Virtue and Consequences: Hobbes on the Value of the Moral Virtues

In the last fifty years, interest in Hobbes's moral theory has witnessed something of a renaissance.[1] David Gauthier has even gone so far as to proclaim Hobbes "the greatest of the English moral philosophers."[2] As Gauthier reads him, Hobbes is a contractarian of sorts. Recently, however, David Boonin-Vail has argued that Hobbes's moral theory is more substantial than Gauthier would allow, because Hobbes is actually offering a kind of virtue theory.[3] Although a number of commentators have suggested that Hobbes is a kind of virtue theorist, their projects have been devoted almost entirely to a defense of this view.[4] As a result, very little energy has been expended on assessing whether Hobbes remains one of the greatest of the English moral philosophers if Gauthier is wrong and those like Boonin-Vail are right. For this reason, the following discussion does not attempt to provide further support for the claim that Hobbes is a virtue theorist. Rather, assuming that Hobbes does in fact hold such a view, I attempt to distinguish Hobbes's view of the virtues from those of Plato and Aristotle and to argue that, in the end, those who are interested in the place of the virtues in the moral life should look beyond Hobbes to the classical tradition.

First, I will summarize the challenge of the Fool in Hobbes's *Leviathan* and outline some of the problems faced by Gauthier's contractualist reading of Hobbes and Kavka's rule-egoistic reading. This will provide a background against which we can distinguish Boonin-Vail's virtue theoretic account of Hobbes's moral theory. I will then compare the value that Hobbes ascribes to the virtues with the way that Plato and Aristotle take the virtues to be good, and suggest that Hobbes's account is less satisfying than its classical predecessors.

An Overview of Traditional Accounts of Hobbes's Moral Theory

The best way to get a sense of Hobbes's virtue theory is to see it in action. Before examining how this reading provides Hobbes with

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a compelling reply to the Fool, it will be useful to look briefly at some of the problems the Fool poses for alternative accounts of Hobbes's moral theory.

An act-egoistic moral theory evaluates particular actions in terms of their (actual or expected) consequences for the acting agent. It differs from act utilitarianism in that the latter evaluates the consequences of an action in terms of all those affected, whereas the former focuses only on the agent herself. On this view, the laws of nature represent rules of thumb that supplement our own decision-making process. They are a repository of knowledge to which we defer when we are not ourselves able to weigh out the possible consequences of an action. The Fool, however, poses some fairly straightforward problems for this view of morality.

> The Foole hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice . . . that every mans conservation, and contentment, being committed to his own care, there could be no reason, why every man might not do what he thought conduced thereunto: and therefore also to make, or not make; keep or not keep Covenants, was not against Reason, when it conduced to ones benefit. He does not therein deny, that there be Covenants; and that they are sometimes broken, sometimes kept; and that such breach of them may be called Injustice, and the observance of them Justice: but he questioneth, whether Injustice . . . may not sometimes stand with that Reason, which dictateth to every man his own good.[5]

It is important to note that the Fool's question applies to cases where:

> either . . . one of the parties has performed already; or where there is a Power to make him performe; there is the question whether it be against reason, that is, against the benefit of the other to performe, or not. And I say it is not against reason. (L 15, 204)

How are we to understand Hobbes's claim that it is against reason to violate a covenant where there is either a power to enforce them or where the other person has already complied? What are we to make of the kind of reasoning involved here?

According to act egoism, the Fool claims that there might be circumstances in which it would be to one's advantage to break a covenant. If another has already complied, we stand to gain more by not complying—so long as we are not found out. In the chaos of the state of nature, it is not hard to imagine a situation in which violation would go undetected by other individuals. Moreover, as Hume would later point out, once society has grown large and prosperous, particular acts of injustice no longer threaten to topple the social order. Self-interest may be sufficient to establish the rules of justice, but it cannot be the principle that sustains them.[6] It is

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hard for the act egoist to deny that the easier it is to hide one's injustices, the more rational it is to be unjust.

Recognizing this point, Gauthier claims that Hobbesian morality is conventional in the sense that it arises only after we consent to lay down a portion of our unlimited right of nature. In so consenting, we take on obligations and duties not to interfere with those to whom we relinquish our rights, thus moving from the amoral state of nature into society and a common moral standard. But Gauthier also argues that in laying down our right of nature we lay down the rationality that goes with it. We renounce our right to judge actions by our own lights. "In covenanting, in laying down one's right, one has renounced natural reason as the court of appeal, in favor of a reason that dictates to every man what all agree is good."[7] We thus take on a conventional rationality once we adopt a conventional morality. Instead of directly seeking self-preservation, we now directly seek peace.

For our purposes, we can locate three main objections to Gauthier's account. The first is that there seems to be considerable evidence that Hobbes does not think that morality is purely conventional. The desire to seek peace does not arise only after we have laid down our right of nature, nor does it replace our desire for self-preservation. These desires coexist even in the state of nature, although Gauthier does not recognize this because he takes the right of nature to be a condition of complete liberty and freedom from all constraint.[8] For example, Hobbes claims that

> [t]he Lawes of Nature are Immutable and Eternall; for Injustice, Ingratitude, Arrogance, Pride, Iniquity, Acception of persons, and the rest, can never be made lawful. For it can never be that Warre shall preserve life, and Peace destroy it. (L 15, 215)

What he means is that all human beings desire peace (L 15, 216) and therefore think that it is good. But injustice never brings about peace, so, even in the state of nature, the laws of nature have normative force in that they bind us *in foro interno* (see below).[9]

Second, given that Gauthier is committed to an *act*-egoistic account of rationality, it is not clear how one can adopt a conventional rationality and still be rational. That is, on an act-egoistic account, the most rational choice is to choose the *act* that maximizes one's own good. If this is the most rational choice, it is not clear how it is rational to act differently, since one would then no longer be choosing the act that maximizes one's own good. Either this is the standard of rationality or it is not. It is important to point out that

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Gauthier does not talk about creating sanctions that attempt to make the conventional morality uniformly rational. He says that "the right of nature expresses right reason" and once we renounce part of this right we renounce the rationality that goes with it.[10] For these reasons, his position has elicited the charge of rational irrationality. To be an act egoist and act according to any other standard of rationality is to act irrationally, and it is not clear that Gauthier can show otherwise.

