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Looks Matter: Beholding Justice in the *Republic*

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Abstract: In Plato's *Republic*, Glaucon tells a story about Gyges' ring that, on the surface, suggests a radical opposition between appearances and truth. We argue that, contrary to Glaucon's intentions, what his story actually reveals is that appearances are always and inevitably implicated in the attempt to tell the truth about justice or the soul. This mutual implication is confirmed by Glaucon's own commentary on his story as well as by Socrates' arguments about the city and the soul. We argue that knowing the soul "in itself" requires that one examine it not *by* itself, but as it is immersed in human life. It is a question of how the soul "looks" – meaning not simply how it seems or appears, but of where it is looking, or what it desires. Taking its looks into account, in this sense, is very different from being taken in by appearances. We explore the implications of this idea for the possibility of attaining philosophical knowledge about justice, and for the relationship between philosophy and politics.

I

From the opening lines, in which Socrates relates that he went down to the Pireaus to see and to pray, to his ultimate assessment of the city-in-speech as a heavenly model for those who want to look at it (592b), the *Republic* is, at some level, about what it means to see. It can be argued (and is commonly maintained) that the kind of seeing to which the *Republic* ultimately appeals is really a metaphor for rational understanding, and that the true philosopher sees beyond the appearances of things (like justice) in order to see the truth in a purely noetic way. Philosophical education, in this view, is a conversion from literal (bodily, sensuous) seeing to a disembodied, purely intellectual seeing of an invisible, purely intelligible reality. If Socrates likens this process to the redirection of one's sight (518c), this is merely an analogy.[1]

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[1]Textual support for this view may certainly be found in the *Republic*, especially in books 6-7. At 507a, for example, Plato has Socrates say that "[t]he many beautiful things . . . are visible but not intelligible, while the forms are intelligible *but not visible*." At 529b, Socrates insists that the "true motions" of things "must be grasped by reason and thought, *not by sight*." The important question, of course, is what one is to make of such passages in light of other, equally significant, portions of the text and, ultimately, of the work as a whole. On the questionability of these very passages, see note 17, below.

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As a way of looking at the *Republic*, this view is hard to challenge because it begs the most basic of questions. If one assumes that Plato uses vision in a purely metaphorical sense, then no appeal to the importance of literal seeing in Plato's text can be used to combat this assumption. To argue in the abstract about where the truth lies in Plato's text presupposes that this truth is itself abstract and accessible only if we ourselves see past the surface details.These details are, however, precisely what move us to wonder about what the moral of Plato's story might really be. In order to understand what the *Republic* as a whole teaches about the nature of justice, it is essential to clarify its teaching on the character of philosophical seeing, insofar as Socrates' argument ultimately leads to the conclusion that the only truly just individual is the philosopher.

For these reasons, we believe, the myth Plato has Glaucon tell about "Gyges' ring" deserves a closer look. Glaucon's story, while short, is rich in detail—concrete, sensuous detail—and very much about seeing, being seen, and getting others to see in a certain way. To the myth proper, Glaucon adds a commentary, in which he tries to make the moral of his story clear. In his commentary, Glaucon suggests that what the myth reveals is the need to get beyond literal (physical, bodily) seeing altogether. He advises Socrates that, if they are to discern the truth about justice and injustice, "the seeming must be taken away" (361b).[2] If one takes the commentary at face value, then, one must refuse to take the myth at face value, for one must assume that the philosophical point of the story (the truth) is revealed only by this theoretical account and not by the physical complexities (the appearances) of the story itself. In our view, however, Glaucon's myth, along with the commentary he provides, suggests a more complex relationship—and a closer affinity—between seeing and knowing, or between appearances and truth, than is often recognized. Philosophical seeing can be reduced neither to merely literal seeing nor to purely metaphorical seeing.

Glaucon's story is about a shepherd who finds a ring and discovers that it makes him invisible. When he realizes this, he seduces the queen, kills the king, and seizes the kingdom. The power supposedly conferred by the ring—unlimited access to what is hidden from others—invites a comparison between the shepherd and the all-seeing philosopher-king.[3] However, Glaucon's shepherd is only all-seeing insofar as he is invisible, and what the story shows is that he needs a visible body to commit his injustices in

[2]All quotations from Plato's *Republic* are from the translation by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), with emendations. Many of the emendations owe much to the translation by G. M. A. Grube, as adapted by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis and London: Hackett, 1976).

[3]See Mary P. Nichols, "Glaucon's Adaptation of the Story of Gyges and Its Implications for Plato's Political Teaching," *Polity* 17 (Fall 1984): 30–39; and *Socrates and the Political Community: An Ancient Debate* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), pp. 60–62.

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the way that we are told he commits them. Rather than interpreting this fact as suggesting the way in which he differs from the philosopher of the *Republic*, we argue that it is precisely in this way—in embodying a more complex relationship between being and seeming—that he does model the philosopher. Glaucon's myth not only prefigures the ways in which the relationship between being and appearance will be explored throughout the rest of the *Republic*, it conditions that exploration by exemplifying through its own structure the way in which the question of what justice is, and the question of how the truth about justice comes to be recognized, are bound together. If it is a mistake to think that the truth about justice can be told by seeing into the soul in a purely metaphorical sense—setting appearances and literal seeing aside—this does not mean that there is no truth to tell.

II

We are not the first to have noticed some curious features of Glaucon's recounting of what is usually referred to as "the myth of Gyges' ring."[4] To begin with, of course, the ring is not Gyges' at all, but belonged to an ancestor of his: "They say he was a shepherd in the service of the man who was then ruling Lydia" (359d). But then, it did not really belong to him either. He stole it from the finger of giant-sized corpse—a corpse that was naked, wearing only this gold ring. The corpse and its ring would have remained invisible, entombed in a hollow bronze horse, but for the window-like openings that permitted the shepherd to catch a glimpse of it. The horse itself would never have caught the shepherd's eye—it, too, would have remained invisible—were it not for a great thunderstorm and earthquake that cracked open the ground and created

[4]For alternative interpretations of the details and significance of Glaucon's myth, see, in addition to Nichols (cited above), Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's* Republic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 35–44; Michael Davis, "Tragedy and Law: Gyges in Herodotus and Plato," *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (March 2000): 635–55; Andrew Laird, "Ringing the Changes on Gyges: Philosophy and the Formation of Fiction in Plato's *Republic*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 121 (2001): 12–29; Jacob Howland, The Republic*: The Odyssey of Philosophy* (Boston: Twayne, 1993), pp. 81–84; and Katherine Philippakis, "See No Evil: The Story of Gyges in Herodotus and Plato," in *Justice v. Law in Greek Political Thought*, ed. Leslie G. Rubin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 27–40. Various other commentators who devote considerable attention to Glaucon's use of the myth nevertheless skim over its many curious details to consider only the moral of the story. See, for example, Drew A. Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 37–46; Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 88–90; Mark J. Lutz, *Socrates' Education to Virtue: Learning the Love of the Noble* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 157–60.

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a chasm at the very place where the shepherd was tending his sheep. This cataclysmic event—natural, but invested with a sense of the supernatural—initiates a sequence in which the shepherd is moved, first to enter the chasm—"He saw this, wondered at it, and went down" (359d),—then to peep through the small openings, and finally, to take the ring.

The story, as Glaucon tells it, has the structure of a progressive unfolding of appearances, or openings, through which the shepherd not only comes to see something, but is moved to see, and ultimately moved to possess. This structure is underscored by a further detail Glaucon inserts. In addition to the hollow bronze horse, the chasm held "other quite wonderful things about which they tell [*muthologousi*]" (359d). These, too, seem to have lured the shepherd on. However, we ourselves are not told about them; at least, they are not described to us. They are made visible to the shepherd—and perhaps also to those who have heard the story before—but kept from the reader. In the way that Plato has Glaucon mythologize about it, the chasm conceals as much as it reveals.

