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## GLAUCON'S CHALLENGE, RATIONAL EGOISM AND ORDINARY MORALITY

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In his inaugural lecture 'Duty and interest' delivered in 1928,<sup>1</sup> Prichard singled out for criticism a theme which, he believed, pervaded many ethical theories, both in ancient times and in his more immediate predecessors. Among philosophers, wrote Prichard, Plato is far from being alone in presupposing that *an action, to be right, must be for the good or advantage of the agent* (2002: 26). After spending a few sentences on Cook Wilson and Butler, he resumes:

Nevertheless, when we seriously face the view that unless an action be advantageous, it cannot really be a duty, we are forced both to abandon it and also to allow that even if it were true, it would not enable us to vindicate the truth of our ordinary moral convictions. (2002: 27)

Later in the same lecture, he writes that he will now take it as established

that (1) both Plato and Butler in a certain vein of thought are really endeavouring to prove that right actions, in a strict sense of right actions, will be for the agent's advantage; (2) that their reason for doing so lies in the conviction that even where we know some action to be right, we shall not do it unless we think it will be for our advantage; and (3) that behind this conviction lies the conviction of which it is really a corollary, viz. the conviction that desire for some good to oneself is the only motive of deliberate action. (2002: 35)

I am very grateful to Terry Penner and other participants at the conference for discussion of the first version of this chapter. Terry Irwin generously gave me written comments which forced me to improve my argument. I also owe a lot to earlier discussions with Adam Beresford, now of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, while he was writing his doctoral thesis, 'Moral Reasons in Plato and Aristotle' (cf. n.25).

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in Prichard 1968 and 2002. Page references are to the latter.

## I OBJECTIONS TO PRICHARD'S CHARGES, AND REPLIES

In this chapter I shall go against the stream and offer a partial defence of Prichard.<sup>2</sup> Though his criticism was highly influential, the predominant opinion today seems to be that it was misconceived, or at least that it can be answered. Two main strands of a critique can be mentioned. (In formulating them, I provisionally accept something I discuss below: Prichard's claim that his talk of actions being right, or being a duty, is equivalent to Plato's meaning when he writes that an action is *dikaion*, or just.) The first part of the critique is to protest that, contrary to what Prichard claims, in the *Republic* Plato is not offering to show that just *actions* are for the good or advantage of the agent. Rather, the thesis being defended is one about justice as a characteristic, not of actions, but of *an individual's soul*.<sup>3</sup> The second part asserts that when Plato makes Socrates talk of being just as advantageous for the just person, he must be understood to mean not that justice is an *instrumental* good for the agent, but rather an *intrinsic* good.<sup>4</sup> To combine these, the objector to Prichard says that Plato argues, not that individual just acts pay, but that justice pays, and we must understand that as the claim that justice is in itself worthwhile for the agent to possess (not, that it *advantages* the agent).<sup>5</sup>

My reply to these objections will be brief, and I take them in the reverse order. The issues raised by the second part – that justice is presented as an intrinsic and not an instrumental good – are important and deserving of fuller discussion, but for the purposes of my argument the point can be conceded. All that my discussion requires is agreement that a person's justice is presented as *good for that person*. Once that is conceded, as it is by most if not all scholars, Prichard's objection still has considerable force.<sup>6</sup> As I explain shortly, I'm particularly interested in defending Prichard's claim that even if the theses he finds in Plato were true, they would not enable us to defend the truth of our ordinary moral convictions. What I take him to have in mind is this: it is part of our

2 There are a number of claims and forms of argument to be found in Prichard which I would not wish to defend. His claim (3) above is fair to Plato (in my view) but only if rephrased in terms of *rational* motives, as I argue in section II below.

3 Vlastos 1971b: 67–8.

4 Irwin 1995: 193 argues that justice should be seen as identical to a *dominant part* of happiness. In Kirwan 1965: 172–3 justice is represented as a formal, not an efficient, cause of happiness.

5 A quite different response is that of Professor Penner, who agrees with Prichard that Plato is talking about advantage, but denies that he is talking about morality (chapter 1 above, e.g., at p. 000).

6 A dissenter is Cooper 1999: 27, at least in so far as the *motivation* of the just person is concerned. He insists that the just person's reason for acting is that the good-itself (not his own good, and not anyone's good) demands it.

ordinary moral convictions that a moral person's reason for doing just actions is not that to do so is a good to the agents themselves.

But what about the first part of the reply, which urges, against Prichard, that Plato does not seek to show that just *actions* are for the advantage or the good of the agent, but that justice itself, as a quality in the soul, is a special kind of good for the agent? I am happy to agree that Plato *should* have drawn a firm distinction between the question 'What reason have I to be just and to cultivate justice in my soul?' and the question 'What reason have I to do this, that or the other just action?' Richard Norman makes this point in connection with Prichard's criticism of Plato, and it is an important one.<sup>7</sup> But in truth the distinction is systematically ignored in the relevant discussion, which, for the purposes of this paper, is Books I–IV of the *Republic*. (I return to this issue at the end of the chapter.) Consider, for instance, the climax of the discussion, where Socrates pinpoints the task as inquiring 'whether it is profitable *to do just acts and to practise noble ones and to be just*, whether or not people recognise that you are like that, or *to do unjust acts and be unjust (adikein te kai adikon einai)*' (445a). So the first reply to Prichard is incorrect; Plato does not restrict his speakers' questions and answers to the psychic state of justice in the agent. He is happy to make Socrates pose the question 'Is it profitable?' both about doing just acts and about being just, and indeed to link these in one breath.<sup>8</sup> So the reply that seeks to defend Plato by saying that he seeks to show that justice is profitable for the agent, but not that doing individual just acts is profitable, does not stand up.

