

PHIL 31: Ancient Philosophy

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Handout #7: Justice and Other Themes in Plato's Republic

BOOK I

In contrast with the rest of the Republic, book i strongly resembles a Socratic dialogue. Socrates considers and rejects various conventional views about justice -- both Cephalus's law conception as telling the truth and repaying one's debts (331cd) and Polemarchus's more Homeric conception as benefiting one's friends and harming one's enemies (332a-336a). These definitions suffer from the "compresence of opposites," the F and not-F problem.

1. If $F = G$, then all and only G-things are F-things.
2. Some G-things are F.
3. Some G-things are not-F.
4. Hence, $F \neq G$.

Though the style of argument here is firmly Socratic, this way of describing the problem is Platonic. It draws on claims about sensible flux from the Phaedo and receives further articulation in book v.

THRASYMACHUS

Thrasymachus notes a tension between eudaimonism and the recognition of other-regarding virtues, such as justice.

1. Justice is a virtue.
2. Virtues benefit their possessor.
3. Conventional-justice often requires the agent to benefit others at her own expense.
4. Conventional-justice = justice.

Thrasymachus rejects (1); he denies that justice is a virtue. He makes three claims about justice:

- (a) Justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c1-2);
- (b) Justice is the advantage of the ruler (339a1-2); and
- (c) Justice is another's good (343c1-3).

Thrasymachus takes the ruler to be stronger and so by (a) takes justice to be conformity with the ruler's orders. If justice only applies to inferiors, this makes justice another's good. This account of justice makes it out to be in the ruler's, not the subject's, interest (341b1-c1). Socrates replies by appeal to the craft analogy. Crafts are generally concerned with the perfection of their objects; if so, ruling should aim at the welfare of the subjects (342bc). However, Thrasymachus replies that crafts are practiced for the good of craftsmen, not the good of the objects of the craft (341b1 c1). Socrates rejoins that Thrasymachus is conflating the original craft (e.g. shepherding) that aims at the good of its object with the money making craft (345c 346c). But even if Socrates were right about distinguishing the crafts in this way, we would presumably want to distinguish between the particular craft's aiming at producing a good product and aiming at the good of the

product (the good x and the good of x). Shepherds aim at producing good wool or lamb-chops but not at the good of the sheep.

Notice that in attacking justice Thrasymachus makes two significantly different claims:

- A. Justice is not a virtue, because justice is not always more advantageous than injustice (348c).
- B. Injustice is a virtue, because injustice is always more advantageous than justice (348b8-349a3).

Though both (A) and (B) challenge Socratic assumptions, (B) is a much stronger claim.

In reply, Socrates argues, among other things, that achieving one's aims requires the cooperation of others which requires justice -- there must be justice even among thieves (351c-354a). Is cooperation among thieves justice? In any case, thieves can and do have a selective concern with justice. This concern for justice is compatible with significant, if selective, injustice. But then Socrates's argument undermines Thrasymachus's stronger claim (B), but not his weaker claim (A). But Socrates's claim that justice is sufficient for happiness (353e8-354a6) requires him to reject both claims of Thrasymachus.

BOOK II

What role do Glaucon and Adeimantus play? How does their challenge compare with Thrasymachus's? On the one hand, they make things easier insofar they require only the comparative claim that justice always be better than injustice, rather than Socrates's sufficiency claim that justice is sufficient for happiness (a complete good).

Sufficiency: Justice is sufficient for happiness (a complete good).

Dominance: Justice is always better than injustice.

Both are strong and counter-intuitive claims. But Sufficiency is stronger than Dominance. Sufficiency requires one to deny that externals (not already necessary for happiness) can affect one's happiness. Dominance does not. Dominance allows that virtue might have a price, but it insists that it is a price that's always worth paying.

On the other hand, Glaucon and Adeimantus make things harder for Socrates insofar as they retreat to Thrasymachus's weaker challenge to justice [(A) above]. Moreover, they require that justice be shown to be better in itself. They distinguish three kinds of goods (357b-):

- (a) things good for their consequences,
- (b) things good in themselves, and
- (c) things good both for their consequences and in themselves.

