

# Socrates' defence of justice in the *Republic*: the dialogical dynamic and the importance of the consequences of justice

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the dialogical dynamic gives important information on the importance of, and the hierarchy between, the reasons illustrated in favour of justice in Plato's *Republic*. Despite his interlocutors' request to focus exclusively on the effect of justice in and by itself, Socrates indicates that the description of the consequences of justice included in Book 10 (608c2-621d3) is an integral part of his defence, and that some of these consequences, the rewards assigned by the gods in the afterlife, are more important than both the other consequences of justice and the benefit of justice in and by itself.

Keywords: Plato, *Republic*, Consequences of justice, Afterlife rewards and punishments, Dialogical dynamic

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years attention has been called afresh to the importance of the dialogical dynamic for the argumentative line followed in the Plato's *Republic*.<sup>1</sup> Rowe has highlighted the relevance of the role of Socrates' interlocutors, particularly Glaucon, in shaping the argument Socrates presents in the dialogue.<sup>2</sup> The acceptance of Glaucon's request to conduct the investigation into justice on the basis of the feverish city (372e8) marks in Rowe's view the moment from which Socrates develops his argument on his interlocutors' assumptions.<sup>3</sup> Ferrari too considers the consent to Glaucon's request an important juncture in the *Republic* as he identifies it as the point from which the control of the conversation starts to slip from Socrates' hands.<sup>4</sup> From the beginning of Book 5 Ferrari considers the transformation of Socrates' role in the conversation complete: thereafter Socrates is portrayed as a character no longer capable of steering a conversation that his interlocutors increasingly frequently direct to topics of their interest.

In this paper I will propose that the analysis of the dialogical dynamic can be fruitfully applied to assessing the importance of the rewards of justice described in the final section of *Republic*. Despite some contrary opinions,<sup>5</sup> it is now widely recognised that along with the lengthy and sustained description of the effect of justice in and by itself, the *Republic* also contains an account of the consequences arising from justice, but the importance of the latter is often considered marginal.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of the dialogical dynamic that I am proposing in this paper will show, or so I hope, that the description of the consequences of justice plays a crucial role in Socrates' defence of justice, and that a group of them, the rewards assigned to the just in the afterlife, is identified by Socrates

as more important than the other benefits of justice. To corroborate my thesis, I will defend three claims: 1) in Book 2 Socrates remains committed to the view that the consequences of justice are a reason for its desirability as well as its effect in and by itself although Glaucon and Adeimantus repeatedly request him to focus his defence *exclusively* on the effect of justice in and by itself; 2) in the final passage of Book 10 (lines 608c2-621d3) Socrates confirms that a description of the rewards forming the consequences of justice is a constitutive part of his defence of justice; 3) Before illustrating them, Socrates announces that the rewards described in the myth of Er are more important than both the other consequences and the effect of justice in and by itself.

## SOCRATES' COMMITMENT TO ILLUSTRATING BOTH REASONS HE HAS IDENTIFIED FOR THE DESIRABILITY OF JUSTICE

In the first part of Book 2 the agenda is defined that Socrates will follow in his defence of justice. At this stage a divergence becomes perceivable between Socrates' position and the interest of his interlocutors Glaucon and Adeimantus. While Socrates clearly identifies justice as a good desirable *both* in and by itself *and* for its consequences, Glaucon and Adeimantus underline that they are interested in an argument that *exclusively* explains the benefit of justice in and by itself.

When Glaucon invites Socrates to present a fresh argument for the desirability of justice (357a2-b2), he asks him to clarify what type of good he deems justice to be. To facilitate this task, Glaucon operates a division of the goods based on the identification of two different reasons why a good can be desirable: in and

by itself, and for its consequences. Depending on whether they contain goods desirable for only one or both of these reasons, he defines three categories. The first comprises goods desirable in and by themselves and not for their consequences,<sup>7</sup> such as enjoyment and harmless pleasures; the second includes goods desirable both in and by themselves and for their consequences, such as thinking, seeing and being healthy; the third contains goods desirable only for their consequences, such as physical exercise, medical treatment, the practice of medicine and other business activities.

Socrates promptly places justice in the second of these three categories: “I myself think [that I will include justice] in the finest one, which the person who is going to be blessed should welcome both in and by itself and for the consequences arising from it”<sup>8</sup> (358a1-3). By announcing that he considers justice a good desirable both in and by itself and for its consequences, Socrates elicits the reaction of his interlocutors, who indicate that they are exclusively interested in why justice in and by itself is desirable and injustice in and by itself damaging.

Glaucón is the first of the two brothers that delivers a speech to communicate his wishes to Socrates.<sup>9</sup> While the ultimate goal of his speech is to persuade Socrates to limit the focus of his defence to the description of the effect of justice and injustice in and by themselves, two passages contain a particularly explicit formulation of this request. The first one is at 358b4-7:

ἐπιθυμῶ γὰρ ἀκοῦσαι τί τ’ ἔστιν ἐκάτερον καὶ τίνα ἔχει δύναμιν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἐνὸν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, τοὺς δὲ μισθοὺς καὶ τὰ γιγνόμενα ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἑᾶσαι χαίρειν.

