Lecture Six: The Rule of Reason

Today is our last session, and I want to thank you very much for being here. I've been doing something slightly odd in these talks, perhaps perverse, by coming to one of the world's greatest scholarly centres for ancient philosophy and trying out all these speculative and experimental and not-very-scholarly ideas. And you've been very patient, and I don't know if it's been useful to any of you, but it's been extremely valuable experience for me, and if any of you have further reactions, please feel free to get in touch with me. And I have a particular apology for today: it won't be a summation or peroration or anything, just one more installment in the ongoing project, and rather an incomplete one at that, a treatment of Plato's idea of the Guardian, the expert ruler of the just city.

I'm going to proceed by asking two questions: first, what does a Guardian know? and second, Why is a Guardian willing to rule? Both discussions are going to be a bit fragmentary -- there are a lot of questions about Plato's theory of knowledge and also about his ethical theory that I simply won't be addressing. Nor will have time to say much in a directly modernizing vein

today. But I will say up front that I think Plato's idea of the Guardian is, at a certain high level of generality, the political idea of the *Republic* which can most productively be transposed to our current situation. Plato's idea is that political power should be reconceived as a kind of work, the work of government; and that this work should be in the hands of disinterested public servants, committed to the rational pursuit of the common good. That seems to me an idea very well pursuing, and I'll say a bit more about it at the end. [I've given you a bunch of quotations from great Victorian interpreters on the handout; I won't be able to go over them, but I'm following in their footsteps in my enthusiasm for the Guardian ideal as a perfectionally actionable one today.]

I. What does a Guardian know?

On the first day I made rather a fuss about using the term 'Guardian' rather than 'philosopher-king'. It is after all Plato's own official and strongly preferred term for the ruling class of a just city -- he even coins the term *phulakikê* to make it official that they practice it as an art. But what the Guardians guard fluctuates wildly throughout his account, and at crucial

moments the Guardians are painter-like instead. So Plato's preference for this terminology is, I think, intended not really to pick out some unitary skill, but merely to classify his ruling class as delegates of the state, trusted employees. To see what the epistemic content of their craft is, we need to look elsewhere.

What Plato's Guardians in fact possess is, pretty clearly, the politike techne, the art of politics. This concept is sketched in Book I, as the baseline for argument between Socrates and Thrasymachus. They agree that ruling is a techne, that is, a kind of specialized practical rationality which, in its sphere, leads to reliable success in action. Thrasymachus assumes that its aim (presumably like that of every other craft) is to benefit the practitioner; Socrates argues that it is disinterested, oriented to the good of the object it acts upon (345-7). And the whole political argument of the Republic will amount to a vindication of that Socratic conception of the political craft.

The idea of the *politike techne* has a short but complex history already by the time it enters the *Republic*. The basic, presumably original version of it is sophistic, and appears in Plato's *Protagoras*. Protagoras claims that he teaches virtue: more fully, good judgement [*euboulia*], which makes people

most able or powerful, both at managing their own private lives and in the affairs of the city, in both speech and action. *Euboulia* is skill at making judgements, giving advice, deliberating, especially in political contexts. Plato is mesmerized by the thought that this could be systematized into an art, but convinced that Protagoras' own conception of it is totally inadequate. In the Republic, *euboulia* is contested territory between Socrates and Thrasymachus, just like the politike techne itself. Thrasymachus actually identifies injustice with *euboulia* at 348d, when he refuses to classify it as vice. Socrates then lays claim to the concept for his own theory, by identifying it in Book IV as constitutive of the wisdom of the city at 428b; the term and cognates are then used repeatedly in the passage, which culminates in the claim that since the Guardian's skill, *phulakikê*, "is the one which makes the city of good judgement [*euboulos*] and wise [*sophe*]" (429d). At this point the claim that the Guardians are wise in this way is basically stipulative -- nothing in the account of their early education and selection really does anything to justify or explain a claim to deliberative excellence. So from here on the question is: what kind of study or studies has *euboulia* as its result? (And what kind of person can actually master those studies?) And of course we find out in Books V-VII that the Guardians will be trained for their deliberative work through an extraordinarily

rigorous and demanding curriculum, culminating in the greatest study, the *megiston mathema*, as Socrates repeatedly calls it (503e-5a): that is, the Good.