A third reason for rejecting Gauthier's distinction between natural and conventional rationalities is that this view may prove that it is not irrational to comply where one could easily succeed and profit from noncompliance. But the Fool's position can be restated as questioning whether it would be more profitable, and thus more rational, to opt out of conventional rationality just as he wants to opt out of occasional contracts. The Fool is questioning occasional breaches of contractual obligations, whereas Gauthier has located both morality and his conventional rationality squarely within a contractual obligation. That adopting a conventional rationality will prevent one from breaking contracts does not suffice to answer why one should continue to adhere to such a rationality.

Rejecting Gauthier's conventionalism altogether, Kavka represents Hobbes as holding a rule-egoistic morality. On this view, the laws of nature are not mere rules of thumb to which we may or may not defer in evaluating a particular action. Rather, he argues that Hobbes's laws of nature are rationally grounded by the following rule-egoistic principle (REP): "Each agent should attempt always to follow that set of general rules of conduct whose acceptance (and sincere attempt to follow) by him on all occasions would produce the best (expected) outcomes for him."[11]

But Kavka does not defend rule egoism very well against the charge of rule worship.[12] This is especially true in situations in which the outcome of the decision can be easily calculated.[13] Kavka argues that it is not possible to defend Hobbes's moral theory if this "is interpreted as requiring that it be most prudentially rational in every case, for every agent, in every possible (or even actual) social environment to follow the laws of nature and eschew offensive violations."[14] He seems to admit that there will be exceptions to the rules such that it might be irrational and imprudent to perform an action in accordance with a specified rule where one would gain more by abandoning the rule. Nevertheless, he maintains that his account provides individuals with adequate motivation to comply with the moral scheme and thereby to insure its stability.

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His main reason for adhering to rule egoism, though, seems to be that it is "necessary to enable us to understand what [Hobbes] is up to in his moral philosophy."[15] Remember, Hobbes is trying to reconcile traditional moral positions with prudence, thereby making them more attractive to people—whom we assume are egoistic to a large degree. Kavka simply holds that this reading seems to accomplish more than that of the act egoist. Problems of rule worship aside, he thinks it makes the best sense of Hobbes's position. This, however, leaves the door open to any other reading of Hobbes that can avoid these problems. If it can be shown that the reading of Hobbes as a virtue theorist retains the virtues of rule egoism but avoids potential problems with rule worship, it will go a long way towards offering a more plausible and possibly more desirable Hobbesian moral theory.

An Overview of Hobbes's Virtue Theory

On a virtue theoretic reading of Hobbes, the laws of nature are not principles for determining *which actions* we ought to perform so much as they are principles for determining *what sorts of people we ought to be*. The laws of nature describe the dispositions that are rational for an agent to cultivate, given that the agent wants to satisfy her various desires and, as such, desires peace as a means to this end. This is why Hobbes says that

> [t]he Lawes of Nature oblige *in foro interno*; that is to say, they bind to a desire they should take place: but *in foro externo*; that is, to the putting them in act, not alwayes. For he that should be modest, and tractable, and performe all he promises, in such time, and place, where no man els should do so, should make himselfe a prey to others, and procure his own certain ruine, contrary to the ground of all Lawes of Nature, which tend to Natures preservation. And again, he that having sufficient Security, that others shall observe the same Lawes towards him, observes them not himselfe, seeketh not Peace, but War; & consequently the destruction of his Nature by Violence. (L 15, 215)

Even in the state of nature, we are to be shaping our characters so that they conform to the laws of nature. This is why Hobbes says that someone may act against the laws of nature even if they satisfy the law *in foro externo*: "For though his Action in this case, be according to the Law; yet his Purpose was against the Law; which where the Obligation is *in foro interno*, is a breach" (L 15, 215). Those who act in accordance with the law only to gain a good reputation are breaking the laws *in foro interno* because they are not acting so as to cultivate a just character. They are not concerned

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with being just people because they do not take justice to be primarily a property of people's characters. They act in accordance with the law without regard for the state of their own dispositions. Similarly,

> The same Lawes, because they oblige onely to a desire, and endeavour, I mean an unfeigned and constant endeavour, are easie to be observed. For in that they require nothing but endeavour; he that endeavoureth their performance, fulfilleth them; and he that fulfilleth the Law, is Just. (L 15, 215)

The laws of nature are binding always *in foro interno*, including within the state of nature. To say they bind us to an unfeigned and constant endeavor that they should be observed is to say that even in the state of nature, even where we cannot safely act on them, we should nevertheless desire that we could.

Boonin-Vail finds two arguments in Hobbes, amounting to Hobbes's reply to the Fool, which aim to show that the laws of nature are meant to be instructions for shaping our dispositions. He calls the first "the argument from revealed disposition."[16] I present it as follows:

1. The state of nature "consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto." (L 13, 186)
2. One's disposition is not easily hidden from others since "the best signes of Passions present, are either in the countenance, motions of the body, actions, and ends, or aimes, which we otherwise know the man to have." (L 6, 129)
3. One's disposition is enduring in that "a Righteous man, does not lose that Title, by one, or a few unjust Actions, that proceed from sudden Passion, or mistake of Things, or Persons: nor does an Unrighteous man, lose his character, for such Actions, as he does, or forbears to do, for feare: because his Will is not framed by the Justice, but by the apparent benefit of what he is to do."[17] (L 15, 206-7)
4. The virtuous and the vicious are distinguished from each other on the basis of their respective dispositions.
5. We can escape the state of nature by making it known that we have developed a peaceful disposition.

