

Plato's Republic and Justice



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Questions



- 1) What Is Justice?
- 2) How do we know a Just State from an Unjust State
- 3) How does a Just State treat women?
- 4) Is Democracy the most Just form of a State?
- 5) Is Justice universal or relative (culturally defined)?
- 6) How does Plato's notion of the Forms (Ideas) inform his answer to these questions?

The Great Question



- What is Justice?
- Thasymachus: The Interest of the Stronger
- “Now governments use their power to make...laws, as suits their interests. These laws, then, designed to serve the interests of the ruling class, are the only justice their subjects are likely to experience.”
- Socrates defeats Thrasymachus with sophistry, but what do we think of this argument?

Metaphor of Doctor and Patient



- Justice as defined by its purpose
- And, Justice subject to its “art”—the art of ruling
- Practitioners of an art are subject to that Art; and Art serves the interests of its object (its purpose)
- Metaphor: Doctor; Patients; Medicine
- Socrates: “So the true doctor concerns himself with the patient’s interest and not his own. The true doctor is like a ruler whose subject is the human body; he is not a mere money maker. Are we agreed?”

Metaphor of Shepherd and Sheep



- Socrates: Likewise, the ruler is like a Shepherd and his people, the Sheep: A good shepherd watches out and guards his flock.
- Thrasymachus: “you fancy that the shepherd or cowherd has the interest of his charges at heart, grooming and fattening them for their own sakes and not to serve the master’s profit or his own. You carry this illusion into politics with the consequence that you fail to see how rulers really behave. The actual ruler or governor thinks of his subjects as sheep, all right, but his chief occupation, day and night, is how he can best fleece them to his own benefit...The just man is always a loser, my naïve Socrates. He always loses out to the unjust.”

Who Benefits from Government?



- Analogy to Business: two partners, one just and one unjust—the unjust man walks away with the assets and the just man is left to pay the debts and taxes
- “The just man in public office will reap no rewards.”
- He has little time left to manage his own affairs
- His principles forbid him to embezzle or accept bribes
- He is unwilling to hand out unlawful favors to friends, thus “he will earn the enmity of his disappointed friends and acquaintances.”

Polemarchus



- Polemarchus quotes the poet, Simonides: “he says that justice is giving each man his due.”
- What is each man’s due?
- Hypothetical example: a friend lends a weapon to a friend; when the second friend returns it he sees the owner of the weapon has gone mad; is it just to give him his “due,” his own weapon?
- Socrates concludes what Simonides really means: “something good and nothing evil.”
- But do we owe good only to our friends or also our enemies?
- And how do we discern what the Good is?

Wages Distinct from Function of an Art or Profession



- The proper function of a profession to serve the clients of the profession
- In the case of government, “governors should serve the governed and not the other way round. That is, the stronger ought to seek the advantage of the weaker and not their own.”

Definition of Justice



- “You remember the original principle we laid down at the founding of the city: each citizen should perform that work or function for which his nature best suits him. That is the principle, or some variation of it, that we may properly call justice.” (113)
- When someone tries to be something they are not suited to be—a cobbler trying to be a warrior, or a warrior trying to be a ruler—we have injustice.
- Likewise in the soul of the individual, when one part of the soul tries to rule another part for which it is unfit, we have an unjust soul.

Analogy



- Individual and State
- Justice in the individual is the precondition of justice in society
- And, justice in the individual is a model for justice in society—argument by analogy
- The Soul has three parts: The desiring part—appetite; the spirited part--passion; the reasoning part—intellect
- Temperance, courage, and wisdom—three virtues that govern each of these three parts

Myth of Fixed Nature and Justice?



- Myth of the Metals: “they were the whole time deep within the earth being given form and feature...When the process was complete, they were all delivered up to the surface by their mother earth...” (113)
- Three types of people: Gold, Silver, and Iron
- Rulers, Guardians, and Workers
- Justice is when those who are Rulers by nature rule; and those who are Guardians, guard; and those we are workers, work.

