

Socratic Communism

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The demise of Soviet communism invites a reappraisal of Socratic communism. Many readers believe that the institutions of Socrates' model city are antagonistic to genuine philosophy, that their formulation is intentionally ironic, and that their significance is accordingly limited to the contribution they make to the disenchantment of utopian thinking. I suggest, on the contrary, that the vital nerve of Socratic communism -- "all saying mine and not mine at the same time" -- supports an ethic of responsible detachment, which reorients one's approach to the whole of human affairs in a manner perfectly congenial to Socratic philosophy.

Satirists report that the world's largest congregation of Marxists now resides in American universities. The jest is witty, for it is only reasonable to expect that the demise of Soviet communism -- so far-reaching in its influence on global affairs -- should have *some* effect on mere professors of a political theory. But precisely what effect is unclear. Might does not make right. The worldly triumph of an ideology does not imply that it is a prescription for the best political order. Such a triumph does not even establish one's superiority to rivals committed to the workings of "History" as the highest authority. Worldly success is, after all, notoriously transitory. So we cannot presume upon the future. Our Marxist colleagues may have the last laugh.

The truth, then, remains unperturbed even by the rise and fall of empires. Yet we mortals in our pursuit of truth cannot help but be affected by our circumstances. In this sense, the influence of politics on philosophy is inescapable. The precise character of this influence, depending upon time and place, will vary. This variability places a premium upon discretion in the conduct of philosophy. Discretion is required so that in pursuing truth one does nothing to subvert perfectly decent political or cultural arrangements, and so that in rousing generous souls to inquiry one does nothing to aggravate or to worsen the condition of the narrow-minded. The exercise of such discretion is what distinguishes *political* philosophy, for as Leo Strauss observed, "political philosophy means primarily not the philosophic treatment of politics, but the political, or popular, treatment of philosophy, or the political introduction to philosophy -- the attempt to lead the qualified citizens, or rather their qualified sons, from the political life to the philosophic life" (1959, 93-94).

Political philosophy thus understood eschews prolixity (Strauss 1972, iii), though there are times when it calls for anything but reticence. Strauss was himself remarkably forthcoming in his appraisal of the menace of Soviet communism. He maintained that "the modern Western project, which had provided in its way against all earlier forms of evil, *could not* provide against [this] new form in speech or in deed" (1964, 5).¹ This strikingly outspoken judgment was nevertheless perfectly discreet. By awakening his fellow citizens to the unprecedented nature of the communist threat, Strauss was sounding an alarm in defense of liberal democracy, surely the most decent of contemporary polities if not the best regime simply. In the same circumstance, it could well have been *indiscreet* of Strauss to have warmly welcomed proposals recommending

the communization of property and family life -- proposals such as those formulated by Socrates in Book 5 of Plato's *Republic* -- which might alienate or otherwise reduce the political allegiance of liberal democrats or "their qualified sons."

Strauss was not alone in recognizing the topical relevance and possible scandal of Socrates' approval of communism. Others responded by disparaging Plato's philosophy as a whole on grounds of its congeniality to totalitarianism (see, for example, Popper 1962, 86-89, 166-167). But this was to throw the baby out with the bathwater. As an alternative to such overreaction, Strauss pioneered a reading of Plato's *Republic* in which the dialogue's endorsement of communism is construed as an instance of Socratic irony. On the basis of this reading, Plato could be reckoned an opponent rather than a flatterer of totalitarian communism.

There can be little question but that Strauss's reading today provides the benchmark against which any attempt to shed further light on Socratic communism must be evaluated. So it is fitting we begin our own study of this issue with a brief overview of Strauss's interpretation.

Strauss on Socratic Communism

Like every pioneer, Strauss began by treading in others' tracks. Like Cicero, he saw the *Republic* as an account of political things rather than as a program for political action (1953, 122; 1963, 41; 1964, 138).² But Strauss's reading was more explicit, and it was presented in a manner that was especially well-suited to the needs of his time. Strauss held that Plato reveals "between the lines" both the extravagant cost and the inevitable frustration of the desire for political perfection, and thus concluded that the *Republic* "conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made" (1964, 127). Strauss accordingly offered at the *surface* of his own interpretation a "lesson in moderation," which he claimed to find at the *core* of Plato's *Republic*. Because a lesson in moderation is truly indispensable to any complete philosophical education (1959, 40), it might appear that subscription to Strauss's ironic rendering of Socratic communism is the precondition of taking Plato seriously.³ But surely we may be permitted to ask if it really was Strauss's intention in offering the ironic rendering of Socratic communism to teach moderation? Did he (and do we) even believe it possible to teach virtue in such a way? Or was it perhaps all along his intention in offering this reading to foster a different disposition, one that might in fact serve as a *popular substitute* for the virtue of moderation? Could he, as a political philosopher, have intended this reading as a means of fortifying a certain salutary complacency with respect to the institutions of liberal democracy? How, on the basis of Strauss's own principles, might such questions be answered?

Strauss famously held that there must be continuity between the surface and the core of any great text, no matter how artfully composed, because "the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things" (1958, 13). The generous-souled reader is led from the cave of dogmatically held opinion to the life of philosophy by means of the "obtrusively enigmatic features" of a textual surface, features which Strauss further describes as "awakening stumbling blocks" (1952, 36). But the ironic interpretation of Plato's *Republic* sweeps away the rather substantial stumbling block posed by Socrates' endorsement of communism. By construing Socratic communism as a rhetorical device intended to condemn the very things for which it calls, this interpretation renders the surface of Plato's text -- its manifest approval of the community of wives, children and property -- unproblematic not only for the most narrow-minded or censorious of Plato's readers but also for their "qualified sons," who, after all, start out as prisoners in the same liberal democratic cave (Bloom 1977, 329). Such a pacification of Socrates' controversial political proposals cannot help but disrupt the continuity

that exists in a great book between the problematic textual surface and “the heart of things.” So, by Strauss’s own accounting, the ironic interpretation of Plato’s *Republic* -- if it were taken wholly seriously -- would constitute a philosophical dead-end.