They want Socrates to show that justice is a c-good. They concede that justice is typically an a-good. So they demand that Socrates show that justice is a b-good (something that is both an a-good and a b-good is, of course, a c-good). When Socrates accepts their demand to show that justice is good in itself, Plato rejects a purely instrumental justification of justice. In so doing, Plato rejects a purely instrumental relation between virtue and happiness.

To make their demand clear, Glaucon and Adeimantus explain the instrumental value of justice. I benefit from another's justice, not my own. The reason I have to be just is that the

justice of others is typically conditional on my own. Others won't be just toward me if they see that I am not just toward them. So in order to secure the benefits of other people being just toward me I must be just toward them. In this way, justice is good for its consequences. But this defense of justice is unstable, as the ring of Gyges makes clear (359b-360d). For then I could receive the benefits of others' justice without incurring the costs of my own. But this shows that the conventional defense of justice is unstable; justice is really a second-best option behind the first-best option of practicing undetected injustice. But this is to praise the appearance of justice, rather than justice itself (360e-362c, 362e-363e, 365b-367a). Glaucon and Adeimantus demand a counterfactually stable defense of justice.

To understand counterfactual stability, imagine that we can rank possible worlds in terms of their value and that their value is a function of virtue and externals, including the appearance of justice or injustice. Moreover, partition these worlds into just and unjust worlds, all those possible worlds in which the agent is just and all those possible worlds in which the agent is unjust. Socrates must show that the worst just world (the world in which the agent is just but has the reputation for injustice and suffers other assorted bad fortune) is better than the best unjust world (the world in which the agent is unjust but has the reputation of justice and is the beneficiary of other assorted good fortune). And this would be to show that justice in itself, independently of its attendant circumstances, is good. This would show that justice is a b-good, as well as an a-good, which would show that it is in fact a c-good.

Is this demand coherent? Can justice be shown to contribute to the agent's happiness without making its value depend upon some of its consequences? Their demand is coherent if they distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic consequences of justice. For then Socrates can answer their challenge if he can show that justice is valuable for its intrinsic consequences.

JUSTICE

Socrates pursues the eudaimonist justification of justice indirectly, by looking at the justice, not of an individual, but of a city. He appeals to a macro-micro analogy (368d, 441cd).

1. First, identify the tri-partite structure of the ideal city.
2. Next, interpret the political virtues as relations among the parts of the ideal city.
3. Next, provide an independent account of the structure of the soul that represents it as having a tri-partite structure isomorphic to the structure of the ideal city.
4. Therefore, conclude that the virtues for an individual agent stand to the structure of the soul as the political virtues stand to the structure of the ideal city.

Does Socrates's discussion meet the constraints that his own macro-micro analogy requires, or is his discussion of the political or social virtues actually parasitic on assumptions about the division of the soul and the psychic virtues (430e)?

JUSTICE AND THE DIVISION OF THE SOUL

Plato's tri-partite division of the soul appeals to a principle of opposites (436b).

1. The same thing cannot do or undergo contraries at the same time and in the same respect (436b).
2. The soul undergoes contraries at the same time: desire and aversion or rejection (e.g. for drink) (437b-c, 439b-c).
3. Hence, the soul must have different respects.
4. Hence, the soul must have parts.

Does this way of dividing the soul support Plato's tripartite division? If Plato is appealing to conflicting attitudes, he may generate only two parts of the soul, viz. the desiring and aversive parts. If he is appealing to potentially conflicting contents of the attitudes, then it looks like he will get a different part of the soul for every different content of desire. This looks like either too many or too few parts of the soul for Plato's purposes.

At 437e-438a Plato distinguishes between desire for F and desire for F qua good; at 439c-d he distinguishes between rational and nonrational desires; and at 442bc he distinguishes desires that are good-independent and those that are good-dependent. This will yield three, and not just two, parts of the soul if we distinguish

optimizing desires (associated with the rational part)

good-dependent but not optimizing desires (associated with the emotional part)

good-independent desires (associated with the appetitive part)

This tri-partition is self-consciously contrasted with the Socratic psychology that implies that all desire is good-dependent (438a). What does Plato's division of the soul imply about the possibility of weakness of will? Leontius appears to act against his judgments about what is best (439e-440a). Does he also act against knowledge of what is best?

