only have a reputation for invincibility - it actually is invincible.20 W. K. C. Guthrie's verdict on Plato's purpose is or should be incontrovertible: 'as by argument in the Gorgias, so here by example, by faithfully following the spirit and method of the traditional epitaphios, he has warned of the dangers of an eloquence that poisons the soul by flattery'.21

3 Republic: a sketch

Republic's date of composition is not known with any exactness.22 A work of such vast scale probably took several years to write. The Seventh Letter (377e–318c) suggests that the dialogue's key idea of philosopher rulers was already in Plato's mind by the time of his first visit to Sicily (379–378 BC), and known at least to his intimates before his second visit (c. 367). A common and plausible inference is that Republic was composed and circulated at some time between the two visits. If a good number of the early dialogues are to be dated to the 380s, and if Symposium and Phaedo also predate Republic, composition in the mid to late 370s seems as good a guess as any.

Republic is a mosaic: the Latin origins of the title deriving ultimately from Cicero's attempt to emulate Plato in his De Re Publica, 'On the commonwealth'. The Greek name of the dialogue is Politia. 'Politia' is the standard word for constitution or political system or ordering of the political structure. So 'political order' would give a better sense of what Plato has in mind. There is a further and deeper complication. It quickly becomes apparent that the dialogue is primarily an inquiry into justice (dikaiosune), conceived as a virtue or moral excellence of individual persons: the disposition to do what is right or fair, or more broadly to act morally. The philosophical task Republic undertakes is the project of showing that justice so conceived is in the best interests of the just person, even if it brings nothing ordinarily recognizable as happiness or success, or indeed (as with the sentence of death passed on Socrates) quite the opposite. Thus Republic carries forward the thinking about justice begun in earlier writings of Plato such as Apology, Critias and Gorgias. Why, then, the title's suggestion that it is a work of political rather than moral philosophy (if for the present we permit ourselves the use of this contestable dichotomy)?

20 See Loras 1980: 340 n. The idea is especially insist as she points out, given that for Plato being defined or peer-assessed by oneself is the sort of thing that can happen to a person.
The setting of the dialogue, established on the very first page, already perhaps implicates the promise of the title in ambiguity. The conversation of Republic takes place in a house not in Athens itself, but in Piraeus, the port and economic centre, where Socrates becomes for the time being the half-availing guest of Cephisus, not a citizen but a wealthy resident alien (in the arms manufacture business), and his son Polemarchus. The most vocal member of the company assembled is a visiting sophist, Thrasymachus of Chalcedon. However when Socrates turns to explicit discussion of what a city is in Book 11, his partners in discussion are Plato's brothers Glaucon (with whom he travelled to Piraeus) and Adeimantus (whom they have encountered on the road in Polemarchus' company), i.e. aristocratic Athenian citizens. These circumstances invite the question: is politics to be at the centre or the periphery of the dialogue?23

One way of answering this question is to attend to the formal structure of Republic. After Book 1, an inconclusive Socratic dialogue which nonetheless introduces, particularly in the conversation with Thrasymachus, many of the themes pursued in the rest of the work, the interlocutors agree to take an indirect approach to the problem of individual justice: they will consider the nature of justice and injustice in the polis, in the hope that it will provide an illuminating analogy. Books 11-17 spell out the class structure required in a 'good city'. It is suggested that in such a community political justice consists in the social harmony achieved when each class (economic, military, governing) performs its own and only its own function. This model is then applied to the individual soul. Justice and happiness for an individual are secured when each of the corresponding parts of the soul (appetite, emotion, reason) performs the role it should in mutual harmony. In working out the idea of psychic harmony Plato formulates a conception of the complexity of psychological motivation, and of the structure of mental conflict, which leaves the simplicities of Socratic intellectualism far behind, and has reminded interpreters of Freudian theory, particularly in Books 817-19. Here he examines different forms of unjust political order (notably oligarchy, democracy, and at greatest length tyranny) and corresponding conditions of order, or rather increasing disorder, in the soul.

Political theory therefore plays a large part in the main argument of the dialogue, even though the ultimate focus is the moral health of the soul, as is confirmed by the conclusion of Book 11 and by the second half of Book x, which brings the dialogue as a whole to an end. In the last pages of Book

23 See Braunschvig 1986.
such corruption makes the emergence of an upright philosopher rarer than improbable — and incidentally leaves highly question-
able the prospects of anyone but a Socrates developing moral order in the
soul when society without is infected with moral disorder.

Here we touch on another broadly political preoccupation of Republic,
worked out at various places in the dialogue. It offers among other things
a radical critique of Greek cultural norms. This is highlighted in the cen-
sorship of Homer proposed in Books 11 and 13, and in the onslaught on
the poets, particularly the dramaticists, in Book 11, and their expulsion from
the ideal city. But these are only the more memorable episodes in a
systematic attack on Greek beliefs about gods, heroes and the departed;
on contemporary music, dance and gymnastics and their ethical basis; on
the morality of erotic courtship; and on medical and judicial practice.
Republic substitutes its own austere state educational programme, ini-
tially focused on the training of the emotions, but subsequently (in Books
vi and vii) on mathematics and philosophy. Plato sees no hope for society
or the human race without a wholesale reorientation, fostered by an
absolute political authority, of all the ideals on which we set our hearts
and minds.