We can add a richer content to this idea of deliberative skill if we go back to the early dialogues again -- notably the Protagoras, Euthydemus, and Charmides. And I can't help noting, by the way, that these are precisely the other major dialogues in which Socrates is the narrator. (In the first lecture I asked what the significance was of this unusual version of Plato's dialogue form, and I don't think I had a satisfactory answer. But it seems that, for whatever reason, Plato adopted it for a particular project, the project of figuring out the politikê technê.) In the *Protagoras*, Socrates eventually takes up the Protagorean project to argue that a real art of rational deliberation would look like nothing Protagoras could have had in mind. The art of wise decision-making would have to be a proper scientific procedure, a kind of weighing or measuring of courses of action in terms of their comparative value and disvalue. In short, a metretike techne, art of measurement, like the one he sketches in the latter part of the dialogue.

In the *Republic*, measurement and calculation are central to what reason does, as Plato affirms by calling the rational part of soul the *logistikon*. So the Guardians, who are ruled by reason personally and are the collective analogue to the *logistikon* in the city, are presented as expert detectors of value and disvalue. They will be compelled to rule precisely because, after a bit of habituation, they will be much better able than others in the 'cave' to spot what is really good, fine, and just, and so to be done. HANDOUT * We shouldn't be misled, though, by Plato's fondness for perceptual analogies. Detecting that some proposed policy is good or bad overall for the city as a whole might be a very complex business involving many stages of inference. One policy might be systemically sexist in its effects, thereby irrelevantly discriminatory, thereby unjust, thereby bad ipso facto -- I take it that whatever is unjust is simply prohibited to the just city, as it is to the just agent, so that that deliberative chain stops there. On the other hand, some bit of foreign policy might be bad by diminishing the freedom of the state to make alliances, but good by increasing safety or revenue. Then again for Plato increased revenue will only a good consequence up to a point, a *metron,* so more complexity ensues. In order to give an all-things-considered result and issue in a wise decision, value-detection in the Cave will have to be about value in all its species (the just, the fine, and the beneficial seem to

be the highest genera of value, with of course their opposites, 520c), and its calculations won't be the simple matter of summing commensurables and choosing a maximizing option, as it seemed to be in the *Protagoras*. It will be an extremely complex business, as well it should be; as Nettleship wisely points out, government is hard. And every step of it will involve reasoned argument, not just plausibly hypotheses or intuitive hunches.

A third way of thinking about the art of politics comes out in the Euthydemus and Charmides. Each craft is organized around its own ergon, the good or end which it produces; but crafts are not unrelated to each other, and none is quite self-explanatory or normatively self-sufficient. (I discuss this in an old paper on the handout list.) The ergon of the flute-maker is to make good flutes, but what counts as a good flute is determined by the craft which uses them, flute-playing; and what counts as good flute-playing is presumably, for Plato, dependent on its effects on the soul. In the Euthydemus, Socrates explores this kind of hierarchy or regress, relating crafts which make or obtain goods to those which know how to use them (288d-). Without the knowledge of how to use the goods it produces, Socrates insists, even the art of medicine or generalship is worthless; so the *only* knowledge which has value in itself would be a knowledge of how to

use the goods which the other crafts produce. This would be the kingly art: the political art understood as architectonike, sovereign over all the others (a conception also explored by Aristotle at the start of the NE).

This conception of the political art as the architectonic art also appears in the Charmides. Here the necessity for such a craft is introduced by a creepy vision of a city without it:

> "Listen then," I said, "to my dream, to see whether it comes through horn or through ivory.[9] If temperance really ruled over us and were as we now define it, surely everything would be done according to science: neither would anyone who says he is a pilot (but is not) deceive us, nor would any doctor or general or anyone else pretending to know what he does not know escape our notice. This being the situation, wouldn't we have greater bodily health than we do now, and safety when we are in danger at sea or in battle, and wouldn't we have dishes and all our clothes and shoes and things skillfully made for us, and many other things as well, because we would be employing true craftsmen? And, if you will, let us even agree that the mantic art is knowledge of what is to be and that temperance, directing her, keeps away deceivers and sets up the true seers as prophets of the future. I grant that the human race, if thus equipped, would act and live in a scientific way—because temperance, watching over it, would not allow the absence of science to creep in and become our accomplice. But whether acting scientifically would make us fare well and be happy, this we have yet to learn, my dear Critias."
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> "But on the other hand," he said, "you will not readily gain the prize of faring well by any other means if you eliminate scientific action."
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> "Instruct me on just one more small point," I said. "When you say that something is scientifically done, are you talking about the science of cutting out shoes?"
>
> "Good heavens no!"