I desire to hear what each of the two [justice and injustice] is and what power it has

in and by itself when it is present in the soul, and to leave aside the rewards and the things resulting from them.

Glaucón indicates both the reason on which Socrates’ argument should focus and the one that he wishes to be left out of consideration. Socrates should elucidate the nature of justice and injustice by illustrating the power (δύναμιν) that each of them has in and by itself (καθ’ αὐτὸ). This power should be illustrated through the analysis of how justice and injustice affect the soul (ἐνὸν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ). What Glaucón requests Socrates to leave out of consideration is the description of the consequences arising from justice and injustice (τὰ γιγνόμενα ἀπ’ αὐτῶν).<sup>10</sup>

Glaucón restates the reason he is interested in hearing Socrates defend in lines 358c6-d4:

I am at a loss because I am talked deaf by Thrasymachus and countless others, but I have not yet heard from anybody the argument in favour of justice, that it is better than injustice, in the form I wish – and I wish to hear it praised in and by itself (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ). – But I think that I would learn this especially from you.

This limitation in focus is also requested by Adeimantus in the speech he delivers after Glaucon.<sup>11</sup> In passage 366e5-367a1 he identifies the same gap that Glaucón already lamented: no author “has ever yet sufficiently developed the thesis, in poetry or in prose, that the one [injustice] is the greatest of evils that the soul has in itself while justice is the greatest good” (365e7). Without making a direct request to Socrates, Adeimantus suggests that the focus of a convincing argument in favour of justice should be on the effect justice and injustice have on the soul of those who choose to turn

to them. In lines 367b3-6 he openly asks Socrates to offer an argument adopting this exclusive focus:

Don't show me with words that justice is superior to injustice, but show that the one is an evil and the other a good by explaining what each of the two does (τί ποιοῦσα) in and by itself (αὐτὴ δι' αὐτήν) to the person who has it. Leave out the reputations as Glaucon requested.

Along with the restatement of this same request, lines 367c6-d3 contain Adeimantus' admission that Socrates considers justice desirable for more reasons than he and Glaucon are interested in hearing:

Since you have agreed that justice is among the greatest goods, those which are worth acquiring for the consequences ensuing from them but much more in and by themselves, like sight, hearing, understanding, health, and all the other goods fruitful by their own nature and not for the reputation, praise the aspect of justice in respect of which it benefits by itself the man who has it and injustice damages him, leaving it for others to praise good reputation and rewards.

Before reiterating that he is interested only in the analysis of the effect of justice in and by itself, Adeimantus refers back to Socrates' categorization of justice, distorting his view in some respects. Although he acknowledges that Socrates affirmed that justice is also desirable for its consequences, he falsely claims that Socrates attached more importance to the effect of justice in and by itself than to its consequences. As we have seen, however, in lines 358a1-3 Socrates included justice in the category of

goods desirable both in and by themselves and for their consequences without establishing a hierarchy between these two reasons.

Given this divergence between Socrates' position and Adeimantus and Glaucon's interest, what reason(s) Socrates should be expected to illustrate in his defence of justice will depend on whether he accepts their requests. Lines 368c5-8 suggest a negative answer to this question:

Both Glaucon and the others asked me to give aid in every way and not to give up the argument but to examine both what each of the two [justice and injustice] is and what the truth is about the advantage (περὶ τῆς ὠφελίας) of each of them.

In this passage Socrates does not explicitly mention any of the two reasons he previously identified for the desirability of justice. The phrases "what each of the two [justice and injustice] is" and "what the truth is about the advantage (ὠφελίας) of each of them" are unspecific and clearly different from those previously used by Socrates and his interlocutors to identify the effect of justice and injustice in and by themselves or the consequences arising from them. Rather than containing an answer to Glaucon and Adeimantus' request to limit the focus of his defence, this vocabulary suggests that Socrates is declaring his willingness to present a defence of justice without clarifying what reason(s) he will illustrate in it. In the absence of a sign that Socrates is willing to accommodate Glaucon and Adeimantus' request, no indication warrants the assumption that he has accepted to omit one of the reasons he identified at the beginning of Book 2 when he placed justice in the category of the goods desirable both in and by themselves and for their consequences.

## THE STRUCTURAL ROLE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTICE IN SOCRATES' DEFENCE OF JUSTICE

The analysis of the passages in which the agenda of Socrates' defence of justice is defined has shown that Socrates remains committed to the idea that justice is desirable both in and by itself and for its consequences. I will now show that in the final passage of Book 10 Socrates confirms that the description of the consequences of justice is an integral part of his defence.

At the beginning of passage 608c2-612e1 Socrates announces that the most valuable rewards of justice have yet to be described: "We haven't illustrated the greatest rewards of excellence and prizes available for it" (608c2-3). By announcing the existence of a set of rewards that have not been described yet, Socrates confirms that his argument in favour of justice is not exhausted by the description of the effect of justice in and by itself. At this stage it is not entirely clear what these "greatest rewards" are or why they are deemed of the greatest importance, but we shall see below that they will be identified with the rewards of justice assigned by the gods in the afterlife and their value will be justified on the basis of the fact that they belong to a higher temporal dimension.