But is it necessary that we take this interpretation so seriously? Minds of a peculiarly humorless stamp might resist the suggestion, but it would appear that Strauss’s interpretation of Socratic communism was never meant to be taken wholly seriously. This assessment follows necessarily from the privileged status within Strauss’s writings that is occupied by his striking statement concerning the significance of perplexity in textual surfaces, which I have quoted above: namely, that “the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things.” Minds too much taken with levity might suggest that in making this statement Strauss was being ironic. Benardete, however, is surely right: he indicates the *preeminent authority* of this statement by describing it as the master’s “golden sentence” (1978, 1). Indeed, Strauss’s declaration of the significance of perplexity in textual surfaces is a veritable North Star in the cosmos of his writings. The bearing of other sentences in Strauss is to be construed in relation to this declaration, not vice versa. Now, if “the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things,” it follows that unproblematic surfaces have no depth. It also happens that Strauss’s ironic reading renders unproblematic (to his audience of liberal democrats) the surface of any of the important texts in which Socratic communism figures. But “lack of depth” is surely an untenable, and even ridiculous, finding in the case of any Platonic writing. One might reasonably infer, then, that Strauss did not intend to present the ironic reading of Socratic communism as his own deepest insight into Plato’s *Republic*.

Strauss did not leave it to us merely to guess at the general character of his own insight into the significance of Socrates’ political institutions. On several occasions he stresses the *pedagogical* importance of these institutions. He observes, for example, that “the superiority of communism to non-communism” is not asserted in order to affirm its opposite, but is instead “intelligible only as a reflection of the superiority of philosophy to non-philosophy” (1964, 115). Strauss’s term “reflection” is especially telling, for it is above all through images in Plato that the learning soul finds her way to true being (see Klein 1965, 117-125; Brann 1967, 36). Similarly, Strauss judges that while the gods in the *Republic* are at best a faint image of the famous Platonic ideas or *eidê*, those “who have come to accept [the model city’s] theology are best prepared for accepting the doctrine of ideas” (1964, 121). Finally, he admits “as a matter of fact” that “the *Republic* never abandons the fiction that [Socrates’ model city] is possible” (1964, 129). Now, the *Republic* never abandons this fiction because the affirmation of the possibility of Socrates’ model city -- or one governed in a manner as near to it as possible -- is the natural consequence of the interlocutors’ insight into the goodness of its underlying constitution. By denigrating this goodness, even on the seemingly moderate basis of concern for the sacrifices it demands, others forsake this insight and renounce the very means Plato provides for progress in philosophy.

If anything, Glaucon -- the young man who is Socrates’ principal interlocutor in the passages in question -- only grows more receptive to the goodness of this polity as the conversation unfolds. Nor does Socrates ever encourage in him anything like the ironic stance now so common among students of Plato. On the contrary, Socrates informs Glaucon (and all others who are listening) that they will have to run the risk of appearing ridiculous in order to carry on the inquiry (445a5-b8, 450d10-451a2, 452b6-c3, 473c6-9).⁴ For this purpose Glaucon is especially well-suited. Socrates finds him, in particular, to be “superlatively courageous always and in relation to everything” (357a2-3). Although the majority of people, lacking Glaucon’s

spirit, would scale back their expectations of justice upon discovering the high price it demands, Glaucon accepts and even welcomes the high price of justice precisely as *corroboration* of its desirability. The demanding life of a civic guardian does not in the least disenchant or “moderate” his enthusiasm for the model city (466c4-d9).⁵ The multitude’s diffidence and disenchantment are not for him, or for those comparatively rare (but terribly significant) human beings like him. On the contrary, it is precisely Glaucon’s enthusiasm for the model city that moves him to join Socrates in the tracks of the true philosophers (471e1-5, 474a5-c7). By virtue of his participation in this search for true philosophers -- a search that is itself a philosophical pursuit -- Glaucon impresses Socrates as one of the rare human beings of that kind (n.b. 475e3-476d7). Properly understood, then, Plato’s dramatic characterization of Glaucon testifies to the pedagogical continuity that exists between the endorsement of communism and the practice of a Socratic love of wisdom. I would suggest, then, that “the problem inherent in the surface” of the *Republic* is nothing less than the problem of accounting for this surprising continuity between Socratic communism and Socratic philosophy.

Yet despite of the testimony of Plato’s dramatic characterization of Glaucon, many scholars -- particularly those who suppose themselves to be following Strauss’s lead -- still maintain that the institutions of Socrates’ model city are fundamentally antagonistic to the practice of genuine philosophy, that their formulation is intentionally ironic, and that their significance is accordingly limited to the contribution they make to the disenchantment of utopian thinking. Such a stance was a matter of discretion during the Cold War, when even so much as an academic appreciation of Socratic communism might cause unnecessary scandal. But the Cold War is over; we no longer carry this burden. Of course, this does not diminish the fact that a new set of challenges have grown in urgency. Above all, we are mindful that the triumph of the liberal species of the modern Western project is inherently unstable, that its victory over totalitarianism is ultimately unsustainable apart from the bracing lessons implicit in our own *classical and medieval* traditions. But this feature of our current situation simply indicates that a concern for social responsibility now accents rather than mutes the endeavor to make Plato understood. It is in this spirit that I shall try to indicate, with perfect candor, the contribution of Socratic communism to genuine philosophy. I hope to do this by showing how the vital nerve of Socratic communism -- “all saying mine and not mine at the same time” -- supports an ethic of responsible detachment, which reorients one’s approach to the whole of human affairs in a manner perfectly congenial to Socratic philosophy.

Socrates, for his own part, is not one to discount the difficulty inherent in any claim of pedagogical continuity between support for the institutions of his model city and the genuine practice of philosophy. He formulates this difficulty -- and, as I shall argue, prepares for its resolution -- in his wonderfully fruitful and yet undeniably perplexing image of the *philosophical dog*. Any further understanding of the significance of Socratic communism must have its source, then, in the elaboration of this image.

Canine Philosophy and Socrates’ Endorsement of Communism

As part of his initial outline of the model political community, Socrates observes that “as regards the possession of women, marriages, and generation of offspring: all things need to be arranged in accord with the proverb ‘friends share’” (423e5-424a2). Mindful of the difficulties this suggestion entails, he proceeds without further elaboration to the discussion of other subjects. But his interlocutors eventually force him back to the issue and challenge him to detail the specific character of the sharing in force among his civic guardians (449a7-451c3). In

response, Socrates recalls that the model city's guardians, though human beings, had been reckoned guardians of a herd -- watchdogs, as it were. So he proposes to provide them with a birth and rearing corresponding to that premise, and then to consider "whether it suits us or not" (451c4-d4).

