
Altruism and the Art of Writing: Plato, Cicero, and Leo Strauss

William H. F. Altman

H. A. Prichard changed the course of Plato's Anglophone reception in his 1928 lecture "Duty and Interest" with the claim that Socrates' defense of justice in the *Republic* is based entirely on self-interest as opposed to disinterested moral obligation.¹ Following this lead, M. B. Foster identified the just guardian's return to the Cave as the sole exception to Prichard's claim, thereby attributing two distinct errors to Plato: the original mistake of defending justice only in relation to consequences accruing to the agent's own advantage,² and then failing to see that a just guardian's unselfish return was inconsistent with this utilitarian project.³ J. D. Mab-

WILLIAM H. F. ALTMAN teaches Latin at E. C. Glass High School in Lynchburg, Virginia.

¹ Conveniently reprinted (21-49) in H. A. Prichard, *Moral Writings*, edited by Jim MacAdam (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 2002), 33: "There is no escaping the conclusion that when Plato sets himself to consider not what *should*, but which *actually does* as a matter of fact, lead a man to act, when he is acting deliberately and not merely in consequence of an impulse, he answers 'The desire for some good to himself and that only.'"

² M. B. Foster, "A Mistake of Plato's in the *Republic*," *Mind* n.s. 46 (1937), 386-393, especially 388: "Socrates' entire argument in favour of justice is based on an appeal to its consequences. . . ." This appeared to contradict *Republic* 357b5-6; for a response, see Nicholas White, "The Classification of Goods in Plato's *Republic*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984), 393-421.

³ M. B. Foster, "A Mistake of Plato's in the 'Republic': A Rejoinder to Mr. Mabbott," *Mind* n.s. 47 (1938), 226-232 directs the reader at 230 back to his "Some Implications of a Passage in the *Republic*," *Philosophy* 11 (1936), 301-308; Foster's argument there is noteworthy, beginning with 301: "It has often been recognized

bott attempted to absolve Plato by arguing that the return to the Cave was only inconsistent with Foster's utilitarian approach.⁴ But W. H. Adkins strengthened Foster's second claim by denying that a guardian would return to the Cave,⁵ while David Sachs, building on Prichard, sparked a new round of debate by denying that Plato's self-interested just man would actually be just in any commonly accepted sense of that term.⁶ In addition to debating about Sachs,⁷ many have attempted to save Plato's consistency by showing why it is in the guardian's self-interest to go back down into the Cave.⁸ Bearing witness to the enduring influence of Sachs, whom he rejects, and Foster, whom he echoes, Terry Penner has recently argued that since the defense of justice in the *Republic* is purely egoistic; any suggestion that the guardians will voluntarily sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of others by returning to the Cave reflects "a certain unresolved tension" in Plato's thought.⁹

that the injunction to the philosophers to return to the cave is the point above all others in which Plato transcends the limits of Platonism." Foster is determined to maintain those "limits" because transcending them would undermine the historical significance of Christianity (307-8).

⁴ J. D. Mabbott, "Is Plato's *Republic* Utilitarian?" *Mind* n.s. 46 (1937), 468-474 cites the return to the Cave at 474 in order to show that "the ultimate reason for a just act does not lie in its consequence:" "Why do the philosophers leave their thinking and descend into the cave? Because some one must rule the city. But why should they do it and no one else? Because only so will the city be well ruled. But why should such considerations weigh with them when they are so happy in the outer world? Because they are just men. δίκαια δίκαιοις ἐπιτάξομεν." This passage was deleted from the reprinted version in Gregory Vlastos (ed.), 1971. *Plato*, Volume 2 (New York: Anchor, 1971), 57-65.

⁵ W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 291; note also his use of "scandalous" at 290.

⁶ David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," *Philosophical Review* 72 (1963), 141-158; for the influence of Prichard, see 141 n. 2.

⁷ A useful way of thinking about these debates is found in Eric Brown, "Mind-ing the Gap in Plato's *Republic*," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 117 (2003), 275-302. A recent response to Sachs makes the problem of altruism central; see G. K. Singpurwalla, "Plato's Defense of Justice in the *Republic*" in Gerasimos Santos (ed.), 2006, *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 263-282 at 264: "The problem for Plato's defense of justice, however, is that his account of justice appears to have nothing to do with justice in the ordinary sense of the term, which at the least implies acting with some regard for the good of others. . . . Plato cannot assuage our worries about justice by giving an account of it that ignores this essential other-regarding aspect of justice."

⁸ The literature on this point is voluminous; see the bibliography in G. R. F. Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 497-98.

⁹ Terry Penner, "Platonic Justice and What We Mean by 'Justice,'" *Journal of the*

Against Penner, I claim that this “unresolved tension” is deliberate on Plato’s part and that it reflects an essential feature of Platonic pedagogy, aptly described by Cicero as Socrates’ *multiplex ratio disputandi* (“multilayered method of disputation”).¹⁰ This article therefore constitutes prolegomena to an altruistic¹¹ reading of the *Republic* in which (1) a philosopher’s disinterested decision to return to the Cave will be presented as the paradigm of just action thereby revealing the altruistic essence of justice that Plato is persuading or rather provoking¹² his philosophic reader to imitate but (2) that a voluntary return to the Cave cannot and was not intended to be justified in relation to the internal definition of justice presented in Book IV.¹³ The need for *prolegomena* to such a reading arises from the fact that I must first set forth the pedagogical basis for my claim that, while the text’s *surface* deliberately encourages an egoistic account of justice such as Penner’s, Plato *qua* teacher intended to reveal the altruistic paradigm of justice to those who could “read between the lines.” This manner of speaking calls attention to the influence of Leo

*Unresolved
tension in
Plato’s
Republic
deliberate.*

International Plato Society, Issue 5 (2005), 73 n. 51: “On the other hand, that the main line of the *Republic*’s account of justice does involve the just person seeking his or her own good seems to me undeniable (so that the best one can get from 519c-521b is the appearance of a certain unresolved tension in Plato’s view).” Available at <http://www.nd.edu/~plato/plato5issue/Penner.pdf>. Cf. Foster, “Some Implications of a Passage in Plato’s *Republic*,” 303: “. . . both meanings are present in confusion together in the *Republic*.” The attack on Sachs begins on the first page of Penner; for his use of the term “egoistic,” see 34.

¹⁰ *Tusculan Disputations* 5.11 (translation mine).

¹¹ Although employed in a different context, the terms introduced at George Rudebusch, “Neutralism in Book I of the *Republic*” in Douglas Cairns, Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, and Terry Penner (eds.), *Pursuing the Good; Ethics and Metaphysics in Plato’s Republic* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2007), 76-92, are very useful: egoism, altruism, and neutralism (76). See Nicholas P. White, *A Companion to Plato’s Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 192-5 for an altruistic approach albeit one he is determined to confine to the guardians (see following note). See his “The Ruler’s Choice,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 68 (1986), 22-46 at 23.

¹² See Mitchell Miller, “Platonic Provocations: Reflections on the Soul and the Good in the *Republic*” in Dominic J. O’Meara (ed.), *Platonic Investigations* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 163-193, for a path-breaking willingness to see Plato as directly engaging the reader. In my approach, the guardians must be compelled to return to the Cave; only the reader freely chooses to do so.

¹³ Hence the strong case made by Simon H. Aronson, “The Unhappy Philosopher—A Counterexample to Plato’s Proof,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 (1972), 383-398. For a recent example, see Robert Heinaman, “Why Justice Does Not Pay in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 54 (2004), 379-393.

Strauss's reading of Plato's Republic remains egoistic.

Strauss, who made a distinction between exoteric surface and esoteric essence in his 1941 "Persecution and the Art of Writing."¹⁴ Despite the fact that Leo Strauss's own reading of Plato's *Republic* is anything but altruistic,¹⁵ the contrast he identified is, in a modified or pedagogical form, crucial for explaining the gap that I am claiming Plato deliberately created between a self-interested account of justice in Book IV and Glaucon's accurate statement in Book VII that the guardians will sacrifice self-interest because the obligation to return to the Cave involves "imposing just commands on men who are just" (521e1; Paul Shorey translation).

These prolegomena will be organized into three connected sections. The first involves the historical and philosophical basis of Strauss's brand of exotericism: I will show why it was antithetical to Strauss's project to discover an esoteric altruism beneath the surface of any ancient text. A post-Straussian¹⁶ or pedagogical conception of exotericism will then be applied to Cicero in the second section: methods reminiscent of Strauss's will lead to conclusions quite the opposite of those he reached. Cicero's writings are particularly useful here because he proclaimed himself to be a Platonist, openly admitted that he considered it Socratic to conceal his own views, and allowed a skeptical character called "Cicero" to preside over the surface of several of his dialogues. Revealing a philosophical altruism between the lines of Cicero's writings is made easier by the fact that Cicero explicitly praised and practiced altruism in his well-documented political life. Given the fact that Cicero follows and indeed copies his master, the parallels between Cicero's *Republic* and its Platonic exemplar are therefore useful for bringing to light Plato's own esoteric altruism, the literary basis of which will then be sketched in Section 3 in relation to several passages in Plato's *Republic* that open the door to the altruistic reading I propose to develop and elucidate more fully elsewhere.