"You wretch," said I, "all this time you've been leading me right round in a circle and concealing from me that it was not living scientifically that was making us fare well and be happy, even if we possessed all the sciences put together, but that we have to have this one science of good and evil. Because, Critias, if you consent to take away this science from the other sciences, will medicine any the less produce health, or cobbling produce shoes, or the art of weaving produce clothes, or will the pilot's art any the less prevent us from dying at sea or the general's art in war?"

"They will do it just the same," he said.

"But my dear Critias, our chance of getting any of these things well and beneficially done will have vanished if this is lacking."

"You are right."

"Then this science, at any rate, is not temperance, as it seems, but that one of which the function is to benefit us. For it is not a science of science and absence of science but of good and evil. So that, if this latter one is beneficial, temperance would be something else for us."

The thought-experiment is: imagine a city in which every possible art, craft, science, and technology is fully developed, but unguided by any thinking about value, any grasp of what is good or bad. Call it the *City of All the Sciences*. The City of All the Sciences is a kind of grisly anticipatory parody of the just city of the Republic, with the crucial feature cut out. For the missing science required to supervise the others and use their products wisely is the knowledge the Guardians would have, the knowledge of goods and evils; without any grasp of value, the lower crafts are misconceived, abused, mismanaged so that the good they could contribute to society is lost. I've sometimes taught this text to undergraduates and asked them if the City of All the Sciences reminds them of anywhere; and the answer is always,

after an embarrassed pause, Well, here -- our society. That's what I think too, I suppose. My students are worried about tech gone wrong (surveillance technology and addictive apps); Socrates is more worried about corrupting art, poets and visual artists and perhaps doctors too -- anyone who might use their powers without a full grasp of the end of their art, and without regard for their effects on the soul. But the general point is shared, and seems to me to stand. The array of crafts which makes up a city, based on economic need, interdependence, and reciprocity -- which is the fundamental nature of the city for Plato, on exhibit as the First City in Republic II -- is not spontaneously self-regulating or self-ordering. It does not naturally produce the common good. The motivations of individual moneymakers, each practising their craft guided only by economic incentives, need to be counteracted and corrected by a broader and more informed perspective -- a rational perspective explicitly oriented to producing the common good, the perspective of politics. [Thakkar

The wisdom of the Guardians in the Republic thus has a threefold lineage or identity. It is the art of wise political deliberation, what Protagoras and other sophists were stumbling towards. It's also the measuring art, able to unerringly detect value and disvalue of various subspecies and select the

value-maximizing course of action. And third, it's the architectonic art, setting correctly conceived ends for the array of crafts and other lines of work which make up a city, and seeing that their products are managed, integrated, and used for the common good.

Plato doesn't have to choose among these conceptions, or even say very much about them, because they all lead to the same destination. What the expert ruler has to know, on all three conceptions -- the 'greatest study' -- is the Good. Plato is curiously emphatic about this *megiston mathema* not only when he introduces it at 503-5, but when he repeats it later on, at 591c, and in very emphatic terms at 618c, in the Myth of Er. Knowledge of the good, in the general and abstract way required for the triple conception of the political art, can only mean knowledge of the Form, and that can belong only to the dialectician. (That's a choice made with the purposes of the Republic in view; the conception or at least the emphasis of the Statesman is very different.)

I'm not going to say anything about the Form of the Good here. Plato himself tries to tell us as little as he can. But the claim that only dialectic can provide the techne the Guardians need seems to me intelligible even if we

leave questions about what the Form consists in in abeyance. I take it that the need for dialectic comes from the same line of thought as the architectonic conception of the techne itself. The idea is that claims about the good, even of the most local and humble kind, seem to be subject to an endless, interrogative explanatory or justificatory regress. (Broadie).

