

Chapter 9

Ethics in the *Republic*

9.1 Readings and Homework

- Readings:

- 1.
2. Plato, Republic IV
3. Summary of Book II and III

- Study questions:

1. Socrates claims that in the ideal city, private property should be forbidden to the guardians (the rulers and warriors). What is his argument for this?
2. What is Socrates' argument in favor of the thesis that the appetitive principle and the rational principle are separated?
3. What are wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice in the city?
4. What are wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice in the individual soul?

9.2 The status of the analogy between the soul and the city

Plato makes Socrates discuss the nature of justice in the soul on the basis of the analysis of justice in an ideal city.

- What is the justification for the analogy?
 - **To analyze at a larger scale:** Socrates gives the argument of the size of the letters. The claim behind is that there is a similarity of structure between justice in the city and justice in the individual soul. We should learn how to read “justice” in the city in larger font, in order to be able to recognize it later in smaller font.
 - Eric Brown has a similar hypothesis: it is easier to see that a just city is flourishing, that is to say, it is easier to see that happiness and justice are tied together at the level of the city

- Nature of the analogy? Not clear
 - sometimes strict identification: X has always the same definition, whatever the objects it is applied to (434d-435a). So, Justice is the same, whether one considers a city or an individual.
 - sometimes mereological (link between parts and wholes): X is X because of the Xness of components. A city is just when its citizens are just. Hence, to know what a just city is would be sufficient to know what a just citizen is. (435d-436a).

- Use of the analogy? Not clear either
 - sometimes strict deduction
 - sometimes heuristic use.

- Controversy
 - grounds for the analogy: does Plato give solid grounds? What objections can we think of?
 - adequacy of the analogy: does the analogy always work?
 - use of the analogy: it is not sure that any of Plato’s claim strongly hinges on the solidity of the analogy. Socrates keeps saying that the way in which they deal with the topic of justice is unsatisfactory – remember that Plato will never write anything on any serious philosophical topic. Justice is probably the most important topic there is for him !

9.3 Tripartition of the city and of the soul – Definition of Justice

9.3.1 The virtues in the city 427c

- Theory of the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice

- Method of residue: justice is one the virtues, let's track it in the city!

Wisdom

- as goodness in counsel
- is knowledge of the city as a whole (not of any particular matters),
- and is the knowledge of the guardians
- **Therefore, the entire city is wise because of the science of the smallest class of citizens – Note the paradox!**

Courage

- is the preservation under all circumstances of the opinion about what is to be feared or not, which is implemented by laws and education,

Note that to know what is to be feared or not is not sufficient for being courageous: in order to be courageous, one has to be able to preserve one's belief about what is to be feared or not, and act upon it, *even under pressure*.
- Analogy with dying: if the ground is not well prepared, the color does not last.
- Courage is the maintenance of the ideas about fear whatever the washing out of the souls by feelings (pleasure, sorrow, desire),
- is to be found in the soldiers
- **The courage of the soldiers makes the entire city courageous**

Moderation

- Analogy with the soul: a soul is said to be temperate if and only if the best part of it is mastering the worst part of it.
- In the same way: a city is said to be temperate if and only if the best part of it is mastering the worst part of it
- Thus moderation is a kind of harmony that goes through the different levels of the State
- That is to say, it does not belong to a specific part of the state
- **Moderation of the city consists in the agreement between the weaker and the stronger that the former rule for the latter – Justice cannot come out of tyranny!**

Justice

- is the principle of the entire construction of the ideal state
- consists in that **every part of the city does willingly whatever is conformed to its nature and relation to the whole.**

Plato advocates a city of **experts**: every body is an expert and should take care only of his proper domain of expertise. *As a carpenter, you have no right to say anything about international politics.*

Confusion of the proper roles is the “greatest harm” that can happen to a city. 434c

9.3.2 The virtues in the individual soul 435a

Back to the analogy: city and individual.

Three principles in the soul

- Just as the city, the soul has three principles: appetitive, spirited and rational
- Objection: are we sure they are separated?

9.3. *TRIPARTITION OF THE CITY AND OF THE SOUL – DEFINITION OF JUSTICE*129

- general principle : the same thing cannot act or be acted upon, in the same part or in relation to the same thing, at the same time, in contrary ways. PRINCIPLE OF CONTRADICTION!!
- Reason vs. Appetition
 - We can act against our desire
 - Therefore there is a principle of the soul, which is separated from the principle that desires – Reason
- Spirit vs. Appetition
 - Spirit can go against appetite (being angry at oneself whenever one failed to resist some desire)
 - Therefore the spirited principle is separated from the appetitive principle
- Spirit vs. Reason
 - Spirit is also different from Reason: kids and beasts have the former, and not the latter
 - Therefore there is a third principle at work in the soul for spirit
- Thus, the soul, just as the city, is composed of three principles.
- **Conclusion: justice in the individual consists in this, that each principle takes care willingly of its proper task:**
 - reason rules
 - spirit obeys and helps reason
 - both command to appetite
 - all this happens while the various parts agree on both their own role and the role of the two others.

The virtues in the soul

- Courage in the individual: when spirit preserves the teaching of reason concerning fear
- Wisdom in the individual: when reason rules according to his knowledge of the advantage of the three parts

- Moderation in the individual: spirit and appetite agree on reason being the ruler
- Justice is finally the proper division of labor in the soul
- checking list of instances of just and unjust actions (is that an argument? how can we be sure we found justice?)
- *Little Game*: what is foolishness, cowardice, immoderation and injustice in the soul?