Interpreters accordingly see Plato as a profoundly conservative work. The conception of politics it recommends is of course anti-democratic through and through; and it offers a regressive view of human society, if the idea of a
rigidly controlled, hierarchically ordered community closed to social or
political innovation, where the political elite do not engage in economic activity, is to be judged a forlorn attempt to return to the illusory securi-
ties of some imaginary past. But Plato's recipe cannot plausibly be repre-
sented as conservative or even 'conventional' in any sense. There is little
Republic which does not contain either of existing political structures (no Greek city was governed by a meritocratically selected
intellectual elite) or of conventional moral beliefs and practices. The dia-
logue is itself written in such a way as to require the reader to be continu-
ously shifting and broadening perspectives on the huge range of concerns it embraces, from the banalities of its opening conversation between
Socrates and the aged Cephalus to its Platonic explication of the very
notion of philosophy in the epistemology and metaphysics of Books
v-vii. As conservative without a huge exercise in deconstruction of his

the answers he gives. And anyway Socrates professes himself dissatisfied because they have been attempting to determine whether justice is wisdom or folly, and whether it is something profitable, making a person happy, before they know what it is.

Book 1’s triad of interlocutors is reminiscent (no doubt designingly) of Gorgias. Cephalus is a senior figure released from the discussion more quickly than Gorgias, whose ‘heir’ Polus is matched by Cephalus’ heir Polemarchos, a spokesman for the traditional ‘help friends, harm enemies’ conception of justice. The most striking parallel, however, is between Thrasymachus and Callicles. Like Callicles Thrasymachus makes a violent intrusion into the conversation, and like him he is sullied by the end off, and refusing anything but token participation. As with Callicles, Thrasymachus’ role is to be critic of the conventional respect for justice with which both associate Socrates. But the vantage point of the critique is different. Whereas Callicles espouses belief in a natural hierarchical justice which directs that the strong should rule the weak, Thrasymachus holds a cynical reductive view of all talk about justice. What he offers is a *comentarii*, expressed in the language of *Realpolitik*, on the language of morality. With his intervention the moral argument of Republic accordingly takes an explicitly political turn.

Thrasymachus couches his account of justice in terms not of the personal virtue *dikaiosmu* but of *to dikaios*, the just. And when called upon to explicate his thesis that the just is nothing but the interest of the stronger, he gives a political analysis. Each kind of regime makes laws in its own interest, democracy democratic laws, tyranny tyrannical laws, and so on.

So justice is the interest of the prevailing regime. For Thrasymachus there is nothing to be said for or even about morality as something constitutive of the identity of the individual – of what a person is. It is to be understood only as behaviour defined as according with laws imposed by the power of a political authority, and required by its interests (338c–339a).

Discussion of Thrasymachus’ proposal continues the political focus. Questioned as to whether rulers can always identify their interests correctly, he insists that they do so insomuch as they exercise a *techar* of rule (340d–341a). This opens the way for Socrates to probe his position on the nature of rule by asking whether *techar* in general promote the interests of others or only of their practitioners, and whether making money is an essential ingredient of the *techar* of ruling: themes that will recur in central preoccupations of later books of Republic. The debate reflects a fifth-century intellectual background – shared with Gorgias and most of Plato’s early dialogues – in which it was taken for granted that any practice must count as exercise of a *techar* if it is to be regarded as a serious and effective human pursuit. Socrates and Thrasymachus conduct their discussion almost wholly by means of analogies. For example, to the other-regarding focus of medicine Thrasymachus opposes the self-interest of sheep-farming (341c–347a). Although Plato gives Socrates the last word, most readers are left doubting that this is the best way to try to settle what sort of practice ruling is.

Book 1 ends with a sequence of swift and sometimes tricky arguments deployed by Socrates against Thrasymachus’ further claim that ‘injustice [subsequently renamed *euboulia*, good judgment] on a sufficiently large scale is stronger, more indicative of freedom, and more masterful than justice [*dikaiosmu*] construed as law-abiding behaviour’ (344b). That claim is supported by an analysis with a strong political orientation once more. In the restatement of Thrasymachus’ position offered by Glaucce at the beginning of Book 1, the myth of Gyges’ ring makes it clear that what he has in mind in his praise of injustice is admiration for free-rider exploiting general acquiescence in the rule of law. Thrasymachus himself argues that the ultimate free-rider is the tyrant: someone who by the ambition and success of his exploitation of the system actually seizes supreme power, enslaves the citizens, and is generally admired and thought happy on account of the perfection of his injustice (344c–d).

Glaucce’s version of Thrasymachus’ position introduces the notion of a social contract (35b–35bb). This turns it into a more articulate theory than it sounded when enunciated by Thrasymachus himself. The theory presents an *a priori* account of the origins of law, and so of justice conceived of as obedience to law. It can be best presented by consideration of the matrix below, which represents the order of preference a rational agent will opt for – according to this view – in ranking various possible patterns of behaviour in his interactions with others:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My behaviour to others</th>
<th>Their behaviour to me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Wrongdoing</td>
<td>Non-retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Refraining from wrongdoing</td>
<td>Refraining from wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Non-retaliation</td>
<td>Wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rational persons would prefer (1) to (2) because what is good by nature is pursuit of one’s own self-interest, if necessary at the expense of the interest...

26 See e.g. Schave 1950, 4’thills 1969: ch. 3, Dovers 1975: ch. 5, Parry 1986: also Prone, in Ch. 9 section 2 above.
27 The account of it offered here is due to De Young 1983. For the fifth-century background, see Winwein, in Ch. 4 sections 1 above, also Taylor, in Ch. 3 above.
of others. But weakness and necessity dictate (2) as the pattern they will aim for in most circumstances. For opportunities to realize (1) are few and far between: ordinarily individuals are not in a strong enough position to commit wrong against others without suffering retaliation. And if (2) is not secured, there is the likelihood that sooner or later a situation will arise in which (3) is the outcome. But (3) is to be avoided at all costs, since the badness of suffering wrong far exceeds the good which is achieved by committing it. So in order to guard against (3) rational persons strike an agreement that each will refrain from wrongdoing on the understanding that everyone else will do the same, that is, a contract to ensure (2). The proof that (1) nonetheless reflects what human nature pursues as good, as opposed to the merely conventional good of equal treatment represented by (3), is apparent if we consider how people would behave if they were strong enough to do wrong against others without suffering retaliation (359b-360d). Someone like Gorgias, who had the power of making himself invisible at will, would opt for (1) simply because he knew he could consistently accomplish it. In short, he would exploit the system as a free-rider.