Of course, the story does not end with the shepherd taking the ring. He wore it to the next gathering of his fellow shepherds, and with no obvious intention of doing or discovering anything further about it, "he chanced to turn the collet of the ring towards the inside of his hand. . . . When he did this, he became invisible to those sitting by him, and they discussed him as though he were away" (359e). The shepherd initially comes to see the magical power of the ring by accident, and "wondered at this" (360a). He then tests the ring, confirming that "when he turned the collet inward, he became invisible, when outward, visible" (360a). At this point, he seems to realize that he can do injustice with impunity; he seduces the queen, and kills the king.

Does it matter that it was not Gyges who did all this (that, as far as we can tell, it was never Gyges' ring, unless he inherited it from his ancestor)? Perhaps not.[5] But the question of whose ring this really is—or of who the shepherd might be taken to represent—opens up on a deeper level. Indeed, the question of identity arises with regard to the story itself, which has an ancestor in Herodotus' *Histories* (1. 8–14). But the stories differ, in ways that should move us to wonder about what Plato's use of it might ultimately reveal.

In Herodotus' version, one Gyges (of Lydia) is, in fact, the hero of the story.[6] He, too, is a servant (a bodyguard), and he, too, is able to see

[5]While this is a curious and seldom observed feature of the way Plato has Glaucon introduce his story, the curiosity may simply be a textual one. After all, Socrates does refer to "the ring of Gyges" later on, at 612b, in a context that clearly relates to the point Glaucon is trying to make in book 2. The inconsistency could be explained away. See, for example, Laird, pp. 14–15, as well as the references cited in Kent Moors, "Muthologia and the Limits of Opinion: Presented Myths in Plato's *Republic*," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (1988) 4: 228, n. 33.

[6]For an interpretation of Herodotus' version of the Gyges story, see Seth Benardete, *Herodotean Inquiries* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 10–15.

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things that men are not ordinarily permitted to see, thanks to his own (incomplete) invisibility. He beholds a naked body—not a superhuman corpse, but a beautiful queen—and, in the end, he kills the king, marries the queen, and becomes king himself. One might say that this is where the similarities between the two stories end, except that they have not really begun. Gyges' first act of injustice was to see the queen naked. He was moved to this act, not by any desire of his own, but because the king (whom he served) was convinced that his wife was the most beautiful woman on earth and wanted Gyges to see this for himself. Horrified at the suggestion that he commit an act of such impropriety, Gyges tries to refuse, but the king insists. Gyges is compelled to perform an action that reveals, and satisfies, not his own unjust desires but those of his master. He does it because, as Herodotus tells us, "he was unable to avoid it."[7] The king physically stations Gyges behind the bedroom door and assures him that, from there, he "will be able to watch [the queen] with perfect ease" and that she will not know that he has seen her.

But the queen sees him, and at once realizes what her husband has done. She herself does not let it appear that she has noticed anything, however. In other words, it is the queen who sees without being seen. She summons Gyges the following morning, and Herodotus makes a point of emphasizing that he "answered the summons without any suspicion that she knew what had occurred." Though he was nearly invisible, while the queen was fully visible to him, he did not see himself being seen. The queen then offers Gyges two alternatives: "Kill Candaules and seize the throne, with me as your wife; or die yourself on the spot, so that never again may your blind obedience to the king tempt you to see what you have no right to see. One of you must die; either my husband, the author of this wicked plot; or you, who have outraged propriety by seeing me naked." The queen's ultimatum is motivated by her desire to see justice done. Against his will (*ouk eth elonta)*, Gyges is moved to kill the king, just as he was moved to see the queen. The queen "put a knife in his hand, and hid him behind the same door as before." This time, he remains unseen, at least by the king, who is asleep. Gyges kills the king, usurps the throne, and marries the queen. The legitimacy of his rule is challenged by the Lydians, but is later confirmed by an oracle from Delphi. Thus was his royal power established—justly, it seems.

If it is important to Glaucon's telling of his story that others have told and heard it before, then it looks very strange indeed when compared to Herodotus' version. According to Glaucon, his tale shows that whenever anyone thinks he can do injustice with impunity, he does it (360c). His thought experiment is designed to allow us to observe both a just and an unjust person under conditions of freedom to pursue whatever they

[7]All quotations from Herodotus are from the following edition: Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 5–6.

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desire, and to "catch the just man red-handed going the same way as the unjust…" (359c). In Herodotus' version, Gyges is, indeed, caught traveling the same road as the unjust, but only because he is forced to do so against his will. Even when he kills the king, seizes the throne, and takes the queen as his wife, we do not see Gyges getting something he secretly wanted. The queen places the weapon in his hand. The unjust desire that comes to light in this story—and is recognized by the queen—is Candaules' desire that others see what he sees (the queen's beauty in its naked state). Candaules may get what he wants, but he does not get away with it. The only person who does is the queen, and what she wants is to see justice done. Rather than showing that human beings behave justly only when forced to, as Glaucon contends, Herodotus' tale shows a person forced to behave unjustly. Why would Plato have Glaucon put his audience in mind of a tale whose moral is apparently the opposite of his own?

Moreover, it is not entirely clear that Glaucon's own version shows a just man going the way of the unjust when granted the power of invisibility, for the ring seems entirely incidental to his performance of unjust actions. In fact, one could argue that the shepherd took his first step down the path of injustice when he descended into the chasm, whose sacred aura he seems to sense. Surely, the bronze horse, with its gigantic corpse wearing nothing but a gold ring, might be seen as something the shepherd would do well not to violate. For him to go on and take the ring was no ordinary act of looting. And yet, he did not require the ring to perform the act.

Herodotus makes it clear that Gyges was forced into his acts of injustice by making us witnesses to what is said and done inside the palace walls when Gyges is first summoned by the king, and again when the queen confronts him and issues her ultimatum. In Glaucon's mythologizing, however, we are not witness to what goes on *in camera*; the seduction and regicide (like the many other wonders) are only briefly reported. Far less attention is given to the main event than to the complex stage-setting that precedes it.What is supposed to be the most important part of the story—the part that seems to illustrate the point Glaucon is trying to make—is conveyed in two brisk sentences. The shepherd "at once arranged to become one of the messengers sent to report to the king. And when he arrived there, he seduced the king's wife, attacked the king with her help, killed him, and took over the kingdom" (360b). But even this brevity discloses as much as it hides, inasmuch as we are told that the shepherd *arranged* to become a messenger, *seduced* (*moicheuein*, to commit adultery) the king's wife, and attacked the king *with her help*. The shepherd, it seems, had a knack for persuading others to do his bidding, a talent that figures much more prominently in his success than the ring itself.

There is no persuasion in Herodotus' version, only compulsion. Nor is anyone led on, or moved to see, by wonders. And, of course, there is no ring. This brings us to what may be the most curious feature of the story as Plato has Glaucon tell it: that is, the very richness of its details. What is

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remarkable about the first (and longest) part of the story is its concentrated abundance of concrete visual imagery. Why should Glaucon rely so heavily on this highly particularized imagery to tell a story that is intended to realize a fantasy of invisibility? No less striking than the imagery itself is its seeming irrelevance to what is supposed to be the story's main point. In introducing his tale, Glaucon himself suggests that it is meant to function more as a thought-experiment than as a myth.[8] The ring, as he employs it, is not so much a magical as a theoretical device, designed to reveal something about the nature of the human soul. As such, it provides evidence—a "great proof"—that "no one is willingly just but only when compelled to be" (360c). But then, the mere proposal that we imagine something that bestows the power of invisibility upon its possessor would have sufficed to make the point, providing proof that was no less—and no more—convincing than that provided by Glaucon's elaborate tale. Indeed, no sooner has Glaucon finished telling the tale of the shepherd than he reverts to just such an abstract proposal: "Let's suppose . . . that there were two such rings, and the just man would put one on, and the unjust man the other; no one, it seems, would be so incorruptible that he would stay on the path of justice. . ." (360b). By exhibiting the tyrant in all of us, once appearances are taken away, Glaucon's story serves merely as the illustration of an argument. His theoretical ambitions, in telling his tale, seem thinly veiled.