Hobbes is confident that a person's character is not easily hidden from a wise person with some years of experience. First, our dispositions show through in subtle ways of which we are often unaware. Second, wisdom, he says, comes not from reading books but from reading men, whose characters of heart are legible "to him that

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searcheth hearts" (L Intro., 83). In other words, wise people will know what to look for when evaluating one's character, and more than likely, they will understand those subtle ways in which one's character betrays one.[18] If this is the case, the unjust person cannot be entirely confident that she will go undetected even in a large, established society. The more wise people there are, the greater her chances of being detected. So it is not more rational simply to pretend to be a just person, because eventually one's true character will show through.

The second argument is what Boonin-Vail calls "the argument from habituation."[19] We can represent it as follows:

1. Reliably performing good actions is good because it is necessary in order to obtain the cooperation of others.
2. The only way to ensure that one will perform good actions with enough frequency to elicit cooperation from others is to cultivate a reliable disposition to perform such actions.
3. Therefore, it is good to cultivate a reliable disposition to perform good actions.
4. In order to cultivate such a disposition one must come to value and enjoy performing good actions for their own sake.
5. Therefore, it is good to habituate oneself to reliably perform good actions for their own sake.

In both arguments, the claim is that it is rational to lead a life in which one cultivates a virtuous character and irrational to cultivate its opposite. As Hobbes says, when "Just" and "Injust" are attributed to persons "they signifie Conformity, or Inconformity of Manners, to Reason. But when they are attributed to Actions, they Signify the Conformity, or Inconformity to Reason, not of Manners, or manner of life, but of particular Actions" (L 15, 206). When one is just, one's manner of life conforms to reason. On the other hand, "the Injustice of Manners, is the disposition, or aptitude to do Injurie; and is Injustice before it proceed to Act; and without supposing any individuall person injured" (L 15, 207).

What exactly does Hobbes mean by conformity with reason? For Hobbes, reasoning is a kind of reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying of our thoughts (L 5, 110-12). Also for him, "the Thoughts, are to the Desires, as Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired" (L 8, 139). Hobbes's position is thus very close to Hume's claim that reason

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"is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions."[20] Reason calculates the best way we can satisfy the ends that our desires have already established.

Now, Hobbes thinks there is one end that we all share in common.

> [A]ll men agree on this, that Peace is Good, and therefore also the way, or means of Peace, which (as I have shewed before) are *Justice*, *Gratitude*, *Modesty*, *Equity*, *Mercy*, & the rest of the Laws of Nature, are good; that is to say, *Morall Vertues*; and their contrarie *Vices*, Evill. Now the science of Virtue and Vice, is Morall Philosophie; and therfore the true Doctrine of the Lawes of Nature, is the true Morall Philosophie. (L 15, 216)

Hobbes takes the laws of nature to represent a common standard of good and evil, not because they are somehow good in themselves, but because all men agree that peace is good and with this, the means of achieving it. He writes:

> The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them. And Reason suggesteth convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These Articles, are they, which otherwise are called the Lawes of Nature. (L 14, 188)

We each seek to avoid death and to achieve the means to attain an adequate standard of living. Thus, the laws of nature are dictates of prudence that appeal to our rational self-interest and are founded upon desires and ends that we as human beings already share. In this sense, Hobbes's laws of nature have the form of what Kant would later call assertoric hypothetical imperatives. They locate ends that we each desire for various reasons and then assert that we should also desire the means to those ends. Although we each have different passions and desires, all men agree that peace is good and with this the means thereunto. We all desire peace, because we all want to avoid death and persecution at the hands of others and to achieve and maintain an adequate standard of living. The state of nature is a state of war where life is solitary, nasty, brutish, and short. We all seek to avoid such states of affairs. To this end—the hub upon which the spokes of our common desires converge—reason has suggested some convenient articles of peace, namely, the laws of nature.

The just person lives a life that is in accordance with reason because she insures that the dispositions she cultivates are in accordance with the laws of nature. In order to do this, she takes great pains that all of her actions are just. The unjust person, on the other hand, cultivates a manner of living that is out of step with

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reason in that she cultivates a disposition to perform unjust acts. This is irrational because even the unjust person desires peace, yet "Injustice, Ingratitude, Arrogance, Pride, Iniquity, Acception of persons, and the rest, can never be made lawfull. For it can never be that Warre shall preserve life, and Peace destroy it" (L 15, 215). It is irrational to cultivate anything but a virtuous disposition because it is by this that we will be judged. We each by our very nature desire peace, but the actions that flow from an unjust disposition lead not to peace, but to war.

On this account, the primary object of rational choice is not which action to perform in certain circumstances, but which manner of life one should cultivate. Choosing to cultivate a certain kind of character will necessarily translate into performing certain actions. It is always rational to perform a virtuous action, because one cannot cultivate a virtuous character and knowingly desire to perform unjust actions. It is rational to cultivate a virtuous character, since this is the fundamental criterion by which agents will be judged by others. People will not contract with unjust individuals. They will be excluded from defense cooperatives and become likely targets of preemptive strikes by fearful neighbors.

Moreover, this does not require a change in one's standard of reasoning, as in Gauthier's theory. One cannot consistently will that one should be a just person and not perform the actions that a just person performs. Because one's character is the locus of the community's scrutiny, it would be irrational not to become a just person. From this it follows that it would be irrational and self-defeating to act unjustly. We can put this in more Hobbesian language if we say that the rational individual always desires to be a just person and in every situation reason sets out to find the best means to this end.