After announcing the existence of rewards previously unmentioned, Socrates highlights that he has so far described only one of the two reasons initially identified for the desirability of justice, and he hints at the cause for this limitation of the focus of his defence.

Have we not [...] both redeemed the other points in the course of the argument and refrained from praising the rewards and the reputations of justice, as you said that

Homer and Hesiod did? But have we not found that justice is the very best thing for the soul and that the soul has to do what is just, whether or not one has Gyges' ring and Hades' helmet next to it? (612a8-b4)

Glaucón's positive reply to this twofold rhetorical question (612b5) confirms that Socrates has so far illustrated *only* the reason for the desirability of justice that was of interest to Glaucón and Adeimantus. That the phrase "the other points" refers to the effect of justice in and by itself is signalled in the second colon of this question where Socrates identifies the soul as the area in which justice produces its benefit as Glaucón and Adeimantus asked him to do at 358b4-7 and 366e5-367a1 respectively.

Socrates also remarks that the consequences of justice have not yet been described and hints at the cause for the omission. The mention of Homer and Hesiod and Gyges' ring calls attention back to the speeches Glaucón and Adeimantus pronounced to ask Socrates to limit the focus of his defence. In Book 2, Adeimantus mentioned (363a8-b1) and quoted (363b2-4, 363b6-c3, 364c8-d2, 364d8-e2) these two poets to denounce that tradition praises justice only for its consequences. This complaint was functional to encouraging Socrates to present an argument supporting justice exclusively on the basis of the effect it produces in and by itself. A similar function was fulfilled by the story of Gyges' ring (359b6-360d7) in the speech Glaucón gave.<sup>12</sup> By imagining a situation in which a person can enjoy the benefit deriving from injustice without suffering the consequences arising from it,<sup>13</sup> this story contributed to rendering more pressing Glaucón's request for Socrates solely to focus on the beneficial effect produced by justice in and by itself. Socrates' mention of Homer and Hesiod and Gyges' ring

in Book 10 establishes a link with the sections of Book 2 and reinforces the suggestion that the adoption of an exclusive focus on the effect of justice in and by itself was caused by the brothers' request.

After accommodating his interlocutors' request, Socrates is confident that it is "without reproach to give back" (612b6-c1) to justice the rewards that constitute the consequences arising from it. He then proceeds to demand that the brothers restore the condition granted to them and causing the adoption of the exclusive focus on the effect of justice in and by itself. The vocabulary he uses clearly suggests that he considers this description an integral part of his argumentative line: "Will you give me back (ἀποδώσετε) what you have borrowed (ἐδανείσασθε) in the discussion?" (612c5). The occurrences of the verb δανείζειν in a middle form and of the verb ἀποδιδόναι in an active form reinforce the language of debit and credit that was introduced first at 612c1 by the use of the verb ἀποδιδόναι and will be used again in the following lines. This vocabulary creates a metaphor that presents Socrates as the creditor of a loan that the brothers have raised and are now requested to repay.<sup>14</sup>

What the loan granted to Glaucon and Adeimantus consists in is immediately explained by Socrates. He conceded (Ἐδωκα, 612c7) that "the just man appeared unjust" (612c7-8), when the brothers requested that the reputations of the just and the unjust man be exchanged. The link with the speeches held by the brothers is clear in this case too. Glaucon was the first to introduce and develop the idea that the reputation of the just person should be attributed to the unjust and vice versa (360d8-362c8). To direct Socrates' attention to the investigation of the effects justice and injustice produce in and by themselves, he claimed that they would have to be compared

in their extreme forms and that their extreme form is reached when the respective reputations are exchanged. A very similar position was adopted by Adeimantus in his speech.<sup>15</sup> As he suggested, Socrates would not be able to illustrate the effect of justice in and by itself unless he would exchange the reputations of the just and unjust person (367b7-c1). Only if the just person is imagined to suffer the consequences deriving from the reputation of the most unjust one, the effect of justice in and by itself could be evaluated.

While what Socrates is ultimately interested in reintroducing is the rewards and the honours granted for the reputation of justice, he first needs to restore the condition allowing them to be assigned. Using a language less technical but still ascribable to the semantic areas of credit and debt, Socrates demands back (πάλιν ἀπαιτῶ, 612d4) from his interlocutors that they accept that the reputation of the just person is recognised by gods and people. In taking this step, he both paves the way for the description of the rewards and the honours provided by justice and confirms that this description is a constitutive part of his argument in support of justice. The financial metaphor he deploys is a clear sign that the exclusive focus on the effect of justice in and by itself was due to a concession to his interlocutors.

