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The goodness of the virtues and the sun-like good

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ABSTRACT

Does the Longer Way, described but not taken in Plato's *Republic*, provide understanding that justice and other virtues are good? Sarah Broadie argues that it does not, on the grounds that Socrates and the brothers learn about justice's goodness without taking the Longer Way. I argue that Socrates' arguments for justice's goodness are not so complete as to make it impossible for philosopher-rulers to gain from the Longer Way greater understanding of the same point. My main textual evidence is a passage of Book IX (589b–c), a summary that has been widely underappreciated.

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At the end of her book's first chapter Sarah Broadie asks what is gained from the so-called Longer Way that the philosopher-guards will take (*Plato's Sun-Like Good*, 10–12).¹ She outlines two options:

- (A) The guards learn how genuinely just and fine things are not only just and fine but good.
- (B) The guards use goodness to find out which things are just and fine.

The question arises from the interpretation of a particular passage, *Republic* 506a4–b2. I quote Broadie's translation (*Plato's Sun-Like Good*, 9 and 47).

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¹See especially the first full paragraph on page 11 (“two alternative answers suggest themselves ...”). In my overview of Sarah Broadie's scholarship, another part of this issue of the journal, I express my admiration for her books, including this final book on the Good, which shows the characteristic combination of discipline, boldness, and imagination. The blurb's description of it as “revolutionary” is no exaggeration. To avoid repetition, in this article I do not give a summary of the book or explain its value or importance. I respond critically to one of its arguments and explain the argument's function in the book as a whole. In what follows I use ‘guards’, not the more familiar ‘guardians’, to reflect the military context in which they are first introduced, except when quoting Broadie, who uses both ‘guard’ and ‘guardian’.

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T1 “At any rate,” I said, “I imagine that if it’s not known exactly in what way just things and beautiful things are good these won’t have acquired a guard for themselves who’s worth anything very much, that is, if he lacks that knowledge; and it’s my guess that no one will properly know just and beautiful things before [i.e. before he knows in what way they are good].”

“That’s a fair guess,” he said.

“So will the arrangements for our city be completely in order if it’s a guard like this who oversees it – one who is a knower of these things?”

“Surely,” he said.

Much of the book is taken up with explicating Broadie’s favoured option, (B). The main objective of the second – and, by far, the longest – part of the book is to work out how exactly goodness is used, first in dialectical training for government and then in political decision-making. On her account, during the dialectical training a formula for a virtue such as justice is tested by asking whether whatever conforms to that formula is, in fact, *good* without qualification (*Plato’s Sun-Like Good*, 44–52). Later, when the philosophers take up responsibilities in government, they continue to use goodness to evaluate candidates for political action and implementation: the ‘goodness’ test must be passed, now with reference to the city’s current circumstances, before an ostensibly virtuous item is endorsed as genuinely just, or temperate (etc), and suitable for the city (84–90). To use an irreverent image of my own: if we think of Callipolis as heaven, as a new law or reform approaches the pearly gates, with the appearance of a virtue on its face, it is asked an all-important question about its goodness to test whether it really is virtuous and deserves entry: ‘But are you *good*?’

If this is right, the guards must be committed already to the view that justice and other virtues, and instantiations of them, are good. Otherwise they should not be using goodness in the way envisaged in Broadie’s description of this test.² So her interpretation requires her to argue against (A) – and, in fact, she argues for (B) precisely by eliminating (A). The Longer Way is supposed to bear intellectual fruit as yet unknown to Socrates, the brothers and Plato’s readers, whereas at this stage in the dialogue they have already learned that justice is good.

[The first interpretation, (A) above] is less plausible because the knowledge it says the guardians must have – that justice is good in itself – is the conclusion which Socrates and we already possess from the argument about parts and virtues of city and individual towards the end of Book IV. Surely the guardians, since they are to be philosophers, will have imbibed that argument. For that, however, they would not have needed any longer and more exact way than

²Thanks to Christopher Rowe for alerting me to the broader significance of the choice between (A) and (B) for Broadie’s interpretation.

has already been successfully travelled by Socrates and his friends. Surely, though, the philosopher-rulers' trumpeted and to us enigmatic longer way must accomplish more than the disparaged shorter way, which had already been expounded and traversed before Socrates even started to construct the philosopher-side of the philosopher-ruler identified with the third wave in Book V. So, we are thrown on to the second answer: the guardians, through some sort of reference to the good, must be able to recognize which specific things are really just and beautiful.

(*Plato's Sun-Like Good*, 11–12)³

This is one of several places in the book where Broadie contrasts what the philosopher-rulers are imagined as doing – not only in government but in their training for it – with what Socrates and his interlocutors do (compare 4–7, 42 n.54, 48–9).

