

Kevin M. Crotty

The City-State of the Soul: Constituting the Self in Plato's Republic. Lanham; Boulder; New York; London: Lexington Books, 2016. xvi + 264 p. \$95.00. ISBN 9781498534611.

Readers of Plato's *Republic* often remember the role of the philosopher-king in the 'beautiful' city, but overlook 'the more encompassing and commanding figure': the founder (p. xi). This is the central claim of Kevin M. Crotty's *The City-State of the Soul: Constituting the Self in Plato's Republic*. Focusing too heavily on the philosopher-king at the expense of the founder has led, Crotty argues, to misinterpretations of the *Republic* as an expression of Plato's authoritarianism. Contributing to the growing body of literature that challenges perceptions of Plato as a totalitarian thinker, Crotty shows why divorcing the city in speech from its larger dramatic context risks missing the point. As Crotty's highly compelling and accessible reading of the *Republic* reveals, Plato does not intend for Kallipolis to serve as a blueprint for an actual city; rather, he intends for his presentation of Socrates' founding of Kallipolis to act as a protreptic drawing the young, intelligent, and ambitious to see the importance of 'founding' or constituting their own souls.

In Part I, Crotty justifies and clarifies the demarcation between philosopher-king and founder by exploring the founding of the city in speech. He begins, however, with a chapter on Book I of the *Republic*, which he regards as 'absolutely integral' to understanding the rest of the dialogue (p. 4). Focusing his analysis on Thrasymachus' attack on justice, Crotty posits that Thrasymachus illustrates 'the intellectual life of the cave-dwellers' – a life immersed in argumentation, but 'hopelessly adrift' (p. 11). Though Socrates tries to rebut Thrasymachus' arguments (and is more successful, in Crotty's view, than critics often acknowledge), Thrasymachus is too deeply rooted in cultural errors to be moved by simple rebuttal arguments. To remove the seductive allure of tyranny, Socrates must take the longer route of showing how societies grow and degenerate. Hence, Crotty concludes, 'We need to read the *Republic* as an artistically structured text, in which successive developments continually enrich the significance of events earlier in the dialogue' (p. 13).

Crotty successfully demonstrates the evolving nature of Socrates' arguments in the remainder of his analysis of the city in speech. Providing a corrective to Thrasymachus' – and, later, Glaucon's and Adeimantus' – wholly negative portrayal of human nature as selfish and violent, Socrates highlights the cooperative side of human beings without which we cannot account for the emergence of cities (p. 40). Starting from people's needs rather than their desires, Socrates traces the logical emergence of the principle of 'one person/one task'. Unbeknownst to the simple denizens of the original city, they have stumbled

upon 'an image of justice'; the fuller conception of Justice that unfolds over the course of the dialogue will reveal the basic correctness of this 'commercial conception of justice' (pp. 46-48). It is the founder who will help to illumine the definition of justice.

The founder emerges when the city grows and requires a military, giving rise to the problem of aggression. By presenting aggression as 'an issue *within an already existing city*', Socrates shows that aggression is not an insurmountable problem, but rather 'one more native human talent that needs to be elaborated into a serviceable skill' (p. 54). Safely harnessing the power of aggression is the founder's task. According to Crotty, Socrates serves as 'the founder *par excellence*' (p. 56). This figure leads the dialogue, providing a model of the kind of thinking someone tasked with creating a just city should exhibit. Indeed, the idea of the philosopher-king is itself a product of the founder's reasoning, suggesting the latter's predominance (p. 57). In contrast to the philosopher's more transcendental vision of the virtues, the founder 'has a practical perspective: he sees that the city needs certain qualities (wisdom, *sophrosune*, courage, justice) if it is to function successfully as a city' (p. 109). The founder thus exhibits impartiality towards the various groups in the city, and strives to be consistent in his application of the 'one person/one task' principle. Crotty concludes Part I by examining the reasons why the philosopher-king will be willing to do his part, emphasizing that it would be wrong to think of the philosopher as 'policing' the arrangements the founder sets down, as 'even when governing the philosopher/governor resembles the founder' (p. 120).

In Part II, Crotty turns to demonstrating how the founding of the city provides an instructive analogy for how one should approach one's soul. Though he engages along the way with key scholarly debates (such as the problem of 'infinite regress' of the soul's parts), his analysis centers more broadly on comparing and contrasting city and soul. Juxtaposing the soul's capacity for sublime reason with its 'abominable appetites', Crotty finds that the 'wild disparity' of the soul's parts means it, like the diverse parts of the city, must be constituted into a whole 'simply in order to lead any kind of life' (p. xv). As such, he reads the *Republic* as Plato's attempt to convince intelligent and ambitious men like Glaucon and Adeimantus that soulcraft is an activity roughly equivalent in importance and dignity to statecraft. What is more, the dialogue seeks to demonstrate the fruitfulness of taking up the founder's perspective when thinking about one's own life. Crotty perfectly captures his central thesis when he writes, 'The person's task, like the city-founder's, is to take the highly diverse elements of the soul – elements that range from the power to grasp reality itself to the darkest and most evil desires – and to forge them into a coherent whole, a genuinely unified soul' (pp. 138-39).

