231ff.

realm "it is not possible... that evil should be destroyed—for there must always be something opposed to the good" (176a5-7). So perhaps the First City, though morally *innocent*, lacks a 'knowledge of good and evil' without which justice does not really deserve the name. As John Cooper puts it, "these primitive people will experience no, or no effective, positive desire of any sort that might tempt them to cheat or freeload"; yet "justice requires not merely fair taking of turns, so to speak, but doing so with some countervailing motivation *not* to do it.... for it to be appropriately said that they acted that way because it was just to do so, they would have to have overcome some tendency in themselves to act otherwise" (Cooper 2000, 13-4, 14-5).[8]

However, it seems to me that this view may be un-Platonic. In Book IV, justice in soul and city alike turns out to consist in a correct ordering of the parts of these complex wholes, so that each part performs only the function for which it is suited. And so defined, justice is in no way dependent on its opposite, or even on any sort of 'overcoming' of it. In fact Plato seems to reject this idea in discussing the qualifications of a good judge (one of the offices to be held by the Guardians) in Book III. The judge is here contrasted with the doctor, who should ideally have first-hand knowledge of many diseases. Since a judge's job is to cure unhealthy *souls*, he cannot have such direct exposure: his soul "must itself remain pure and have no experience of bad character while it's young" (409a5-6). A good judge is one who has "learned late in life what injustice is like and who has become aware of it not as something at home in his own soul, but as something alien and present in others" (409b5-7). So it should not count against the First City that its justice goes with a kind of innocence or naïveté: so will the justice of the Guardians.

An alternative reading of the demise of the First City would see Glaucon as something like the voice of common sense and 'realism,' with both his objection and Socrates' quick concession representing historical inevitabilities. It would be overstraining human nature to expect this acorn-eating simplicity to last: humans will rebel and demand more. Socrates' initial founding of the City, with its ambiguous principle of interdependence, suggested a slippery slope between need and desire. In acquiescing to Glaucon, he would admit that this slope is soon slipped down in practice.

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[8] Cooper is, I think, right that justice *for us* involves the kind of 'countervailing motivation' he describes. However, I would insist that this is a fact about human nature rather than about *justice*. If the souls of the gods have a tripartite structure but only good tendencies throughout, as depicted at *Phaedrus* 247a-8e, they still count as just—perfectly so—by the definition of justice given in *Republic* IV. And on the political level, if the Kallipolis were to succeed in its program of ideological indoctrination so completely that the producer class came to have no inclination *at all* to rebel, that would make the city all the more just rather than less. *Pace* also Bloom 1968, 347-8.

However, if Glaucon's point were simply that the First City is unrealistic in its austerity, Socrates would have reason to reject it. For the Kallipolis is designed both to fulfil human nature and to be maximally stable; and in it the Guardians will live without wealth, property, unnecessary pleasures or even families. As Lovejoy and Boas note, "the rulers and the guardians live an even more austere if hardly a more simple life than the happy and innocent rustics of the earlier picture" (1935, 156). So this reading of the First City as 'unrealistic,' like the reading of it as 'naïve,' cannot be quite right: both criticisms of the City could just as well be leveled against the Kallipolis itself.

To understand the dismissal of the First City, it will help to look more carefully at Socrates' account of it as a whole, and in particular at what kind of writing it is. For though his account is at each stage straightforward enough, Socrates' sketch is formally ambiguous and complex. It is an uneasy mixture of sociological analysis, mythico-historical storytelling and norm-setting; fully to grasp its method and resonances would require investigation of a number of ancient genres, including poetic accounts of the 'Golden Age' or the 'Age of Cronus,' 'constitutions' and political texts like Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens* and *Politics*, and Presocratic attempts to discern 'first principles' both in natural science and in human society. I will here confine myself to some suggestions on the implications of the first two parallels.

For a reconstructionist like Lowes Dickinson, the First City reads naturally as a depiction of the blessed primeval 'Golden Age' or 'Age of Cronus' (a standard byword for the Golden Age, cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 111-222): i.e., "that idyllic society which the Greeks were apt to conceive as lying in the golden age of the past" (Dickinson 1947, 72; cf. Lovejoy and Boas 1935, 155). This is an era of social harmony, leisurely ease, and the simple pleasures—in fact, our early surviving accounts of the Golden Age emphasise its social virtues far less than the free food.[9] Not only do comic poets emphasise this at obsessional length: the claim that foods provided themselves in the Age of Cronus goes right back to Hesiod (*Works and Days* 117-8). Socrates' depiction of the First City recalls these accounts in its emphasis on social harmony and on 'feasts': but the austere character of those feasts can only have been read as a subversion of the cliché. Indeed the austerity of the First City is more reminiscent of a very different kind of story about the past: 'hard primitivist' or 'anti-primitivist' tales (in the terminology of Lovejoy and Boas 1935) which told of early hardships and a struggle towards civilization. Plato's disorienting amalgamation of the two suggests, I think, that Socrates is teasing Glaucon by presenting a parodic pseudo- or anti-idyll as normative—a suggestion confirmed by the structure of Plato's presentation. For Socrates' two depictions of the City, at 372a6-c1 and

[9] Cf. Lovejoy and Boas 1935, 38-41. The evidence is shaped by the peculiar interests of Athenaeus, our source for much of it, but the way in which moral and political harmony appears as peripheral to the main topic of food and drink still seems striking.

372c4-d2, could easily have been collapsed into one, as could Glaucon's two objections in response. The point of the repetition is presumably emphasis. We, like Glaucon, are being teased—being given time to wonder, *what's wrong with this picture*?[10]

At the same time, Socrates' depiction of the First City bears the hallmarks of an exercise in political science, comparable to Protagoras' 'Great Speech' in the *Protagoras* or Glaucon's account of the orgins of justice earlier in Book II. The closest parallel of any surviving text is, as Prof. Deslauriers notes in her Comments, the opening of the *Politics*. Here Aristotle's account of the nature of the city proceeds through a story-telling about origins which at the same time serves as a logical analysis to elements or first principles. The parallel seems to support a reading of the First City as belonging to the same historico-analytical genre: for the City can be taken together with the 'luxurious city' and its 'purification' to add up to a *Politics* I-style analysis of the Kallipolis into its constituent parts. In the Kallipolis the third class, the 'producers' responsible for its economic sustenance, are dominated by the appetitive part of the soul; they are money-makers by nature, suited to lives as farmers and traders. Like the inhabitants of the First City, they will be moderate and pious, will enjoy an intact family structure, and will live in a stable society untouched by poverty or war—or, for that matter, politics or philosophizing.[11] Thus some scholars have plausibly seen in the First City a depiction of the lowest stratum of the Kallipolis: "Plato offers it to us, not as an autonomous polis, but as a constituent ... of a larger whole that is being slowly revealed."[12]

