

PHIL 321
Lecture 9: Plato's *Republic*, Books I and II
9/26/2013

For Board

Why would someone doubt whether Socrates' main method of philosophical discussion, the elenchus, could make philosophical progress?

"Do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? Do you think that is possible?"

Book 1: Conventional views of justice

Cephalus: Justice is telling the truth and returning what one owes (331)

Polemarchus: Justice is doing good to one's friends and harm to one's enemies (332)

Thrasymachus: Justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c)

- [A] "the stronger" = the established power in a community, or ruler
- [B] Being just = serving the good of another person or class, as defined in [A]
 - As such, T claims justice is actually harmful to oneself
- [C] Being unjust = serving one's self, *either* as a citizen by not performing [B] actions, *or* as a ruler or tyrant by setting up the standards of justice for others, but ignoring them oneself (343-44)

Justice is, in fact, a vice—i.e. it is unprofitable to the agent to be just; injustice is, in fact, a virtue—i.e. it is profitable to the agent to be just (348)

- Remember the background notion that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the goal in life and that virtue is supposed to contribute to/ensure the attainment of that goal

The perfectly unjust person would, if he/she were clever, courageous, etc. be happy

The reaction of S and the other interlocutors indicates that T's claims go against the generally received view, but are there elements of his claims that are widely accepted?

Almost looks like it's going to be another standard Socratic dialogue—at 354b S regrets having investigated features of justice before determining what justice is

Division of goods (Book II, 357)

Kind of good

- [1] Good for own sake only
- [2] Good for own sake and consequences

Examples

- Joy, harmless pleasures
- Knowing, seeing, being healthy

[3] Good for consequences only Physical training, medicine, making money

One of the central questions of the dialogue, “What kind of good is justice?”

- None of these senses = T's view in Book I
- Sense [3] = As Glaucon argues in Book II (although note that G says he himself isn't persuaded by the argument but wants to hear S's response to it)
- Sense [2] = Socrates

Glaucon

Origin of justice: A contract produces laws that are mutually beneficial

- Doing injustice is naturally good & suffering injustice is naturally bad (in which sense of good?)
- Pre-contract justice/injustice = force applied to property or person
- Justification of contract: I act justly I act unjustly
 You act justly 2 1
 You act unjustly 4 3
 - The situation in which we both act unjustly is worse than when we both act justly because the cost of suffering injustice outweighs the benefits of acting unjustly oneself

Justice is practiced unwillingly—i.e. is only good in sense [3] (or, at least, people think it's good in sense [3])

- Proof: Gyges' ring—supposed to show that if the consequences of justice were attainable for an agent without justice, and if the outcome of this were better than the outcome when the agent is just, the agent would have better justification for acting unjustly than justly
 - Two assumptions: i) the consequences of others' acting justly are beneficial
 ii) happiness is an independent criterion by which we can judge which outcome is better for the agent

Injustice is in fact better than justice for the agent

- G argues that a comparison of justice without its consequences and of injustice without its consequences would show not just that injustice is better justified, but that justice without its consequences has no value—i.e. doesn't contribute to happiness and so is not a good in sense [1] or [2]

Socrates

S wants to show that justice is good for its own sake, even without its consequences

He also wants to show that justice is better than any other combination of goods without it [**THE JUST MAN ON THE RACK IS HAPPIER THAN THE UNJUST MAN WITH THE GREATEST RICHES**]

- Are either of these necessary to support a reasonable theory of justice?

S sets out to argue:

- [X] Inter-personal justice is strictly analogous to and causally dependent on intra-personal justice. So, by examining the nature of political justice, S thinks he can show:
- [Y] Intra-personal justice is a state of character which is both intrinsically good and a necessary condition for any kind of ordered life, and hence for happiness, AND
- [Z] Intra-personal justice is a dominant constituent of happiness itself, and hence happiness cannot be specified or achieved independently of it, and justice is better for the agent than any combination of goods without it

[X]-[Z] are problematic. Is it reasonable to *define* happiness by reference to the virtues? What relation is there between justice in a city and an individual? Why think that “psychic justice” would produce recognizably just acts?