

The Republic of Plato

Central Questions of the Republic: What is Justice? How can the demand that justice be beneficial to him who receives it be reconciled with the demand that justice represent obedience to the laws (Strauss)? How can justice be understood to be beneficial in and of itself, regardless of its consequences (CDC Reeve)? What is the relationship of the philosopher to the political community (Bloom)?

Pathway to an answer: After first rejecting conventional accounts of justice (Bk I), Socrates prompts his interlocutors to find a solution to the question of what justice is by founding a city. This is possible because the citizen and the city are both analogous and causally connected. The key to understanding justice lies in reaching harmony through a whole of well-regulated parts. The combination of habit formation and education at the individual level with particular institutional arrangements at the city level leads to this harmony. This harmony indicates that justice is good both for its own sake and for its consequences.

BRIEF OUTLINE

Book I: Rejection of conventional accounts of justice

Book II: Foundation of the just city

Book III: The role of myths and poetry in the selection and education of the guardians

Book IV: Individual happiness results from the fit between the aptitude of each class of citizen and his role in the city.

Book V: Virtue and vice in souls and cities; plausibility of good city; gender equality and sharing of wives and children.

Book VI: Why philosophers should rule

Book VII: The cave and the education of philosopher-kings.

Book VIII: Four degenerate constitutions (timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, tyranny) and the analogous character types

Book IX: Why the tyrannical man is wretched and the philosopher-king the most just and happiest of men

Book X: Comparison of an education based on philosophy to an education based on poetry.

DETAILED OUTLINE

Book I: Rejection of conventional accounts of justice. Cephalus' belief that justice is telling the truth and returning to each what is just is rejected because one shouldn't return something to its rightful owner if the owner might be harmed by this act (e.g. returning a weapon to a suicidal friend). Polemarchus' understanding of justice as doing good to one's friends and evil to one's enemies is rejected because it can't be just to harm anyone. Thrasymachus' definition of justice as obeying the will of the stronger is rejected through a complex argument about the capacity of the artist (or ruler) as an artist, and the money-making role of the artist (or ruler). Insofar as the second, personal benefit seeking, aspect of an artist (or ruler) is tangential to the definition of the artist (or ruler), and a good artist is judged to be good by the primary output of his work, so a ruler should be judged good by the benefits his rules bestow on those who live under them.

Book II: Glaucon asks whether justice is valued intrinsically, or just for its consequences. Why would someone who possessed the ring of Gyges, which could make him invisible, not be understood as the paradigm of the happy man, who can engage in pleasurable injustices without being called on this? Socrates replies that it belongs in the highest class of goods, valued both intrinsically and for its consequences. To make this argument about the just individual, Socrates' founds the just city. "The founding of the good city takes place in three stages: the healthy city or the city of pigs, the purified city or the city of the armed camp, and the City of Beauty or the city ruled by philosophers" (Strauss, 43). The transition from the healthy to the purified city necessitates war, and thus the guardians and their education are introduced.

Book III: This book concerns music, myths, and poetry, especially as they relate to the education of the guardians. Because music and myths foster a certain kind of soul, one should not rely on existing Homeric verse but should create a new tradition appropriate to the just city. Lying seems unacceptable for non-rulers, but acceptable for rulers for the benefit of the city. One such "lie" is the myth of the metals—the god, in fashioning those competent to rule, mixed gold, silver and bronze in different types of people—so that the hierarchy of the city reflects a natural inequality. Musical training is necessary because a certain kind of harmony needs to be cultivated. At the same time, the guardians must not concern themselves with the arts, but pursue guardianship alone, for it is generally best when citizens single-mindedly pursue a single craft. This stage is still one of the luxurious city, with the money-making lower class, and the guardian-upper class, but no philosopher-kings.

Book IV: Adeimantus asks whether the guardians, to whom the city belongs, derive any good from their role. Socrates replies that they get the maximum happiness that is possible for them individually by devoting themselves to a single task and pursuing it appropriately. What corrupts craftsmen is both wealth and poverty. Thus no-one should derive extreme goods at the expense of others. When each group single-mindedly pursues its craft, the city as a whole is happy. When this does not happen, there is chaos: "Meddling among the classes, of which there are three, and exchange with one another is the greatest harm of the city and would most correctly be called extreme evil-doing".

The soul is divided into three parts (appetitive, spirited, rational), corresponding to three classes of people (rulers, guardians, producers). “This city was just because each of the three classes in it minds its own business”.