On this reading of Hobbes, the laws of nature have normative force even in the state of nature. Furthermore, this account avoids any problems with rational irrationality or rule worship. What is more, it provides Hobbes with a fairly compelling reply to the Fool. Because we each desire the means to satisfy our desires, we desire peace. When we desire peace it is rational for us to become just individuals and to shape our character and dispositions by internalizing the convenient articles of peace that reason has set out for us. Even the Fool desires peace: it is just that he thinks he stands to gain more as a free rider. The problem with the Fool's reasoning, however, is that no one will want to contract with such a person. Defense cooperatives and civil societies will seek to purge themselves

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of such people. The Fool's mistake is thinking that it is most rational not to cultivate a virtuous character. He does not understand that it is precisely because he is such an unjust person that he will come to ruin.

Plato and Aristotle on the Value of the Virtues

Before we can bring out some crucial differences between Hobbes, on the one hand, and classical thinkers like Plato and Aristotle on the other, we need to look at the way in which these latter thinkers value the virtues. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*,[21] Aristotle says that the Platonists distinguish between goods that are "pursued and loved for their own sake" and those that "produce such goods, preserve them in some way, or are preventative of their opposites," and that these latter goods are pursued because they stand in one of these relations to a good of the former sort (1096b10-14). The former class of goods contains those things that are good in themselves. He then says:

> Aren't these the sort of goods which are sought after even when isolated from other things, such as understanding, seeing, certain pleasures, and honors? For even if we also pursue these things for the sake of something else, still one would class them among those things good in themselves. (1096b15-19)

The idea here is supposed to be that understanding, seeing, certain pleasures, and honors are valuable apart from any contribution they may make to some other good. That is, apart from being good for their contribution to other goods, these things are good just in themselves. Consider sight, for example. On the one hand, it is valuable because of the way it contributes to all sorts of other good things—that is, sight allows us to pursue all sorts of projects that would be more difficult, if not impossible, to pursue if we were blind. However, Aristotle claims that sight is valuable apart from these consequences. Simply being in visual contact with the external world is a good in its own right. Similarly, although understanding the Pythagorean theorem may allow me to do all sorts of valuable things, nevertheless, the understanding itself is something worth pursuing for its own sake. We desire to understand, perhaps because it is pleasant, perhaps because it is useful, but also just because understanding is a good in and of itself.

A few pages later Aristotle brings up the same division of goods. He says that the supreme good must be something final (1097a25-b6). A good that is always chosen for the sake of something else is less

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final than a good that is chosen both for its own sake and for the sake of something else. The most final good, however, is one always chosen as an end in itself and never as a means to something else. This appears to be the case most of all with happiness, as it is always chosen for its own sake, never for the sake of anything else.

> But, honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy. (1097b1-4)

For our purposes, this is a crucial passage. Aristotle is clear that the various human virtues are valuable for their contribution to our happiness or flourishing. But he also makes the stronger claim that each of the virtues is worthy of being chosen even apart from their contribution to our happiness. That is, Aristotle contrasts choosing the virtues for the sake of their contribution to our happiness with choosing the virtues for their own sake, and claims that each of the virtues is valuable on both counts.[22] This is why, near the end of Book Six Aristotle says that wisdom and practical wisdom "are necessarily valuable in themselves because they are each virtues of the respective parts of the intellect, even if neither of them produces any effect." He then goes on to say that these virtues do in fact produce an important effect: "they produce happiness" (1144a1-7).

This is a view that Aristotle inherits from Plato. In the opening lines of *Republic* II, Glaucon distinguishes three categories of goods. First, there is the kind of good that we welcome "not because we desire what comes from it, but because we welcome it for its own sake" (357b). He lists joy and simple pleasures as kinds of goods that do not lead to anything beyond themselves. Second, there is "a kind of good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from it" (357b). Knowing, seeing, and being healthy are some examples. Finally, there are goods that we do not choose for their own sakes, "but for the sake of the rewards and other things that come from them" (357c). These goods, like physical training, medical treatments, and most ways of making money, are onerous, and if they did not lead to some further benefit we would not pursue them. When asked where justice belongs, Socrates places it in the second category of goods, those that are chosen both for themselves and for the things that come from them (357e-358a).

According to Glaucon and Adeimantus, the majority of people put justice in the third category of goods because they believe that "it is to be practiced for the sake of the rewards and popularity that

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come from a reputation for justice, but is to be avoided because of itself as something burdensome" (358a). That is, most people think that the best possible state of affairs would be to be able to act unjustly with impunity and thereby outdo everyone else by profiting more than anyone else. Of course, they also think that the worst possible state of affairs is to suffer such injustice. As a result, they value justice only because it represents a compromise between extreme profit and victimization (359a). Glaucon and Adeimantus are dissatisfied with the way justice is traditionally praised, because it is praised for providing the agent with benefits such as being able to hold political office, engage in commerce, marry into a good family, cultivate many friendships, and so on. But, they point out, a shrewd person will see that these are not actually consequences of justice itself; they are the benefits one receives from having a reputation for justice. So, someone like Thrasymachus or Hobbes's Fool can argue that the best state of affairs is to have a reputation for justice when one is in truth a crafty and unjust person.

As a result, Glaucon and Adeimantus tell Socrates that they want to hear justice praised not for the benefits that come from a reputation for justice, but "by itself" (358d).

