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What Constitutes Justice?

In the civilization that we live in, if one were to be asked to define justice, they may say that it is doing good for others, or it may take on a more cynical and sardonic definition than I would like. Some may describe justice as the pursuit of finding happiness within oneself and going to the greatest of lengths to do so. The variance seen in the definition of justice throughout culture has not only subsisted in recent years, but has since the beginning, and Plato's era was no different. Plato wrote *The Republic* using a narrative, communicating his views by addressing them through Socrates in an imitation of a dialogue between other characters in search of an absolute definition of justice. I will initiate the beginning of this paper with the three definitions of justice that are in Book I. I will then critique art, music, education, policy, and religion to attest how manipulating these things through legislation will first help the state achieve justice, then, how the individual can accomplish justice. Finally, I will state my opinion about the conclusion that Plato develops.

Depictions of one doing just acts will not suffice a definition of justice. Plato begins Book I with a dialogue amid Socrates and Cephalus. Socrates asks Cephalus to define justice, and he says that it is "speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred" (Republic 331c). This is immediately disregarded. Socrates then turns to Polemarchus. Polemarchus is now asked to give his definition of justice, to which he replies by saying that it is "to give each what is owed" (Republic 331e). A counterexample is provided. What if a friend of yours were to give you a sword whenever they were in a sober state and then later demanded repayment for

the sword whenever they were deranged? Should I have to give him back the sword if I know that he might injure someone with it? I do not think so, and neither does Plato.

Polemarchus exchanges his definition, saying that it is “[the] benefit to friends and harm to enemies” (Republic 332d). This is not satisfactory either. What if our friends are the bad men and our enemies are good? Is one behaving justly by doing good to bad men and doing bad to good men? No, it's not. Once again, Polemarchus changes his definition to “treat a friend well, provided he is good, and to harm an enemy, provided he is bad” (Republic 335b). Socrates refutes this by saying that justice is a human virtue and that when humans are harmed, they become worse to this. They both agree that “it is never just to harm anyone” (Republic 335e).

Thrasymachus hinders the discussion by saying “justice is nothing other than what is advantageous for the stronger” (Republic 338c). The type of government that rules a state will enforce laws that will benefit the government that is in place and will call this just. The citizens who are deviants and stray from these axioms will be called unjust. Socrates says that rulers are apt to error and can implement laws that are not propitious to themselves. Thrasymachus responds with, “no craftsman ever makes errors” (Republic 340d). Medicine has been scrutinized to serve the people who need the utilization of medicine to live, not to serve the art of medicine itself. A ruler may receive a form of alimony for the deed of the ruling, while the sole purpose of the ruling is to rule. The denouement drawn by Socrates is that “no one in any position of rule, to the extent that he is a ruler, considers...what is advantageous for himself, but what is advantageous for his subject” (Republic 342e).

The discourse now advances toward how a utopian society would be constructed (if possible) to achieve justice in a state by defining the qualities regarding the rulers of that state. To ascertain the characteristics of the rulers, they begin by addressing justice within oneself.

Socrates says, “good people won’t be willing to rule for the sake of money or honor” (Republic 347b). They accede and conclude that an unjust person aspires to do better than both the just and unjust, a just person possesses sagacity and is a good person, and that an unjust person is an imbecilic bad person. “Justice is virtue and wisdom, and injustice is vice and ignorance” (Republic 350d). For a syndicate to hold a shared ambition that is unjust, such as thieves, there would have to be some degree of justice present within the group; otherwise, the thieves could not function properly. They would not be capable of working in harmony contemporaneously if they were truly unjust and nothing could be accomplished, which; therefore, implied that they are incompetent of enactment. This concludes with Socrates saying that one who possesses a bad soul will behave maladroitly and that a good one does things adroitly. “A just man will live well and an unjust one badly” (Republic 353e). Moreover, a just person is the happier one of the two, and the unjust man is worse off.

At the end of Book I, Socrates proclaims to know nothing, because justice has not been appropriately defined, and will not be defined until Book IV. We can now identify that for one to live a good life; one must attain happiness and a state of justice.

