

*The Goodness of Justice*



*An Approach to Plato's Republic*

# The Requests of *Republic* ii

- ❖ ‘Glaucou and the others begged me to come to the rescue not to abandon the argument, but to help in every way to track down what each is (*scil.* what justice and injustice are *essentially*) and what the truth about their benefits is’ (*Rep.* ii, 368c4-7).
- ❖ Plato is agreeing to offer an account or an essence-specifying definition of justice (δικαιοσύνη)
- ❖ He is also agreeing to explain what benefit (ὠφελία) justice bestows upon the just person.

# A Division of Goods: *Rep.* ii 357 b-d

❖ Three kinds of good things:

1. Goods welcomed for their own sakes (e.g. harmless pleasures)
2. Goods welcomed for their own sakes *and* for what comes from them (e.g. health and knowledge)
3. Not chosen for their own sakes; chosen, though onerous, because they are beneficial (e.g. exercising and going to the dentist)

# A Contention about the Nature of Justice

- ❖ They say that to do injustice is naturally good and to suffer injustice bad, but that the badness of suffering it so far exceeds the goodness of doing it that those who have done and suffered injustice and tasted both, but who lack the power to do it and avoid suffering it, decide that it is **profitable** to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. As a result, they begin to make **laws and covenants**, and what the law commands they call **lawful and just**. This is the **origin** (γένεσις) and **essence** (οὐσία) of justice: it is between what is best, doing wrong without paying the penalty, and what is worst, being wronged without the power to exact revenge. So, as something mid-way between these extremes, justice is accepted not as something good, but is honoured rather because of a powerlessness to do wrong. . . That, Socrates, is the **nature** (φύσις) of justice and such are the circumstance in which it arose (*Rep.* ii, 358e-359b).

# If so, then. . .

- ❖ What reason remains for us to prefer justice to the greatest injustice?. . .By what route will anyone with any resources of mind or wealth or body or birth set any value on justice, rather than simply guffawing when he hears someone praising it?  
(*Rep.* ii, 366b-c)

# Four Features of this Account

- ❖ It is a *genetic account*: if we learn the origin of justice, then (and only then) will we grasp its nature.
  - ❖ Compare: if one wants to know what consciousness is, then one needs (and needs only) to determine when and how and for what purpose consciousness evolved
- ❖ It is perfectly univocal:
  - ❖  $x$  is an instance of justice  $=_{df}$   $x$  is a law or law-governed action produced on the basis of a mutually beneficial contract
- ❖ It assumes that the goodness of justice, if any, is ascertained by uncovering its nature (φύσις)
- ❖ It presupposes, rightly or wrongly, that justice is essentially implicated in other-regarding conduct

# A Type-2 Good?

- ❖ The illustrations of Plato's type-2 good are instructive:
  - ❖ Health is choiceworthy in its own right; so too is knowledge.
  - ❖ Health is also choiceworthy in so far as it contributes to goods beyond itself; same again for knowledge.
    - ❖ Health partly constitutes a good sort of life, and in this way, at least, is equally choiceworthy for the goods to which it leads; arguably, this holds true of knowledge as well—though it may have extrinsic benefits as well.
- ❖ So, plausibly if Justice is a Type-2 good, it will be partially constitutive of some larger, more encompassing good.

# The Tasks before Us

- ❖ Define Justice
- ❖ Show that Justice is good, in the sense of beneficial
  - ❖ . . .and to do so by showing that justice is always choiceworthy
- ❖ Two Assumptions
  - ❖ Justice admits of a non-disjunctive essence-specifying definition
  - ❖ The goodness of justice may be ascertained by grasping its nature

# Defining Justice: What is wanted?

- ❖ Essence-specification: Justice has a perceiver-independent *nature*.
  - ❖ Doubts:
    - ❖ Justice has no perceiver-independent anything: a human being is the measure of all things.
      - ❖ ‘A human being is the measure of all things; of things which are ( $\phi$ ), that the are ( $\phi$ ), and of things which are not ( $\phi$ ), that they are not ( $\phi$ ) (*Theaet.* 152a)
        - ❖ If  $S$  believes that  $a$  is just, then  $a$  is just *for*  $S$
- ❖ Justice is non-univocal: there is no single, non-disjunctive account of justice

# Disputed Cases?

- ❖ One question: how do we determine what sort of good  $x$  is when the matter is in dispute?
  - ❖ Suppose, e.g., someone says that *reading Trollope*, or *practicing yoga*, or *travelling*, *tending one's own garden*, *having a family*, *visiting the British Museum*, or. . .are good things.
    - ❖ We agree—but then we wonder what sorts of good things they may be.
      - ❖ Minimally: we must first agree on *what it is* about which we are disputing.
      - ❖ Optimistically: we learn the good of something by ascertaining its essence.
        - ❖ In either case, we look first towards definition or account-specification.