The Gorgias scenario leads Glaucion into a comparison between the lives of the just and the unjust person which will be the underlying preoccupation of the whole of the rest of Republic. He takes extreme cases of each. The unjust man is imagined as someone who like Gorgias has all the power and resources he needs to achieve his ends, and who additionally enjoys the reputation of justice. The just person, by contrast, is supposed to have a reputation for injustice, and to be the victim of every conceivable physical outrage, culminating in crucifixion. Which is the happier?

Glaucion's arguments are supplemented by a detailed examination by Adeimantus of popular attitudes to just and unjust behaviour (361a-c). The scrutiny is designed to show that they betray no conviction whatever that being just is intrinsically desirable. First, there is a preoccupation with the reputation justice or injustice brings: the consequences - in this life or the next - of being thought just or unjust are their principal concerns. Second, ordinary people and poets alike qualify both their endorsement of justice and their criticism of injustice by stressing that the one is hard and (some), the other sweet and easy and more profitable. The vicious are admired, if wealthy and powerful, the weak and poor dishonoured even if virtuous. Third and most strikingly, the

34 For Thrasymuchus, of course, all ruling powers of whatever complexion are successful free-riders.

5 The response: (1) A first model

The response of Glaucion and Adeimantus throw down is developed over ten pages of text, sophisticated, lucidly organized and deadly serious philosophical argumentation. The view of justice it encapsulates goes back to the sophists, particularly Anaxiphanes' Or Thn and the Sisyphus fragment. But Plato has borrowed it for his own dialectical purposes and - we may guess - brilliantly elaborated its theoretical structure and rhetorical presentation. Both the matter and the manner of the reply he puts in Socrates' mouth come as something of a shock.35

35 See Winton, in Ch. 4 section 1 above.
We might have expected a resumption of the Socratic cross-examination of interlocutors which dominated Book I. Instead, Socrates shifts into a speculative mode which is sustained for the whole of the rest of the dialogue. It would be hard to conceive a greater contrast either with the chiasmus or with Glaucou and Adeimantus’ procedure. Where they presented a disciplined and tightly focused set of arguments, Socrates - to confine ourselves for the moment just to Books I–III - embarks on a rambling, largely descriptive story of what a good city might be like, and what education and living arrangements would be appropriate for the ‘guards’ or military specialists who are to conduct its military operations and (as emerges subsequently) to govern it. The point and overall coherence of the story are in some respects obscure. In places it seems distinctly arbitrary. And some of its claims and proposals can hardly be meant seriously.

At one point - later on, in Book VII - Socrates is given the mildly self-critical comment: ‘I forgot that we were playing’ (516c). Play seems an apt description for what he offers us. Plato is effectively asking us to relax our minds: to forget for the time being the fierce stringencies of proof and counter-proof, and to ask ourselves instead ‘What if . . . ?’, chasing a few hares down apparent by-ways if the mood so takes us. The rationale of this way of proceeding will presumably emerge only later.

Socrates’ decision to talk first about the city is also a surprise. His mission as described in Apology was focused on care of the soul. And that focus is apparent both in earlier dialogues in general and in Plato’s previous writings on political themes: notably Critias and Gorgias. Book III of Republic had ended with discussion of justice as what makes the soul perform its function well. So when Glaucou and Adeimantus asked for a demonstration of the power justice has in its own right, they and we were expecting something quite different from what we get. Socrates offers an analogy to justify talking first about the city. If something written in small letters is hard to make out, the situation can be retrieved if one finds the same message written in larger letters on a larger surface. Armed with a grasp of the large version, readers are equipped to return to the small letters and check whether they are the same. So with justice. A city can be characterized by justice no less than an individual - but it is larger, and so perhaps there is more justice in it than in the individual, and easier to make out. This argument is not very convincing. It threatens to beg the question whether justice as predicated of a city is the same sort of thing as justice in an individual. And the idea that there might be more justice in the city than in an individual in some interesting and relevant sense is ill-defined, to say the least. But perhaps we should put our doubts on hold, and turn to look at the first of the models Plato invites us to play with.20

He certainly has Socrates begin with a fundamental question: why is it that cities come to be in the first place? Socrates gives a simple answer. Humans are not self-sufficient, but have many needs requiring satisfaction if they are to lead a civilized life (516b).

Because people need many things, and because one person calls on a second out of one need and on a third out of a different need, many people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers. And to this common settlement we give the name of city. (trans. after Gruge (res. Revell))

Socrates then imagines that he and his interlocutors are to construct a city ‘in fancy’ - i.e. in speech or theory. In setting about this task, the key principle he calls in aid is the notion of specialization. The optimal way of satisfying our many needs is to collect together specialists in (and only in) the relevant crafts and skills. This is because a specialist with a natural gift for his craft will do a better job more efficiently than a non-specialist, or than someone practising more than one craft.