This watchdog analogy holds a noble pedigree in Socrates' model city. From the outset, Glaucon finds Socrates' city better suited to swine than to human beings (362d4-5). Socrates points out that the characteristically human refinements, whose inclusion Glaucon demands, could be provided by adding specialists in the martial arts to the city's complement of craftsmen. But when he and Glaucon resolve upon this addition and attempt to identify the natural aptitudes relevant to guarding a city, they quickly find themselves at an impasse (ἀποροῦμεν, 375c11-d4). Civic guardians need the capacity to be both gentle (when dealing with their countrymen) and fiercely spirited (when dealing with the city's enemies). It seems impossible for powers so opposite to one another to inhere in the same nature until Socrates observes that the necessary combination does exist and may be found in -- a dog. Socrates locates the key to a dog's remarkable harmonization of ferocity and gentleness in the peculiarly canine manner of distinguishing friend and foe. Regardless of the consideration or the abuse to which it may be subjected, a dog distinguishes its friends and foes solely on the basis of knowledge. Friends are those it knows, even if they do all manner of harm to the dog. Foes are those it does not know, even if they should praise the dog and treat it with all manner of kindness. Hence, the dog may be said to be affected more by knowledge than by utility, pleasure, or honor. Socrates accordingly identifies the love of knowledge as the dog's ruling passion and pronounces this feature of the canine nature truly philosophical (376a11-b1).

Of course, in saying that the dog is truly philosophical, Socrates is not saying that the dog is *wholly* or adequately philosophical. Nevertheless, Socrates' notion of canine philosophy blazes the trail along which a more fully adequate conception of philosophy may be discovered. By welcoming the unfamiliar analogy between dogs and human guardians, Glaucon undertakes the exercise of his own distinctively human mind. Were he like many sentimental humanists, Glaucon might have taken offense at the very notion of a philosophical dog and *barked* at Socrates' unfamiliar allusion. But such a response serves only to confirm one's own doggishness; it would do nothing to substantiate, much less to mobilize, one's capacity for something more than canine philosophy. In fact, Glaucon heeds Socrates' advice and follows the canine analogy to its limits. We, too, may follow along, if only to discover ultimately whether the analogy "suits us or not." For it is at the limits of this analogy, and only at its limits, that we may hope to catch a glimpse of the distinctively *human* soul. In this way, Socrates' philosophical dog will prove to be completely amenable, and naturally subservient, to the human pursuit of philosophy. We may thus say that Socrates' philosophical dog is indeed man's best friend.

Now, the canine analogy implies that female and male guardians must train and work in common -- like watchdogs (451e6-8). The practice of sexual equality, self-evidently just to us today, is painstakingly defended by Socrates. His argument uncovers a difficulty that we, in our complacency, might not perceive. On Socrates' account, it is impossible to reconcile sexual equality with family life as we know it. Yet, in justice, the best of the city's females must take their place in the gymnasium and on the battlefield beside the male guardians. Under such circumstances, there is bound to be "mingling." Celibacy is out of the question, as it would deprive the city of its best chance at high-quality offspring. Yet promiscuity is simply intolerable to anyone concerned for the good order or happiness of the political community (458d8-e1). So there really is no alternative -- once women have been included in the ranks of the guardians --

but to consider how to orchestrate the guardians' sexual activities in a manner suitable to their occupation. Socrates accordingly proposes that "all these women shall belong to all the men in common, and none is to cohabit with any privately. The children must also be common, and no parent is to know which offspring is his own, nor any child his parent" (457c10-d3). Socrates can account for the practical implications of his proposal, strikingly unconventional as they may be, by means of the simple observation that they are merely what is appropriate (πρέπει γάρ, 460d6-8) to the character and circumstances of civic guardians.

Nevertheless, Socrates finds that he must whet Glaucon's enthusiasm for familial communism before undertaking the more problematic task of discovering the way to achieve it (458a1-7). There must be a will before one bothers to search for a way. At minimum, Socrates must offer Glaucon some indication of the essential nature of the communism he has in mind. It would be most helpful if this nature were to manifest a goodness Glaucon could appreciate. Socrates accordingly sets out to reveal the nature of his communism precisely in light of its goodness (see 509b6-10). To indicate the goodness of familial communism, Socrates first calls attention to the terrible harm caused by civic disintegration and the great good achieved by whatever binds the city together (461e5-462b3). Sharing in pleasure and pain -- as when all, or as many citizens as possible, rejoice and grieve alike at the same experiences -- certainly binds a city together. Civic disintegration, by contrast, results from the privatization (ιδίωσις, 462b8) of such things. By *idiôsis* Socrates means something amiss in the order of one's attachments, an inappropriately narrow or exclusive relationship toward what is one's own. He explains that this disorder "arises when citizens do not give voice at the same time to expressions of this sort: *mine* and *not mine*; and when they do not give voice concerning what is someone else's in the same way" (462c3-5). This, then, is what threatens all that is politically wholesome. But how does familial communism make headway against this problem?

To answer this question, we must pay close attention, for Socrates' formulation of his proposal is not without equivocation -- as Aristotle was the first to note (*Politics* 1261b16-32; see Dobbs 1985). "All saying mine" can be understood in two ways. One possibility (the way Socrates is most likely to be interpreted, Aristotle predicts) is that all will say "mine" but really mean "ours."⁶ But such an utterance, as Aristotle observes, does nothing to enhance civic concord. "Ours" lacks the reminder of personal responsibility that is present in "mine." Systematically substituting the former locution for the latter invites a combination of personal neglect and collective selfishness, which only aggravates civic fractionalization. The other possibility -- which Aristotle himself indicates is "more what Socrates intends" (μᾶλλον ὁ βούλεται ... ὁ Σωκράτης, 1261b21-22) -- is that all will say mine and each will mean just what he or she says: "mine." But is it in the nature of any collective, as such, to utter so singular a claim of ownership? This seems, as Aristotle said, to be an impossibility. Moreover, we should recall that the word "mine," spoken absolutely, implies privacy; so we are brought around again to the very danger Socrates began by warning against. It follows that some qualification is necessary if this utterance is truly to manifest, and not simply to come closer to, what Socrates intends.

