

Two questions about the guardians

Callicles on philosophers

Philosophy is no doubt a charming thing, Socrates, if someone is exposed to it in moderation at the appropriate time of life. But if one spends more time on it than he should, it is the undoing of mankind. For even if someone has great natural advantages, if he engages in philosophy far beyond the appropriate time of life, he will inevitably turn out to be inexperienced in all those things in which a man has to be experienced if he is to be admirable and good and well thought of. Such people have no experience of the laws of their city or of the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, public or private; they have no experience in human pleasures and appetites; no experience, in short, of human character altogether. So when they venture into some private or political activity they become a laughingstock ...

So when I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giving it up, I think such a man by this time needs a flogging. As I was just saying, such a man, even with natural advantages, will end up becoming unmanly and avoiding the middle of the city and its meeting places ... and will slink away for the rest of his life, whispering with three or four boys in a corner, never coming out with anything free-spirited, important, or worth anyone's attention ...

As it is, if someone got hold of you or of anyone else like you and took you off to prison on the charge that you're doing something unjust when you're not, be assured that you wouldn't be able to do yourself any good. You would get dizzy, your mouth would hang open, and you would not know what to say. You would come up for trial and face some no-good wretch of an accuser and be put to death, if death is what he wanted as your sentence. How can this be a wise thing, Socrates, 'the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse', not able to protect himself or to rescue himself or anyone else from the gravest dangers, to be robbed by his enemies, and to live a life without honor in the city? To put it rather crudely, you could give such a man a smack on the jaw and get away with it. Listen to me, friend, and stop this refuting. 'Practice the sweet music of an active life and do it where you'll get a reputation for being intelligent. Leave these subtleties to others'

— whether we call them merely silly, or outright nonsense — ‘which will cause you to live in empty houses’, and do not envy those who go in for these fiddling refutations, but those who have a life, and fame, and many other good things as well.’¹

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 *Republic*, 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

¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 483e–486d. Translated by Bernard Williams in *The Sense of the Past* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 162–63.

² Bernard Williams, “Intrinsic Goodness” in *The Sense of the Past* (Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 134.