> You agree that justice is one of the greatest goods, the ones that are worth getting for the sake of what comes from them, but much more so for their own sake, such as seeing, hearing, knowing, being healthy, and all other goods that are fruitful by their own nature and not simply because of reputation. Therefore, praise justice as a good of that kind, explaining how—because of its very self—it benefits its possessors and how injustice harms them. Leave wages and reputations for others to praise. (367c7-d5)

There is some scholarly debate over what it means to say that something is valuable in itself. It appears that we can distinguish two different ways in which justice might be valuable in itself. First, justice may be valuable in itself in the sense that it is valuable apart from any of the things that come from it.[23] This seems to be what Aristotle has in mind when he says that the virtues would be valuable even if they produced no additional advantage for us. Second, justice may be valuable in itself because there are certain benefits that justice necessarily produces that do not depend on a reputation for justice.[24] That is, justice may have some powers of its own to provide the just agent with benefits that do not depend on others believing that the agent is just. For this reason, the just agent would benefit from her justice, even if she had a reputation for thorough-going injustice, since justice itself produces some sort of nonsocial benefits for an agent. In this way, Plato would be distinguishing the

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benefits that justice itself directly produces for an agent from what I will call the "social benefits" that come from a reputation for justice.

Apart from the interpretive question concerning what Plato means when he says that the virtues are valuable in themselves, I believe that Plato and Aristotle hold that the human virtues are valuable in each of the ways we have outlined above.[25] That is, the virtues are "intrinsically valuable" in that they are valuable apart from their contributions to any further good. Second, they are valuable for their "immediate benefits" in the sense that they each necessarily provide the virtuous agent with some sort of benefit independently of others believing that they possess the virtue in question. Third, the virtues offer us "social benefits" that depend crucially on others believing that we possess the virtue in question. I contend that Hobbes cannot claim that justice is valuable in either of the first two senses outlined above. That is, for Hobbes, justice is neither intrinsically valuable nor valuable for its immediate benefits. Rather, justice is valuable only for its social benefits, which benefit us only when others believe that we are just. At the conclusion of this discussion I will suggest why we should prefer Plato's and Aristotle's way of thinking about the virtues to Hobbes's.

Hobbes on the Value of Virtue

We have already seen a number of indications that Hobbes values the virtues only for their social benefits. Consider Boonin-Vail's argument from revealed disposition. The upshot of this argument is not that a just character is valuable in itself. Rather, a just character is valuable because it engenders the belief in others that one can be trusted. It is only if others have this belief that one receives the social cooperation required to pursue one's various life projects. The force of the argument is supposed to be that the only way to reliably engender this belief in others is actually to become just. Nevertheless, the value of a just character lies in producing the belief in others that secures a more profound good for the agent, namely, the peace and cooperation she needs to pursue her various projects. That someone is not directly benefited by one's just character itself can be shown by considering the following: If one were indeed just, but no one believed this, then one's just character would not provide any recognizable benefit.

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There are a number of passages that seem to support this view. For example, Hobbes says that "Reputation of power, is Power; because it draweth with it the adhærence of those that need protection" (L 10, 150). Popularity, which is a "Reputation of love of a mans Country" is power for the same reason. "Also, what quality soever maketh a man beloved, or feared of many; or the reputation of such quality, is Power; because it is a means to have the assistance, and service of many" (L 10, 151). Similarly, success is called power because it generates a "reputation of Wisdome" and the "reputation of Prudence in the conduct of Peace or War, is Power; because to prudent men, we commit the government of our selves, more willingly than to others" (L 10, 151). Finally, after providing a fairly lengthy catalogue of things that are honorable, Hobbes says that "Honour consisteth onely in the opinion of Power" (L 10, 156). In each of these cases, Hobbes explicitly recognizes that the reputation for possessing certain qualities or powers is itself a power. Surely the moral virtues fall under the category of qualities that "maketh a man beloved." But Hobbes is clear that the reputation for possessing such qualities is sufficient to secure the cooperation of others. For this reason, it is not at all clear that the moral virtues are valuable for any other reason than that cultivating them will reliably produce a reputation that will then secure for us the trust and cooperation of others. That is, apart from the reputation they engender, it is not at all clear how the moral virtues provide their possessor with any recognizable benefit.

There is a point at which it looks as though Hobbes wants to claim that there are a few rare and noble individuals who value justice for its own sake. He says "that which gives to humane Actions the relish of Justice, is a certain Noblenesse or Gallantnesse of courage, (rarely found,) by which a man scorns to be beholding for the contentment of his life, to fraud, or breach of promise" (L 15, 207). Perhaps it is because he thinks these sorts of people are so rarely found that he does not elaborate on this remark. However, I suspect that he is anticipating Hume here. The reason these traits are pleasing to us is that they are pleasing to others, and the main reason we find them pleasing at all is due to their social utility. Consider the following: Hobbes calls nobility a power, "not in all places, but onely in those Common-wealths, where it has Priviledges: for in such priviledges consisteth their Power." He goes on to say that the value or worth of a man is his price, which is "so much as would be given for the use of his Power," and that the true value

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of a person is "no more than it is esteemed by others" (L 10, 151-52). Similarly, both honor and dignity are cashed out in terms of the value that others place on us because of the powers we possess. So there is reason to think that the relish we receive from abstaining from fraud and breach of promise comes from the idea that this may make us look more powerful in the eyes of others. In this case, the relish of justice is just another face of the relish of the power that proceeds from a reputation for power.

What about the argument from habituation? Boonin-Vail points out that this argument "does not rely on the claim that one's character is, or is likely to be, made known to others through one's behavior."[26] Nevertheless, it still relies on the premise that one must perform good actions if one is to gain the cooperation of others. But this moves too quickly. Surely, if someone performed nothing but good actions but, because of slander, say, everyone thought that he was unjust, then that person would never receive the cooperation of others. So this argument must begin with the claim that people need to believe that an agent reliably performs just actions. From there it should go on to argue that the best way to instill this belief is to actually develop the disposition to perform such acts. Boonin-Vail is right when he says that the argument does not rest on the claim that our character will become known to others. Nevertheless, it is not clear that it can be made to work without the claim that the best way to make people believe that one reliably performs just actions is to cultivate the disposition to do so. In this way it does not look like the virtue itself has any value apart from its ability to generate and sustain a certain sort of reputation.