It is certainly plausible that the First City, among its other functions, helpfully offers what the *Republic* would otherwise lack: a picture of what life will be like for the ordinary people of the Kallipolis. But that does not entail that it is a genuine exercise in the historico-analytical mode of *Politics* I. If anything, the First City seems to be a deviant and parodic play on that genre, as it is on the genre of the 'Golden Age'—deviant because the First City is in itself

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[10] As Martha Nussbaum has put it to me, the gluttonous comic visions of the Golden Age depend on a suspension of the realities of the natural world; the First City depends on a similar suspension of the realities of human nature; in both cases, the result is untroubled appetitive satisfaction. The parallel suggests a reading of the City as a rationalized, philosophical appropriation of the comic appetitive paradise: since the City is an impossibility, the upshot is a parodic rejection of any such appropriation.

[11] This resemblance between the people of the First City and the third class of the Kallipolis is confirmed by their shared likeness to Cephalus. Cephalus not only resembles the people of the First City in being a moderate 'producer'; he is depicted precisely as they are described, taking part in a festive occasion with his children, garlanded and performing sacrifices (328a-c, 331d6-6, cf. 372b).

[12] Reeve 1988, 178. Reeve notes that, taken independently, the First City "is stable only in a fantasy world in which people never pursue pleonectic satisfaction" (ibid.). Cf. Nettleship 1901 (9-10, 69-76): Plato follows not a 'historical' but a 'logical' order of exposition.

a strictly *impossible* city, and impossible for reasons soon to be made obvious by the moral psychology of the *Republic* itself. [13]

In terms of the psychological theory expounded in Books IV-IX, the inhabitants of the First City are, as I have noted, ruled by the appetitive part of the soul; but they are strikingly moderate. Indeed, as several scholars have noted, Socrates seems to depict the people of the First City as motivated only by what will later be classed as the 'necessary appetitive desires.'[14] This distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is introduced in the discussion of oligarchy in Book VIII. Necessary desires are ones which "we can't desist from and ...whose satisfaction benefits us" (558d11-59a1). They include "the desire to eat to the point of health and well-being and the desire for bread and relishes," to the extent that relishes too are "beneficial to well-being" (559a11-b7). These are contrasted with unnecessary desires, which "someone could get rid of if he practiced from youth on, those whose presence leads to no good or even to the opposite" (559a3-7). The latter include "the desire that goes beyond these and seeks other sorts of foods, that most people can get rid of, if it's chastened and educated while they're young, and that's harmful" (559b8-10). And there is a corresponding distinction in the case of the desire for sex and the other appetites (559c6).

Now the people of the First City are content with a way of life in which only these 'necessary' desires are provided for; and Socrates thus describes the 'luxurious' city as overstepping the bounds of what is necessary (373b4, 373d10). But this limitation to the necessary is by no means the default state of a dominant appetitive part. This is made clear by another distinction drawn within the appetites at the start of Book IX.[15] Here Socrates describes some of our unnecessary desires as 'lawless' (571b4-c1). He emphasises that though they can be constrained by reason, such desires are disturbingly resilient: we can tell as much from our dreams, where they run wild and shrink from nothing (571c-d). The moderate person is able to minimize such outbreaks, but "dreams make it clear that there is a dangerous, savage, and lawless form of desire in each of us,

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[13] I take it (following Saunders 1995, 59-60) that we should take Aristotle's historical mode of presentation in *Politics* I at face value, as grounding his analytic claims; and further, that an exercise in this ancient genre which *could not* be true historically could not presume to genuine analytic standing either. This is admittedly a large assumption which deserves further discussion, as does the important question of what it implies for modern inheritors of the genre such as Hobbes and Rousseau. I am endebted to Prof. Deslauriers not only for her Comments on this issue but for helpful discussion. Cf. also Bloom: "The first city is obviously impossible" (1968, 346); but his reasons seem to amount to a version of the 'naïveté' reading.

[14] Cf. Cooper (2000, 13-14), Devereux (1979, 37), Annas (1981, 77), and Reeve (1988, 176-7).

[15] On these distinctions cf. Reeve 1988, 43-7. In general, Plato seems less interested in the the necessary/unnecessary dichotomy than in the gentle/savage one, and I will focus on the latter.

even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate or measured" (572b). Likewise in Socrates' peroration on moral psychology in Book IX. Here the rational soul is depicted as a human being, the *thumos* as a lion, and the appetitive part as "a single kind of multicoloured beast having heads in a ring, of gentle and of savage animals, and able to change and grow all these from itself" (588c7-10). And our task is to keep our 'human' reason firmly in control, while we "tend the many-headed creature as a farmer does his animals, nourishing and taming the gentle ones and preventing the savage ones from growing" (589b1-3).

So Plato is evidently quite pessimistic about the prospects for human freedom from the worst appetitive desires. The Book IX image suggests that both gentle and savage desires arise spontaneously from the fertile soil of the appetitive part; even in the more optimistic Book VIII passage, there is no suggestion that the savage ones are deviant pathologies. Plato does not envisage the appetitive soul as beginning from a neutral *tabula rasa* or Rousseauian innocence. At best, a strenuous education from youth may enable us to *get rid of* the savage desires—and not, strikingly, to prevent them from arising in the first place. And Socrates' discussion of dreams seems to concede that this 'riddance' can never be more than a holding action.

If anything, the basic dispositions of the appetitive part seem to favour the unnecessary and savage versions of our appetites.[16] For Plato leaves it in no doubt that if left to its own devices, or placed in charge of the soul, appetite will spontaneously overreach. In the survey of degenerate constitutions and personality types in Books VIII-IX of the *Republic*, the oligarch is the closest of the appetite-dominated figures to moderation. But that is a by-product of his enslavement to a single appetite, the desire for money, which like a relentless species of weed has strangled the competition.

