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# Review of "Plato's Critique of Imperfect Reason"

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THE *REPUBLIC*

SCHINDLER (D.C.) *Plato's Critique of Impure Reason. On Goodness and Truth in the Republic*. Pp. xiv + 358. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008. Cased, US\$79.95. ISBN: 978-0-8132-1534-1.

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In this book S. explores the thesis presented by Socrates in the *Republic* that the good is both the goal of all human striving and the safeguard of the truth and intelligibility of our varied descriptions and representations of the world. S. writes from within the dramatic school of interpreting Plato, which starts from the premise that a Platonic dialogue is a representation of action and so cannot be reduced to a set of arguments offered in support of favoured conclusions. Like the best representatives of this method, S. pays close attention to the arguments which function as the pivot-points of the action. He traces the dramatic presentation of Socrates as a man who does good for his companions by devoting himself to the painstaking investigation of the good through argument.

S. begins with an introduction which provides the motivation for his concern with Plato and the *Republic* in particular. Reading Plato attentively is an effective antidote to the misology which S. diagnoses in our culture, a misology which consists not so much of avowed hatred of reason as of a tactical employment of the accepted conventions of reasoning in pursuit of ends set by desire without consulting reason. An encounter between reason and misology is enacted in Book 1 of the *Republic*, to which S. devotes his first chapter. Thrasymachus is presented as a relativist of the Protagorean sort depicted at *Theaetetus* 152–72, since he conceives of the best life as the individual's maximisation of power, wealth and pleasure, a good for which there is no measure beyond the individual. Socrates speaks for justice as a good which benefits the individual but is absolute in the sense of not relying on its benefit to a single individual for its goodness. The second chapter ties together in a novel way the opening of Book 2 of the *Republic* and the central metaphysical discussions of Books 5 and 6. In Book 2 Glaucon presents a division of goods into three types, those we welcome only for themselves and not for their results, those we welcome both for themselves and for their results, and those we welcome only for their results. S. discusses the third class of goods as relative goods; they are things we care about because of their relation to their products. The second class of goods, in which Socrates places justice, is made up of goods which have relative goodness due to their results but also an absolute goodness, since we choose them for themselves. This distinction between relative and absolute goodness allows S. to connect Glaucon's division of goods to the distinction Socrates makes in Book 5 between the many beautiful things and the one Form of Beauty. This latter distinction holds between items that are beautiful in a relative way, since they are also not-beautiful, and an absolute beauty, which is never not-beautiful and is beautiful in virtue of itself. The connection asserted between the division of goods and the metaphysical distinction between the one and many, S. suggests, helps us to understand the role of the Form of the Good. The Good Itself helps to establish for all things other than it the distinction between absolute and relative existence, or between appearance and reality (p. 114). The discussion of the Form of the Good continues in the third chapter, which deals with the images of sun, line and cave in Books 6 and 7. This chapter contains the claim

that Socrates himself is the fullest image of the Form of the Good that Plato has fashioned: Socrates' insistence that the philosophers of the cave image must return to the cave to rule over the best city gives us insight into the way that the Good Itself is not only good in splendid isolation but also brings goodness to the many things that relate to it (pp. 163–4). In three further chapters S. pursues the theme of Socrates as embodying the Good Itself in other dialogues, including the *Lysis* and *Symposium*, and in a discussion of Socrates' account of poetry in Book 10 of the *Republic*.

S. merits praise for insisting on a synthesis of word and deed, as expressed in Socrates' ability to do good for his companions by preserving the possibility of a rational access to the Good Itself. Yet several of S.'s central claims are not convincing. It is hard to credit that Thrasymachus is a relativist of the Protagorean stripe, since such a relativist will not allow that one person is ever wiser or more knowledgeable than another. By contrast Thrasymachus conceives of the successfully unjust man on the model of the wise craftsman who knows better than others how to achieve the good life. In his second chapter S. presents the difference between goods of the second class and goods of the third class as the difference between goods that have an absolute goodness and goods that are merely relational. This description serves to connect the division of goods in Book 2 with the discussion of forms in Books 6 and 7, but it obscures important differences between the way in which goods of the second class are absolute (we value them apart from their results) and the way in which forms are absolute (the Form of Beauty is what it is in virtue of itself). Goods of the second class are good as ends, but they are not good intrinsically or in virtue of themselves; like all good things, they are good in virtue of their relation to the Form of the Good. And finally, S.'s claim that Socrates is the fullest image of the Good rests on Socrates' role in convincing Glaucon and Adeimantus that the true philosopher who escapes from the cave to see the sun outside must, for the good of the whole city, return to the cave of ruling over the earthly city. S. also appeals to the similarities between Socrates and the philosopher who returns to the cave and then is persecuted and even killed for his attempts to free his comrades. These observations about Socrates do indicate that he is uniquely perceptive of and responsive to the good, a man who is in love with the good. However, this is different from being like the Good Itself, a role that is filled in the image of the cave by the sun. As we learn in the *Symposium*, Socrates is the personification of Eros not because he is good or an image of the Good Itself, but because he lacks goodness and beauty and turns to philosophy in his pursuit of goodness and beauty.

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### PRIOR ANALYTICS 1

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