Consequence: justice as an harmony of the inner part of man

But in reality justice was such as we were describing, being concerned however, not with the outward man, but with the inward, which is the true self and concernment of man: for the just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others, –he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself; and when he has bound together the three principles within him, which may be compared to the higher, lower, and middle notes of the scale, and the intermediate intervals –when he has bound all these together, and is no longer many, but has become one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature, then he proceeds to act, if he has to act, whether in a matter of property, or in the treatment of the body, or in some affair of politics or private business; always thinking and calling that which preserves and co-operates with this harmonious condition, just and good action, and the knowledge which presides over it, wisdom, and that which at any time impairs this condition, he will call unjust action, and the opinion which presides over it ignorance. [This is a different translation from RAPG: in RAPG p 442 top, ie. 443d-444a]

Injustice

Injustice is then strife among the three principles

Just and unjust actions

- Justice is health of the soul –
- Just and unjust actions are as health and disease: they respectively produce health and disease
- Consequence about which is profitable or not – no need, really?
 - we have found that to be just is always better
 - but not that it is always better to do just actions
 - for this we need to prove that the just men always do just actions
 - that is to say, that psychological justice implies practical justice (Careful, the reverse is not true: not all just actions are completed by just men of course!)
 - It is unclear that Socrates has really answered the question he was asked at the beginning: whether to be just and act justly is always better for itself and for the consequences
 - Another détour is needed: the study of vice

Vice in the city

- Analogy again: as many sorts of soul as constitutions
 - One sort of virtue: the ideal city: monarchy/aristocracy (BOOK V)
 - Four sorts of vice
 - ...what should follow is going to be delayed until Book VIII!
 - Polemarchus interrupts: more is to be said on the sort of community and the ways of educating which will prevail in the ideal city

9.4 Comments on the three principles, or the division of the soul

9.4.1 Is this a simplistic view of human psychology?

- They are not parts of the soul in the literal sense: the soul being immaterial, it seems highly improbable that the principle that Plato

distinguishes here correspond respectively to different organs of the body.

- They are to be identified to cognitive representation, desire and sentiment. There can be some rational desire or sentiment, or representative expressions of the appetitive and the spirited principles.
- They are “psychological attitudes” potentially in conflict in the soul.
- They together contribute to one’s psychology, and their respective power in one’s soul determine what one considers as his good or advantage.
- In general, Plato’s psychology is far more complex than what the division of the city in classes of persons of different natures would let us think at first.

9.4.2 The issue of practical justice

- Socrates does not answer the question he was asked, that is, the question whether it is always better to do just actions. He proved that it is better to be just man, but no link has been made between the just man and the just actions.
 - obviously, we don’t want the co-extension of the two classes: not all just actions are completed by just men!
 - rather, we want that just men always do just actions
 - then only, if it is always better to be a just man, and if just men always act justly, then, it is always better to act justly
 - and practical justice is
- One possible answer will be:
 - a man is just if and only he is a philosopher
 - philosophers have knowledge of the forms
 - in particular of the form of the good
 - hence they *know* what is good
 - hence they act justly

9.4. COMMENTS ON THE THREE PRINCIPLES, OR THE DIVISION OF THE SOUL¹³³

- But this leaves no hope for the non-philosophers to act justly...
- Another answer is education
 - high importance of education
 - see the censorship
 - highly optimistic: not only education teaches to appreciate good things, but it will also make you better: the circle (424a)
 - one might assume that well educated persons know what is right to do, and that just persons will follow this knowledge, even if they don't have the true knowledge of the form of the good.

To go further...

The only argument we find really in Book IV in favor of a just life is the argument of a healthy soul. This argument is aborted though, and will be given its full extend only in Book VIII, sometimes called the book of the tyrant, and book IX.

Enjoy!

9.4.3 The issue of happiness

Adeimantes' objection: how could the guardian be happy? 417b

- distinction between the happiness for individuals and happiness for the entire city
- happiness of every one does not add to happiness of the whole!!!
- “consider rather whether, by giving this and the other features their due proportion, we make the whole beautiful”
- in assigning to each their proper due, the State will be in order, and each will receive its proper reward

That should apply to the individual soul as well: Plato rejects the distinction between the happiness of the whole and the happiness of the parts.

- First he believes that it is necessary for the parts to be happy that the whole be happy (the other way around : it is sufficient for the whole to be happy to make the parts happy)

- But, second, this is not to say that the parts should be unhappy! On the contrary, *the happiness of the whole and the happiness of the parts simply overlap*:
- **One is happy ONLY IF he (she) does what he (she) knows is best suited to him (her).** That means that there is no happiness in willing or even obtaining more than what is good for you. Examples!!!

9.5 Plato and Theories of Ethics

- Plato does not fit our classification of ethical theories. Plato's ethics is neither mere virtue ethics nor mere utilitarianism.
- Indeed:
 - Justice has to be good both by itself and for its consequences: not mere virtue ethics
 - But happiness is not so much a consequence of justice than a part of it: not mere utilitarianism
 - Not only the rational, but also the spirited and the appetitive principles contribute to the justice of a human soul: neither sentimentalism, nor rationalism
- Both reason and sentiment contribute to decide what is right to do. Now, is there a potential conflict between considerations about what is right to do and the good consequences? According to Plato, there is none: *nothing bad happens to the good man.*