And of course, it isn't sufficient for the Good to be reliably detected by the Guardian in the Cave: it must be in all cases preferred, valued, pursued, loved. This is supposed to come naturally to people in whom reason rules. For reason itself, the logistikon, has a double orientation, to truth and knowledge on the one hand and goodness on the other. It "has forethought about all of the soul" (441e), "acts from knowledge of the good of "the whole composed of the community of these three parts" (442c), and for the body too (442b). Plato's formulations here leave room for a lot of rich philosophical puzzles. Is it the nature of reason to pursue its own good, but on a broad construal of its self? Or is it to pursue the good of the community of which it is part? Or is to pursue the good as such, on the largest scale it can? Or is the scope of its concern fixed by its appointed teleological *job*, and if so what exactly is that scope? This is our invitation to worry about how far Plato's ethics are in the end egoistic or altruistic, but I'm going to

decline that invitation today -- I will now however turn to look at the ethical requirements for Guardianship from another angle.

II. Why Does a Guardian Rule?

My question here is about one of the central debates regarding the ethics and politics of the *Republic*, in recent English-language scholarship anyway: the 'return to the Cave'. There are two puzzles here, and one is a puzzle about *motivation*. Guardians are on the one hand said to be 'compelled' to take part in politics; but they are also said to be 'willing' to do so. So what kind of compulsion is this, and why is it necessary if they're willing? Second is a puzzle about their *happiness*. Glaucon objects to Socrates: "will we make them live worse, it being possible for them to live better?" Socrates seems to reject Glaucon's objection -- and he had better reject it, since if this arrangement *does* make them less happy, we seem to have the most glaring possible counterexample to his argument that justice is advantageous for the just person. On the other hand, if ruling *doesn't* make them any less happy, why would the Guardians (who are rational agents par excellence) have to

be compelled to do it? So we shuttle back to the first puzzle in an endless loop of scholarly dispute.

Let's make a start by looking more closely at the question of compulsion. Plato is extremely emphatic on this point. It's repeated six times that the Guardians will have to be compelled to rule, and the whole return to the Cave passage is suffused with different expressions of the idea (519e, 520a, e, 521b, 539a, 540a, 540b). However, the nature of the compulsion is left vague. It's clearly not that physical force is applied. Not only would that be practically unworkable, Plato says that the compulsion renders the guardians 'willing' to rule (519d, 520a, 520d, cf. 347d). So the compulsion they experience doesn't override their capacity to choose, but determines their choice in some way.

The tension or paradox dissolves, as Eric Brown has pointed out, if we suppose that the compulsion is that of a law, which the Guardians willingly obey. And this reading is I think secured by the way in which Socrates speaks of himself and Glaucon as the sources of the compulsion. He says things like: "our job as founders is to compel the best natures"; "we will say just things to them while compelling them...", and so forth. Moreover, when

responding to Glaucon's objection Socrates says "My friend, you have again forgotten that it's not the concern of law [*nomos*] that any one class in the city fare exceptionally..." -- evidently taking it as obvious that what they are speaking of here is the law being laid down for the city.

Now the proposed law will be a just one, as Socrates points out, on at least two grounds. First, it demands that the guardians pay their debt to the city, which has supported them and enabled them to experience the happiness of the philosopher. This debt is why the philosopher is obliged to rule only there, and not in unjust cities, where becoming a true philosopher is an uphill battle. And second, their ruling is required for the continued existence of the city, and thus counts as their required contribution, their ergon, to the common good. We might think that the Guardians should want to pay their debts and earn their keep regardless of whether there is a law *compelling* them to do so. But I take Plato's emphasis on compulsion to be his way of affirming that there is one anyway.

This is the obvious sense in which the Guardians are compelled; but it still seems fair to ask why they Guardians *obey* the law. Psychologically speaking, what compels them is a second, internal kind of compulsion: they

recognise the law as just, and take themselves to have an obligation to comply with it. I will have much more to say later about this.

Why then must the Guardians be forced to rule? First, note that Plato has in fact been committed to this claim since Book I, where as a requirement for morally acceptable rule he lays down the *reluctant ruler* principle. HANDOUT There Socrates points out that the only good rulers are ones who do *not* want political power. They do it for 'wages', like other crafts; and their particular 'wage' is to avoid being ruled by worse people. The point of the principle is of course to exclude the pleonectic Thrasymachean ruler, who uses power to exploit his subjects for his own benefit. In Book VII, the principle is presented as a criterion which the Guardians will meet. They meet it because they have something better to do with their time: philosophical activity. The Guardians will have a very strong preference for spending their time in this way; and they will be right in having that preference. For those who are capable of it, intellectual activity regarding eternal realities is the greatest source of happiness there is. Socrates closes the passage with a reaffirmation of the reluctant ruler principle, saying that "men who aren't lovers of ruling must go to it; otherwise, rival lovers will fight". Clearly he again has in mind Thrasymachean rulers, with their

pleonectic commitment to amassing the zero-sum goods of wealth and power. But the emphasis on faction is new and seems to imply a stronger version of the principle. It would seem to exclude *anyone* with a positive appetite for power, even the eager philanthropist or well-intentioned radical, driven by a disinterested desire for the common good. For such figures will fight just as hard for power as the spoils-system politician. But the Guardians, who have a strong active preference for doing something better, will still pass the bar.