# This Goodness Revealed

- ❖ This goodness is plainly type-3: we have reason to be just only to the extent that being just is necessary for seeming to be just.
  1. If acting unjustly could be separated from its normal consequences, then no one would willingly choose to be just. ('We'll catch the just person red-handed travelling the same road as the unjust.'—Rep. ii, 359c)
  2. If (1), then Justice is a type-3 good.
  3. So, Justice is a type-3 good.
  4. If Justice is a type-3 good, then no one has any reason to be just, beyond what may be required to seem to be just.
  5. So, no one has any reason to be just, beyond what may be required to seem to be just.
- ❖ This, then, is a great proof that no-one is just willingly' (*Rep.* ii, 360c)

# UA applied to Justice in the *Republic*

- ❖ As between souls and states, we have good reason to suppose that sameness of structure suffices for univocal applications of a given predicate  $\phi$  (*Rep.* ii 368c-369a; iv 434d).
- ❖ Consequently, what holds of justice in the macrocosm of Kallipolis holds in the microcosm of the soul—on the assumption that city and soul are isomorphic.

# Psychic Division

- ❖ Plato's Motivation:
  - ❖ 'We thought that if we first tried to observe justice in some larger things that possessed it, this would make it easier to observe in a single individual' (*Rep.* 434e; cf. 544a-b, 545b, 577c).

# The Importance of Isomorphism

- ❖ ‘A city was thought to be just when each of the three natural classes (*eidê*) within it did its own work, and it was thought to be moderate, courageous and wise because of certain other conditions and states of theirs.’
- ❖ ‘True,’ he said,
- ❖ ‘Then, if an individual has the same three kinds belonging to his soul, we will expect him to be called by the same names as the city if he has the same conditions (*pathê*) in him.’
- ❖ ‘That’s altogether necessary,’ he said.
- ❖ ‘Then, once again, my good man, we arrive at a rudimentary question regarding the soul: do these three kinds belong in it or not?’ (Rep. 435b4-c5).

# The Analysis: Justice as Harmony

- ❖ Justice in the city =<sub>df</sub> each of its three parts of the city (rulers, soldiers, productive classes) does its own work, deferring where appropriate and never meddling in the affairs of any other part (Rep. iv 433a-c).
  - ❖ Informally: Justice is civic harmony.
- ❖ Justice in a soul (or, if you like, in a person) =<sub>df</sub> each of a soul's (person's) three parts (Reason, Spirit, and Appetite) does its own work, deferring when appropriate and never meddling in the affairs of any other part (Rep. iv 443c-3)
  - ❖ Informally: Justice is psychic harmony.
- ❖ Justice =<sub>df</sub> the virtue whereby each essential component of a complex entity executes its appropriate function, while never interfering in the functions of any other component of that unity.
  - ❖ Informally: Justice is mereological harmony.
    - ❖ N.b. this analysis treats Justice as univocal.
      - ❖ Rightly?

# The First Two Elements

- ❖ First, he establishes that the reasoning element (*to logistikon*) is not the same as the appetitive element (*to epithumetikon*) (*Rep.* 436c-439e).
- ❖ N.b. that ‘appetitive’ here is not the same as ‘desiderative’.