Now the two interpretations that Aristotle criticizes share -- in addition to an admitted failure to get to the heart of Socrates' intention -- an unexamined assumption. Both assume that the referents of "mine" and "not mine" must be distinct. But is this necessary? Perhaps no such distinction is required. Then we would surmise that Socrates intends all his guardians to deem precisely the same person -- say, a fellow guardian -- "mine and not mine." A particular guardian might then say: "this woman, with whom I have been coupled by the city's rulers, is both mine and not mine." Speaking in this way, a young man is reminded that his spouse is his but not only

his. In fact, she is *not his* in the sense that there are many dimensions of her personality and of her very essence and natural destiny that rightly govern, rather than are governed by, his espousing her. This “not mine” therefore qualifies the otherwise absolute “mine.” It is something one must acknowledge if he is to espouse his mate without privatizing her, that is, without treating her as if she were simply his property to use and abuse according to his own private whim. By acknowledging that his mate is “both mine and not mine” in this way, the guardian fosters an aversion to *idiôsis* and establishes an ethos conducive to the common good of the civic community as a whole.

Socrates’ description of the genesis of *idiôsis* corroborates this interpretation. “The problem arises,” he suggests, “when citizens do not give voice at the same time to expressions of this sort: *mine* and *not mine*; and when they do not give voice concerning what is someone else’s in the same way” (462c3-5).⁷ Now we must note carefully that in the first clause of this sentence Socrates expressly states what is to be said, namely, “expressions of this sort: *mine* and *not mine*,” even though he does not identify what it is that is to be described in this way. Then, in the second clause, he reverses this pattern. Here Socrates identifies his referent; it is that which is someone else’s (τοῦ ἀλλοτρίου, 462c5). But he does not express what is to be said of it. Because the second clause refers to “what is someone else’s,” we may infer (from the overall pattern of the construction) that the first clause refers to what is one’s own. Moreover, because the first clause speaks of “*mine* and *not mine*,” the expressions necessary to fill out the second clause must (by virtue of the same pattern) be construed as “*yours* and *not yours*,” “*his* and *not his*,” or “*hers* and *not hers*.” Once we have identified these expressions as belonging to the intention of the second clause, we can see that Socrates is not talking about two different sets of things but about one’s own things, when, in the first clause, he finds fault with us for not saying “*mine* and *not mine*.” Socrates, in other words, is not invoking some ghostly *volonté générale*, which on behalf of everyone in society would declare certain things “ours” and other things “not ours.” On the contrary, his intent is to reform the particular disposition of each guardian toward whatever is his or her own. Each guardian would then deem whatever is nearest and dearest “not only mine but also not mine.” It is in this sense only that one can say that “that city is and will be arranged best in which most say this in the same way of the same thing: *mine* and *not mine*” (462c7-8).

Socrates likens this good arrangement of a city to the disposition of a single human being. It is clear that in doing so he is not reversing the direction of the analogy that inaugurated his discussion of the model city, for the soul -- and especially the operation of justice and injustice in it -- remain suitably obscure in this passage. Instead, what Socrates offers is an account of the integrity of our personal experience of the material world. Underlying the possibility of such experience, Socrates shows, is a rule like the rule he would enforce among his guardians. To illustrate the operation of this rule, Socrates describes what happens “when a finger of ours is struck a blow.” In such a case, he explains, “the entire community -- the one stretched throughout the body toward the soul and coordinated into a single arrangement under its ruler -- is not only aware that a fragment is wounded, at the same time it all suffers together as a whole. And it is in just this way that we say that one of us (ὁ ἄνθρωπος), in respect of his finger, suffers pain” (462c11-d5).

We must pay close attention to Socrates’ description, for then we may appreciate how he illuminates the integral wholeness of a human being in light of one’s experience of pain as something “both mine and not mine.” Above all, we must keep in mind that the integrity of a human being is something to be established rather than assumed. Socrates accordingly observes that one is aware of a “wounded fragment” (ἤσθητό ... μέρους πονήσαντος, 462d1). This

“fragment” is not assumed to be one’s own, and so its pain -- if such awareness of it could ever be isolated -- would not be felt as one’s own. One would simply say of it that it is someone else’s, that it is “not mine.” This is our typical response upon becoming aware of the suffering of strangers. But in “the community that is stretched throughout the body toward the soul” there are no strangers. Thanks to the operation of its ruling element, the experience of pain is never isolated. For its rule ensures not only that the community is aware of the wounded fragment but also that it all suffers along at the same time as a whole (ἡσθετό τε καὶ πᾶσα ἅμα συνήλγησεν μέρους πονήσαντος ὅλη, 462d1-2).⁸ Remarkably, it is the simultaneity of these divergent tendencies that enables one to perceive that it is precisely a *part of himself* -- neither an alien fragment nor some undifferentiated “self” no greater than that of which it is composed -- that has been wounded. Hence, Socrates indicates that the *meros* or fragment comes to be recognized as a genuine member: namely, a finger (τὸν δάκτυλον, 462d3). So we can, at last, say that one of us (ὁ ἄνθρωπος, 462d2), in respect of his finger, suffers pain. The *human being* thus turns out to be neither a pile of spare parts nor a homogeneous lump but, rather, a diversified whole. The wholeness of an *anthropos* emerges, according to this analysis, only as a result of its common suffering with what had been taken to be a mere fragment.⁹ This wholeness cannot be taken for granted. It is the achievement of a ruling element (τοῦ ἄρχοντος, 462c12), which ordains that the pain of the blow be experienced simultaneously as mine and not mine. What would otherwise remain isolated as the exclusive property of a mere fragment is thus made common. It all happens so naturally that we tend to take it for granted. But, as Socrates indicates, we cannot take it for granted if we are to discern the ruling element’s contribution, via the communism of sensitivity, to human integrity. The rule governing this communization clearly ensures that the pain will be “common property.” But more important than the common character of this pain is the promotion of genuine fellowship among the several bodily members and the soul, which this rule brings about. This fellowship integrates bodily fragments and establishes a diversified whole. Integrity -- as distinguished from mere uniformity -- is what emerges. The ruling element, mandating this communization, animates the body.

