

The Project of the *Republic* □

I. *Republic*, Book I

Assumptions of Socrates' elenctic project:

1. Philosophical inquiry is morally therapeutic; the unexamined life is not worth living.
2. Everyone is an appropriate target for elenctic testing.
3. Philosophical inquiry leads to (or is the best path to) true beliefs.
4. Philosophical inquiry supports and sustains traditional virtues. (Through gaining elenctically tested beliefs, one is more reliably good.)
5. Virtue = knowledge (craft analogy)

Problems which emerge in Bk 1 of the *Republic*:

- Cephalus is good, but hasn't done philosophy.
- Elenchus can undermine traditional virtue:
 - Polemarchus and the hypothesis that justice is to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies, and Socrates fallaciously challenges this (ambiguity of harm/corrupt, or harm/disable), leaving Polemarchus with nothing.
- Polemarchus is too young and ignorant to see fallacies.
- The elenchus tests the person, not the position. (Thrasymachus and Polemarchus)
- Conventional judgments may be indoctrinated: Justice is the advantage of the stronger.
- Craft can be used to do good or evil.

Questions:

--If the elenchus is not a good vehicle for becoming virtuous and sustaining virtue in a society, what is?

--Why accept traditional virtue as real virtue?

Thrasymachus offers two kinds of skeptical challenges:

- i) Why be just/moral? What should motivate me to be just?
- ii) What is it in virtue of which justice is a virtue? What makes justice a good?
 - a) Justice is a virtue.
 - b) Virtue benefits the virtuous (excellence/happiness in a life).
 - c) Justice does not benefit the just; injustice benefits the unjust.

Problem of justice: which do we give up (a), (b) or (c)?

II. Division of Goods:

Tell me, do you think there is a kind of good which we welcome not because we desire its consequences but for its own sake; joy, for example, and all the harmless pleasures which have no further consequence beyond the joy which one finds in them?...Further there is the good which we welcome for its own sake and also for its consequences, knowledge for example, and sight and health. Such things we somehow welcome on both counts...Are you also aware of a third kind, such as physical training, being treated when ill, the practice of medicine, and other ways of making money? We should say that these are wearisome but beneficial to us; we should not want them for their own sake, but because of the rewards and other benefits which result from them. (357b-d)

A-goods: Things that are desirable not for their consequences, but for their own sake. (e.g., happiness, pleasure)

B-goods: Things that are desirable for their own sake, and for their consequences. (e.g., knowledge, sight, health)

C-goods: Things that are desirable only for their consequences. (e.g., taking medicine, making money)

Glaucon and Socrates agree that although most people would count justice as a C-good, i.e., desirable only for its consequences, they believe that justice is a B-good, i.e., it is desirable both for its own sake and for its consequences.

III. Glaucon's challenge

Glaucon challenges Socrates to show that justice is a B-good, rather than only a C-good. Why does this matter? Glaucon suggests that if justice is only good for its consequences, then we would have no enduring motivation to be just, and we would be wrong to count justice as a part of the ideal or virtuous life. (Remember that the virtuous life is assumed to be the life of excellence and happiness.) If Glaucon is right, and if justice is only a C-good, then we have no answer to the Thrasymachean skeptic who maintains that justice is not a virtue, and that the strong have no reason to act justly.

Glaucon sets out the steps of his challenge:

So if you agree, I will do the following: I will renew the argument of Thrasymachus; I will first state what people consider the nature and origin of justice; secondly, that all who practice it do so unwillingly as being something necessary but not good; thirdly, that they have good reason to do so, for according to what people say, the life of the unjust is much better than that of the just. (358c)

i) On the nature and origin of justice (358e-359b):

- People, by nature, will do wrong if they have the power to do so; but they also recognize that to be wronged is bad.
- The best option is to do wrong without paying the penalty; the worst is to be wronged without the power of revenge.
- Suffering injury is worse than inflicting it is good.
- To avoid suffering injury from others, people sacrifice some of their power to do wrong. This is the origin of justice.
- The strong person has no need to fear injury, so has no reason to sacrifice the power, and no reason to be just.

ii) On justice pursued unwillingly, only as a necessity (359b-360d):

- People pursue by nature the satisfaction of their desires. They want as much as they can get, within the limits of their power. (359c)
- If we were to allow anyone (just or unjust) the freedom to act however they pleased, without fear of consequences, they would act unjustly. (story of Gyges)

iii) On injustice being choiceworthy (360e-361d):

- We should decide whether injustice is choiceworthy by comparing the completely just and completely unjust person, to determine which is happier.