Why, then, are these ambitions so thickly veiled in Plato's text? If the point is obviously general and abstract, why is the making of it so excessively particularized? Who needs the earthquake, the hollow bronze horse with its small window-like openings, the corpse of larger than human size, which is entirely naked but for the gold ring? Why is it important that we picture this nameless shepherd as going down into a chasm whose depths are suddenly made visible by a violent storm? Why mention the many other wonders of which we are not told? The answer would seem to be that nobody needs these details. Glaucon certainly does not need them to make his point, and Plato does not need them, given the apparent function of Glaucon's speech in the overall argument of the *Republic*.[9] The details are not only superfluous. It is these very details that obscure the ancestry of Glaucon's tale. We are told (by Glaucon) that this story has been told before. Yet, none of these details appears in Herodotus' version.

If this story seems useless to Glaucon as a story, then the ring that the story is presumably about seems even more so. If ever a person might feel observed, whether or not anyone else was around, and concern himself

[8]Cicero's reading of Glaucon's story assumes precisely this, and treats it simply as a thought-experiment. See *De Officiis*, 3: 39.

[9]As Michael Davis observes, the more closely one attends to the details of Glaucon's story, the more "one wonders . . . why Glaucon chooses to make a story at all." "The Tragedy of Law," 651.

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with acting justly, it would be in the presence of something god-like or superhuman. Yet Glaucon's shepherd exhibits no qualms about violating a seemingly sacred space and stealing from a corpse; he exhibits neither shame nor fear. The brash disregard for conventional law that Glaucon sees as the natural result of the power of the ring can already be seen in the brashness of the shepherd's first unjust act, the act by which he acquired it. That he could not have used the ring to perform this act is beside the point. He seems, rather, not to have needed it. But then, the same is true of the unjust acts he goes on to perform after he has taken possession of the ring and discovered its power. If one's goal were merely apprehension of the queen's beauty from across the room, as it was in Herodotus' version, then a magical ring might be useful inasmuch as it hides one better than a door. But while invisibility is a sufficient condition for allowing one to see with impunity, as soon as one wants to possess the queen, one needs a body. At that point, the ring becomes useless, and one would have to rely on force or charm. And there is always the risk that she will turn him in. The best protection of all, then, would be to make her fall in love with him.

Moreover, why does the shepherd resort to practical stratagems and persuasion to gain access to the king if, under cover of invisibility, one might just walk in the door and kill him? Why bother to enlist the queen's help when the deed could have been committed directly—and with complete impunity—with the ring? If we are really to picture the shepherd as doing these things, it becomes difficult to picture him actually using the ring to do them. Not only does he seem not to need it, but given what he does, it does not make sense for him even to want it. It would be impossible to do what he does and maintain invisibility; in order to have sex with the queen, and in order to rule a city, one needs a visible body—both for the commission of these acts and for enjoying the fruits of one's injustice.

III

Having apparently finished his mythologizing, Glaucon goes on to distill the point of his story, which is that we are all secretly unjust. The shepherd could be dismissed as a single unjust man going his own way, but Glaucon claims that any one of us would do the same. Glaucon assumes that the shepherd is an unwillingly just man whose latent penchant for injustice comes to the fore only when outward appearances (the seeming) are stripped away. But all his myth really shows is a series of outwardly unjust actions—that is, images of unjust actions.[10] The myth does not make visible the interior of the shepherd's soul. Just as the ring was of no real use to the shepherd in committing

[10]The actions of Herodotus' innocent Gyges would look similarly unjust outside of the context Herodotus provides.

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his unjust acts, it is of no real use as a philosophical device; it does not perform the revelatory function Glaucon takes it to perform. We cannot see into the shepherd's soul to know whether some conversion to injustice has taken place. Instead of showing us an inside, Glaucon has shown us an outside.[11]

If both the just and the unjust would go the way of the unjust when given the freedom to do so, then there really are no just men; the distinction between the just and the unjust disappears. Glaucon continues as though the distinction were intact, however, maintaining as separate in speech (that is, theoretically) that which he has just shown (poetically) to be one: "As to the judgment itself about the life of these two of whom we are speaking, we'll be able to make it correctly if we set the most just man and the most unjust in opposition" (360e). Glaucon creates an opposition between the just and the unjust by having each appear in the world as his opposite. His perfectly unjust man does not appear in the world as Thrasymachus' fearsome tyrant who blatantly disregards conventional morality. Rather, he appears as the perfectly just man. The unjust man "rules the city *because he seems to be just*. He marries into any family he wants to [and] he contracts with whomever he wishes" (362b, emphasis added). The greatest injustice of all, Glaucon says, is to appear to be just when one is not (361a). This is, in fact, what perfect injustice is really good for—not simply for getting what one wants and getting away with it, but for enjoying all the benefits of justice in the process. This perfect lie is itself the true mark of injustice.

To the just man, Glaucon attributes "the greatest reputation for injustice" (361c). As he sets his two exemplars in opposition, he assumes that appearances will always lie. This radical disjunction between appearances and reality provides the basis for Glaucon's demand that Socrates must take the seeming away if justice is to be properly defended.

Glaucon's commentary includes a curious gloss designed to confirm the existence of a truly just man and to allow him to be recognized. He argues that if someone had the opportunity to commit injustice with impunity (like the shepherd), but did not take advantage of it, that person "would seem most wretched to those who were aware of it, and most foolish too, although they would praise him to each others' faces, deceiving each other for fear of suffering injustice" (360d). In this scenario, everyone is trying to fool everyone else, but no one is really fooled. All must suspect their

[11]At no point in his story does Glaucon explicitly say that the shepherd realized he could do injustice with impunity. We are told only that he realizes that the ring makes him invisible. But this is just an outward observation. The ring itself does not reveal anything more about the condition of the shepherd's soul. Just as Glaucon's story differs from Herodotus' in not making us witness to what happens inside the palace, it does not make us witness to any internal conversion from justice to injustice.

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fellow citizens of unjust tendencies if they participate in the charade out of fear of suffering injustice. Glaucon claims to have revealed what everyone thinks (and wants) but no one is willing to say.

Even if we accept Glaucon's interpretation of what everyone really thinks, this only takes care of one part of his task. He set out to prove, not only that everyone secretly admires injustice more than justice, but also that they are correct in this assessment (358c). The latter is more difficult to show insofar as it requires a clear vision of the human soul to know what is best for it. If anything, Glaucon has unwittingly shown us how murky our vision is when it comes to peering inside souls. Each time we think we have gotten inside someone's soul, we encounter another outside. For example, the man who supposedly proves his justice by refusing to use his power is not as transparent (to us or to his fellows) as Glaucon makes him out to be. If it is the essence of injustice to appear to be just, we should be especially suspicious of someone who is known to refuse to use the unjust means at his disposal. Given what it would mean for him to use his power, how could anyone know it? An unjust man could use a magical ring and convince his neighbors that he did not use it. If the ring works as it should, he would not be seen using it, in any case. Or he may not use it at all but instead, like the shepherd, rely exclusively on his powers of persuasion. Or he may do one better and use it by showing it off, since a ring made public combined with a puritan reputation might work even better than a ring kept private and used discreetly. Glaucon has not provided us with any way of telling the difference between a fool who really does not use the ring, and a clever man who hides behind the reputation of a fool in order to use the ring to pursue injustice effectively.

