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Socrates' Satisfied Pigs

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At the start of *Republic's* book II (358e-361d), Glaucon renews Thrasymachus's challenge to Socrates with a robust account of the origin of justice, arguing that justice is only instrumentally desirable for the end of a good reputation, and that everyone would choose to be unjust were there no legal or social consequences. Socrates soon responds to this narrative account in kind (370c-372d), telling the story of an idyllic city whose people live simply, "in peace and good health," and contribute to one another's welfare by performing the task for which they are best suited. Socrates praises this city as "the true city" and "healthy," remarking as well that it has "grown to completeness" and will span generations. Glaucon, however, dismisses it as a "city for pigs" (372d), and at his request Socrates, after defending the city against Glaucon, introduces luxury into the *polis*, which results in its degeneration and subsequent rebirth as Kallipolis. I will argue that Socrates' words should be taken at face value, and that this City of Pigs is Socrates' political ideal, superior even to Kallipolis.

In the course of my argument, I make use of two main contentions to respond to existing concerns with the City of Pigs. I will quickly offer reasons to think these claims enjoy *prima facie* support, though I will defend them more thoroughly in the course of engaging with other views. One of my contentions is that the inhabitants of *huopolis*, who I will sometimes refer to as 'pigs,' are temperate and just. Two straightforward exegetical considerations work in favor of this claim. First, it is natural to read the inhabitants of the City of Pigs as paradigm cases of temperance, and Socrates claims that "someone who keeps himself healthy and temperate will awaken his rational element before going to sleep and feast it on fine arguments and investigations, which he had brought to an agreed conclusion within himself" (571c), implying that temperance involves the supremacy of the soul's rational element, the trademark feature of justice in a soul.¹ Second, when Socrates and Glaucon finally arrive at their definition of justice, Socrates points back to the City of Pigs as the original instantiation of this principle-- that justice is present in a thing if and only if it and its parts are performing the task to which they are best suited. He ironically remarks that "right from the beginning, when we were founding the city, we had, with the help of some god, chanced to hit upon the origin and pattern of justice" (443b). Of course Socrates himself constructed the city, in opposition to Glaucon, so this is no accident. Considering that the behavior of the pigs is exactly what Socrates would have us expect from temperate, just souls, and that the harmony of the city is exactly what Socrates would have us expect from a temperate, just *polis*, this first contention enjoys a good deal of plausibility.

My second main claim is that the City of Pigs engages in the moral education of its citizens. Socrates calls the city complete, meaning that it lacks in

¹ For a more in-depth defense of the temperance of the city's inhabitants, see M.E. Jonas et al (2012)

nothing it needs. However, Socrates also says the city's temperate inhabitants "will pass on a similar sort of life to their children" (372d). The temperance of future generations depends on the cultivation of their rational selves, and Socrates argues that the cultivation of one's rational self requires moral education (401d-402a). If the City of Pigs does not engage in moral education, then its inhabitants cannot pass on their temperance to their children. If they cannot do this, then their city is not complete. However, the city *is* complete, and its people *do* pass on their temperate lifestyle, so the city necessarily engages in the moral education of its citizenry. There is no guarantee that the moral education in the City of Pigs resembles the system present in the Kallipolis in its particulars, but we must conclude that it takes place.²

Let's now address two considerations *against* taking Socrates at his word. Several scholars have offered reasons to think that the City of Pigs is deficient in some respect that disqualifies it from being just. Catherine McKeen (2004) argues for three necessary qualities of a just city: it must be temperate, the right size, and its citizens must value justice *for itself*. According to McKeen, both the City of Pigs and Kallipolis are temperate and the right size., but the citizens of the City of Pigs value justice instrumentally, not for itself. McKeen construes the City of Pigs as a "mutual benefit society unified by individuals operating from considerations of enlightened self interest." This dependence on self-interest, she argues, means that "the *huopolis* depends on overly lucky circumstances which allow individual self-interests to coincide." Since the inhabitants of the City of Pigs value justice only because it is in their self-interest, the unity of their society is "highly contingent."