Just as the ruling element in man dictates a form of communism that facilitates the integral wholeness of the human being, so too the rulers of Socrates’ model city ordain a scheme of communism intended to combat civic discord and to integrate the city. The vital nerve of Socratic communism consists in each guardian’s recognizing what touches himself most closely as something “not only mine but also not mine.” If all, or most, of the guardians do this “at the same time,” the city will be arranged best. All the details Socrates provides of his proposal for communism cultivate this arrangement. Having disclosed his pattern of integral wholeness, Socrates can now turn to the consideration of these communistic details to determine whether “our city” or some other conforms more closely to this model of integrity (462e4-6). With good reason, he and Glaucon find in favor of their city. The rulers of this city, like the ruler Socrates identifies within the human being, supervise a communization that produces integrity, not uniformity. Above all, Socratic communism nurtures a spirit of stewardship without excessive attachment to one’s own. This spirit of responsible detachment promotes concord, whereas the rigid separation of mine and thine, so typical of other cities, promotes faction and civil strife.

This finding enables Socrates to address a question concerning the personal happiness of his guardians (465e4-466a6, 419a1-421c7). Socrates is now able to declare that his guardians live a life even happier than the storied existence of Olympic victors. Indeed, it would be foolish for anyone living such a life to do anything inconsistent with his or her being a true guardian, even if it were possible thereby to gain *everything* in the city. Socrates thus joins the “truly wise

Hesiod” in observing that “half is more somehow than all” (466c2-3). Because “half” measures and is thus an integral part of the whole, we understand Socrates to be indicating that while the guardians’ life under communism is not the absolute summit of human happiness, it is wholly commensurate with and integral to this summit; even taken by itself, the guardians’ life is more choiceworthy than a life embracing all the fragments of human happiness (see Dobbs 1994a, 268, 276). Socrates’ egalitarian man lives a life of the latter kind (561c6-e8). But that life is not integrable with the happiest human life. The egalitarian man cannot get there from here. To make further progress toward human happiness, the egalitarian man would first have to be willing to become a Socratic guardian. Egalitarian man might balk, but *Glaucon* is moved by Socrates’ arguments to join in endorsing communism. The interlocutors agree that “women in communal fellowship with men -- who, like dogs ... have their education, children, and guardianship in common -- do best and act neither contrary to the nature of the female in comparison to the male nor to their natural partnership with one another” (466c6-d5).

Having convinced Glaucon of the goodness of this community, Socrates can proceed to consider its possibility. What he does instead is to raise a question concerning the guardians’ conduct of warfare (466e1-4). This may seem puzzling. But perhaps we are to remember that war is a “time that tries men’s souls,” for it is in Socrates’ “digression” on the guardians’ conduct of warfare that we discover the critical limitation of his canine analogy. Once this limitation is grasped, we shall gain a glimpse of the distinctively human soul. The attainment of this limited but critical insight will provide important testimony of the pedagogical continuity between the model city’s practice of communism and the genuine pursuit of philosophy.

Warfare, Socratic Communism, and the Opening to Genuine Philosophy

In all that relates to war, male and female guardians will share and share alike. This clearly comprehends the guardians’ training in music and gymnastics. But Socrates introduces a new element to the guardians’ apprenticeship. Observation -- a theoretical dimension, so to speak -- is now acknowledged to be a critical part of their training (466e4-467a5, 467c1-e7). While they are themselves still quite young, the future guardians must be made spectators of war (θεωρούς πολέμου, 467c5-6). They must be brought within viewing distance of battle and so into harm’s way. The risk is considerable, not only to them but also to the city itself should they be lost (467b2-4). So, for the sake of the city, these youths must be made secure in their theoretical activities. Socrates accordingly proposes that over these youths there be set certain rulers, top-grade ones at that, to serve as leaders and teachers (467d5-7; cf. 540b5-6). These *rulers* (ἄρχοντάς, 467d5) -- the only persons thus described in the entire passage on war -- will serve the city not as field officers in its military campaigns, or as administrative functionaries, but literally as the pedagogues of its most promising youngsters. As long as the partnership between the best youngsters and these rulers is maintained, Socrates notes, even the destruction of the army will not prove fatal to the city (467e6-7; see also 540e5-541b1). For this partnership to prosper, though, the youngsters must be appropriately “winged.” As soon as they are able to ride, they must be mounted upon steeds specially selected for the purpose. These beasts must be exceptionally swift and docile without being either spirited or belligerent (467e2-5). Evidently, something more than bestial spirit is required if the city’s youth are to bear up to the combined burden of civic preservation and a suitably theoretical education. The interlocutors’ subsequent survey of the model city at war will confirm this inference, further expose the limits of canine spiritedness, and reveal the need for a distinctively human spirit. Inasmuch as it turns out to be

something the city needs, this distinctively human spirit will provide a political foothold for genuinely Socratic philosophy.

The interlocutors' survey of warfare -- a most intriguing combination of theoretical speculation and positive law-making -- is twofold, corresponding to the soldiers' disposition toward themselves and toward their opponents (468a1-2). First, the interlocutors determine that the soldiers experience solidarity with one another, but not simply because of familiarity or kinship. Then they determine that these same soldiers practice severity toward foreigners, not always and everywhere, but allow this severity to dissipate in consideration of the prospect of reconciliation. Thus, Socrates and Glaucon find that their soldiers behave in something other than a simply canine manner, notwithstanding the governing metaphor of their recruitment and organization.

Socrates and Glaucon begin by noting that any of the soldiers who, through his own fault, has abandoned his post or thrown away his arms shall be broken from the ranks. Anyone, by the same token, who is captured shall be given as a prize to his captors. On the other hand, whoever is deemed bravest shall be crowned and congratulated and kissed by each of his comrades (468a5-b11, see also 403b4-c3). Glaucon ventures an addendum to this dispensation: "while they are on this campaign no one whom this one wishes to kiss shall be permitted to refuse, so that if someone happens to be in love with another, whether male or female, he will grow more spirited toward bearing the prize of excellence" (468c2-4). Socrates accepts this addendum, a similar incentive -- and an even greater inroad against sexual autonomy -- being already implicit in the city's marriage regulations, and because it is only right to reward the good in such a manner as to provide honor and at the same time to foster an increase in excellence (468c10-d7). But he also stipulates, and Glaucon concurs, that these rewards -- including the kisses, which "we were just mentioning" -- shall be conferred at, and so confined to, such public occasions as the periodic celebration of sacrifices (468d7-e3).¹⁰

It is noteworthy that the interlocutors detect not the slightest hint of fraternal complaint as the soldiers' comrades are expelled from the ranks or denied ransom. Nor is any deception (noble or otherwise) employed to reconcile the soldiers to someone else's selection as the recipient of military honors and the privilege of kissing. They neither begrudge others the rewards of their excellence nor complain when those closest to them suffer the consequences of their depravity. Evidently, it is not blind loyalty that binds these soldiers together. Theirs is a higher caliber of solidarity. These men and women recognize the good as something distinct from the familiar. How has this come about?