Moreover, Glaucon implies that even the truly just man uses the ring in some sense. It is only by making visible his power to commit injustice (his potential invisibility) that his justice (his not taking advantage of it) can be recognized. If we are supposed to mistrust the words of anyone who has no choice but to praise justice (which, Glaucon imagines, is true of most people), but take seriously the deeds of someone who has the power to do injustice but chooses not to, then the potential for injustice—or something like the ring—is necessary to bring that proof (of justice) to light. The perceived ability to go undetected would be necessary to making true justice detectable. Even then, we have reason to mistrust those apparent deeds (or lack thereof), since this proof may be just another façade. Glaucon does not trust words, and rightly so, but seems to think that deeds speak for themselves. However, his attempt to bring to light what someone would do if no one were watching only brings to light a deed that must itself be interpreted—hence the need for Glaucon's commentary on the myth.

The hidden core of Glaucon's myth is supposed to make its appearance when Glaucon spells it out. But his commentary includes several additional proofs for his defense of injustice, as though each had a hidden core that

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must be drawn out by the next. Glaucon keeps trying to set out the conditions of perfect injustice, but such conditions do not seem to exist, or at least they cannot be made intelligible, because as soon as they are made intelligible, they cease to be the perfect conditions for injustice. He says more and more to prove his point, but the more he says the more he loads onto the supposedly pure construct with which he began.

Glaucon's commentary is valid only if his myth reveals the truth of everyone's soul, but his myth, which is about a lone shepherd, is universalized only by his commentary. The commentary, which seeks to move beyond the particulars of the myth to its universal core, sets up another surface (the appearance of the wretched fool) that must itself be interpreted. Glaucon ends up having to appeal to common opinion in order to defend the conclusion that he draws from the story, which is that everyone would do as the shepherd did. He cannot prove that we all secretly admire the unjust man, because that man appears in the world as perfectly just. Therefore, he must make our admiration appear with reference to its opposite, that is, to the disdain that everyone feels for the wretched fool who clings to justice and refuses to use his magical ring. But that man might actually be the unjust man. And in any case, no one is expressing that disdain out loud. If everyone is really fooling everyone else, then how does Glaucon know what everyone is really thinking? Glaucon believes that he can penetrate this façade by doing away with appearances, but each time he tries to take the seeming away in order to catch the unjust man, his quarry disappears. The only mark of his existence is his apparent justness and excellent reputation, which reintroduces appearances or seeming. The question of what injustice is, then, is answerable only by reference to how it seems.

Glaucon has created a seamless façade covering a seamless reality; everyone appears to be just on the outside, and everyone is unjust on the inside. He wishes to separate the just and the unjust in order to see them clearly so that they might be properly judged, but each keeps fading into its opposite. The truly just man disappears because he is really unjust, while the unjust man disappears insofar as he can only appear as a just man. "To seem to be just when one is not" is "the extreme of injustice" (361a). Glaucon's attempt to tell the truth about the soul either tells us nothing (i.e., it makes nothing appear), or it tells us a lie.

Glaucon's "great proof" rests on the premise that if he can show us a person who is completely immune to opinion, he can show us the truth about the soul. He can show us the soul in itself, not as it appears. But neither his example nor his explication offers up an individual who is thoroughly unconcerned about appearances. Although he claims that appearances always lie (everyone praises the wretched fool in public), his argument ultimately relies on how the supposed fool truly appears to his fellows. Paradoxically, Glaucon's demand that the seeming be taken away makes it impossible to answer his own question.

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Glaucon takes over Thrasymachus' argument (restores it), so that Socrates might better appreciate its power.[12] "Come now, hear me too, and see if you still have the same opinion" (358b). He implies that Socrates would be more effective in countering the unjust speech if he were less immune to its charms. Because Socrates could not see what was so compelling about the view articulated by Thrasymachus; he could not get hold of Thrasymachus' soul in order to move it to see things differently. In order to persuade another to see differently, one must first see as the other sees. To that end, Glaucon supplies a story rich in visual details—the better to make Socrates see the power of the unjust speech.

Glaucon offers his powerful speech in praise of injustice as a model for the kind of speech he would like to hear from Socrates in praise of justice; that is, as the model for a truly persuasive speech. "[I]n speaking I'll point out to you how I want to hear you, in your turn, blame injustice and praise justice" (358d). Yet Glaucon insists that he himself does not hold the position that he is about to defend. What Glaucon claims to offer, then, is a persuasive speech that is not persuasive. He maintains that a speech can be simultaneously persuasive and unpersuasive by holding the form and content of the speech radically separate. The self-contradictory structure of the speech thus parallels the structure of the soul in the story Glaucon tells, in which the apparently just man (who claims to be persuaded by justice and persuades others that he is just) is actually unjust on the inside (that is, not persuaded by justice). Just as Glaucon must use the ring to validate the justice of the wretched fool, Socrates must use the unjust speech in order to praise justice. Here again, justice and injustice are mutually implicated in the attempt to tell the truth about either.

IV

Glaucon thinks that we will be able to make a correct judgment in the choice between the just and the unjust lives only "if we set the most just man and the most unjust in opposition; if we do not, we shall not be able to do it" (360e). But as we have seen, Glaucon's own demand that the seeming be taken away interferes with the attempt to separate the just from the unjust man and to conceive of the difference between them. Socrates praises Glaucon for having thoroughly "polished" both the just and the unjust man, as one might polish a pair of statues for a competition (361d). But while Glaucon may have removed the dirt and grime that make it difficult to see what lies beneath, what he has made visible is only a surface—a

[12]Blondell argues that "Glaucon and Adeimantus render Thrasymachus more dangerous by showing the grounds on which an ordinary person may identify with him." Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 89. See also pp. 197–98.

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spectacle for display—whose looks would still have to be judged from the outside.

Socrates' praise is doubly ironic. Even if Glaucon had left us with two unblemished surfaces, he would not have accomplished what he wants to accomplish, which is to do away with surfaces altogether. Glaucon wants to know "what justice and injustice are and what power each itself has when it's by itself [*auto kath' hauto*] in the soul" (358b). The language he uses echoes the language Plato often has Socrates use to describe the Forms. In the *Symposium*, we are told that Beauty is not "in something else" but is rather "alone by itself and with itself, always being of a single form..." (211b; see also, e.g., *Phaedo* 78d, and *Rep.* 476b). Long before the theory of Forms is introduced in the *Republic*, Glaucon and Adeimantus are looking for the Form of Justice. But this is not all they are asking to see. Glaucon says that he wants to see justice "by itself," and hear it praised (358d); but he also wants to see justice at work in a soul. This is why Glaucon goes on to insist that the just and unjust persons be given opposite reputations (361b–62c). He thinks that seeing justice itself at work in the soul and showing that the just person is happier under the worst possible circumstances amount to the same thing. But these demands are different. Seeing what power justice itself has in the soul would be like seeing the Form (justice itself) present in the particular. But as Socrates often reminds us, when one looks at a particular, one sees only pale images or reflections of the Form, not the Form itself. The kind of vision that is necessary to see justice itself is a purely intellectual one. In the *Symposium*, Socrates talks of seeing Beauty itself in the only way it can be seen (212a); the true lover of Beauty is satisfied by the sight of something that is not in something else. Ultimately, such a person cares only about contemplating the Form. But if one wants to see justice in a soul, something more is required. Glaucon and Adeimantus want to see justice itself, but not by itself. They want to see both it and the person who possesses it, in order to see the difference it makes in a life. For Glaucon and Adeimantus, it is not enough to tell the difference between justice and injustice in such a way that the one will not appear to be its opposite (cf. the beautiful and the ugly, 479a). If we cannot clearly separate the perfectly just from the perfectly unjust *human being*, Glaucon says, we will never be able to judge which of them is happier (361d).