¹⁴ Reprinted in Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 22-37; see my "Leo Strauss on 'German Nihilism': Learning the Art of Writing" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (2007), 587-612.

¹⁵ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 124-8, especially 124: "We arrive at the conclusion that the just city is not possible because of the philosophers' unwillingness to rule." If White (see n. 11) restricts altruism to the guardians, Strauss generalizes egoism to every philosopher, including the reader.

¹⁶ Ralph C. Hancock, "What was Political Philosophy? Or the Straussian Philosopher and his Other," *Political Science Reviewer* 36 (2007).

Section 1. *Leo Strauss and the Use or Abuse of Exotericism*

Exoteric literature presupposes that there are basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man, because they would do harm to many people, who having been hurt, would naturally be inclined to hurt him who pronounces the unpleasant truths.¹⁷

In his seminal article “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” Leo Strauss assumed that the only “basic truths” that an exoteric writer would wish to hide are those that would bring harm to an author who expressed them openly. Strauss’s exoteric author is no altruist: the reason given for not harming others is to avoid being harmed by them in return. Such an author probably could not decently be described as a decent man; if an argument could prove that any decent man would wish to pronounce truths “which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man,” Strauss doesn’t provide it.¹⁸ Certainly such an argument would, on Strauss’s terms, presuppose that a decent man is motivated by a concern for his own safety as opposed to the wellbeing of others.¹⁹ It will be noted, then, that Strauss’s description applies paradigmatically to a man who refuses to say in public: “there are no decent men; decency itself is a sham,”²⁰ but it does not apply, for example, to the parables of Jesus. In the latter case, it is certainly not to avoid being hurt that Jesus uses exoteric discourses (requiring “eyes to see and ears to hear”) about vineyards, shepherds, and the like, in order to convey esoteric truths that, although doubtless unpleasant to some, are clearly truths that many decent men would still be willing to pronounce in public. But then again, Jesus must be admitted to have had a considerable influence on how decency is or has been conventionally regarded, at least among the vulgar.

It was in order to outflank this influence—or, more accurately,

Unlike Jesus, Strauss’s exoteric author is no altruist.

¹⁷ Strauss, *Persecution*, 36; also Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research* 8 (1941), 488-504, at 504.

¹⁸ See the first paragraph of William A. Galston, “Leo Strauss’s Qualified Embrace of Liberal Democracy” in Steven A. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 193-214; for Strauss as an exoteric writer, see my “Exotericism after Lessing: The Enduring Influence of F. H. Jacobi on Leo Strauss” in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 15 (2007), 59-83.

¹⁹ Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 10 (“... if a man ruins himself”).

²⁰ Compare Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Heinrich and Wiebke Meier (Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1996-), Bd. 3, 536.

to achieve a horizon beyond the revealed tradition²¹ of which Jesus was merely an intermediate part²²—that Strauss, under the influence of Martin Heidegger,²³ returned to the Ancients;²⁴ this decisive aspect of his thought is embodied in what he called “the second cave.”²⁵ Described in English only once (1948)—albeit with an ominous element of conspiracy added for the first time²⁶—Strauss published two accounts of “the second cave” in German (1932 and 1935).²⁷ But in accordance with the same kind of archeological impetus that led Strauss to develop it in the first place, the best way to understand “the second cave” is in its original form, found in two unpublished manuscripts from the early 1930s.²⁸

*Strauss's
“second cave”
an attempt
to recover
“natural
ignorance.”*

The keynote of Strauss’s second cave is an attempt to recover the natural difficulties of philosophizing.²⁹ Enmeshed in our tradition—defined by both the Bible and Greek philosophy in the 1930 version—we are trapped in a second cave below the one described by Plato: only by disentangling ourselves from that tradition can we recover our “natural ignorance.”

We *can* begin from the very beginning: we are lacking all polemic affect toward tradition (having nothing wherefrom to be polemical against it); and at the same time, tradition is utterly alien to us, ut-

²¹ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 387 and 446.

²² Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 238 and 2, 300, 303.

²³ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, xix.

²⁴ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 181-2 and 167; Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 152-3; Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, xviii-xix and 2, 456; and Heinrich Meier, *Die Denkbewegung von Leo Strauss; Die Geschichte der Philosophie und die Intention des Philosophen* (Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1996), 28-29 n. 10. See also Strauss’s letter of 20 May 1949 to Julius Guttman in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological Political Problem*, translated by Marcus Brainard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23-4 n. 32.

²⁵ All five instances of “the second cave” are conveniently listed in Heinrich Meier, “How Strauss Became Strauss” in Svetozar Minkov (ed.), with the assistance of Stéphane Douard, *Enlightening Revolutions; Essays in Honor of Ralph Lerner* (Lanham: Lexington, 2006), 363-382 at 380 n. 40.

²⁶ Strauss, *Persecution*, 155-6; see Meier, *Denkbewegung*, for publication dates.

²⁷ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 13-4 n. 2 and 439; English translations can be found in Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law; Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, translated by Eve Adler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 135-6 n. 2 and Michael Zank (editor and translator), *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921-1932)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 214-6.

²⁸ “Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart” (1930) in Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 377-392 and “Die geistige Lage der Gegenwart” (1932), 441-464.

²⁹ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 386.

terly questionable. But we cannot immediately answer on our own; for we know that we are deeply entangled in a tradition: we are even much lower down than the cave dwellers of Plato. We must rise to the *origin* of tradition, to the level of *natural ignorance*.³⁰

What needs to be clearly understood is that the “natural ignorance” to which we must “rise” is the absolute rejection of certainties, especially of the otherworldly kind described by Plato and taught by the Bible. The teaching of Plato’s Cave—that the absolute truth, in all its ethical and metaphysical grandeur, is not of this natural world—this teaching is precisely what imprisons us in Strauss’s second cave. Naturally this leads Strauss to say little about escaping from the first, i.e. from Plato’s Cave, except insofar as it comes to represent vulgar opinion as opposed to those “. . . basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man.”³¹

But even though Strauss is using Platonic imagery to achieve an anti-Platonic end, there is also a strong anti-Biblical component to what he means by “tradition” in 1930; Strauss emphasizes this component in the recovery of “natural ignorance”:

The end of this struggle is the *complete rejection* of tradition: neither merely of its answers, nor merely of its questions, but of its possibilities: the pillars on which our tradition rested: prophets and Socrates/Plato, have been torn down since Nietzsche. *Nietzsche’s* partisanship for the kings and against the prophets, for the sophists and against Socrates—Jesus neither merely no God, nor a swindler, nor a genius, but an idiot. Rejected are the *θεωρεῖν* and “*Good-Evil*”—Nietzsche, as the *last* enlightener. Through Nietzsche, tradition has been shaken at its *roots*. It has completely lost its self-evident truth. We are left in this world without any authority, without any direction.³²

“Jesus neither merely no God, nor a swindler, nor a genius, but an idiot.”

In addition to Jesus and the Old Testament prophets, Strauss implicates Plato and Socrates as pillars of tradition. A crucial element of this approach—the rejection of the traditional conception of Platonism³³ and “Socrates/Plato”—persisted throughout Strauss’s life. In his 1970 “On the *Euthydemus*,”³⁴ for example, he was still at-

³⁰ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 389 (unpublished translation of Michael Zank).

³¹ Strauss, “Persecution,” 503 n. 21, a passage omitted in Strauss, *Persecution*.

³² Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 389 (Zank).

³³ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 621 and 650.

³⁴ Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, edited by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 67-88.

tempting to reverse the traditional view that Plato's Socrates was the enemy of the sophists.³⁵ It may be useful to think of Strauss's reading of Plato's dialogues as a means for extracting Plato from one tradition in order to enroll him in another.³⁶

Still following Nietzsche even after 1929,³⁷ Strauss emphasizes the anti-Christian element in the recovery of "natural ignorance." But the influence of "the Jewish Question" is already visible in Strauss's 1930 recovery of "natural ignorance"; it is, after all, a comment of Maimonides that Strauss uses to launch the discussion in the first place:

In a manner of speaking, the struggle of the entire period of the last three centuries, the struggle of the Enlightenment, is sketched, drawn up, in RMbM's comment: in order to make philosophizing possible in its natural difficulty, the artificial complication of philosophizing must be removed; one must fight against the *prejudices*. Herein lies a fundamental difference between modern and Greek philosophy: whereas the latter only fights against appearance and opinion, modern philosophy begins by fighting against prejudices.³⁸

This turns out to be a matter of great importance because our entrapment in a second cave, allegedly "discovered" by Maimonides—it will be noted that among the "prejudices" (Strauss's synonym for revelation)³⁹ only "the corporeality of God" is mentioned by RMbM⁴⁰—and rediscovered by Strauss, originates, as will be seen, not in Plato's Idea of the Good but in Mosaic revelation.

At first glance, Strauss's 1932 "*Geistige Lage der Gegenwart*" ("Spiritual Situation of the Present")—despite the fact that it belongs to what Strauss calls at the outset "the Age of National Socialism"⁴¹—is not vastly different from its 1930 analogue. Strauss proposes to negate both science (in the Greek sense) and Biblical "brotherly love" (*Nächstenliebe*) in the 1932 version while showing

*Strauss's
critique of
Biblical
"brotherly
love" in
"the Age
of National
Socialism."*

³⁵ See my "Leo Strauss on the *Euthydemus*" in *Classical Journal* 102 (2007), 355-379.