Plato uses the division of the soul into rational (good-dependent) and nonrational (good-independent) parts to define (psychic) virtue as rule by the rational part of the soul. What does he have in mind by control of the rational part?

- **Instrumental control.** The rational part decides how to best satisfy existing desires; it determines only how to satisfy appetitive desires most efficiently.
- **Directive control.** Reason forms desires as well as restrains existing ones; both formation and control of desires are guided by reasoning about the overall good of the agent.

If we bear in mind Plato's account of political rule and his analysis of deviant men in books viii-ix (who exhibit instrumental control but lack virtue and happiness), it seems clear he must have directive control in mind.

- A person is wise by virtue of his rational part exercising directive control over the other parts of his soul (442c).
- A person is courageous by virtue of his emotional part honoring and enforcing the dictates of the rational part against his appetites (442bc).
- A person is temperate by virtue of his appetitive part obeying and agreeing in the rule by the rational parts (442cd).

- Justice is this relation among the parts of the soul in which each part does its job (441de, 443d).

Might this account of psychic order be compatible with the inseparability and unity of the virtues? Imagine the virtues as involving a single tri-partite pyramid structure just viewed from four angles: the bottom (temperance), the middle (courage), the top (wisdom), and the bird's eye point of view (justice).

A FALLACY IN THE REPUBLIC?

We can see why the proper ordering of an individual's soul -- psychic justice (p-justice) -- is good in itself. But what does p-justice have to do with the demand to benefit others made by conventional justice (c-justice) and challenged by both Thrasymachus and Glaucon and Adeimantus?

Plato thinks c-injustice results from p-injustice (442e-443b; cf. G 507a-e). But why should the person who is p-just care about others?

EROS AND ANOTHER'S GOOD

Consider Plato's account of love (eros) in the Symposium (esp. 206e-212c). The Republic invites this appeal in two ways. (1) Sometimes eros is linked with sexual desire and the appetites, rather than the rational part (439d6-8). But Plato also recognizes philosophical eros. Genuine philosophers are lovers of truth (485a-d, 501d1-2; cf. Ph 68ab). Indeed, the Symposium describes an ascent or progression from sexual desire to philosophical eros (204d-, 211c). In the Republic Plato claims that the philosopher will not have consummated his eros until he has had intercourse with true reality and begotten intelligence and truth (490ab). (2) But Plato also thinks that eros is other-regarding. He remarks upon the love that a virtuous person will have for others (402d-403c, 412d). Plato tries to connect (1) and (2).

Plato describes an ascent of desire through various stages (Symposium 210a-212a).

1. love of a particular beautiful body
2. love of bodily beauty, as such,
3. love of all beautiful bodies
4. love of spiritual beauty, that is, what is fine or beautiful in souls
5. love of fine laws and institutions
6. love of all kinds of knowledge
7. love of what is fine, as such

This last, best sort of love aims at what is good or fine (201a, 204d, 205d, 206b-e) and, in particular, at propagating what is good or fine (206c-208a, 212a). Plato believes that virtue is fine and that spiritual love aims at producing virtue. In middle dialogues, such as the Republic, he understands virtue as a psychic state in which one's appetites, emotions, and actions are regulated by practical deliberation about one's overall good. Virtue, so understood, is the controlling ingredient in a good or flourishing life. So when A loves B, Plato concludes, A will aim to make B virtuous (209a, 212a).

Such love benefits the beloved, because one benefits by becoming virtuous precisely insofar as one is better off being regulated by a correct conception of one's overall good. But Plato also believes that the lover benefits from loving another (Phaedrus 245b), as he must if he

is to reconcile interpersonal love with his eudaimonism. The key to seeing how Plato can reconcile interpersonal love with self-love is to appreciate the way in which he thinks that reproducing one's virtuous traits in another is the next best thing to immortality (Symposium 206c1-209e5; Phaedrus 276e-277a).