Glaucon consents to the request for restitution (612e1) and agrees that justice and injustice do not escape the gods' notice (612e7). His approval restores the gods to the function of guarantors of a just order which administers punishments and rewards according to authentic ethical principles. This notion of the gods is fully consistent with the theology previously embraced by Socrates in the *Republic*. In the discussion of the stories admissible in Callipolis he and Adeimantus

hold in Book 3, Socrates sets three requirements for the representation of the gods:<sup>16</sup> the gods are exclusively source of good while evil has to be traced back to another origin (379c15-16); the gods never deceive other gods or human beings; the gods never undergo a change of shape or deceive human beings into believing they have (382e8-11). Glaucon's agreement in Book 10 that the gods recognise the moral quality of human behaviour and assign punishment or reward accordingly allows Socrates to enrich the notion of the gods already formulated in Book 2 by adding a further facet fully consistent to it.

After obtaining the restoration of justice to the reputation it deserves, Socrates is in a position to complete his defence by addressing the second of the two reasons why he deems justice a good. The description of the rewards of justice is articulated in three subsections, each of which describes a different set of rewards along with the corresponding set of punishments. The first two subsections illustrate the rewards and the punishments people receive during their earthly life. In the first (612e2-613b7) Socrates describes the benevolent attitude of the gods towards the just and their punitive approach towards the unjust. In the second (613b8-614a4) he lists the rewards people grant to the just and the punishments they inflict on the unjust. The third section (614a5-621b7), mostly occupied by the myth of Er (614b2-621b7), describes what the gods hold in store for the just and the unjust in the afterlife and, as we shall see in the next paragraph, it is preceded by the statement that these rewards are more important than both the other rewards and the effect of justice in and by itself.

Socrates' description of the rewards that living just people are granted by the gods is centred on the observation that by practicing

virtue a person "approximates to god as far as humanly possible" (613b1).<sup>17</sup> Such a person is held dear by the gods (θεοφιλής, 612e5) and receives "all the best possible rewards that come from the gods" (612e8-613a1). By formulating a principle that vaguely reminds modern readers of Christian providence, Socrates explains that this promise entails that even seemingly difficult conditions such as poverty, illness or other misfortunes will turn out well for the just. In the case that a "previous mistake" (613a2) looms over a just person, he or she will not achieve the prosperity and happiness that the gods assure to the other just people. Rather than introducing a real exception, this warning suggests that the moral quality of a soul is evaluated on the basis not of one single earthly life but of all the lives that a soul lives. With an indirect reference to the doctrine of reincarnation,<sup>18</sup> Socrates clarifies that the soul of a person who has chosen to serve justice is not excluded from the benevolence of the gods even if it is stained with an evil committed in a previous incarnation. The hardship in which he or she may happen to live is not a divine punishment but a trial by the gods for his or her improvement.

Socrates only suggests how the gods punish unjust people when they are still alive by drawing a contrast with how they treat just people. Contrary to the just person, the unjust is hated by the gods (θεομισής, 612e6). Accordingly, such a person receives the opposite treatment to that reserved to the just (613b5-6). Specifically in which punishments this divine attitude results is not clarified by Socrates, who proceeds to describe the next type of rewards without adding further details.

The tone of the description of the rewards and punishments assigned by other people is set by a twofold comparison. Socrates likens unjust people to runners capable of quick



sprints but having little endurance and just people to skilled runners who ultimately win their race. Like long-distance runners, just people eventually become successful and are rewarded and honoured when they reach a mature age. The rewards and honours they will earn at this stage are the same, Socrates stresses, that Glaucon invited him to imagine granted to unjust people who achieve the reputation of being just as a result of his extreme injustice (362b2-5). They will hold high offices in their cities, be able to choose their spouse from the families they want, give their children in marriage to whom they wish. By contrast, the life of unjust people resembles a race run by the first type of runners. Even if unjust people manage to deceive their fellows and take advantage of the situation when they are young, they will face poverty and misery in their old age. Then they will be abused and maltreated by their fellow citizens and foreigners alike and suffer those evils that Glaucon imagined inflicted to just people mistaken for unjust ones.

### THE SPECIAL IMPORTANCE OF THE REWARDS ILLUSTRATED IN THE MYTH OF ER

In the previous section we have seen that Socrates considers the description of the rewards of justice a constitutive part of his defence. Now I will turn my attention to the evidence showing that Socrates attaches more importance to one set of them, those granted by the gods in the afterlife, than to both the other two sets of rewards and the effect of justice in and by itself.

We have already seen that lines 608c2-3 contain Socrates' announcement that the most valuable rewards of justice have not yet been

illustrated, but they do not clarify over which items they are declared pre-eminent or why. The following lines signal that these rewards are in his view more valuable even than the effect of justice in and by itself. Surprised by the announcement of the existence of such valuable rewards, Glaucon observes that Socrates must be referring to "something extraordinary in size [...] if there are other things bigger than those mentioned" (608c2-3). The natural referent of the phrase "those mentioned" is the harmony and the happiness that justice produces in the soul as at this stage of the *Republic* no reason for the desirability of justice has been discussed other than the benefit it produces in and by itself.