The practice of Socratic communism is critical to the soldiers' recognition of the good as something distinct from the merely familiar. As we have already noted, Socrates' soldiers cultivate a spirit of responsible detachment by deeming their nearest and dearest "both mine and not mine." These soldiers are by no means indifferent to the other members of their tribe. But they are not so attached to their brethren as to be unable to recognize that kinship does not necessarily make someone good. This kind of detachment from one's own is absolutely necessary if the distinction between good and bad is ever to come into view as something different from -- that is, in no way reducible to -- the distinction between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Indeed, the danger posed by *idiôsis* is precisely that it obscures the difference between what is merely one's own and the good. The resulting excess of attachment arrests human development at a level of bestiality. But men and women who, like Socrates' soldiers, can perceive the difference between the good and the merely familiar must be distinguished from dogs -- even from "philosophical dogs." It is, after all, in the nature of a dog to be blindly loyal

toward those who are known or familiar, and to be just as blindly hostile toward those who are unfamiliar or unknown. In either case, the dog is utterly oblivious to the good as being anything different from the familiar (375e1-4, 376a5-7). So the canine spirit of attachment prevents a dog from ever *coming to know* the difference between good and bad. The dog's love of knowledge is therefore radically incomplete. It loves what is known, but not all that is knowable. The soldiers of Socrates' model city are different. They embody a distinctively human spirit, upholding an independent conception of what is best rather than merely rationalizing and defending their own. This is the spirit needed to be a lover of the knowable as opposed to merely a lover of the known. This spirit is what separates canine and genuine philosophers. Yet it is a spirit fostered by the very political institution Socrates and Glaucon endorse in pursuance of the canine analogy.

One might suggest that the good that Socrates' soldiers elevate above the familiar comprises only the good as it is found within one's own city, that their "good" is simply an expression of collective selfishness and is still beholden to what is their own. Yet it is surely significant that this elevation takes place outside the city, while the soldiers are on campaign. It would appear that the good in question is not a good confined to their own city. To elaborate this point, Socrates considers the soldiers' conduct toward outsiders, and especially toward their opponents. Joining in this consideration, Glaucon agrees with Socrates in maintaining that "on the whole and in every respect, sparing [Grecian captives from enslavement] matters" (469c3). It matters, Glaucon explains, because such a policy would help to alleviate the internecine animosities of the Greeks and thus allow them to pay more attention to the threat posed by the Persians and other barbarians. It is noteworthy that this panhellenism represents a good that transcends the model city, even if it does not yet extend to absolute universality. Glaucon further agrees that permitting the corpses of an enemy to be plundered or abused is incompatible with proper military discipline. Indeed, Socrates condemns it as *effeminate* to treat the inanimate and defenseless remains of an enemy as if they constituted a worthy opponent. This condemnation is not meant to reflect badly upon the females whom he has recruited into the guardian class. On the contrary, the charge of effeminacy is designed to discredit any *machismo* informed by admiration for that notorious abuser of an enemy's corpse, the bestially-spirited Achilles. Socrates disparages such conduct as fit only for dogs, who are wont to "go on snarling at stones thrown at them even after the thrower has slipped away" (469d9-e2). Socrates thus leaves no doubt that we have reached the limits of the canine analogy. Dogs are excessively attached to their own hostility. But the soldiers of the model city must be more discriminating. This marks a significant departure from bestial spirit, but precisely insofar as it is a departure we may expect it to be launched from a point of commonality. So when Socrates decrees that his soldiers are not to offer up any captured arms in the temples of the gods, he notes that the prohibition applies especially to the arms of other Greeks (469e7-8). Similarly, he initially expresses concern lest the farms and fixtures of Grecian opponents be ravaged; but in the final, legal formulation of his prohibition he makes no such specification. Socrates' final word is that true guardians do not ravage land or burn houses, *period* (471b9-c2).

Socrates thus expects the soldiers of the model city to live up to this gentler code of warfare, *in the first instance* simply on grounds that other Greeks are akin. He contends that hostilities between fellow Greeks must be distinguished from hostilities between Greeks and barbarians (470b4-c3).¹¹ Glaucon agrees and takes the remarkable step of embracing Sparta, Athens' mortal foe against whom he has personally fought (see 368a15). Moreover, he proposes an analogy, suggesting that "our soldiers treat barbarians as Greeks now treat other Greeks" (471b6-8). This analogy anticipates the extension of Socrates' gentler code of warfare beyond a

mere panhellenism, for if other Greeks can come to be embraced as one's own, and barbarians are to be treated as Greeks are now, what is there to prevent barbarians from eventually being similarly embraced? Indeed, as we have seen, Socrates' legislation ultimately constrains the soldiers' conduct with respect to *all* opponents (471b9-c3). For Glaucon, as for the soldiers of his model city, then, "other Greeks" supply the necessary bridge beyond blind patriotism or tribalism precisely because they have a foot in both camps: "other Greeks" are both mine and not mine. The soldiers of the model city are thus oriented in their foreign relations by the same ethic of responsible detachment originally inculcated in them by Socratic communism. As nurslings of Socratic communism, these soldiers -- quite unlike watchdogs -- are prepared to welcome the unfamiliar good. This openness transforms and humanizes their spirit.

