There are those who contend that Plato's intention in The Republic was to provide an argument for and to illustrate an ideal polis. Others, looking at the same text, conclude that Plato's intention was to describe an ideal city so as to demonstrate both its practical impossibility and human undesirability and, thereby, to 'purify' its (Athenian) adherents of their attachment to it. Yet others claim that Plato's aim was to show philosophically that 'justice pays', that is, makes any man happier than injustice. This claim is countered by those who allege that his project was not fundamentally philosophical but educational-political, that is, social engineering whose aim was to acculturate individuals to believe in the conjunction of justice and happiness.

I shall focus here on this latter dispute. More than one commentator has pointed out that there is no room in Plato's ideal polis for Socrates, the philosopher par excellence. For the functional life of the acculturated citizen in that city stands in stark contrast to the examined life Socrates urged and in the name of which he relinquished his own life. The issue I shall explore can be stated quite simply. Is Plato attempting to provide a philosophic argument for justice or does he realize, on the contrary, that no such argument could succeed - to tyrannical types like Thrasymachus or any and all others - and consequently what is required is a radical social change which makes possible the conjunction of justice and happiness for all? I shall call these arguments "the philosophic argument" (Does justice pay?) and "the political argument" (A radical social change is required for people to believe that justice pays).

Rolf Sartorius, in a recent paper, attempts to make plausible "the political argument" as follows:

1. He agrees (with Sachs) that Plato fails to meet the challenge of Thrasymachus according to which justice - fair dealing to others - makes a man happier than injustice.
2. He maintains, however, that Plato never intended to meet
Thrasymachus' challenge because he couldn't expect
Thrasymachus, the paradigmatic sceptic, to accept the
premises of his argument.

3. For sincere moral scepticism is itself conclusive proof
that the sceptic is ignorant of (or unable to recognize)
what is right and that his soul is "dominated...by base
appetitive desires aided and abetted by prideful spirit."9

4. Because of this "false consciousness" and psychic
upheaval the sincere moral sceptic is not hospitable to
rational persuasion.

5. That this is so is, for Sartorius, a compelling argument
for radical social reform. That one cannot motivate men to
be just in ordinary society is for Plato, according to
Sartorius, "the very best of reasons for radically
restructuring that society so as to bring about those
conditions under which rational morality will be possible."10

If, as I shall maintain in this paper, the defensibility of the radical
change recommended in _The Republic_ depends on the defensibility of the
argument that "justice pays" then the latter argument must be disentangled
from the radical reform. For if the philosopher cannot defend, on independent
philosophic grounds, the thesis at the center of _The Republic_ - that justice
makes any man happier than injustice - then clearly he has not legitimated his
proposed radical change of society, alleged to yield the just-happy life for
all. The "conditioning" or "acculturation" process is not an argument, nor
is it an adequate philosophic response to the challenge which Glaucon and
Adeimantus, rehabilitating Thrasymachus' argument, pose.