

How Totalitarian is Plato's *Republic*?

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1. Preliminaries

This paper revisits the controversy between Vlastos and Popper on the nature of the political proposals to be found in Plato's *Republic*. It may well seem that this is a dead issue, for two reasons. First, the paper's very title will seem an outdated echo of the Cold War era.¹ Second, when in 1977 Vlastos published his critique of Popper's attack on Plato, the furore the latter had provoked, with numerous refutations, had already died down, and Vlastos's piece may well have seemed to be the last nail in its coffin.² Certainly his alternative analysis has been widely accepted.³

Popper, writing with an all-too-vivid awareness of twentieth century totalitarianism in action, painted a dark and in many ways distorted picture of Plato. But, while by no means offering a full defence of Popper's views,⁴ I shall suggest that his charges of 'holism, collectivism and totalitarianism' are not entirely misplaced, and that Vlastos's alternative reading of the political proposals of the *Republic* paints an unduly benign picture.

The question, then, is in what sense and to what extent may the political proposals in the *Republic* be described as totalitarian.⁵ The term has a wide range of meanings, and that with which I shall chiefly be concerned (in sections 2 and following) is that in which it asserts some kind of priority of the state over the individual. But first, to get them out of the way and to set the scene for the main discussion, I consider two other senses of the term. The first is taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: totalitarian = of or pertaining to a polity (i.e. a state) which permits no rival parties or loyalties. Given that definition, defenders and critics alike must agree that the *Republic's* ideal *polis* is totalitarian. While the *polis* contains three classes, the guardians (or rulers), the auxiliaries (or soldiers), and the lowest class of workers (or 'wage-earners'), these are in no way to be rival political parties. One class alone is to have power, and there is no provision for political parties or other sub-groups contending for office. Rival loyalties are firmly excluded, for the guardians, by the abolition of marriage and the family,

and, by implication, of other forms of association. The chief aim of all the arrangements is to have a unified, harmonious and stable *polis*, with no source of dissension or rivalry. It is quite evident, then, that the proposed *polis* would be totalitarian in this first sense.

The second preliminary sense involves the means of control associated with the canonical totalitarian regimes: a state using repressive measures to ensure conformity and to stifle dissent, including lies, state propaganda, and censorship of free speech, art, music and literature. Popper goes to town in reciting and condemning all the lies, propaganda and censorship he claims to find in the proposals for the *polis*. And of course much of it is there, though debate will continue to rage over the 'seriousness' of the proposals, notably the total ban on representative art and literature in *Republic* 10. But while it is uncontroversial that censorship, lies and propaganda feature prominently in the political proposals, I take a different view of the 'lie' over which Popper waxes most indignant, the *gennaion pseudos*, noble lie or fiction, often called the Myth of the Metals, but labelled by Popper as Plato's 'Myth of Blood and Soil'.⁶ In Book 3, after delineating the basis of division of the three classes, Socrates suggests a 'useful fiction', in the form of a myth, to reconcile each to their appointed place in the *polis*, whether as guardian, auxiliary or worker. This place is to be determined by which metal (gold, silver, or a mix of iron and bronze) is supposedly mixed into them (414-15). But while Popper castigates this as Plato's 'greatest propaganda lie', he should have made a different criticism. In mythical form, the story of the metals represents an important truth, not a lie, according to the theory underpinning the political proposals. For that theory depends crucially on the claim that each person is *endowed with an ineluctable nature* which suits them for a determinate role in the *polis*, and that role, like it or not, they must fill. Once that nature has been discerned by those whose job it is to identify people as made of gold, or silver, or bronze-cum-iron, then their lives are mapped out for them. Far from being a propaganda lie, the 'Myth of Blood and Soil' represents a disturbing truth (within the political theory) and one which will prove important in my later discussion. But even with that proviso about what Popper labelled Plato's 'greatest propaganda lie', it is undeniable that in this second sense too, the *polis* would count as totalitarian.