## II 'ORDINARY MORAL CONVICTIONS': PRICHARD ON DUTY, RIGHT ACTION AND *DIKAION*; RATIONAL EGOISM INTRODUCED

As already indicated, my chief aim is to support Prichard's charge that Plato's theory cannot vindicate our ordinary moral convictions. In this

7 Norman 1998: 45: 'There is one way in which we might try to avoid it [the position he labels moral egoism], and might retain the idea of one's own happiness and the idea of other people's needs as reasons for altruistic activity. We might do this by distinguishing two levels of reason giving. We could perhaps distinguish between the question, "What action should I perform (here and now)?"', and the question, "What kind of life should I lead?"'

8 I am not suggesting that Socrates hopes to prove that a non-just person, in doing just acts, benefits himself. No doubt the claim that doing just acts benefits the doer would be restricted to the just acts of a just person. What I do draw attention to is the fact that Socrates *is* represented as arguing both that doing just acts, and that being just, benefits the agent (and thereby suggests that this benefit is the just person's reason for doing the acts).

chapter I consider some traces of 'ordinary moral convictions' as we find them in the first two books of the *Republic*. I look at how they are treated (or mistreated) by all parties to the debate – Thrasymachus, Glaucon, Adeimantus and Socrates. I hope to show how the discourses of all the participants omit something important in ignoring and/or distorting these everyday moral views.

Of course, to appeal to 'ordinary moral convictions' is highly dangerous. It may be thought that what Prichard understood by it is so far removed from any fifth-century or fourth-century Greek notion that it is idle to spend any time on his views as quoted above. For a start – it may be objected – neither the Greeks nor we now are inclined to discuss the issues in terms of *duty*. True, but note that in the other quotations Prichard simply speaks about an action's being *right*. Is Prichard's equation of the notions of 'right' and 'duty' with Plato's *dikaion* (just) defensible? There are reasons why one might dispute it. Drawing on Williams's distinction, we might point out that *dikaion* (just) is a thick moral concept, whereas 'right' (as well as 'duty') is a thin one. Indeed, we should recall that justice is only one of four virtues discussed in the *Republic* (the others being wisdom, courage and temperance), though of course it is by far the most prominent.

Despite these considerations, it is not a distortion to regard the challenge 'Why should I be just/do just actions?'<sup>9</sup> as being very close in spirit to the challenge 'Why should I be moral/why should I do what is right/my duty?' And many scholars – whether or not they have accepted Prichard's critique – have agreed with this. Here is a further piece of evidence in its support. Although, as noted above, four virtues are discussed, of which justice is but one, the other three are – in Books II–IV of the *Republic* – used only to describe agents (whether the person, or the *polis*). Only *dikaios* is used of actions as well as agents. This supports the impression that discussion of just actions is in effect discussion of right actions, specifically, actions in which we do the right thing by others. So I am happy to go along with Prichard's framing of Plato's question in terms of right actions.

In favour of this rough equation of the just with the right, we can note that the range of actions designated *dikaion* and *adikon* (just and unjust) is far wider than those picked out by the English just/unjust. As Socrates reminds us, mentioning vulgar or everyday views (442D–E), typically *adika* acts include depriving someone of the gold they have left on deposit with you; temple-robbing, theft; betrayal, either of friends or of the city; breaking oaths or other agreements;

9 See the end of section I above for evidence that Plato does not (though he should) distinguish these questions.

adultery; neglect of one's parents; not giving due care to the gods. Many of these would not naturally be described as unjust (but rather simply as wrong or immoral), and similarly many of the acts labelled *dikaia* would not naturally be called just. This handy list will be important when we come to ask how we should understand Glaucon's point that unless you strip a man of his reputation it will be unclear if he acts *tou dikaiou heneka* 'for the sake of the just thing/for the sake of justice'. Henceforth, though I largely continue to use the terms 'just' and 'unjust', as direct translations of Plato's *dikaion* and *adikon*, we must bear in mind that 'right' and 'wrong' would be an equally good and in some ways less misleading translation. To this extent, then, Prichard's equation of the right and the just (when applied to actions) can be accepted.

So what are the ordinary moral convictions Prichard appeals to? First, that what makes just actions just is not their contribution to an agent's happiness, good or well-being. An essential feature of just actions is that they are other-regarding; indeed, we can usefully take over the idea Polemarchus derives from Simonides, that a just action is one in which in some way someone gives another what is owed or appropriate or due to them. As the list of 'vulgar' unjust actions shows, the 'other' may be the *polis* or the gods, as well as other persons. Though this account was rejected in Book I (no doubt because it focused on the justice of actions and not of agents), it certainly chimes well with the list of unjust (and by implication just) actions Socrates offers in Book IV. Of course, that they are other-regarding cannot be the whole of what makes just actions just, since an account is also needed of why they are praiseworthy. Second, and importantly for my argument, a *dikaios*/just person has reasons for doing *dikaia*/just actions which are independent of the agent's own good or happiness. This second point could be understood in terms of either motivating or justifying reasons. I am assuming that 'ordinary moral convictions' are at odds with both forms of egoism, psychological and rational. Rational egoism is the thesis in which I am mainly interested, but let us first get the other out of the way.