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# The Argument, Phase I

1. If S stands in two opposing relations with respect to some object *o*, then S must do so in virtue of different internal elements *a* and *b*. (Call this the Principle of Opposing Relations (POR) (*Rep.* 436b8).
2. Acceptance and rejection are opposing relations, as are pursuit and avoidance (*Rep.* 437b1-5).
3. So, if S both accepts/pursues and rejects/avoids *o*, S must do so in virtue of different internal elements *a* and *b*. [1, 2]
4. Sometimes one and the same soul S both accepts/pursues and rejects/avoids one and the same object *o*. (Call this the Phenomenological Datum (PD).)
5. So, S must do so in virtue of different internal elements *a* and *b*. [3,4]
6. If (5), the soul S is complex: it has internal elements *a* and *b*.
7. So, S is complex: it has internal elements *a* and *b*. [6, 7]

# POR

- ❖ Not ‘the earliest explicit statement in Greek literature of the maxim of Contradiction.’ — Adam (1905, vol. 1, p. 246)
- ❖ ‘It is clear that the same thing will not be willing to do or suffer opposites (*tanantia*) in respect of the same element, in relation to the same thing, at once. Accordingly, should we discover these things occurring in these cases [sc. in the soul], we shall know that this was not the same but many.’ (*Rep.* 436b8-11)
  - ❖ Instances of acceptance and pursuit include: appetite (hunger or thirst), willing, and wishing. (*Rep.* 437b7-c7)
  - ❖ Instances of rejection and avoidance are: refusal, unwillingness, and lack of appetite. (*Rep.* 437d8-10)

# Putative Counterexamples

- ❖ *Rep.* 436c7-e7, 439b8-c1
  - ❖ A person who is both moving and stationary
  - ❖ A spinning top
    - ❖ Turned back: axis (*to euthu*) and the circumference (*to peripheries*) are relevantly distinct.
  - ❖ An archer
    - ❖ Turned back: ‘It is not right, I think, to say of an archer that his hands are both pushing the bow away and pulling it towards him, but rather that one hand is pushing it away and the other is drawing it towards him.’ (*Rep.* 439b10-11)
- ❖ These seem to show that Plato has in mind more than a synthetic psychological principle.
- ❖ Consequences regarding his conception of psychic mereology?

# PD

- ❖ Query I: What, precisely, is this datum?
- ❖ Query II: Must one—must every human soul—experience this datum?
  - ❖ Presumably the just person does not?
  - ❖ If not, could the argument even in principle establish *essential parts* to the human soul?

# The Argument, Phase II

❖ The case of Leontius (*Rep.* 339e-440a):

1. S is complex: it has internal elements *a* (the *logistikon*) and *b* (the *epithumetikon*).
2. Sometimes we experience *a* conflict with *b* (viz. the *epithumetikon*).
3. (POR)
4. So, there is an element of the soul, *c*, which is distinct from *b*.
5. This element is either identical with *a* (the *logistikon*), or it is a third element in the soul
6. If this element, *c*, is identical with *a* (the *logistikon*), then, *c* and *a* have all their properties in common. [LL]
7. The elements *c* and *a* do not have all their properties in common.
8. Hence, *c* is not the same element as *a*. (5, 6)
9. Hence, there is a third element of the soul, *c*, distinct from both *a* and *b*. (5, 8)

# This Third Element

- ❖ Plato calls this third element *thumoeides* (Spirit)
  - ❖ It engages in self-rebuke. (*Rep.* 440a)
  - ❖ It wells up in anger when it perceives a slight or senses injustice. (*Rep.* 441d)
  - ❖ It allies itself with reason against appetite, when called to do so, like a dog to a shepherd. (*Rep.* 440c-d)
- ❖ In general, it seems to be a psychic element with a reflexive awareness of the self and its social standing, able to combat desires and easily incited to anger when it perceives something as amiss.

# Justice—So Analyzed

- ❖ What relation does this analysis of justice—let us call it Platonic Justice—bear to our ordinary conception of justice, to justice as it is commonly conceived—let us call it Common Justice?
- ❖ Evidently, CJ is essentially other-regarding.
- ❖ By contrast, PJ is avowedly, in the first instance, inner-directed:
  - ❖ And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn't concerned with someone's doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with the other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. Only then does he act. . .(*Rep.* iv 443c-d)

# Two Worries

- ❖ Do we have grounds for supposing that justice is univocal? One might think: PJ is inward looking; and CJ is outward looking; so, they are different properties.
- ❖ Waiving that, and even granting Plato everything he has contended, why suppose that PJ has anything to do with CJ?
  - ❖ . . . And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private contracts—in all of these, he believes that action to be just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions. And he believes that the action that destroys this harmony is unjust, and calls it so, and regards the belief that oversees it as ignorance (*Rep.* iv 4433-444a)
  - ❖ So: An action a is just *iff* a preserves psychic harmony.
- ❖ He asserts that every PJ person will also be CJ (443d)—but why should we take his word for it?