2. The Priority Thesis: strong and weak versions

I turn now to the third characterisation of totalitarianism, which I label the thesis of 'the Priority of the *polis* over the individual'. A particularly interesting version of this is what is known as 'the organic theory of the state'. Though a hint of this can be found in Aristotle,⁷ its most famous exponent is Hegel, and it figures prominently in Popper's hostile discussion of Hegel

in volume 2 of *The Open Society*. Hegel's views had an undoubted influence on fascist ideology, as shown by the following quotations from Mussolini's 1932 essay 'The Doctrine of Fascism':⁸

Fascism reaffirms the State as the true reality of the individual. For Fascism the State is an absolute before which individuals and groups are relative. Individuals and groups are 'thinkable' insofar as they are within the state.

Calling the state organic, Mussolini asserts that the Fascist state 'has a consciousness of its own, a will of its own'. No doubt with some of these later writings in mind Popper claims that in the *Republic* we find a view which

makes of the state a kind of super-organism or Leviathan [and which] introduces into the occident the so-called organic or biological theory of the state (Popper 1966, 79).

But apart from reminding us of the fundamental analogy between the state and the individual, discussed below, Popper offers little hard evidence for the ascription of the organic theory to Plato. Instead he speculates as follows:

Plato's holism, I believe, is closely related to the tribal collectivism mentioned in earlier chapters. Plato was longing for the lost unity of tribal life. A life of change ... appeared to him unreal. Only a stable whole, the permanent collective, has reality, not the passing individuals. It is 'natural' for the individuals to subserve the whole, which is no mere assembly of individuals, but a 'natural unit' of a higher order.⁹

Later Popper uses a different image, that of the cogs in a machine, to make the same point.

If the individual is nothing but a cog, then ethics is nothing but the study of how to fit him into the whole.¹⁰

What the two images have in common, of course, is the idea that citizens are not ontologically independent of the state, any more than hands, feet, heart, and kidneys are ontologically independent of the organism of which they are organic parts, or than its cogs are independent of the whole machine.

That's the Priority Thesis in its strong version — which, following Popper, I label the theory of the State as an Organism, or, the organic theory of the state.

A weaker version of the 'Priority of State over Individual' thesis avoids the strong ontological claim that the individual *is* to the state no more than a hand or foot to the whole organism. The weak version holds rather that the individual *ought* to act as though he or she were thus subordinate to the state.¹¹ On the strong view, the individual's good cannot come into conflict

with that of the state, for the individual — as a mere cog in a machine, or an organic part of a whole — simply does not have a good independent of that of the whole of which he or she is a part. The weaker view, in contrast, leaves room for the individual to have a good (as well as an existence) independent of the state; it rules that the state's good *ought to* take priority over that of the individual.

Now Popper, I shall argue, accuses Plato of both versions; but it seems clear that one cannot consistently hold both. Whether the inconsistency is Plato's, or Popper's, remains to be seen. We've noted how Popper, in the quotations above, ascribes the strong version, the 'organic theory', to Plato. But many of his complaints assume the weaker version; that is, that Plato makes it clear that the aim of the political and social arrangements of the ideal *polis* is that each and every person, be they guardian, soldier or worker, shall strive to do their best to ensure that the whole city is *eudaimōn* — is happy, well-off. For instance, Popper contrasts "the humanitarian" or "liberal" principle that the task and purpose of the state is to protect the freedom of its citizens' with the Platonic principle 'that it should be the task and purpose of the individual to maintain, and to strengthen, the stability of the state' (p. 94). Elsewhere (p. 89) he claims that Plato used the term 'just' as a synonym for 'that which is in the interest of the best state', and again (p. 107) 'The criterion of morality is the interest of the state ... This is the collectivist, the tribal, the totalitarian theory of morality'.¹²

3. The 'organic theory': for and against

I first ask what grounds there are for discerning in the *Republic* the strong version. This sees the *polis* as an organism, whose citizens are nothing but its organic parts, with its corollary that the good/*eudaimonia* of a citizen is simply a function of that of the *polis*. I here consider two possible sources, Book 5 on the best *polis* being like a person with a hurt finger, and Book 4 on the city-individual analogy (also called the city-soul analogy). I dismiss the first, and argue that the second tells both for and against, but chiefly against, the 'organic theory'. Having shown that there are serious problems in reconciling the 'organic theory' with the overall plan of the *Republic*, I move in section 4 to consider the weak version of the priority theory. But that discussion will force us to recognise, especially in the analogy between making the *polis* happy (*eudaimōn*) and painting a statue to be beautiful (Book 4.419-20), compelling hints of the organic theory. But first, let us consider the texts which might support the organic theory.