³⁶ Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 145-59.

³⁷ Cf. Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 648.

³⁸ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 387 (Zank).

³⁹ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 456: ". . . prejudices in the strong sense of the word are only the 'prejudices' of revealed religion" (translation mine). Compare Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 254, and *Philosophy and Law*, 136.

⁴⁰ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 386 (Zank).

⁴¹ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 443-4 (translation mine).

that the Enlightenment remained enmeshed in both.⁴² Even though there are still indications that both the Bible *and* Greek Philosophy have lost their standing⁴³—and that Nietzsche deserves the credit for this *salutary* development⁴⁴—the emphasis now falls with unmistakable force upon one particular tradition: revealed religion.

It is therefore not the habituation to scripture in general, the growing up in a tradition generally, but the habituation to a *very distinct* scripture, growing up in a tradition of a *very distinct* character: namely in a tradition of such *unlimited authority* as is the *tradition of revealed religion*. The fact that philosophy has entered into a world resting on a tradition of revelation has increased the *natural* difficulties of philosophizing because of the *historical* difficulty.⁴⁵

Contrary to Heinrich Meier who reads “the second cave” as an attack on the radical historicism of Heidegger,⁴⁶ this passage proves that it is not emancipation from historicism, as Strauss himself later admits twice in print,⁴⁷ but a Heideggerian *Destruktion*⁴⁸ of one particular historical tradition that is being proposed here. Moreover, although the term “revealed religion” is certainly capacious enough to embrace Islam and Christianity as well as Judaism, it is the latter that is the *fons et origo* of the second cave. In any case, the “change of orientation”⁴⁹ reflected here as well as in his 1932 article on Carl Schmitt,⁵⁰ alters Strauss’s conception of Greek Philosophy. In 1930, Plato and Socrates were conflated with Jesus and the prophets as “the pillars on which our tradition rested”; in 1932, the decision to focus the attack on revealed religion is complemented by a revaluation and rehabilitation of Greek Philosophy, as the last words of the essay prove:

Strauss’s decision to focus attack on revealed religion complemented by return to Greek philosophy.

When, therefore, the battle of the enlightenment against prejudices is only the battle against *the* historical difficulty of philosophizing,

⁴² Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 446.

⁴³ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 446.

⁴⁴ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 446-7.

⁴⁵ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 456 (translation mine).

⁴⁶ Meier, *Denkbewegung von Leo Strauss*, 21-5; notice that “the radical historicist” uses historicism against *itself* at Strauss, *Natural Right*, 26.

⁴⁷ Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 136 (*Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 14) and Leo Strauss, “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” *Social Research* 13 (1946), 326-367, at 332. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution*, 30: “The real opinion of an author is not necessarily identical with that which he expresses in the largest number of passages.”

⁴⁸ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 415.

⁴⁹ Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 257.

⁵⁰ Conveniently reprinted in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by George S. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

then is the actual goal of this battle but this: the restoration of philosophizing to its natural difficulty, of natural philosophizing, i.e. to Greek philosophy.⁵¹

Strauss's antipathy to revealed religion precludes an altruistic reading of Plato's Republic.

It is important to realize that Strauss is calling for a very particular conception of Greek Philosophy. When Nietzsche called Christianity "Platonism for the masses,"⁵² he recognized a certain kinship that Strauss himself may also be said to have emphasized in 1930. Indeed the whole conception of "the second cave" is directed against the dualistic metaphysics signified by the Cave and the Idea of the Good, Becoming and Being, or *phaenomena* and *noumena*,⁵³ and is therefore consistent with Strauss's attack on Biblical "prejudices," above all against the transcendent God of monotheistic tradition central to revealed religion. Important though the metaphysical implications of Strauss's second cave undoubtedly are, it is, however, the ethical dimension that is here my principal concern. Unlike Heidegger's, Strauss's restoration of Greek Philosophy is not focused on the pre-Socratics; he aims to reclaim Plato for "natural ignorance." At first sight, this seems not implausible: in addition to his profession of ignorance, Socrates is, of course, independent of the tradition Strauss seeks to outflank. But in addition to the metaphysical similarities between Platonism and revealed religion, there is an ethical kinship to be considered. If the purpose of Plato's *Republic* is to persuade the reader to follow Socrates down to the Piraeus by voluntarily returning to the Cave, there is an underlying altruism or *Nächstenliebe* that joins Platonic justice to such paradigmatic moments as the descent of Moses from Horeb and the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. In other words, the philosophical or anti-theological basis of Strauss's project—his insistence on the irreconcilable conflict between Athens and Jerusalem—prevents him from being able even to consider giving Plato's *Republic* an altruistic reading.

Paradoxically, the first principle of such a reading is that it is only on the *surface* of Plato's *Republic* that the guardians of a fictional city are compelled to return to the Cave and where justice, a purely internal arrangement, means each man's doing the one job for which he is by nature suited. In short: an altruistic reading of

⁵¹ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 456 (translation mine).

⁵² *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface.

⁵³ It is characteristic of Strauss's project that while his Kant *can* be a Platonist (Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 449-50), his Plato *can't*.

the *Republic* requires that it be considered as an exoteric text where it is precisely Plato's altruism that is "written between the lines."

An exoteric book contains then two teachings: a popular teaching of an edifying character, which is in the foreground; and a philosophic teaching concerning the most important subject, which is indicated only between the lines.⁵⁴

Except for Strauss's use of the word "edifying," this definition applies perfectly to the reading of Plato whose foundations are being laid here; in that reading, by contrast, it is the philosophic teaching that is an edifying altruism while the text's surface affirms a popular, if comparatively harmless, selfishness. Strauss may well have been right that post-revelation exotericism served to conceal what he calls "the evil teaching."⁵⁵ In any case, this is not my present concern. But Strauss's campaign against revealed religion blinds him to the reason that he turned to the Greeks in the first place: to find an intellectual environment in which there is no "second cave." This is why Strauss's reading of Plato's *Republic* constitutes "abuse of exotericism." There was no need for the Greeks to conceal a selfishness "between the lines." In an environment where the self-sacrificing altruism of "brotherly love" was folly at best,⁵⁶ and apparently unthinkable,⁵⁷ it was altruism that needed to be concealed. Nor was this only because a committed altruist might face the "persecution" of ridicule: esoteric altruism has a pedagogical purpose.

*Strauss's
egoistic
reading
of Plato's
Republic as
"abuse of
exotericism."*

This purpose is analogous to a feature of Strauss's exotericism first noted by Robert McShea:

There is a further point to be mentioned here: what Strauss means to stress in this case is not an attempt by Machiavelli to communicate information despite a censor, but rather an attempt to corrupt the minds of his readers without their knowledge, subliminally, so to speak.⁵⁸

When a reader becomes aware of an indecent teaching below a text's edifying surface, that indecency must already somehow

⁵⁴ Strauss, *Persecution*, 36.

⁵⁵ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 10.

⁵⁶ Plato *Republic* 348c11-d1 and Thucydides 3.45; see Gregory Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵⁷ Plato *Republic* 347d6-8.

⁵⁸ Robert J. McShea, "Leo Strauss on Machiavelli," *Western Political Quarterly* 16 (1963), 782-797 at 792.

exist in the reader's own intellectual or ethical proclivities; after all, the writer has not explicitly said anything indecent. McShea's use of the word "subliminally" is therefore very suggestive; in a Platonic context, it brings to mind the theory of recollection.⁵⁹ In the Platonic pedagogy described and practiced by Socrates in *Meno*, the student is never given the truth but is rather guided towards it by being made aware of the obvious but superficial solution's inadequacy. If the purpose of Strauss's Machiavelli is to corrupt the readers by forcing them to think the indecent truth without being directly exposed to it, then the purpose of Plato's Socrates can easily be conceptualized as its ethical antithesis: an attempt to reconnect readers with their own intrinsic but forgotten humanity by means of a multilayered text that provokes them to discover it for themselves. In summary: I propose to *use* Strauss's rediscovery of exotericism to establish an altruistic reading of Plato's *Republic* that mediates between his approach and the traditional reading where Socrates vindicates justice on the text's surface, which I will claim he deliberately does not. Sachs and his followers have therefore accurately drawn attention to the inadequacy of the text's surface teaching about justice but have also failed to realize that this hardly vitiates Plato's project, a project that can only be understood in the context of a pedagogical exotericism that Cicero, Plato's foremost Roman disciple, imitated in his dialogues.

Section 2. Cicero's Esoteric Altruism

This section's title must strike the sympathetic student of Cicero's Consulship as incongruous: no reader of the *Fourth Catilinarian* can doubt that Cicero's willingness to take responsibility for putting the captured conspirators to death—a step he accurately predicted would pit him in an unending war with his enemies⁶⁰ and lead to dire consequences for himself⁶¹—was a crucial factor in the Senate's decision to support Cato against Caesar.⁶² It is therefore

⁵⁹ See also Arthur M. Melzer, "Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism," *American Political Science Review* 100 (2006), 279-295 at 280: "They [sc. "Classical and Medieval writers"] also had pedagogical motives: a text that gives hints instead of answers practices the closest literary approximation to the Socratic method—it forces readers to think and discover it for themselves."