So far, Plato's position seems to be quite clear. The Guardians are compelled to rule, and that compulsion takes the force of a law which they recognise as just. The compulsion is necessary because they have a strong and well-founded preference to do something else which excludes government work, namely intellectual activity. The residual puzzle is exactly the one raised by Glaucon's objection: does ruling therefore make them less happy; and if so, how much damage does this do to the argument of the *Republic* as a whole?

Now Glaucon's objection is supposed to sound familiar. The moment is neatly ring-composed with an earlier objection: the one which prompts the 'statues' passage, at the start of Book IV, which we discussed in Lecture

Three. And again, it seems to me clear that Plato once again means to reject Glaucon's objection. Socrates' response at 520a-d breaks into a direct address to the Guardians themselves, as if to persuade them on the occasion of their return -- so, as I suggested in Lecture Four, this crucial moment is also ring-composed with the Noble Lie, which summoned the Auxiliaries out of the earth and likewise directed them to care for the city. The persuasion here consists in an argument that what is being demanded of them is just, along the lines already noted. Socrates then asks whether Guardians so addressed are likely to disobey, and Glaucon concludes, with flat-footed finality: "Impossible", he says. "For we'll be giving just orders to just people". The objection was his, raised on behalf of the Guardians in absentia; but having heard Socrates' response to them, he takes it the case is closed.

To see why Socrates' response gives us all we need, we have to get clear about exactly what Glaucon's objection means. Glaucon asks, "will we make them live worse, it being possible for them to live better?" But the phrase 'live worse' (ie live less happily) is dangerously ambiguous, and so is the scope of the possible here. We need to ask 'worse than what?', and 'possible under what circumstances?'. Compare three cases:

(1) a Guardian who obeys the requirement that she share in the work of government in the just city;

(2) a Guardian who lives in the Isles of the Blessed, ie a just city with no need for a requirement that philosophers share in the work of government (alluded to at 519c);

(3) a Guardian who free-rides, living in the just city but refusing to share in the work of government;

And for the sake of completeness, we might add:

(4) a philosopher (with all the capacities and dispositions of a Guardian) who however lives in an unjust city and doesn't share in the work of government.

The case (4) philosopher is free to do all the philosophy they like, circumstances permitting. But circumstances probably won't permit: they will have to luck into an education, avoid becoming corrupted, not get murdered by the angry mob, and so forth. Case (1) is uncontroversially

happier than *that*: that is, no philosopher would prefer to chance their luck in an unjust city rather than participating in the work of a just one.

Case (2) is more salient. The Isles of the Blessed, alluded to just before at 519c, are a kind of more upscale, selective, magical Hades, offering the prospect of infinite affluent happy leisure under the direct governance of the gods. A philosopher who thinks she's in the Isles of the Blessed thinks that she's lucked into a community where where no political effort on her part will ever be required. Now Plato takes it as obvious that the Guardians *would* be happier in the Isles of the Blessed, where they can engage in uninterrupted intellectual activity without doing anything unjust. And this is what they think too. But the Isles of the Blessed is not actually possible. It's magicworld: in the real world, the work of government has to be done by human beings, and if it's to be done well it has to be done by Guardians, *as* their 'work'.

And that brings us to the really important comparison class: (3) the freerider. Imagine a Guardian whose greatest happiness is in astronomical research, and who needs just another year's worth of calculations to put the finishing touches on her theory of epicycles, but is now told that her number has come

up, and that she has to report for duty in the Ministry of Fisheries. Why should she actually obey that command? Wouldn't someone so wholly dedicated to intellectual activity indeed be happier if she fakes a mild illness, and gets that extra year to do her real work?