It initially appears that at the limit an extremely small community indeed could meet at any rate basic needs: (i) a farmer, a builder, a weaver, and a shoemaker would perhaps suffice. But further reflection on the principle of specialization suggests that this conception of what one might call the minimal city is unstable. For production of the tools required by those producing the basic necessities of civilized life must - by that principle - be put in the hands of (a) a second wave of specialists: smiths, carpenters, herdsmen, etc. (l) in its turn similarly dictates the need for (k) exporters and importers, since the numbers in the city who will be required to practise all the specializations already generated can probably not be supported by local resources alone. But the existence of (k) exporters and importers generates a further need, for (k) many more farmers and other craftsmen to supply home and overseas consumers. And (k) will in turn create the need for coinage and the market. Hence (k) middlemen will be required to operate the market, which provides the conditions for (k) labourers offering the use of their bodies for pay. Adeimantus is invited to agree that their city is now ‘complete’ (516a: 37e).

What are we to take to be Plato’s point - relative to the strategic objects

20 The treatment of the ‘economic city’ which follows draws on Schefold 1993. Its role in Plato’s argument has often been found puzzling: see e.g. Antin 1981, 77–9.
of the dialogue – in developing this dazzling and dazzlingly original set of ideas? They constitute the invention of something like the concept of an economy: a sort of transcendental deduction of the market. But that has been little noticed by the commentators. And in a way they are right not to notice it. Nothing in Republic or any other dialogue suggests that Plato thought understanding the economy was a project to be undertaken for its own sake, as something of independent importance.

A better assessment construes the passage as prophetically and provocatively in a variety of ways. First for consideration is its bearing on the question of justice. This point is in fact raised explicitly by Socrates as soon as Adeimantus has said ‘Perhaps’ to the suggestion that the city is now complete (371e-372a):

Where are justice and injustice to be found in it? With which of the things we examined did they come in?

I’ve no idea, Socrates, unless it was somewhere in some need that these people have of one another. (trans. Gruge, rev. Revel)

The reader can be more specific than Adeimantus, and pinpoint the passage which introduces the principle of specialization. This can be formulated as the rule (S) that, where people need the products others make or supply, it is best that each stick to one task or function for which his natural capacities best equip him. Rule (S) anticipates the principle which Book IV will make the essence of justice in city and soul alike. Indeed Socrates there refers back to our passage, when he suggests that the answer to the question of justice ‘seems to have been rolling around at our feet from the very beginning, and we didn’t see it’ (434b), and then points specifically to the rule ‘that everyone must practice one of the occupations in the city for which his nature is best suited’ (434b). Doing one’s own job – and not meddling with what isn’t – turns out to be what justice consists in.

Why does Plato not clinch this definition when he first proposes the rule, in his account of the economy? Doubtless because other occupations besides the economic – military and governing functions – need to be introduced before he has in place a political structure which will permit the analogy with the structure of the soul to be developed in his theory of individual justice. And as we shall see, he also has other issues he wishes to pursue before he gets to that point. For the present a hint that discussion of the economy is relevant to the problem of justice will suffice for his purposes.

31 For the general approach of Virgilius 1995: 13–18.

32 Cornford 1941: 39.
focussed on luxury. On the contrary, at one point in his account of the parita-
tanal regime proposed for their education he has Socrates remark that the
interlocutors have been purging what they earlier described as a city
of luxury (399e). This is strictly a non sequitur, since it was not the military,
by Plato’s argument, which conceived the appetite for high living in the
first place, but those they exist to protect. The non sequitur simply rein-
forces the sense that the introduction of the warrior after the economic
class does not really have much to do with a theoretical concern about
the relationship between economy and war.25

It seems best to conclude that Plato must have been well aware that his
isolation of an economic city in the particular terms he specifies was no
more than a highly abstract and artificial model of one dimension of
human social activity. These features of the model indicate the sort of role
it really play in his argument, that is, in helping to spell out the nature
of justice. It is ill-designed to function as an ideal to which we should try
to conform ourselves: it articulates a limited system of relationships, not
an imitable pattern of living. But these limitations on its scope are just
what make it an excellent paradigm to think with.

6 The response: (ii) a causal story

The principle of specialization requires that if the city has to be prepared
for wars, there must be a specialist class trained to conduct them. These
specialists are named ‘guards’, and indeed Plato works out a number of his
key theses about them by pursuing the analogy with guards dogs. But while
the role of the guards in fighting wars against external enemies is never
forgotten in his account, it is not its dominant feature. Plato’s hugely
extended treatment (375e–41a) of how guards should be educated does not
make specifically military virtues or skills its focus. And in the pages
immediately following it, the notion of guarding is subjected to some deft
manipulation which results in a significantly different understanding of
the whole idea.26

The most important form of behaviour now designated ‘guarding’
turns out to be rule or government, apparently conceived above all as

25 According to Clay (1981: 16), in making discussion of the good city begins with the introduction
of luxury and war Plato ‘seems to suggest that an initial act of injustice lies at the foundation of
Kallipolos’, and to ‘forces upon us’ (ibid. 26) the question of how it is that political philosophy
is possible only in an active society. See such alleged deconstructive implications are never
mentioned subsequently in Rep.

26 For a fuller discussion of this section of Rep. see Nettleship (1972: ch. 9). Barker (1978: ch. 9) (who
taking precautions against the acquisition by citizens of the power to mount an internal threat to the wellbeing of the city. The specialists who were originally called guards are now seen as younger people, whose military role is redefined as 'assisting and helping the decisions of the rulers' (414b). Rulers themselves are to be chosen from among the guards in general, on account of intellectual and moral qualities which make them the 'best guards of the conviction they have that they must do whatever they judge best for the city' (411c), and in this sense good guards of themselves and their education. For that is what makes a person 'most useful both to himself and to the city' (413a). In other words, new forms of activity are recognized as exemplifying guarding; and in the end guarding as an activity is reinterpreted as an expression of guarding construed as a reflexive psychological disposition.