Rep 5.462: the best city is most like a single person. Socrates to Glaucon:

Is the best governed city the one in which most people say 'mine' and 'not mine' about the same things in the same way? (Indeed.) What about the city that is most like

a single person? For example, when one of us hurts his finger, the entire organism that binds body and soul together into a single system under the ruling part within it is aware of this, and the whole feels the pain together with the part that suffers. That's why we say that the man has a pain in his finger ... (Certainly. And as for your question, the city with the best government is most like such a person.) (*Republic* 462c-d).¹³

Not only are women and children to be held in common, remarks Socrates, but in the best city even pleasures and pains are to be in common. Some may find these remarks chilling, and an indication of the so-called organic theory of the *polis*. But they strike me rather as a plaintive plea for a unity of concern which Plato presumably found lacking in the divided Athens with which he was familiar. 'Wouldn't it be good if the *polis* responded to the joy or hurt of one of its members as a man does to the hurt of his finger': that's how I read the above passage, not as a heavy philosophical claim for the *polis* as an organism.¹⁴

A more promising source for the strong version may lie, as Popper himself asserts (p. 79), in 'the fundamental analogy between the state and the human individual', the analogy which plays such a seminal role in the *Republic's* construction. But I shall argue that while on one reading the analogy supports the strong version of the priority theory, the 'organic theory', a second reading tells equally strongly against.

First: in favour. Recall that the city-soul or city-individual analogy, as developed chiefly in Book 4, goes as follows. (I use 'soul', 'individual' and 'person' interchangeably, in keeping with Plato's own presentation.) Just as the individual soul consists of three parts — the rational, the spirited and the appetitive part, so the city consists of the guardians, the soldiers and the workers. For an individual to be just, and therefore happy, the three parts of the soul must be in a harmonious arrangement, with reason ruling, supported by the spirited part and keeping the appetitive part under control. Likewise, for a city to be just, and therefore happy, the guardians must rule, backed up by the auxiliaries, and the mass of workers must simply mind their own business and do what they are told. Now here is how one might argue that the city-individual analogy supports Popper's 'organic theory' of the *polis*:

It is not the *parts* of an individual person/soul which are happy, but only that which these parts constitute, viz., the whole individual; likewise it is not the parts of the city (the guardians, the soldiers etc.) which can be said to be happy, but only the city as a whole. To ascribe happiness or the lack of it to a *part* of the city, to a class or its members, would be as absurd as ascribing it to one *part* of the soul.

If we take the analogy seriously (this line suggests) it is indeed absurd to ascribe an independent good, well-being or happiness, to a class or its

members — only the whole city can be the *locus* of happiness or well-being. Looking at it that way, we find the city-individual analogy supporting the ascription of the strong version of the priority thesis — the version that makes citizens ontologically dependent on the city. But, as readers, we are bound to feel that something must be wrong with that argument. Recall how it reached the conclusion that makes individual citizens mere parts of the organic whole, the city, and not true individuals in their own right; it was from the premise that *a city is like an individual person* (or soul). It derived a conclusion (there are no true individuals) that contradicts its own starting-point: the claim that there is a similarity between a city with its parts, and an individual person or soul with its parts.

This is what I meant by saying that a second reading of the analogy tells equally strongly *against* the so-called organic theory of the state. It can't be right to say that in the *Republic's* theory there are no real individuals independently of the *polis*, since the work is centred around the account of what justice and happiness is *for an individual*. The *Republic* contains a very robust and striking account of the nature of the individual person or soul, the so-called tripartite soul theory which is immensely powerful and has considerable psychological realism. Whatever conclusions we draw from the famous analogy between a *polis* and an individual, we may not conclude that after all there are no real individual persons, they are merely cogs in a machine or parts of a *polis* as a super-organism. Indeed Popper himself admits: 'One could perhaps defend the view that Plato ... does not offer so much a biological theory of the state as a political theory of the human individual' (p. 79). I shall suggest in the conclusion that the attempt to evaluate Plato's political theory is made enormously difficult by the tension in the *Republic* between the accounts of justice/happiness in an individual and in the city. But this much is clear: the city-individual analogy cannot support the organic theory of the *polis*.

