

Yixuan Huang

Philo 3210 First & Second Paper

Professor Allan Silverman

A discussion of justice

1. Introduction of whole paper
2. Explain and analyze different thoughts in *Republic* Book I & II
3. My own thinking about justice
4. Responses and explanation to several possible arguments to my definition of justice
5. Conclusion

In the first two chapters of the *Republic*, Plato discussed several definitions of justice in detail. However, none of the definitions of justice seem to fit my ideas; in other words, I do not agree with those definitions in *Republic*. In this paper, I will give my own definition of justice, and elaborate on it. I am going to discuss arguments in *Republic* first, and I will use Plato's thought process to make my own arguments. It is important to explain Plato's thinking before I give my personal ideas.

Part 2.1: Cephalus' justice and Plato's argument

In book one, Plato analyzes four different definitions of justice. The first definition is given by Cephalus that speaking the truth and repaying what one has borrowed(R. 331d+). This first definition may seem reasonable because it is necessary for everyone to repaying what one has borrowed, and people should not lie to others. However, Plato gives his worry about this definition which is also his argument with an example that everyone will agree that if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he is out of his mind, the friend should not return, and nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to someone who is out of his mind(R. 330c+).

What Plato thinks is that if in the course of the relationship, the lender is out of his mind, should the borrower pay the debt according to the agreement? Obviously, his answer is no, and this is my first disagreement with Plato. I must clarify that I also disagree with the first definition of justice, but I do not think when the lender is out of his mind, the borrower should not return things which he borrows. What I think is that he should still return things back to the lender; however, after returning things, the borrower should also take a series of protective measures to the lender. In fact, I think that speaking the truth and repaying what one has borrowed is more as a norm in the level of human communication, and an ethical requirement, but it is not the only and most important standard for us to define justice.

Part 2.2: Polemarchus' justice and Plato's argument

The second definition of justice is given by Polemarchus. He supposes that justice gives benefits to friend and does harm to enemies(R. 332d+). Plato argues that if justice is to give benefits to friends and does harm to enemies, then it seems that we can make an analogy to think of justice as a skill or as an ability, such as medical skill, and navigation ability, since both of those skills and justice give each what is appropriate to a person(R. 332b+). Then, justice will arise the following paradoxes inevitably.

First, sometimes justice is useful, and sometimes it is not. For example, a just man can best benefit his friends and harm his enemies when he is in war, so when people are not in war, a just man is useless(R. 332e+). Second, helping the bad and hurting the good sometimes becomes a justice. Because people often make mistakes about believing many people to be good and useful when they are not and make the opposite mistake about enemies, so in this situation, our friends will represent bad parts, and thus, good people will become our opposite parts, which are enemies(R. 334c+). At that time, justice is to benefit bad people and harm good ones(R. 334c+). And third, just people are likely to become more unjust. In this argument, Plato follows Polemarchus' idea of justice by making the following inference that shows the contradiction in Polemarchus' argument. Plato mentions that it is not the function of heat to cool things but of its opposite; nor the function of dryness to make things wet but of its opposite; and nor the function of goodness to harm but of its opposite. Besides, according to Polemarchus, we have

already known that a just person is good. Therefore, we can conclude that it is not the function of a just person to harm a friend or anyone else, rather it is the function of his opposite, an unjust person. Thus, it is clear to us that it is never just to harm anyone(R. 335d+). Furthermore, Plato supposes that it is obvious that any kind of skills can both help and hurt others, so according to Polemarchus, it seems that justice can not only give benefits but also do harm to friends.

Above all, Plato disagree with the idea that justice gives benefits to friend and does harm to enemies. For my personal view, I totally agree with Plato's arguments, and the most important mistake made by Polemarchus in his definition of justice is that he does not give a clear definition of friend and enemy. Beside, using friends and enemies to define justice is not good, because it is really easy for a person's friend to become his enemy by some unexpected things. Therefore, it is impossible to define justice by saying that giving benefit to friends, and harm to enemies unless we can give a definitely clear definition about the characterized of friends and enemies, but it seems too difficult to define. Furthermore, if a person does something both benefit to friends, and enemies, does he is just or unjust?