This pattern of analysis, moving from external to internal, effect to cause, behaviour to disposition, is typical of Plato's treatment of the guards, inseparable as the emphasis of the entire account falls on their qualities of soul. Plato frames his discussion with two passages which both dwell on the need for guards to possess innate opposite characteristics of gentleness (reflecting a philosophical impulse) and ferocity (an emotional quality) requiring to be harmonized (375a–376d, 410a–412a). He thereby signals his intention to make the problem of harmonization, initially presented as intractable, the leading issue to be addressed by his educational proposals. And he thus foreshadows the eventual definition of individual justice as psychic harmony, although harmony embracing the appetitive as well as the rational and emotional parts of the soul. So the method of studying the city in the hopes of understanding justice in the soul turns out to be a supplier and more complex procedure than might initially have been supposed. Both the model of the economic city and the proposed educational programme for the guards contribute to that end, but in quite different ways.

The explicit suggestion at the outset of the educational section, however, is that discussion of education will help us to see how justice and injustice arise in the city (376c–d). What helps it gives towards this is not immediately apparent. Perhaps we should take Plato's emphasis to be on the causal origins of justice and injustice in the city. He makes Socrates comment early in the discussion that 'the beginning is the most important part of every enterprise' (377a). The context of this remark is concern over the myths children are taught when they are still young and malleable. Myths mould them. The stories they take into the soul imprint a pattern upon it. Hence the sustained efforts Socrates makes to establish what are the right kinds of myth for children to hear, by way of a memorable critic of Homer and other poets. Its political rationale quickly becomes evident.28

The initial subjects of the critique are the accounts in Homer and Hesiod of war in heaven: the plots of one generation of gods against their predecessors, hatreds between individual deities, or enmities between gods and heroes and their kin generally. But those who are to guard the city must be got 'to hold the belief that it is shameful in the extreme to fall easily into mutual hatred' (418c). Stories like these must not be told—even if they were true—if future guards are to be persuaded that no citizen has ever been at enmity with another, and that such a thing would be an impurity (ibid.). After his treatment of the guards' education is completed, Socrates suggests that it would be advisable for all the adult citizens to be told a 'splendid fiction' that would, in the best case, persuade even the rulers, but if not, then the rest of the city (414c) or perhaps (Glaucus thinks) only later generations, i.e. when children and so susceptible to story-telling. This 'fiction'—sometimes translated 'noble lie'—is the charter myth of the city, and the other interlocutors are 'founding', and is allegedly derived from Phoenician sources. Its principal theme is the natural brotherhood of all the citizens, since the myth will teach that all of them were 'fashioned and nurtured within the earth' (414d), and are all therefore children of one mother. There is then a rider explaining that nonetheless they belong to different classes because they are made of different metals, with the warning that the city will be ruined if those made of iron or bronze, and so fitted to be farmers or artisans, ever become guards. But the main point of attempting to inculcate belief in such a story is clear. It is to make the citizens 'care more for the city and each other' (415d).

Here, then, is a further set of hints about justice. It will turn out to be something brought about by the mutual care which produces social harmony. The fact that Plato intimates this conclusion in his treatment of fiction and its uses in moulding the human soul suggests an additional complexity: mutual care in a community will not come about unless people come to hold the deeply ingrained belief that that is the natural order of things. Confirmation that this is his drift comes in a later passage. When Socrates raises the question of how much detailed legislation the

27 Cl. Las 1990.

28 On the critique of poetry see e.g. F. R. Stztz 1989.
interlocutors should devise for their city, he comments that it is all insignificant provided that the one great thing is 'guarded': education and upbringing (42.32). Everything else flows from that. It is as though Plato is saying: 'Exploring the political is not just a helpful way of getting clear about the soul. It is a project which necessarily leads anyone who undertakes it back to the soul, and its beliefs and dispositions - or at any rate, anyone who engages in it in the constructive way founders of cities must do, committed as they will be to achieving social harmony before all else. Without shaping souls it is impossible to build or change society.'

What Plato proposes in order to achieve an appropriate blend of virtues in the soul is a radical and thoroughly going reform of every aspect of Greek culture. Physical training, for example, is to be focused not on the body as distinct from the soul, but is conceived as forming with music an integrated strategy for harmonizing the spirited and wisdom-loving parts of the soul. Music is treated as particularly important, because 'rhythm and harmony infiltrate the inmost part of the soul more than anything else does' and 'make a person graceful' (40.10). Moreover it sharpens perceptions, so that someone properly brought up in it will acquire - in advance of rational understanding - a distance for anything shameful and a deep attachment to what is fine and noble. Many of the reforms in music as in other spheres are directed towards the development of two virtues in particular: courage and moderation, which Plato here associates with behavior under emotional stress and with deliberately chosen activity respectively (399c-2).

I don't know all the musical modes. Just leave me the mode which would appropriately imitate the sounds and accents of someone who is courageous in battle and in every respect forced upon a person, or who is failing and facing wounds, death or some other misfortune, and who in all these circumstances stands up to what befalls him steadily and patiently. Leave me also another mode: appropriate for someone who is engaged in a peaceful action, not forced upon him but voluntary, such as persuading someone of something and making a request (whether it be a god in prayer or a human being by instruction and exhortation), or, by contrast, holding oneself back when someone else tries to instrone or get one to change one's mind - and who as a result acts intelligently, and does not behave arrogantly but in all these circumstances acts moderately and in a measured way, and is content with the consequences. Leave me, then, these two modes, a forcible and a voluntary one, which will best imitate the tones of voice of the unfortunate and the fortunate, the moderate and the courageous.

