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

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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-
bott attempted to absolve Plato by arguing that the return to the Cave was only inconsistent with Foster’s utilitarian approach. But W. H. Adkins strengthened Foster’s second claim by denying that a guardian would return to the Cave, 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. In addition to debating about Sachs, 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. 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.

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. Mabott, “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 δικαίοις 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, “Minding 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”).

This article therefore constitutes prolegomena to an altruistic 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 provoking 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. 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 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.

Strauss, who made a distinction between exoteric surface and esoteric essence in his 1941 “Persecution and the Art of Writing.”

Despite the fact that Leo Strauss’s own reading of Plato’s *Republic* is anything but altruistic, 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-Straussian 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.

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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 in turn 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,
to achieve a horizon beyond the revealed tradition\textsuperscript{21} of which Jesus
was merely an intermediate part\textsuperscript{22}—that Strauss, under the influence of Martin Heidegger,\textsuperscript{23} returned to the Ancients;\textsuperscript{24} this decisive aspect of his thought is embodied in what he called “the second
cave.”\textsuperscript{25} Described in English only once (1948)—albeit with an
ominous element of conspiracy added for the first time\textsuperscript{26}—Strauss
published two accounts of “the second cave” in German (1932 and
1935).\textsuperscript{27} But in accordance with the same kind of archeological im-
petus 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.\textsuperscript{28}

The keynote of Strauss’s second cave is an attempt to recover
the natural difficulties of philosophizing.\textsuperscript{29} Enmeshed in our tradi-
tion—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-

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\textsuperscript{21} Strauss, Gesammelte Schriften 2, 387 and 446.
\textsuperscript{22} Strauss, Gesammelte Schriften 3, 238 and 2, 300, 303.
\textsuperscript{23} Strauss, Gesammelte Schriften 3, xix.
\textsuperscript{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: Uni-
versity 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 Guttmann in Heinrich
Meier, Leo Strauss and the Theological Political Problem, translated by Marcus Brainard
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23-4 n. 32.
\textsuperscript{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 (Lan-
ham: Lexington, 2006), 363-382 at 380 n. 40.
\textsuperscript{26} Strauss, Persecution, 155-6; see Meier, Denkbewegung, for publication dates.
\textsuperscript{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,
\textsuperscript{28} “Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart” (1930) in Strauss, Gesammelte Schriften 2, 377-
392 and “Die geistige Lage der Gegenwart” (1932), 441-464.
\textsuperscript{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 \(\text{θεωρεῖν} \) 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.\(^{32}\)

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 Platonism\(^ {33}\) and “Socrates/Plato”—persisted throughout Strauss’s life. In his 1970 “On the Euthydemus,”\(^ {34}\) for example, he was still at-

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\(^{31}\) 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.

tempting to reverse the traditional view that Plato’s Socrates was the enemy of the sophists.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{36}

Still following Nietzsche even after 1929,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{39} only “the corporeality of God” is mentioned by RMbM\textsuperscript{40}—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”\textsuperscript{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


\textsuperscript{38} Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 387 (Zank).


\textsuperscript{40} Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 386 (Zank).

\textsuperscript{41} Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, 443-4 (translation mine).
that the Enlightenment remained enmeshed in both. Even though there are still indications that both the Bible and Greek Philosophy have lost their standing—and that Nietzsche deserves the credit for this salutary development—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, this passage proves that it is not emancipation from historicism, as Strauss himself later admits twice in print, but a Heideggerian Destruktion 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” reflected here as well as in his 1932 article on Carl Schmitt, 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:

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

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,” 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, 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.

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

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\(^{54}\) Strauss, *Persecution*, 36.


\(^{57}\) 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 esotericism 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 esotericism 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 enemies\(^{60}\) and lead to dire consequences for himself\(^{61}\)—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.


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 [cruciatustque], 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].\footnote{in Catilinam 4.1 (translation mine).}

Bombarded with political rhetoric of this kind,\footnote{W. K. Lacey, Cicero and the End of the Roman Republic (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 40-1.} 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,\footnote{Jerome, Letters 22.30.} (2) Cicero’s willingness to present himself as playing a woman’s part—in addition to pario,\footnote{Compare Cicero Philippiics 2.119.} both labor and perfero are associated with child-bearing in contemporary Latin\footnote{Plautus Amphitryon 490, Varro, Res Rusticae 2.19, and O.L.D. (ad loc.).}—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,\footnote{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.} 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.

This realization becomes important when the student turns to Cicero’s philosophical writings, particularly those pervaded by skepticism;\footnote{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.} 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,\footnote{Compare Pliny the Elder Natural History, praef. 7 (Cicero de Republica fr. 1.1) and de Finibus 1.7.} the less visible

\footnote{That Cicero believed self-sacrificing altruism to be morally excellent cannot be denied.}
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

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 aerumnas 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, Plutonic 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

77 Compare Academica 1.16 to Plato Apology 21d3-6.
78 Academica 1.45.
80 Tusculan Disputations 5.11 (translation by J. E. King).
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. 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 Anaxagoras and Cicero’s own decision to “follow the practice of Socrates”—derives from a Platonic project to relieve the reader of error through dialectic. Cicero’s creation of “Cicero” introduces varietas—i.e. a dialectical contrast between author and character—that makes his text exoteric or multiplex.

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. 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).

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. But in a field where skepticism reigns supreme, there is little evidence that Anglophone scholars are willing to entertain any doubts about the dogma of Cicero’s skepticism. 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, explanations must be found “to save the appearances.”

