

Part 1 Approaching the Sun-Good Analogy

1.1 Introductory

'In the case of things that are seen, I think you'll say that the sun is cause not only of their being able to be seen, but also of their coming-into-being, their growth and their sustenance – even while not itself *being* coming-into-being.'

'Yes, of course.'

'Just so, in the case of things that are known, you need to say not only that being known belongs to them because of the good, but also that being and reality [or: essence] accrue to them because of it, even while the good itself is not reality [or: essence], but is even beyond reality [or: essence], superior to it in dignity and power.'

(Republic 509b1–9)¹

These words round off the great parallel by which Plato illustrates the good, or the form of the good,² through analogy with the sun.³ This book is an attempt to understand the epistemology and ontology of that superlative form. According to the *Republic*, the form of the good is somehow central to the intellectual method that characterizes truly excellent rulers. So, the book is equally about this method, which Plato calls 'dialectic'.

Dialectic is the kind of thinking practised by philosophers, so dialectical rulers are rulers who are philosophers. Rather than turning straight to Plato's analogy between the form of the good and the sun, it makes sense to approach from an earlier point, the point where philosophical rule is introduced as a requirement of the truly good human society. Socrates puts forward this thesis expecting it to drench him with a

¹ Throughout I follow S. R. Slings's Oxford Classical Text of the *Republic* (2003). I mainly use Christopher Rowe's 2012 translation of that edition with occasional modifications.

² These expressions are close to being intersubstitutable in the part of the *Republic* that concerns us. Crombie 1962, 111 n. 2; Delcomminette 2006, 2: 'qu'est-ce que l'Idée du bien sinon le bien considéré come *objet de connaissance*?'; also Penner 2007a, 118–20; Rowe 2007a, 138–45; 2007c, 244. In contexts such as 'X knows/does not know –', 'X inquires about –', it seems indifferent whether one completes them with 'the good', 'what the good is', 'the form of the good', 'the good as such', or 'the good abstractly conceived'. Also, although the *form* of the good is not of or for anyone, it does not follow that there is no such thing as my good or yours. I use 'form' for both *idea* and *eidos* in the text.

³ For a very clear exposition of the analogy see Ferrari 2013, 158–62.

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huge wave of scornful laughter (473c–d). This is the last and, he thinks, the most absurd-seeming of his three subversive proposals concerning the truly good city-state; the others were education for leadership of girls and women on the same terms as boys and men, and elimination of individual families within the guardian sector (451c–464d). The third proposal is distinctive in being said to represent not only a feature of the truly good city-state but the single least change (presumably, the single least disruptive change) needed to bring such an entity into existence (473b). If and only if supreme power is joined with philosophy, whether by philosophers becoming rulers or rulers becoming philosophers, can the truly good city come into being.⁴ And the truly good city is not mere fantasy, a unicorn somewhere over the rainbow. It is a real possibility, Socrates emphasizes, even though its likelihood is remote (499b–d; cf. 502a–c).⁵ Hence combining philosophy with power is a real possibility too.

But before entering into any detail about philosophy's intellectual contribution to the task of ruling, Socrates must dispel false assumptions about philosophy. One stumbling block is that the word 'philosophy' suggests an unbounded, even omnivorous passion for wisdom and learning (474c8–475c): but then there is a question of what to mean by 'learning'. Those people who run about Athens and Attica attending each and every spectacle and show with indiscriminate passion – aren't they in some sense learning things at each encounter, so that the experiences they love so insatiably could be called experiences of 'learning'? Whereas true philosophers love to learn *truth* and to acquire *knowledge*, and truth and the objects of knowledge are not mere 'sights and sounds' but changeless intelligible forms, which to the lovers of sights and sounds are unreal and meaningless (475d–476d). Still, the lovers of sights and sounds cannot be expected simply to concede that what they pursue is something other than real knowledge (since then they would be admitting that what they so keenly do is inferior). So, Socrates offers an argument to persuade them that at best they acquire opinion (*doxa*), not knowledge (476d–484a).⁶

Next, Socrates argues that the true philosopher's passion for truth brings with it a train of moral and intellectual virtues such as moderation, liberality, courage, justice, gentleness, good memory, quickness to learn (485c–487a). He then addresses a series of popular misunderstandings and bad images of philosophy: philosophers are useless; some of the most obvious examples are morally corrupt

⁴ On 'if and only if' see D. Morrison 2007, 236 with n. 8.