But the intention is also to foster other more distinctively aristocratic virtues, as the stress on what is fine and noble already suggests: liberality of mind, largeness of style and perspective, and cognitive qualities, as befits those who are to be 'craftsmen of freedom for the city' (395c).

Harmony and political independence for the city are therefore to be secured principally by the education of an elite, selected because they have the natural endowments of spirit and reflectiveness needed in guards: an education radically reconstructed to foster the requisite harmony between dispositions of the soul. This set of ideas constitutes another model for thinking about justice. 49

7 The digression: (i) unity and the good city

It will come as no surprise that Socrates in due course puts it to the interlocutors quite explicitly that the city they have been constructing 'fits the footprint of the good' (452a) inasmuch as it avoids division and achieves unity: there is no greater good than what binds it together and makes it one. This assessment in the digression of Book x recapitulates earlier discussion and anticipates later. It looks back to the beginning of Book iv, where the happiness of the whole city is de facto explicated as the condition of unity: it enjoys because each class performs only the functions to which it is naturally suited. It looks forward to Books vi and vii, and to the metaphysical conception of the Form of the Good as what supplies the ultimate unifying explanation of everything there is.

The beginning of Book iv is the point in Republic as which the totalitarianism of Plato's political thinking, found objectionable by critics from Aristotle (who of course did not speak of 'totalitarianism') to Karl Popper (who did), starts to become apparent. 46 Socrates has been confronted with an objection. Guards are to be restricted to a communal way of life, forbidden economic activity, and denied private property beyond the bare minimum. So someone might say, says Adeimantus, that they get no good from the city which in truth belongs to them, and can hardly be particularly happy. Socrates offers the counter-suggestion that living as they are to do the guards might well be very happy. But his key point is that the aim has not been to make one particular class happy, but the whole city so far as possible. The interests of the parts are to be made to predominate over those of any part of the whole. Happiness for the parts - the constituent
classes of the polis – is not a matter Socrates and his interlocutors should concern themselves with in the construction of the city, but something to be left to ‘nature’ (423c), i.e. to the course of events. The happiness of the whole city, as conceived at the beginning of Book IV, will consist simply in the fact that it is well organized according to the principle of specialization. Socrates is in effect commandeering Adimantus’ word ‘happy’ to insist that good order is a more important value than the satisfactions and successes of individuals or groups which the expression usually conveys. 43 This would probably not have struck contemporary readers as a particularly novel or adventurous claim in itself. There was a long tradition of political thought in which the ensemble, ‘law-governed order’, and harmony, ‘unanimity’, of the city were advocated as values which should override individual or factional interests. 44 In any historical Greek polis of Plato’s time the relatively close-knit fabric of society, emphasized during frequent episodes of warfare, was such that the relative importance Socrates attaches to the good of the city would have been accepted as a commonplace in most quarters. Nor does his position involve postulation of any proto-Hegelian idea of the State (as distinct from civil society). So Socrates’ thesis is not totalitarian if totalitarianism is construed as necessarily tied to the characteristically modern attempt at radical and coercive politicalization of diverse forms of civil association, hitherto independent of the State, such as the unions, the press, the police, sport, science, law, art, family life, education, and, of course, the economy. 45

But the way Socrates uses the principle of specialization to achieve good order in the city bears uncomfortable resemblances to the practices and ideologies of modern totalitarian states. It is true that Republic does not recognize violence or the threat of violence as a dominant or regular instrument in maintaining the structures it recommends, although the bonds of social harmony are to be maintained by ‘both persuasion and necessity’ (496e). Instead it employs something no less characteristic of totalitarianism: propaganda. We have already mentioned the ‘splendid fiction’ of the brotherhood of all the citizens and the natural rightness of the class system, which builds something like false consciousness into the foundations of the political settlement. When Socrates comes to work out the commissaristic breeding arrangements to be imposed on the guards, he stresses again that the rulers will need to ‘make frequent use of falsehood and deception’ (496d), dragging those they rule into accepting the provisions to be implemented. It is assumed that in this sphere, as elsewhere, existing political and social structures have been swept aside. But sweeping them aside could scarcely be achieved without violence. Socrates conceives that the state would be wiped clean by sending into the countryside everyone over the age of ten, so leaving the children to be brought up in the laws and customs he is recommending. Coercion on a massive scale, as in Caececeus’ Romania or the ‘cultural revolution’ of Mao Tse-tung’s China, is presumably what is envisaged. Moreover, while the dichotomy of state and society may find no purchase in the ancient Greek context, many of the points at which the totalitarian state threatens civil society correspond to places where Republic submits to the control of the city institutions or social practices which in Plato’s Athens were regarded as properly belonging within the domain of the family or the individual. One of these is education: in Athens no concern of the city, but on Socrates’ proposals to be prescribed by it down to the last detail, and to be preserved without any change whatsoever if the rulers are to ensure the survival of its wellbeing. Another – as Adimantus noticed (496d) – is the regulation of the lives of the guards, and the consequent proposal that there be communal arrangements with regard to women and children: Socrates goes to the extreme lengths of not simply subjecting the family to control by the city, but abolishing it altogether. 46

It is sometimes held that the political proposals of Republic are designed to be practicable. 47 If so, such a view, the remedy Socrates is recommended for theills of society contains so many harshnesses, internal difficulties and downright absurdities as to deconstruct itself. Or even if it does not (or Plato does not think it does), it is taken as merely an ideal blueprint which he could never have expected or even wanted to see implemented. In particular, Book V’s advocacy of women guards and communal breeding and child-rearing provisions have been construed as

43 Sometimes it is suggested (reg. e.g. Popp 1962, vol. 1) that Socrates conceives the happiness of the whole city as something more than is achieved for the happiness (as far as he can be achieved) of all the citizens so Vlastos 1977. But see Bock 1980 for a demonstration that the city is in fact created as a whole with its own needs and characteristics, above all a need for order and harmony. To that extent readings of the Republic which find in it anticipations of the Hegelian conception of the state have some justification.