⁶⁰ in *Catilinam* 4.9 and 4.22.

⁶¹ Erich S. Gruen, "The Trial of C. Antonius" in *Latomus* (1973), 301-310.

⁶² Robert W. Cape Jr., "The Rhetoric of Politics in Cicero's Fourth Catilinarian," *American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995), 255-277.

at the most public moment of his career that Cicero openly reveals his altruism:

If the consulate has been given to me on the condition that I would endure [*perferrem*] all pangs [*acerbitates*], pains, and tortures [*cruciatuſque*], I will bear [*feram*] them bravely and even gladly, provided only that through my labors [*meis laboribus*], dignity for you and salvation [*ſaluſque*] for the Roman People may be brought to birth [*pariatur*].⁶³

Bombarded with political rhetoric of this kind,⁶⁴ the modern student is apt to miss three crucial points: (1) achieving *ſaluſ* for others by willingly choosing *cruciatuſ* for oneself is a pre-Christian statement of Christian self-sacrifice that makes Jerome's famous Ciceronian dream perfectly plausible,⁶⁵ (2) Cicero's willingness to present himself as playing a woman's part—in addition to *pario*,⁶⁶ both *labor* and *perfero* are associated with child-bearing in contemporary Latin⁶⁷—would be a bold step for a male to take even in a context more sympathetic to altruism than B.C. Rome where *virtuſ* was the private property of the *vir*,⁶⁸ and (3) Cicero is, in any case, presenting himself as heroic precisely because his actions are altruistic. To put this last point another way, the fact that Cicero believed self-sacrificing altruism to be morally excellent cannot be denied even by those who would be inclined to deny that he practiced this excellence himself.

That Cicero believed self-sacrificing altruism to be morally excellent cannot be denied.

This realization becomes important when the student turns to Cicero's philosophical writings, particularly those pervaded by skepticism;⁶⁹ it is here that the phrase "esoteric altruism" has provenance. I would like to suggest that the more erudite Cicero's audience, i.e. the more he is writing for the learned,⁷⁰ the less visible

⁶³ in *Catilinam* 4.1 (translation mine).

⁶⁴ W. K. Lacey, *Cicero and the End of the Roman Republic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 40-1.

⁶⁵ Jerome, *Letters* 22.30.

⁶⁶ Compare Cicero *Philippics* 2.119.

⁶⁷ Plautus *Amphitryon* 490, Varro, *Res Rusticae* 2.19, and O.L.D. (*ad loc.*).

⁶⁸ Myles McDonnell, *Roman Manliness; Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161-3; this point is further developed in my "Womanly Humanism in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 139 (2009), 411-445.

⁶⁹ John Glucker, "Cicero's Philosophical Affiliations" in John M. Dillon and A. A. Long (eds.), *The Question of "Eclecticism": Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 60.

⁷⁰ Compare Pliny the Elder *Natural History, praef.* 7 (Cicero *de Republica* fr. 1.1) and *de Finibus* 1.7.

is his altruism. In the dialogues that constitute *de Finibus*, for example, Cicero—considered strictly as *persona* in those dialogues—proposes no doctrines of his own while merely refuting arguments advanced by Stoic and Epicurean spokesmen. Although altruism is repeatedly discussed throughout these dialogues,⁷¹ Cicero never actually endorses it *in propria persona* while nevertheless challenging his readers to do so for themselves:

I say that a successful eulogy of virtue must shut out pleasure. But you must no longer expect me to show you this. You must do your own introspection. Scan the contents of your own mind, deliberate thoroughly, and ask yourself which you would prefer: to enjoy continual pleasure, experiencing the state of tranquility that you frequently mentioned and spending your whole life without pain (as you Epicureans generally add, though it cannot happen); or to be a benefactor of the whole human race, enduring the labours [*aerumnas*] of Hercules to bring it aid and succour in its hour of need?⁷²

Cicero avoids endorsing altruism for a maieutic purpose.

Posing this question to his readers is characteristic of Cicero's Socratic method: they are being challenged to discover, recollect, and give birth to their own altruism. In other words: Cicero refuses to state his view that self-sacrifice for the common good is morally excellent for a pedagogical, or better, for a *maieutic* purpose.⁷³

Another comparison with Plato is apt: Plato wrote dialogues in which a character called "Socrates" professes to know considerably less than most of us (Leo Strauss is an exception)⁷⁴ suspect that he knows. In Cicero's philosophical dialogues, particularly those that appear to be most skeptical about reaching the truth,⁷⁵ a character called "Cicero"⁷⁶ professes to know considerably less than his own

⁷¹ *de Finibus* 1.67, 2.118-9, 3.64-6, 4.17, and 5.63-7.

⁷² *de Finibus* 2.118 (translation by H. Rackham); since the word *aerumna* is associated with childbirth by the playwright Cicero calls *Plautus noster* (*de Republica* 4.20b; cf. *Plautus Amphitryon* 490), and since Cicero boldly compared his daughter Tullia—who died as a result of giving birth—to Hercules in the lost *Consolatio* (*Lactantius Divine Institutes* 1.15.27), the womanly or maternal altruism explicit in the *Fourth Catilinarian* (see "(2)" above) may likewise be said to inform this passage.

⁷³ Plato *Theaetetus* 150c7-e1; see my "Tullia's Secret Shrine: Birth and Death in Cicero's *De finibus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008), 373-393.

⁷⁴ *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 411 (1931); Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959), 115; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 32; and Strauss, *Platonic Political Philosophy*, 42; cf. *Apology* 21d7. It was Cicero who, for an antithetical purpose, invented this self-contradictory Socrates at *Academica* 2.74; cf. my "How to Interpret Cicero's Dialogue on Divination," *Interpretation* 35 (2008), 105-121; 117, Addendum 1.

⁷⁵ But see *de Finibus* 1.3.

⁷⁶ Harold Gotoff, "Cicero's Caesarian Orations" in James May (ed.), *Brill's Com-*

words and deeds indicate that he knew. Cicero knows, for example, that Plato's Socrates (let alone Xenophon's) never said: "I know that I know nothing"⁷⁷ (Arcesilaus had indicated that it would be self-contradictory to do so)⁷⁸ but "Cicero" does not.⁷⁹ To this extent, Cicero's cover is better than Plato's: very few acknowledge a distinction between Cicero and "Cicero."

It is useful to consider what Cicero, writing *in propria persona* in Book V of the *Tusculan Disputations*, regarded as the essence of his claim to being a follower of Socrates:

. . . his [sc. Socrates'] many-sided method of discussion [*multiplex ratio disputandi*] and the varied nature of its subjects [*rerumque varietas*] and the greatness of his genius, which has been immortalized in Plato's literary masterpieces have produced many warring sects of which I have chosen to follow that one which I think agreeable to the practice of Socrates, in trying to conceal my own private opinion [*sententiam*], to relieve others from deception and in every case to look for the most probable solution [*veri simillimum*].⁸⁰

According to Cicero, the Socratic method of disputation has three components: (1) a concealment of one's own position (i.e. exotericism), (2) an attempt to relieve others of error (a pedagogical species of altruism), and (3) a search for what is most like the truth based on a skeptical denial that the truth itself can be discovered. I am claiming that "(3)" is, despite conventional wisdom,⁸¹ merely the exoteric cover that explains "(1)." What this means in practice is illustrated throughout the *Tusculans*: a character called "M.," although generally considered to be Cicero himself,⁸² is not in

panion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 223-4. See also Julia Annas (ed.), *Cicero: On Moral Ends*, translated by Raphael Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xvi: "What of the fourth major figure? Although he is called Cicero, he is not to be straightforwardly identified with the author Marcus Tullius Cicero."

⁷⁷ Compare *Academica* 1.16 to Plato *Apology* 21d3-6.

⁷⁸ *Academica* 1.45.

⁷⁹ *Academica* 2.74; see my "The Truly False Basis of Cicero's Platonism" forthcoming in *McNeese Review* (2010).

⁸⁰ *Tusculan Disputations* 5.11 (translation by J. E. King).

⁸¹ See Woldemar Görler, "Silencing the Troublemaker: *De Legibus* 1.39 and the Continuity of Cicero's Scepticism" in J. G. F. Powell (ed.), *Cicero the Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 85-113, and, in the same collection, A. E. Douglas, "Form and Content in the *Tusculan Disputations*" at 215: "It is scarcely possible to reconcile the first part of this claim [sc. that Cicero is "concealing his own opinion and freeing others from error"] with what actually happens in the *Tusculans*."

⁸² Margaret Graver (trans. and ed.), *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

fact presenting Cicero's own *sententia* but merely "what was most similar to the truth," i.e. that which the traditional reading regards as Cicero's last word.⁸³ Cicero tells us here that his inspiration for constructing a contrast between his own views and those of his characters—reflected, for example, in the difference between M.'s endorsement of Anaxagoras⁸⁴ and Cicero's own decision to "follow the practice of Socrates"⁸⁵—derives from a Platonic project to relieve the reader of error through dialectic. Cicero's creation of "Cicero" introduces *varietas*⁸⁶—i.e. a dialectical contrast between author and character—that makes his text exoteric or *multiplex*.⁸⁷ The three components are therefore one: it is by distinguishing for themselves Cicero's own *sententia* from "Cicero's" *veri simillimum* that readers are relieved of error.⁸⁸ To put it another way, the success of Cicero's altruistic project depends on the reader's awareness of "Cicero's" strictly exoteric inability to disclose anything more than "the truth-like" (*veri simile*).