The comparison test, thus conceived, requires that we take (false) appearances into account. As a guarantor of invisibility, one might expect that Glaucon's ring would allow one to dispense with appearances, and thus with the comparison test, entirely. Glaucon seems to realize that this is impossible. His setting up of the comparison between the extremes of justice and injustice is as elaborate as his myth turned out to be. He is not really polishing his statues so much as constructing them: "We'll subtract nothing from the injustice of an unjust person," he says, "and nothing from the justice of a just one, but we'll take each to be complete in his own way of life" (360e).

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The unjust person is compared to a "clever craftsman" (360e). His being very good at being very bad means that his successful attempts at injustice will remain undetected, though if he happens to slip, he can put things right. If, by chance, his injustice is discovered, he will restore the façade using persuasion or even force, if necessary (361a–b). The means by which the shepherd perpetrated his acts of seduction and regicide are the means by which the perfectly unjust man will conceal his injustice after the fact. More importantly, they are also the means by which he is recognized in Glaucon's account. The unjust man's exterior tells us nothing, for it presents an appearance of justice, unless we see it being restored, for only then does the discrepancy between the exterior and the interior come to light. Just as Glaucon had to restore Thrasymachus' argument in order to draw out its implications, he must restore his unjust character's façade in order to make visible the discrepancy between the inner and the outer.

How, then, will we recognize the most just? Glaucon tries to create a parallel discrepancy, insisting, once again, that we shall be able to recognize the truly just man—we shall see him for what he really is—only if we take the true seeming away and put an entirely false seeming in its place. Any reputation for justice "must be taken away," since this would bring him honors and rewards, and "it wouldn't be plain" whether he is just for the sake of justice itself. But then, he must not only "be stripped of everything except justice"; his situation "must be made the opposite of an unjust person's" (361c). This means that, although he performs no unjust acts (and presumably has no unjust thoughts or desires), he "must have the greatest reputation" for injustice. On the outside, he will look exactly the way one would expect the most unjust man to look. Glaucon insists that the most just man must remain like this until he dies, "seeming throughout life to be unjust" (361d). He assumes that, while the unjust man's injustice may occasionally be glimpsed—may appear on the surface—this will never happen in the case of the just man. The truly just man will not deliberately cultivate a reputation for justice, since he is not interested in its (external) rewards. But why could his justice not appear by chance? Ironically, while the perfectly unjust man's unjust actions may accidentally show through, in Glaucon's presentation, it is the just man who never gets caught, whose veneer (his thoroughly sullied reputation) never cracks.

Perfect justice can be seen, according to Glaucon, only when the just man is whipped, stretched on a rack, chained, and blinded with fire. In the end, having suffered "every sort of evil," he will be impaled, at which point, Glaucon says, he will come to realize that "one shouldn't wish to be just but to seem to be just" (361e). This is a curious declaration, in light of Glaucon's insistence that appearances be discounted for the sake of justice. One might expect that the greatest evidence of the just man's perfect justice would be the declaration that, even under these extreme circumstances and despite his false reputation, he would still rather be just than unjust. Then it would be plain that he is just for the sake of justice itself.

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But this is exactly what we do not see. Glaucon himself imagines that, in the end, the truly just man will realize, not that it was better to have been just, but that it was better to appear just. Glaucon tries to show us a perfectly just man, by giving him the opposite reputation, but his dramatic construction does not allow for either the affirmation or the recognition of perfect justice. Even if we suppose that the person Glaucon describes were to declare in favor of being just, we would still have only his words to go on, as in the case of the person who possessed the ring but (supposedly) did not use it. Glaucon's construction of the perfectly just man is as invested in appearances as his construction of the perfectly unjust man proved to be.

What is it about justice and injustice that makes it necessary to take appearances into account in order to tell the truth about their presence in the soul? According to Glaucon, it is because the extreme of injustice is to appear perfectly just; he assumes that the reverse is the case for justice. His attempt to set perfect justice and perfect injustice in opposition ultimately leads him to think that one cannot be just if one is also believed to be just; the wretched fool is replaced by the prisoner on the rack. In driving a wedge between being and seeming, Glaucon is in a way emulating the clever craftsmanship of the unjust man. The fundamental difference between the just and the unjust man is that the former wants to be just. But this entails a further difference, one that Glaucon fails to acknowledge: while the unjust man wants to appear as his opposite, the just man must not, or else he, too, is a liar. This does not mean that justice must remain invisible, or that it cannot appear at all, as Glaucon seems to assume. It means that the just man does not want simply to be believed. When it comes to telling the truth about justice, the investment in appearances is more complex than Glaucon is able to recognize.

V

If justice and injustice are both invested in seeming, the difference must lie in the way they manage their investments. The unjust man, as Glaucon and Adeimantus picture him, is invested in an illusory façade. Because he must use justice to conceal his injustice, he cannot be thoroughly or consistently unjust (inside and out), as Thracymachus' tyrant is represented as being; he cannot be an unjust whole. That his injustice may occasionally show through is not the only way to tell the difference between him and the just man, however. The seeming in which the unjust man is so heavily invested, precisely because it wants to be taken (or mistaken) for reality, strives to be (or to appear to be) exhaustive of his being. The story that the unjust man tells about himself and the stories he wants others to tell about him are meant to be seen as the whole story, made up in such a way as not to invite any questions or suspicions. The false seeming which is constitutive of the being of injustice is something (like a suit of armor) that is meant

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to cover completely, since no one knows for sure where the protection will be needed. Justice's covering is not like that, although Glaucon tries to make it look that way. In attaching a false reputation to the perfectly just man (in order to make his situation the opposite of the unjust man's), Glaucon not only makes justice look like injustice, he makes them *be* the same, and in so doing, indirectly reveals the real difference between them. He forces upon justice a covering that will not fit, for it will only be seamless if the just man makes every effort to maintain his false reputation. In this way, Glaucon's ill-fitting covering (i.e., the discrepancy in his account) shows us something of what justice is really like. The just soul does not, by nature, seek to hide or conceal itself. It does not invest all that it has in maintaining appearances, not only because it cares about being (rather than seeming) just, but more importantly because it knows—and this is the philosopher's knowledge—that the truth about justice can never be made perfectly intelligible. The just man's justice is revealed by a longing which does not pretend to be what it is not, but which also knows that it can never be fully seen for what it is. Try as Glaucon does to picture it, there can be neither complete injustice nor complete justice. The difference between the unjust man and the man who loves justice is that the latter knows this, and it shows.[13]

The difference between the unjust and the just man is, therefore, not that the one cares about appearances while the other does not. The difference lies in how they care about them. The alternative to striving for perfect deception is to give up striving for full revelation. If the chinks in the unjust man's armor are revealing, it is not because we see through them to his inner being. A truly unjust man could make it difficult if not impossible for us to do this. If his injustice is manifest, it is in his ceaseless efforts to project a seamless appearance. What the chinks allow us to see is where he is looking. The aspiration to seamlessness reveals more than the seamlessness itself (which would simply cover, were it perfectly achieved).