Socrates' address explains why the law is just; and in doing so it show that the freerider Guardian isn't a real possibility either. Hence Glaucon's response in dropping his objection: we're giving just orders to just people. Anyone who would freeride by disobeying a just law is ipso facto unjust, and the Guardians are ex hypothesi just. Moreover, the nearest possible counterpart of such a person -- a fake Guardian, someone who has attained the position by mistake and now reveals themselves as unjust by freeriding -- is absolutely *unhappy*. The whole core of Plato's argument in the Republic is that anyone unjust is unhappy; they've corrupted and enslaved their most precious possession, their soul, and the miseries of ill-health, or for that matter public service, are nothing compared to that (444e-5b, 588e-92b). So when our dispirited astronomer deliberates about whether to actually show up for duty, she's by the same process finding something out about herself: whether she is a real Guardian or a fake. But if she is a real Guardian, the deliberation will be short and swift. She'll remind herself of the fact that the

law is just; and if her reason is fully mature and in perfect control of her soul, that should be sufficient.

So Glaucon's objection is disarmed. There is no possible alternative world in which a real Guardian is happier than in the just city. They're happier in the Isles of the Blessed, but that's not genuinely possible; and they have no reason to envy their counterpart in any possible world where they turn out to be a freeriding fake.

So we now have a reading of the return to the Cave which addresses the puzzles I set out. The philosophers are compelled to rule in the sense that they are required to by a law of the just city, and they obey that law because they recognise it as just. In doing so they are not less happy than they would be in any genuinely possible alternative world. One might protest that there is still a puzzle here, and ask: if they are not made less happy, if ruling doesn't harm their self-interest, why do they need to be compelled? But that question gets things backwards. The fact that it's compelled by a just law is the *reason* that ruling is in their interest. Ruling isn't antecedantly or independently happiness-maximizing; but by being compelled in the right

way it becomes a requirement of justice and thereby required for happiness as well.

I'm going to call the reading I've constructed here the *boring* reading of the return to the Cave. What makes it boring is that it sticks to the text, and insists that there's nothing more needing to be said than what Socrates and Glaucon say. Nonboring interpreters have offered a range of ingenious explanations to explain why the Guardians will in fact have a positive motivation to return to the Cave. Several have argued for 'consequentialist' motivations: ways in which ruling as such, and not merely as a requirement of justice, is directly in their self-interest. David Reeve has suggested that if they refuse the polis will be torn apart by civil war; David Sedley argues that the Book I argument about reluctant rulers is still fully in view, and that if they refuse they will be ruled by people worse than themselves. Neither is really a good argument to make to the individual Guardian, however. Each dispirited astronomer will be able to respond, perfectly reasonably, that their fellow Guardians will step up and can do just as good a job as they can.

Other scholars identify a deeper motivation. Irwin draws on the Symposium and Phaedrus to depict the Guardian as motivated by a complex erotic desire

for self-propagation: "the philosopher's concern for the community in which she propagates what she values most about herself gives her reasons to follow the principles that aim at the good of the community rather than her own good." (p. 315) Richard Kraut emphasises that Guardians seek to imitate the Forms by instantiating them in beautiful human lives and institutions. Such arguments get the right result, that there is no real sacrifice of happiness on the part of the Guardians; and I think both are Platonic in general spirit. But if the boring reading is adequate, the motivations they postulate are unnecessary, and there are at least two difficulties with them. First, Plato seems to think that the closer we come to the Forms the more our assimilation to them is expressed in theorizing (*Symp.* 210d-e), not practical activity; so it's not obvious that his metaphysics gives him grounds for valuing the political life as such. Second, if such readings work they're too strong: the need to apply compulsion to the Guardians becomes inexplicable, and it isn't clear why philosophers of the unjust city wouldn't be *engagé* too.

A third interpretive school take the Guardians to be motivated by considerations which are essentially non-rational. Malcolm Schofield seems to think that their earlier conditioning must be at work in their decisions. And Frisbee Sheffield has just published a fascinating reading of the

Guardians as motivated by *philia* for their fellow citizens. But these readings, as we might call them, again seem too strong. They explain why Plato's Guardians *should* rule willingly; but Plato's Guardians *don't* rule willingly, in the sense of having a positive desire to do so. They are fascinating and plausible explanations in search of an explanandum. And the really interesting puzzle here, which they bring out, is why Plato *doesn't* help himself to some of these really excellent suggestions about how to motivate his recalcitrant rulers. (Of course that would require scaling back to the weaker version of the reluctant ruler requirement, but that would be easily done.)