Here is a second argument against discerning in the *Republic* the strong version of the priority thesis, the version which holds that individual citizens are merely organic parts of the *polis*, and thus that their good is subsumed within the good, or *eudaimonia*, of the *polis*. On the strong version, there can't be a conflict between what is good for the individual citizen and what is good for the *polis*, any more than there can be a conflict between what is good for the hand or foot, and for the whole creature of which it is a part. But in the ideal state there appears to be just such a potential conflict, for the guardians, between the good/happiness of the individual guardian and service to the *polis* to ensure its good.

We find this in book 7, at 519e, where, just after elaborating the simile of the ascent from the cave, Socrates faces the objection that a disservice is done to the philosopher-guardians when they are compelled to leave the

pleasures of pure philosophical study and return to the cave, i.e. take a hand in ruling the *polis*. Why is this a disservice? Because once they have enjoyed the pleasures of pure philosophy after several years of studying mathematics, they will be less happy putting that knowledge to use in governing the city. Socrates appears to concede Glaucon's complaint that they'll have a worse life if compelled to take a turn at ruling. He insists that they must take a turn; they owe it to the *polis* from which they have received the wonderful education which has extended their horizons. So, if you are a guardian, there is a conflict between the life that is best/happiest for you as an individual, and the life in which you do the most you can for the *polis*.¹⁵ If the *Republic* is to be consistent, it cannot *also* hold that no such conflict is possible.

With these two arguments, we've almost — but not quite — seen the last of Popper's much-trumpeted 'organic theory of the state'. I'll return to find a grain of truth in it after examining the grounds for finding the weak version of the priority thesis.

4. The Priority Thesis: weak version

I've argued that the *Republic* accords a role to the individual which is inconsistent with that required by the 'organic theory', that is, the strong version of the priority thesis. For the organic theory subsumes the *eudaimonia* and even the existence of individuals into that of the *polis*. I turn now to examine a weaker version. The weak version claims that individuals are required to subordinate their good to the good of the whole *polis*; indeed that all the social and political arrangements, especially those bizarre and restrictive arrangements for guardians, are so designed as to promote the good of the *polis* — hence *totalitarianism*. As I showed in section 2, in many of his criticisms Popper imputes this version to the *Republic*, though without distinguishing it from the strong version.

Here we come to the heart of the debate between Popper and Vlastos. Popper often suggests a reading according to which the good/*eudaimonia* of the *polis* is superior to and apparently independent of that of the classes and citizens which make it up.¹⁶ Vlastos robustly rejects Popper's interpretation, insisting that when Plato speaks of 'the whole *polis*' he means simply, 'all the citizens', and hence that by 'the happiness of the whole *polis*' he means nothing more than the happiness of all the citizens. Vlastos writes:

[T]he *polis* whose happiness and excellence is the end of all just conduct can be *nothing but* the people themselves who are its members — all of them in all their institutionalised interrelations.¹⁷

Which of them is right?

The first round must go to Vlastos. He points out that whenever Socrates is represented as insisting that the aim is the happiness of the whole *polis*, the contrast is *not* (as Popper claims) with the happiness of all the citizens. The contrast is always with the happiness of *one or other subgroup* of citizens. Thus when Adeimantus complains (419a) that what with all the restrictions in their lives, the guardians will not be very happy, Socrates replies that while it wouldn't be surprising if they *were* happy like that, nonetheless

we aren't aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy, but to make the whole city so, as far as possible (420b).

