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A Problem for the Political Reading of Plato's *Republic*

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ABSTRACT

On one of the most common readings of the *Republic*, Plato means for us to agree with Socrates and his interlocutors that their aristocratic city is the just *polis*. For convenience, I call this the political reading. It is no wonder, of course, that this interpretation is as common as it is, since it might be one of the most natural interpretations of the *Republic*. I argue, though, that it faces a serious problem: Socrates and his interlocutors' argument for the justice of the aristocratic city has certain deficits, and—more important—there is considerable evidence that Plato was aware of at least one of these deficits and that he thought it was obvious enough for his readers to see.

In the *Republic*, according to most scholars, Plato means to show what the just city is.¹ To be sure, most scholars think he also wants to point up the nature and value of justice in the *soul*: in other words, they think he offers an ethical argument, as well as a political argument. But on one of the most common readings, at any rate, he means for us to agree with Socrates and his interlocutors that their aristocratic city is the just *polis*.² It is no wonder that this reading—call it the political reading—is as common as it is. It might be one of the most natural interpretations of the *Republic*, in part because of how much of the dialogue concerns the aristocratic city.

Nonetheless, I think the political reading faces a serious problem, one that runs far deeper than the difficulties that have gotten the most attention from scholars.³ Scholars have focused on various shortcomings that Socrates and his interlocutors' political argument can seem to have. And similarly, in this paper I will underscore a certain deficit in that argument. But what I will mainly emphasize is how much evidence there is that *Plato was aware* of this particular deficit and that he thought it was obvious enough for his readers to see. To strengthen my argument, I will suppose that one version of the political reading might say that Plato means to promote his political view just rhetorically—that is, by some means other than a sufficiently promising argument. I mean to show that even this alternative version of the political reading faces the problem I will name. After making my case, I will briefly indicate why this problem seems significant.

¹ At least, he means to provide a satisfactory account of what it is. Perhaps for some commentators, his argument is supposed to be only provisional (see, e.g., Burnyeat 2006, 3; Singpurwalla 2006, 263; Long 2005, 181; Kamtekar 1998, 315). See the last par. in §III below.

² Here and below, I refer to the aristocratic city that Socrates and his interlocutors deem the just *polis* by the end of the *Republic*. Some commentators have suggested that although Plato makes both the ethical argument and the political argument, he does not mean for the ethical argument to subsume the political argument (see, e.g., Lane 2006, 173; Annas 1981, 185, though in relation to 187, 296). Other commentators have held that the political argument *is* part of the ethical argument, meaning that Plato makes the political argument in order to bolster his claim about the nature and value of justice in the soul (see, e.g., Penner 2006, 162n.19; Kraut 1997b, 217-18n.11; Murphy 1951, 76; Guthrie 1966, 30). Even Annas (1999) seems to think that the political argument is integral to the ethical argument (see 82): apparently, all she denies is that the *Republic* is supposed to provide a blueprint for building or reforming cities in the phenomenal world (see 72-95, especially 80, 88, 90-91, 98-99n.7, 126ff.). On the status of the city of pigs, see note 19 below.

³ Among these difficulties are the ones noted in Sachs 1997, difficulties involving the city-soul analogy, and the talk of compulsion in passages such as 500d4-8, 519e1-520a4, 520a6-9, e1-4, 521b7-11, 539e2-5, and 540b2-5. Contending that the *Republic* is aporetic, MacIntyre (2007) points to certain flaws that Socrates and his interlocutors' arguments seem to have. In my estimation, MacIntyre offers too little evidence that Plato was aware of those flaws. Herein all my references to Plato's works are to the texts in Burnet's edition; translations of passages in the *Republic* are based on Bloom 1968; and translations of passages in other Platonic dialogues are based on the translations in Cooper 1997a.