Now Plato holds that domination by the appetitive part is the most common human condition. This part of the soul is by nature the largest (588d4); and in most people the rational part of the soul is too weak to overcome it (428d11-9a4). That means that only by the careful ongoing rule of a rationality *external to their own souls* can most people be made moderate; and this is just what the rule of the Guardians in the Kallipolis, with their careful supervision of art, education and economic conditions, is designed to do (590c8-d6). In the absence of such careful 'cultivation' by an external reason, the typical state of most people would be the intemperate and irrational pursuit of pleasure (cf. *Rep.* IX, 586a-b).

Now the First City very strikingly lacks any such rational control; instead, it is presented as *spontaneously* moderate and self-regulating. And this is just what the appetitive part, and the people dominated by it, can never be. It is true that the austere economic circumstances of the First City will be comparatively

[16] It is striking that in the *Timaeus*, the appetitive part of soul *as a whole* must be treated "as a savage creature [ὡς θρέμμα ἄγριον]" (70e4).

favourable to moderation. But even in the First City, we could not hope that the unnecessary and savage desires will simply fail to occur. For one thing, they do not have distinctive objects which the correct social arrangements could eliminate. Some, such as immoderate sexual desires, will be just as easily satisfied in the First City as anywhere else; and one can covet a neighbour's pile of acorns as easily as his pile of gold. Nuts and berries are no substitute for the rule of reason.

So the reading I considered earlier of the First City as 'unrealistic' and short-lived, though it involved a grain of truth, was too weak. The problem with the First City is not just that it would be unstable from one generation to the next—though if it *were* unstable that would indirectly show it to be impossible, since stability was stipulated to be one of the City's virtues (372d1-2). Rather, the City is not a genuine possibility at all: for it embodies the hypothesis that a city without rational rule could be moderate in its appetites, and that hypothesis is false. I will call this the problem of *self-regulation*. Complementing it is another impossibility. In the First City each person will do the job for which he is naturally suited: but some people are suited for military life, and others for ruling and for the pursuit of wisdom, and there is no room in the City for them. A Glaucon or a Socrates born into the First City would end up a shoemaker or shepherd, deformed by an unnatural and (in the strictest sense) unjust way of life. So Glaucon speaks more truly than he knows when he describes the life of the First City as subhuman. It could fail to be unjust only if its inhabitants were *without exception* naturally dominated by appetitive rather than spirited or rational desires; and this, like the self-regulation of the City's appetites, would require a magical suspension of the ordinary course of human nature. I will call this the problem of *full justice*.

Thus there are two respects in which the First City misrepresents basic and permanent facts about human nature. On closer examination, Glaucon's objection points to both of them. It raises the problem of self-regulation explicitly: what prevents the appetites of such people from becoming immoderate? And it raises the problem of full justice by ostension, for its indignant tone makes vivid the impossibility of a Glaucon finding a home in the First City—not really because it fails to give sufficient scope to his appetites, but because it gives no scope at all to the *thumos* which should keep them in their place. Both defects are then made fully visible by the theory of the tripartite soul given in Book IV, and corrected in the politics of the Kallipolis. They are corrected simultaneously, for the tripartite class system serves at once to regulate the appetites of the many and to provide a just way of life for the rational and spirited few.

None of this entails that the First City is, Socrates' statements to the contrary, an unjust one: rather, the whole account is simply a *suggestio falsi*. This is why we need to move to more elaborate cities to see either justice *or* injustice arise (the grain of truth in the 'naïveté' reading): this City is too unreal

and incoherent for either to be genuinely in play. Since it observes a correct division of labour, it must be just; but given the problem of full justice it cannot be so. Since it is not subject to rational rule, it must be unjust; but since it is stipulated to be moderate and stable, it cannot be.

A picture which depends on falsifying human nature can have no historical, analytic or normative standing: that is why in Books V-VII Plato takes such pains to prove that his account of the Kallipolis does *not* do so (456b-c, 502a-c, 540d-e). By the time we have read Books IV-IX, it should be obvious that nothing resembling the First City could exist, and so much the worse for those who indulge fantasies of moral nostalgia. Plato's account of the First City does not genuinely assert the trope of the Golden Age, let alone propose it analytically as the origin and first principle of a city: he plays with both genres the better to subvert them. It is a perverse tribute to Plato's powers of evocation that this plan has misfired with so many readers.

This parodic reading is compatible with another important function of the First City. As scholars have noted, the City is naturally read as an alternative—a rival 'foundation myth'—to the account of justice and human nature on which Glaucon relied in posing his challenge to Socrates (cf. Cooper 2000, Devereux 1979). On the reading I have offered, this substitution cannot do foundational work; indeed, the City is even further from the psychological facts than Glaucon's picture, which is arguably valid as an account of what 'justice' could be in a community of otherwise unregulated producers. It does, however, serve a pivotal dialectical function. Both accounts depict one-dimensional communities in which only appetitive motivations have any power: Glaucon depicts Appetitive Man in his usual unregulated state, while Socrates depicts him in the happiest he can attain. And, crucially, when Glaucon sees what *that* looks like, he spontaneously rejects it as beneath him. To put it another way, in Glaucon's picture our rational and spirited capacities (and their attendant virtues, intelligence and courage) could figure only as the servants of pleonectic appetite; the First City clarifies the stakes by subtracting them altogether. The unattractiveness of the result suggests that the life of successful injustice appeals to a naturally rational or spirited person only if it is confusedly supposed to provide scope and satisfaction to those other aspects of our selves, soon to be analyzed by Socrates as distinct and superior parts of the soul. In that respect, the whole of Socrates' later account of the parts and virtues of soul and city can be read as a meditation on the shortcomings of the First City—as Plato's answer to the question, 'what's wrong with this picture?' What matters for dialectical purposes is that Glaucon senses something wrong with it as well.

IV. *The Golden Age in the Later Dialogues*

Suppose we try to imagine conditions under which something *like* the First City might be possible. Suppose that the problem of full justice could be solved, by postulating a community in which no one would be oppressed by the appetitive life. And suppose that this community luckily solved the problem of self-regulation—by being governed by an external reason, say. That might not be a stable arrangement; but while it lasted, it might look very much like the First City.

I believe that Plato explores this hypothesis in the famous myth of the 'Age of Cronus' in the *Statesman*. This very complex passage, which I cannot here treat in full, is part of a mass of myths involving cosmic cataclysms; among other functions, it shows the gulf separating our time from the era in which humans were directly tended, like a herd, by divine rulers. During the Age of Cronus, god himself supervised the rotation of the cosmos, and each animal species had its own divine caretaker, humans included.