It may seem surprising that Socrates introduces rewards of higher value than the benefit of justice in and by itself, which he has described in great detail in a discussion that has occupied an important part of the previous eight books, but he proceeds to illustrate to surprised Glaucon what reason justifies this hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> His explanation is centred on the polarity between the limited time of human existence and the unlimited extension of eternity. The dismissal of the former as a time in which anything of high relevance can take place (608c6-8) introduces the theme of the immortality of the soul. To convince Glaucon, Socrates provides an argument intended to prove the immortality of the soul (608d11-611b10). Glaucon's approval of the argument enables Socrates to formulate the expectation that the soul will inhabit a time dimension in which truly valuable experiences occur, and it justifies assigning higher importance to the rewards granted in that time span.

Agreement that the soul is immortal may seem to suggest that Socrates is going to identify the rewards introduced in lines 608c2-3 with the projection onto eternity of



the benefit that justice in and by itself has been shown to produce in the embodied soul. As harmony and happiness result from the good order produced by justice in the soul when it is associated with the body, so they may be expected to continue to be enjoyed by a just soul after separation from the body once the soul has been proven to be immortal. It would accordingly seem plausible to identify the greatest rewards of justice with the harmony and happiness that a just soul would enjoy after disembodiment.

However, the words Socrates pronounces after convincing Glaucon that the soul is immortal cast a very serious doubt on the viability of this hypothesis. The proof of the immortality of the soul is followed by Socrates' warning about the possibility of making safe inferences on the true nature of the soul from the analysis of its characteristic in incarnate state. As Glaucus is covered in debris and incrustations when he emerges from the sea, so is the soul "damaged by its association with the body and other evils" (611b10-c1) when it departs from the body. To see the true nature of the soul, attention has to be focused on its "love for philosophy" (611d8) and consideration has to be given to its kinship with "the divine and the immortal and what is always existing" (611e1-2). Along with its nature, Socrates is careful to underline that the forms of justice and injustice will become more easily identifiable (611c3-4) once the soul is observed in its discarnate state. Whether these forms will be different from those justice and injustice assume in the incarnate soul is not clarified by Socrates, who adds a further layer of complexity to the question by leaving it open whether after separation from the body the soul will have one or more parts (612c3-4).

Whether the comparison between the soul and Glaucus is intended to warn of the

methodological limitations of the analysis Socrates carried out in Books 4, 8 and 9<sup>20</sup> or to suggest that the soul shows a tripartite structure when its analysis is conducted under the premises negotiated by Glaucon and Adeimantus,<sup>21</sup> Socrates invites caution in making assumptions about the disembodied soul. Due to the lack of conclusive evidence that the soul will be tripartite after separation from the body, it is arbitrary to assume that justice will continue to create harmony and happiness in the afterlife by promoting an orderly relation among three parts that the soul has been shown to possess in its embodied state. Socrates' expressed uncertainty about the true nature of the soul undercuts the expectation that justice produces the same effect in an embodied and in a disembodied soul, and it renders the identification implausible between the greatest rewards announced at 608c2-3 and the effect that justice produces in and by itself in the soul after it has departed from the body.

While the benefit of justice in and by itself is unlikely to be perceived by a soul in its discarnate state, the rewards that gods and people assign to the just when they are alive do not belong to the dimension in which truly valuable experiences occur. The most valuable rewards are assigned post mortem and can be correctly identified with those awarded by the gods in afterlife. When he introduces the section dedicated to their description, he singles them out and underlines their pre-eminence over the rewards the gods assign to living just people, those humans give to living just people and the benefit produced by justice in and by itself: "these [...] are nothing in number and size comparing to those awaiting each person after death" (614a5-6). While these lines show that Socrates assigns a pre-eminent place to the rewards granted by the gods in the afterlife,

they are not specific about the term ("these," 614a5) with which these rewards are compared. His immediately preceding statement helps to clarify it: "these [the rewards assigned to just people when they are still alive] would then be the things [...] that come as prizes, rewards and gifts for the just person, when he is still alive, in addition to those goods that justice itself provides" (613e5-614a3). In this statement both the rewards assigned by gods and people to the just when they are still alive and the effect of justice in and by itself are considered. Since the term "these" at 614a5 looks back to the items mentioned in the previous sentence, it is natural to take it to refer to all items mentioned in that sentence. Accordingly, lines 614a5-6 contain a statement in which Socrates asserts that the rewards granted by the gods to the just in the afterlife occupy a pre-eminent place over both the two other sets of rewards and the benefit of justice in and by itself.

The importance Socrates attributes to the rewards assigned in the afterlife reverses rather than simply corrects the statement made by Adeimantus at 367c6-d3. We have seen that in these lines he misrepresented Socrates' position. He falsely claimed that Socrates had attached more importance to the effect of justice in and by itself than to its consequences although Socrates had not established a hierarchy between the two reasons for desirability of justice he identified in Book 2. What Socrates says in lines 613e5-614a6 rectifies Adeimantus' statement: not only does he not subordinate the value of the consequences of justice to that of the effect of justice in and by itself, but he states that one set of the rewards that come as consequences of justice carries highest importance.