⁵ I follow, e.g., Burnyeat 1992, D. Morrison 2007, and Vegetti 2013a, in taking the claim of real possibility to be sincere. Whether it is realistic is another question. On the problem of feasibility see Annas 2017, 23–30. Socrates is careful not to set the standard unrealistically high: he says that the main question of the *Republic*, whether justice is good for the just person, does not depend on assuming that a perfectly just person is possible, and then he interprets his claim about the good city's possibility as a claim about *approximating* the Callipolis portrayed in words (472b–473b). For an interesting complex discussion see Schofield 2006, ch. 5.

⁶ The argument is discussed in Section 2.19.

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and sell their souls to public opinion; certain low-grade small-souled intellectual dabblers have usurped the honorific description 'philosopher'; philosophy is not a serious occupation for mature people but a brief stage of youthful education to be left behind or dipped into as an occasional pastime (487c–498a).⁷ But none of these impressions, Socrates contends, is the fault of philosophy itself as distinct from its contingent social and cultural circumstances. If the misconceptions were cleared away, ordinary people, initially hostile, could be persuaded that philosophers should be their rulers (499d–500b; 501c–502a).⁸

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Next, after a reflection on the fact that all-round excellence, moral and intellectual, depends on a combination of characteristics not easily found together (503b–d), Socrates makes the *Republic*'s first allusion to the *topics* which philosopher-rulers must be capable of handling. He begins by speaking of them simply as 'the most important things to learn' (*ta megista mathēmata*, 503e3). 'But what exactly are these?' asks Adeimantus. Socrates' response, which refers Adeimantus back to an earlier moment in the dialogue, is a pointer rather than a direct clarification:

'You probably remember', I said, 'that after distinguishing three kinds of element in the soul we tried to reach conclusions about justice, moderation, courage and wisdom, and say what each of them is.'

'If I didn't remember that', he said, 'I'd deserve not to hear the rest.' (504a)

This refers back to Book IV, 441e–442d, thereby suggesting that the 'things most important to learn' are the natures of the four main virtues; and this impression is not cancelled by anything that comes later. But instead of now going on to say more about the virtues, as one might expect, Socrates refers Adeimantus back yet again to some still earlier remarks about method. He says:

'So do you also remember what we said before that?'

'What was that?'

'I think what we were trying to say was that in order to get the finest view possible of the things in question,⁹ we'd need to take another and longer way round, and then

⁷ See Vegetti 2001, 269–74 on a range of cultural reasons why rule by philosophers must have seemed 'un scandaleux paradoxe'.

⁸ Roslyn Weiss has proposed the daring thesis that the central books of the *Republic* feature two 'distinct and irreconcilable portraits of the philosopher', 'the philosopher by nature' and 'the philosopher by design' (Weiss, 2012). Weiss's arguments, even if convincing, are mostly orthogonal to the concerns of this book, which are the metaphysics and epistemology of *Republic* V–VII. It seems that her two philosophers differ not in metaphysics and epistemology but in moral character.

⁹ 'The things in question' may refer to the virtues or the elements in the soul, or both. There is the same ambiguity in 'this matter' at Book IV, 435d1–3, on which passage see below in the main text. The interpreter must decide whether the main topic of the 'longer and more exact way' will be the soul, mentioned explicitly just before, at 435c5, or the virtues. If the latter, 435c5 ff. must

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they'd become clearly visible to us, but that meanwhile it would be possible to apply proofs that were on the same level as the things we'd been saying up to that point. You people said that that was enough for you, and it was on this understanding that we said what we said then – to me, it seemed to lack exactness (*tēs men akribeias . . . ellipē*); whether you were happy with it is for you to say.'