> A god tended them... just as now human beings... pasture other kinds of living creatures...; and given his tendance, they had no political constitutions, nor acquired wives and children, for all of them came back to life from the earth, remembering nothing of the past. While they lacked things of this sort, they had an abundance of fruits from trees and many other plants, which grew not through cultivation but because the earth sent them up of its own accord. For the most part they would feed outdoors, naked and without bedding; for the blend of the seasons was without painful extremes, and they had soft beds from abundant grass that sprang from the earth (271e-2b).

These Cronus-folk live austerely but pleasantly, with no need of political organization—just like the people of the First City. But they are utterly remote from us, and not entirely human (for instance, by being generated out of the earth): the Age of Cronus is here more like science fiction than a fable of 'good old days' for which *we* might feel nostalgia. Still, the myth serves to show how the problem of appetitive self-regulation without politics could be solved. And it is striking that even this divine supervision does not, for Plato, settle the question of whether the 'Age of Cronus' was a genuine Golden Age. The Eleatic Visitor proposes a simple basis for judging the question: if the Cronus-folk made use of their magical advantages "to do philosophy, talking both with animals and with each other" (272c1-2), then they were more fortunate than us. But if they instead wasted their leisure on gorging themselves and telling myths, they were not. Plato is uncompromising. Leisure, divine protection, being able to talk to the animals: none of it is any good unless used in the pursuit of wisdom. Without that, it seems, the Age of Cronus counts as *less* happy than our own, presumably because we at least have the option of philosophizing.

The image of earthborn primitives discussing epistemology with their animal friends is a hopelessly comic one; despite the Visitor's polite agnosticism, one

suspects that the Cronus-folk are not likely to have been philosophers.[17] In fact, we can be quite sure that they were not. For the Cronus-folk are ruled, like the producers of the Kallipolis, by a providential rationality from outside. And external rule is always a second best: as Plato says in *Republic* IX, "it is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, *preferably within himself and his own*, otherwise imposed from without" (590d3-5, my emphasis). The ability to rule and to philosophize are expressions of a single capacity: if the Cronus-folk were best served by divine herdsmanship, they cannot have been philosophers. I said earlier that no human community could be *relied* upon to produce only unphilosophical natures; but these feeble folk are only dubiously our kin.

If this reading is right, then the myth of the Age of Cronus is (among other things) a further reflection on the problems posed by the First City. And its upshot seems to be to confirm the impossibility of that City. For divine trusteeship can be used to solve the problem of appetitive self-regulation; but this solution *excludes* any solution to the other problem, that of finding a just fulfilment for philosophical natures. The hypothesis of a natural 'herd' community, in which such natures never arise, solves that problem by Pyrrhic means: to accept this solution is to admit that we are no longer really discussing *human* life, and the prospects for human virtue and happiness, at all.

The *Timaeus* and *Critias* confirm that when Plato postulates a fully human Golden Age, it takes a very different form. Here both ancient Athens and Atlantis (before its decline into decadence) are depicted as virtuous cities; and neither shows the least trace of primitivism. Admittedly, both are, like the Cronus-folk, separated from us by aeons and cataclysms, and it is emphasized that both cities benefit from divine tutelage (*Timaeus* 24b-d, *Critias* 109b-d, 113dff.)—almost to the extent of 'herdsmanship' in the case of the Atlanteans (109b-c), but this herding is carefully stipulated to be of a special kind involving *persuasion*. Meanwhile ancient Athens has the class system of the Kallipolis, complete with feminism and communism for the military class (*Critias* 110c-d); and it is said to have been devoted to wisdom (*Timaeus* 24a-d, cf. *Critias* 109c-d). The Atlanteans are actually descended from Poseidon (as well as from 'earth-born' humans, *Critias* 113c): thus they share in the divine nature (120e), and though following laws handed down by Poseidon, they are self-governing (119c-21c). The spectacular quality of the account of Atlantis leaves it somewhat 'other' and opaque; but the major political point made by it is evidently to correct a possible misreading of the *Republic*, by emphasizing that material austerity is optional for a virtuous society. Atlantis is fabulously wealthy: the key to its virtue is that its rulers "possessed conceptions that were true and entirely lofty.... except for virtue, they held all else in disdain and thought their present good fortune of

[17] Compare Socrates' polite agnosticism about the tyrant Archelaus in the *Gorgias*: to know whether he is happy, we have to know how he stands in regard to education and justice (470d9-e7).

no consequence" (120e). The prerequisite for a healthy society, then, is that wealth not be wrongly *valued*: its mere presence or absence is irrelevant. Nuts and berries are no more necessary for virtue than they are sufficient.

Neither Athens nor Atlantis represents a Before of the sort reconstructionism requires. Besides being hopelessly remote, they represent not the simpleminded decency of tradition, but the complex civic virtue of the Kallipolis. And that, as Plato always allowed, could be realized in any era, and by foreigners as well as Greeks: [18]

> if in the limitless past, those who were foremost in philosophy were forced to take charge of a city or if this is happening now in some foreign place far beyond our ken or if it will happen in the future, we are prepared to maintain our argument that, at whatever time the muse of philosophy controls a city, the constitution we've described will also exist at that time (*Rep.* VI, 499c7-d4)

The rule of reason is in accord with the deepest potentialities of human nature, and so could be instantiated anywhere and at any time. Plato's politics thus lack the temporal inflection which reconstructionism would require.

Another late dialogue, however, seems to offer reconstructionism exactly what it needs. In Book III of the *Laws*, the Athenian proposes to look into how political systems first came into existence (676a). He takes it for granted that countless civilizations have arisen in the past, and flourished before being destroyed by floods and other disasters. Only a handful of mountain-dwellers are likely to have survived; and the Athenian's post-cataclysm society has all the hallmarks of a moral Before. Among these rustics, "war and civil war alike came to an end" (678e6-7); circumstances contrived to make them, not virtuous in the highest degree, but more generally decent than today (678b1-3). The absence of wealth and poverty preserved them from crime, and "what we might call their naïveté" preserved their innocence: "When they heard things labeled 'good' or 'bad,' they were so artless as to think it a statement of the literal truth and believe it.... they accepted as the truth the doctrine they heard about gods and men, and lived their lives in accordance with it" (679c3-7).

