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### The Problem of Justice

Plato's Republic addresses the natural conflict between the desire to be unjust and the necessity of justice for a community to function. This conflict is shown primarily through Socrates' discussion with Glaucon. Plato makes it clear to the reader that Glaucon is secretly tempted to be a tyrant, and wants Socrates to persuade him against this. Glaucon states, "All those who practice [justice] do so unwillingly, as necessary but not good...the life of the unjust man is, after all, far better than the just man, as they say" (358c). He continues by requesting that Socrates be the one to prove justice's superiority. After all, acting unjustly often proves to be more advantageous for a person given that they avoid punishment. So, how can a city of people be prevented from practicing injustice? Socrates proposes that the following education would mold citizens' beliefs in such a way that they would prefer justice to injustice.

One of the foundational aspects of this education is the censorship of stories that promote acting unjustly, cowardly, or otherwise poorly. Socrates describes how this would affect the development of character, "We'll persuade nurses and mothers to tell the approved tales to their children and to shape their souls with tales more than their bodies with hands" (377c). He maintains that to raise a city of courageous, good people they can only tell stories where people are courageous and good or being punished for not acting so. To accomplish this, they must suppress the idea that something can be both good and bad. If the citizens believe that to act unjustly would be impossible without themselves being corrupted, they will be thus motivated to

always act decently. This censorship holds another use in that by changing the narrative surrounding death, soldiers could be made to act more courageously. Socrates comments on current depictions of death, “‘It’s not that they are not poetic and sweet for the many to hear, but the more poetic they are, the less should they be heard by boys and men who must be free and accustomed to fearing slavery more than death’” (387b). If soldiers have no reason to fear death, they have no reason to act cowardly in battle. By creating an army full of such soldiers, the city would be that much more effectively protected. The cultivation of these stories will create a city of people fully prepared to perform their duty for the common good of the city.

To better convince the citizens of their purpose and to create a stronger bond between them, Socrates introduces The Noble Lie. Once they had been given their education, the founders would wipe their memories and tell them that they had been born from the earth as they are. Socrates describes, “‘And now, as though the land they are in were a mother and nurse, they must plan for and defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth’” (414e). This is yet another way to protect the city and prevent conflict within its walls. If the citizens are convinced that the earth is their mother, they possess a stronger love for and desire to protect it. But if all citizens are born equal from the earth, why are some preferred for certain roles over others? Socrates continues the lie, “‘All of you in the city are certainly brothers...but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; and iron and bronze in the farmers and the other craftsman’” (415a). This statement enforces a rigid class system that ensures all roles in the city are filled and avoids leadership disputes. The belief that everyone is made for certain roles would serve to keep citizens satisfied and less likely to revolt against their leaders.

Socrates emphasizes that for each to best perform their function they must be kept from interfering with each other. Or, in simpler terms, each must avoid “being a busybody.” He relates this to how the soul functions, proposing that each soul is made up of three distinct parts that work as one despite their sometimes opposing natures. This relates to the Noble Lie, as the existence of separate parts implies that each has its own purpose. From 439e to 440a, Socrates tells the story of Leontius. Initially, Leontius tries to avert his eyes from the executions. Eventually, his morbid fascination wins over and he allows himself to look at the bodies, criticizing his eyes and telling them to “drink their fill” as if they had desires removed from his own. If the factions of a man’s soul can conflict in this way, then such disagreements would naturally occur in a city. These separate parts, however, can be persuaded to work together when in pursuit of a common good. Socrates describes, ““Now let no one catch us unprepared...and cause a disturbance, alleging that no one desires drink, but good drink, nor food, but good food; for everyone, after all, desires good things”” (438a). We avoid excessive dissent through our innate pursuit of what will grant us a healthy, happy life. All parts of a man’s soul pursue what is best for himself. All parts of a city pursue what is best for the city. This relates to the Band of Thieves argument (351c), as even a group of thieves must act justly towards each other to pursue their common goal. While each may wish to steal from the others, they understand that there is more to gain by working together and thus act justly towards each other. Socrates says, ““Isn’t [a single man] moderate because of the friendship and accord of these parts—when the ruling part and the two ruled parts are of the single opinion that the calculating part ought to rule and don’t raise faction against it?”” (442c). The proposed city places every person in their natural vocation, meaning everyone should be thus satisfied and have no temptation to upset this system. And so, Socrates determines that through education they can create a city of people so convinced

of their brotherhood, individual duties, and the common good that it may never occur to them to act unjustly.

However, the measures taken concerning censorship may promote the very behaviors it seeks to prevent. By removing complexity from its stories, the city fails to prepare its citizens for the real world. Reality is not so black and white. Rather, stories highlighting a character's flaws serve as cautionary tales and intriguing character studies to help better understand the human condition. Chiefly, the proposed edits to the *Illiad* by Homer oversimplify the story of Achilles and rob the text of its meaning. Socrates asserts, ““And we’ll not let our men believe that Achilles...was so full of confusion as to contain within himself two diseases that are opposite to one another—illiberality accompanying love of money, on the one hand, and arrogant disdain for gods and human beings, on the other”” (391b-c). To take away Achilles' flaws (his pride and grief) leaves an empty symbol of courage that fails to explain his motivations. The founders cannot expect to raise a truly courageous army if they do not teach the soldiers to come to terms with their fears and the risks that they take.

The insistence that every person is meant for a certain job from birth makes crucial false assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that every person has a single job that they are meant for, which becomes especially dire in relation to the city's rule. If we assume that someone is born to be a leader, then we ignore the simple fact that leaders are made by circumstance and study. No one is necessarily “born to lead”. In addition, this proposal wrongly assumes that each person's skill is something that would contribute to the city, or that people's callings would naturally fill every role. Socrates states, ““And in the same way, to each one of the others we assigned one thing, the one for which his nature fitted him, at which he was to work throughout his life, exempt from the other tasks, not letting the crucial moments pass, and thus doing a fine job”” (374b-c). This

would assume that everyone wants to be exempt from other tasks. In reality, many people find joy in pursuing a variety of skills. These pursuits, however, would have no place in the “perfect city”.

In summary, one of the vital problems of justice is persuading people to act justly when, at first glance, injustice much better satisfies private pursuits of wealth and influence. Socrates proposes that through the methods of education described, citizens would be able to act justly both in their community and in their separate functions. However, these proposals make assumptions and fail to account for the complexity of humans and their circumstances. By poorly preparing these citizens for the complexity of human life, they leave them vulnerable to the temptation to act unjustly.