I. A gap in the Republic

Let me start by noting that in the *Republic*, when Socrates and his interlocutors claim that the aristocratic city is just, the reason they give is that it is the *best possible* city. This is to say that, on the one hand, they infer the aristocratic city's *justice* from its *bestness* and, on the other hand, they treat the *best* city as the *best possible* city.⁴ In turn, they claim that the aristocratic city is possible—in other words, that it could exist, meaning that it is allowed by the constraints of this world. These include physical constraints (such as gravity), psychological constraints, and so on. By the end of the *Republic* and even from the outset of the discussion of political justice, Socrates and his interlocutors act as if a city has to be allowed by these constraints in order to be the just city. That is, they adhere to the possibility requirement, as we can call it. For example, as soon as they set out to describe the just city, the first thing they try to see is how to arrange a city so that the people in it have enough food (369d1-3).

I have already argued for all of this at length elsewhere,⁵ and I will not beat a dead horse here. What matters at the moment is that once Socrates and his interlocutors claim that the aristocratic city is possible, they need to argue well enough that it *is*, and it is not at all clear that they follow through in this regard. To start with, notice how hard their task is. In the aristocratic city, there are rulers who know the Form of the Good.⁶ So in order to show that the aristocratic city is possible, Socrates and his interlocutors need to show that the Good is humanly knowable.

To show *that*, they need to be pretty thorough: they need to show that there are no insurmountable obstacles to humanly knowing the Good—in other words, that there is nothing that would always block our path. And Socrates and his interlocutors are scarcely that thorough. Granted, they recognize *certain* things that might keep a human being from knowing the Good, and they work hard to show that *those* obstacles could be overcome. For example, they argue assiduously that human beings someday could overcome the obstacles to getting a proper education (see especially 376e-427c, 474b-502c, 502d-541b). But although it helps that Socrates and his interlocutors address obstacles of that sort, it is not enough, because there still might be other obstacles. Suppose, for example, that we came to be properly educated by Socrates and his interlocutors' standards. Even then, there still might be something that kept us from knowing the Good. Momentarily, I will indicate why; but for now, the point I mean to make is that there is a substantial gap in Socrates and his interlocutors' political argument.

II. Why the gap matters

Did Plato just overlook this gap? Or, if he saw it, did he think his readers would overlook it? If we adopt the political interpretation, then presumably we have to say “yes” in response to one of those two questions: we have to say either that he thought his readers *should* be persuaded, or simply that he thought they *would* be persuaded, by the argument he put into the mouths of Socrates and his interlocutors (see the second par. of this paper).⁷ And perhaps we would turn out to be right if we said one

⁴ At least, this is the case *all told*. Below see note 22 and the text to it on the shifts between the *possibility* requirement and the *approximation* requirement, as I call them. In the final estimation, the requirement that Socrates and his interlocutors have to meet is the possibility requirement, rather than the approximation requirement.

⁵ See Marshall 2008. On the inference from “best” to “just,” see 427e10-12. On treating “best” as “best possible,” see, e.g., 456e6-7. Let me stress that when Socrates and his interlocutors claim that the aristocratic city is possible, their claim is not that it *is* attainable for some particular society, but simply that there *could* be such a city *somewhere sometime* (see Marshall 2008, 72; Burnyeat 1999, 306-07). I should add that on the issue of possibility, herein I sacrifice a little accuracy for ease of statement. Although Socrates and his interlocutors proceed as if a city has to be possible in order to be *best*, it is not clear that on their terms a city must be possible in order to be *just* (see Marshall 2008, 80). Nothing hinges on this herein, though.

⁶ Rowe (2007, 214-28; 2005, 222-24; 2003b), e.g., has effectively denied this (cf. Williams 2006, 133-34), and I lack enough space to defend it here. But it is exceedingly common for scholars to make this sort of claim. In fact, for commentators such as Keyt (2006, e.g. 198-99), Weiss (2001, e.g. 204), Kraut (1973, e.g. 213), and C. Gill (1979, 152), in the *Republic* even just to *be a philosopher-ruler* is to know the Forms.