Book V: This book covers two questions concerning the plausibility of the good city. First, the equality of the sexes and the community of women and children are introduced. The equality of male and female guardians is justified because with respect to performing the single duty they are meant for, gender differences are irrelevant. Just as one would not distinguish between a bald and a long-haired person for this purpose, so one should not make gender distinctions. The commonality of women and children would be beneficial both because the city aims at the elimination of privacy, and because through breeding you get the best next generation. The laws and customs to make this best practice feasible will be introduced. The second question about the plausibility of the good city concerns the worthiness and realism of having philosopher-kings. The first question is easily settled: “Unless [...] the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide [...] there is no rest from ills for the cities, [...] nor I think for human kind.” (473d). But why would a philosopher want to be a king? Why would the ruled accept a philosopher as their ruler? These questions will be answered when people truly understand what a philosopher is, as explained in the next book. The theory of forms-- ideas to which philosophers only have access, and which are necessary for reaching knowledge-- is introduced. The philosopher is described as “a desirer of wisdom, not of one part and not another, but of all of it”. True knowledge comes not when you look at many fair things, but when you see the fair itself, and similarly for other concepts, such as justice itself.

Book VI: There is a conflict between the demands of ruling and the demands of philosophizing. This conflict however might disappear when philosophers are raised in the right kind of constitution—in this case they will be recognized by the people as worthy rulers. Not only must philosopher-kings be educated in a particular way, but the guardians too need to master philosophy and other important subjects (See Book VII). Then the theory of ideas is developed through two examples, those of the sun and of the line. “Ideas are intellected but not seen”. A complex parallelism is made between the sun, light, and sight, on the one hand, and a soul illuminated by truth on the other. Geometers don’t make arguments about a particular line or angle they draw, but about the idea of the line and angle. This type of abstraction is the essence of ideas more generally.

Book VII: This book begins with the allegory of the Cave. Then the education of the philosopher-kings is described, an education that is very lengthy and combines training with selection and weeding out of weaker people at every stage. In terms of content, this education begins with music and poetry, some math and physical training, and continues with extensive training in mathematics, dialectic and practical politics.

Book VIII: This chapter presents four corrupt cities and the types of men they are associated with. At the shortest distance from the good city we find a timocracy, where spirited people seeking honor rule. Next furthest from justice is an oligarchy, whose

rulers follow their appetites, but in a controlled fashion. Still furthest is a democracy, where appetites are followed with license. The very worst is a tyranny, where appetites truly consume the soul of the ruler and the city itself.

Book IX: The tyrannical man is described as wretched. Then three arguments for why justice is choiceworthy in itself are presented. First, Socrates asks Glaucon who is the happiest of the five types of men described earlier (the philosopher-king, the timocrat, the oligarch, the democrat or the tyrant), and Glaucon decides that it is the philosopher king. Second, Socrates splits the soul into three parts, the appetitive, the spirited and the rational, and describes the type of man who is dominated by each part. Although each man will defend what he sees as most pleasurable as the supreme good, the lover of learning wins out as he is the only one who's experienced all three types of pleasures and is thus in the best position to pick the supreme one. The final argument states that a philosopher's pleasures are more true than those of men loving money and honor. This argument is made by analogy to someone in pain—he sees relief from pain as the biggest virtue, but when healthy doesn't value this most. Thus, relief from pain cannot be the truest pleasure. Similarly, when the soul needs to fill some sort of spiritual emptiness, that cannot be the truest pleasure. The philosopher's pleasure is thus superior to those of people needing to fill a void with money and honor. Furthermore, this pleasure is superior because it is connected to something that doesn't change (and why this is good has to do with ideas, and is evident to Socrates' interlocutors).

Book X: The traditional education based on poetry is rejected, as the poet is an imitator and thus distant from the truth. Philosophy on the other hand is the creation of the truth and is thus appropriate education. The myth of Er – in which a guy goes and looks at who gets rewarded in the afterlife – illustrates that it is the just who get the best treatment.

Helpful diagram?

From:
<http://www.friesian.com/plato.htm>

| SOUL | INTEREST | CLASS | VIRTUE | |
|--------|-----------|--------------|------------|---------|
| reason | knowledge | philosophers | Wisdom | justice |
| spirit | honor | warriors | Courage | |
| desire | pleasures | commoners | temperance | |