How complete is the *Republic's* argument for the goodness of justice supposed to be? Is it so complete as to make it impossible for the guards to gain deeper understanding of the goodness of justice and other virtues, or at least so complete as to render any further understanding that the guards might gain too meagre to be a worthwhile achievement of the Longer Way?

Although Broadie speaks only of the argument in Book IV, the main argument of the *Republic* continues into Book IX and even, if we include the rewards just people gain from being recognized as just by other people and the gods, Book X. (I stay neutral on how the arguments of Books IV, IX and X relate to Glaucon's division of goods at the start of Book II.)⁴ There are various indications in Books VI and VIII that the question of justice and human interests is not yet settled (484a5–b2, 544a1–8, 545a2–b2). So, however we evaluate the argument for justice in Book IV and interpret what is said about it, the text indicates that the case for justice has not yet been made in full by the time we read about the Good in Book VI. Never mind, Broadie might say, changing ground a little: the Longer Way should lead to understanding that is not gained by Socrates and the others within the *Republic* as a whole. By the end of Book IX (or, perhaps we should say, Book X), we have heard in full the argument for justice's goodness, and so there is nothing left for the guards to gain on the Longer Way, as on the first of the two options, (A). So (B) remains the only plausible option.

But have we really heard that argument in full? Let us see what Socrates actually says about the completeness or incompleteness of his argument for justice's goodness. Given that the argument extends beyond Book IV

³The argument is summarized in point (3) on page 133. See also the discussion of 505a on page 148: "in saying that just things and the rest, by relating in a certain way to the form of the good, become useful and beneficial, Plato is surely not iterating the great thesis of the whole dialogue, namely that justice in itself is supremely beneficial to the just person. The core of this thesis has already been established by the end of Book IV on the basis of the anatomy of the soul and the functions of its parts, including reason, whose function is to rule ...".

⁴For accounts of Glaucon's distinction, see, for example, Annas, *Introduction*, 314–15; Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 189–93; Devereux, "Justice and Happiness"; Anderson, "Wages of Justice".

into Books IX and X, we should expect those later books, not Book IV, to contain the most explicit evidence. In the relevant part of Book X (612a–614a), Socrates proposes to restore to just people the rewards accruing from the recognition of their justice, but he does not indicate whether the argument is now so complete as to allow no supplement. For the relationship between Socrates' argument and the study of goodness the most important passage, I suggest, is the following from Book IX:

T2 So in every way the person who praises just things tells the truth, it seems,⁵ whereas the one who praises unjust things speaks falsely. For *both* if you look to pleasure *and* if you look to proper condition and benefit, the advocate of justice tells the truth to you, and its disparager doesn't say anything sound or even know what he talking about when he makes his criticism.⁶

(589b8–c4)

As I will soon argue, there are strong reasons in favour of this version of the Greek text, with Socrates mentioning, as objects of consideration, proper condition and benefit on the one hand and pleasure on the other. The passage contains the most explicit indication, in the whole dialogue, of the kind of completeness that its main argument strives to attain. And so it is this passage that must settle whether the goodness of justice has been shown too comprehensively in the *Republic* for the future rulers to learn more about justice's goodness from traversing the Longer Way – as Broadie's argument for rejecting (A) requires.

But first we have to reckon with a question, so far unrecognized in the scholarship, about the text. Burnet's text has *eudoxian* ('good reputation') and adds nothing in the apparatus. Translations from the pre-Slings era presuppose this Greek wording, such as Waterfiels and Ferrari/Griffith ('reputation' in both). But, as Slings' apparatus records – he does not provide further comment in his *Critical Notes* – while other manuscripts have *eudoxian*, manuscript F (Vindobonensis *Supplementum Graecum* 39) has *euexian* ('proper condition', as in the translation above).⁷ Although Slings' Oxford Classical Text was published back in 2003, this alternative has not made its way into editions and translations. For example, the younger Loeb edition (Emlyn-Jones and Preddy, published in 2013) has *eudoxian* (and, as the

⁵As in 444d12–e1 (my other key εὐεξία passage), the potential optative expresses a tentative assertion, not a hypothetical. Hence 'tells the truth, it seems', not 'would tell the truth'.

⁶Κατὰ πάντα τρόπον δὴ ὁ μὲν τὰ δίκαια ἐγκωμιάζων ἀληθῆ ἂν λέγοι, ὁ δὲ τὰ ἄδικα ψεύδοιτο. πρὸς τε γὰρ ἡδονὴν καὶ πρὸς εὐεξίαν [so F; other MSS and Stobaeus εὐδοξίαν] καὶ ὠφελίαν σκοπούμενον ὁ μὲν ἐπαινήτης τοῦ δικαίου ἀληθεύει, ὁ δὲ ψέκτης οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς οὐδ' εἰδὼς ψέγει ὅτι ψέγει. In supplying 'say' (in 'doesn't say') I follow Rowe and Vegetti. Although I use the passage as evidence for the (in)completeness of the *Republic*'s main argument, I do not take "the person who praises just things" to refer to Socrates alone. He will soon consider well-established patterns of praise and blame in their society and the rationale for them (589c–591a).