⁷ At least, we probably have to say that Plato meant for *most* of his readers to overlook the gap. If *many* of them spotted the difficulty, word might spread quickly enough. (On Plato's target audience or audiences, see note 11

of these things. But based on the evidence we have, Plato is more likely to have seen the gap and to have figured there is a good chance that readers would see it. Here is what leads me to think so. Regardless of whether it is novel, it seems compelling.

First, knowledge of the Good (if there is such a thing) is the most valuable kind of knowledge. And in Greece, at the point when Plato probably wrote the *Republic*, a certain religious view said that the most valuable kind of knowledge is out of reach for human beings because only gods can have it, and human beings cannot become gods.⁸ This was the traditional religious view, and a lot of Greeks still held to it.⁹ At the same time, other Greeks, more and more, were rejecting the traditional view in favor of a new religious view. Is the traditional view correct? That was a live question at the time, and it got a lot of attention.¹⁰ It is hard to imagine that Plato was blind to this or that he thought his readers would be.

Among other reasons: In the *Republic*, Socrates rejects the traditional view, obviously. But he seems to accept it in other dialogues that Plato is thought to have written before the *Republic* and around the time when he wrote the *Republic*.¹¹ For example, in Plato's *Apology* Socrates makes a point of saying that he has, at most, only human wisdom, as opposed to full-blown divine wisdom. Similarly, there is a passage near the end of the *Phaedrus* where Socrates seems to mean that only gods are wise, and human beings can never be. There is a string of passages like that in Plato's dialogues other than the *Republic*.¹² If you were an inquisitive ancient Greek and you compared those passages to the *Republic*, while all around you the traditional religious view was being debated, you would wonder what Plato was up to. You would wonder *why* in the *Republic* Socrates rejects that view, whereas in those other dialogues he sticks with it; in other words, in reading the *Republic* you would want to know what *evidence* Socrates has that the traditional view is false. And if, for example, you suspected that *Plato* had changed *his* mind, now rejecting the traditional view, you would be especially curious what the evidence is supposed to be. So the gap in Socrates and his interlocutors' political argument would tend to draw your attention: you would be waiting to see Socrates explain what he thinks is wrong with this traditional religious view.

And there also is another point you might expect him to address. Consider the *Phaedo*—another dialogue that Plato is thought to have written before he wrote the *Republic* (see note 11 above). In the *Phaedo*, too, Socrates maintains that knowledge of the most valuable kind is out of reach for human beings. But in this case, his reason has to do with more than just the traditional religious view I have mentioned. One idea in the *Phaedo* is that the human path to knowledge is forever blocked by a certain

below.) On another point: Note that not even Blondell (2002, 165-250) suggests that Plato offers any argument for the aristocratic city's possibility other than the argument which Socrates and his interlocutors explicitly voice.

⁸ Cf., e.g., Forster 2006, 12-13n.25, 18n.41; McPherran 2006b, 246; 2006a, 100n.27; 1996, 291-97; Vlastos 1994, 63; Sourvinou-Inwood 1990, 303; Ostwald 1986, 287; Dover 1974, 75; Snell 1953, 136-52. On the importance of religion in the culture in which the *Republic* was written, see, e.g., McPherran 2006b, 245; Morgan 1992, 227-29; Sourvinou-Inwood 1990, 304-06; Yunis 1988, 19-28, 40.

⁹ See, e.g., Morgan 1992, the text to 228n.4, 229-31; 1990, 113, 194n.5. Cf., e.g., Price 1999, 67-88, especially 78-79; Parker 1996, 152-53, 196, 220-21; Bremmer 1994, 91.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Humphreys 2004. Cf., e.g., Burkert 1985, 305-29.

¹¹ On Platonic chronologies, here and below see especially Kahn 2002, which includes some other relevant bibliographical information. Herein I make no claim about who Plato's target audience was (or who the target audiences were); whether, e.g., the *Apology* or *Phaedo* was *circulated* before the *Republic* was; or—for that matter—whether the *Republic*'s Socrates is supposed to be the same character as the Socrates in other Platonic dialogues. All I need to say is something on this order: When Plato wrote the *Republic*, he likely envisioned that many of his readers *might* at some point gain access to, e.g., the *Apology* or *Phaedo* in generally the form in which we have them (cf. note 7 above). For some recent claims about whom Plato wrote for, see, e.g., Yunis 2007, 1, 5, 15; Burnyeat 2006, 3; Thesleff 2000, 63-64; 1998, 55, which contain some other relevant bibliographical information.