Glaucon, in contrast, lets it be known that he is conflicted. He claims not to be persuaded by his own speech, which he, nevertheless, presents as a persuasive speech. Glaucon wants, as he says, to be truly rather than apparently persuaded (357b). He wants to believe (that justice is better). At the same time, he wants to be believed. This is not to say that he is interested merely in his (or justice's) reputation. It is not just the sincerity of his belief that is in question. What is at stake is his love of justice, and, moreover, what it means to love justice. If Glaucon truly loves justice, one might ask, why should he need the kind of support for it that he says he needs? This question implies that loving justice is simply a feeling, independent of knowledge. Glaucon's stance suggests a more nuanced sense of what it

[13]On the level of Plato's own philosophical activity, it shows in the partiality of each dialogue. See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 61–62.

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means to love justice. His desire to be "truly persuaded" is the first indication of this. It may often be the case that one appears to others to be persuaded when one is not. But this is not the only sense in which one might fail to be truly persuaded. One might also remain uncertain within oneself; that is, one can appear to oneself as persuaded, even if one is not truly persuaded. This is the possibility with which Glaucon seems to be struggling. If he is pretending, it is not because he wants other people to believe something (either about him or about justice) that is not true. If what he offers is a persuasive speech that is not truly persuasive, it is because he both is and is not persuaded within himself. That combination turns out to be key. Glaucon's self-presentation (to himself and to Socrates) functions much like the complex images Socrates defends toward the end of book 6. Although he had earlier drawn a (famously) sharp distinction between image and reality, he now identifies a category of images that summon the intellect toward being. Whereas a simple image does not summon thought, because it does not appear to be itself and "at the same time the opposite" of itself, something that does appear both "one and not one" compels the soul "to be at a loss" and, thus, sets in motion the intellect within it, drawing the soul toward being (523c–24e).

Glaucon persuades Socrates of his commitment to justice—and renews their investigation of what justice truly is—by making his inner conflict visible (unlike Thrasymachus, who expresses hostility toward such complexity, e.g., toward Socratic irony and all expressions of doubt). Glaucon's commitment is grounded in desire rather than conviction. Desire not only tolerates doubt, it is fueled by it, whereas conviction is settled. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates distinguishes between conviction (being convinced or convincing others) and the properly philosophical attitude of devotion to truth (91a–c). The former, he suggests, may be antithetical to the latter. The *Republic* suggests that the same point applies to a devotion to justice. The challenge Glaucon's desire generates (to himself as well as to Socrates) is the most reliable indication of his love of justice and the most reliable indicator of who he really is.

When Glaucon claims to remain unpersuaded by his own persuasive speech, Socrates must decide whether or not to trust Glaucon's self-presentation.

> Now you truly don't seem to me to be persuaded. I infer this from your whole way of life [*tou humeterou tropou*], for if I had only your words to go on, I wouldn't trust you. And the more I trust you, the more I'm at a loss as to what I should do. On the one hand, I can't help out. For, in my opinion, I'm incapable of it.... On the other hand, I can't not help out...(368b).

Is Socrates being ironic? After all, what does he have to go on? If words cannot be trusted, one might look to deeds, but deeds, too, might mislead.

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Ultimately, both must be interpreted in light of some whole. But what constitutes a whole way of life or overall character (***tropos***), and how might one know it? In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle raises the question of how someone's life might be judged before death—or even after (1:10). The crux of the problem is the difficulty of making a whole of one's life and, similarly, of one's soul. Glaucon tells a story in his attempt to treat the soul as a whole, but the soul he makes visible can only be an artful construction (like a statue). Socrates cannot see inside Glaucon's soul, any more than Glaucon himself can. Glaucon tries to satisfy his concerns by mythologizing. His own interpretation of that myth theoretically veils its meaning, keeping it at a distance, and making it look as if the story is really about someone else—about two different lives between which he must choose. But having constructed his statues, he is unable to tell them apart. He thinks he has nothing to go on as long as he takes appearances into account. Socrates sees that he will have nothing to go on if he takes the seeming away. If Socrates pretends to be at a loss when Glaucon asks for help, it is because what he needs to help Glaucon to see is what Glaucon has to go on in assessing the state of his own soul. What he has to go on is the projection of himself in his own story. But then, he needs to see what the moral of this story really is. The story functions not as a ring that allows us to see inside the soul, but as a projection that reveals what the soul loves.

In response to Glaucon's attempt to peer inside the human soul, Socrates ultimately concludes that "we have to look elsewhere in order to discover [the] true nature" of justice and the soul. We must look "to its philosophy or love of wisdom," he says. We must "recognize what it lays hold of and with what sorts of things it longs to have intercourse . . .and we must realize what it would become like if it were to give itself entirely to this longing" (611e). This means not simply treating the soul as a static entity but rather in action, pursuing its desire. Giving oneself over entirely to a longing at once unifies the soul as a whole (insofar as it pursues only one object) and works against its being a whole, insofar as it is defined by its perpetual longing and, thus, its incompleteness. Socrates' reference to what the soul would be like if it were to give itself over completely to a desire for the Forms is in the conditional; he suggests that it takes an act of projective imagination to see the soul fully manifest in this way. Socrates thus draws attention to the fact that their depiction of the whole of the philosopher's soul is not—and can never be—the whole story.

Admittedly, the just man does become explicitly identified with the philosopher, the truth-lover (481c ff.), in book 9. It is the philosopher's life (and his soul, harmoniously ruled by reason) that is finally contrasted with that of the tyrant, the thoroughly unjust man. Philosophers love truth and are not led on by opinion. Unlike the lovers of "sights and sounds" who are caught up in particulars, philosophers seek—they want to "see and embrace"—"the thing itself" (480a). In this way, the philosopher may be said to resemble

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Glaucon's unjust shepherd, whose ring allows him to be not simply invisible but all-seeing.[14] Like the philosopher, the shepherd is no longer subject to opinion. He sees beyond the "sights and sounds"—the way people and things appear, or what people say when they think he's listening—and he need no longer care about the way he appears to others or about respecting convention. He can live his life based on the truth rather than on appearances (362a). He sees how things really are.

If there is a distinction to be made between the philosopher and the unjust man, does it rest on the difference between what each of them wants, in their goals? Glaucon's shepherd wants not only to see but to possess; not only to know but to have. He wants to take advantage of his unencumbered access to hidden chambers of sex and political power, and, for this reason, he cannot remain invisible. In Herodotus' version, Gyges would presumably have gotten away with just looking (at the queen) were he able fully to overcome his bodily nature and to become invisible—that is, if he had Glaucon's ring. He would indeed have been all-seeing (and avoided detection by the queen). He would not have become a king, however, and perhaps that is just as well. This may simply be a reflection of the persistent tension between philosophy and politics, suggesting that the philosopher can maintain his perfect justice by refraining from exercising power over other human beings.

But does the philosopher, even one who does not rule, desire only to see (theoretically) the queen's beauty—that is, to contemplate beauty (or justice) "itself, by itself," from afar, and not to touch? This depends on how we interpret the notion that philosophers have eyes for, or are erotically disposed toward, the Forms (see *e.g.*, 490a–b).[15] If we look carefully at Socrates' way of picturing the philosopher's relation to the Forms, we see that the philosopher is not just a voyeur. He is not content to contemplate from afar. Even if he abstains from politics, he desires, not simply to know (like the shepherd at the meeting), but to possess or embrace. He wants to have intercourse (to couple) with the Forms (490b).[16] He wants to have justice—both to grasp its Form and to imitate (and thus particularize) it by taking it into his own soul (cf. 500b–d).