In the first place, it seems McKeen is right to note that the City of Pigs was founded because it was in the self-interest of many individuals.. However, this by itself is not enough to infer the nature of the city's continued operation, and the claim that all actions of the citizens are predicated solely on self-interest is highly speculative. This is highlighted especially when we consider that we would expect the actions of a just person to be in their own self-interest, and the functioning of a just city to be in its citizens' self-interest, *since that this is exactly what Socrates is attempting to prove*. As I have mentioned, Socrates even points to the City of Pigs as an example of justice in action. Why should we think that self-interest is here serving to undermine justice?

It is true that Socrates never explicitly says that the pigs desire justice for itself. But why would he, at this stage in the dialectic? Socrates has hardly introduced the city. A more detailed tour would have no doubt involved an examination of the pigs' psychologies, but this exploration is cut short by

² Of course, by relying on Socrates' claim about the necessity of moral education, I assume that the City of Pigs employs the same view of human nature that is at play in the remainder of the dialogue. I will defend this assumption in due course.

Glaucon. However, it is easy enough to infer what Socrates thinks about the pigs, since his description of their activity lines up seamlessly with his accounts of temperance and justice. It would surely be no surprise if Socrates revealed that each individual in the City of Pigs was just. In fact, it would not be necessary to change a single feature of the City of Pigs in order to accommodate this claim. All that we lack in Socrates' account of the city is an account of its inhabitants' psychologies. In spite of this, we should not infer the pigs' psychologies solely from the practical considerations that led to the founding of their city. After all, Socrates offers only high praise for the city, and this should lead us to suppose virtuous psychologies for its inhabitants..

But isn't it plausible, McKeen asks, that the pigs are merely performing the motions of justice because they align with their self-interest? Isn't it plausible that they would change their tune if unjust actions were more to their advantage? I think not. We should be careful about reading Socrates' account as a redux of Glaucon's society, whose inhabitants perform the just action only when they are "compelled" by self-interest (360d). After all, Socrates' explicit purpose here is to refute Glaucon's conception of justice. If he were intending to stick to Glaucon's account, he could have easily worked with Glaucon's city instead of starting from scratch. Keeping in mind Socrates' explicit purpose, we should prefer interpretations that put the City of Pigs at odds with Glaucon's stance on justice. In presenting his own city, Glaucon argues for the view that justice is a political arrangement that is only contingently desirable and advantageous. On McKeen's interpretation, Socrates responds with the exact same view. Much more sense can be made of the City of Pigs if we understand Socrates to be presenting a contrary view of justice, one which portrays justice as not only desirable for what it gets us, but desirable in itself.

John M. Cooper (2000) argues that the inhabitants of the City of Pigs "are not assumed to be motivated at all by any of that open-ended desire for pleasurable gratification that was the hallmark of human life according to Glaucon's psychological principles." From the apparent absence of *pleonexia* in the city, Cooper infers that it employs an incomplete account of human nature, and thus that the search for justice can only commence in earnest once Glaucon makes the picture more "human" by demanding luxuries. As soon as this is done, the city collapses, becoming "feverish" (372d). According to Cooper, Kallipolis is superior to the City of Pigs because it possesses means for combating *pleonexia*, that unrestrained desire at the heart of human vice. The Kallipolis can do this thanks to its Philosopher-Kings, who have a sure grasp of the Good, and the authority to ensure the *polis* conforms to this standard.

Ultimately, I think this critique fails. Cooper's claim that the City of Pigs is absent of *pleonexia* is based on the fact that the pigs are not portrayed as resisting any kind of pleonectic tendency, and the claim that their style of life

could only be passed on so easily and successfully in the absence of *pleonexia*. But couldn't we expect the same outside appearance from a temperate society that practiced moral education? This clash of my contentions with Cooper's does not merely result in a hermeneutic stalemate. Once we consider that fact that it is *Socrates* presenting the City of Pigs, it is clear that my interpretation has support elsewhere in the *Republic*, where Cooper's does not. The fact is, there is no other point in the *Republic* where *Socrates* denies or suspends the pleonectic motivations of human beings. Why would he do so here when he is, as I have contended, presenting an account of justice in opposition to *Glaucon*? If the pigs aren't supposed to demonstrate temperance or justice, but simply a lack of desire, if the City of Pigs is nothing more than a disposable step on the dialectic ladder, then how can we explain *Socrates*' resistance at the prospect of discarding it, and his insistence on praising it before leaving it behind? As far as I can see, Cooper's interpretation can offer no satisfying response to these questions.

