

The Main Argument of Plato's *Republic*

I. In *Rep. II* Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates to define justice and to show why acting justly should be thought to be in anyone's self interest.

A. They offer a three-fold classification of goods:

1. intrinsic goods (e.g. harmless pleasures)
2. intrinsic and instrumental goods (e.g. health and knowledge)
3. instrumental goods (e.g. medicine and exercise)

B. G. and A. claim that most people rightly regard justice as a type-(3) good; they want S. to show that it is a type-(2) good. They argue:

1. Justice arises as a sort of social contract.
2. Hence, people have a reason to seem just, but no reason to be just.
3. Moreover, if justice is a type-(2) good, then the just person must always be happier than the unjust person—even when the just person is "on the rack" and the unjust person is at liberty.

II. Plato proposes to meet their challenge by considering justice in a macrocosm; hence, he proposes to construct a city—the Republic—as a heuristic device designed to help determine what justice is in the individual case, the microcosm of the soul (368d).

A. The Republic must contain three classes: the Guardians (or rulers), the Auxiliaries (or soldiers), and the Productive Classes (or workers). Justice turns out to be a relation between these classes, each doing what befits it (433-34).

B. But if this account is to be useful for the task for which it was introduced, the soul had better be, in some direct sense, analogous to the city.

C. S. argues that the individual soul is indeed analogous to the Republic: the Republic and the soul are isomorphic.

D. S. endeavors to establish that the soul is tri-partite as follows:

1. He articulates a principle (P), according to which: a person cannot act in opposite ways or be in opposite states in the same way, at the same time, and with the same part (436c)

2. He then offers the following argument;

(1) P

(2) Accepting and rejecting are opposite actions.

(3) Sometimes some person C both accepts and rejects some one object (e.g. a doughnut or a glass of single-malt Scotch whiskey).

(4) Given (1), C cannot both accept and reject that object with the same part.

(5) Hence, C has two parts (Reason and Appetite (439c)).

3. What about the third part? Plato offers the case of Leontius (440-42).

III. Platonic and Vulgar Justice

A. Plato's account of justice in the individual turns out to be inner directed: S is just whenever her soul is in a state of psychic harmony, with each part doing its own, performing its appointed task, and obeying when it should obey (441d-e).

B. Vulgar justice in the individual is essentially outer directed; S is just whenever she avoids performing various unacceptable deeds (e.g. stealing, cheating, etc.).

C. Do these have anything in common? Does Plato simply provide an irrelevant response to G. and A's challenge, thereby committing the so-called fallacy of irrelevance?

IV. A Different Interpretation of Plato's response to G & A

Plato's account of the formation of a state implicitly suggests a different idea of justice and morality. The state is formed because it is better for individuals if they band together so as to benefit from a division of labor, and the excellence which accrues to everyone when each does that, and only that, which he/she is very good at doing. Thus the basis for state formation is not that individual interests are served by social arrangements that protect us from domination by the strong (social contract theory à la Glaucon: we only work together out of fear of harm from each other), but rather that individual benefits accrue more to those who form cultures of mutual dependency and support than to individuals in isolation, or those who do not cooperate through a system of divided labor. Morality arises when my interests depend on your interests being satisfied, which produces the basis for my concern over your welfare. Glaucon's picture of human nature makes self-interest and mutual interest appear incompatible (except for fear of mutual harm). Plato's corrects this. Hence, what distinguishes Plato's theory of justice from Glaucon's implicit view is not that Plato's is inner-directed, but rather, that it is based on a different view of why human beings band together. For Plato, we band together largely for mutual benefit, not simply to avoid personal harm.