'It seemed to me to deal with the subject in due measure,' he said, 'and so it did to the others too.' (504a9–b)

This interchange refers to Book IV, 435c9–d7, a moment in the run-up to the proof that the soul has three elements analogous to the three classes in the city. Justice and the other three main virtues have already been defined for the city in terms of its three classes. Socrates then pointed out that these definitions can be transferred to the virtues in the individual provided it can be shown that the individual soul is made up of factors sufficiently analogous to the classes in the city. Soon will come the proof that the soul does have the right kind of tripartite structure and that its virtues correspond to those of the city; and the resulting definition of justice in the individual will supposedly make it impossible to deny the main theorem of the *Republic*: that justice is a better condition for the individual than injustice. But, before initiating those important arguments, Socrates emphasized that the style of approach he and his companions are using, while adequate for the current purpose, is incapable of giving them 'an exact hold on this matter' (*akribōs men touto . . . ou mē pote labōmen*): attaining an exact hold would require going by a different road, one that would be longer and more challenging (435d3).

When in Book IV we worked towards those major conclusions about the anatomy of the soul, the associated definitions of the virtues, and the goodness of justice for the just soul itself, we may not have paid much attention to Plato's warning that we were following an intellectually inferior path for understanding the virtues. But now in Book VI, after the concept of the philosopher-ruler has been defended at length, we are told in effect that what the *Republic* has taught us so far concerning the things most important to learn

be read on the spot as referring to the tripartite psychology about to be presented on the shorter way; but it must also, when we get to the back-reference at VI, 504a–b, be read retrospectively as pointing to the topic of the virtues as studied by the trainee rulers (but not by the characters of the *Republic* nor by us) on the longer way. This discrepancy is certainly a bit awkward, but not deeply surprising given that composition of the huge *Republic* was probably intermittent. Penner 2007b, 26–30, argues convincingly that the discrepancy is minor given the close relationship between the tripartite psychology and the virtues as defined in Book IV, and that the longer way will say more about the virtues (although now involving the form of the good); see also Sedley 2013, 76; Scott 2015, 44–5; Rowett 2018, 143. I follow this general interpretation, but without sharing Penner's view that the longer road is entered by Socrates and his interlocutors, hence by the reader. Rowe thinks that the longer way treats of the soul and includes the argument in Book X about the soul's simplicity and immortality (Rowe 2007c, ch. 5; see also Scott 2015, 53; for objections Szlezák 2015, 247–50).

about, namely the virtues, falls decidedly short of what learning about them would be if it were conducted with full exactness.

So, what have we, along with the interlocutors of Socrates, been missing? Well, nothing that we needed in order to get this far in the argument of the *Republic*. For in calling the approach 'inexact' Socrates does not say it was wrong to adopt it. After all, it was he who ushered his interlocutors and us along that path. It was good enough for them and us. What he does now say is that the inexact approach would be unacceptable for the guardian of the ideal city and its laws. The inexact approach is lazy (at least for anyone able to follow the exact one) and laziness 'is the last thing we want to find in someone guarding the city and its laws' (504c5–7). The ruler-guardian's task, even if not ours, is 'to go round by the longer route and work just as hard at his studies as he does in the gymnasium, or else . . . he'll never get to the end of the most important thing to learn (*to megiston mathēma*), and the one that is most appropriate to him' (504c9–d3).

Let us postpone the question of Socrates' shift here, unexplained, from plural to singular: from speaking, as before (503e3), of the *things* most important to learn to speaking now of the *thing* most important to learn. Let us first try to get a grip on the charge of inexactness.