Cooper also charges that the City of Pigs does not have what it takes to combat *pleonexia*, while the *Kallipolis* has two advantages over the in the face of *pleonexia*. These advantages are the result of the city's careful education of Philosopher-Kings: a sure grasp of what is good, and means of ensuring the *polis* conforms to this standard. Where are these functions in the *huopolis*?

I have argued that the pigs have robust means of satisfying the second condition and ensuring that their city remains virtuous: the reason ruling in each individual's soul, and the practice of moral instruction to produce temperance. However, the first condition may appear more problematic. After all, accuracy about the form of the Good seems necessary for a just city. Without it, the pigs seem vulnerable to divisions stemming from differing conceptions of the Good, and may run the risk of letting pleonectic desires corrupt their understanding of goodness. *Kallipolis* has its philosopher-kings who enjoy knowledge of the Good, and lay down laws accordingly. Does anyone in the City of Pigs have such knowledge?

Defenders of the City of Pigs have offered two types of response to this problem. Donald R. Morrison (2007), construes the City of Pigs as composed of the very same people who would be Philosopher-Kings in *Kallipolis*. In this city of Philosopher-Pigs, each citizen has knowledge of the unchanging form of the Good, to which they conform themselves. This happily ensures that, just like the Philosopher-Kings of the *Kallipolis*, Philosopher-Pigs will share a single, accurate conception of the Good. This seems to afford the City of Philosopher-Pigs protection against *pleonexia* which is far *better* than that of the *Kallipolis*. After all, as Smith (1999) points out, *Socrates* includes a justice system in the *Kallipolis* indicating that, for all its virtues, the city cannot prevent *pleonexia* from sometimes rearing its ugly head (433e). The City of Philosopher-Pigs, in contrast, would have no need for a justice system. At most, the citizens would need to cast

out or otherwise eliminate offspring who did not show sufficient promise, in a eugenics program mirroring that of Kallipolis-- no additional justice system needed.

The second proposal, offered by M.E. Jonas, et al. (2012), does not suppose that the City of Pigs is composed only of the elite cadre capable of becoming Philosopher-Kings. Instead, they argue that the epistemic security of the city requires only a small group of Philosopher-King types, and perhaps only one. The sure knowledge and sound teaching of this elite group with respect to the Good, could be passed down through the generations via the city's educational practices. As Socrates argues, anyone can learn temperance, and so long as this temperance is grounded in the sure teaching of these wise men, the City of Pigs may be safeguarded against the vicious influence of *pleonexia*.

Both of these solutions immediately raise concerns about the practicability of this city. After all, knowledge of the Good does not occur spontaneously. Even Socrates, who spends his whole life seeking such knowledge, fails to obtain it, arguing that it can only be the result of a rigorous and thorough education. At the moment, however, we may safely set aside these concerns about practicability, since neither of these solutions can be sustained by the text. After all, Socrates calls the City of Pigs complete, and these key philosopher-figures are nowhere to be found in its description.

I think Cooper is right to suppose that the City of Pigs lacks the bulletproof epistemic safeguard that the Kallipolis has in its Philosopher-Kings. However, I contend that Socrates does not take infallible knowledge of the Good to be a necessary feature of a just city. This much is clearly necessary if the City of Pigs is to be just: The denizens of the city must be just souls whose lives give rise to a just *polis*. I have argued that this is exactly the state of affairs which Socrates presents.

Cooper supposes that, without sure knowledge of the form of the Good, the City of Pigs is liable to lapse into injustice, but is this the case? As Socrates tells it, the pigs are drawn into their political arrangement by a lack of self-sufficiency. By employing the principle of specialization, Socrates' definition of justice, the pigs act exactly as we would expect just souls to act, and give rise to the harmony that we would expect from a just city. Just as Socrates supposes we can search the city and its citizens for justice and injustice (371e), the pigs themselves have the capacity to *simply look around and inward*. In living their lives, the pigs are experiencing all of the benefits that attend justice. More crucially, they can, and do, come to appreciate the just state of affairs, constituted by the rule of reason in their souls, and thus the city, *for itself*.