And Vlastos is quite right: 'the whole city' is always contrasted with one or other class of citizens; never with all the citizens. In all the relevant passages, the context never suggests a contrast between making the whole city happy and making all the classes as happy as possible, but rather seems to equate these ideas.¹⁸

So, round one to Vlastos. But not, I think, the whole match. While we can agree with Vlastos that (in these passages) the good of the *polis* is not represented as something independent of the good of all the citizens, but rather is equated with it, that does not entirely settle the issue in Vlastos's favour. While I agree with Vlastos that Plato equates the happiness of the whole *polis* with the happiness of the citizens of all the classes, I disagree with his assumption that we understand the first as mere shorthand for the second. This is the nub of my criticism of Vlastos' reading.¹⁹

It is central to Vlastos's view that we (and Plato) know what it is for an individual to be well-off, to be happy, and so by aggregating individual goods or happiness, we get the happiness of the whole *polis*, i.e. of all the citizens. The view simply becomes classical utilitarianism, or a near relation, where the general happiness is merely the aggregate of individual happinesses. To be sure, in the *Republic* this aim entails gross inequalities of political rights, with extreme subjection of the lowest, and most numerous, class. But, claims Vlastos, a worker is to suffer lack of self-determination 'for his own good'.²⁰ The theory is thus, on Vlastos' reading, paternalist, as well as utilitarian: paternalist insofar as the incompetent are to be treated in a way which may counter their wishes but is for their own individual good/happiness, as a benevolent father treats his children. Or again, if any citizen is asked to endure a hardship 'for the happiness of the *polis*', this is to be understood as 'for the aggregate happiness of all the citizens'. In a nutshell, Vlastos sees the aim as that of making all the citizens as happy as possible, aggregating individual well-being to form that of the whole *polis*, with the subjection of the lowest (and largest) class being only a means to their supposed good or well-being.

But this tame view, I shall argue, is not what we find in the *Republic*.

Despite his exaggerated and sometimes inconsistent criticisms, Popper had, I believe, a greater insight into the true nature of the political proposals than Vlastos. I consider three main texts, all discussed by Vlastos, to argue for this conclusion. The first and most important is Book 4.419-20, on making a statue beautiful.

The analogy which Socrates draws with painting a statue forms a crucial part of his answer to Adeimantus's objection (*Rep* 419a, quoted above) that the arrangements will not make the guardians very happy. Recall that Socrates first replies that the aim is not to make one group outstandingly happy, but to make the whole city so. He continues:

Suppose then that someone came up to us while we were painting a statue and objected that, because we had painted the eyes (which are the most beautiful part) black rather than purple, we had not applied the most beautiful colours to the most beautiful parts of the statue. We'd think it reasonable to offer the following defence: 'you mustn't expect us to paint the eyes so beautifully that they no longer appear to be eyes at all, and the same with the other parts. Rather you must look to see whether by dealing with each part appropriately, we are making the whole statue beautiful.' Similarly, you mustn't force us to give our guardians the kind of happiness that would make them something other than guardians (*Republic* 4.420c-d).

The moral of this analogy with a statue is, I think, clear. There are two ways in which one can make a given part of the statue — say the eyes — beautiful. One is to treat them in isolation and paint them the most beautiful colour — say purple. But that would be to endow them with an *inappropriate* beauty — a beauty which would make them something other than what they are, the eyes of the whole statue. The other, correct, way is to have regard always to the beauty of the whole statue, and with that in mind give each part that colour and shape which will allow it to contribute to the beauty of the whole statue. The application to the relation between the good or happiness of the parts of the city and of the city as a whole is obvious — indeed Socrates helps us by pointing the appropriate moral:

Similarly, you mustn't force us to give our guardians the kind of happiness which would make them something other than guardians.

He goes on to say how they could dress up the farmers in golden robes and let them sing and dance and feast day and night, but again (it is suggested) this would be an inappropriate happiness, indeed, no real happiness at all. Each of the constituent classes is to be made happy — oh yes! — but with that happiness which it derives from its place in the *polis* as a whole — compare the eyes, hands etc. of the statue. This makes it clear that by 'the happiness of the whole *polis*' we are *not* to understand merely the aggregate of the happiness of individual citizens. Indeed, we seem perilously close

It be aggregate of individual happiness of citizens as part of polis.

once again to what we had almost dismissed, the so-called organic theory of the *polis*.

Two later passages also seem to require a less benign interpretation than Vlastos allows them. First, 519e, where the statue passage just discussed is recalled. This time the objector is Glaucon, who once again is concerned about the guardians:

Then are we to do them an injustice, by making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?