The Book IV definitions of the virtues in both city and individual soul were given in terms of the different parts and their distinct functions. The entity is wise just in case the part that ought to rule, reason, rules the others and does so from knowledge of what is in the interest of the whole and each part; it is courageous iff the part that ought to execute the ruler's prescriptions can be counted on to do so despite distracting pains and pleasures; it is moderate iff all three parts share the belief that reason should rule; and it is just iff every part performs its proper function (428d–433d; 441e–443d). The just individual, and presumably also the just city, will call 'just' or 'unjust' whatever action preserves or disrupts the correct internal arrangement, and will call the attitude that issues in such action 'wisdom' or 'ignorance' as the case may be (443e–444a).¹⁰ All this says very little about what exactly wisdom knows or how it gets to know it. How does wisdom determine what would be in the interest of the whole and each part, and what it would be just and harmony-preserving to do? Granted, the Book IV account of wisdom and justice is enough to answer the main question of the *Republic*, whether justice is to the just person's advantage or benefit; but as an account of what specific sorts of conduct justice demands and how wisdom determines answers to such specific questions, it is unsatisfactorily sketchy and thin.

¹⁰ On what this 'calling' amounts to, see Section 2.20.

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At least, that is how it seems if we think that for us, even though we are not the rulers but are looking at them from the outside, there has to be more to say about their wisdom and its method for understanding justice and the other virtues. But one might not think that. On a first reading of the *Republic*, having reached the end of Book IV, one might have the impression that the rulers' upbringing as described in Books II–IV is enough to qualify them for rule; and we might find this conclusion satisfactory, and not expect further specification of what the wisdom and justice *are* that especially qualify them to rule. After all, many people seem to think that there is no great story to be told about how a well brought-up person, one who has absorbed good values through training and practice and the right encouragement, in obedience to good authorities and presented with none but good examples, ends up knowing what specific conduct is demanded by justice and the other virtues. We know already that Plato's guardians have had that sort of upbringing, so what more needs to be said? They are thoroughly decent people, and because it is a properly ordered city they do not have to battle to stay decent while living closely with people whose values are opposed to theirs:¹¹ so we can take it for granted that they will know what is just and what is not, what to enjoin and what to forbid. They will surely often have to think their way to an answer, weighing up considerations for and against, so it is certainly true that they *reason* (*logizesthai* and cognates occur at 439d–d5; 440b1–5; cf. *bouleuesthai* 353d5). But they don't have a distinct identifiable *method* for reaching their judgements. But why should that matter, given that they are reliable? What is important is that those in positions of responsibility come out with the right judgements in situations as they arise, and this is what well brought-up people, like the rulers in the *Republic*, can be trusted to do.

To Plato, at least in this dialogue, this common-sense picture of moral wisdom and moral authority is dangerously lazy if taken as the last word.¹² Good rulers are not equipped to rule simply by being decent sensible people (even if they could be relied on to remain so), and a philosophical account of the ideal ruler has to say something about what more is needed.¹³ Of course,

¹¹ The guardian class lives segregated from ordinary citizens.

¹² Cf. the myth of Er on the soul lucky enough to draw first pick for its next life. It makes an appalling choice; its level of luck is matched by the depth of its stupidity. This soul, we are told, had lived its previous life under a well-ordered constitution, *partaking of virtue through habit without philosophy* (619b6–d1). The same danger presumably awaits non-philosophical citizens even of Callipolis.