*Psychological egoism* is the thesis that the sole ultimate motive of action is the agent's own happiness/good/well-being. As I mentioned in my introduction, Prichard does assume that Plato held this thesis (and some views expressed by Socrates in, say, *Protagoras* and *Meno* offer some support). But I think that this is wrong. Certainly, all speakers in the *Republic* assume that one's own good is a very pervasive motive, but, as I shall show in sections III and IV, Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus all briefly mention exceptions. They recognise, but describe scornfully, what I shall label moral 'oddballs', people who

act from considerations of what is just, despite holding that this is in opposition to their own good. A very different kind of exception is recognised by Socrates in his discussion of the tripartite soul. There Socrates argues that sometimes people are motivated by their appetites to do something in opposition to what the rational part recognises is best for oneself. So we should not agree with Prichard that Plato holds psychological egoism to be universally true of all actions, though no doubt Plato regards the motive of one's own good or happiness to be a very common one.

*Rational egoism* (also known as *rational eudaimonism*) is the thesis that the *practically rational* person always acts or chooses with a view, ultimately, to their own happiness. That is, it is a view about what it is *rational* to choose (not about what everyone does in fact choose). I take Prichard to be arguing that 'ordinary moral convictions' deny rational egoism, and are correct to do so. And I take his criticism of Plato to be a challenge to a discussion of morality which assumes that, to defeat the sceptic about morality, it can and must be shown that being just and doing just acts benefits the agent. 'Ordinary moral convictions', once again, deny rational egoism. They deny that the ultimate reason for doing a certain action is that it conduces or contributes to your own happiness. As such, ordinary moral convictions are at odds both with the immoralism of Thrasymachus, who declares that there is no reason to do just acts, since they do not benefit the agent,<sup>10</sup> and with what some have called the moral egoism of Socrates, who replies that there is supreme reason to do just acts and to be just, since to do so and to be so is a special kind of good for the agent.<sup>11</sup>

### III 'ORDINARY MORAL CONVICTIONS': A GLIMPSE IN *REPUBLIC I*

In discussing what I call the glimpses of 'ordinary moral convictions' in *Republic I* (and, in the next section, *Republic II*), I borrow a little from White's *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics* (2002). White is concerned to deny the widespread belief in what he calls Hellenic harmony, the view that in Greek thought, both that of the philosophers and of the common man, there was held to be no conflict, but rather a harmony, between one's own happiness and one's conformity to ethical norms. I do not accept White's interpretation of the major thinkers, wherein he denies that Plato and Aristotle should be characterised as espousing

10 For instance at 348cd.

11 See especially IV. 443–end, discussed in my final section.

eudaimonism or rational egoism.<sup>12</sup> But I think White is absolutely correct about everyday moral views, and is right to argue that the common man did not necessarily espouse eudaimonism or rational egoism. In addition to arguments drawn from Thucydides and Aristophanes, White draws on the *Republic*. He convincingly shows that both Thrasymachus and Glaucon fleetingly recognise (but deride) a type of person who is not motivated solely by pursuit of their own happiness; and they recognise (but do not endorse) a view which holds that there are reasons to act which are not eudaimonist. In the next section I'll consider Glaucon's stance at some length. Here I consider Thrasymachus, drawing on White's discussion.<sup>13</sup> Notoriously, Thrasymachus characterises injustice as *euboulia*, good sense, and justice as high-minded simplicity, *panu gennaia euêtheia* (348c12). Now White's argument – that Thrasymachus recognises and derides non-eudaimonist thinking on the part of the everyday adherent to justice – depends on the adjective *gennaia*, high-minded or noble.<sup>14</sup> If the people whose justice he labels thus – the simple just people – were assumed to be merely pursuing what they took to be their own self-interest in acting justly, then they would deserve the label 'simple', since they are – in Thrasymachus' view – badly mistaken about where their self-interest lies. But Thrasymachus is not merely saying these people are going the wrong way about pursuing their self-interest. In calling their conduct high-minded, he implies that they take the fact that certain conduct is just as a reason for doing it, independent of its being in their interest to act that way; perhaps even in spite of recognising that it is not in their interest to act that way.<sup>15</sup>

12 See Irwin 2004 for a searching review of White's book. While White argues that neither ordinary Greek morality nor Plato (or Aristotle) accepted what he calls Hellenic harmony, Irwin holds that eudaimonism, as defined above, is the predominant view both in ordinary Greek morality and in the philosophers. Irwin's criticisms of White's major theses are telling, and I agree with him against White that Plato's own theory is eudaimonist. But on 'ordinary morality' as glimpsed in the *Republic*, White is, I believe, correct.