Socrates replies:

You are forgetting again that it isn't the law's concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion and compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community. The law produces such people in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together (519e-20a).

This passage, but without the last (important) sentence, is one of Vlastos' star texts against Popper. He properly criticises Popper for omitting from his translation any rendering of *allēlois* — here translated '<share> with each other'; Vlastos translates it '<impart> to one another'. Vlastos writes: 'Thus for them to 'impart benefit to the community' (*to koinon ōphelein*) is to 'impart benefit to one another' (p. 17). But it is important to read the whole of Socrates's reply (quoted above), and to note that it forms a single period in the Greek, though Grube, like other translators, breaks it into two sentences. It is clear that the rhetorical climax comes with the declaration of the aim of binding the city together; this, not making all the citizens happy, is what these arrangements are said to be aiming at; this it is which is contrasted with allowing everyone to do as they choose; this, it seems, is what it is to make the whole city happy. In this passage, with its emphasis on the ultimate goal of binding together the city, no less than in the statue passage, Popper's charges against Plato's theory of holism, collectivism and indeed totalitarianism seem nearer the truth than Vlastos was prepared to allow.

Finally, a passage in Book 9.590c ff., to which Vlastos rightly draws attention.²¹

Why do you think that the condition of the manual worker is despised? Or is it for any other reason than that, when the best part is naturally weak in someone, it can't rule the beasts within him but can only serve them and learn to flatter them? Probably so.

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rules the best person, we say that he ought to be the slave of that best person who has a divine ruler within himself. It isn't to harm the slave that we say he must be ruled, which is what Thrasymachus thought to be true of all subjects, but because it is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without, so that as far as possible all will be alike and friends, governed by the same thing (590c2-d6).

Given that Socrates says that the slave (this is strong language, used of all those members of the lowest class) is to be ruled by another, but not to harm the slave, Vlastos reasonably claims it is 'for his own good' (p. 29). And perhaps it is.²² Certainly the immediately following passage, 590d, compares the law's aim, in controlling the lives of the 'slaves', with that of parents vis-à-vis their children. But note that the expected contrast with 'not to harm the slave' — viz. 'to benefit' — is not made explicit; instead, the rhetorical climax comes with the stated aim 'that ... all will be alike and friends'. Though it carries less weight than the previous passages, this text reinforces the impression that unity and harmony take pride of place as the aim of the political arrangements; that this, and not 'making all the classes happy', is the most revealing account of the aim of making the city happy.

All parties would agree, I think, in ascribing to the *Republic* some weak version of the priority thesis. For Vlastos the claim of the weak version: that individuals should act for the good of the whole *polis*, amounts merely to the thesis that the individual should do their best to 'contribute to the happiness and excellence of everyone in the *polis*' (p. 18). I have argued that close attention to the texts suggests a subtly different analysis.

5. Drawing the threads together

In section 3, I argued that the *Republic* cannot maintain the 'organic theory' consistently with other important themes, notably the prominence of the idea of an individual person and the inquiry into what *eudaimonia* is for such an individual. In section 4, I then turned to an alternative, weaker, version of the Priority thesis, one which forms another strand in Popper's critique. This included the implied charge that when Socrates insists that the aim is to make the whole *polis* happy, he is making the *eudaimonia* of the *polis* independent of and morally prior to that of all the citizens, such that it wouldn't matter if the citizens were unhappy so long as the whole *polis* is happy. While I accepted Vlastos's demolition of the case for reading that view into the *Republic*, I disputed the benign and anodyne reading ('paternalist utilitarian') that Vlastos offered in its place, when explicating the oft-repeated aim of 'making the whole *polis* happy'.

Where does that leave us? Let A1 be the aim of making the whole city happy and A2 be the aim of making all the citizens happy.

I agree with Vlastos that Plato's discussion suggests that A1 cannot conflict with, but is in some way equivalent to, A2. But I dispute his thesis that, for Plato, A2 is the more basic, more explanatory, way of stating the aim. A1 does not, I believe, simply reduce to A2, and our best understanding of A1 is not in terms of A2; if anything the reverse is suggested by the statue passage (419-20) and its companion passage at 519-20. Furthermore, these texts suggest that A1 is illuminatingly redescribed as the aim of harmonising, binding, unifying the *polis*. But then have we not now come full circle back to the organic theory? — at least insofar as it maintained that the *eudaimonia* of the citizen could not conflict with that of the *polis* but must be understood with reference to it.