Practically, this means that to constitute the soul one must ‘deal with [it] as an ‘other’ – much as the founder deals with the city and its inhabitants as another’ (p. 156). At the same time, Crotty stresses, the founder wants what is best for this other. Just as the founder aims to organize the city so as to maximize the happiness of all its parts, in founding one’s soul one must think not of repressing any part, but of harmonizing the various parts. Reason performs the organizing function, helping individuals constitute their souls so they can truly pursue what they love. Building on his work in *The Philosopher’s Song: The Poets’ Influence on Plato* (Lexington Books, 2009), Crotty ends the book by arguing that Plato ultimately seeks to combat the deterministic worldview of the tragedians, instead persuading readers that freedom lies in ‘the ability to do what you *love* – that is, to act in accordance with that external value you cherish most in your life (whether truth, or honor, or money)’ (p. 238). As should be clear from this conclusion, Crotty’s reading of the *Republic* is unconventional in the sense that he believes Plato’s goal is not to elevate the philosophical life as *the* only right choice of lives, but rather to call everyone – even non-philosophers – to become true agents over their lives.

There is much to admire in Crotty’s effort to recover the original purpose of the *Republic* and to explain how we today might be brought if not to share, then at least to appreciate, Plato’s perspective. His major contribution – distinguishing founder and philosopher-king – is well supported by textual evidence and offers an important corrective to interpretations that isolate the city in speech from its dramatic context. Differentiating founder and philosopher-king allows for a more nuanced understanding of the *Republic*, one that better elucidates how the dialogue speaks not only to budding philosophers, but also to ordinary citizens. Crotty’s study would thus be an excellent way to introduce undergraduate students to Plato, as it offers a helpful framework for sympathetically approaching the ideas presented in the *Republic* while alerting readers throughout to major criticisms raised in the scholarship.

One might wish, however, for even more attentiveness to the “performative” quality of the dialogue’ (p. xiii). Unlike other ‘literary’ interpretations, Crotty’s does not pay much attention to the dramatic setting in the Piraeus, the historical backdrop of the Peloponnesian War, or actions such as Thrasymachus blushing. While Crotty underscores the importance of Book I, he skips rapidly over the roles of Cephalus and Polemarchus. He also neglects to mention that Socrates was coerced into the conversation, instead presenting it as ‘pleasant, intelligent banter amongst friends’ (p. 234).

The inattentiveness to some of the dialogue’s dramatic details bears most problematically on Crotty’s examination of the purpose of the city in speech. Though Crotty acknowledges that Socrates frequently refers to Glaucon and

Adeimantus as founders (p. 55), he largely proceeds as though Socrates were developing the city independently. For instance, he does not attend to the fact that it is Glaucon's dissatisfaction with the lack of luxuries in the original city in speech that leads to the construction of the luxurious city and, ultimately, Kallipolis. Might this, as other interpreters contend, indicate that Kallipolis is founded on injustice and therefore is actually a dystopia? To be sure, Crotty makes clear that we should not treat Kallipolis as a model for an actual city. Nonetheless, he defends it as providing a standard by which we can judge actual cities (p. 65). Upholding this interpretation necessitates, however, disregarding moments in which Socrates' interlocutors play a fundamental role in shaping the city in speech for the worse.

By not directly engaging interpretations that argue for Kallipolis as a negative model or as a means of revealing ineluctable tensions between philosophy and politics, Crotty opens himself to the criticism that he is too quick to defend Kallipolis in some form or another. Indeed, it is curious that Crotty notes the 'surprising, forward-looking results' – such as the education and empowerment of women – that can come from carrying out the 'one person/one task' principle to its logical conclusion, yet does not concede that some indefensible policies may also result (p. 64). Crotty's defensiveness towards Kallipolis seems at odds with his larger point about the city in speech functioning as a protreptic to soulcraft. Given this aim, why is it necessary for Socrates to provide a good model of founding? Couldn't his interlocutors also learn something from accidentally founding a bad city? That is, couldn't following a seemingly irrefutable assumption to its extreme help to uncover problems with that assumption? In not attending to the possibility that Kallipolis might represent a dystopia rather than a utopia, Crotty misses an opportunity to show how approaching the soul from the founder's perspective may serve not as a panacea, but rather as a means of cultivating perplexity about how one should live one's life.

Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile exercise to think with Crotty about how one might defend Kallipolis, as most readers are inclined to reject it offhand. Ultimately, Crotty's larger thesis about approaching one's soul from the founder's perspective remains compelling. For its in-depth picture of the founder as distinguished from the philosopher-king, Crotty's study is well worth reading. Readers will also discover a wealth of other insights from this thought-provoking and well-crafted book.

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