13 White 2002: 166–73.

14 Cf. also 361b7 *andra haploun kai gennaion*, a straightforward and noble person. It is true that *gennaios* can have connotations of naivety (see next note on Irwin on this passage), but it seems clear that in the famous description of justice as *panu gennaia euêtheia* it also has the connotation 'high-minded' or 'noble'. Plato is surely echoing Thucydides III.83.1, which also links *euêthês* with *gennaion*. As part of his well-known description of how words came to be differently applied, Thucydides relates 'simplicity, of which nobility has a large share, became a matter for derision'. Here *gennaion* has to have connotations of nobility, and so does it in the mouth of Thrasymachus.

15 Irwin 2004 resists this line of argument. He thinks that Thrasymachus' labelling justice as high-minded simplicity is compatible with his holding that the simple-minded just people are eudaimonists. The naive and foolish belief they hold is not that I can have a good reason for doing something that does not promote my

#### IV EGOISM IN GLAUCON'S DISCOURSE, AND THE ODDBALL

I turn now to the discourse of Glaucon. Let's recall how the whole debate is framed within an assumption of rational egoism.<sup>16</sup> When Glaucon kicks off with a division of goods into three classes, the goods of all three classes are goods *for the agent*. They are all things we welcome for what they bring us, whether directly ('by themselves') or indirectly, i.e., through their so-called consequences.<sup>17</sup> It is sometimes remarked that this leaves no room for something we might regard as good in itself, independently of any good *for someone*. And it's true that the division has no room for such a conception. Another absence, not often remarked, is this: there is no place in the three classes of goods for goods we welcome for their consequences, but not for their consequences *for the agent*. A person who had suffered from the plague might well be aware that he was in no danger of getting it a second time. Might he not still welcome as a good the ending of the plague, or a medicine which cured it or relieved its symptoms, or the practice of a doctor who could help sufferers? Of course, such concern *might* be purely egoistic (the person might value the health and the lives of other people only as contributing to his own well-being), but again it might not. So here is an overlooked class of good: one we welcome for what it brings to others. (This underlines what I said above about the whole discourse being framed in terms of rational egoism.) You may object that we are dealing with a division of goods introduced by Glaucon, which should not, therefore, be supposed to represent Plato's take on the matter. But I don't think this reply will do. It is a prevalent assumption voiced by Socrates in many of Plato's discussions that to desire

interest. Their naive beliefs will be that justice promotes the common interest and that rulers (who like everyone else are recognised to be pursuing their own interest) in claiming to act justly are claiming to promote the common interest as well as their own interest. But this interpretation depends on taking *gennaia* to mean naive. As argued in the previous note, it more probably retains its meaning of being noble or high-minded.

16 Cf. Kraut 1992b: 313: 'the thesis [Socrates] undertakes to prove is phrased in various ways: It is better (*ameinon*) to be just than unjust (357B1); justice is to be welcomed for itself if one is to be blessed (*makarios* 358A3); the common opinion that injustice is more profitable (*lusiteleia*) must be refuted (360C8); we must decide whether the just person is happier (*eudaimonesteros*) than the unjust (361D3); justice by itself benefits (*oninanai*) someone who possesses it whereas injustice harms him (367D3-4)' and so on. The question of which life we should choose is decisively answered by showing which life benefits us more, makes us happier, is better for us etc.: these are simply interchangeable.

17 I pass over the much-debated question of how we should understand the division of goods. I have been convinced by Heinaman's 2002 interpretation, but I don't think my argument depends on a particular interpretation.



something is to desire that it come to oneself.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, it is assumed that to regard something as good is to regard it as good for oneself.

The social contract theory sketched by Glaucon places justice, *to dikaion*, 'in the middle'. This amounts to the claim that justice – that is, me doing just acts – is a second best. It is intermediate in value for me between the best for me (allegedly the situation in which I am able to wrong others by getting what is rightly theirs, and not suffering in return) and the worst for me (in which others wrong me and I am powerless to defend my own interests, 359A6–9). Notoriously, in his presentation of the social contract theory, Glaucon paints a strikingly pessimistic picture of human nature, claiming that everyone, just and unjust alike, pursues *pleonexia* – the desire for more than your fair share – as a good, and that anyone, granted immunity from detection, would commit every crime in the book to pursue his own interest at the expense of others. (Despite this, he will go on to mention an oddball exception, of whom more in a moment.)

It is interesting to note how unsympathetically the social contract theory is presented by Glaucon, in comparison to its appearance in Protagoras' Great Speech.<sup>19</sup> Here are some contrasts. First, the version in Protagoras' myth makes it advantageous *to the group* to acknowledge laws which prevent them fighting one another, while Glaucon's version presents it as an advantage *to an individual* that he secure a non-aggression pact. Second, Protagoras's version bases law and morality on self-interest, yes, but not on the outright selfishness or *pleonexia* to which the Glaucon-theorists marry it. And third, Protagoras' myth shows how the benefits of coming together in a mutually beneficial set of rules and practices can be achieved only when those in a community have the motives of *aidôs* and *dikê* instilled into them. In effect, Protagoras' myth recognises that if *pleonexia* were indeed the predominant motive of every individual, then law-abidingness, mutual respect and the advantages they bring would not be possible.<sup>20</sup> All this is missing from Glaucon's version. That version may take for granted the advantages to the group of a set of rules and practices which are generally observed, but it is striking that there is no mention of such, but rather, an insistence on *pleonexia* as a motive and a focus on the attractiveness of being a free-rider.