¹² In the *Apology*, Socrates repeatedly emphasizes, meanwhile referring to the divine, “that human *sophia* is worth little or nothing” (23a6-7)—that the “wisest” (**sofw/tato/j**: 23b2; cf. **sofw/taton**: 21b6) human being is the one who sees, like Socrates, “that his *sophia* is worthless” (23b3-4). In the *Phaedrus*, see 278d3-6. On other relevant passages in Plato, see, e.g., Forster 2006, 12 with 12-13n.25, and 18 with 18n.42; Rowe 2005, 222n.23 and the text to it; 2003b, 57n.1 and the text to it; Wolfsdorf 2004, 130; Weiss 2001, e.g. 6, 8-10, 139-40, 179; 1994, 273-74; Schmid 1998, e.g. 159; Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 38-45; Kraut 1984, 288-94.

obstacle involving sensory perception.¹³ Roughly, the idea may be that only phenomena can trigger recollection of the Forms, and phenomena can trigger recollection only if they are (or appear) *F* and, in turn, remind us of the Form of *F*-ness;¹⁴ yet each phenomenon has contrary predicates,¹⁵ and as a result phenomena are too different from the Forms to recollect them to us.¹⁶ In its context, that idea has force; for in working off of phenomena that are both *F* and not-*F*, we might always struggle to isolate their *F*-ness enough to determine what the Form of *F*-ness consists of.¹⁷ And at any rate, in reading the *Republic* you would wonder why this obstacle involving sensory perception is *not* insurmountable—that is, you would wonder why Socrates is *right* in the *Republic*, such that he is *wrong* in the *Phaedo*. Granted, you might think that Plato had simply changed his view on this issue. But at the least, you would wonder *why* his view had shifted. This is another reason that the gap in Socrates and his interlocutors' political argument in the *Republic* would tend to draw readers' attention. Now, perhaps this connection between the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* just did not occur to Plato. Or perhaps he was confident that it would slip past his readers. But that seems unlikely, in part since the bit about the obstacle involving sensory perception is a major theme in the *Phaedo*.

All of this leads me to the idea I mentioned—that the likelihood is that Plato saw the gap and that he figured there is a good chance that his readers also would see it. With that idea in mind, I have come to think that the political reading of the *Republic* runs up against a serious problem.

III. Some objections

But we might say I am being too hasty, because there are certain obvious objections we can raise. For one, we might say that my focus has been too narrow. Granted, there *is* a gap in Socrates and his interlocutors' political argument in the *Republic*. But the main thrust of their argument is that the aristocratic city is *just*; and the part of the argument I have targeted is the claim that the aristocratic city is *possible*. We might ask whether that part of the argument is essential to the argument. Could we not get rid of that part and still have a decent argument? In other words, even if Socrates and his interlocutors are wrong that the aristocratic city is *possible*, could they not still be right that it is *just*?

Oddly enough, the answer is “no.” Again, Socrates and his interlocutors proceed as if a city is not just unless it is possible: rather than trying to picture the city that is best *and* that also happens to be possible, they try to think of the *best possible* city.¹⁸ If a city *need not* be possible in order to be just, then Socrates and his interlocutors' discussion of cities is misguided from its outset; for in that case, the just city might be better than all the cities they describe—including the aristocratic city and even the so-called city of pigs (372d5-6), since Socrates and his interlocutors adhere to the possibility requirement even

¹³ See especially 65a9-c1; 66d4-7 with Baltzly 1996, 125-28; 66e3-5; 79c5. Perhaps the idea is not just that *full-blown* knowledge is out of reach, but that even *partial* knowledge is. Although at 66d8 and e5 there are references to knowing *purely* and at b6-7 to *sufficiently* (i(kanw=j)) attaining the truth, there is no qualifier such as **kaqarw=j** or **i(kanw=j)** at 66d6-7, e1-4, e4-6, or 67a2-6.