This thought points to the purpose Plato had in giving Socrates such evocative language when he is describing the city:

They will make food, wine clothes and shoes, won't they? And they will build themselves houses. In the summer, they will mostly work naked and barefoot, but in the winter they will wear adequate clothing and shoes. For nourishment, they will provide themselves with barley meal and white flour, which they will knead and bake into noble [καλὸς] cakes and loaves and serve up on a reed or on clean leaves. They will recline on couches strewn with yew and myrtles and feast with their children, drink their wine, and, crowned with wreaths, hymn the gods. They will enjoy having sex with one another, but they will produce no more children than their resources allow, lest they fall into either poverty or war. (372a-b)³

The reader is supposed sense, as I certainly do, that this political arrangement is *kalos*. We are meant to resist, with Socrates, Glaucon's claim that this is a "city for pigs." If the reader is able to recognize the value that this kind of city has *in itself*, then we should expect no less from the citizens living within it. On this reading, we can understand the full significance of the inhabitants' decision to bestow this political arrangement upon far-off generations. Pure self-interest could not motivate the kind of sound moral instruction required to preserve the temperance of the city, nor can it explain the city's stubborn resistance to *pleonexia* and lack of a justice system. Plato intimates, through Socrates, that the pigs have understood justice as desirable for itself. Thus, even without sure knowledge of the Good, the city of pigs can remain morally stable. This is because the pigs are able to observe something near to the form of justice in their own lives. This peculiar feature of the city is what leads Socrates to practically sing its praises.

One difficulty remains: Even if the city of pigs is not *worse* than Kallipolis, why should we think it is better than Kallipolis, which Socrates says is an image of justice?

Smith (1999) argues that the City of Pigs is as good as Kallipolis, but no better. He argues that as mere images of a perfect form, no just city will be without injustice. Because of this inevitable imperfection, we should expect many different images of the form of justice to be maximally just. On this view, the City of Pigs and Kallipolis are two such instantiations. According to Smith, Socrates concedes to the demand for a luxurious city only because Glaucon and Adeimantus can't see the justice present in the City of Pigs. Ever the patient teacher, Socrates follows Glaucon's own *pleonexia*, and constructs an image that will be a more helpful heuristic for seeing "how justice and injustice grow up in

³ The word καλὸς (*kalos*) has no exact analogue in our language. Translators of Plato often render it as "fine" or "noble," but its full meaning cannot be understood without considering other English approximations such as beautiful, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, and honorable.

cities” (372d). The fact that Kallipolis is the tool for the dialectical job, does nothing to make this second city more just. Thus, Smith says we may take Socrates at his word, and understand both Kallipolis and the City of Pigs as maximally just.

Smith’s claim that there can be multiple maximally F instantiations of a form of F-ness is very plausible. And he is right to point out the pedagogical motivation for abandoning the City of Pigs and investigating Kallipolis. However, he fails to account for Socrates’ claim that the City of Pigs is “*the* true city.” The definite article here suggests that Socrates sees the City of Pigs as peerless, and not simply on a par with other just cities. This may again seem to result in a hermeneutic stalemate, since my interpretation, unlike Smith’s, has so far failed to take into account Socrates’ insistence that the *Kallipolis* is just, and his further claim that it is just with respect to the same principle as the City of Pigs. However, nothing I have argued thus far is inconsistent with Socrates’ claim that the Kallipolis is just. Specifically, I do not think there is any inconsistency in referring to the City of Pigs as *the* true city, even while both it and the Kallipolis are maximally just. The unique quality of the City of Pigs, as I have argued, is the presence and appreciation of maximal justice in the city as a whole *and in each individual*.

The City of Pigs is only as just as its citizens. The Kallipolis on the other hand, forms a just whole, but lacks universal justice on the individual level, as demonstrated by its need for a legal system. Though both cities are equally just on the level of the *polis*, they are not equally just on the level of the individual. The Kallipolis requires courts to deal with unruly citizens, and must concentrate authority in the hands of the few who can comprehend the Good and understand the nature of justice. Socrates acknowledges Kallipolis as just, and claims that it can serve as a guide to justice for all who examine it. However, he fails to treat it with the same esteem as the other city, demonstrating a clear preference, *ceteris paribus*, for justice that is both political and personal.

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