My answer is that both themes, one conflicting with the organic theory, and one in harmony with it, can be found in the work. As I have already indicated (section 3), the 'organic theory' is inconsistent with the overall plan of the *Republic* as an inquiry into what justice and *eudaimonia* are for an individual person; it is also inconsistent with the strongly individualistic answer given to that inquiry, whereby justice, and hence *eudaimonia*, for the individual is a matter of the internal harmony resulting from each part of the soul playing its proper role. But when we focus on the 'political' sections of the work, there are indications both for and against the 'organic theory', with its subsumption of individual *eudaimonia* into that of the *polis*.

This comes out most clearly when one considers separately the guardian class and the lowest class. (It is unclear what should be said about those in between, the auxiliaries.) If we consider would-be guardians, there is a difficulty maintaining the organic theory, as it is clear that each of them in their own right has a possible *eudaimonia* — viz. a life spent in abstract studies — independently of that of the *polis*. (That is not to say that someone could actually be *eudaimōn* other than in a *polis*.) At times, Socrates seems to concede that the demands of the *polis* should take priority over the individual guardian's *eudaimonia* (as Vlastos, but not Irwin, agrees); and I've argued that the demands of the *polis* do not simply reduce to those of the aggregate individual happiness of all the citizens. But at other points, particularly in the statue passage, a different picture is suggested. The appropriate, and thus the only true *eudaimonia* for each type of person is to live the life in which they make their naturally fitting contribution to the *eudaimonia* of the *polis*, just as the appropriate beauty for an eye is not to be painted the most beautiful colour absolutely, but is that which allows it to contribute to the beauty of the whole statue. On this reading, true *eudaimonia* for a member of any class is to live a life in which they contribute the most their nature allows to the *polis*. And for members of the lowest class, I suspect, this is the only *eudaimonia* of which they are capable. There is

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nothing which can count as individual *eudaimonia* for a worker other than a life so ordered that they make their (largely negative) contribution to the *polis*, for members of this class lack the inner control by reason which is a condition of the possibility of individual *eudaimonia*. With respect to the workers, then, the 'organic theory' with its implications for what counts as being *eudaimōn* may be close to the truth.

Popper's study does not display much interest in the account of individual justice and *eudaimonia* in the *Republic*; rather it focusses attention on the political proposals. Though Popper's unqualified ascription of the 'organic theory' to Plato cannot be accepted, I have argued that strands in the 'political' parts of the work suggest it more strongly than Vlastos was prepared to allow. And where Vlastos saw, in the arrangements for the men and women of the lowest class, a misguided paternalism designed to promote their individual *eudaimonia*, I am more convinced by Popper that the only *eudaimonia* conceivable for members of this class would be, in effect, their playing their part like good cogs in the great machine.

Notes

1. Already in 1972 Leonard Shapiro in his monograph *Totalitarianism* reported criticisms that totalitarianism was a misleading and out-of-date concept. Though he rejected that view, his own analysis of the concept tied it so closely to the three twentieth-century movements, Fascism under Mussolini, National Socialism under Hitler and Communism under Stalin, that the idea of applying it to Plato would have seemed absurd.
2. Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* was first published in 1945. All references are to the revised, fifth, edition of 1966. References to Vlastos are to the original publication, North 1977. The essay is reprinted in Vlastos 1995.
3. For instance by J. Annas 1981, 188; C.C.W. Taylor 1986, 15-20; A.W. Price 1997, 407-8. On Taylor, see further n. 11, on Price see n. 19.
4. I make no attempt to defend Popper's interpretation of Plato as 'historicist'.
5. Neither Popper nor Vlastos shrank from the assumption that in the lines assigned to Socrates they could discern Plato's own beliefs, principles, assumptions and proposals. This is not the time to debate that view.
6. Popper ch. 8, especially 139-41.
7. *Pol.* 1253a19-29: the *polis* is prior in nature both to the household and to each individual, as the whole is prior to the part, cf. the living body vis-à-vis the hand. Every individual, unless beast or god, is a part of the *polis*, which alone is self-sufficient.
8. In Lyttleton 1973. The first quotation is from p. 42, the next two from p. 53.
9. Popper 1966, 80. Popper allows that 'Plato does not defend the [organic] theory, and indeed hardly formulates it explicitly' p. 79.
10. Popper 1966, 108. Though the point is here put hypothetically, it is clear that