¹⁴ For Sedley (2006), e.g., Plato in the *Phaedo* “is at pains to avoid tying his whole argument to the choice of resemblance as the correct account of the vexed Form-particular relationship” (321), but Plato struggled to find a satisfactory alternative to the resemblance account, and “to judge from his persistent adherence to it in both *Republic* and *Timaeus*, the resemblance model is the one on which Plato eventually settled” (322). For indication that the idea in the *Phaedo* might be just that phenomena *appear F*, and not that they *are F*, see, e.g., 74b7-c3.

¹⁵ See, e.g., 74b7-10, 102b3-d2. Cf. *Republic* 523b9-525a1.

¹⁶ Perhaps we are to think that *F* phenomena are “deficiently” *F* (74d6-8, d9-e5, 75a11-b3) just in being *contingently F*, and that they thus are *fully F*, instead of just approximately *F*. Commentators now often hold that this is what the *Phaedo* means. See Kelsey 2000 for a response and for some other relevant bibliographical information. Osborne (1995), e.g., tries to chart a path around the *Phaedo* obstacle referred to here above.

¹⁷ Of course, perhaps when we scrutinize the objects of sensory perception that we take to be *F*, investigating what *F*-ness might be, we need not make *continual* reference to them in the course of inquiry. The danger is just that, in whatever way, our encounters with phenomena will ineluctably color our reflections, keeping us from seeing far enough beyond the phenomenal world to glimpse the Forms fully enough.

¹⁸ See the qualifications in notes 4 and 5 above.

when they first start to discuss political justice.¹⁹ If the just city is not the best *possible* city, then perhaps it is simply the best *conceivable* city; and perhaps the best conceivable city is better, so to speak, than the best possible city.²⁰ For example, the best conceivable city might be a *polis* in which, say, no one needs food, people can fly like Superman, and they need only to love and be loved, if they have any needs at all. A wide range of counterfactual states of affairs are readily conceivable (Superman, Homeric and Hesiodic gods—anything but square circles, for example). In short, Socrates and his interlocutors need to be right that the *just* city is the best *possible* city; and they also need to be right about *which particular* city is the best *possible* city.

Granted, this, too, is something Plato might have overlooked. But we would go too far if we said that he did miss it; for the point is fairly straightforward.²¹ It simply proceeds from the general rule that the looser the constraints a city is under, the better the city can be. The constraints act as a cutoff that keeps the city from getting any better; they function as a cap on how good the city can get. For that matter, there are passages in the *Republic* which reflect the idea of a cutoff. Take, for example, a disputed passage in Book V—namely, 472b3-473b3. There (473a7-b3), at a point when Socrates and his interlocutors have been faithfully adhering to the possibility requirement, they effectively trade it in for what we might call the *approximation* requirement, meaning they agree to look not for the best *possible* city, but for the best city that could at least be *approximated* closely enough in the phenomenal world. In this passage, they plainly allow that there is a city which is better than the best *possible* city. And it is odd that they make the move that they make here—most especially because they have switched *back* to the *possibility* requirement by the time the dialogue ends.²² Plato might have included this passage so as to get readers to reflect on the notion of a cutoff.

Of course, there are other objections we might raise. For example, we might say that contrary to what I have suggested, Socrates and his interlocutors need not *show* that the Form of the Good is humanly knowable: Plato means for us just to *provisionally* accept that the Good could be humanly known. The snag here, though, is that unless we know what it is to be in a state of knowing the Good, it is hard to see what counts as evidence that a human being *could* be in that state. Typically, when we do see what counts as evidence that a human being could be in a certain state, we have a full enough picture of what being in that state is, what signs or symptoms it brings with it—for example, what it is to have the flu. When we do not already know the Good, we are in much less familiar territory as we speculate about what knowing it would be. So in any case, it would seem that either Socrates and his interlocutors *show* that the Good is humanly knowable, or they leave us in the dark about whether it is. Further, it would seem that the only way to *show* that the Good is humanly knowable is to show that some human being *has* known it or does know it. Perhaps there are other ways. But what would they be?