This 'archeology' presents just the picture which I have argued is *not* genuinely asserted in the *Republic*. It allows a second-rate 'virtue,' consisting in unreflective piety and decency, to follow from sheer naïveté and austere socio-economic conditions. We might well infer that by this time, and in keeping with the generally reactionary tone of the *Laws* as a whole, Plato has come to believe in a primeval Before.

However, I am not convinced that this reading is required. It is important to bear in mind that, despite its dramatic colourlessness, the *Laws* takes place in a very determinate dialectical setting. The Athenian's interlocutors, Clinias and

[18] Incidentally, this comparative freedom from ethnocentrism makes all the more telling the absence from Plato's writings of any sentimental idealization of the 'noble savage'—the synchronic counterpart to moral nostalgia. (On this literary commonplace, see Lovejoy and Boas 1935, 287-367.)

Megillus, are old men from rigidly conservative and absurdly isolated societies; and the argument of the *Laws* is sharply oriented to their limitations and prejudices.[19] With the 'archeology' in particular, we are explicitly in the realm of 'old stories' (677a1) and myth (682a8); and some strangely deadpan praise of the poets indicates that the attitude to these is here uncharacteristically uncritical (682a). In short—though to make good on this suggestion would of course require a full reading of the dialogue—it seems to me that the *Laws* does not genuinely propound moral nostalgia but simply exploits it as an *ad hominem* persuasive trope. Though the interpretation of Plato's use of such tropes is a complex business, we might compare his tactical reliance elsewhere on such dubious and nondialectical modes as etymology, poetic citations and myth.[20] It *may* be that the Plato who wrote the *Laws* himself endorses moral nostalgia about a primeval Before: but the hypothesis is one we can do without.[21]

V. *Platonic Psychology and Ethical Reconstruction*

I have argued that Plato's depictions of various 'golden ages' express no commitment to that cliché, and that he himself has no taste for moral nostalgia: on some occasions, as when Socrates is rude about the four statesmen in the *Gorgias*, he enjoys shocking those who do. Moreover, Plato's theory of human psychology precludes any sentimentality about a simpler good old days, whether

[19] For instance, in Book II the Athenian insists that the just life must also be the happiest; but rather than prove this fundamental doctrine, he is satisfied with an agreement that it be adopted as state doctrine (660e1-64c3c3). The biases of old age are pandered to, at times to comic lengths (e.g., 658e).

[20] N.B. *Phaedrus* 229e-30a, 275a-c; cf. Barney 1998, 88-9.

[21] Another part of the *Laws* which deserves more discussion than I can give here is the argument in Book X against fashionable scientific materialism (885c-99d). Here too the Athenian's arguments have the look of reconstructionist polemic; however, their target is curiously unclear. The Athenian initially insists that it would be wrong to assume that atheists are such merely to serve their intemperance: they also are influenced by scientific doctrines (886a8-b2). Thus "the principles of our modern pundits do need to be denounced as a pernicious influence" (886d2-3), in contrast to the edifying (!) effect of old myths (887d). At the same time, in his hypothetical address to a young atheist, the Athenian emphasises that the problem is endemic. "Neither you nor your friends are the first to have held this opinion about the gods. It's an illness from which the world is never free, though the number of sufferers varies from time to time" (888b6-8, cf. 890b4, 891b2-3). Moreover, we are told that atheists are, after all, "maddened... by their greed for pleasure" (888a3). So intellectuals do not invent new modes of corruption, but merely provide defenses for those so inclined—as the young perennially are. This must be why, as the Athenian promises, older people often revert to theism (888b-c): they are unlikely to have discovered new scientific insights, but their desires will have become less strenuous. In the end, scientific atheism seems to be at most fancy dress for a timeless stance (cf. n. 3 on Callicles).

located in Athens circa 490 B.C. or in the primordial mud. For it is a permanent feature of our nature that most people are dominated by appetite, and it is in the nature of appetite to be non-self-regulating. What Plato admires in cities is thus uniform, be they past, present or future, Greek or foreign, rich or poor. If reason rules, justice and happiness will follow: if not, nothing else will help. As he states flat out in the *Republic*: "Until philosophers rule as kings... cities will have no rest from evils" (473c11-d6). The point of this famous line is not that no other city will ever be optimal, or count as just by some special Platonic standard, but simply that no other can hope to reliably restrain its appetites, and in particular the desire for wealth. Some bad societies are worse than others; but greed is endemic in all of them, because it is endemic in us. And the therapy for greed is far more complicated than anything a prephilosophical 'Golden Age' could provide.

So I conclude that Plato cannot have been an ethical reconstructionist: however bleak his perception of his own era, the Before part of the picture is missing. And if we want a master narrative to explain the urgency of Plato's ethical and political thought, a more plausible candidate has emerged from this discussion. Plato consistently presents his ethical and political programme as one of opposition, not to dangerous modernity, but to the perennially mesmerizing desire for wealth. It is that desire which is, more than anything, at the root of all misdeeds; it is the cause of all wars and civil strife (*Phaedo* 66c-d). Money is at best a conditional good, and positively harmful unless put to right use by wisdom (*Meno* 87eff., *Euthydemus* 279a-282a); in relation to the goods of soul and body, it comes last in the scale of value (*Gorgias* 477b-e, *Laws* 743e). Yet almost all statesmen pursue it as the chief good for their societies—even though that pursuit itself precludes the virtue on which real civic happiness depends (*Laws* 742d2-e7, cf. 743e-4a). Private greed is even more harmful to cities, and its frustration is the agenda which unites the central Books of the *Republic*. The social arrangements depicted in Book V, communism and the abolition of the family, are explicitly designed to suppress any acquisitiveness on the part of the ruling class. Their philosophical education works for the same end from *within* the individual soul: it aims to ensure that, animated by the love of wisdom, the Guardians will be unmoved by any desire for wealth. It is by this channelling of desire that any city stands or falls:

> If you can find a way of life that's better than ruling for the prospective rulers, your well-governed city will become a possibility, for only in it will the truly rich rule—not those who are rich in gold but those who are rich in the wealth that the happy must have, namely, a good and rational life. But if beggars hungry for private goods go into public life... then the well-governed city is impossible (520e-1a).