18 *Meno* 77C6–D1; *Symposium* 204D, 205E.

19 The Great Speech, *Protagoras* 320D–328D. Zeus's gift of conscience and justice, *aidôs* and *dikê*, 322BC; cf. 323A. Similar theses can be found in some fragments of Democritus D 109, D 112 (law benefits men, in opposition to Glaucon's view that it constrains them) and D 116, with Taylor 1999: 229.

20 Cairns 1993: 356 stresses correctly that Protagoras envisages internal as well as external sanctions operating. He suggests that nurses, teachers etc. saying 'this is just, this is unjust' etc. (325D) amounts to the teaching of *aidôs*.

Most of the time it is left implicit in Glaucon's speech that good means good for the agent, but occasionally this is made explicit, as at 360C–D, a passage of interest as it is the first appearance of what I shall call the oddball, the exceptional just person.

No one is just voluntarily, but only under compulsion. Justice is not thought to be a good thing for the individual (*hos ouk agathou idiai ontos*). Every man believes injustice to be much more profitable to the individual (*idiai* again) than justice.

Now for the oddball (360D):

anyone who came into possession of the kind of freedom I've described, and then refused ever to do any wrong and did not lay a finger on other people's possessions – he'd be despised as pathetic and brainless, though in public people would be deceptive and praise him, for fear of being wronged.<sup>21</sup>

Here is the first appearance of the oddball: the exception to Glaucon's rule about what everyone would do. True, he is strictly only a hypothetical case, but the remainder of the description suggests he is a reality, praised in public but pitied and despised as a loser. So here is someone who – unlike everyone else – is *hekôn dikaios*, is voluntarily just. He isn't doing it only for the reputation, and in fear of the consequences of being caught stealing someone else's property. Acting justly isn't a *pis aller* for such a person – the silly fool!

I now jump ahead to the reappearance of the oddball in Adeimantus' speech, before returning in the next section to interrogate Glaucon's speech further. Adeimantus recalls how parents, poets and teachers recommend the just life for its rewards, and urge that even the gods can be bought off by appropriate rites. He asks how anyone with any power, money or influence would honour justice rather than laugh at it, but then recognises the possibility of one who through some divine nature has an aversion to wrongdoing, or one who through knowledge refrains from it (366C–D). No one else, among those who act justly, does so voluntarily, *hekôn* (a direct echo of what Glaucon said) – they're compelled to by cowardice, old age or weakness.<sup>22</sup> I suggest we have here another glimpse of the person who doesn't want to take another's property

21 Here and elsewhere translations are from Griffith 2000, though lightly adapted in some cases.

22 Vegetti 1998: vol. 2 notes ad loc. suggests that we are to understand Socrates as the one who through some divine nature has an aversion to injustice, and Plato as the one who refrains through knowledge (*epistêmên labôn*). But I find this implausible.

(360D), because, say, the idea of stealing what rightfully belongs to the orphan disgusts him. White correctly points to these passages as showing Plato's recognition of exceptions to the rule that everyone seeks their own interest in everything, so that if they do just acts, it is because they think it is in their interest to do so.<sup>23</sup> Unlike White, however, I do not find authorial recognition that the approach represented by these exceptions is a rational one. The dice are loaded heavily against morality, in a way I'll now try to demonstrate by returning to Glaucon's speech.

### V THE JUDGEMENT OF LIVES: SOME ISSUES

Glaucon follows up the social contract theory and the thought experiment of Gyges' ring with a further one: the Judgement of Lives. Here an even more extreme counterfactual possibility is envisaged, labelled by Bernard Williams Plato's 'experiment in motivational solipsism'.<sup>24</sup> Two lives are to be described – that of the perfectly unjust person with all the advantages of the reputation for justice, and that of the perfectly just person with all the disadvantages of the reputation for injustice – and we are invited to decide which is preferable, which is happier. We are to subtract nothing either from the injustice of the unjust man or from the justice of the just man, but must assume that each is a perfect example of his particular way of behaving, his *epitêdeuma*. Blocking a gap left in Thrasymachus' position, Glaucon insists that the unjust person is to be allowed to attempt only what he can succeed in; he successfully acquires a reputation for justice, or the power, money and friends sufficient to get his way with or without such a reputation (360E–361A).

Now I draw attention to how the Judgement of Lives is staged, and first, to the unjust person. Though we get a pretty clear picture of what we are to suppose about the unjust man who gets all the advantages of the reputation for justice, please note the following. He is said *adikein ta megista* (to commit the greatest crimes) but Glaucon does not spell out the massively unjust and wicked acts his life entails – the murders, enslavements, betrayals and so on.<sup>25</sup> Since these do not accrue to him,

23 'Two distinct attitudes prevail. Some people find justice attractive and injustice repulsive, and engage on just action without reckoning on advantages to themselves. Many others profess to be like these people, but they do so merely to reap the benefits of a reputation for justice. What they profess, however, is not that they are just for their own advantage, but rather that they think justice beautiful and injustice ugly'. White 2002: 173.