Augustine
recognized
Academic
skepticism
as exoteric.

This manner of reading Cicero is hardly new: Augustine claimed in *Contra Academicos* that the New Academy embraced skepticism in order to conceal an ongoing commitment to Platonic dualism.⁸⁹ But in a field where skepticism reigns supreme,⁹⁰ there is little evidence that Anglophone scholars are willing to entertain any doubts about the dogma of Cicero's skepticism.⁹¹ To be sure there are some texts that defy a skeptical reading; for these, and in particular for Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* in Book VI of his *Republic*,⁹² explanations must be found "to save the appearances."⁹³

An interesting drama in the history of ideas arises from com-

⁸³ John Glucker, "Probabile, Veri Simile, and Related Terms" in Powell, *Cicero the Philosopher*, 115-143.

⁸⁴ *Tusculan Disputations* 1.104, 3.30 (also 3.58), and 5.66-7.

⁸⁵ *Tusculan Disputations* 5.10.

⁸⁶ See O.L.D. (5b).

⁸⁷ Malcolm Schofield, "Cicero for and against Divination," *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986), 47-65; at 63.

⁸⁸ *de Natura Deorum* 1.10.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, translated with Introduction and Notes by Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 87-8 (3.17.37-18).

⁹⁰ Jonathan Barnes, "Antiochus of Ascalon" in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 53 n. 12.

⁹¹ Barnes, "Antiochus," 92; see also John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 296-8.

⁹² Görler, "Silencing the Troublemaker," 89-90.

⁹³ Glucker, "Cicero's Philosophical Affiliations," 58.

paring the fate of two fourth century A.D. readings of Cicero: Augustine's reading of Cicero's *Academica*⁹⁴ has been as universally rejected as Macrobius' reading of Cicero's *Republic* has been uncritically embraced.⁹⁵ According to Macrobius, the principal difference between Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's is that the former is about an ideal state, the latter about a real one; the principal similarity is that both books end on the same astronomical note, i.e. that the *Somnium Scipionis* is best understood as Cicero's version of Plato's "Myth of Er."⁹⁶ In other words, the survival of the *Somnium* depended on Macrobius' view that it contained valuable information about cosmology,⁹⁷ i.e. that the dream was to be taken literally. It is surprising that such a reading maintained its hold even after the rediscovery (1822) of a partial manuscript of the *de Republica*, where Socratic arguments against astronomy placed in the mouths of Cicero's Scipio⁹⁸ and Laelius⁹⁹ leave no doubt that justice is the subject of Cicero's *Republic*¹⁰⁰ just as it is of Plato's.¹⁰¹ Obscured by analogy with the "Myth of Er" are the obvious parallels between Cicero's *Somnium* and Plato's "Allegory of the Cave": Scipio leaves the Earth behind,¹⁰² realizes its insignificance,¹⁰³ is exposed to the beauty of unearthly reality,¹⁰⁴ wishes to abide in its proximity,¹⁰⁵ but is reminded of his duty to others down below¹⁰⁶ and, despite

Striking parallels between Cicero's Somnium and Plato's "Allegory of the Cave."

⁹⁴ See Charles Brittain, *Philo of Larissa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 247, and A. A. Long, "Arcesilaus in His Time and Place" in his *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 76-113 at 102 n. 12: "There is no reason to think that Augustine drew on anything more for his account of the Academics than Cicero's *Academica*, which he would have known in its complete form, and his own imagination."

⁹⁵ James E. G. Zetzel, *Cicero. De Re Publica: Selections*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15, 223-4 and J. G. F. Powell (ed.), *Cicero: On Friendship and the Dream of Scipio* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 122-3.

⁹⁶ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 81 (1.1-2).

⁹⁷ Macrobius 1.3.

⁹⁸ *de Republica* 1.15.

⁹⁹ *de Republica* 1.19.

¹⁰⁰ *de Republica* 2.70.

¹⁰¹ Plato *Republic* 472b3-5.

¹⁰² *de Republica* 6.15; compare Plato *Republic* 515a5 and e6-8.

¹⁰³ *de Republica* 6.21 and 6.24; compare Plato *Republic* 516c4-6.

¹⁰⁴ *de Republica* 6.22; compare Plato *Republic* 516b4-7.

¹⁰⁵ *de Republica* 6.19 and 6.24; compare Plato *Republic* 516c5-6, d1-7, and 519d8-9.

¹⁰⁶ *de Republica* 6.33; compare Plato *Republic* 520b5-6.

the dangers of returning,¹⁰⁷ when exhorted to descend,¹⁰⁸ he does.¹⁰⁹ When Walter Burkert noted the entire absence of Plato's Cave from Cicero's writings,¹¹⁰ he missed something essential.

Taken as an allegory, Cicero's *Somnium* is based on the same Platonic distinction between Being and Becoming to which Augustine claimed Cicero secretly maintained his loyalty and upon which "going back down into the Cave"¹¹¹ entirely depends. Of course Cicero's loyalty to Plato is hardly a secret. In *Orator*, the work he placed at the conclusion of his philosophical writings¹¹² and which finally expresses his embrace of the Platonic Ideas,¹¹³ he makes this abundantly clear:

Of course I'm also aware that I often seem to be saying original things when I'm saying very ancient ones (albeit having been unheard by most) and I confess myself to stand out as an orator—if that's what I am, or in any case, whatever else it is that I am [*aut etiam quicumque sim*]¹¹⁴—not from the ministrations of the rhetoricians but from the open spaces of the Academy. For such is the *curricula* of many-leveled and conflicting dialogues [*multiplicium variorumque sermonum*] in which the tracks of Plato have been principally impressed.¹¹⁴

It will be noted that Cicero puts particular emphasis on the fact that Plato's writings are *multiplex*; it is this dialectical element that the Roman student learned from his Greek master and is, moreover, the necessary precondition for their "esoteric altruism." In Cicero's *Republic*, for example, the explicit statement that justice is self-sacrificing altruism is made by Philus,¹¹⁵ the spokesman for injustice in Book III.¹¹⁶ And in the *Somnium* itself, Cicero uses the word "return"¹¹⁷ only to describe the rewards¹¹⁸ in store for the just

¹⁰⁷ *de Republica* 6.16; compare Plato *Republic* 517a4-6.

¹⁰⁸ *de Republica* 6.20 and 6.33; compare Plato *Republic* 520c1.

¹⁰⁹ *de Republica* 6.33; compare Plato *Republic* 520e1.

¹¹⁰ Walter Burkert, "Cicero als Platoniker und Skeptiker." *Gymnasium* 72 (1965), 175-200 at 198.

¹¹¹ Plato *Republic* 539c2-3.

¹¹² *de Divinatione* 2.4.

¹¹³ *Orator* 7-10.

¹¹⁴ *Orator* 12 (translation mine); see Elaine Fantham, *The Roman World of Cicero's De Oratore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50 n. 2 for translating *sermones* as "dialogues."

¹¹⁵ *de Republica* 3.8.

¹¹⁶ David E. Hahm, "Plato, Carneades, and Cicero's Philus (Cicero, *Rep.* 3.8-31)," *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999), 167-183; compare Plato *Republic* 343c3.

¹¹⁷ *de Republica* 6.17, 6.29, and 6.33.

¹¹⁸ *de Republica* 6.12 and 6.29.

man who “dies”¹¹⁹ in the service of his country.¹²⁰ Cicero’s emphasis on the advantageous return to heaven partially obscures (while actually revealing) the altruistic return to Rome that is its prerequisite.¹²¹ And Cicero is even less obvious in his later dialogues. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, for example, M. states an intention to challenge Plato (and Aristotle!) to explain why a philosopher would be willing to descend into “the Bull of Phalaris” (the paradigm for torture) but records no response.¹²² And it is M. who gives a very plausible argument for the proposition that it is sensible to love another as much as oneself (*aeque*) but never more.¹²³

So great, in fact, is Cicero’s determination to keep Plato’s secret that he refuses to divulge his teacher’s altruism even when revealing his own. A. A. Long has shown that Cicero’s last philosophical work, the *de Officiis*, is best understood in a political context:¹²⁴ like the *Fourth Catilinarian*, it is openly altruistic and it is not presented as a dialogue.

Cicero refuses to divulge Plato’s altruism even when revealing his own.

Nature likewise by the power of reason associates man with man in the common bonds of speech and life; she implants in him above all, I may say, a strangely tender love for his offspring [*quendam amorem in eos qui procreati sunt*]. She also prompts men to meet in companies, to form public assemblies and to take part in them themselves; and she further dictates, as a consequence of this, the effort on man’s part to provide a store of things that minister to his comforts and wants—and not for himself alone [*nec sibi soli*], but for wife [*coniugi*] and children and the others [*liberis ceterisque*] whom he holds dear and for whom he ought to provide; and this responsibility also stimulates his courage and makes it stronger for the active duties of life.¹²⁵

Out of respect to Tullia, it is worth bearing in mind that *coniugi* can mean “husband” as well as wife,¹²⁶ it is as foolish to confine self-sacrificing altruism to the male of the species as to define human

¹¹⁹ *de Republica* 6.18.

