

Two questions about guardians

Callicles on philosophers

- 1 ... we take the best and strongest from their youth upwards, and tame them like young lions, charming them with the sound of the voice, and saying to them, that with equality they must be content, and that the equal is the honourable and the just. But if there were a man who had sufficient force, he would shake off and break through, and escape from all this; he would trample under foot all our formulas and spells and charms, and all our laws which are against nature: the slave would rise in rebellion and be lord over us, and the light of natural justice would shine forth.
- 2 And this is true, as you may ascertain, if you will leave philosophy and go on to higher things: for philosophy, Socrates, if pursued in moderation and at the proper age, is an elegant accomplishment, but too much philosophy is the ruin of human life. Even if a man has good parts, still, if he carries philosophy into later life, he is necessarily ignorant of all those things which a gentleman and a person of honour ought to know; he is inexperienced in the laws of the State, and in the language which ought to be used in the dealings of man with man, whether private or public, and utterly ignorant of the pleasures and desires of mankind and of human character in general. And people of this sort, when they betake themselves to politics or business, are as ridiculous as I imagine the politicians to be, when they make their appearance in the arena of philosophy. ...
- 3 Philosophy, as a part of education, is an excellent thing, and there is no disgrace to a man while he is young in pursuing such a study; but when he is more advanced in years, the thing becomes ridiculous ... when I see a youth thus engaged, the study appears to me to be in character, and becoming a man of a liberal education, and him who neglects philosophy I regard as an inferior man, who will never aspire to anything great or noble. But if I see him continuing the study in later life, and not leaving off, I should like to beat him,

Socrates; for, as I was saying, such a one, even though he have good natural parts, becomes effeminate. He flies from the busy centre and the market-place, in which ... men become distinguished; he creeps into a corner for the rest of his life, and talks in a whisper with three or four admiring youths, but never speaks out like a freeman in a satisfactory manner. ...

- 4 And you must not be offended, my dear Socrates, for I am speaking out of good-will towards you, if I ask whether you are not ashamed of being thus defenceless; which I affirm to be the condition not of you only but of all those who will carry the study of philosophy too far. For suppose that some one were to take you, or any one of your sort, off to prison, declaring that you had done wrong when you had done no wrong, you must allow that you would not know what to do: there you would stand giddy and gaping, and not having a word to say; and when you went up before the Court, even if the accuser were a poor creature and not good for much, you would die if he were disposed to claim the penalty of death.
- 5 And yet, Socrates, what is the value of 'An art which converts a man of sense into a fool,' who is helpless, and has no power to save either himself or others, when he is in the greatest danger and is going to be despoiled by his enemies of all his goods, and has to live, simply deprived of his rights of citizenship? He being a man who, if I may use the expression, may be boxed on the ears with impunity. Then, my good friend, take my advice, and refute no more: 'Learn the philosophy of business, and acquire the reputation of wisdom. But leave to others these niceties,' whether they are to be described as follies or absurdities: 'For they will only give you poverty for the inmate of your dwelling.' Cease, then, emulating these paltry splitters of words, and emulate only the man of substance and honour, who is well to do.'

Why they might value running the city 'for its own sake'

"The city needs just people as rulers, but, equally, just people need the city. This is to some degree concealed by the downward movement of the *Repub-*

¹ Plato, *Gorgias* (483e-486c), translated by B. Jowett.

lic, which emphasizes the sacrifice of the Guardians in becoming rulers. But the question of that sacrifice can come up only in a context in which the able young have received an education which enables them to be Guardians, that is to say, the education offered in a just city. Guardians will not emerge, and young people will not become fully just, unless the institutions replicate themselves ... and it is precisely the strongest spirits that will be corrupted without those institutions (492). So not only does the city need people who will see justice as a final end; such people, and young people who would like to become such people but do not yet fully understand what is involved, need the just city, or some approximation to it which can also bring it about that there will be such people.

So we can reply to the challenge of Book II. The rational person needs to regard justice as a final good. Moreover, he, and we, can make sense of regarding it as a final good, because that is exactly what the various arguments of the *Republic* have enabled us to do.”²

² Bernard Williams, “Intrinsic Goodness” in *The sense of the past: essays in the history of philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 134.