After indicating the special importance carried by the rewards awaiting the just in

the afterlife, Socrates illustrates them and the corresponding punishments in the myth of Er.<sup>22</sup> Their description is part of the report that Socrates claims to contain information overheard by Er from the souls gathered at the miraculous place and waiting to be reincarnated in a new body.<sup>23</sup> The details given on the rewards are less precise than those on the punishments but they afford a glimpse at how souls fare after they have departed from the body.

Just souls ascend to the heaven where they are said to experience "pleasures and spectacles of extraordinary beauty" (615a3-4). Due to the brevity of the description it is not immediate to explain what the "spectacles of extraordinary beauty" are. A parallel has been suggested between them and the forms,<sup>24</sup> but the analysis of the information given on the forms in the *Republic* and in the *Phaedrus* does not confirm the existence of this parallel. In Book 6 of the *Republic* no definitive statement is made about the beauty of the form of the Good.<sup>25</sup> The *Phaedrus* does make mention of the form of Beauty and its brilliance,<sup>26</sup> but, unlike the myth of Er, it includes an account of the recollection doctrine that links the metempsychosis with the forms and helps the reader understand why ontologically perfect entities feature in an eschatological myth. By contrast, the myth of Er does not provide indications suggesting a possible connection between the forms and the journey undertaken by the souls after separation from the body.

The expression "spectacles of extraordinary beauty" is rather reminiscent of the characteristics attributed to the outer surface of the earth in the *Phaedo*. When Socrates introduces the description of the earth, he announces to surprised Simmias that "there are many wondrous regions" (108c6).<sup>27</sup> After stressing the rather unattractive appearance

that nature has in the cavities where humans live, Socrates contrasts it with the splendour of the outer surface of the earth, which is “in no way worthy to be compared with the beauties in our world” (110a7). The colours that can be admired there are more glowing and brilliant, covering a part that is “purple, marvellous for its beauty” (110c3) and one that is golden. The parallel between the place where Er reports that souls enjoy “pleasures and spectacles of extraordinary beauty” and the outer surface of the earth is also supported by the analogous function that these two regions are said to fulfil. In the *Phaedo* Socrates explains that “as for those who are found to have lived exceptionally holy lives, it is they who are freed [...] and who attain to the pure dwellings above, and make their dwellings above the ground” (114b6-c2). In the *Republic* “pleasures and spectacles of extraordinary beauty” are what “the souls from the heavens” (615a3) report to have experienced after separation from the body. Both the “wondrous regions” described in the *Phaedo* and the places of “marvellous beauty” mentioned in the myth of Er are the dwellings assigned to just souls as a reward for their virtuous conduct on earth.

Like the rewards, the afterlife punishments are described in the report of the conversations Er overhears when he joins the other souls in the miraculous place. From this report it can be inferred that the types of punishment are at least two: one is inflicted to the souls that will be reincarnated after serving their time in Tartarus and another to the souls that have committed incurable evils during their earthly life. On the first type of punishment only two brief remarks inform the reader: the souls awaiting reincarnation begin “bemoaning and crying when they recall how many and how big punishments they suffered and saw in their journey beneath the

earth” (614e6-615a2); being forbidden to leave Tartarus was their biggest angst, “although they experienced many fears of many different kinds there [in Tartarus]” (616a4-5). While these lines point to the harsh character of the punishments administered in Tartarus, they do not allow hypotheses to be formulated about their exact nature.

More details are given on the particular punishment incurably evil souls receive if they attempt to leave Tartarus. How these souls, which in most cases belonged to tyrants and less frequently to particularly evil private citizens, are prevented to escape Tartarus is illustrated by the example of Ardiaeus the Great. Carrying the same name as an Illyrian tribe inhabiting the Eastern coast of the Adriatic, this imaginary figure is given the same appellation as the Persian king and is presented as a cruel tyrant who killed his father and his elder brother.<sup>28</sup> When he undertakes to emerge from the channel leading out of the inner earth after a millennium of punishments, the channel’s mouth gives a bellow. At this sound the severe guardians of Tartarus intervene chaining and dragging away Ardiaeus and other criminals of a similar sort. Once out of the channel, the guardians flay them and tear their skin before throwing them in Tartarus again. To the other terrified souls they clarify that this is the deserved punishment for the crimes such as those committed by Ardiaeus.

The myth of Er contains a description of the afterlife punishments and brief but relevant information on the afterlife rewards. The “pleasures and spectacles of extraordinary beauty” held in store for the just are considered by Socrates more valuable both than the other rewards of justice and the effect of justice in and by itself. By being awarded in the afterlife, these rewards belong to a time dimension that he considers of higher value

than human life and they carry therefore higher importance than the benefits enjoyable during life on earth.