24 Williams 1993: 99.

25 Adam Beresford first drew my attention to this, and to the parallel omission re the just person.

but to others, why – Plato seems to ask – should we be interested in them in judging which life is preferable?

When we turn to the just person wrongly believed to be unjust, some interpretative problems arise. The first is: how should we envisage this? I distinguish two possible scenarios, which I label the Moral Loner, such as Socrates, and the Victim of Calumny, such as Hippolytus. If the just person is a moral loner, then the sense in which he is a just person thought unjust is that onlookers are mistaken *about justice*. We may think of Socrates: what he *does* is perfectly well known; the mistake is not about the nature of his acts, but about their being just or unjust. Whereas on the Victim of Calumny scenario, where the case of our just person thought unjust is like that of Hippolytus, the onlookers' mistake is not about what is just and unjust, but, more simply, about what he has been getting up to. Which does Plato intend the reader to imagine?

Since the figure of Socrates as the pre-eminently just person is so pervasive (cf. 361C7 and 367D8–E1), one might, with Bernard Williams, favour the first reading.<sup>26</sup> But I think we should prefer the second. As the Just man scenario is to be the mirror image of that of the Unjust man, then what we must suppose is a mistake about his lifestyle, about what he actually gets up to, since that was also true in the unjust man scenario: for him it was crucial that he doesn't get caught (361A4). So let's think of the just person as the victim of Calumny or Mistake.<sup>27</sup>

The second question in interpreting the Judgement of Lives is this: what are we to imagine about the just person in the thought experiment? Glaucon issues two injunctions:

- a. take away his reputation (361B7: *aphaireteon to dokein*);
- b. strip him of everything except his justice, and put him in a situation which is the opposite of that of the unjust person.

To anticipate, I shall conclude that the injunctions in fact come to the same thing. But it is worth thinking of some of the many ways in which (b) might go beyond (a). In particular, what if the just person is to be stripped of his power of actually doing just actions, the power to pay his debts, to ransom prisoners of war, to succour orphans, to care for

26 Williams 1993: 98–101 with notes. At n.46, p. 199, Williams suggests the two scenarios of Socrates and Hippolytus, citing for the latter Winnington-Ingram, *Hippolytus: A Study in Causation*, Entretiens Hardt, vol. 6, p. 185. The labels are mine, not Williams's.

27 A second reason for favouring the Victim of Calumny scenario is that it makes more sense of the suggestion that a just person of this kind could escape the notice of the gods in being just.

his parents in old age, return deposits and so on? For those who hold what I have called ordinary moral convictions, it surely makes a huge difference which scenario we are asked to envisage: (1) a just man whose life consists of successful devotion to just causes and actions such as those listed above, but who through misrepresentation or misunderstanding suffers terribly for his false reputation for injustice; or (2) a man with a pure heart and good intentions but whose entire life is somehow so arranged (for instance, by stepmotherly nature) that he never succeeds in just action: never manages to keep a promise, pay a debt and so on *and furthermore* suffers terribly for his false reputation for injustice. Though a certain Stoic or Kantian approach might find as much moral value in (2) as in (1), ordinary moral convictions would naturally value (1) more highly.

Despite the language of (b), strip him of everything etc., it is pretty clear that the injunction is not meant to go beyond (a). Why? First, because immediately Glaucon reverts to the formula: let him do no wrong but have the reputation for supreme wrongdoing. And second, because when the Judgement of Lives was set up, we were told to imagine each as 'a perfect example of his particular way of behaving (*epitêdeuma*)' (360E6).

So for Glaucon, stripping him of everything but his justice simply equates to removing his reputation and all the good things which accrue to him from that. But that passes over in silence something of huge importance: what he achieves in the world by his justice. That he is supremely successful in his practice of justice might seem to us pretty important in the question whether his life is preferable. But the way Glaucon is made to set up the debate shows that, for all of the parties to the argument (and, I am tempted to say, for Plato himself), it seems to be *of not the slightest relevance* what the just person achieves by the *epitêdeuma*, the practice of his *dikaïosunê*. Any good he achieves is another's good, and why should anyone care about that? (Remember we noted how Glaucon also did not trouble to describe the terrible deeds wrought by the unjust person, but only the good results which accrued to him.) Since the good done by the just person is not *idiai*, is not good for him, it is irrelevant to the discussion, apparently. But let's recall the oddball who 'didn't want to do any wrong or to take another's goods' (360D) – soon to be recalled by Adeimantus as the person who through some divine nature is disgusted at the idea of doing unjust acts. If we try to imagine his response to the Judgement of Lives, these considerations – what each person actually achieves in his life, how he interacts with others – would not, I suggest, be irrelevant.

Between the two injunctions ((a) and (b) above) comes a remark which raises another important issue about the Judgement of Lives.