Part 2.3: Thrasymachus' justice and Plato's argument

Next, I want to introduce one of the most famous part in *Republic*, the discussion between Thrasymachus and Plato. Thrasymachus gives his idea that justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger(R. 338c+). He argues that every kind of ruler makes laws to his own advantage(R. 338d+). Then he specifically explains his argument that democracy makes democratic laws, tyranny makes tyrannical laws, and so on with the others(R. 338e+). Thrasymachus points out that every governor declares what they have made, what is to their own benefits, to be just for their subjects, and those rulers punish anyone who goes against this as lawless and unjust(R. 339+). Thus, Thrasymachus thinks that justice is, the same in all cities, the advantage of the established rule(R. 339+).

In order to argue against with Thrasymachus, Plato offers the following rebuttal that what is good for the strong is sometimes good for the weak. He gives an example that according to Thrasymachus,

Polydamus, the athlete, is stronger than we are, so it is to his advantage to eat beef to build up his physical strength; however, this food is also advantageous for us who are weaker than he is. Does this mean that eating beef is injustice for us(R. 338c+)? Besides, Plato considers that Justice is sometimes to the detriment of the rulers who are stronger because the rulers will order what is bad for themselves unwittingly(R. 339e+). Therefore, it seems that justice sometimes damage the benefits of the stronger.

Furthermore, Thrasymachus provide an argument that justice is a kind of skill, which will not make mistakes. He gives this idea in order to response to Plato that a true ruler does not make mistakes, so the rulers in the example given by Plato before are not justice, in other words, they are not “real rulers”, thus, his definition of justice is not challenged by Plato.

Plato argues that we can assume that justice is a skill, and we all know that no other craft seeks its own advantage but the advantage of that of which it is the craft, and at the same time, no kind of knowledge seeks or orders what is advantageous to itself, then, but what is advantageous to the weaker, which is subject to it(R. 342c+). For ruling, its objects are all citizens. Therefore, he concludes that nobody in any position of rule, seeks or orders what is benefit to himself, but what is also benefit to his subjects, that on which he practices his craft. It is to his subject and what is advantageous and proper to it that he looks, and everything he says and does and does for it(R. 342e+).

Thrasymachus objects Plato’s idea, he then explains that doctors treat their patients to make money, and so do the horse trainers, so it comes down to self-interest, which is the benefits of the stronger. For Thrasymachus’ explanation, Plato says that the measure of a good doctor is whether he cures his patient; the shepherd can take good care of the sheep, or the horse trainer can train great horses. Besides, our criterion for judging skill depends on whether it serves the object well, rather than the other. Above all, Plato thinks that Thrasymachus’ idea of justice is radical.

Part 2.4: The argument between Plato and Glaucon about whether justice is better than injustice
and my conclusion for part two

Finally, I want to introduce the discussion of justice between Glaucon and Plato. After Plato argues Thrasymachus' view of justice, he continues talking about another idea that a just person lives better than an unjust person, which means that the just person has more benefits(R. 345b+). And he posts the following arguments. First, it seems that a just person does not outdo someone like himself but someone unlike himself, whereas an unjust person outdoes both like and dislike(R. 349c+). Furthermore, Plato asks Thrasymachus some tough questions, and they get another conclusion that a good and clever person does not want to outdo those like himself but those who are unlike him and his opposite, but a bad and ignorant person wants to outdo both his like and his opposite(R. 350b+). Therefore, combining the two arguments above, Plato suggests that it seems that a just person is like a clever and good one, and an unjust is like an ignorant and bad one(R. 350c+). Above all, Plato shows that a just person is clever and better than an unjust person. Plato also assumes that the function of each thing is what it alone can do or what it does better than anything else, and he also considers that each thing to which a particular function is assigned also have a virtue(R. 353b+). Then he gives the following arguments that we have already agreed that justice is a soul's virtue, and injustice its vice(R. 353e+). Then, it follows that a just soul and a just man will live well, and an unjust one badly. Therefore, a just person is happy, and an unjust one wretched. In addition, it profits no one to be wretched but to be happy. Thus, injustice is never more profitable than justice(R. 354+).