¹²⁰ *de Republica* 6.15-16 and 6.33.

¹²¹ *de Republica* 6.17; *hinc profecti huc revertuntur* (“having set forth from here, to here they return”).

¹²² See *Tusculan Disputations* 5.75, 5.82-3, and 5.119. With the latter, compare Plato *Cleitophon* 408e1-2.

¹²³ *Tusculan Disputations* 3.72-3; compare *de Finibus* 2.79, 2.84, and 5.63.

¹²⁴ A. A. Long, “Cicero’s Politics in *De Officiis*” in André Laks and Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 213-240.

¹²⁵ *de Officiis* 1.12 (Walter Miller translation).

¹²⁶ O.L.D. *coniunx* (1b).

nature strictly on the basis of male behavior.¹²⁷ But it is the phrase *nec sibi soli* that reveals Cicero's debt to Plato, as he tells the reader a few pages later: "But since, as Plato has admirably expressed it [*Ninth Letter*; 358a2-3], we are not born for ourselves alone [*non nobis solum nati sumus*], but our country claims a share of our being, and our friends a share. . . ."¹²⁸ Despite this clue, Cicero keeps his teacher's secret in the crucial passage:

And so [sc. given the many reasons one would fail to protect others from injustice] there is reason to fear that what Plato declares of the philosophers may be inadequate, when he says that they are just because they are busied with the pursuit of truth and because they despise and count as naught that which most men most eagerly seek and for which they are prone to do battle against each other to the death. For they secure one sort of justice, to be sure, in that they do no positive wrong to anyone, but they fall into the opposite injustice; for hampered by their pursuit of learning they leave to their fate those whom they ought to defend. And so, Plato thinks, they will not even assume their civic duties [*ad rem publicam*] except under compulsion. But in fact it were better [*aequius*] that they should assume them of their own accord [*voluntate*]; for an action intrinsically right is just [*iustum*] only on condition that it is voluntary [*voluntarium*].¹²⁹

This passage constitutes the heart of the matter. Cicero appears to be taking Plato to task for promoting injustice among his philosophers: merely to refrain from unjust acts is an insufficient sign of justice. It is only through altruism, through defending others from injustice, that Cicero's justice becomes complete. Insofar as Plato's guardians belong only to the city that Socrates has created in speech, their return to the Cave is indeed strictly compulsory;¹³⁰ Cicero replies, and his reply must be admitted to be compelling, that justice must be voluntary to be just. The needful thing, then, is to determine whether or not Cicero is actually advancing beyond Plato by insisting that the completely just man must voluntarily defend others from injustice, as he undoubtedly suggests that he is in *de Officiis*. If Cicero knew, however, that the true teaching of Plato's *Republic* was that justice required the philosopher, even when born

¹²⁷ M. R. Wright, "Self-Love and Love of Humanity in *De Finibus* 3" in Powell, *Cicero the Philosopher*, 171-195.

¹²⁸ *de Officiis* 1.22 (Miller); compare *de Finibus* 2.45.

¹²⁹ *de Officiis* 1.28 (Miller); note the connection to Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," 142-4.

¹³⁰ Plato *Republic* 520a6-9; emphasized by Brown, "Minding the Gap," 280.

in distant Rome,¹³¹ to return to “the sewer of Romulus”¹³² as an orator from Athens¹³³ just as Socrates had long ago gone down to the Piraeus with Glaucon¹³⁴ to battle with Thrasymachus,¹³⁵ it would not only explain a good deal about the philosophical origins of Cicero the politician¹³⁶ but also elucidate why Cicero the philosopher wrote, in the same sentence in which he admitted to concealing his own *sententia*, that

. . . Socrates on the other hand was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens [*philosophiam devocavit e caelo*] and set her in the cities of men and bring her into their homes and compel her to ask questions about life and morality and things good and evil¹³⁷

Also against the view that Cicero is teaching here what he believes Plato didn't are (1) his frank admission of Plato's influence in *Orator* (quoted above), (2) the parallels between his *Republic* and Plato's, i.e. between the *Somnium* and the Cave, and (3) Plato's *Republic* itself, at least when considered as the exemplar of Cicero's “esoteric altruism,” or better: when post-Straussian *means* (i.e. pedagogical exotericism) are applied to Plato's *Republic* in the service of an end antithetical to Strauss's own.

Section 3. Exoteric Injustice in Plato's Republic

Like Penner,¹³⁸ Strauss celebrates the lack of concern for others that Cicero deplors: “. . . in an imperfect society the philosopher is not likely to engage in political activity of any kind, but will rather lead a life of privacy.”¹³⁹ The point is most clearly made in a 1958 lecture:

¹³¹ Plato *Republic* 520a9-b4.

¹³² *ad Atticum* 2.1.8.

¹³³ *de Inventione* 1.1-5.

¹³⁴ Plato *Republic* 327a1.

¹³⁵ Plato *Republic* 358b7-d3.

¹³⁶ Plutarch *Cicero* 4.1-2 and 32.5 (translation mine): “He himself, however, besought his friends not to call him ‘orator’ but ‘philosopher;’ for having chosen philosophy as his *métier* [ἐργον], he employed rhetoric as a tool [ὄργανον χρῆσθαι] for the needs of being political [πολιτευόμενος].”

¹³⁷ *Tusculan Disputations* 5.10 (King).

¹³⁸ Penner, “Platonic Justice,” 5: “Thus, in my picture, the Plato of the *Republic* thinks, following the historical Socrates, that the virtue of Justice is a self-interested psychological state of the psyche that is not at all moral. What we call ethics is, for the historical Socrates, part of the science of psychology: The just or good person will, as a purely factual matter, be the person good at maximizing his or her own happiness.” For Penner on altruism, see 71 n. 47.

¹³⁹ Strauss, “New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy,” 361; it is only in this passage that Strauss explicitly denies the philosopher will return to the Cave.

Socrates speaks less of doing one's job well than simply of doing one's job, which has a common meaning of minding one's own business, not to be a busybody, or to lead the retired life. To lead the just life means to lead the retired life, the retired life *par excellence*, the life of the philosopher. This is the manifest secret of the *Republic*. The justice of the individual is said to be written in small letters, but the justice of the city in large letters. Justice is said to consist in minding one's business, that is to say, in not serving others. Obviously the best city does not serve other cities. It is self-sufficient.¹⁴⁰

There is, of course, considerable authority for this self-interested reading in Plato's *Republic* itself,¹⁴¹ compellingly presented at its conclusion by Homer's Odysseus.¹⁴² Indeed this is what Sachs and those who followed him rediscovered: the justice defined by Socrates on the text's surface—i.e. in Book IV—is not just.¹⁴³ In their different ways, both Strauss and Penner reject this moral critique.

Strauss makes explicit in a letter his view that for Plato "philosophy is injustice."

Unlike Penner,¹⁴⁴ Strauss conceals—at least in his published work—his awareness that the philosopher's decision to serve only himself is actually *unjust*. More revealing is the following passage from a letter to his best friend Jacob Klein (February 16, 1939) where he makes this awareness explicit:

The *Republic* is beginning to become clear to me. My conjecture from the previous year, that its actual theme is the question of the relationship between the political and theoretical life, and that it is dedicated to a radical critique and condemnation of the political life, has proved completely right. It has therefore defined itself with utmost precision: the *Republic* is indeed an ironic justification [*Rechtfertigung*] of ἀδικία [injustice], for philosophy is injustice—that comes out with wondrous clarity in the dialogue with Thrasymachus.¹⁴⁵

It was perhaps to conceal from himself the self-contradiction implicit in any "justification of injustice" that Strauss used two dif-

¹⁴⁰ Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, selected and introduced by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 161. It is noteworthy that Strauss justifies the philosopher's self-interest on the basis of the city's.

¹⁴¹ Plato *Republic* 443c9-444a3 (hereafter references to the *Republic* will be by Stephanus numbers alone).

¹⁴² 620c3-d2.

¹⁴³ Compare Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," 155: "In this regard, it is tempting to assert that the most that can be said on behalf of Plato's argument is that crimes and evils could not be done by a Platonically just man in a foolish, unintelligent, cowardly, or uncontrolled way."

¹⁴⁴ Penner, "Platonic Justice," 50 n. 10: "Unlike White, however, I see Socrates and Plato as presenting a radically new and non-moral approach to ethics."

¹⁴⁵ Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 567-8 (translation mine).

ferent languages to express his complex thought. But the decisive point is simple: if the teaching of the *Republic* is that the philosopher's justice consists "in minding one's business, that is to say, in not serving others," then "philosophy is injustice." In order to show that the ironic Socrates is really justifying Thrasymachus,¹⁴⁶ Strauss must read *Republic* as an exoteric text in which the claims of a justice radically different from "the advantage of the stronger" are upheld only on the text's surface. The apparent purpose of the text, i.e., to describe the ideal state, is deliberately undone precisely by the forced accommodation of philosophy to the city:¹⁴⁷ compelling the philosophers to return to the Cave is advantageous to the city but not for the strongest element in it. This compulsion, as Allan Bloom puts it admirably, "would force one man to do two jobs, to be both philosopher and king,"¹⁴⁸ i.e., would contradict the basic principle of what appears to be Plato's account of justice.