Distinguishing between the tyrant and the philosopher, then, does not simply depend on the difference in the objects of their desires (power

[14]Again, see Nichols, *Socrates and the Political Community: An Ancient Debate*, pp. 60–62.

[15]On the erotic nature of philosophy in the *Republic*, see Stanley Rosen, *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 102–18.

[16]For further discussion of Socrates' portrayal of the philosophical apprehension of truth as a sexual activity, see Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 115–6. See also Adam's commentary on the Greek text. James Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), Vol. 2, p. 15.

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versus wisdom). There is another difference between them, which Glaucon's story helps bring to light. If the shepherd is all-seeing only insofar as he is invisible, and if he cannot maintain invisibility, he either fails to model the philosopher or else the philosopher must be understood differently. In fact, by embodying a more complex relationship between seeming and being Glaucon' s story does offer insight into both the nature of philosophy and the nature of justice itself.[17] If we look to the philosophers to tell us the

[17]Here again, it could be argued that Socrates (and, by implication, Plato himself) tells his own story in books 6–7, and that the moral of this story is clear: while there may be a complex relationship between appearance and reality, or particulars and forms, there is ultimately a radical disjunction between them. The philosopher may use the appearances to arrive at the truth (as Socrates describes it at, for example, 529b–530a), but the latter is purely intelligible, not visible, and is grasped with the intellect and "not by sight" (507a). On this view, while Glaucon may inadvertently suggest an affinity between seeming and being (and literal and intellectual seeing), the true philosopher wants, and is able, to transcend literal seeing. While a full response to this objection lies beyond the scope of this paper, more could be said about what there is to see in books 6–7. It is easy to regard these passages—where the theory of Forms seems to figure so prominently—as stating a doctrine. But the discussion of the Forms that begins near the end of book 6 and continues into book 7 is contextualized in ways that complicate Socrates' point. It is actually a continuation of the discussion that began in book 5 of the corruptibility of philosophic nature, which would be incomplete without some mention of "the most important subjects" for the philosopher to master if he is to be trusted to rule (504a). Most important of all is the Form of the Good (505a), but Socrates does not think himself capable even of an inexact treatment of it. Instead, he proposes that they "abandon the quest for what the good itself is" and famously offers to tell "what is apparently an offspring of the good and most like it" (506e). We should beware (as others have noted) of regarding the discussion that follows as providing an unambiguous statement of what philosophy itself is or involves. Socrates prefaces the following discussion by warning Glaucon to "be careful that [he doesn't] somehow deceive [him] unintentionally by giving . . .an illegitimate account of the child" (507a). He then asks Glaucon to recall things that have already been said "both here and many other times" (507a). The obvious reference is to the discussion in book 5 of what it means to be a philosopher, where the distinction was first drawn between "beautiful things" and "beauty itself" (476a ff.), but where the distinction between the visible and the intelligible realms was not clearly drawn. Instead, Socrates attempted to draw a more complex distinction between knowledge, ignorance, and opinion, as well as between being, nonbeing, and what is ambiguously "in-between" (477a ff.). Socrates' attempt to separate the philosopher from the nonphilosopher actually leaves a greater impression of continuity than of distinction. In contrasting the "lovers of sights" with "those who love the sight of truth" (476a), for example, Socrates refers to both as spectacle-lovers. The philosophers, too, are "beholders" (*philotheamonas*). The emphasis here is not on thinking as opposed to vision. Rather, the fundamental point is that the philosophers are able to see (*horao*) what the non-philosophers are not (476b). Philosophical seeing can be reduced to neither merely literal seeing nor merely metaphorical seeing. As Stanley Rosen puts it,

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truth about justice, it is not because they know it but because they long for it.[18] To tell the truth about the philosopher's or anybody's soul, one must look, not inside it, but at its longing. Knowing the thing itself requires not that one simply examine it by itself, but that one be able to see where it is looking and what it loves. It is a question of how the soul "looks"—not just of how it seems, but of where it is actually looking. Taking its looks into account, in this sense, is very different from being taken in by appearances. And yet, it does not do away with the risk of appearances. It gives us something to go on, but we never completely "have" it.

Who, then, is the true philosopher in the story Glaucon tells? The shepherd sees things that men are not ordinarily permitted to see. But the power he exercises does not derive from his being all-seeing or from his total invisibility, if only because he steals the ring itself with impunity. There is a similar limitation in Herodotus' version of the story. Gyges' approximate invisibility enables him to contemplate (or at least catch a glimpse of) something wondrously beautiful. But there is something he fails to see—he fails to see himself being seen.

There is also Candaules to consider. By compelling Gyges to behold the queen's beauty—exposing the thing itself, in its naked state, and making him look at it—does Candaules reveal himself to be not only a tyrant but perhaps also a philosopher? Plato himself can be understood as trying to move others to see what he sees—not just the beauty of the Forms, but Socrates' beauty in particular (see *Second Letter*). In the *Symposium*, Plato has Alcibiades describe Socrates as ugly on the outside but beautiful on the inside, as if one could break open the shell and reveal the secret, invisible truth (215b, 222a). But this does not seem to be what Plato actually does in his dialogues. If anything, his exhibition of Socratic irony works against precisely this sort of penetration. The dialogues do not peer inside Socrates as a static entity so much as gesture toward what he is longing

"Seeing the Ideas is like stargazing, not astronomy." *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 76. The characterization of philosophers as seers, or beholders, does not disappear after book 5. For another discussion of the notion of philosophers as seers, as it prevails throughout the *Republic*, see S. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 206–32.

[18]Benardete makes a related point: "In order to assign justice in the strict sense to the philosopher exclusively, Glaucon believes it is necessary to assign him thinking in the strict sense—pure mind in contact with pure being. But justice in the strict sense is applied to the soul as a whole, and thinking in the strict sense, endowed as it now is with its own desires and pleasures, does not involve the whole soul, let alone the whole individual. Mind apart from soul and soul apart from body seem to be implicit in the proof that without justice thinking is impossible. Socrates, however, offers another argument that does not involve either implication." *Socrates' Second Sailing*, p. 210.

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for. It is his longing, depicted dynamically in the activity of his speeches, which reveals something about his soul.

In this sense, Plato seems to have more in common with Herodotus' queen than with either Candaules or the shepherd. The queen is the one who actually sees what everyone else fails to see—in catching a glimpse of Gyges, she at once knows the truth and sees the injustice in her husband's soul. And yet, she is the most visible of all. It is neither a ring nor a king that enables her to see herself being seen. If she sees what others do not, it is because she knew where to look. She sees what Gyges is looking at and what her husband is really longing for. They see how she looks, but she sees them looking.

VI

If we want to know the truth about justice, the *Republic* teaches, we must know the truth about the soul. Our reading of the dialogue suggests that to know the soul, we must not simply gaze into it, hoping to see what lies inside; we must look to what it loves. When it comes to beholding justice, looks matter, not simply in the outward appearance one casts but in the way in which one sees.

In book 9, Socrates seems prepared to deliver the correct judgment Glaucon was so eager to make and draws yet again on a political analogy to make his point. To know the truth about the tyrant's way of life, Socrates suggests, "one must know how to look at his whole soul" (579e) in the way one studies, or really gets to know, a *polis*. That is, by "creeping down into every corner and looking" (576e). The political analogy helps us to see what is problematic about such attempts to see the "whole" in this way.[19] Even on the inside—be it the city square, the well-furnished parlor, or the dark cellar—one is still presented with an outside, or what may, in fact, be an artfully (or craftily) constructed façade. We saw this in Glaucon's myth as well. Despite the promise of the ring, the shepherd must still contend with external appearances. As Glaucon's speech unfolds, we (like the shepherd) see layers of appearance stripped away, only to reveal deeper layers of appearance. It is not just the body that presents a façade. Souls also have an outward appearance (perhaps even to those whose souls they are), insofar as we try to know them.