44 See e.g. Bock 1980, in Ch. 3, section 4 above, and Oliver, in Ch. 6, section 4 above.

45 Huxley 1949: 129, who adds “The ‘sin between state and society’ did not yet exist, and that could neither have been defined nor destroyed.”


critical challenge to reliance on cultural assumptions about the sexes. Its siting at the beginning of Book v means that it constitutes the first stage of the great philosophical excursus of Books v-viii: we should not be surprised if it does some real philosophical work. Its basic premise is the claim that there is no reason to think human nature any different from animal and particularly canine nature where questions of sex and (the next argument will add) eugenics are concerned. If a bitch hunts with the dogs and takes minimal time off for childbirth, why should not women of suitable ability become guards like men of the same ability, even if their nature is in general ‘weaker’ (457c-456a)?47 So since there can be ‘sharing (διαιτίας) in the work of guarding the other citizens’ by women with men (456d), for the good of the city there should be – and what is more, they should share in education and training (including participation naked in public gymnastics) and in all their activities. The grounds of the ‘should’ are spelled out more explicitly in Laws, where Plato continues to insist on the desirability of training and using women as well as men for military functions, as with Herodotus’ Amazonian Saurromatae: it is remarkable mindlessness to make only half of the citizens available for war at the same cost and effort as double the number (82a-3).48 This is not feminism. It is true that gender is rejected as a cultural construct. But deconstructivist feminists would be likely to press deeper doubts about the objectivity of the notion of rationality which governs the whole argument of Book v-viii of Republic. And there is not a glimmer of a concern with rights.

Socrates and Glaucon agree that his argument for the possibility and desirability of women guards escapes any wave of criticism which might threaten to submerge it. Indeed, Socrates has gone out of his way to articulate and rebut the contrary view that women are naturally different from men, and should therefore – in accordance with the sort of thinking sanctioned by the principle of specialization – be assigned a different function in society. A bigger wave, however, is on its way. The next proposal Socrates makes is presented as ‘following’ (457c) the provisions for women guards, in the sense that it continues to work out the idea that the city needs to make optimal use of its human resources. If we can achieve a better breed of bird or dog by genetic engineering, why should the same strategy not work with humans? Hence a eugenic programme involving tight

47 Glaucon – always more preoccupied than Socrates with the feasibility and practical application of his proposals (cf. e.g. 526-7) – volunteers the view that ‘there are many women better than many men in many ways’ (456d).
control of mating by the city, and communal nursing arrangements for the offspring to minimize interference with the military functions of women guards. The core of this proposal is introduced as follows (457e–d).

All these women are to be shared by (krônêi) all the men, and no one woman is to live privately with any one man. And the children too are to be shared, with parents not knowing their own offspring nor children their parents.

Glaucot suggests that there is much more scope for disbelief here, regarding both the possibility and the benefits of what is proposed. The challenge to show that this form of communism is desirable is not met by stressing its reproductive utility or functional efficiency. Instead Plato writes an extraordinarily eloquent passage celebrating a much more intense and radical form of unity than has been claimed for the interlocutors' city so far (462a–464b). He has Socrates suggest that without the ties of the traditional family the guards as a group—"the city"—will constitute a single great family. Since everyone perceives everyone else as father or sister or grandmother, any one person's success or misfortune will be shared as pleasure or pain by all. There will be an end to the privatization of these emotions, and maximal agreement in saying that this is "my" sorrow or "my" joy. When one individual has a good or bad experience, the sympathy felt throughout the city will be like the sensation felt throughout the body when any one of its parts is affected by pain or pleasure. The unity produced by abolition of the family, together with that of private property, is a recipe for harmony and peace; and Socrates spells out in some detail the disappearance of occasions for conflict which he represents as its consequence (464c–465d).

Plato's attachment to this vision of the social good appears to have remained undiminished. He sketches it briefly once again in Laws, where in terms clearly designed to recall this section of Republic he reiterates his allegiance to the idea that the best city is one where the old saying "among friends things are held really in common" is observed so far as possible throughout the entire city (579a–d). His treatment of the other issue—whether such a city could actually come into being—is guarded and highly nuanced. In Laws the ideal is presented as a model to be emulated rather than a scheme for implementation: what is wanted is that constitution which will resemble it as closely as possible while being suitable for humans, not gods and heroes (579d–e). A similar interpretation is indicated by Socrates' discussion in Republic itself.