¹³ Cf. Shorey 1895, 219–20. The present discussion assumes that the options are rule by common sense unbolstered by any special intellectual training versus rule by philosophy understood as Plato understands it. (His conception of *philosophia* was not uncontested when he wrote the *Republic*, as we know from the works of his contemporary, Isocrates.) But in the actual culture a third option might have suggested itself: rule by something like the supposed expertise in management and politics offered in the fifth century by Protagoras (cf. 600c–d and *Protagoras*

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philosophy as exemplified by Socrates cannot give a complete *a priori* catalogue of things that it would be just for ideal rulers to prescribe (to expect *that* level of exactness would be unreasonable), but philosophy can say something definite, even if general and abstract, about the ideal rulers' kind of *method* for deciding what to prescribe. For, according to Plato, there is, in the area in which they have to operate, a rational method, not just hunches and intuitions and semi-articulated inferences of a well-nurtured moral sensibility; and applying the method sure-footedly is not easy. Applying it (and passing it on to future rulers) involves reflective, articulate, understanding of what one is doing. Hence, access to the method and practising it well requires one to be a philosopher with special intellectual training. The rulers' exercise of their special method, and the special training they need for this end, is what Socrates means by 'the longer route'.

We and Socrates' interlocutors, and even Socrates himself, cannot explore the philosopher-rulers' specific practical decisions or their rationales.¹⁴ The philosopher-rulers develop and exercise the wisdom for ruling by following the longer way, but Socrates and his interlocutors do not take that path and are not going to acquire that wisdom, at least so far as it concerns rulers.¹⁵ Even so, Socrates must not conclude the philosophical defence of justice (or for that matter the defence of philosophy) before saying something *about* the longer way and the special method on which the rulers depend. He must at least say enough to explain why the best rulers have to be philosophers. Everyone would agree that wisdom should rule: this is a banal truism. But with 'wisdom' interpreted as some sort of *philosophical expertise* it becomes a surprising,

318d–319a); see A. G. Long 2013b. Plato ignores this because, as emerged in the *Protagoras*, Protagorean political wisdom apart from its rhetorical element turns out to be, at best, much the same as common-sense decency (*Protagoras* 327e–328b). In the *Republic* the sophists, presumably including Protagoras, are more darkly represented as knowing only the opinions and feelings of the mob, along with tricks for manipulating them (493a–d).

¹⁴ On 'practical decisions': this is as good a place as any to confront the well-known problem posed by the *Republic* doctrine that particular objects of sense cannot be objects of knowledge (*epistēmē*) or intelligence (*noēsis*); see especially the argument against the sight-lovers (476d–480a). The problem seems to threaten the very notion of philosopher-rulers: as philosophers they must have knowledge of values, but as rulers ('returned to the cave') they must be intelligent about concrete particulars. But the main point is that because of their commerce with the forms, the returners have a more expert grasp of particulars than anyone else (*muriōi beltion ... gnōsesthe hekasta ta eidola hatta esti kai hōn*, 520c4); whether this is called *epistēmē* may seem unimportant. There is room to say that while they see each particular *as* an instance of some form which they have explored when beyond the cave, their cognitive contact with the particular as such is informed perception, not 'intelligence' or 'knowledge'; see Moss 2021, ch. 4, section 5. Another possibility is that the cognitive demotion of sense experience is restricted to when a sensible object is presented in response to a question like 'What is beauty?' (Penner 1987, 109–13). Philosophers back in the cave no longer seek answers to such questions but apply answers they have discovered in the upper world.

¹⁵ Cf. Rowett 2018, 143–5.

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even paradoxical, claim. To show that the claim is nonetheless a truth, Plato must remove false images of philosophy, as we have seen, but he must also explain or at least sketch what philosophy actually offers that rulers need. This is what he tries to do in Books V–VII of the *Republic*. He has to make it clear that (a) there is much more to be known about justice and the other virtues than we needed to know in order to follow the main argument that justice is good in itself for the agent, even though (b) *we* cannot know this ‘great deal more’ so far as it concerns the rulers; and he has to make it clear that (c) the knowledge of this ‘great deal more’ in anyone who does possess such knowledge is not a miraculous gift or the sturdy natural offshoot of non-intellectual good upbringing, but is to be attained through use of an identifiable rational method, a method whose general nature can be explained to us even if only in abstract outline. (This method is going to be called ‘dialectic’ or ‘dialectical’).¹⁶ For us to be rationally convinced that rulers must be philosophers, we don’t need to know or be able to find out everything that philosopher-rulers would know; but if their method could not even be delineated to us, then we would have from Plato a mere dogmatic assertion (however dressed up) that rulers need something called ‘philosophy’.¹⁷ We might accept this, but our acceptance would be mindless, not based on understanding.¹⁸