What has perhaps made this simple agenda less striking than it should be is that there is nothing exclusively Platonic about it: *all* the major ancient philosophical schools give prominence to a similar rejection of the pursuit of

wealth. For all the enormous scope and diversity of ancient thought, there is a sociological level at which ancient philosophy can be seen as a surprisingly coherent ethical movement, and the most accurate slogan for that movement would probably be: *intellectuals against greed.* This rather obvious moralistic agenda has rarely been the focus either of scholarly discussion or of books with titles like *Plato Today*. But it seems to have been as important to Plato as anything else; and unlike reconstructionism, it looks as contemporary as ever.[22]

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COMMENTARY ON BARNEY

MARGUERITE DESLAURIERS

The aim of Professor Barney's "Platonism, Moral Nostagia, and the 'City of Pigs'" is to demonstrate that Plato was not a political conservative. The argument of the paper is directed against the claims of a view that she calls 'reconstructionism,' a view according to which Plato was a conservative as well as, in some sense, a radical. The reconstructionist attributes to Plato a kind of moral nostalgia which includes the belief that at some moment in the past—whether this past is historical or mythical is incidental to the reconstructionist—people lived simpler lives, and, as a result of this simplicity, morally and politically better lives. Because the reconstructionist assumes that moral nostalgia brings with it the desire to recapture or recreate that better past in the present, he assumes that Plato was a conservative. Since the attribution of moral nostalgia to Plato seems to be necessary to make the case that Plato was a conservative, Professor Barney examines the evidence for that attribution. The evidence is supposed to be found in the First City, the simple pleasures of which the reconstructionist takes to be a manifestation of that moral nostalgia. Professor Barney argues that the First City was not intended by Plato to be either a historical or a mythical representation of some better time. She claims, to the contrary, that the First City is impossible, and that Plato intends us to see that it is impossible, because its citizens are impossibly measured in their desires.

The argument for this interpretation of the First City, and, more generally, the argument against the claim that Plato was a conservative, are persuasive. My comments are directed at two issues, both concerned with what is natural, or what is taken to be natural. In the discussion of the first of these issues I aim to provide support for Professor Barney's claim that the description of the First City is not motivated by moral nostalgia. In the discussion of the second I pose certain questions about the claim that the savage desires belong necessarily to all of us, with the intention of clarifying the meaning and scope of that claim.

Socrates does say that the First City is 'true' and 'healthy.' If we accept Professor Barney's interpretation of the First City we must take these remarks to be ironic. I think that they are indeed ironic, that Plato does not offer us the First City as a paradigm of political organization. The irony of the remarks is clearer, I want to suggest, if we consider descriptions of the origins of political community in political philosophy (both ancient and modern), and ask what the point of such descriptions is. The point, I claim, is always to demonstrate something about what is natural—natural to us, to political community or to some feature of political community. If this is right, it lends support to

Professor Barney's interpretation of the First City, by making clearer why the irony might be expected to be apparent.

The impossibility of the First City, as Professor Barney argues for it, hinges on the naturalness of savage desires. I want to raise two questions with respect to Plato's views on the naturalness of such desires. To say that the savage desires are natural to us might mean that, given a certain political culture, none of us can avoid experiencing the savage desires; or it might mean something stronger—that no matter what our political culture we just are the kind of creatures that are bound, by our nature, to experience savage desires. One question, then, is about the different possible senses of nature in the claim that savage desires are natural, and which of these senses Plato intended. A second question has to do with the scope of human nature that the claim about savage desires presupposes: does Plato think that the savage desires belong to us *all* (and so belong to us no matter what our role in the city) or does he think that savage desires belong only to all of those who have natures suited to certain roles in the city?

I turn first to the issue of the description of the origins of political life. The story of the First City, as such a description, is not unique, either in the *Republic* or in the history of political philosophy. In considering how to interpret the First City it is instructive to look at what such stories are typically meant to convey. Consider, first, two other descriptions in the *Republic* of the origins of a city. The first is the sketch offered by Glaucon at 358e-359b, before the First City is introduced:

> They say that to do injustice is naturally good (πεφυκέναι...ἀγαθόν) and to suffer injustice bad, but that the badness of suffering it so far exceeds the goodness of doing it that those who have done and suffered injustice and tasted both, but who lack the power to do it and avoid suffering it, decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. As a result, they begin to make laws and covenants (συνθήκας), and what the law commands they call lawful and just. This, they say, is the origin and essence (γένεσίν τε καὶ οὐσίαν) of justice. It is intermediate between the best and the worst. The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty; the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge. Justice is a mean between these two extremes. This is the nature of justice (φύσις δικαιοσύνης), according to the argument, Socrates, and these are its natural origins (ἐξ ὧν πέφυκε). (*Republic* II, 358e-359b)[1]

I take this to be a description of the origins of political community, because it speaks of beginning to make 'laws and covenants.'[2] Glaucon has said that what

[1] Translations from the *Republic* are by G. M.. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve, from Cooper with Hutchinson (1997).

[2] Most commentators do not take this to be a description of the origin of society, but rather a description of the origin of justice or law. See Nettleship (1901), who says of this passage "[Glaucon] gives a theory of the origin of justice, explaining the nature of justice by showing how it arose," (50); and "Glaucon gives us a popular

he wants to know is what justice and injustice are in and of themselves (and not merely what the consequences of justice and injustice are). His aim in offering this description of the origin of political life is then to say what justice itself is by saying what its origins are. The suggestion is plainly that if we consider the origins of political life, we will see also the origins of justice; and, more importantly for my purposes, that seeing the origins of justice will be seeing what justice itself is. This passage then establishes the idea that if one wants to know what something is in and of itself, one ought to look at its origins, because the original form or state of something will be what that thing is in itself.

The second of the two other descriptions of the origins of a city in the *Republic* is of course that of the Kallipolis. When Socrates accepts Glaucon's suggestion that they should describe the origins of a 'luxurious city' he says, "For by examining such a city we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up (ἐμφύονται) in cities." (*Rep.* II, 372e) This repeats what he had said before embarking on the First City, "If we should watch a city coming to be in theory, wouldn't we also see the coming to be of justice and injustice in that city?" (*Rep.* II, 369a). What is the point of watching justice come to be? Socrates' interest, like Glaucon's, is in what justice is (in the first instance) and whether it is beneficial to someone who has it (in the second). The point of watching justice and injustice come to be in the description of a city will be to see just what justice and injustice are, as in the case of Glaucon's description of the origins of political life.