Inasmuch as it is Glaucon's analogy that foreshadows this triumph over tribalism, we may surmise that a similar transformation is concurrently taking place in the lad's own spirit. This surmise is corroborated by Glaucon's sudden and surprising announcement that he has had enough of war (471c4-e5). Though his interest is no longer captivated by Socrates' war stories, he remains as spirited as ever in his pursuit of what does interest him (472a1-2). Glaucon is able to see that *all* good things -- many of which have not even been discussed -- would arise for a city governed in this way (πάντ' ἄν εἴη ἀγαθὰ ... ὄρω, 471c8-d7). But he is not interested in dwelling on this. Instead, he calls on Socrates to join him in saying goodbye to this plethora of goods in order "to attempt right now to persuade ourselves that this one itself (τοῦτο αὐτὸ, 471e3) is possible and in what way it is possible." "This one itself" refers to the civic genesis of the constitutional order, the *politeia*, which Socrates has described thus far only in speech. Glaucon clearly considers the genesis of this *politeia* to be the one great foundational good underlying the multitude of goods he sees. Though he does not number the genesis of this *politeia* among the goods he sees, Glaucon is prepared to say goodbye (χαίρειν ἔωμεν, 471e5) to all that is most familiar in order to pursue this foundational good. Unlike a dog -- whose spirited "love of knowledge" causes it to bark at the unfamiliar -- Glaucon proves to be remarkably receptive to the unfamiliar.

But the real trial and proof of Glaucon's receptivity to the unfamiliar comes next. Although the lad wants to see the inquiry shift to a consideration of the possibility of the best *politeia*, Socrates insists that the goodness of this regime in no way depends upon its civic genesis. He reminds Glaucon that the pattern of the model city was wrought to assist in comparing and choosing between the just life and the unjust life (368c7-369a3, 472d9-e6). The merit of such a pattern does not depend upon its embodiment in an existing city. Consequently, the genesis of this polity cannot be the one great good after all. The one great good must be something else -- something with which Glaucon has *even less* familiarity than the longed-for genesis of the best *politeia*. Yet Glaucon welcomes Socrates' reminder! This is the true mark of his achievement of responsible detachment, for even though it means giving up the very thing for whose sake he has just bid all else farewell, Glaucon agrees with Socrates that the civic genesis of his best polity is not the measure of its own or anything else's goodness. He even agrees that the manner of speaking in which he and Socrates are presently engaged attains a better grasp of the truth and so provides a measure superior to anything contributed by political praxis (473a1-4). As a result, Glaucon now has *no idea* what will issue from the subsequent conversation. Whatever unfolds will present itself as something radically new, perfectly unblemished by his own prejudices or preconceptions. Nevertheless, despite its utter unfamiliarity, Glaucon is prepared to receive it welcomingly. He is, in short, poised to learn.

No longer stuck on the genesis of the best *politeia*, Glaucon, with Socrates, cherishes instead the genesis of his own ability to make a discovery (οἷοί τε γενώμεθα εὐρεῖν ... ἀγαπήσεις, 473a5-b3). This ability is not disconnected from the preceding discussion, as Socrates indicates, for it will be directed to the question how, in the most decisive respect, a city might come to resemble the model polity. To discover how a city might, in the most decisive respect, come as close as possible to the model *politeia*, Glaucon and Socrates find that they must follow in the tracks of true philosophers. This may be inferred from some of the most celebrated lines in all of Plato. For Socrates now maintains that “Unless philosophers rule as kings in cities or those now called kings genuinely and adequately engage in philosophy ... there will be no respite from evils, dear Glaucon, for cities or, I believe, for the human race; nor, before then, will that *politeia* we have just been describing in speech ever be brought forth to the extent possible and see the light of the sun” (473c11-e2). Socrates is more than willing, with Glaucon at his side, to substantiate this claim. But to do so, he must first distinguish who it is that he means by the true or genuine philosophers (τούς δὲ ἀληθινούς, 475e3). So, in this next and last stage of Socrates’ account of what his guardians have in common, Glaucon and Socrates join in a search -- a search that is itself a genuinely philosophical pursuit -- for the distinctive character of true philosophers.

It is by means of his discussion of a model polity under the rule of communism that Socrates has drawn this high-spirited youth into a quest of genuine philosophy. Were we to follow the interlocutors in their quest, we would find Socrates setting genuine philosophers apart from others on grounds of their distinctive receptivity to the one beauty, which cannot itself be seen or heard but which underlies the multitude of beauties that can be seen or heard (476a9-d4, 470e10-480a13). Others, Socrates indicates, could not bear so much as even to hear him speak of the existence of this one foundational beauty; but he numbers Glaucon among the few who are able to be receptive to his argument (475e6-476a7, 476c2-4). Socrates himself implies, then, that Glaucon is to be numbered among the truly philosophical. How well Glaucon exercises this philosophical receptivity -- or retains it -- remains, of course, to be seen. But it is in no small measure thanks to the mediation of the model city, and particularly to the influence of his own enthusiasm for its institution of communism, that Glaucon has been able to come this far.

Conclusion

In no other culture is liberty, or the preciousness of each human being, which is its basis, prized as it is in Western Civilization. Yet, at the center of this civilization’s greatest work on social and personal justice, its most celebrated philosopher endorses communism. This paradox is sharpened by the fact that Socrates’ endorsement of communism is itself an implication of his comparison of human beings to dogs. Socrates’ bestial analogies pose an insurmountable stumbling block for sentimental humanists, who forget that an informed appreciation of what is distinctively human cannot begin by begging the question. Cheerleading is no substitute for philosophy.