Now although we speak of an individual as being the same so long as he continues to exist in the same form, and therefore assume that a man is the same person in his dotage as in his infancy, yet, for all we call him the same, every bit of him is different, and every day he is becoming a new man, while the old man is ceasing to exist, as you can see from his hair, his flesh, his bones, his blood, and all the rest of his body. And not only his body, for the same thing happens to his soul. And neither his manners, nor his disposition, nor his thoughts, nor his desires, nor his sufferings, nor his fears are the same throughout his life, for some of them grow, while others disappear. ... In this way every mortal creature is perpetuated, not by always being the same in every way, as a divine being is, but by what goes away and gets old leaving behind and in its place some other new thing that is of the same sort as it was [207d3-208b12].

On Plato's view, intrapersonal and interpersonal love are parallel; indeed, love of another appears to be just a special case of self-love. I extend myself into the future by reproducing my traits into the future. But I can also reproduce myself somewhat less systematically in others by sharing thought and discussion with them, in particular, thought and discussion about how best to live. On this view, the interests of those whom I love become part of my interests in just the sort of way that the interests of my future self are part of my overall interests.

1. I extend my interests by reproducing my valuable traits into a future self (intrapersonal reproduction).
2. The lover reproduces his valuable traits in his beloved (interpersonal reproduction).
3. Hence, the beloved extends the lover's interests.
4. Hence, benefits the lover confers on his beloved benefit the lover.

If so, the virtuous person has reason to love others. By loving others, the virtuous person will make them virtuous. By making them virtuous, she will benefit them. Therefore, the virtuous person who has p-justice will not only avoid injuring others (avoid c-injustice) but actually benefit others.

Does Platonic love express concern for the beloved's own sake? Because Socrates treats intrinsic and instrumental concern as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive (Lysis 219c, 220ab), Socratic eudaimonism implies instrumental concern for the beloved.

1. Insofar as x is desired for the sake of some other thing y, then x is only instrumentally valuable (219c-220b).
2. If A and B are friends, A cares about B because of the contribution this makes to A's eudaimonia.
3. Hence, friends care about each other only instrumentally.

But as the Republic ii discussion of the kind of good justice is shows, Plato rejects (1). He allows things can be valuable in themselves, as constituent parts of happiness, and because of

their intrinsic contribution to happiness. If so, Platonic eudaimonism can apparently explain love for the beloved's own sake. The fault in Platonic love lies less in Plato's egoism than in his (passive) conception of how the beloved is to be improved. Complaints about Platonic love have a direct bearing on the paternalistic character of Plato's political theory (discussed below).

POLITICAL VIRTUE

Plato thinks society should be based upon a natural division of labor (NDL). NDL is reached by consideration of a person's function (353a, 369e, 406-408, 420b, 421b, 433a, 435a, 590d). F is the function of x iff:

1. It's best for x to F (406-8, 420b, 421b).
2. x can F better than anything else x can do (353, 435a).
3. x can F better than anyone/anything else can F (353, 369).
4. It's better for the state for x to F (406-8, 420b, 421b).

A person's function will depend upon her soul. There will be three main types of functions depending on which part of the person's soul predominates: the city will consist of **artisans** (whose appetitive part dominates), **auxiliaries** (whose emotional part dominates), and **guardians** (whose rational part dominates) (374a-e, 412c-414b, 428de, 429b). We can then define political virtue in terms of NDL.

- The city is wise when philosophers rule, with the aid of auxiliaries, over the artisans for the benefit of all (428b-e).
- The city is courageous when the auxiliaries enforce the edicts of the guardians at home and protect the city abroad (429a-430c).
- The city is temperate when its members, especially the artisans, consent to and follow the rule of the guardians (430e-432b).
- The city is just when each class performs its own function (433a-434d).

Notice that this account of political virtue does not ascribe political virtues to any particular class; the city as a whole is the bearer of these virtues. This is required by the macro-micro analogy. Though members of the ruling class may have psychic virtues, it is not any particular class (much less any members of a class) that has the political virtues.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF PHILOSOPHICAL RULE

Epistemological claims underlie Plato's defense of philosophical rule.