Consider now Aristotle's account in *Politics* I of the origins of the city:

> He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin (ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὰ πράγματα φυόμενα), whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them. In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the species may continue ...and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved ... Out of these two relationships the first thing to arise is the family...The family is the association established by nature (κατὰ φύσιν) for the supply of people's everyday wants...But when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village. And the most natural form of the village appears to be that of a colony from the family, composed of the children and grandchildren ...When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore every state is natural (φύσει ἔστιν) if the earlier forms of society are natural, for the state is the end of them and the nature of a thing is its

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theory of the nature of justice, explaining it by its historical origin," (52). As an aside, it is interesting to note that Nettleship understands this description to be historical, although he takes the First City to be a logical rather than a historical account of the origin of the state, as we will see below. See also White (1979), for the view that this is a description of "how laws arise" (76-7).

> end...Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature (τῶν φύσει), and that a person is by nature a political animal. (*Politics* I 2, 1252a24-1253a3).[3]

In this passage Aristotle describes a kind of progression from what he takes to be the two primary kinds of human association (that of male and female for the purpose of reproduction, and that of 'natural ruler' and 'natural subject' for the purpose of mutual preservation) through the family, and the formation of villages from the extension of the family, to the state which is the community of several villages. Aristotle insists that each of these relations is natural and that the end of the progression, the state, is natural. He is interested in political community itself, rather than justice as an attribute of political community, and so the claims he makes about what is natural have to do with political community itself. In this respect, his description of the origins of society differs from those that we find in the *Republic*.[4] But the methodological point is the same—Aristotle too claims that by looking at the origins of something we see it for what it is in itself most clearly.

The question both Aristotle and Plato leave open in their descriptions of the origins of political community is whether the descriptions are intended to be historical or mythical. That is, are we to understand the story of the First City, or the story Aristotle tells of the progression from family to state, as factual histories of the beginning of political life? If we consider a second passage from the *Politics*, we have some reason to think that Aristotle need not consider his account to be historical:

> Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed there will be no foot or hand, except homonymously, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that ... The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. (*Pol.* I 2, 1253a19-27).

The claim that the state is 'prior' to the family and to the individual, is clearly not a claim about temporal priority; Aristotle cannot believe that there were

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[3] The translation of the *Politics* is by B. Jowett (with some changes) from Barnes (1984).

[4] See Newman (1887). In his note on this passage, Newman calls the method Aristotle here employs the 'genetic method' and refers us to *Meteorology* 4. 12 389b 24ff. He adds, "In tracing the growth of the πόλις from its earliest moments, Aristotle follows Plato's example both in the *Republic* (369A) and in the *Laws* (678 sqq.). Plato's object, however, is different from Aristotle's. In the *Republic* his object, or nominal object, is to find justice—in the *Laws* it is to discover τί καλῶς ἢ μὴ κατῳκίσθη κ. τ. λ. (*Laws* 683 B); whereas Aristotle's object is to distinguish the δεσποτικός, οἰκονομικός, βασιλικός, and πολιτικός, and still more to prove that the πόλις is by nature and prior to the individual, and the source of αὐταρκεία to the latter. His substitution of this method of watching the growth of the πόλις from its smallest elements is not a desertion of the method of division (διαιρεῖν, 19) announced just previously; it is, on the contrary its best application" (104).

states before there were people. On the other hand, despite the presentation of the different stages of society as a sequence, it is not obvious that Aristotle intends to say that these different stages occurred at historically distinct moments. Indeed, that he insists that the individual is to the state as the hand is to the body suggests that he believes that the earlier stages are not temporally prior any more than they are prior in being; a hand does not pre-date in time the body to which it belongs.

Let me introduce here some remarks made by Rousseau in the second *Discours, sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, as he sets out to describe the origins and therefore the nature of inequality in political life. "Let us then begin by putting aside all the facts, because they have no bearing on the question. One must not take the investigations into which one can enter on this subject for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings, more appropriate for illuminating the nature of things than for demonstrating their true origin, and similar to those which our physicists undertake every day on the formation of the world."[5] Rousseau here acknowledges the methodological strangeness of stories of origins. Only the naive could believe that they are historical; rather they are 'hypothetical and conditional.' He also says quite explicitly that the point of such stories is not to point out the true (i.e. historical) origins of political community, but rather to illuminate the nature of political community and various features (inequality included) of political community. Rousseau then links the point that the aim of these stories of origins is to reveal the nature of things with the point that such stories need not be, and typically are not, historical. The implication is plainly that revealing the nature of something by describing its origins does not depend on the historicity of the description of the origin.

I want to suggest that Plato and Aristotle are just as happy to put aside the facts as Rousseau, and for the same reason. Since it is clear that the aim of their stories of origins, like that of Rousseau, is to reveal the nature of something, if that revelation can be provided by 'hypothetical and conditional reasonings,' then the historical truth is incidental. Such an understanding of the story of the First City, in particular, is put forward by Nettleship, who claims that the First City is "a logical picture of the origin of society in this sense, that it illustrates what the existence and maintenance of society demands, and how those various demands can best be satisfied, taking those demands in a certain logical order."[6]

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[5] Rousseau (1971), 158.

[6] Nettleship (1901), 70. See also White (1979), 89: "..we may ask whether [Plato] thought it inevitable that a city of the sort described before 371e should turn into one of the sort described thereafter. But this question raises the broader question whether Plato intended his whole description of the city, from 369b onward, to describe historically a process that actually took place. In fact it is probably impossible to establish whether, or in what degree, he intended his description to be historical. But however we answer this question, nothing in his subsequent argument

Nettleship acknowledges that Plato might appear to be describing 'an actual historical beginning,' but insists that this is just a 'picturesque way' of putting the question, which might have been put more abstractly. Of course, we might wonder why, if the stories are not historical, we can be so confident that they do indeed reveal the natures which they are intended to reveal, but there is no evidence that this is a question that troubled Aristotle or Plato.[7]

If I am right that the philosophical aim of any description of the origins of political community is to see something in its natural state (whether the something is justice, inequality, or political community), then moral nostalgia as a motivation for providing such descriptions is beside the point. One might of course bring moral nostalgia to such a description, and if one did it might provide part of the motive for offering the description in the first place. Certainly if one suffered from moral nostalgia one's account of the origins of political community might look rather more like the one Plato provides with the First City than the one Glaucon provides at *Republic* II, 358-359. One need not, however, suffer from moral nostalgia in order to have a motive for producing a description of the origins of the state.[8] As we have seen, it is sufficient motivation to want to discover the nature of political community or of some feature of political community. Another way to express my point is to say that moral nostalgia, if it does inform Socrates' accounts of the origins of cities, is not so much a view about the past, historical or mythical, as it is a view about nature.