Furthermore, there is no inconsistency in holding (1) that in order to become a just person an agent must perform just actions simply because they are just actions and (2) that a just character is valuable only because of its consequences. The first proposition simply states that a person who performs just actions from fear of punishment, or in order to appear just, does not perform the just action in the way a just person performs them. Rather, the just person performs them precisely because they are just actions. Nevertheless, as the above argument shows, the very reason an agent habituates herself to perform just actions and seeks to value them for themselves is that she must establish her own just character if she is to ensure that others will believe her to be trustworthy. Clearly, an agent can value her just character and the performance of just acts because they are just. The point is simply that there does not seem to be

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any distinct benefit that she would receive from possessing this character apart from the reputation it produces. So, although an agent may continue to value her just character even though others are convinced that she is unjust (because of slander, say), it is not clear why it would be rational for her to do so.

The Ring of Gyges: A Thought Experiment

In order to bring out the reasons for which I think we should be dissatisfied with Hobbes's account of the value of the virtues, I want to introduce a thought experiment of sorts: What sort of reply is open to the above views if we equip the Fool with the Lydian shepherd's ring of Gyges from Book Two of Plato's *Republic*? Gyges' ring has the property of making whoever wears it invisible, and Glaucon employs the example as part of an argument to the effect that people have no reason to be just apart from the consequences of being caught when perpetrating some injustice. Those who actually hold this position argue that it is not in one's interest actually to be just; it is best to *seem* to be just because all of the social benefits of justice actually flow from having the reputation for justice. The point of the example, as I understand it, is to disassociate the shepherd from the consequences of the unjust actions that his invisibility allows him to commit. The challenge then put to Socrates is to defend being just not only because of its consequences, but because it is a good we welcome for its own sake.[27]

As Gauthier and Kavka read Hobbes, Gyges' ring effectively eliminates an agent's motivation to be just. Gauthier, however, claims that the ring does not challenge our adherence to the rules or rights of the social contract; it removes any motive we may have to achieve peace. The challenge is not to Hobbes's third law of nature, but to the first and second. Gyges' ring effectively places us outside the sphere of justice because it places us "outside the bounds of human life."[28] Gauthier thinks it is a "profound error" to look for an intrinsic value to justice over and above its regulation of social interaction precisely because justice is a peculiarly human virtue. In real life we live in the circumstances of justice; we are not self-sufficient and our interests often conflict with the interests of those around us. The lesson he draws from Gyges' ring is that we must "beware of conferring more than human powers on those with human desires, for they cannot then be bound by justice."[29]

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Although there is much of value in what Gauthier says here, there is also an important sense in which this response misses the argumentative power of the thought experiment. The ring experiment provides a way of purifying the Fool's position. The act consequentialist and the rule consequentialist base their reply to the Fool on the possible harm that comes from being found out. The Fool is shrewd. He is willing to gamble and take his chances, but he is no fool. He bides his time and will wait for the moment when he is least likely to get caught. More than this, however, he works to acquire the position and power that will help to ensure that he is not caught. He works to make himself invisible by hiding behind large institutions, bureaucracies, loopholes, and the favors that power easily garners when it asserts itself on behalf of others. In short, the Fool need not himself be a thief or a murderer. He may simply be the tireless bureaucrat who shrewdly hides his injustice behind his power and position, exploiting these things for personal gain at the expense of the rest of us.

On this reading, the Fool's point is that if he can achieve a level of invisibility by working himself into a position of power and influence within those institutions governing our interactions with each other, if he can stand on the shoulders of such an institution, he too could effectively remove himself from the sphere of justice. Gyges' ring brings out the subtle nature of the Fool's position and it forces the act or rule consequentialist to rely solely on chance. In other words, there is always the possibility of getting caught, if for no other reason than that no plan is absolutely foolproof. What the ring example brings out, though, is the fact that *sometimes* the odds will be in the Fool's favor. Sometimes it will be rational to lie, cheat, steal, and murder, and when those opportunities present themselves, it is perfectly rational to seize them. The ring embodies those instances where chance combines with cunning to produce occasions for individual profit at the expense of others. For some, these occasions may be relatively rare. For a few wealthy, powerful, well-placed individuals, these opportunities will be more frequent.

At this point, those who read Hobbes as a virtue theorist will point out that although the ring separates one from the consequences of individual acts of injustice, it cannot separate an agent from the character she develops in the course of performing those actions. By acting as she does when she is invisible, the agent cultivates an unjust and vicious character that she cannot leave behind once she is again "visible." So long as she hopes to live amongst others as

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a visible member of society, she must guard against forming an unjust character. The consequences with which an agent must be primarily concerned are those that arise from cultivating a given disposition of character. Although no one may catch the Fool *in the act*, Hobbes is confident that the nature of her disposition will show through in her interactions with others. People will distrust her, be suspicious of her, and most likely, be more vigilant against her.

But this is exactly where I think we should be dissatisfied with Hobbes's conception of the virtues. For Hobbes, our allegiance to the virtues is too conditional, too instrumental. The Fool can still point out that when equipped either with the ring of Gyges or with a position of power, she will be able to get away with individual acts of injustice for perhaps quite a long time. Furthermore, the likelihood of being detected will depend on the amount of time the Fool has to spend in one place, on the number of wise people she will have to associate with, and on other people's ability to trust their judgment of another's character enough to increase their vigilance, among other things. If the Fool is willing to admit that her character often shows itself in ways of which she is not aware, and that people are more or less able to perceive this, Hobbes's position may provide compelling reasons for her not to gamble. But it does not provide any reason to cultivate the virtues in cases where one can locate a more effective means of achieving one's ends, or in cases where one's virtue is no longer instrumentally useful in securing the cooperation of others.

