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## Just Men and Just Acts in Plato's Republic

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

just Men and Just Acts in Plato's Republic JEROME SCHILLER I. Introduction Too MUCH has already been written about Plato's Republic. But this, strangely enough, is why a little more needs to be written. For the book has been worked over so often that an obvious sign of fatigue has set in: critics are beginning to find such elementary flaws in the Republic that one wonders why he should waste time on such a philosophically embarrassing work at all. It is to counter one of these recent criticisms and thus, hopefully, to help offset the fatigue, that this study is written. It purports not only to show the criticism mistaken, but also to sketch a way of looking at the Republic which should send the reader back for a further look at this incredibly rich work. The richness of the Republic is, indeed, a source of embarrassment for anyone writing on it. For because of its structure it is at least misleading to isolate one topic from the myriad others treated there, and because of its complexity, impossible to document interpretations of more than a few topics. I shall follow the time-honored practices here of merely expressing my bias on some topics (such as my non-political interpretation) and leaving it up to the reader to follow up hints of my interpretations of other topics (such as that of the Sun, Line, and Cave). II. Plato's Alleged Fallacy in the Republic David Sachs and A. W. H. Adkins

have recently claimed that Plato commits the fallacy of equivocation in the Republic, not in the course of some minor argument, but in answering what is probably the central problem posed by the work: Why be just?<sup>1</sup> Simply put, their objection goes like this: In the first book of the Republic, Socrates attempts to prove to Thrasymachus why justice is preferable to injustice. But even Socrates is dissatisfied with this answer and early in the second book, after a brilliantly fashioned defense of the Thrasymachean position by Glaucon and Adeimantus, the brothers ask for a more convincing demonstration from "You, [who have] passed your entire life in the consideration of this very matter." Socrates seems to accept the challenge and proceeds to a search for the concept of justice writ large in the state. Now, claim Adkins and Sachs, Plato never does answer Glaucon's and AdeiDavid Sachs, A Fallacy in Plato's Republic, Philosophical Review, LX(XII (1963), 141-158; A. W. H. Adkins, Merit and Responsibility, A Study in Greek Values (Oxford, 1960), p. 289. Adkins, in developing a political interpretation of the Republic, does not elaborate the criticism as does Sachs; hence I refer in this study primarily to the latter's article. Plato, Republic 376e-3, trans. P. Shorey (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1937-42). All subsequent quotations are from this translation. [1] HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY mantus' request. For though he does eventually purport to show that justice is preferable to injustice, the justice he attempts to prove this of is not at all the same justice that Glaucon and Adeimantus have in mind. Plato has simply equivocated on the term "justice," meaning at one time the set of acts generally considered just, but at another time a certain order in the individual's soul. He has purported to show that an individual with a well-ordered soul reaps advantages, but unless he can show a clear relation between this "Platonic" notion of justice and the "vulgar" notion of justice, the notion which Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus have in mind, he will not have answered the brothers' question, and will thus have avoided the central problem of the Republic. The relation he has to establish is, Sachs claims, that Platonic justice is a necessary and a sufficient condition for vulgar justice. Then he could argue that since he has shown that a man reaps advantages just to the extent that he is Platonically just, (1) a vulgarly unjust individual will not reap more advantages than a vulgarly just one (on the grounds that Platonic justice entails vulgar justice), and (2) a vulgarly just man will reap more advantages than a vulgarly...

# Just Men and Just Acts in Plato's *Republic*

JEROME SCHILLER

## I. Introduction

Too much has already been written about Plato's *Republic*. But this, strangely enough, is why a little more needs to be written. For the book has been worked over so often that an obvious sign of fatigue has set in: critics are beginning to find such elementary flaws in the *Republic* that one wonders why he should waste time on such a philosophically embarrassing work at all.

It is to counter one of these recent criticisms and thus, hopefully, to help offset the fatigue, that this study is written. It purports not only to show the criticism mistaken, but also to sketch a way of looking at the *Republic* which should send the reader back for a further look at this incredibly rich work.

The richness of the *Republic* is, indeed, a source of embarrassment for anyone writing on it. For because of its structure it is at least misleading to isolate one topic from the myriad others treated there, and because of its complexity, impossible to document interpretations of more than a few topics. I shall follow the time-honored practice here of merely expressing my bias on some topics (such as my non-political interpretation) and leaving it up to the reader to follow up hints of my interpretations of other topics (such as that of the Sun, Line, and Cave).

## II. Plato's Alleged Fallacy in the *Republic*

David Sachs and A. W. H. Adkins have recently claimed that Plato commits the fallacy of equivocation in the *Republic*, not in the course of some minor argument, but in answering what is probably the central problem posed by the work: Why be just?<sup>1</sup> Simply put, their objection goes like this: In the first book of the *Republic*, Socrates attempts to prove to Thrasymachus why justice is preferable to injustice. But ever Socrates is dissatisfied with this answer and early in the second book, after a brilliantly fashioned defense of the Thrasymachean position by Glaucon and Adimantus, the brothers ask for a more convincing demonstration from "You, [who have] passed your entire life in the consideration of this very matter."<sup>2</sup> Socrates seems to accept the challenge and proceeds to a search for the concept of justice writ large in the state.

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<sup>1</sup> David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," *Philosophical Review*, LXXII (1963), 141-163; A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility, A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford, 1960), p. 280. Adkins, in developing a political interpretation of the *Republic*, does not elaborate the criticism as does Sachs; hence I refer in this study primarily to the latter's article.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic* 376c 2-3, trans. E. Shorey (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1927-42). All subsequent quotations are from this translation.





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