At any rate, if the point of such accounts is always to reveal what is natural in our political arrangements, then an account which involves obviously unnatural elements will be dissonant with our expectations. If then the desires of the citizens of the First City are unnatural, Plato might expect it to be obvious to us that the First City is an impossibility. He might expect us to see the irony in his claim that the First City is the true or healthy city; and so might expect us to understand the need for the description of the city that is the Kallipolis. This

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depends on the answer. What is important for him is neither that events of this sort did take place nor that they did not. What is important is simply that the city as it is finally constituted should manifest natural human tendencies as he maintains that it does..."

[7] My own view is that descriptions of the origins of political community are always methodologically suspect, not because we cannot tell whether they are intended to be historical, or mythical, or logical, but because they beg the question. They assume that certain things are natural in order to draw a picture of the beginning of political life, and thereby demonstrate something about the nature of political life.

[8] It is perhaps worth pointing out that many of the commentators Professor Barney cites as proponents of the view that Plato was nostalgic for some better past would have been familiar with Nettleship. This means that any of them might have considered the possibility that the First City was not intended either as a historical or mythical account, but as a 'logical' account.

supports Professor Barney's argument that the First City is an impossible city rather than an ideal city.

The question this raises is whether indeed the desires of the citizens of the First City are unnatural. This concerns what Professor Barney calls 'the problem of self-regulation' (*supra*, 228). That is, the First City is impossible in part because a city without rational rule could not be self-regulating and moderate in its appetites. The evidence she adduces for this claim comes from the later books of the *Republic*, in particular from the description of tyranny in Book IX. The most important passage for the argument is at 572b: "...dreams make it clear that there is a dangerous, savage, and lawless form of desire in each of us, even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate or measured." If there are lawless desires in each of us, and if, as Professor Barney says, "only rule by a rationality external to the appetites themselves can maintain them in a genuinely moderate form," and if there is no such rationality in the First City, then the First City is impossible. The argument depends on the strong claim that we are all, even the person with the best nature and the best education, susceptible to experience savage desires. While Plato may well believe this, he seems to hesitate to say it plainly.

There are some reasons for doubt. First, just before the dream passage, at *Republic* IX, 571b, Socrates says of the unnecessary pleasures and desires that they probably (*κινδυνεύουσι*) occur in everyone. But of course the savage desires are only one kind of unnecessary desire. Moreover, the *κινδυνεύουσι* indicates precisely some doubt about the origins and the universality of such desires. It suggests that this might not be a claim about our nature (talk of nature is significantly absent from the passage itself), but rather a claim about how our desires are formed in the context of certain kinds of political organization.[9] Both this note of doubt, and the context—a description of the decline of the constitution from democracy to tyranny, suggest that savage desires may not be natural to us in the strong sense that they belong to us necessarily and irrespective of our political arrangements.

A second source of doubt about the claim that savage desires are natural to us, lies in the scope of the 'us.' Does Plato think that there is a single human nature, and that it is one which necessarily involves the savage desires? The principle of specialization itself suggests that we have different natures: "we are not all born alike, but each of us differs somewhat in nature (*διαφέρων τὴν φύσιν*) from the others" (*Republic* II, 370b).[10] If the Guardians of the Kallipolis

[9] On the other hand, consider the *Timaeus* at 69c ff. The description of the correspondence there between parts of the body and desires suggests that savage desires belong to all of us simply in virtue of having bodies.

[10] Annas (1981) recognizes the possibility that there are different natures for the different classes of the city, but denies that this is what Plato intended to say: ."if each class corresponds exactly to some limited function in the soul, then in an important way the citizens of the state will not share a common human nature. The

have a nature rather different from that of most people, is it not different with respect to savage desires?[11] At 431a-c Socrates says that the naturally better part controls the naturally worse part of the soul, except when there is 'bad upbringing or bad company'; he goes on to say that we find all kinds of 'desires, pleasures, and pains' but mostly in children, women, slaves and the 'inferior majority,' whereas we find desires that are simple, measured and rational in 'the few people who are born with the best natures and receive the best education.' This might mean only that it is possible, given a good nature and a good education, to suppress the savage desires; but it might mean that given a good nature and a good education, one can eliminate the savage desires.

We find a similarly ambivalent passage at *Phaedo* 69b-c. Socrates says that in truth *phronesis* itself is some kind of 'purging' of all pleasures and pains and fears. The language of purgation suggests the elimination of these things, not merely their suppression. Moreover, Socrates claims that true philosophers abstain from (*ἀπέχονται*) and refrain from (*καρτεροῦσι*) and do not give themselves over to (*οὐ παραδιδόασιν*) bodily desires (*Phaedo* 82c). This cannot mean that the true philosopher experiences no bodily desires, but it might surely mean that the true philosopher can eliminate those bodily desires which are savage or lawless.

My point then is that the First City is impossible only if the savage desires are truly natural to all of us. Whether or not they are natural in this strong sense will depend on whether the appetitive part of the soul can in principle be trained or educated, at least in some people, so that it no longer produces savage desires at all. This will depend on the answer to the question I have raised above: do we all share a single human nature, an essential feature of which is the occurrence of savage desires? It seems to me that Plato hesitates to say categorically that we do, and sometimes suggests that we do not.

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reasoning that the productive class do will be a quite different kind of reasoning from that done by the Guardians. And, in spite of the extent to which he thinks people do differ, Plato does not want to deny a common human nature to all his citizens. The differences between members of the different classes are extreme, but they are not as extreme as the differences between the different parts of the soul." (150)

[11] Moline (1978) makes an interesting point, which supports Professor Barney's claim about desires. He argues that, "One is the kind of person one is owing to one's predominant desire. One may have others, however...There would be no occasion for Plato's principle of specialization if citizens of diverse classes could not overlap at a minimal level in their capacities *and* their desires" (7). That is, if what it meant to be the kind of person who could be a Guardian was that one was incapable of doing or wanting anything other than what a Guardian ought to do or want, then Plato would not need to invoke the principle of specialization.

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