What he got Right? Women's Equality



- “The basic questions concerns the nature of women: can a woman perform all or none of the tasks a man can perform? Can she manage some but not others? Is she really capable of waging war?”
- Women, like men, have natural talents and these talents should be nurtured
- “Then we must conclude that sex cannot be the criterion in appointments to government positions. No office should be reserved for a man just because he is a man or for a woman just because she is a woman. All the capabilities with which nature endows us are distributed among men and women alike. Hence women will have the rightful opportunity to share in every task, an so will men, even though women are the weaker of the two sexes.”

What he got Wrong about Sex



- The Great Lie: Lottery for reproduction
- But in fact, the lottery is rigged by the rulers
- They want Gold women to mate with Gold men; and so on.
- Eugenics underlies this notion.
- **And can a Just State be founded upon a lie about something as important as sexual reproduction and the family?**

The Just State Ruled by Philosopher King



- Lover of Knowledge: “We must first agree that one trait of the philosophical nature is to be in love with knowledge—not the kind caught up in the never-ending round of birth and death, but the knowledge that discloses something of the eternal.”
- Disdain bodily pleasures
- Moderate and “no lover of money”
- Generous rather than stingy
- Courageous—he will not fear death
- Truthfulness: “gentle and just” and not “quarrelsome and savage”
- Quick to learn
- Good memory—to remember what he has learned

Anti-Democratic



- “Is it possible for the multitude to have an understanding for the reality of beauty itself, or will it be able to perceive only a multiplicity of beautiful things? Will the many be able to understand the essence of anything or only the particulars in which essence finds expression?”
- The multitude will censure the philosopher because they cannot understand him
- Natural philosophers corrupted or dissuaded from public service; pretenders fill the gap
- Analogy of a Ship at Sea and struggle to be Captain (178)

How to Produce Philosopher Kings



- Guardians who show a proclivity to study of difficult things, the Forms, are given further training
- Cave Metaphor: Light and Shadow
- Imaginary/Material::Rational/Forms
- Study of Mathematics and Philosophical Dialectic

Coercing the Philosopher King to Rule



- He will not want to govern
- Governing will involve him in many troubles that will distract him from a consideration of the Good, True and Beautiful
- He can't be “bribed” into it because he cares little for money
- Honor is not an incentive—he cares little about what others think
- He will be persuaded to serve out of a sense of duty and obligation

Critique of Democracy



- Desire for money leads to lending at exorbitant interest, and a corresponding rise in poor class. The poor hate the rich and plot revolution, while the rich ignore the poor and their needs.
- Revolution of the poor: They set up a new constitution in which everyone remaining has an equal share in ruling the city. **They give out positions of power pretty much by lot, with no notice of who is most fit for what role.**
- In this city the guiding priority is freedom. Everyone is free to say what they like and to arrange their life as they please. **No one works at what they are most fit to do.**
- In the last stage of degeneration, democracy, the most free city, descends into tyranny, the most enslaved. The insatiable desire for freedom causes the city to neglect the necessities of proper ruling.

Ideal State: Aristocracy



- Aristocrat – The Best
- Rule of the Best
- Not by birth, however, but by nature. Thus, the philosopher king must rule
- Assumes people are by nature superior and inferior
- Assumes that the People are unfit to rule—the majority is irrational, misguided, and driven by unnecessary appetites
- Do we agree or disagree? Why?
- Is Freedom as bad or dangerous as Socrates imagines?

What can we learn from the Republic?



- We should promote politicians who are not driven by base desires, but by a true public service
 - How can we tell?
 - Look at who benefits from their actions
- We should promote an electoral system that elects the Good person, the “philosopher Kings” of our society
 - Campaign Finance Reform—Clean Elections and Move to Amend
 - More complete financial disclosure, SuperPacs and PACs
 - Redistricting without gerrymandering
- Elect leaders who govern based on true knowledge of what is Good and True, not what is expedient, not what appeals to our baser nature, not what is good in the short term, but the long term
- Leaders should promote the general welfare, not the private welfare of powerful elites or even the majority
- He must know how to elevate the minds of the people so that they can subordinate immediate and personal gain for long-term and general good