In Book II, Adeimantus finds an impropriety in people who have the appearance of possessing this virtue as opposed to the actual possession of virtue. Adeimantus also says that the youth are told to strive for justice, but in actuality, the teachers are only advising them to appear just and that most humans mistake appearing just as justice itself. Since justice is a good and virtuous, by definition, it is good in and of itself. For one to procure good for its own sake, it does not depend on the consequences of receiving payment, honor, or a cachet for doing the act.

Later, in Book II, the construction of the ideal state starts to form. Since Guardians will be the leaders of this state, they will require the most education to cultivate a philosophical state

of mind to perceive things solely for themselves. Plato, through Socrates, makes various attempts to ensure the Guardians will effectuate the intentions of the legislature via several gimmicks. This necessitates precise training involving critical thinking. The thinking will lead to more knowledge, eventually the appreciation of knowledge, and finally, the love of knowledge. Because of this, Guardians will be trusted to rule, and therefore, an ideal state would require few laws. Also, if there were plethora of laws, citizens may neglect them due to the abundance. Soldiers also need to be trained to defend the city in the same fashion that a dog befriends his family and gets aggressive towards foreigners.

In Book III is where I will begin the critique of education, art, music, and religion to form Guardians that will be well adept to rule the state once they have completed the process. The education that the Guardians receive is prorated into two parts: musical and gymnastics. Gymnastics is the physical training, and musical training is the mental training. The music in this sense is meant to turn boys and girls into civil men and women. Girls are to undergo the same education as boys and will have total equality with one another. Men and women are equal; therefore, the same training that makes a man a good Guardian will also make a woman a good Guardian.

Plato wants to censor literature in the ideal state and have children be told only the stories that have been approved. Homer is unacceptable because he delineates Gods behaving defectively at times and the youth are to be taught that evil does not come from the Gods, God is exclusively good. There are some things ascertained in Homer's and other's poems that make the readers fear death, and everything in education should make the young willing to die in battle. Education should instill values in children to make them think that being a slave is worse than being killed during combat. Stories of mourning men or stories where erroneous people are

propitious and good people are wretched should not be permitted either. Therefore, a decision is made to exclude poets and actors. The reason for the prohibition of actors is that if an actor is a good man, he should not be imitating a bad man because that is an act of injustice.

Plato also wants to censor music for several reasons. The Lydian and Ionian harmonies are to be banned because they cause sorrow and relaxation. The Dorian harmony creates courage in a time of war, and the Phrygian harmony creates temperance in times of peace, so they are allowed. Once a child reaches a particular age, they are to be exposed to a terror that is not too terrifying and pleasures that are not too enticing. These children are also to see battles take place to gain experience, but they are not to fight.

Lying is something that the government has to do in this ideal state. Their job is to deceive people and systematize marriages by class. The "Noble Lie" is that God created three kinds: the best is gold, the second is silver, and the last is bronze or iron. The gold is fit to be Guardian rulers of the state, the silvers are soldiers or auxiliaries, and the bronze/iron are the craftsmen that carry out the day-to-day work to produce goods. This takes on a form of religion that has to be executed to make citizens content with their position in their society. Citizens will think of their country as a parent and that they were created from of the earth. The "Noble Lie" or "Myth of the Metals" explains to the citizens the origin of life and that they were born with a purpose in the world.

A kind of policy or economics that Plato wants to establish is a sort of communism for the Guardians because they will do everything together and live in small houses with no private property other than what is unconditionally necessary. They "will receive their upkeep from the other citizens as a wage for their Guardianship" (Republic 464c). But you have to remember that

the purpose of the ideal state is for the good of the whole, not the happiness of individuals within it.