Then, at the beginning of book two, Glaucon wants to challenge Plato's argument that it is better in every way to be just than unjust(R. 357+). He defines three different kinds of good. The first kind of good we welcome, not because we desire what comes from it, but because we welcome it for its own sake; the second good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from; and for the third good one, we would not choose them for their own sakes, but for the sake of the rewards(R. 357b+). After giving these three different kinds of good, Glaucon gives his thinking about justice by asking Plato a question where he puts justice. He argues Plato's idea that justice will be in the finest good, instead, Glaucon thinks that justice belongs to onerous kind, and is to be practiced for the sake of the rewards and

popularity that come from a reputation for justice, but for is to be avoided because of what comes from it(R. 358+).

To continue the discussion, Glaucon first state what kind of things people consider justice to be and what its origins are. Then, he assumes that all who practice it do so unwillingly, as something necessary, not as something good. Lastly, he argues that people have good reason to act as they do, for the life of unjust person is, they say, much better than that of a just one(R. 358c+). During Glaucon's arguments, one of the most important idea is personal interest. Glaucon tries to connect the justice with personal interest, which is also one of the most important and basic part in my own thinking later in this paper. For Glaucon, he thinks that if people are granted the freedom to do whatever they want, in order to take more personal interest, people will do great numbers of unjust things and become unjust people(R. 359c+).

Conclusively, I think that Thrasymachus and Glaucon have a very realistic view of justice, because when they talk about justice, they do not only focus on what justice is, but also on whether we should continue to insist justice if injustice brings more benefits to people. Both of them build a connection between justice and personal interest, so the actual problem for Thrasymachus and Glaucon is the relationship between justice and happiness. Thrasymachus and Glaucon believe that injustice can bring people more happiness than justice; however, Plato disagrees with their opinions. The two sides of conflict over their different conceptions of happiness. Thrasymachus and Glaucon suppose that happiness is the satisfaction of desire, so for Thrasymachus, even if according to Plato's view, something is injustice, but since people can satisfy their own desires, and get their own interests by doing these things, it is justice. I think that Thrasymachus and Glaucon are basically correct that it is necessary for us to connect they personal interest with justice; however, I think that in Thrasymachus' discussion of justice, he should not set the subject of groups of people who take the profits from justice with the stronger, and this mistake makes Thrasymachus' arguments are easily argued by Plato. Beside, that mistake is also the

main difference between my definition of justice and Thrasymachus', so I think it is properly to start my own thinking of justice now.

Part 3.1: Explanation for the origins of justice

However, before I give a clear definition of justice, I want to state what people consider justice to be and what its origins are, which helps me present my points better. In the beginning, people are relying on default rules to interact with each other. Afterwards, a small group of people find that doing something in order to get more benefits to themselves, so they start doing those things. After that, more and more people join them and now a large group of people do the things; however not surprisingly, comparing with the benefits brought by those things, a stable, default rules' communication environment is completely broken which means that the profits of the collective have been harmed and thus everyone suffers badness(R. 359b+).

Those people, actually most people, who both have done and suffered injustice realized that the badness of suffering injustice so far exceeds the goodness of doing it. Maintaining a balanced communication environment without injustice can get more benefits for everyone, so they decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other not to do injustice, so they all do not suffer it. As a result, they begin to make laws and covenants, and what the law commands they call lawful and just(R. 359b+).

Therefore, the most fundamental purpose of making laws is to ensure that the interests of the majority in a collective will not be damaged harmed by the minority, and at the same time, also ensure balanced development of the collective. Justice is a way to protect the collective interests, or the interests of the majority. This, according to the argument, is justice's natural origin.