These indications are both substantive and formal in character. As to substance, Socrates makes it clear even as he is describing it that the eugenic programme would be an immensely difficult project to carry through successfully. He recognizes that it will require control over sexual drives or "erotic necessities" (458d) which will only be enhanced by the close physical proximity, not least during gymnastic training, in which men and women are to coexist. As we have noted, he envisages the need for frequent deceptions by the rulers to persuade the guards to accede to the requirements of the programme (459c). And he writes laws to cover various kinds of breach of the rules, whether caused by "dangerous weakness of will" or otherwise, which he appears to regard as inescapable (461a–c). When in Book vii he imagines the degeneration of the ideal community, it is significant that he postulates as cause a miscalculation in the computations governing optimal mating seasons (546a–547b). In chapters 3 to 4 of Book ii of the Politics Aristotle argues that the extreme degree of unity hypothesized for that community would be the ruin, not the salvation, of the city, and that even if it were not, Socrates' account of how such perfect unity is achieved will not work—he succeeds in producing at best a "watery" kind of friendship. Modern commentators have followed Aristotle in diagnosing all manner of tensions and contradictions in Plato's efforts to reconcile the ideal of social unity with the conditions which actually govern the way humans develop emotional attachments or antipathies towards each other.50

As to form, Socrates is represented as strikingly evasive on the question of feasibility. Where women guards were concerned, he addressed the question first and at length before turning briefly to ask whether, given that it is feasible, it would be a desirable provision. On sharing of women and children he defers the issue of practicability not once but twice (458d, 466d), and is finally made to address it only by an intervention from Glaucot (471c). When he finally does confront it he opts for the same response as is given in Laws. What the interlocutors have been constructing in speech or argument (logos) is a model (paradigma) of a good city. Their project is to be compared with the way they have approached the problem of justice. The point of inquiring into what justice is and of considering the perfectly just man is not to prove that there could be such a person, but to have a benchmark to use in their discussions about happiness. Whoever approximates most closely to the paradigm would then be agreed to come closest to being happy. Just so with the city: the request to show that a city such as has been described is a possibility misses the

point. If Socrates is to accede to it, "possibility" must be interpreted not as full implementation of the ideal, but as an account of how a city could live in a way that most closely approximates to the description" (473a) the interlocutors have given. 

Laws shows what such an approximation might be like. For example, even though there is to be apportionment of land under the second best constitution, it is still to be regarded as the common property of the city (739e-740b). And although the institution of the family is retained, the city is to use a variety of means to ensure that there remain always the same number of households all of roughly equal size, for example by providing for the transfer of surplus males from one family to another, and by making the birth-rate a matter of public concern (740b-741a).

Once again, therefore, Republic gives the reader a model for thinking with, rather than a blueprint designed to be exactly reproduced; and this time it explicitly says that this is what it is doing. "Thinking with" does not exclude "acting upon". The dialogue's theoretical discussion of justice points to the conclusion expressed on the last page of Book x that we "should practise it with understanding in every way we can" (621e). In drafting his account of the perfect unity of the harmonious city Plato presumably means to supply a basis for guidelines which are to inform— in whatever approximations to the ideal—the work of legislators and makers of constitutions.  

8 The digression: (ii) philosopher rulers

The introduction of the idea of philosopher rulers is the greatest of all the revolutionary moments Plato has prepared for reader of Republic. It provides the context for the visionary account of philosophy itself that is offered at the heart of the dialogue, and for the approach to Republic's focal point, the Form of the Good, through the successive analogies of Sun, Line and Cave. The idea of a specifically philosophical impulse in the soul was already adumbrated in the initial discussion of the education of the guards. Now it is articulated as the all-consuming passion (500b) for a comprehensive rational understanding of eternal reality and truth, to be nurtured by a rigorous and extended higher education in all the mathematical sciences from arithmetic to astronomy. This philosophical perspective is something readers are being invited to reach for, not anything they are already presumed to possess. In Books v-vii it is described—notably in images and analogies—rather than practised; and the emphasis, as

51 In other words, Republic already looks forward to Laws (cf. Laws 995a); see further Lakes, in Ch. 13 section below. 

in the accounts of philosophy in Plato and Symposium, is on the desire for understanding rather than its possession. Socrates is presented as stressing the sketchy and provisional nature of what he has to say, and on his reluctance to speak about things he does not know as if he knew them. Paradoxically this is the most supremely optimistic passage of the entire dialogue; paradoxically, because the grounds Socrates registers for doubting the prospects for either political or moral and intellectual progress are formidable. The moral and intellectual condition of humanity at large is represented by the Cave as one of utter ignorance and triviality and almost total complacency. Yet Socrates focuses on the possibility of conversion and painful ascent to virtue and clarity of understanding. As for the political sphere, Socrates anticipates a third and even bigger "wave" of criticism when he reformulates Gorgias' idea of a true politics, and proposes that rule by philosophers or philosopherizing by rulers is the one single change necessary and sufficient for making the ideal city— or a close approximation to it—a reality. It threatens to deluge him with "outright laughter and contempt" (473c). The next few pages are devoted to explanation of what "philosopher" should be taken to mean in this context: a lover of eternal truth. But the criticism predicted duly arrives, when Adeimantus puts the objection, in terms reminiscent of CallICLES' outburst in Gorgias, that philosophers are either weird misfits (if not thoroughly vicious) or if perfectly decent useless to cities (482b-c). Nothing daunted, Socrates replies with an indictment of the corruption of society which resonates with Plato's contempt for the Athenian democracy during the period of his lifetime. He imagines a ship controlled by ignorant and quarrelsome sailors who refuse to believe that there is any such craft as navigation, and would write off a real helmsman as a useless stargazer. Just so in cities as they are now: a true philosopher will be branded as useless, not because he really is so, but because the populace is incapable of thinking otherwise (487e-489c). In such societies most persons with philosophical potential are indeed corrupted, the more so the greater their talents (489q-90). But that shows only that society needs radical transformation. And Socrates ends his reply to Adeimantus with three pages of argument in which he reiterates again and again that it can be transformed, provided only that cities are governed by philosopher rulers who have somehow escaped the prevailing moral degradation and are able to work with a clean slate—something he insists will be difficult but not impossible (499-502). This conclusion is restated at the very end of Book vii, when the outcome of the entire discussion of Books v-vii is summarized (540d-541a).

What is it about philosophers that makes them uniquely suitable to