

Social and Psychic Justice in the *Republic*

I. Our question: why be moral? Why be just?

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, e.g., 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.?

Answers to Part I tell us what "social justice" is, i.e., what it is for a society to be just, and how an individual functions justly within a social context. Answers to Part II tell us what "psychic justice" is, i.e., what it is for a person to be just and to have a just character. Once we understand Plato's conceptions of social justice and psychic justice, we must return to the questions:

- Is justice part of the human ideal?
- Is justice, by its very nature, linked with human well-being and happiness?
- Is one who is psychically just always socially just, and vice versa? Do the two sorts of justice always coincide?

II. Social justice

Plato considers four virtues he wants to find in the city: wisdom, bravery, moderation, justice. After describing the origins and principles governing the establishment of a city, he defines the virtues of a city.

What is the nature of a city?

a. A city is formed out of need. These needs being natural, the city's basis is a natural cooperation. (Note contrast with those who maintain that such cooperation is an "unnatural" imposition on us.)

b. The excellence / virtue of a city will be in its capacity to satisfy our needs.

c. The city will be best organized to fulfill its function under a natural division of labor such that each individual performs a single task for which she or he is naturally suited. (This is the *Principle of the Natural Division of Labor*.)

The three groups constituting the city are: guardians (rulers plus auxiliaries), and workers.

What are the virtues of a city?

Wisdom (428c-d): The city is wise in virtue of sound judgment--not about carpentry, etc., but about the welfare of the city as a whole. Sound judgment about "cityhood" is the knowledge that resides in the rulers.

Bravery (429b-c, 430b): The city is brave in virtue of its capacity to preserve through everything the right and lawful belief about what is to be feared and what is not. This virtue resides in the auxiliaries, who are trained for excellence in this capacity.

Moderation (432a): The city is moderate in virtue of the natural harmony and agreement among its parts about who should rule. This parallels the notion of self-control. (431a)

Justice (433e-434d): The city is just in virtue of each part performing its own task. Injustice is the meddling of the groups in each other's tasks.

III. The Tripartite Soul

1. The division of the soul into the rational and the irrational parts:

Plato gives an argument in Book IV of the *Republic* to show that the soul (psyche) has at least two distinct parts: a rational part and an irrational part. He begins by asserting the principle (OPP):

Opp: It is clear that the same thing cannot act in opposite ways, or be in opposite states at the same time in the same part of itself in relation to the same thing. (436b)

To see what this principle is meant to rule out, consider what it does not rule out. It does not rule out, for example, the possibility that one and the same part of my soul both loves my sister on Monday and hates my sister on Tuesday. For although the same thing (namely my soul) is in opposite states (love and hate) in relation to the same thing, the times involved are different (one Monday, the other Tuesday). Nor does it rule out the possibility that I love my sister and hate my brother on Monday. In such a case the objects of love and hate are different. Neither of these cases counts as psychic conflict.

However, the principle will rule out the possibility that one and the same part of my soul both loves and hates my sister at exactly the same time. Consequently, if we can find some situation in which my soul both loves and hates the same thing at the same time, then it will have to be the case that one part of the soul does the loving and another does the hating. In other words, if we accept the principle (OPP), we may use cases of psychic conflict in order to prove that there are distinct parts of the soul.

Plato adopts this strategy and considers the following case of (OPP):

The same thing cannot both want to drink and want not to drink at the same time in the same respect and in relation to the same thing.

Plato presumes that wanting to drink is the opposite of wanting not to drink, and that the soul should satisfy (OPP). He points out the obvious fact that sometimes even though a person is thirsty, and hence wants to drink, she will nonetheless refrain from drinking because she has deliberated and decided not to drink. The deliberation gives her a reasoned desire not to drink. Since there are times when the soul both wants to drink and wants not to drink the same thing at the same time, we must conclude that there are at least two parts of the soul: one part which wants to drink, and another part which wants not to drink. This suggests that not all desire is for what seems best to the agent. Not only are there reasoned desires for what, as a result of reflection, seems best, but there are also irrational desires which seem to be immune from reasoning and reflection.

2. The third part:

Plato wants to divide the soul into three parts, and so far we have only shown that there are at least two. Using the strategy above, to show that there are three parts Plato should give an example of a three-way psychic conflict. But he cannot do this because the principle (OPP) applies only to opposites, and each thing has only one opposite. So instead he produces other arguments to show that there is a third part. For instance, he gives the example of Leontius who both desired to look at the corpses, and was disgusted by them. If we allow that the desire and the disgust are opposite states directed at the same thing at the same time, and if we further suppose that neither is deliberative, i.e., rational, then it would appear that we should divide the non-rational part of the soul into two parts: the "appetitive" and the "spirited". Plato also argues for a "spirited" part by pointing out that a child has two parts (because one can discover psychic conflict even in children), but children lack reason; so at the age of reason a third part is added to the previous two. Again we find that the rational part (reason) must be distinct from two different non-rational parts.

3. Reason, Spirit, and Appetite:

It is important to see that the three parts of the soul each have their characteristic desires and pleasures (580d), they can come into conflict (440e), and promote their own interests. The *rational* part loves wisdom and learning; it is responsible for extending our knowledge and takes pleasure in this (436a, 580d, 581b). Its domain is not just the pursuit of "scientific" knowledge, but also practical deliberation. The *spirited* part loves honor and winning; it tends towards aggression and competition, but when educated or trained allies itself with reason as aspiration for what is right. (441a, 441e, 442b, 581b) The *appetitive* part loves food, drink, sex, "and other things which follow from these", as well as money as the means to these (436a, 437b, 437d, 439d, 580d-e). The appetitive part may be capable of means-end reasoning (e.g., it pursues money as a means to its other ends), but it does not deliberate about what is right or good.

The virtues of the soul are parallel to the virtues of the city.(441c-444a) For example, a wise soul is one in which reason rules and makes sound decisions for the advantage of the soul as a whole. (442c) A just soul is one in which each of the parts performs its proper function (443d-e); injustice in the soul is "a kind of civil war between the parts (444b).

III. Psychic justice

What is the nature of the soul?

The soul has three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite. (As we've seen above.)

What are the virtues of the soul?

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