- The completely just person is one who is just in spite of seeming unjust; the completely unjust person is one who gets away with the injustice unsuspected.
- The completely unjust person would be happier than the just; so injustice is choiceworthy as part of a happy life.

If Glaucon is right about the nature of justice, then it would appear that at best it is only good for its consequences under special social conditions where it brings rewards and reputation. Under circumstances where the rewards are lacking, we have no motivation to be just. Moreover, since it is possible to be a happy person without being just, justice is not an essential component of the happy life, and so should not be counted a human excellence, i.e., not a virtue. We can formulate the two challenges as follows:

- 1) Traditional justice is not part of the ideal for humans, and so is not a virtue. If it is good, its goodness is instrumental, as a means to avoid greater evils.
- 2) The motives we have for pursuing justice depend upon the benefits it offers us in certain circumstances, but not all circumstances. So one need not be motivated to be just.

IV. Accidental Consequences

At this point it becomes puzzling how Glaucon's and Adeimantus's demand lead them to ask Socrates to show that justice is a B-good, rather than an A-good, for they explicitly state that Socrates should not defend justice in terms of the rewards and reputations it brings. Are they simply assuming that justice has good consequences, so Socrates need only concentrate on the issue of whether justice is good for its own sake? It seems not, for if the only good consequences of justice are contingent, i.e., if one need not be benefited by justice, but will be only in certain circumstances, then it remains unclear whether individuals will be guaranteed to be motivated to be just (in all circumstances). Moreover, it would seem that if the good consequences of justice depend only upon one's seeming just to others, then one's motivation would be directed by the desire to appear just rather than to be just. Here the background assumption is that individuals are motivated to act only insofar as they can see the benefits.

In order to see more clearly the demands Glaucon and Adeimantus place on Socrates it is important to distinguish natural from artificial consequences of our actions. An artificial consequence of our action is one which depends upon the social import of that action, they depend upon the human practices and conventions governing public rewards. If the only good consequences of justice were artificial, then they would accrue to the just person in the absence of such conventions; further, because humans are fallible in their judgments of others, one could achieve the good artificial consequences by merely appearing to be just to others, while being unjust. So if Socrates is to show that we have motivation to *be* just, not just appear just, and if we have motivation to *be* just regardless of the social circumstances, then he must show that justice is good for its own sake, *and* for consequences other than its artificial consequences. How might we characterize these other consequences? These are consequences which are part of or flow from their nature or essence of the goods. Thus we might modify our characterization of B-goods:

B-goods: Things which are desirable for their own sake, and for consequences other than their artificial consequences, i.e., for consequences which derive from their essence.

So we can formulate two questions which Socrates must answer:

- 1) Is justice desirable for its own sake, and not merely as a means to some other end? Since the final end is happiness, we can reformulate this to ask:

- 1*) Is justice a component of happiness? And:
- 2) Is justice desirable only for its accidental consequences, or are there good consequences which derive from its essence or nature?

The outline of Plato's response is as follows:

I. What is justice for a *city*?

A. What is the nature of a city?

--What is its function?

--How might a city be constructed so as to serve its function virtuously excellently?

B. What are the virtues of a city?

--What is it about an excellent city that constitutes its virtue: its wisdom, courage, etc.

II. What is justice for an *individual* (soul)?

A. What is the nature of the soul?

--In what ways is the structure of the soul similar to the structure of a city?

B. What are the virtues of the soul (individual)?

--What is it about this structure that constitutes its virtue, e.g., its wisdom, etc.?