## THE DIALOGICAL DYNAMIC AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONSEQUENCE OF JUSTICE TO SOCRATES' DEFENCE

I hope that the analysis of the dialogical dynamic I propose in this paper shows that the description of the consequences of justice given in the final section of Book 10 is an integral part of the defence of justice presented in the *Republic*: Socrates openly states that his defence would not be complete without illustrating the second of the two reasons for the desirability of justice he has initially identified and he singles out one set of consequences, the rewards assigned by the gods in the afterlife, as the most important among all the benefits of justice. Immediately after he is persuaded by his interlocutors to present a fresh argument in favour of justice, Socrates places justice in the category of goods desirable both in and by themselves and for their consequences. Glaucon and Adeimantus repeatedly ask him to focus exclusively on the first of the two reasons he has identified, but Socrates gives no sign that he is willing to limit the focus of his defence. When he proceeds to provide the description of the consequences of justice, he confirms that their description is an integral part of his defence. Among the three sets of rewards that come as consequences of justice, Socrates singles out those granted in the afterlife and affirm that they carry higher importance than both the rewards assigned to the just when they are alive and the effect of justice in and by itself.

Despite being an integral part of Socrates' defence, the description of the consequences of justice receives a significantly smaller amount of attention than the effect of justice in and by itself. Although the repeated requests presented by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book 2 fail to convince Socrates to limit the focus of his defence, they seem to have an effect on the distribution of attention dedicated to each of the two reasons for the desirability of justice. While Socrates relegates the description of the consequences of justice to the final section of Book 10, his illustration of the effect of justice in and by itself extends from Book 2 to the end of Book 9. He does not openly state that this distribution of attention has been directly determined by his interlocutors' requests, but the high level of detail reached by the description of the effect of justice in and by itself is in line with their requests. There is however no match between the amount of attention and the level of importance attributed to the consequences of justice. Socrates clearly indicates that the consequences of justice are no less important, and some of them even more important, than the benefit of justice in and by itself.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 An important impulse to the study of the reflection of the dialogical dynamic on the development of the argument in the Platonic works was given by Stokes 1986.
- 2 Rowe 2007.
- 3 All quotations of the *Republic* are from the text established by Slings 2003.
- 4 Ferrari 2010.
- 5 Reeve 1988, 25 and 33, Pappas 2006<sup>2</sup>, 52, Payne 2011, 58-78 maintain the *Republic* exclusively contains a description of the effect of justice in and by itself.
- 6 White 1979, 75, Annas 1981, 60-68, Heineman 2002, 314-315, Anderson 2020, 1-26 argue that both the effect of justice in and by itself and the consequences arising from it are described in the *Republic* but they disagree on the importance carried by the description of the latter for the argument developed in the *Republic*.
- 7 The phrase "in and by itself" translates the Greek αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα/χάριν (357b6, 357c1, 357c9); "consequences of justice" translates what the Greek text renders through either of the participles τὰ γιγνόμενα (357c2-3) or τὰ ἀποβαίνοντα (357b5-6) in conjunction (357c2-3) or not (357b5-6) with the phrase ἀπ'αὐτοῦ, or through the corresponding relative clause (ὅσα γίγνεται ἀπ'αὐτῶν, 357d1-2). What the phrase αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα/χάριν on the one hand and the phrases τὰ γιγνόμενα (357c2-3) or τὰ ἀποβαίνοντα (357b5-6) on the other identify is a matter of a long-lasting debate. The interpretations of the notion of justice in and by itself have followed two main lines: Foster 1937, 386-93, Sachs 1971, 35-51, White 1979, 78-79, White 1984, 393-421, Annas 1981, 348-9, Pappas 2006<sup>2</sup>, 54-55 argue that an account of justice in and by itself includes the description of some of the causal consequences of justice; Kirwan 1965, 162-73, Mabbott 1978, 57-65, Reeve 1988, 28-33, Irwin 1995, 189-191 contend that justice is conducive to happiness because the former is a component of, or consists of the same basic elements as, the latter. The notion of consequences of justice has attracted less interest and has been sometimes left unconsidered. Proposed interpretations vary from consequences other than those directly depending on the causation of justice (Annas 1981, 60-68), consequences that arise when certain factors are at play (White 1979, 78-79), consequences that depend on the response of society (Pappas 2006<sup>2</sup>, 54-55).
- 8 Translations of the *Republic* are my own.
- 9 Glaucon is described as a sophisticated member of the aristocracy with a love for culture, a competitive attitude and a high sense of morality. For a detailed description of Glaucon's character see Ferrari 2011, 116-124 and Vegetti 1998a, 152-154.
- 10 Anderson 2020 argues that consequences of justice exclusively consist in the rewards for the just described in Book 10 (6-10). More generally he argues that the consequences of any of the goods considered in the tripartite division proposed by Glaucon at the beginning of Book 2 always depend on recognition by society (10-14).
- 11 For an analysis of the religious and traditional background of Adeimantus' speech see Vegetti 1998b, 221-232.
- 12 The identification of the owner of the ring featuring in Glaucon's story is not straightforward. In Book 10 he is called Gyges (612b3), but in lines 359d1-2 of 2 Book, a place generally considered corrupted, he is referred to as "the ancestor of Lydian man." If the information given in Book 10 is accepted, the protagonist of Glaucon's story is likely to be Gyges, the founder of the Mermnadae dynasty and king of Lydia, of which Herodotus speaks in the first book of the Histories (1.8-1.13). For a concise but clear overview of the scholarly debate on the issue see Emlyn-Jones 2007, 175. For a study of the origin of the motives recurring in the story see Calabi 1998, 173-188.
- 13 The function performed by the story of Gyges' ring has been explained in different ways. According to Irwin 1999 the story is consistent with the view that "justice has some slight intrinsic value in addition to the value that depends on its consequences" (73). Paytas and Baima 2020 contend that Gyges' behaviour is evidence "none of us value justice for its own sake at all" (8). But by becoming invisible, Gyges makes sure that he will not suffer the consequences of his unjust actions rather than taking advantage of some consequence of justice without accepting to suffer the supposed burden of serving justice in and by itself. On this basis it seems more plausible to accept Heineman 2002's view that the aim of the story of Gyges' ring is to show that people consider injustice a good in and by itself (320 n. 23).
- 14 Morgan 2000, 204-207 compares this financial metaphor with the one used in Book 6 to introduce the image of the sun (506e2-507a5) and notes that in the former Socrates is presented as the creditor while he features as the debtor in the latter.
- 15 Emlyn-Jones 2007, 188-189 observes that Adeimantus' speech (367a5-e6) ends with the formulation of the same idea proposed by Glaucon at the conclusion of his speech (360d8-362c8) and reflects on the function that this idea performs in the speech of the former.
- 16 The section (376e1-392c7) in which Socrates discusses the content of poetic (and prose) discourses suitable for Callipolis is part of a larger passage that includes an examination of typologies of narrative (392c7-398b9). See Giuliano 2005 for a comprehensive analysis of the attitudes Plato adopts towards poetry in the *Republic* and beyond. See Halliwell 2009 for a study attentive to the difficulties of extracting