We must remove the just person's reputation for justice, for otherwise 'it will not be clear whether his motive for being just was a desire for justice or a desire for the rewards and the recognition' (*eite tou dikaiou eite tôn doreôn kai timôn heneka toioutos eiê*). (361c2–3)

It is this remark which leads commentators to say that Plato here is making Glaucon give a condition for being a truly just person, viz., that the person must act *tou dikaiou heneka*.<sup>28</sup> I think this is correct, and that the function of the Judgement of Lives is both to say what it is to be just, and to pose the question of whether the life of the just person, so understood, is preferable to that of the unjust person. But it is more controversial what it is to act *tou dikaiou heneka*. Here are some possibilities:

- A. The just person is the one who chooses just acts and does them because they are just (that is, not for some ulterior motive such as rewards, reputation, avoidance of punishment and so on).
- B. The just person values/cares for justice for its own sake.<sup>29</sup>
- C. The just person values justice as an intrinsic good to himself.

In so far as he is appealing to an everyday conception of what it is to be a just person, Glaucon at least intends (A), as the remainder of the sentence quoted above makes clear. It may be thought that (A) and (B) amount to the same thing, though (B) may have the extra implication that to value justice for its own sake is to value it regardless of *any* consequences just acts may have. If so, (B) goes beyond (A). I shall argue that, contrary to appearances, (C) is quite different from both the others.

Exactly what (A) entails is a controversial matter, not so dissimilar from the issues of what Aristotle intends by his insistence that the virtuous person is the one who chooses virtuous actions 'for themselves', and by his other formulation: because of the noble (*hoti kalôn*). I suggest that the ordinary moral convictions on which Glaucon is here drawing would hold the following. To do just acts *tou dikaiou heneka* is for those acts themselves, and the concerns which prompt them – providing for the orphans, making your elderly father comfortable, returning the deposit or whatever – to be the reason for what you do, rather than any ulterior motive of reward, good reputation or whatever. 'Doing just acts for the sake of the just' may well not even require the

<sup>28</sup> Irwin 1999: 182.

<sup>29</sup> Irwin 1995: 258. Most translations support Irwin, if 'acting for the sake of justice' is the same as 'caring for justice for its own sake'. For instance, Griffith, quoted above; Williams 1993: 98, 'it will then be unclear whether he is just for the sake of justice, or for the sake of the honours and rewards'; Grube 1992, 'for the sake of justice itself'.

person to have the thought that his act is just, and I feel more sure that it does not require the agent to 'care about justice for its own sake', though of course these extra conditions may well obtain. It is important here to remember that acts described as *dikaia* are a far wider range than acts we would label just. Recall (cf. section II) the list of 'vulgar' unjust acts at 442E–443A.

An everyday example of someone whose conduct which might be described thus comes in a speech of Lysias.<sup>30</sup> The speaker claims that his father, as well as doing various services to the *polis*, privately provided money for dowries, ransoms and burials, 'thinking a good man should help his friends, even if no-one should know about it'. What the speaker claimed need not of course have been true but it must at least have been faintly plausible. I suggest that the speaker is claiming, in effect, that his father did these things *tou dikaiou heneka* and not for the honours which such deeds might reap if publicly known.<sup>31</sup>

But now I want to bring out the sharp difference between that everyday understanding of what it is to be just person – that you act *tou dikaiou heneka* in the sense I've described – and what Glaucon and Adeimantus ask of Socrates, when they say they want to hear justice praised itself for itself, and to hear what power it has, by itself, in the soul of the possessor. In effect they are saying: 'Most people think justice is one kind of good to the possessor (the kind which is burdensome in itself but has indirect consequences which are good). We want you to show that justice is another kind of good to the possessor.' And, as we know, Socrates accepts the challenge in that very form. Once Socrates has delivered his account, to the satisfaction of all parties, does it follow that the just person – who recognises that justice is this other kind of good to him – acts *tou dikaiou heneka*? Not on any natural understanding of that phrase, I submit.<sup>32</sup>

Put in terms of the three interpretations above, the point is this. (A) is (I suggest) the natural understanding of the condition of what it is to be a just person. (A) is often equated with (B), and it is easy to see how it is possible to slide from (B) to (C), though in truth they are surely very different, given that (C) speaks of valuing justice *as a good for oneself*. The upshot is that Glaucon's speech contains an unstable

30 Lysias 19.59, quoted in Dover 1974: 222.

31 Compare Demosthenes *Oration* 16.10.5 'Then it will be obvious to everyone that you want Messene to exist not because it's just (*tou dikaiou heneka*) but because of your fear of Sparta.'

32 I here disagree with Irwin 1995: 258: 'In focussing on virtues and motives, Plato is not abandoning common intuitions about justice.' I think that the reinterpretation (as (C)) of the condition that a just person act *tou dikaiou heneka* does, subtly, take Glaucon and Socrates far from the common intuitions about moral motivation.

amalgam of the assumptions of 'ordinary morality', as exemplified in 361c quoted above, and his own egoist take on the matter, as exemplified in (C). But while ordinary morality assumes, correctly, that being just gives you reasons for action which are quite independent of your own good or happiness, Glaucon's challenge shows that he cannot accept or even fully understand this, despite his using the 'ordinary moral language' of acting *tou dikaiou heneka*.