To see why Plato refuses this move, we need to look at Glaucon's summation of it: "just orders to just people". Just people are rule-followers: the Guardian is someone who does the right thing for the right reason, and the right reason is simply because it's just. And this motivation contrasts with *all* of those others. The supplementary positive motivations which interpreters ascribe to the Guardians, deeply various though they are, are all what Kant would call grounds of inclination of the will: contingent desires, at least loosely oriented to the agent's own happiness (even if they interpret that expansively). And the Guardian's motivation is different in kind. When

the she returns to the Cave, she announces herself as someone who for whom considerations of justice are conclusive and compelling all by themselves: as someone who acts from respect for the moral law.

In fact, on the boring reading (and I hope that by now you can see that by boring I mean Kantian), we don't have to suppose that helpful inclinations are never present. They might be; but if the Guardians are to act correctly (Kant would say, if their action is to have moral worth), such inclinations can't be the cause of their action. Instead, they act from an inner rational compulsion which mirrors and internalizes the external compulsion of law. Instead, they obey a maxim which indeed is a natural candidate for the status of categorical imperative: *always obey just laws*. The use of the language of law and compulsion in both cases is not accidental or coincidence. Both Plato and Kant are groping to articulate the spirit in which a truly good person recognises a moral obligation -- especially an obligation that runs deeply counter to their strongest inclinations and their conception of happiness.

My proposal is, then, that with his concept of the Guardian we see Plato once again inventing something curiously modern. Not Kantianism exactly,

but Kantians: agents who experience a conflict between duty and inclination, and, being ruled by reason, choose to side with the former. I say 'not Kantianism' because the shape of the surrounding theory is different: Plato promises happiness to agents who adopt the right rules of action, in the long run, in a way that Kant refuses to do (at least in this life). As a matter of moral theory, Platonism claims that our self-interested end of eudaimonia gives us all overwhelming reason to do whatever justice requires. Still, if 'just orders to just people' is the whole story, the actual deliberation of the Guardian will look very much like the Kantian one; and it's a deliberation in which any thought of self-interest is one thought too many. The Guardian called in to political service will experience strong aversions, reluctance and regret; she'll overcome them not because of inclinations on the other side but because in addition to being a practitioner of the politike techne, she's something even more innovative in political thought: a respecter of the moral law.

III. Closing reflections:

So Platonic Guardians are public officials who meets two kinds of criteria for their role, epistemic and and ethical. Epistemically, they are practitioners of the art of politics. They are able to deliberate well and make good decisions because they are highly skilled detectors of the fine, the good, and the just; and what that means is that they are skilled dialecticians, able to investigate and resolve philosophical aporiai raised by the pursuit of all more particular goods. Ethically, Guardians are obedient to the moral law, with a lifelong commitment to doing what is just. That means being willing to take on government work when justice requires; and, when performing that work, setting aside their own good to pursue that of the community as a whole. And all this is a working out of Plato's principle of political justice, the appropriate work principle, which we discussed in Lecture 3: these are the people to whom public service is appropriate, and in a just city they will be the people who do it.

Of course, like any very abstract political norm this raises more questions than it answers, and it doesn't tell us directly what is to be done. How to best to get government *into* the hands of Guardians, and what other values or constraints need to be taken into account, are further large questions, and perhaps very problematic ones. But they're of no interest unless Plato's norm

is also a norm for us in the first place. I think that it should be a norm for us -- and, crucially, a norm for politicians, rulers, *archontes* at the highest level, not just for civil servants. A great paradox of the *Republic* is that, as the Victorians excitedly realized, Plato invented a conception of government which is highly modern. His concept of Guardianship involves many of the norms we now take for granted for the public service: the absence of personal interest or partiality, the assignment of jobs on the basis of qualifications and expertise, promotions on the basis of merit, a hierarchical chain of command, and so on.