A biological/eugenics approach is also needed to create a perfect state, which Book V introduces. Men and women will be brought together to partake in orgiastic festivals to be manipulated by the eugenic principles established by the rulers. The gold class should have the most children because they will provide the best citizens of the state. "The best men should mate with the best women in as many cases as possible, while the opposite should hold of the worst men and women" (Republic 459e). The children are taken away from their mothers after they are born, so no parent knows its child and no child knows its parent. Children who are born from the wrong classes will be disposed of, and people will have no voice in choosing whether to engage in these exploits. They will feel they have an obligation to the state to do so. But if they were to go to war, they would remember that they do not know who their genuine family members are and would honor everyone like family. Therefore, there should be a strong comradery amongst all. I find this approach entirely impractical because most cultures in today's world are monogamous.

Four virtues are identified: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. These are going to be defined in the state, then the similarity will be drawn to the individual. If a state has a wise ruler, the state will be wise. Only the rulers have to be wise because the soldiers and laborers do not rule the state and implement regulations. In a state, only the soldiers need to be courageous because they are the ones that are going into battle. "Their beliefs about what things should inspire terror...and what should not is what I, at any rate, call courage" (Republic 430a-430b).

The completion of a perfect state has been developing through the examples used above. In Book IV, Socrates says that "Justice is doing one's own work and not meddling with what is

not one's own" (Republic 433b). No citizen is to bereave someone else of their rewards for being in a particular class, and if one did so, they would be divesting justice; therefore, performing an unjust act. A state holds temperance when there is an agreement of the superior to be the rulers and the inferior--hopefully docile--agree to be ruled.

Now, for justice in the individual. A just man consists of three parts: the rational, irrational, and the spirited parts. The rational part should rule over the other parts. The irrational should obey the commands of the rational part. The spirited should grant assistance to the judgments made by the rational part. Justice in an individual man is when every one of these parts is satisfying their appointed roles and not infringing on the functions of the other components. This is where the analogy of the state is drawn to the individual. "So a just man won't differ at all from a just city [concerning] the form of justice but will be like it" (Republic 435b). "The best and most just is the [happiest]" (Republic 580c). An individual can only suffer injustice if when one part of the soul does not fulfill its assigned role. Such would happen if the irrational part of the soul were to rule over the rational part and the spiritual part were to not lend help to the rational.

Plato's Republic is about justice and the knowledge and training the Guardians receive to be the righteous rulers of the state. Books VI through Book X, using the "Form of the Good," "Allegory of the Cave," etc. are just ways to rationalize this approach to help us understand how he peroratorically arrived at the definition that he did. Plato's representation of justice is primarily concerned with property rights and has nothing to do with equality. It licenses inequalities of power and privilege among the classes without calling it unjust. Guardians have all the power because they are the most knowledgeable. They have the luck of having been born into the Guardian class and because of this, will be entitled to a more rigorous and punctilios

education their entire lives in the hope of developing a philosopher-king. Due to all the training he has endured, a philosopher king will supposedly utilize his skill in the interest of the public, and not for himself or his class. This will only work if we posit the belief that a ruler who possesses this much knowledge would sincerely benefit us all.

I agree with Thrasymachus's definition of justice in that it is whatever is in the interest of the stronger and ones who are in control of the state. The people who are in power will change, and what was considered to be just in the 19th century is no longer considered just. You have to agree with Plato's definition of justice and how it can be obtained because his rules will govern, and you would only benefit from this by following the laws in place. But if you were to disagree, because your opinion doesn't matter, there is nothing that you can do about it, you will be harmed. You could not live in such a society and would be expunged. "It is difficult for a city constituted in this way to change. However, since everything that comes-to-be must decay, not even one so constituted will last forever...it, too, must face dissolution" (Republic 546a).

The kind of state that Plato has constructed would be more utopic if the people weren't born into classes and assigned roles; instead, could choose what they wished to do. It was said that whenever a family member recognizes the potential of one of their offspring, they will push him in the direction that will be the most profitable, which is not necessarily the most fruitful for him. On the contrary, just because you are born into the Guardian class, does that necessarily mean that you have a desire to want to be a ruler of the state? In my opinion, the society is actually a dystopian one. The citizens are told that it is the highest society to live in, but they have no choice in pursuing their interests.

Works Cited

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