⁷The manuscript is available online at www.onb.ac.at (search for "Supplementum graecum 39"). The relevant part of the text is on page 414 of the digital viewer.

translation, ‘honor’), without comment, more or less as Shorey’s Loeb did before them (*eudoxian* and ‘reputation’).⁸

Slings notes in his Latin preface that although manuscript F has many errors, sometimes it alone provides the correct reading: his examples are 526d6 (*Critical Notes*, 127); 556a4 (F’s reading defended at *Critical Notes* 145 and 193); 568e8.⁹ And in T2, despite the consensus of editors and translators (including Slings himself), *eudoxian*, ‘good reputation’, cannot be right. Socrates explicitly postpones until Book X the advantages, for a just person, of a reputation for justice. At this point in Book IX reputational advantages still fall on the side of *injustice*, not justice: about one Stephanus page before T2 he has reminded the brothers that he is assuming the unjust person to have the reputation of being just (588b2–4; compare 580c7–8, the just person is happier even if his justice is unrecognized). So a reference to reputation as a consideration in favour of justice would simply be out of place.¹⁰

But we can make sense of *euexia*, ‘good/proper condition’.¹¹ Socrates’ wording (*pros te ... kai pros ...*, “both to ... and to”) suggests a distinction between two kinds of consideration: pleasure on the one hand, proper condition and benefit on the other. The first, “looking to pleasure”, must refer to the discussion of justice and pleasure in Book IX itself. The second, “proper condition and benefit”, has either a local or a remote reference – or indeed both. Local reference: directly before T2 Socrates has got Glaucon to visualize inside each person a many-headed beast, a lion, and a human.¹² He then uses that image to evaluate acts of justice and injustice. To say that acting unjustly is advantageous is to say that it pays to behave in such a way as to indulge and empower the beast and lion, weaken the human, and foster enmity and conflict between them. But saying that just acts are advantageous is to say that it pays to promote the supervisory control of the human and friendship between all three, with the wilder parts of the many-headed beast prevented from growing (588e4–589b6). “Proper condition and benefit” may summarize this argument that acting justly pays: it is beneficial to foster, through just actions, a benign and proper relationship between soul parts and so the proper condition of the soul as a whole. But there may be (or also be) a

⁸So too Vegetti (‘reputazione’) in the 1998–2007 translation and the 2007 Greek text and Italian translation; Rowe’s 2012 translation. The tendency among scholars to think of the Book IV argument as about psychic *health* (see, for example, Scott, *Levels*, 13 and 26) may contribute to the collective inattention to the reading εὐεξίαν. As we will see, in Book IV virtue is also said to be εὐεξία. Brodie herself probably had this in mind when she speaks of “good order” in her own description of the Book IV argument (46, n.58).

⁹Slings also follows F in 484a2, although this is not among his examples in the preface.

¹⁰The problem is at least recognized in Gastaldi, “L’immagine”, where it is suggested that *eudoxia* is the “authentic” good reputation of a just person. But in T2 Socrates has not yet been allowed to credit the just person with a good reputation.

¹¹How could εὐεξίαν have changed to εὐδοξίαν in the transmission? Perhaps assimilation to the previous noun, ἡδονήν (compare West, *Textual Criticism*, 23–4; Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 232).

¹²On this image see, for example, Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*, 294–5; Devereux, “Justice and Happiness”, 301–2, which I follow in emphasizing actions; Gastaldi, “L’immagine”; Scott, *Levels*, 79.

reference all the way back to Book IV. At the end of that book, Socrates says that virtue is “proper condition” (*euexia* again) of the soul (444e1). In fact, in the whole of the *Republic* *euexia* is used, in connection with justice, to mean a condition of the soul only in these two passages: here in Book IX, if we follow manuscript F, and in this passage at the end of Book IV.¹³ Perhaps, then, the considerations summarized as “proper condition and benefit” encompass not only the discussion of internal animals in Book IX and its lesson but also the Book IV argument for justice. There is nothing strained in such a double reference; after all, the passage on internal animals describes in figurative and more graphic terms the soul-parts and the benign and unhealthy relations between them (dragging around, biting) that Book IV has already outlined, although by the time we reach the end of Book IX we have a much better sense of, among other things, the desiderative part’s complexity and the elements within it whose growth must be thwarted (see the discussion of appetites in 558d–559d, 571a–572b). So construed, T2 becomes extremely significant. It shows the kind of completeness that arguments of Books IV and IX – that is, very large portions of the *Republic*’s defence of its main thesis – look to attain. And yet it has received very little discussion in the scholarship.¹⁴

What, then, does T2 suggest about the *Republic*’s argument for the goodness of justice? It says, in short, that the argument is dialectical – by which I mean not that it is an example of the advanced study called ‘dialectic’ in Book VII, but that it aims to speak convincingly to particular perspectives, both to people whose standard is pleasure and to people whose standard is proper condition and the benefits attendant on it.¹⁵ Incidentally, this shows the importance of the discussion of pleasure in Book IX: pleasure is taken sufficiently seriously by a sufficient number of people to make it necessary to consider whether justice helps or thwarts the pursuit of it.