Plato's Republic is an exoteric text, but Strauss doesn't grasp its secret teaching.

Whether or not Strauss will ultimately call the philosopher's deliberate decision *not* to return to the Cave "just" or "unjust" isn't the issue: the point is that Strauss's Plato can only justify this decision *between the lines*. My position is: (1) that Strauss is right about *Republic* being an exoteric text and (2) that Plato's critics, beginning with Foster—including Adkins, Strauss, Sachs, Aronson, and Penner—are right that the philosopher's voluntary decision to return to the Cave is inconsistent with the justice upheld by Socrates in Book IV. What I am calling (3) "Exoteric Injustice in Plato's *Republic*" is the result of combining these two positions. The principle that one man will do the one job for which he is by nature suited is merely the dialogue's exoteric teaching¹⁴⁹ and is indeed the antithesis of Platonic justice which calls for the just philosopher to take on, albeit only temporarily, a second lifelong task. The real "justice upheld by Socrates" is implicit in the opening "I went down" while the return to the Cave—not forced upon the fictional guardians of a nonexistent city but freely chosen by the philosophic reader—is not so much one of the many things that can be called "just" but rather the very essence of justice.

This distinction is crucial: it explains the difficulties that have beset a host of scholars intent on showing how returning to the

¹⁴⁶ Strauss, *City and Man*, 81: "Thrasymachus' view, according to which the private good is supreme, triumphs."

¹⁴⁷ Strauss, *City and Man*, 124 (cited above)

¹⁴⁸ Bloom, *Republic*, 407.

¹⁴⁹ 435c9-d5.

Readers
provoked
to follow
Socrates'
example in
regarding
justice's call
as imperious.

Cave is just *and* why the guardians who do so are securing their own self-interest.¹⁵⁰ Primarily by giving what Eric Brown calls “deflationary readings” of the compulsion applied to the returning guardians,¹⁵¹ repeated attempts have been made to show that it benefits the philosopher to bring harmony to mundane political affairs.¹⁵² But giving up one’s life for others without heavenly compensation is, on this world’s terms alone, the unhappy folly of altruistic self-sacrifice; nor is it clear that Athens became a better city because Socrates died in her service. It will be remembered that Cicero’s *Somnium* is predicated on the heavenly rewards awaiting the soul who departs and then returns again: the demands of Plato’s brothers temporarily preclude this approach.¹⁵³ I would like to suggest that it is precisely *this* form of censorship that renders the *Republic* a merely exoteric defense of justice. Socrates created the city in speech—where the guardians are compelled to return—because no more than Cicero does he believe that any involuntary act can be just.¹⁵⁴ The construction of such a city is therefore intended to make justice conspicuous by its absence: Platonic pedagogy is intended to provoke—and does in fact provoke—his chosen readers to follow the example of Socrates in regarding justice’s call as imperious and its moral grandeur as its own undying reward. It is impossible to prove that returning to the Cave is just in relation to the exoteric teaching of the *Republic* because Plato was determined to answer and indeed succeeded in answering the Socratic question: “What is Justice?” Thanks to his mastery of pedagogical exotericism, Plato answers between the lines that any given philosophic reader’s free choice to return to the Cave instantiates or rather imitates *justice itself*.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ The absence of discussion about the harrowing fate of Glaucon’s just man at 361e1-362a3 is noteworthy; for an exception, see Sachs, “A Fallacy in Plato’s *Republic*,” 149, where he nevertheless deletes Shorey’s “crucified.”

¹⁵¹ Brown, “Minding the Gap,” 280-1.

¹⁵² The approach of Terence Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 308-16 is usefully called “expressivist” at Eric Brown, “Justice and Compulsion for Plato’s Philosopher-Rulers,” *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2000), 1-17 at 5 while he uses the term “imitationist” to describe Richard Kraut, “Return to the Cave: *Republic* 519-521” in Gail Fine (ed.), *Plato 2; Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 242-8; see also G.R.F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 101.

¹⁵³ 358b6-7 and 366e6.

¹⁵⁴ 619c6-d1.

¹⁵⁵ This point of view is developed in my unpublished manuscript “Plato the Teacher: The Crisis of the *Republic*.”

Despite his rediscovery of exotericism,¹⁵⁶ Strauss cannot even entertain this possibility because he is committed to the view that it is only the surface of the text that is edifying while the esoteric teaching necessarily consists of “basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man.” The cause of his blindness is buried in “the second cave.” The recovery of natural ignorance means emancipation from the Biblical tradition: only on this basis can we see ourselves “on this world’s terms alone.” Strauss must be either silent or dismissive of Plato’s Ideas;¹⁵⁷ they are all too suggestive of the common ground between Athens and Jerusalem. It was precisely in order to escape Judeo-Christian “prejudice” in favor of the otherworldly that Strauss returned to the Greeks. Unlike Nietzsche and Heidegger, however, Strauss was intent on enlisting the aid of Plato *against* the tradition: this required reading Plato’s *Republic* in a new way, i.e., as an exoteric text. The irony is that Plato’s *Republic* needs to be read this way but that Strauss himself was too deeply prejudiced to give it the reading it deserves.

Strauss returned to the Greeks to escape Judeo-Christian “prejudice.”

It is not only that Plato’s transcendent Idea of the Good is too Jewish or his descending Socrates too Christian; Strauss underestimated how committed to “natural ignorance,” how far removed from both the transcendent and the altruistic, Plato’s world really was. There was no need for Plato’s Socrates to vindicate Callicles¹⁵⁸ or Thrasymachus *between the lines*: theirs was the orthodox position among the bright young men that Plato tried to educate by undermining that position from below and belittling it from above but never by attacking it too directly. Proving to Callicles that it is more shameful to wrong another than be wronged¹⁵⁹ depended on a variety of otherworldly expedients combined with a mastery of rhetoric. But it was far more difficult to prove that it is better to benefit others than to be benefited by them.¹⁶⁰ Precisely

No need for Plato’s Socrates to vindicate Callicles or Thrasymachus between the lines.

¹⁵⁶ Compare Laurence Lampert, “Strauss’s Recovery of Esotericism” in Smith, *Companion to Leo Strauss*, 63-92.

¹⁵⁷ Strauss, *City and Man*, 119-21 and Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 141-42.

¹⁵⁸ Miles Burnyeat, “Sphinx without a Secret” in *New York Review of Books* (May 30, 1985); see also Altman, “Exotericism after Lessing,” 61 and 82 n. 97.

¹⁵⁹ Plato *Gorgias* 482d8.

¹⁶⁰ Platonic pedagogy originally revolved around the possibility that a freeborn Greek could be brought round (518c8-9) to recognize that self-interest is a *slavish* point of view. Thrasymachus (344c5-6; Shorey) claims that “. . . injustice on a sufficiently large scale is a stronger, freer [ἐλευθεριώτερον], and more masterful thing than justice.” Socrates aims to reverse this judgment in accordance with *noblesse*

because the world into which Plato was born—vividly depicted by Thucydides¹⁶¹—regarded or came to regard benignity as folly, it was counterproductive to defend altruism on the text's surface. Strauss, however, was so enmeshed in his own battle against the Judeo-Christian tradition that he unconsciously allowed it to invade even the precincts in which he sought to evade it (although it would be more accurate, and far more ominous, to say that Strauss consciously realized that just as the only way to defeat Plato was with Platonic imagery,¹⁶² so also the only way to defeat Jerusalem was to use it against itself).¹⁶³ In Plato's world, by contrast, as in Cicero's—Sallust fulfills the role of Thucydides for the latter¹⁶⁴—opposing a commonsense selfishness too openly was for fools.

For we may venture to say that, if there should be a city of good men only, immunity from office-holding would be as eagerly contended for as office is now, and there it would be made plain that in very truth the true ruler does not naturally seek his own advantage but that of the ruled; so that every man of understanding would rather choose to be benefited by another than to be bothered with benefiting him.¹⁶⁵

oblige and he therefore depends on his audience's abhorrence of acting the part of a slave. Callicles' conception of τὸ δουλοπρεπές ("that which befits a slave" at *Gorgias* 485b7) is indicated by comparing 485e1 and 486c3; Socrates reverses this formula beginning at 518a2 (already implied at 482d8). The process actually begins at *Alcibiades Major* 134c4-6: wickedness is δουλοπρεπές while virtue is ἐλευθεροπρεπές; Alcibiades is in a slavish position (134c10-11) from the start; see my "The Reading Order of Plato's Dialogues," forthcoming (2010) in *Phoenix*. Compare also Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1 (1120a21-23): "And of all virtuous people the liberal [οἱ ἐλευθέριοι] are perhaps the most beloved, because they are beneficial [ὠφέλιμοι] to others; and they are so in that they give [ἐν τῇ δόσῃ]." By definition the liberal (οἱ ἐλευθέριοι) aren't slavish, i.e. selfish. See also 1120a13-15 and 1120a23-25.

¹⁶¹ Although there is something to be said for the view that Diodotus practices esoteric altruism in the Mytilene Debate, this is not the place to say it; naturally Strauss cannot do so at Strauss, *City and Man*, 231-6, although he is evidently aware of the relevant facts. See my *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism*, forthcoming (2011) from Lexington Books.