It is a perpetual testimony to Plato’s greatness that the *Republic* does not beg such questions. Socrates’ manifest intention, in following the canine analogy, is to provide his civic watchdogs with a nativity and rearing befitting noble puppies. But he also indicates that he intends to consider whether such an arrangement “suits us or not.” In other words, he means to follow the canine analogy to its limits, for only at its limits will what is distinctively human present itself. Though it runs against the grain of many of our most cherished prejudices, Socrates finds that the analogy suits human beings rather well. He shows first that the abandonment of sex-exclusivity in occupational assignments, as mandated by the canine

analogy, passes the test of dialectical analysis. Then he finds that the rule of communism -- which directs each guardian to deem his own both mine and not mine -- promotes a responsible detachment conducive to political integrity and the common good. But ultimately, as Socrates and Glaucon consider their soldiers' conduct of warfare, they encounter the limits of the canine analogy. They find that their soldiers' solidarity is not, and cannot be, based on the simple differentiation of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Dogs may be said to be lovers of knowledge, and on this basis may even be said to be philosophical. But the philosophical dog loves that which it happens to know, not that which in principle is knowable. As a consequence, the dog is not a lover of learning. A dog typically does not welcome, but instead barks at, the unfamiliar good. But the case with human philosophers -- even the philosophical warriors of the model city -- is different. Once this is recognized, it is possible (and necessary) to differentiate such men and women from lower beasts and even from "philosophical" dogs. The latter's "love of knowledge" is, after all, nothing more than a symptom of an excessive attachment to the familiar. We human beings are to be distinguished from brutes, then, in virtue of our capacity to disengage responsibly from the merely familiar. It may be that our own education and our own political institutions are not terribly effective in nurturing this prototypically human capacity. Perhaps no actual political community can do any better. But the institutions of Socrates' city in speech (though they will never arise in practice) can help us to nurture it -- provided we allow ourselves to remain open to their goodness and, in this sense, take them seriously.

Notes

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¹ I underscore "could not" because Strauss indicates in these words that it is a flaw within modernity itself, and not the subsequent corruption of an originally pristine enterprise, that constitutes the infirmity of liberal democracy. The architects of modernity indeed provided against "all earlier forms of evil" -- presumably, the excesses of throne and altar -- by means of their uncompromising rejection of classical metaphysics. But this very rejection, once elaborated and fully entered into the modern consciousness, renders liberal democrats defenseless before the secular god of History.

² On Strauss's debt to Cicero, see Nicgorski (1991, 235-6). For a vigorous, nonciceronian reading of the *Republic*, see Klosko (1981, 373-7; 1986, 176-80). Klosko rightly insists upon the seriousness of the political institutions featured in the *Republic*. Yet I would maintain that one can take these institutions seriously without supposing (with Klosko's Plato) that Socrates' piecemeal, one-soul-at-a-time educational mission is "foredoomed to failure" (1981, 375-6). The political institutions of Book 5 may be pedagogically effective precisely as they are presented -- namely, as elements in the mimetic presentation of inter- and intra-personal dialogue -- quite apart from any prospect of wholesale cultural reformation (see, e.g., Euben 1990, 275-6; Dobbs 1994a, 264-6).

³ For many, subscription to Strauss's irony thesis represents the beginning of wisdom in interpreting Plato's *Republic*. This common root nourishes a variety of blossoms. The most interesting developments include Rosen (1965, 460-4); Bloom (1968, 380-2, 405-8); Sallis (1975); Saxonhouse (1978, 895-900); Nichols (1987, 99-123); Nendza (1988); Hyland (1988) and (1990); Benardete (1989, 109-23); and Forde (1997).

⁴ Platonic citations in this essay are to the *Platonis Opera* (Oxford, 1900-1907), and provide the conventional Stephanus divisions of page, section, and line. Unless indicated otherwise, all references are to the *Republic*. The translations are my own.

⁵ Though Forde (1997) does not address himself to Glaucon's situation, he rightly notes that the communization of family life "will be repugnant to most human beings," and yet "must be seen as a necessary consequence" of Socrates' views on sexual equality (1997, 665, 668). He then reads Book 5 as a cautionary tale, whose "effect in practice is to dampen utopian impulses" (1997, 668). Forde thus succeeds in reformulating Strauss's thesis for a generation no longer given to laughter at the idea of sexual equality -- a generation for whom diffidence (that is, anxiety concerning one's own ability to keep what one possesses), rather than a sense of shame or fear of disgrace, must supply the motive for utopian disillusionment.

⁶ In his valuable commentary on Book 5, Halliwell (1993) recognizes the paradox of all *collectively* saying "mine." But he appears not to credit Aristotle's criticism of this collectivist interpretation of Socrates' dictum, or to note Aristotle's indication that this interpretation mistakes Socrates' intention, for he holds that it would have been apter of Socrates "to stress the desirability of reducing the use of 'mine' to a minimum ... and making the use of 'our(s)' the norm" (1993, 172). It seems to me, though, that Aristotle is right. By methodically substituting "ours" for "mine," one produces perhaps as potent a prescription for private alienation as can be imagined. In no way can this be construed as promoting concord or civic integrity.

⁷ Socrates explains that by "expressions of this sort" he means not only *mine* but also *not mine* (τό τε ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἐμὸν, 462c4-5). Now, anything that belongs to a stranger can be said to be "not mine." It follows that "not mine" subsumes the merely expressive intention of the term "someone else's." Therefore, I read Socrates' addition of τοῦ ἀλλοτρίου (462c5) not as another chant his guardians are to voice in common -- as the translators commonly construe it -- but rather as another thing *about which* they are to chant.

⁸ The formulation "*te ... kai hama*," which Socrates employs here is used throughout the *Republic* to indicate the pairing of things that might well be regarded as irreconcilable. The discovery of such a pairing, Socrates says, naturally awakens dialectical thought (524e2-5). It is well to pay close attention to such pairings (see Dobbs 1994b, 669, 681).

⁹ Note the location of ἄλη at the end of its clause in 462d2 and compare πᾶσα earlier in the same clause.

¹⁰ Hence, this provision in no way promulgates "rape as a right" (*pace* Benardete 1989, 121). Benardete's reading is typically quite insightful. But it appears here that embracing the satirical interpretation of Socrates' model city can induce, in even a careful commentator, a tendency to ridicule quite at odds with Plato's text.

¹¹ Plato's Eleatic Stranger rejects the division of mankind into Greeks and barbarians as noneidetic, on grounds that *barbarian* is a mere catch-all for the unrelated leftovers of mankind once one has culled out the Greeks (*Statesman* 262c8-263a1). But one might well endorse this division in view of the balance of spiritedness and intellect necessary to sustain the practice of self-government. Aristotle, for example, distinguishes Greeks from barbarians of all stripes precisely on grounds of their unique purchase upon this balance (*Politics* 1327b18-1328a16). This division is eidetic in that it focuses the mind on the one factor (namely, the sound condition of the human soul) apart from which any universal concept of mankind would prove to be merely nominal rather than real. There is no reason to assume that Socrates does not intend his distinction between war and faction to be taken seriously simply because it does not conform to the precepts of the Stranger from Elea.

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