¹⁶ Why does Socrates call the longer way ‘another, longer, way round’ (*allē makrotera ... periodos ... perielthonti*, 504b2)? Perhaps because it involves the dialectician-rulers in the same task, in a sense, as the one he himself undertook at 368c6–7, namely the pinning down of what justice is (along with the other three cardinal virtues, all four being mentioned at 504a4–6). Socrates and his imagined rulers pose and answer the same question, but at different levels, as we shall see. A longer way to the (in a sense) same destination is naturally called ‘circuitous’; see LSJ *perierchomai* I.1. (I am not convinced that *makrotera periodos* implies that the ‘shorter way’ is also a circuit, *pace* Scott 2015, 84.)

¹⁷ Giving us a sense of their method might be unnecessary if it doesn’t matter what their philosophizing consists of as long as they philosophize; for instance, if ‘The best rulers are reluctant rulers’ (519c–521b; 540b2–5; cf. 347b–d) were a sufficient reason for installing *philosopher-rulers*, who (it is assumed) would readily relinquish power on account of their love affair with philosophy. In such a scenario there need be no connection between the content of their philosophizing and their wise government: any consuming hobby, e.g. horsemanship (cf. Antiphon, *Parmenides* 126c), would provide suitably reluctant rulers. It hardly needs saying that for Plato there is more to the value of rule by philosophers than their willingness to *retire* from ruling; see e.g. the sea-captain simile, 488a–489c.

¹⁸ The fact that rule by philosophers in the good city corresponds to rule by wise *reason* in the individual explains why the other two soul-parts are not topics of Books VI–VII. The silence is not evidence that Socrates now explains the human soul in terms of intellect alone, thereby reverting to the monistic psychology of earlier dialogues, as has been suggested by Sedley 2013. In fact, as Sedley himself notes, 490b3–4, 518c4–d1, 527d8, and 532c6 imply that there is more to the soul than intellect. The claim that the true philosopher will not be a lover of bodily pleasures or of money because all his passions (*epithumiai*) are channelled towards learning (485d6–e2) is hardly evidence that the tripartite psychology has been suspended (thus Sedley 2013, 79). It is common sense, regardless of one’s psychological theory, that strong interest in one thing distracts from others (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1175b3–15, on pleasure). Again, the central books’ statement (505e1–2) that the good is what every soul pursues, doing

1.3 'The Most Important Thing to Learn': Between Plural and Singular

Let us return to Socrates' slide from the plural to the singular, from 'the most important *things* to learn' (503e3; cf. 504e1–2) to 'the most important *thing* to learn' (504d2–3; cf. 504e3–4). Adeimantus is puzzled by the singular. Is Socrates still making the same point that was agreed to a moment ago, the point that the rulers must have an exact understanding (not just a sketch, *hupographē*, 504d6) of the virtues, or is he now referring to some different most important thing to learn – something more important even than the virtues (504d4–5)? Of course, the latter is the case, and, as we are about to be told, this even more important thing is the form of the good (505a2). But Socrates' teasing and confusing turn from plural to singular is designed, I take it, to convey that the topic of the virtues and the topic of the form of the good are closely intertwined without being identical. Just how we shall think they are related will depend on how we interpret the sun-analogy.

Another telling ambivalence shows up in a slightly later passage:

'At any rate,' I said, 'I imagine that [1] if it's not known exactly in what way just things and beautiful things are good these won't have acquired a guard for themselves who's worth anything very much, that is, if he lacks that knowledge; and it's my guess that [2] no one will properly know just and beautiful things before [i.e. before he knows in what way they are good].'