I think the most important mistake in Glaucon's explanation is that at the beginning of his describing, he states people are doing just or unjust things. It should be unclear for a pre-civil community to define justice or injustice, so in my explanation, I rebuild the structures and clarify that problem. In

addition, during my explanation, I think it shows the main difference between Thrasymachus and me that I think the subject of justice is majority whereas Thrasymachus' view is the stronger.

Part 3.2: Given my own definition of justice and explain my definition

Now, it seems that we have a clearer understanding about justice, but I still cannot define justice only through the nature of justice. I would like to give more examples and elaborate on it so that we can have a deeper thinking about justice.

Let us consider a question: under what circumstances you think you are doing justice? In other words, when you are doing something, do you think you are being just? Giving the simplest example, when you see a thief stealing things from others, you stop him; do you think you are doing justice? Certainly yes! But why you think you are just? Is it simply because stealing is bad? I do not agree with that idea. What I think is that we stop the thief because we want to show that stealing is bad, or more specifically, we want to let other people realize that stealing is bad, thus whenever other people see a thief stealing things, they should also stop him. The reason why we want other people to realize that stealing is bad is we hope that when a thief is stealing our things, someone can help us and stop him, during which process we want to secure our profits. In other words, we are doing what can benefit us, and this benefit is not only good for ourselves, but also good for everyone, so we can suppose that we are doing what is in most people's profits.

So far, I think I have a clear definition about justice-- doing what is to most people's profits. According to my definition, what doctors do is justice, because it contributes to most people's profits -- health, and what soldiers do is also justice, because it contributes to most people's profits, safeguarding our homelands. You may wonder that if country A has larger population than country B, then when country A sends soldiers to invade country B, country A is supposed to be justice, according to the definition I gave earlier. Here, you should realize that regardless of nationality, what soldiers doing is hard to say whether justice or not, but when we focus on a specific situation, soldiers' behaviors may be

injustice, and even according to my definition, it is always unjust to invade other countries. Soldiers themselves are just; however, their behaviors are not always just.

The reason is that when country A invades country B, citizens in both countries do not get any benefits. Citizens in country B will even lose some profits, their cities destroyed, themselves being displaced and their family members' passing. So during the invasion, country A is not on behalf of the profits of the majority, and at the same time it harms others' profits, so country A is in an injustice position. It should be noted that I am not saying soldiers of country A are unjust, but that the country's governor, and soldiers' behaviors are unjust, because the invasion is decided by the country government, not by the soldiers, and soldiers follow the orders just because of their identity. So, when we want to judge whether something or someone is justice or not, we should delve into the underlying factors or clearly find things or people of our judgment. Besides, we should also clarify who are the actual benefit groups, and we should not just simply compare the numbers of people, such as in the invasion example.

Part 4.1: Explanation to the first possible argument:

the relationship between laws and justice

Now, I think that it is necessary for me to clarify the relation between laws and justice. After reading the following parts of my paper, some people may ask that when I talk about the origin of justice, it seems that I actually discuss the origin of laws, so I think that it is necessary for me to explain. When I started talking about the origin and nature of justice, I mentioned that "making laws and covenants, and what the law commands they call just." Some of you may ask whether it means that laws also represent the justice, in other words, whether justice is always following laws. My answer is no. The reason is that law will always change, and as time passes, we have perfect laws. In the process, we have scrapped some old laws and established new laws, which means that laws do not always hold true. However, justice is eternal; it will always do what is in most people's profits. In fact, to a larger extent, the law represents fairness, not justice, so I can conclude that justice is not 100% represented by laws. Some of you may also

ask since laws are all made by people, so according to my previous discussions, the law makers are injustice, not the laws themselves. You are right, but you should realize that we also have natural laws, which are made by the nature. Some natural laws are definitely injustice, so at this time, we can conclude that those natural laws themselves are injustice since we cannot find the natural laws' builder.