1. Moral knowledge is necessary for good ruling.
2. Knowledge of Forms is necessary for moral knowledge.
3. Only philosophers have knowledge of Forms; the many are sightlovers and have no knowledge of Forms.
4. Hence, only philosophers can have moral knowledge; the many have only (at most) moral belief.
5. Hence, only philosophers can rule; the many are unfit to rule.

AGAINST THE SIGHTLOVERS

Plato argues for (2) and (3) at 475e-480a. 475e-476d presents a short argument.

1. For certain properties, attention to Forms yields knowledge; whereas, attention to sensibles yields only (at most) belief.
2. The views of the many are concerned with sensibles; the views of the philosophers are concerned with Forms.
3. Hence, for certain properties, the many have only (at most) belief; whereas, philosophers have knowledge.

But this restates, rather than supports, the claims in question. Plato aims for an argument that might persuade the sightlover (476d). On one reconstruction, this argument builds on the Phaedo's argument that knowledge requires nonsensible forms, because sensibles are in flux -- that is, subject to the compresence of opposites.

1. Knowledge is set over what is, and ignorance is set over what is not (477ab); belief is set over what is and is not (478a-e)
2. Hence knowledge entails true belief, ignorance entails false belief, and (mere) belief entails neither true nor false belief.
3. For any property F, the many base their account of F on sensible (or observable or behavioral) properties (479a, 479e).
4. For any disputed property (D-property) F, the sensible property (properties) that the many fix on in their account of F both is [F] and is not [F] (479ab).
5. Hence, for any D-property F, the many's account of F leads to some truths and some falsehoods (479cd).
6. Hence, for any D-property F, the many have only belief about F (479de).
7. Hence, for any D-property F, if one is to have knowledge of F, one must not base one's account of F on sensible properties.
8. Hence, for any D-property F, if one is to have knowledge of F, one must base one's account of F on nonsensible properties.
9. Forms just are nonsensible, explanatory properties.
10. Hence, for any D-property F, one has knowledge of F iff one bases one's account of F on the Form of F (479e).
11. For any D-property F, philosophers base their account of F on nonsensible (explanatory) properties.
12. Hence, for any D-property F, philosophers base their account of F on the Form of F (479e).
13. Hence, for any D-property F, philosophers have knowledge of F (479e).

Despite the similarity between this argument and the arguments of the Phaedo, this reconstruction of the argument requires further commentary.

THE RANGE OF NONSENSIBLE FORMS

The restriction to D-properties (e.g. relational, moral, and aesthetic properties) is necessary to accommodate the "finger passage" (523-5), which says that appeal to forms is

necessary only where sensory accounts lead to compresence, as they do with moral properties, but not with the property of being a finger.

THE OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

Premise (1) together with Plato's association of knowledge with Forms and mere belief with sensibles lead commentators to think that he is endorsing a **Two Worlds** theory (TW) according to which there is knowledge only of forms not sensibles, and there is belief only of sensibles. However, TW would be an unwelcome Platonic commitment.

- TW would seem to undermine the common view that we can progress from belief to knowledge about one and the same thing by tying the original belief down with an explanatory account (Meno 97e 98a).
- TW would underwrite skepticism about the sensible world, which would make it very difficult to see why we should want philosophers to rule.
- Plato clearly contradicts TW; he claims that he and others have only beliefs about the various Forms, including the Form of the Good (505e 506a, 506c, 515e 516a, 517bc) and that philosophers do have knowledge of the sensible world (520c).

THE DIVIDED LINE (509d-511c, 533c-534e) AND THE CAVE (514-20)

Plato divides our cognitive states into two parts: belief or opinion (endoxa) and knowledge (episteme). Each of these is also divided in two: belief into (L1) conjecture (eikesia) and (L2) confident opinion (pistis) and knowledge into (L3) thought (dianoia) and (L4) understanding (nous).