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).
88 de Natura Deorum 1.10.
91 Barnes, “Antiochus,” 92; see also John Glucker, Antiochus and the Late Academy (Göttingen: Vanden hoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 296-8.
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 Academica⁹⁴ 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 Republic¹⁰⁰ 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

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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.”


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,\textsuperscript{107} when exhorted to descend,\textsuperscript{108} he does.\textsuperscript{109} When Walter Burkert noted the entire absence of Plato’s Cave from Cicero’s writings,\textsuperscript{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”\textsuperscript{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 writings\textsuperscript{112} and which finally expresses his embrace of the Platonic Ideas,\textsuperscript{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 \textit{[aut etiam quicumque sim]}—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 \textit{[multiplicium variorumque sermonum]} in which the tracks of Plato have been principally impressed.\textsuperscript{114}

It will be noted that Cicero puts particular emphasis on the fact that Plato’s writings are \textit{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,\textsuperscript{115} the spokesman for injustice in Book III.\textsuperscript{116} And in the Somnium itself, Cicero uses the word “return”\textsuperscript{117} only to describe the rewards\textsuperscript{118} in store for the just

\begin{footnotes}
\item[107] \textit{de Republica} 6.16; compare \textit{Plato Republic} 517a4-6.
\item[108] \textit{de Republica} 6.20 and 6.33; compare \textit{Plato Republic} 520c1.
\item[109] \textit{de Republica} 6.33; compare \textit{Plato Republic} 520e1.
\item[111] \textit{Plato Republic} 539c2-3.
\item[112] \textit{de Divinatione} 2.4.
\item[113] \textit{Orator} 7-10.
\item[114] \textit{Orator} 12 (translation mine); see Elaine Fantham, \textit{The Roman World of Cicero’s De Oratore} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50 n. 2 for translating \textit{sermones} as “dialogues.”
\item[115] \textit{de Republica} 3.8.
\item[117] \textit{de Republica} 6.17, 6.29, and 6.33.
\item[118] \textit{de Republica} 6.12 and 6.29.
\end{footnotes}
man who “dies”\textsuperscript{119} in the service of his country:\textsuperscript{120} Cicero’s emphasis on the advantageous return to heaven partially obscures (while actually revealing) the altruistic return to Rome that is its prerequisite.\textsuperscript{121} And Cicero is even less obvious in his later dialogues. In the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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 (\textit{aeque}) but never more.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{de Officiis}, is best understood in a political context:\textsuperscript{124} like the \textit{Fourth Catilinarian}, it is openly altruistic and it is not presented as a dialogue.

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 [\textit{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 [\textit{nec sibi soli}], but for wife [\textit{coniugi}] and children and the others [\textit{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.\textsuperscript{125}

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

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{de Republica} 6.18.
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{de Republica} 6.15-16 and 6.33.
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{de Republica} 6.17; \textit{hinc profecti huc revertuntur} (“having set forth from here, to here they return”).
\textsuperscript{122} See \textit{Tusculan Disputations} 5.75, 5.82-3, and 5.119. With the latter, compare Plato \textit{Cleitophon} 408e1-2.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Tusculan Disputations} 3.72-3; compare \textit{de Finibus} 2.79, 2.84, and 5.63.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{de Officiis} 1.12 (Walter Miller translation).
\textsuperscript{126} O.L.D. \textit{coniunx} (1b).
nature strictly on the basis of male behavior. 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. . . .” 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].

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; 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

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, to return to “the sewer of Romulus” as an orator from Athens just as Socrates had long ago gone down to the Piraeus with Glaucon to battle with Thrasymachus, it would not only explain a good deal about the philosophical origins of Cicero the politician 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 evil ...

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, Strauss celebrates the lack of concern for others that Cicero deplores: “...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.” 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 [ἔργον], 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.\footnote{140}

There is, of course, considerable authority for this self-interested reading in Plato’s *Republic* itself,\footnote{141} compellingly presented at its conclusion by Homer’s *Odyssey*.\footnote{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.\footnote{143} In their different ways, both Strauss and Penner reject this moral critique.

Unlike Penner,\footnote{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.\footnote{145}

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

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\footnote{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.

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

\footnote{142} 620c3-d2.

\footnote{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.”

\footnote{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.”

\footnote{145} Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, 567-8 (translation mine).
different 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, 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: 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,” i.e., would contradict the basic principle of what appears to be Plato’s account of justice.

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 teaching 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

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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)


149 435c9–d5.
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.”
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 esotericism, 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; 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.

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 Callicles or Thrasyymachus 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 wronged 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. Precisely

157 Strauss, City and Man, 119-21 and Strauss, Political Philosophy of Hobbes, 141-42.
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. Thrasyymachus (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 Thucydides\textsuperscript{161}—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,\textsuperscript{162} so also the only way to defeat Jerusalem was to use it against itself).\textsuperscript{163} In Plato’s world, by contrast, as in Cicero’s—Sallust fulfills the role of Thucydides for the latter\textsuperscript{164}—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.\textsuperscript{165}
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 interruption\(^{166}\) 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.

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

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\(^{166}\) 347a7-9.

\(^{167}\) 599b3-7.
a carefully contrived moment of crisis within the reader by means of paradox, inadequate surfaces, intimations of hidden depths, as well as a series of deliberate self-contradictions out of which—"like a blaze kindled from a leaping spark"—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. 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." 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-
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

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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.  

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,” 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,  and gives both friends and foes their due, 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.