The resemblance is made much stronger by a surprising moment at the very end of his discussion of the just city, at 539-40, and this is the last passage on your handout. Plato says that after their dialectical studies, but before they ascend dialectically to a grasp of the Good, the Guardians will be required to have *fifteen years* of practical experience, in the service of the city. And only after *that* do they descend to the cave a second time, as full rulers. So, rather fascinatingly, the dialectic required to grasp the Good, on which the Guardian's claim to euboulia depends, itself depends not only on her dialectical skill but on the practical experience gained in a long period of public service. The highest offices then, go to those with a combination of

practical experience and intellectual skills, and each is taken to contribute something essential to the other. The second rather astonishing thing here is that, given the general administrative weakness of the Greek polis, and Plato's own distaste for regulation and busywork, it's hard to see how there will be anything for all these junior Guardians to *do* for fifteen years. Plato has invented the civil service hierarchy of the modern administrative state, but as a kind of toy. The division of the Guardians into junior administrators and senior rulers serves serveral functions -- probably above all simply to postpone the age at which the tob jobs are held to the age of reason, which as we all know is fifty -- it's not that there's actually any administrative for the administrators to do, certainly none he can specify.

On this topic we can greet Plato with some good news: Guardians are much easier to produce than he thought they were, at least at the junior levels, and there's actually plenty of work for them to do. Most functional states today manage to reliably produce junior Guardians, who meet the ethical if not fully the epistemic side of Plato's requirements. That's *why* they're functional states. And there's more good news: it turns out that the limitless desire for wealth in the appetitive part, which we discussed last week, is not so irresistable as Plato feared. There's no need to throttle it by denying public

servants families and private houses. As I said on the first day, the Book V mechanisms are not only totalitarian; they're bad institutional design, above all by being unnecessary. Give your Guardians decent wages, a pension, and a precautionary audit from time to time, and most of them will behave as they should, at least in cultures where the expectation is entrenched that they'll be motivated by duty.

The bad news, of course, is that this is true only up to a point. The great puzzle of modern politics from the Platonic point of view is that our top decision makers, our *archontes,* are not expected to be Guardians at all. The average civil servant in the Ministry of Fisheries is almost certainly disinterested, expert, and committed to the rational pursuit of the common good insofar as it involves fish, though they won't be very skilled at it by Plato's standards. But the actual ruler, the Minister, probably isn't of those things. The decision-maker, who should be a wise and dialectically trained value-detector, very likely has no relevant training, not about fish or not about dialectic either. And he may well have no commitment to the common good. He holds the office he does as the result of Thrasymachean politics -- the pleonectic battle for spoils every election. And if he *does* make it his end to pursue the Fisheries-related good using the tools of philosophical

dialectic, he probably won't last very long. There will be people in the Cabinet Office to remind him that his real job is to make the PM look good and help the party win reelection. No doubt at even the highest level in electoral politics there are a few genuine Guardians -- people who are committed to, and qualified for, the rational pursuit of the common good. Likewise there are probably a few Thrasymacheans lurking in the lower ranks of the civil service. But on the whole, we've managed to create a society in which the sorting is upside down: those with the propensity and the capacity for Guardianship are sorted towards the bottom, as government scientists and nurses and public schoolteachers, while the practitioners of Thrasymachean politics rise to the architectonic heights. In short, the City of All the Sciences: and that's correctly identified by Plato's theory as not just an ineffective society but a deeply unjust one.

So study of the *Republic* returns us to the question it started with: does it really have to be this way, as Thrasymachus says, 'in all the cities'? Must our politics be Thrasymachean politics, even though our society is perfectly capable of producing both philosophers and Guardians? Is it really impossible for us to commit to the appropriate work principle, particularly where politics are concerned? We might fear that the status quo *is* inevitable

for distinctively modern reasons, since the very idea of a professional civil service depends on the sharp separation of it from the realm of the politicians. The Victorian enthusiasts on the handout blur that point by talking ambiguously about 'the work of government', and I've been doing the same in my more optimistic moments here. But it might be objected that there are two fundamentally different things here, politics and public service, to which opposed norms apply. Plato's conception of the politike techne is a sort of preemptive objection to that claim, however: for him, the rational pursuit of the common good is a single enterprise, from top to bottom. And I see nothing obviously incoherent or unintelligible about that. Our situation is only inevitable if the whole enterprise is not really possible -- if politics has to be Thrasymachean because Thrasymachus and Glaucon are right about human nature. And Plato has, I think, given us some pretty good arguments that they aren't. If Thrasymachean politics today seems to us so natural as to be inevitable, the reasons for that are contingent, and have to do with cultural corruption of various kinds. There's a long story to be told about how we've come to live in the City of All the Sciences, and to take it as the norm. And if Plato can do nothing else for us he can at least make it clear to us that there really are very different kinds of city we can choose to live in,

with deeply different politics, and he can help us to get clear about what the crucial differences consist in.