The distinctions might be understood in terms of the degree of justification and truth implications associated with each state. L1 is unclear and concerns appearances (509d); L2 is concerned with sensible particulars that cause appearances (510a); L3 introduces reflection on nonsensible properties, but this reflection is mediated by sensible images and relies on hypotheses (510b-511a, 511c; cf. 435d, 437a, 506c-e); L4 eschews sensible images and tries to remove hypotheses by linking them in one overall explanatory scheme governed by the Form of the Good (510b, 511bc, 517c1, 533c-534c).

The image of the Cave is isomorphic to that of the Divided Line: C1 (the prisoners looking at shadows) corresponds to L1; C2 (the prisoners looking at models that cause shadows) to L2; C3 (ex-cons studying real objects through reflections and representations) to L3; and C4 (ex-cons studying objects themselves) to L4 (517b). After achieving C4/L4 philosophers return to the cave (520c).

PLATO'S AUTHORITARIANISM

The guardians of the ideal state regulate the behavior of citizens so as to preserve NDL.

- They are free to implement NDL by whatever means they deem necessary.
- They have discretion to lie if this promotes social stability or happiness (389c, 459c).
- They should censor literary and artistic works that do not adequately represent the virtuous life or promote unity (377e-, 399e, 401b).
- They should install eugenics policies that will produce the best possible offspring (456e, 459d e, 460c, 536a).

- They should promulgate the myth that people are born with various mixtures of the metals gold, silver, and bronze in their souls. Predominantly gold souls will be rulers; predominantly silver souls will be auxiliaries; and predominantly bronze souls will be artisans (415a-c). Rulers ascertain the proportion of the metals in anyone's soul.
- They are politically unaccountable; the other classes cannot hold public office, and they have no voting rights.

In assessing Plato's authoritarianism, we must remember that the political institutions of the Republic are for ideal theory. Plato says little about non-ideal theory in the Republic. He does not think that the ideal state is impossible (499bc, 502c), but he does think that genuine philosophers are rare (428e, 491ab, 503b) and that popular prejudice will make it difficult to realize the ideal state (488a-489a, 502c, 516e-517a; cf. 592ab). At one point, he suggests that we might try to approximate the ideal (437ab), but we should not assume that he thinks that we should accept authoritarian rule by non-philosophers. Indeed, in the Statesman Plato claims that whereas monarchy is the best ideal constitution, democracy is the best non-ideal constitution (302e6-8, 303a-b). If so, we should assess aristocratic rule for the circumstances for which it is defended, namely, ideal circumstances in which philosophers can be found and convinced to rule.

Plato believes that authoritarian rule is in the best interests of the governed. This makes his justification for authoritarian rule paternalistic. Plato thinks that the next best thing to being ruled by one's own rational part is to be ruled by the rational part of another (590cd). His authoritarianism rests less on failure of concern for the interests of the governed than on his conception of human nature and the unequal distribution of rational capacities.

But even if rational capacities are not distributed equally, artisans and auxiliaries are neither children nor mental defectives; their good consists in their developing their rational capacities and assuming as much directive control of their own souls as is possible. Plato himself recognizes that everyone has a rational part (518c). If so, and if, as he believes, political institutions should be designed to promote the interests of each citizen (F1), then political institutions should develop everyone's capacities for deliberative control of their lives. But deliberative control of this sort presumably involves participation in public deliberations, a significant sphere for self-control and private deliberation, and informed and reflective assessment of alternatives in both public and private deliberation.

We can now see more clearly what is wrong with Platonic love and Plato's conception of the way in which guardians should express their concern for the welfare of their citizens. Plato's conception of interpersonal love is troubling because of the comparatively passive role the beloved plays in his own improvement. In the Phaedrus Plato likens the relationship between lover and beloved to that between sculptor and the statue or image that he fashions (252d5-253b1). This neglects that active part and responsibility the beloved must assume in his own improvement. Similar concerns plague his paternalistic justification of authoritarian rule. If, as Plato believes, my own good consists in my exercising directive control over my appetites and passions, then another cannot express proper concern for me for my own sake by trying to improve me in ways in which my own deliberations play no essential role. Concern for another must attempt to improve an agent's deliberative capacities in ways that engage those capacities.