This does not make the activity of philosophy futile. In book 9, near the close of the entire argument, Socrates tells Glaucon and Adeimantus that they have, in fact, failed "to see the soul as it is in truth."

[19]For a different view of the function of Plato's politics in understanding the soul, see Jonathan Lear, "Inside and Outside the *Republic*," *Phronesis* 37, no. 2 (1992): 184–215.

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> Now we were telling the truth about the soul as it looks at present. But the condition in which we saw it is like that of the sea god Glaucus, whose original nature cannot be easily made out by those who catch glimpses of him. Some of the old parts have been broken off, others have been ground down and thoroughly maimed by the waves at the same time as other things have grown on him—shells, seaweeds, and rocks—so that he looks more like a beast than what he was by nature. So too we see the soul in such a condition.... (611b–d)

This is not simply an image of a soul that is concealed by a body. It is an image of the soul as they have studied it—a being whose original nature cannot "easily" be seen by those who catch glimpses of him. Such an image may provide an insight into what Glaucon and Adeimantus are really trying to see: not justice itself, pure and abstract, but justice entangled in a human life. What Glaucon's speech reveals is both that they are right to look at justice in this way and that the attempt to do so will inevitably be caught up in appearances. For the story they have told, Socrates insists, while it may fall short of the whole truth, is not a failure after all, but a "fair" account of the soul "when it is immersed in human life" (612a).

Glaucon's paradoxical demand—that appearances be stripped away and that they not be stripped away—makes Socrates' task seem not just practically impossible (how could the just person be happier, suffering all those tortures?) but philosophically incoherent.[20] Glaucon's failure to picture the just man's soul is not simply a failure of imagination (which might be corrected by tinkering with the details). It points to a more fundamental problem. If the requisite vision is not to be a "merely theoretical" one, as Adeimantus insists (367b), it is because what needs to be described is not just a matter for contemplation (as the Forms are usually taken to be). Insofar as Glaucon and Adeimantus want to see the possession of justice itself by an individual soul, they want to see both the Form and the particular together. Such a vision cannot dispense with appearances entirely, because what needs to be seen—a just human being—is not exclusively inner. This does not mean that justice is simply a matter of appearing just, but neither should it be taken to mean simply that the inner state of being must somehow be translated into resolutely just acts. Even when Socrates does picture justice as an inner state, it is neither as static nor as determinate as we might expect. In book 4, where justice is seemingly defined, Socrates suggests that it is fundamentally a matter of the dynamic interrelation of all the parts of the soul, or of how one acts within oneself (443c–e). Justice in the soul is itself, therefore, not simply a state of being but already a kind of doing. If we need a city to see inside the soul, it is because the soul is itself a kind of city. There is a politics of the psyche that conditions any further realization of justice in political terms.

[20] For more on the incoherence of Glaucon's challenge, see Devin Stauffer, *Plato's Introduction to the Question of Justice* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000).

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Perhaps, then, one might argue, we could still hope to see justice realized on the individual level, where the three parts of the soul are perfectly ordered. Those who read the *Republic* as a critique of political idealism see that political life can never achieve such static perfection and, therefore, that perfect political justice is impossible. Such readings leave intact the assumption that perfect philosophical justice is both possible and desirable. This presupposes that, at least on the level of the individual soul, we can say—and see—what justice definitely is. Socrates' provisional definition is, however, suggestively indefinite. The perfect ordering of the soul remains indeterminate insofar as the nature and number of its parts remain an open question. The just man, Socrates says, "puts himself in order ... and harmonizes the three parts of himself.... He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one...." (443d). If we cannot yet say, or see, what those parts are, or even how many they are, in what sense can we identify the soul as entirely one? We cannot, at present; at least, not in book 4. But then, Socrates says virtually the same thing at 611c–d. The soul can never be seen as being "entirely one," all at once, or in the present tense; at least not insofar as it is immersed in human life.

This suggests that philosophy must proceed, at some level, phenomenologically (a matter of seeing or studying the soul through its immersion in human life). Again, this means giving up on full revelation, that is, revelation that is neither immersed nor, consequently, ambiguous. Glaucon, seeking something like a Cartesian certainty, wishes to know the whole truth about justice before making a decision about his life, whereas Socrates suggests that this whole can only be a projection. Yet this projection is not simply a fiction; it is something like a true appearance.[21] It reveals the soul's orientation, and, thus, something fundamental about the soul—so fundamental that Socrates concludes that education is ultimately a matter of turning the soul around, of redirecting it so that it is "looking where it ought to look" (518d).

What is revealed by such a projection is not fully manifest because it is not a static thing; it is becoming. But this does not leave us with postmodern fragmentation, for it is still something coherent and ordered, though not static or determinate. This subtle distinction is captured in Socrates' remark that their model of the just soul must allow for however many parts there are. The soul's oneness is a projection—and a project—but not a fiction. One can have integrity while remaining incomplete in some way (e.g., unwise, or simply alive). A model that combines indeterminacy with integrity is necessary to do justice to a living human soul—and to philosophy understood as the active pursuit of wisdom.

[21]For an extended analysis of the possibility of "true appearance" for Plato, see Stanley Rosen, *Plato's "Sophist": The Drama of Original and Image* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

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Glaucon's way of picturing justice (or injustice) at work in the world—in terms of some inner reality that appears through external words and deeds which may or may not be trusted—reflects a certain way of reading the *Republic* as a work of political theory, one that provides a static blueprint or heavenly model of justice that may or may not be realized on earth. It is also a way of picturing the relation between the Forms as being and the particulars as becoming. However, as we have argued, Glaucon's own story ultimately suggests a different picture—one that resonates more closely with what Socrates says elsewhere about the particulars *striving* to be what they are in reality but fall short of being (*Phaedo*, 74e, b). This means that the philosophical pursuit of knowledge cannot proceed in a foundational manner; nor is it doomed to a perpetual skepticism.[22] Both of these alternatives are problematic from a political perspective. The former encourages us to read the *Republic* as a tragedy that puts forward a foundational blueprint for justice that can never be realized in political life. A more Socratic interpretation, in contrast, sees in this failure an affirmation of perpetual skepticism. In this view, knowledge of ignorance is both the beginning and the end (goal) of philosophy, and perpetual openness is the mark not just of the ideal philosopher but of an ideal form of citizenship.[23] One must question, however, whether such perpetual uncertainty can form the basis for any political order.[24]

The understanding of philosophical seeing that we have elaborated invites a reconsideration of the question of the relationship between Platonic philosophy and politics. If philosophy must pursue knowledge immersed in human life, then it is always fundamentally political in its foundations and implications. Moreover, if it is possible to pursue justice without requiring foundational knowledge, then we must consider the possibility that a city might acknowledge that justice itself will never be fully realized in any particular regime yet, nevertheless, remain devoted to the ideal of justice.

[22]This is supported by Devin Stauffer's argument that across the historical variety of conceptions of justice there is an "ever-present core:" a "*devotion to a set of principles* more important than any individual's own good," along with the promise that justice is good for us. *Plato's Introduction to the Question of Justice*, p. 134 (emphasis added). Stauffer presents his reading of Plato on justice (which similarly focuses on Glaucon but not his story about Gyges) as an alternative to "foundationalist" readings on the one hand and a Kantian view (the affirmation of ordinary moral opinion), on the other.

[23]See, for example, Dana R. Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[24]See Denise Schaeffer and Mary P. Nichols, "Platonic Entanglements," *Polity* 35:3 (April 2003): 459–77, especially 463–66.

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