## VI CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DISCUSSION OF GLAUCON'S DISCOURSE

Let me draw out some morals of this examination of some details in the discourses of Glaucon and Adeimantus. First, we get glimpses which show that they both recognise an oddball, someone whose acts are not motivated exclusively by desire for their own good or happiness, but by moral considerations. Second, all parties to the debate assume that the only *rational* motivation is a desire for one's own happiness (compare the presuppositions of the three classes of goods); thus oddballs are regarded as foolish, though doubtless also as high-minded. Third, the Judgement of Lives is constructed in such a way that what might seem to us (and to the people I have labelled oddballs) highly salient matters when we come to judge which life is preferable – the dreadful crimes of the one, and the massively beneficial acts of the other – are passed over in almost complete silence, since only the good or bad *for the agent* is deemed to be a relevant consideration. Fourth, in the requirement that a just person act *tou dikaiou heneka*, we get another glimpse of ordinary morality: the everyday thought that a just person is, say, the one who paid for dowries simply to help his poor neighbours, or the one who repays his debts from a concern to give the other what he owed him, and not merely to avoid a lawsuit. It is unclear to me how close this need be to the Kantian thought which the phrase 'caring for justice for its own sake' suggests. It is certainly a long way from what underlies Glaucon's request that justice be shown to be good in itself, since that proves to mean: show that it is a special kind of good for the agent himself. The truly just person, on this new understanding, is the one who acts for the sake of a special kind of good for himself – a far cry from the everyday understanding of the demand that a just person act *tou dikaiou heneka*.

## VII SOCRATES' RESPONSE TO GLAUCON'S CHALLENGE: PRICHARD VINDICATED

It may be objected that I am being unfair in criticising the egoist stance revealed by Glaucon in his challenge to Socrates. After all, Glaucon



rehearses points and theories propounded by others.<sup>33</sup> The challenge he puts to Socrates is a sophistic one, and that accounts for the stress on external sanctions and on selfish motives.<sup>34</sup> But it remains true that Glaucon's own request to Socrates is that he show justice to be a supreme good for the agent himself, and that in setting up this request he shows no understanding of the kind of reasons a just person has for their actions. But, the objector will continue, this criticism still focuses on the discourse of Glaucon, and we should look at the response Socrates makes to the challenge.

My reply is that, had Plato rejected this approach root and branch, he could have made Socrates refuse to accept the challenge Glaucon issues. But Socrates welcomes it, and provides Glaucon with exactly what he asks for: a defence of justice and of just acts in terms of the agent's own good (albeit a good of a very rarefied kind). I stand by the claim I made at the outset, that *all* parties to the debate, Socrates as well as the others, 'omit something important in ignoring and/or distorting everyday moral views'. The key evidence comes towards the end of the reply Socrates makes to the challenge. After developing his analogy between individual and city, and after discussing the division of the soul and the nature of the virtues in an individual soul, Socrates concludes the search into what justice is for an individual in a well-known passage, 443C9–444A2. Justice for an individual is an internal version of 'each doing its own', when the elements of a person's psyche are correctly harmonised. And by showing that justice is this kind of internal harmony, Socrates intends to have shown that it is the just person who is the happier.<sup>35</sup> The eloquent speech concludes thus:

In all these situations he believes and declares that a just and good action is one which preserves or brings about this state of mind [i.e. the harmony of the soul's elements] – wisdom being the knowledge which directs the action. An unjust action, by contrast, is any action which tends to destroy this state of mind – ignorance, in its turn, being the opinion which directs the unjust action. (443E4–444A2)

Recall the distinction (section I) between the questions 'Why should I be just?' and 'Why should I do this, that or the other just act?' If we look at the wider context, the upshot is that justice is supremely worth having since it is a harmony of the parts of the soul, analogous to

33 358E3, 'they say'; 359B5, 'according to this theory'.

34 Sarah Broadie urged this line of argument at the fourth Leventis conference.

35 Cf. n.16.

bodily health. This answers the question 'Why should I be just?' But the extract quoted is about just and unjust *actions*, claiming that just actions are those which promote this excellent state of the soul. The extract gives Socrates' answers to two questions: 'What makes a just act just?' and 'Why should I do this, that or the other just act?'<sup>36</sup> The answer suggested to the first question seems extraordinary, and it is hard to know how seriously it is meant. It is to suggest, as the criterion for calling an action just, that it promotes a state of internal harmony in the agent.<sup>37</sup> The answer to the second question is exactly the one which rational egoism/eudaimonism demands, but it too seems quite unsatisfying. Like Glaucon and Adeimantus earlier, so too here Socrates fails to recognise that a just person has reasons for just action *of a quite different kind* from an appeal to one's own good. What I have called ordinary moral convictions (glimpsed in the oddballs who are scorned in the brothers' speeches) recognise this, and I agree with Prichard that it is a fatal flaw in Socrates' account in the *Republic* that it does not do so.

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36 This passage provides excellent support for the claims made by Prichard quoted at the opening of this essay.

37 Annas 1981: 160 takes a different view. She regards this passage as containing an 'idea which is to become much more developed in Aristotle's ethics (and those of the Stoics): the good man is the norm for just action. . . . the just man identifies the just action by reference to the state of psychic harmony which is Platonic justice, not by reference to lists of duties accepted from any external source'. This sympathetic reading seems to overlook an important difference between Socrates' proposal to identify as a just act one which *produces* psychic harmony (i.e., justice in the individual), and Aristotle's view by which a just act is the act a just person would do in the circumstances. Annas's Aristotelian reading of the passage cannot succeed, I think.

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