Besides, when I was discussing the nature of justice, I did not mean that justice is in the service of the law, instead, the reason I mentioned what the law commanded they called just is that at the beginning, we do not have complex laws and covenants, therefore, law and justice are consistent. We can simply consider that laws and covenants protect nearly all profits of the majority, thus, I conclude that doing what laws command is justice.

Part 4.2: Explanation to the second possible argument:

whether justice is always right

Moreover, I also want to simply talk about another question, whether justice is always right. However, I want to first clarify one thing that the question which justice is right or wrong is actually not accurate. The most specific problem I post at here is whether justice can lead to morally bad outcomes, and I define morally bad outcomes in terms of wrong. I think it is really necessary for me to clarify this before I start the following arguments. Since this problem is really complex, I will only give my personal thought and simply talk about what Plato's idea on this problem.

For me, I think that it is possible for justice to be wrong, which means it leads to a bad outcome. It is true that my definition shows that justice is doing what is in most people's profits, but my definition never tells that most people's profits are always morally good. Many of Plato's objections against his interlocutors is such that their accounts lead to morally bad behavior. For example, during the discussion between him and Polemarchus, Plato seems make an assumption that according to Polemarchus, giving benefits to friend and doing harm to enemies is justice; however, if your friends are not good, then giving benefits to your friends will lead to morally bad, so since there is a conflict between an obviously true fact

and Polemarchus' idea, Polemarchus has to rebuild his arguments so that he can fix the conflict.

Similarly, in almost every discussion in book one and two, Plato argues his friends' thinking of justice by showing that according to their definition, justice will lead to bad outcomes so that his friends have to change their arguments. My definition will also have the same challenge, which may be provided by Plato, thus, I want to explain how I would response to him.

According to my definition, justice is connected to profits, so we can assume that doing justice is a choice, which we choose some profits and drop other profits. It seems that both kinds of profits can be considered as the morally good outcomes. Then, it is also possible for us to consider that dropping profits is a bad outcome, therefore, when we make the choice, we both have good outcomes, and bad outcomes. Thus, I think that it is possible for justice to get morally bad outcomes, and whether the justice is good or not depends on whether we get more than lost. Above all, I think that those are my responses to Plato's challenge.

Part 4.3: Argument to Plato:

where we put justice

Before I finish my discussion, I want to analyze the main differences between Plato's view and mine. For Plato, he considers that justice itself is the end, which means people do justice both because of itself and because of what comes from it(R. 357d+). However, I think that justice is just a process. We do justice not because of itself, but because of its outcomes. To argue with Plato, and support my idea, let us think this question that when we are born, do we have any ideas or appearances for what is justice and what is injustice? Obviously, the answer is no. So how and when do we start knowing what is justice and injustice? I think that our parents, teachers, and any other society members teach us doing what kinds of things is justice, and what kinds of things is injustice. And we should also admit that during the teaching processes, they also show expectations for us that we should do justice, and we are actually affected by their expectations. So, what I think about the reason why we do justice is because we hope to get their

response by doing justice, which means that we expect an outcome. At here, I just give a basic idea on how to response to Plato, I may explain this idea with more details in other paper, so that I will have enough place to list everything.

I think until now, it is possible for us to have a conclusion that we do justice because of what comes from it. And then, I want to explain why we do justice do justice both because of itself is not the necessary condition. As I mention before, our parents, and teachers teach us what is justice, and what is injustice. Our understandings are all comes from others, which means that we do not have a completely independent thinking about justice. Even if we grow elder enough to have our own thinking, it is more like we are using the conclusion to deduce the premise, justice itself is the premise, and what comes from it is the conclusion. It may be correct, but not necessary for us.

Above all, I have already clearly defined justice and respond to some possible doubts to my definition. I am aware my argument is not finished, and there may be some other questions that can potentially challenge my argument for example. Maybe I will have more other articles to supplement this paper, but I do not want to include more arguments in this paper. This paper is long enough to be ended, so let this paper end here for the time being.

Reference

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