¹⁹ See the first par. in §I above. For Smith (2001, 122-25), Plato thinks the city of pigs is as good as the aristocratic city; and for Morrison (2007, 252-54) and Silverman (2007, 69), Plato thinks the city of pigs is *better than* the aristocratic city. But even if Morrison is right that nothing in the *Republic* suggests that the city of pigs is impossible, neither are we given much reason to think it is *possible*.

²⁰ Now, perhaps the best possible city and the best conceivable city are coterminous with each other: perhaps a city, *by definition*, contains human beings, and human beings, by definition, are under the constraints of this world—such that a would-be city which is *not* under those constraints is on par with a square circle, meaning that the very idea of it is incoherent. But if so, this is simply an open-and-shut case: in order to show that a particular city is just, Socrates and his interlocutors need to show that this city is allowed by those constraints.

²¹ Incidentally, Marshall 2008 was by no means the first essay to include the sort of claims I make about possibility in the *Republic*. See, e.g., Morrison 2007, 232, 234; Barney 2002; Bobonich 2002, 73; Burnyeat 2000, 64; 1999; Laks 1990; Reeve 1988, especially 110; Annas 1981, 185 (which has to be viewed in light of 187, 296); Moline 1981, 45-46; White 1979, 152. Cf., e.g., Yunis 2007, 17; Kamtekar 2004; Klosko 1983; 1981.

²² Another reason is that they may be *mistaken* in switching to the approximation requirement: at least, Nagel (1991, 6-7), e.g., has a potent intuition on his side when he maintains that a political ideal should be rejected if it is humanly unreachable (cf. 26-32; Brown 2005, 85-86). On the dispute over V.472b3-473b3, see Marshall 2008. Therein see 72 and 76 on the switch to the *approximation* requirement, and 81-82 on the switch back to the *possibility* requirement.

IV. Conclusion

In the end, the political reading of the *Republic* does seem to face a serious problem. On the one hand, there is a substantial gap in Socrates and his interlocutors' argument for the justice of the aristocratic city; and if we maintain that Plato endorses that argument, we have to say that he overlooks this gap or expects his readers to overlook it. But on the other hand, it is more likely that Plato *saw* the gap and that he figured there is a good chance that readers would see it.

Of course, it is sensible to ask: So what? Even if the political reading is problematic, we might say, its competitors are plainly no better off. But we might well be wrong about this. Various commentators may be correct that there is a "hermeneutic circle" of a certain sort, in the language that one of them borrows.²³ The idea is that all readings of Plato are inevitably rooted in certain assumptions, some of which are so diverse as to yield not just competing interpretations but rival interpretive frameworks, as they might be termed. The frameworks affect *what counts as evidence* against a particular reading, or at least how heavily a piece of evidence counts against that reading. As a result, oftentimes the only way to demonstrate the superiority of one reading over another is to show, for example, that the other reading does not cohere with itself or that it clashes too much with intuitions that even its proponents will presumably have. Opponents of the political reading will often be able to neutralize certain evidence that at first can seem to count decisively against them.

Take, for example, the fact that Aristotle knew Plato and apparently accepted the political reading of the *Republic*. At the least, this can seem to put the burden of proof firmly on anyone who opposes the political reading.²⁴ But according to Giovanni Ferrari, even Leo Strauss is able to nullify the Aristotle evidence.²⁵ That is significant because whatever Strauss took the ultimate purpose or purposes of the *Republic* to be, the conflict between the political reading of the *Republic* and Strauss' interpretation can seem to be especially sharp. In fact, on a reading commonly associated with Strauss, the *Republic* is supposed to teach us that the just city is impossible, so as ultimately to purge us of the ambition to make our *polis* into all that a city should be.²⁶ At any rate, we might expect the Aristotle evidence to pose an obstacle particularly for Strauss. Yet Strauss paints a picture in which Aristotle knew full well what Plato was really up to in the *Republic*: Aristotle recognized that Socrates' arguments were supposed to reveal