In contrast, Plato and Aristotle both claim that there is something valuable about possessing the virtues even if one receives no social benefits from them. That is, these thinkers can claim that the Fool, equipped either with a position of power or the ring of Gyges, is missing out on something of value precisely because she does not possess the human excellences. In the *Republic*, for example, Plato tries to argue that even with the ring of Gyges we are better off cultivating justice rather than injustice. I am not claiming that Plato's arguments here are sound; I am arguing that proponents of the virtues should not give up looking for conclusions of this kind. That is, if we are going to give the virtues a special place in our moral thinking, then I suggest that we do so not simply because the virtues are dispositions to perform certain kinds of actions and to make certain sorts of choices. Rather, we should retain the idea that part of what makes the virtues valuable is that they are excellences, that cultivating them represents a certain individual achievement, and that they are

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valuable both in themselves and for their immediate benefits. In closing I would like to gesture at the sort of account of the virtues I have in mind.

In what way might the virtues benefit their possessor apart from their social consequences? In both Plato and Aristotle, we find the idea that the very perceptions of the unjust are corrupted by their vicious character in much the same way that the perceptions of the person with a fever are corrupted by illness. Aristotle says:

> The good man judges each thing rightly, and in each department things appear to him as they truly are, for different things are noble and pleasant according to each character state and perhaps what most distinguishes the good man is that he sees the truth in each thing, being himself the norm and measure of the noble and the pleasant. (*NE* 1113a26-35; cf. 1176a12-19)

The perceptions of the virtuous person differ from those of people with other characters. What distinguishes the virtuous person is that she *sees these things for what they are.*[30] This allows Aristotle to claim that the virtues are valuable in each of the three ways we mentioned above. For example, such states represent the proper functioning of our cognitive and affective faculties and, as such, they are valuable simply because they are excellences of these faculties.[31] That is, we might argue that it is a good thing simply to have well developed cognitive and affective faculties in much the same way that it is a good thing simply to have a strong, healthy body.

Even if we do not want to take this approach, however, it is the case that such states are also valuable for their immediate consequences. It is only by cultivating them that we can have the cognitive and affective access to the world that they provide. It is a good thing simply to be in touch with the aspects of the world that these virtues make possible. More importantly, though, this sort of responsiveness opens up possibilities for acting that are unavailable to those who lack the virtues, simply because they cannot respond to aspects of the world of which they are unaware. For example, if we lack the virtue of sympathetic understanding, we may fail to apprehend the cause of discord in a group of people because we fail to apprehend the ways in which the various members of this group feel that certain of their needs are not being met. This will prevent us from being able to attend to those needs as well as from being able to point out to others the ways in which they need to modify their behavior.

Similarly, and perhaps more importantly, we might argue that the virtues do more than provide us with a certain sort of access to

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facts about the world around us. They also provide us with the same sort of access to facts about ourselves that would be unavailable to us if we lacked them. If we are excessively prideful, selfish, intemperate, and rude, then we may fail to have a realistic estimation of our own abilities, needs, and even desires. In this respect, the virtues may play a crucial role in our own self-understanding and in our own ability to properly attend to our own needs.

Clearly, these remarks do not constitute anything like a rigorous argument to the effect that the virtues are valuable in themselves or for their immediate consequences. They are merely meant to highlight one respect in which those who are interested in the virtues are attempting to demonstrate their centrality to the moral life.[32] I offer this as an illustration of the sort of account of the virtues as human excellences that I am claiming Hobbes does not recognize and that the friends of virtue should not neglect. I believe there are many other examples of this kind, some of which may be more persuasive than the one I have chosen. Nevertheless, to the extent that we believe that the virtues are valuable apart from their social consequences, I believe those interested in the value of the virtues for the moral life would do well to continue to look past Hobbes to the classical tradition for inspiration.[33]

Notes

1. See J.B. Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy From Montaigne to Kant*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 111.
2. David Gauthier, "Thomas Hobbes: Moral Theorist," *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 547-59, p. 558.
3. David Boonin-Vail, *Thomas Hobbes and the Science of Moral Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
4. See, for example, R.E. Ewin, *Virtues and Rights: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Boulder & Oxford: Westview Press, 1991); Bernard Gert, "The Law of Nature as the Moral Law," *Hobbes Studies* 1 (1988): 26-44, and his Introduction to *Man and Citizen* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1978), pp. 3-32; and Mary Deitz, "Hobbes's Subject as Citizen," in Deitz (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), pp. 91-119. These and other precedents for this reading of Hobbes are discussed in Boonin-Vail, pp. 114-18. Because Boonin-Vail's discussion is the most thorough and the most recent, my discussion will focus almost entirely on his work.
5. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1985), chap. 15, p. 203. Henceforth cited in the text as (L chapter, page).
6. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. L.A. Selby-Bigg, rev. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 499.