Popper holds Plato to accept the hypothesis. Compare 'For the cogs in the great clockwork of the state can show "virtue" in two ways. First, they must be fit for their task ..., and secondly they must be fitted each into its right place and must retain that place' (Popper 1966, 107-8).

11. Though I label it weak, this version is in another sense more extreme in its implications for the subordination of the individual, as suggested by C.C.W. Taylor's enlightening discussion (Taylor 1986, 6-8). In sec. 4, however, I reject Taylor's conclusion, following Vlastos, that the *polis* is totalitarian in only the mildest sense, whereby 'the *polis* is an organisation devised with the paramount aim of promoting individual *eudaimonia*' (Taylor p. 17).
12. Later Popper makes a different claim again; he writes of 'Plato's declaration of his wish to make the state and its citizens happy' (p. 170). Cf. (p. 171) 'There is no reason to doubt that one of his most powerful motives was to win back happiness for his citizens'.
13. All translations are from Grube, revised Reeve, 1992.
14. Aristotle criticises the *Republic's* claim at this point (*Pol.* 1261b), in spite of having earlier written of the *polis* as having the priority over a citizen which a whole organism has over a part such as a hand (cf. n. 7).
15. Some recent writers interpret this passage differently. They insist that since Book 4 has argued that the just person is thereby *eudaimōn*, and since it is said to be a just demand on the guardians that they spend part of their lives ruling the *polis*, there cannot be a conflict between the just course of action (part-time ruling) and that which is best, i.e. happiest for the guardians. See, for instance, Irwin 1995, 299-317. But the text strongly suggests otherwise; Socrates' reply is not: since ruling is the just life, it is also the happiest for them. His reply is: our aim is not to make one group happy (so, even if it is a less happy life than they might otherwise live) guardians must do the just thing and spend part of their lives less well for themselves, but in the manner that is for the good of the *polis*.
16. Popper does not explicitly claim that the *polis* can be *eudaimōn* without the citizens being so, but implies it. Aristotle, *Politics* 1264b16, seems explicitly to charge the *Republic* with the thesis (which Aristotle considers false) that a *polis* can be happy without all or most of its citizens being happy.
17. Vlastos 1977, 14; see also n. 94 p. 26.
18. As well as 420b-21c, see 462-66 and 519-20. The first and last of these are discussed further below.
19. Vlastos's interpretation on this crucial point is accepted by the authors cited in note 3. A.W. Price 1997, 407, defends this reading thus: 'Plato inclines rather to translate out talk about a city in terms of its citizens (as when he derives any quality of a city from its citizens, IV. 435e1-6)'. But Price's general claim — that Plato derives any quality of a city from its citizens — is false, as the *Republic's* account of what it is for a *polis* to be just clearly indicates. The claim at 435e1-6, that the 'kinds and characters' found in the *polis* must come from the citizens, is confined to motives and tendencies (cf. Irwin 1995, 230). So, as Vlastos recognised, only attention to the texts where the aim of 'making the whole *polis* happy' is discussed (and not a purely general argument about the application of predicates) could show that it is to be explained as 'making all the citizens happy'. I argue below that Vlastos fails to show this.

20. p. 29. The labels 'utilitarian' and 'paternalist' are my descriptions of Vlastos' reading, not his own.
21. pp. 28-31. Vlastos notes the extraordinary conjunction of claims, that the members of the lowest class are to be both slaves to and *philo*i of the best type of person, the guardians.
22. The phrase Grube translates 'it is better for everyone to be ruled ...' may be taken to mean, 'for each person, it is better for him/her to be ruled ...'. But it can also mean 'it is better (impersonally) that everyone be ruled ...'.