If the completeness of the *Republic*’s main argument is understood in these dialectical terms, is there any scope for improvement? It seems to me

¹³The word is also used of the body’s good condition or vigour in the discussion of eating and necessary appetites (Book VIII, 559a11–b1, b6). That there is *euexia* of the soul as well as of the body is uncontroversial, to judge from a short exchange in the *Gorgias* (464a1–3).

¹⁴The retrospect in T2, from Book IX, does not, of course, take in Book X. It also fails to capture in full the multi-faceted ‘first’ proof, as it is called in the scholarship, that concludes at 580c. This proof mentions the tyrant’s pains (579e5), a point I owe to Erginel (in preparation), but it is not confined to considerations of pain and pleasure (see the comment on tyranny and friendship below). Inattention to T2: when I use each book’s index of passages I find no discussion of T2 in Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*; Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*; Ferrari (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*; McPherran (ed.), *Critical Guide*; Reeve, *Blindness and Reorientation*; Scott, *Levels*. That Broadie does not discuss T2 in *Plato’s Sun-Like Good* is less surprising, as her book is primarily about Books VI and VII.

¹⁵Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 102–4 also argue that Socrates’ proof, uninformed by knowledge of the Good, is dialectical, but they relate the dialectic to the challenge posed by Glaucon and Adeimantus, which on their account treats goodness as what meets human desires. Erginel (in preparation) focuses on the arguments about pleasure in Book IX and argues that those arguments, and even sub-arguments that constitute parts of them, target specific audiences.

that there is. That pleasure is good has been agreed from the start of Book II, where Glaucon distinguishes between different kinds of good. There he says that pleasures are good not because of consequences but in themselves (in fact, they are his only example of this class, 357b4–8). He also says that being healthy is good both in itself and because of its consequences (357c2–4), and health is at least closely associated with proper condition, both in the soul and in the body (444d12–e1, 559a11). But there has been no attempt to show that, in their evaluation of justice, they have considered *every* aspect of human interests, or that pleasure and proper condition exhaust what should be considered under that heading. Other considerations, such as that of friendship, entered their discussion serendipitously: as Socrates considered how a tyrant experiences life, he argued that that tyrants lack friends and must flatter and endear themselves to the most despicable people in their cities (579d10–580a8). (Of course, it may be that, as in some accounts of Epicureanism, the value of friendship can be reduced to that of pleasure, but the *Republic* contains no argument showing this.) For all Socrates knows, there may be still further areas of human interests, as yet unconsidered, that bear on the choice between justice and injustice.

Secondly, although, in the choice between justice and injustice, considerations of one's proper condition and considerations of pleasure point in the same direction, conceivably there are other areas of choice where they conflict. The guards must learn about virtues other than justice: for example, they must foster wisdom in their successors, and they are said to create instances of temperance and beauty as well as of justice in the city (501b1–7). Until they have examined each of the virtues in relation to human interests, they cannot be sure that there will *never* be a conflict between the standards by which goodness is judged. If a conflict arises, what should be prioritized, and why? Here again Socrates is silent.¹⁶

These are two respects in which systematic study of goodness promises more than what we find in the *Republic's* main argument. I conclude that (A) may yet capture at least part of what the guards learn on the Longer Way.

Now that the Longer Way is systematic study of goodness is precisely one of the familiar claims that *Plato's Sun-Like Good* resists. And one of Broadie's other arguments is untouched by what I have said here. She notes that the sun is presented as what we use to perceive other things: "a resource mobilized – without itself being an object of attention – in the process of exploring or contemplating something else" (40; the quoted words are part of a question, but she gives her endorsement later on the same page). We do not gaze at the sun to learn about its own composition or nature; rather, we hold up other objects to learn about them from its illumination. If we take the image

¹⁶There is ... something in the *Republic* for the hedonist and for the non-hedonist ... To which of these strands did Plato attach greater importance? That is anybody's guess" (Crombie, *Examination*, 251).

of the sun seriously, she argues, we are compelled to see goodness as a tool or resource used to understand other items, the virtues. Despite what I have argued above, this independent argument still poses a powerful challenge to traditional approaches to the discussion of goodness in the *Republic*.

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