¹⁶² Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 316.

¹⁶³ See my "The Alpine Limits of Jewish Thought: Leo Strauss, National Socialism, and *Judentum ohne Gott*," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 17 (2009), 1-46, and Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, translated by Christopher Nadon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 161-2; see also my "Review Essay: Pyrrhic Victories and a Trojan Horse in the Strauss Wars" in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 39 (2009), 294-323.

¹⁶⁴ Compare Sallust *Conspiracy of Catiline* 10.3-12.2 with Thucydides 2.53; see also Ronald Syme, *Sallust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 245-6.

¹⁶⁵ 347d2-8 (Paul Shorey translation).

Naturally a complete reinterpretation of the *Republic* can't be accomplished here; only prolegomena to such a project are now being presented. But this passage from Book I, in which Socrates responds to Glaucon's first interruption¹⁶⁶ and explains the penalty that forces good men to rule (i.e., to avoid being ruled by men worse than themselves), contains the germ of the interpretation I am proposing. The claim that "the true ruler does not naturally seek his own advantage but that of the ruled" prefigures the self-sacrificing altruism of the philosopher who voluntarily returns to the Cave to prevent others from being harmed, while the claim "that every man of understanding would rather choose to be benefited by another than to be bothered with benefiting him" immediately contradicts it. It is the latter that constitutes the exoteric surface of the dialogue, the former its secret teaching. I will support this interpretation by examining the two other passages in the *Republic* that revolve around active and passive forms of the same verb, as here with "benefiting" and "benefited," because all three involve deliberate self-contradiction.

Deliberate self-contradiction opens door to Plato's exotericism.

The third instance (the middle one will here be considered last) is found in Book X, and the subject is the poet *qua* imitator. Placed by Plato in the mouth of his character Socrates, the following words are refuted by the very same action that puts them there:

But, I take it, if he had genuine knowledge of the things he imitates he would far rather devote himself to real things than to the imitation of them, and would endeavor to leave after him many noble deeds and works as memorials of himself, and would be more eager to be the theme of praise than the praiser.¹⁶⁷

By praising Socrates in his dialogues, Plato *qua* imitator proves that he actually prefers praising to being praised, much as the esoteric teaching of the *Republic*—foremost among the "many noble deeds and works as memorials of himself" he will leave behind—is that it is nobler to benefit others than to be benefited by them. The explanation is simple. When Cicero allows his Crassus to observe that Plato never showed himself to be more eloquent than in the speech against rhetoric he placed in the mouth of Socrates in *Gorgias* (*de Oratore* 1.47), he proves the principal point: Plato is a peerless teacher and the essence of Platonic pedagogy is to provoke

¹⁶⁶ 347a7-9.

¹⁶⁷ 599b3-7.

a carefully contrived moment of crisis¹⁶⁸ within the reader¹⁶⁹ by means of paradox,¹⁷⁰ inadequate surfaces,¹⁷¹ intimations of hidden depths,¹⁷² as well as a series of deliberate self-contradictions,¹⁷³ out of which—“like a blaze kindled from a leaping spark”¹⁷⁴—emerges Plato’s teaching. There is clearly something delightfully amiss when Plato—whose little *Ion* is a work of supreme artistry (to say nothing of his *Republic*) and who is unquestionably the greatest poet among philosophers—banishes the poets from his ideal city.¹⁷⁵ When a divinely inspired honey-bee of a Socrates—clearly no stranger to groves, rills, and springs (*Ion* 534a7-b3)—*proves* that Ion’s capacity to interpret Homer is completely irrational, when he makes his eloquent speech against rhetoric in the *Gorgias* (511c7-513c3), when he denies the dialectical efficacy of the written word in *Phaedrus* (275d4-e3), and when he insists on the rectitude of banishing imitators in *Republic* X immediately after he has just made indelible the image of the man, the lion, and the multi-headed beast all joined together in the outer form of a man in *Republic* IX (588b10-e1), we must surely realize that our leg is being pulled.

“There probably is no better way of hiding the truth than to contradict it.”¹⁷⁶ Strauss’s brilliant observation is valuable but characteristically one-sided: Plato and Cicero had long since discovered that there is no better way of *revealing* the truth than by contradicting it, thereby forcing their sympathetic readers to come to its aid. Only the reader who realizes, for example, that Plato’s Socratic manikin has just contradicted the conditions of his own purely literary existence can begin the joyful task of adequately praising Plato for his “many noble deeds and works as memorials of himself.” As it happens, there are other passages in Book VI that involve similar self-contradictions involving Plato and his Socrates: at 495a2-3, Plato’s Socrates rules out the possibility that a rich, well-born, and handsome youth brought up in a great city (494c5-

¹⁶⁸ 520c1.

¹⁶⁹ 520b5-c1.

¹⁷⁰ 473d3-5.

¹⁷¹ 435c9-d2.

¹⁷² 435d3 and 434e4-435a3.

¹⁷³ Beginning with 347d6-8.

¹⁷⁴ *Seventh Letter* 341c7-8 (L.A. Post); compare 435a1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Especially when his surface teaching (433a8, 443c9-d1, 496d6) is identical with that of Homer’s Odysseus (620c3-d2).

¹⁷⁶ Strauss, *Persecution* (“The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*”), 73.

7) would continue to philosophize—i.e., Plato’s Socrates negates the possibility of Plato himself—while a few moments later, at 496d4-5, Socrates denies the possibility of himself as Plato will preserve or reinvent him: that he could, through Plato, continue to benefit his friends and city even after being fed, as it were, to the lions.

This brings us to the third and final example. Socrates creates “the city of good men only” in order to illustrate the principle that it is only the penalty of being ruled by worse men that compels good men to rule.¹⁷⁷ This prepares the way for the Cave because only a ruler who would rather be philosophizing,¹⁷⁸ one who prefers the good of others to his own good,¹⁷⁹ can rule well. Between the Cave in Book VII and the City of Good Men in Book I, Socrates describes the Ship in Book VI. Here the philosopher’s refusal to compete for the helm with ignorant,¹⁸⁰ conniving,¹⁸¹ and dangerous¹⁸² competitors is *defended*; here also is found the last of the three instances linking active and passive verb forms.

But the true nature of things is that whether the sick man be rich or poor he must needs go to the door of the physician, and everyone who needs to be governed to the door of the man who knows how to govern, not that the ruler should implore his natural subjects to let themselves be ruled if he is really good for anything.¹⁸³

Contradicting the Book I penalty, the petulant philosopher chooses not to benefit others by offering to rule them because it is natural for the one who needs to be ruled to seek out the ruler, not the reverse. On the Ship, then, Strauss’s observation holds: “philosophy is injustice.” Although Strauss performed a valuable service by pointing out the importance of an exoteric writer’s deliberate self-contradictions, his own unintentional self-contradiction—i.e., that Plato’s *Republic* justifies injustice¹⁸⁴—also has its uses: Strauss nowhere comes closer to revealing Plato’s true intentions than when he is flatly contradicting them. It is therefore no accident that the image of the Ship (488a1-489a2) and Socrates’ self-refuting

Strauss comes closest to revealing Plato’s true intentions when he is flatly contradicting them.

¹⁷⁷ 347c3-5.

¹⁷⁸ 520e4-521a2.

¹⁷⁹ 347d4-6.

¹⁸⁰ 488b4-6.

¹⁸¹ 488c4-5.

¹⁸² 488c6-7.

¹⁸³ 489b8-c3 (Shorey).

¹⁸⁴ With which Penner’s “non-moral approach to ethics” might be compared; note also Penner’s claim (“Platonic Justice,” 61 n. 27) that “Plato recognizes no exceptionless moral rules.”

portrait of the aloof philosopher (496c5-e2) are quickly followed by the claim that Socrates and Thrasymachus have just become friends and were not enemies before (498c9-d1), a crucial element in Strauss's reading of the *Republic*.¹⁸⁵

Only the reader who understands the ongoing danger posed by Thrasymachus requires no other compulsion except justice itself to "go back down into the Cave." Unlike the guardians in the exoteric city to whom it will not even be permitted "not to wish to go back down,"¹⁸⁶ the philosopher's choice for selfless altruism is completely free, and must be generated, thanks to Plato's pedagogical exotericism, entirely from within, albeit with the help of a midwife's son. In point of fact, Thrasymachus is proved right in his claim that justice is "another's good" (343c3) but is given no opportunity to savor his victory when the just philosopher returns to the dangerous Cave of political life for the express purpose of combating his poisonous influence. In voluntarily choosing to perform two jobs, shielding the weaker from harm in heroic indifference to hemlock or worse, the just philosopher who re-enters the Cave—Cicero springs to mind—repays his debts to Plato,¹⁸⁷ gives both friends and foes their due,¹⁸⁸ and even proves that justice's enemies, both Ancient and Modern, were not entirely wrong.

¹⁸⁵ In addition to Strauss, *City and Man*, 73-87, see Leo Strauss, "Fârâbî's Plato" in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 357-393.

¹⁸⁶ 519d4-5 (translation mine).

¹⁸⁷ Compare 331c3 and 520b6-7; see Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 314.

¹⁸⁸ 332a9-b8.