²³ Ferrari (1997, 62) uses this term. Rowe (2007, 50-51; 2002b, 308ff.) seems to think there is a hermeneutic circle of the sort I characterize here. Morrison (2007, 241) and Dillon (1999, 222) believe the circle is closed, so to speak, meaning that it prevents us *entirely* from arbitrating among radically opposed holistic interpretations, as Rowe (2007, 50-51) calls them—i.e., radically opposed views about what ultimate purpose or purposes the *Republic* has. Ferrari might agree. Some of my reasons for *disagreeing* are those which Rowe (2002b, 308ff.) offers. Some commentators see little need to identify the correct holistic interpretation (see, e.g., Blackburn 2006, 163n.9 on Jonathan Barnes; Pappas 2004, 219; and especially Irwin 1988, 199). Meanwhile, some commentators acknowledge that they work off of certain assumptions, and they deem this unproblematic (see, e.g., Beversluis 2006, 85, 86, 91; C. Gill 2006, 137; 2002, 215-16; Irwin 1988, 197). But contrast, e.g., Rowe 2002a, 253-55; and note that many of the most prominent Anglo-American scholars now are wary of simply assuming, e.g., that Socrates speaks for Plato in the *Republic* (see, e.g., Rowe 2007; 2006b, especially 23; 2006a, e.g. 8; 2003a, 116-17; McCabe 2006; Schofield 2006, 16-19; 1996, 51; Annas 2004, 32; 2003b, 9-10, 25-42; 2003a, 1190, 1191; 1999, 10; Frede 1998; Cooper 1997b, xviii-xxv; M. Gill 1996, 5n.3; Kahn 1996).

²⁴ Beversluis (2006, 101) and Irwin (1995, 5-7; 1992, 77) seem to think the opponents have the burden of proof. Granted, Tarrant (2000, 47) might be right to deny that in *Politics* 2.2-5 Aristotle identifies Plato's Socrates "directly with Plato. [The Socrates whom Aristotle refers to] is, perhaps, an intermediate hybrid." But see *Politics* 1274b9-11 with, e.g., Stalley 1991, 183-84n.5. Admittedly, there is no guarantee that Plato told Aristotle what the dialogues are meant to do; and even if Aristotle knew what Plato's *philosophical beliefs* were, Aristotle still might not have known what Plato's *intentions as an author* were. But we might figure that Aristotle at least talked with Plato about the dialogues, such that Aristotle had far more to go on than we have.

²⁵ See Ferrari 1997, 62.

²⁶ I.e., to purge us of that ambition, even if some distant approximation of political justice is worth seeking. See first and foremost Burnyeat 1998, 342-44, though contrast Ferrari 1997, 45. (References could easily be proliferated.) Strauss is famously enigmatic. Among his writings, see first and foremost Strauss 1964, 50-138.

philosophical problems that were intractable, and Aristotle addressed those arguments because he meant to offer solutions.²⁷ No doubt, Strauss' claim can be off-putting; but according to Ferrari it neutralizes the Aristotle evidence. If there is a hermeneutic circle of the sort I have mentioned, then a piece of evidence counts against a particular reading only if the evidence counts as a problem within that reading's own interpretive framework.

Further, if *Strauss* can sidestep even the Aristotle evidence, then many other competitors of the political reading may also fare much better than we might expect. Meanwhile, in laying out my argument above, I called on intuitions that most Anglo-American scholars will presumably share; so there seems to be evidence against the political reading that counts as a problem within its own interpretive framework. Certainly, the political reading might still be tenable, and perhaps all of its competitors still pale in comparison to it. But I submit that the problem I have pointed to is worth considering. At the least, it seems to deserve more attention than it has gotten.²⁸

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²⁷ See Ferrari 1997, 62.

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