- a Platonic stance about poetic discourse from the *Republic*.
- 17 Sedley 1999 notes that the assimilation to the gods was considered the main moral aim pursued in the Platonic dialogues during the Roman Empire. To demonstrate the relevance this principle had for Plato, Sedley identifies it and explains its application in the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Theaetetus*. The results of his articles supplement those he reached in Sedley 1997 which is dedicated to the investigation of the relevance of this principle in Plato's *Timaeus* and in Aristotle.
  - 18 Halliwell 2005, 167.
  - 19 Recent scholarship has not systematically discussed the question of whether the rewards granted in the afterlife are given higher value than the benefit produced by justice in and by itself. While Annas 1981, 349 seems to assume that these rewards occupy a pre-eminent place only among the consequences of justice, Vegetti 2015<sup>8</sup>, 226 maintains that the rewards granted in the afterlife are ranked higher than both the other rewards and the benefit of justice: "to Glaucon's surprise he [Socrates] considers the rewards he is going to speak about "far greater" (608c) than those discussed in Books 4 and 9: and yet in them it had been argued that justice is for the soul what health is for the body, i.e. a harmonious disposition able to bring individual and collective happiness [my translation]." An interpretation along these lines had already been proposed by Adam 1902, 421-2: "there is no reason why τῶν εἰρημένων should not, like ἐκείνοις in 612 B, refer to what Plato in 612 A calls 'those goods which Justice by herself supplied' (ἐκείνοις τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς οἷς αὐτὴ παρείχετο ἡ δικαιοσύνη): and it is much more natural to assign this meaning to τῶν εἰρημένων [...]."
  - 20 Woolf 2012, 150-173.
  - 21 Rowe 2007, 167-175.
  - 22 The myth of Er is one of the four narratives found in the Platonic corpus that scholars commonly consider eschatological myths, the other three being included in the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo* the *Phaedrus*. A considerable impulse to their study has been given by Annas 1982. More recent analyses of these narratives are collected in Partenie 2011 and in Collobert, Destrée and Gonzalez 2012. Each myth is usually studied in the context of the dialogue of which it is part. A notable exception is Inwood 2011, which undertakes to extrapolate eschatological beliefs from the information disseminated in these myths and in relevant sections of the *Laws* and the *Timaeus*.
  - 23 Like many of the myths that Socrates is portrayed to retell in the Platonic dialogues, the myth of Er is presented not as a story invented by Socrates but as a report originating from another source. Most 2012 considers this feature one of the narratological criteria identifying Platonic myth. For an analysis of the narratological structure of the myth see Halliwell 2007, 449-450.
  - 24 Halliwell 2007, 451 suggests that the wording "spectacles of extraordinary" seems to be "echoing the form of the good, 509a."
  - 25 Although Glaucon postulates that Socrates is referring to "an extraordinary beauty" (509a6) in relation to the form of the Good, Socrates invites him to proceed to the next point without confirming or denying his hypothesis (509a9-10).
  - 26 The form of Beauty is mentioned at 249d5, 250d7, 250e2, 251a3, 251b2, 254b6, 255c6; its brilliance at 250b5-6 and 250c8-d1.
  - 27 Translations of the *Phaedo* are from Gallop 1975.
  - 28 See Halliwell 2005, 175.



