Papers
William H.F. Altman
“The Missing Speech of the Absent Fourth: Reader Response and Plato’s Timaeus-Critias”
David Levy,
“Socrates vs. Callicles: Examination and Ridicule in Plato’s Gorgias.”
Nathalie Nercam,“En tout et pour tout (Théétète 204a-210b)”
Matthew Robinson,“Competition, Imagery, and Pleasure in Plato’s Republic, 1-9”
Scott J. Senn,“Ignorance or Irony in Plato’s Socrates?: A Look Beyond Avowals and Disavowals of Knowledge”
The question you are asking,” I said, “needs an answer given through an image . . . At all events, listen to the image so you may see still more how greedy I am for images.”

(Socrates in Republic 487 E–488 A)

INTRODUCTION

1. In book 9 of the Republic, after he has completed the description of the tyrant’s extreme unhappiness, Plato gives an account of pleasure that some scholars including Richard Kraut have taken to be of little importance to the argument of the dialogue as a whole. On the other hand, in his recent monograph, Daniel Russell shows that Plato’s treatment of pleasure is an important extension of the Republic’s argument that the just life is by nature the best life. I support Russell’s claim that the pleasure arguments are required to complete the Republic’s argument about the soul’s nature. I also defend the further claim that when Socrates labels the defeat of the unjust man in terms of pleasure, “the greatest and most sovereign” of the unjust man’s defeats, a careful analysis of the imagery that accompanies this argument shows that Book 9’s pleasure arguments form a final, decisive stage in the Republic’s larger refutation of Thrasymachus’ sophistry as restored by Glaucon in Book 2.

2. I begin by analyzing in detail one of the dialogue’s central, parallel images, a contest between the lives of the most just and most unjust men, whose significance within the dialogue as a whole has been largely overlooked. This contest is initially depicted
by the image of Glaucon’s two statues, which summarizes the logic in Glaucon’s challenge by distilling the contrast between the ‘most just man’ and most unjust man from the standpoint of Thrasymachus’ sophistry (360 E 2).4 In this analysis, I focus on parallel imagery as distinct from other kinds of imagery Plato used in composing the Republic. The central images of the sun, line, cave and the myth of Er, for instance, function as a replacement for argumentation, as Socrates says when introducing the first of these images (506 D 8 – E 5).5 As parallel imagery, the contest imagery does not replace logical argument, but rather develops and complements it.6

A. THRASYMACHUS’ DEFEAT IN BOOK 1

3. To prepare for this analysis, it is important to see that Glaucon’s restoration of Thrasymachus’ argument is given against the backdrop of Thrasymachus’ submission to Socrates in book 1. There, Socrates defeated the sophist on sophistic terms, taming the metaphorical ‘beast,’ silencing his trickery, and thus clearing the pathway for intellectual exchange.7 Recognizing Plato’s suggestion that the real sophist must be silenced is important because it highlights Plato’s implied claim that Thrasymachus, who has been characterized as deeply attached to victory and appearance,8 cannot participate in philosophical dialogue while also prioritizing these goods. In Plato’s view, philosophical progress requires receptivity to what lies beyond all exterior goods. Furthermore, in seeing the dramatic interplay of power and domination between Thrasymachus, the eventual loser, and Socrates, the eventual victor, we witness an early contest between their conflicting positions and Plato’s early suggestion that Thrasymachus’ position must eventually be answered on its own ground of power, dynamis. I will argue that the strategic function of Book 9’s pleasure arguments becomes clearer when Socrates’ response to Glaucon’s challenge is seen as a gradual appropriation of the terms of Sophistry’s argument. In this context, the theme of power re-emerges in Book 9 where the pleasure arguments are decisive because they are the final stage of this appropriation of terms. For now, I return to the beginning of book 2 where Glaucon, rather than Thrasymachus, sets forth the logic of sophistry from his own genuine desire for intellectual enlightenment. Again, Glaucon is better suited to restoring Thrasymachus’ argument as his attraction to something higher (367 E 6–368 B 2) allows him the critical detachment from Thrasymachus’ position required to articulate its logic transparently.9

B. TWO STATUES IN COMPETITION

4. In the third stage of this restoration, Glaucon depicts the furthest extreme of injustice in the description of the most unjust man whose injustice is made complete in his seeming to be perfectly just while in fact being the opposite (361 A 2–B 1). Conversely, Glaucon’s most just man is inwardly just, while appearing to be perfectly unjust (361 B 8–C 3). This ensures that, in Kantian terms, the just man’s motive for justice is derived from duty and not inclination, and that he is therefore just in the extreme.10 Today, Glaucon’s most just man might be a living saint, falsely convicted of something like terrorism or pedophilia. In order to test whether justice really is intrinsically good, the dikaios receives for his detested appearance the penalties of political and social disenfranchisement and, ultimately, bodily torture (361 B 7– 362 A 3).