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7. Gauthier, "Thomas Hobbes: Moral Theorist," p. 557.
8. The view that there are no moral distinctions within the state of nature is also embraced by Thomas Nagel in "Hobbes' Concept of Obligation," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 68-83. Against this view, see Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 357-68, and Boonin-Vail, op. cit., pp. 70-82.
9. Kavka describes the laws of nature in the state of nature as "ought-principles" that derive their normative force from their appeal to our rational self-interest (pp. 309-14).
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., pp. 358-59.
12. This and the following objections are amplified in Boonin-Vail, pp. 82-92.
13. See, for example, J.J.C. Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism," in Philippa Foot (ed.), *Theories of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 171-83. See also David Lyons, *Forms and Limits of Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Clarendon, Pess, 1965).
14. Kavka, p. 381.
15. Ibid., p. 383.
16. This argument is summarized in Boonin-Vail, op. cit., pp. 145-46, and elaborated through p. 160.
17. The importance of Hobbes's distinction between performing just acts and cultivating a just disposition is the subject of A.E. Taylor's article, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," in K.C. Brown (ed.), *Hobbes Studies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 35-55. See also Gert's Introduction to *Man and Citizen*, and Boonin-Vail, pp. 92-97 and 106-23.
18. This aspect of Hobbes's argument is not without precedent. In the context of discussing what makes a good judge in the *Republic*, Socrates says:

    The clever and suspicious person, on the other hand, who has committed many injustices himself and thinks himself a wise villain, appears clever in the company of those like himself, because he's on his guard and is guided by the models within himself. But when he meets with good older people, he's seen to be stupid, distrustful at the wrong time, and ignorant of what a sound character is, since he has no model of this within himself. But since he meets vicious people more often than good ones he seems to be clever rather than unlearned, both to himself and to others. (409b-e) (This and all subsequent translations from Plato are taken from *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).)

    The vicious person's character shows through in subtle ways that she is not aware of. She may be distrustful at the wrong time, she may show her approval of the wrong things, she may let others see that certain unscrupulous motives are not beyond her consideration. In short, the fact that one's will is not bound by the laws of nature *in foro interno* will bleed into one's life in ways that are beyond one's ability to control.
19. This argument is summarized in Boonin-Vail, op. cit., p. 160, and elaborated through p. 176.
20. Hume, *Treatise*, p. 415.

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21. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).
22. Generally, commentators on Aristotle do not dispute the claim that in this passage Aristotle asserts that the virtues have intrinsic value. They do dispute, however, the relationship of such intrinsic goods to happiness. Those who hold a "dominant" conception of happiness argue that among the intrinsic goods there is one to whose pursuit we should devote all of our energies (e.g., W.F.R. Hardie, "The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics," *Philosophy* 40 (1965): 277-95). Those who hold an "inclusive" view of happiness argue that happiness is supremely valuable because it includes all intrinsically valuable goods and that, as such, we must pursue each of those goods if we are to be happy (e.g., J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 15-34). That this passage indicates two possibly incompatible ways of valuing the virtues is brought out nicely in Sarah Broadie, *Ethics With Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), p. 55 n. 25.
23. This is the most straightforward way of understanding what Plato means by "goods that are valuable in themselves." It is defended most recently by Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 189-91.
24. This view, sometimes referred to as the "two consequences view," is defended by David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," *Philosophical Review* 72 (1963): 141-58; and by Nicholas White, "The Classification of Goods in Plato's *Republic*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984): 393-421. However, Irwin, op. cit., pp. 190-91, points out that this view cannot explain why Plato divides the second from the third class of goods.
25. For my thinking in this matter I am indebted to Daniel Devereux (University of Virginia), "Virtue, Happiness, and the Good in Plato's *Gorgias* and *Republic*" (unpublished paper).
26. Boonin-Vail, op. cit., p. 160.
27. See *Republic* 357b-d.
28. David Gauthier, "Three Against Justice: The Foole, the Sensible Knave, and the Lydian Shepherd," reprinted in *Moral Dealing: Contract, Ethics, and Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 129-49; p. 147.
29. Ibid., p. 149.
30. D.J. Allan captures the spirit of the above passages when he says that "it is the intuitive judgement of [the man of practical reason] which serves as the *criterion* of right action for all who do not yet feel confident of their own power of decision." However, he goes on to explain that the man of practical wisdom is, "simply a faithful interpreter of prevailing moral standards." See *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 133. The present passage makes it clear, however, that the virtuous person is in touch with actual facts about the world, facts that others fail to appreciate. In this way, her judgment serves as the criterion of right action because it is rooted in an appreciation of the way things really are.
31. For Plato and Aristotle, every virtue has a twofold effect on the thing to which it belongs; virtue both renders the thing itself good and assures that it performs its distinctive work or function well (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a15-18). For an attempt to explain and defend Aristotle's naturalism and with this a certain view of the virtues as human excellences see John McDowell, "Two Sorts of

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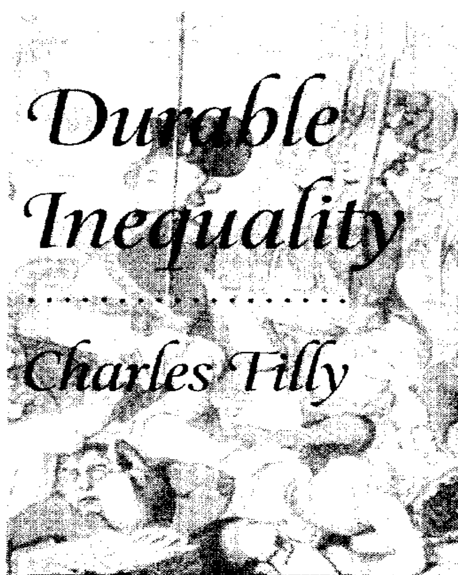
Naturalism" in R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence, and W. Quinn (eds.), *Virtues and Reasons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 148-80.

32. See, for example, John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62 (1979): 331-50, and "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics" in Rorty (ed.), 359-76; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Michael Woods, "Intuition and Perception in Aristotle's Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1986): 145-66; Miles F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good," in Rorty (ed.), pp. 69-92; David J. Furley, "Self-Movers," in Rorty (ed.), pp. 55-67.
33. I thank John Marshall, A. John Simmons, and Talbot Brewer for their comments on drafts of this paper, and Daniel Devereux and Thomas C. Brickhouse for the light their conversations helped to shed on difficult passages in the *Republic*.

Alex John London
Corcoran Department of Philosophy
University of Virginia
ajl8h@virginia.edu



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