'That's a fair guess,' he said.

'So will the arrangements for our city be completely in order if it's a guard like this who oversees it – one who is a knower of these things'¹⁹ (*ho toutōn epistēmōn*)?

'Surely,' he said. (506a4–b2)

In his first speech here, Socrates says that [1] good guardianship of just things and beautiful things depends on 'knowing in exactly what way they are good', and then he immediately adds that [2] not knowing in what way they are good

everything for its sake, etc., is not 'in *manifest* tension' (Sedley's phrase, my emphasis) with the case of wretched Leontius at 439e5–440a5. To Leontius, arguably (see Lesses 1987; Moss 2008; Ferber 2013), indulging his somewhat twisted longing *was* the good thing to do even though he also felt it as shameful. The good on that occasion appeared to him as an indecent kind of pleasure; the alternative behaviour appeared to him seemly but not good; but this is a familiar phenomenon: cf. Polus, *Gorgias* 474c–d; 475b. Still, even if the longer way does not imply revision of the tripartite psychology of Book IV, it does raise a question uncatered for by that psychology: is reason, in Aristotelian terms, fundamentally theoretical or practical – and, if both, how are these functions related? Reason in Book IV was practical (428b–d; 441e; 442c); in Books V–VII it seems much more theoretical – not least, of course, because of the rulers' special mathematical education.

¹⁹ This phrase sits on the fence between 'knower of these things' *simpliciter* and 'knower of the way in which these things, etc. are good'.

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amounts to not knowing just things and beautiful things themselves. But on the face of it this is a contradiction. Knowing in what way just things, etc. are good surely presupposes first recognizing them *as* just things; but the next sentence says that the very recognition of just things *as* just things depends on first knowing in what way they are good. This last occurrence of ‘they’ must refer to things that are candidates for being counted as just, etc.: then the point in [2] would be that recognizing that they really are just, etc. involves recognizing their goodness. Plato must mean us to be wondering whether the goodness that in some way belongs to just things is internal to them or somehow additional and external.

The notion of externality seemed to be in the ascendant when, slightly earlier in the text, Socrates finally named the most important thing to learn: it is the form (*idea*) of the good.

‘... it is the form of the good that is the most important thing to learn, since it is what brings about the goodness and usefulness (*chrēsima kai ôphelima*) both of just things and of the rest.’ (505a2–4)²⁰

(I take ‘the rest’ to mean things picked out by terms for the other virtues.) The above translation has smoothed out a knotty expression. More literally, this is what Plato says:

‘... it is the form of the good that is the most important thing to learn, <since> it is by making additional use of it [sc. the form] (*hēi proschrēsamēna*) that both just things and the rest come to be good and useful.’²¹

It is as though just things, etc. come to their full fruition, whatever that amounts to, through appropriating for themselves the distinct form of the good. Whatever the full meaning of this, it shows the good as somehow added to the just things, etc., or brought to bear on them, as if it is not an intrinsic part of them. Here we are given a pre-echo of the sun-analogy: for whatever the exact relation of the literal sun to the objects it illuminates and nurtures, this sun is clearly external to them.

1.4 What Further Knowledge Does the Longer Way Achieve?

Socrates goes on to assert as common ground between himself and his current interlocutor, Adeimantus, that we do not properly know the form of the good,

²⁰ See Section 3.3 for close discussion of this passage with other translation options.

²¹ A. A. Long 2020 is exceptional in commenting on *proschrēsamēna*; the word is indeed, as he says, ‘rather surprising’. Adam 1907, 51, glosses it with ‘by *koinōnia* with the Idea of the Good’. The translations of Jowett, Shorey, Lindsay, Cornford, Grube/Reeve, Waterfield, Griffith, Leroux, Rowe, and Emlyn-Jones and Preddy play down or ignore the *pros-* prefix. Chambry, Bloom, and Rufener take some account of it; so do Lee and Vegetti in notes to their translations.