

PHIL 321
Lecture 10: Plato's *Republic*, Books III and IV

10/1/2013

Context of the tri-partition argument

The city has three “kinds” or “classes” of people in it: workers (money-lovers), guardians (honor-lovers), and rulers (wisdom-lovers). They have the distinct functions of: producing, guarding, and ruling respectively.

Some of the city's virtues are “located” in its parts: *wisdom* in rulers, *courage* in guardians. Some consist in a certain relation “between” its parts: *temperance* is a certain concord between workers and rulers. *Justice* consists in *each part* performing its proper function.

If the city is a good model for the individual, both should have three “parts” with distinct functions.

The three kinds of desires or faculties in the *Republic*

Appetite: Desires for food, drink, sex, etc. These are “physiological” desires (439)

Spirit: Emotions of anger, self-disgust, shame and desires for honor or respect (440-41)

Reason: Rational desires are for the overall good or good of the whole (441e)

Either we always “go for” things with part of the soul *or* the whole soul—e.g. we learn with one part of it, get angry with another, and desire pleasures of food with a third (436a).

Argument for one non-rational part (i.e. the appetitive part)

[P1] **Principle of Opposites:** A thing cannot undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time (436b-37a)

[P2] Going (assent, wishing) for X and rejecting (dissent, not wishing for) X, are opposites

[P3] The desire for a drink is an unqualified desire ≠ the qualified desire for a good drink

[P3.i] Thirst *as such* is a desire for drink *as such* (437b-39a)

[P3.ii] Unqualified desires are for unqualified objects

[P4] Sometimes we have a desire for drink, but choose not to drink

[P5] Having this desire to drink and not wanting to drink are opposites

[C] So there are two “things” in the person involved in this event—one thing is the proper subject of the desire to drink, a *distinct* thing is the proper subject of the rejection of drink

The former is a motivation generated by appetite, the latter by reason

Arguments for a second non-rational part (i.e. the spirited part)

[1] **Spirit is distinct from appetite (439e-40)**

Evidence: Leontius—wants to look at corpses and does, but is angry with himself

[2] **Spirit is distinct from reason (440e-41)**

Evidence 1: Children and animals do not have reason but do act contrary to their appetites

Evidence 2: Odysseus—wants to take vengeance on his unfaithful servants, but is restrained by reason

[3] Spirit is “allied” with reason (440)

Evidence: The cases of a good person undergoing just and unjust punishment

***Akrasia* (lack of self-control) on this theory**

S here seems to allow, against the view presented in the *Protagoras*, that lack of self-control is possible

X does B, i) *thinking* B is bad, ii) when able not to do B, and iii) overwhelmed by pleasure

- In the *Protagoras* S maintained that in such cases it is actually a judgment that B is the best course of action that causes X to do B (so “being overcome by passion” does not, in fact, occur)
- In the *Republic*, S maintains that in such a case the judgment of the rational part of the soul (i.e. a rational desire) is overcome by the non-rational appetitive desire of the soul

Question: On the *Republic*'s theory, is *akrasia* possible when X knows that B is bad, or only when X *merely believes* that B is bad?

Justice

Given the tri-partition of the soul, and the city-soul analogy, S maintains that justice is the harmonious functioning of the three parts of the soul, with each part fulfilling its proper “function” or “work”:

- Reason rules, making judgments about the overall good for the person
- Spirit and appetite “obey” reason in the sense that they only desire things that, in fact, accord with reason's determinations about what is good overall
 - Spirit and appetite, however, *do not* do this because they can judge what is best, or because they can judge that reason “knows best,” or because they can judge anything at all (they are *non-rational*—they cannot grasp reasons)
 - They do it because they have been trained or conditioned only to generate such desires

So, only the just person's soul is genuinely unified, with no internal conflicts. This is why G agrees that it is always better to be just than unjust (although S himself says that the argument is not done)

Problems

[P3] makes a logical point about qualified and unqualified things: how could this show that we actually have non-rational desires?

It may be possible to re-describe [P4] along the lines of the view presented by Socrates in the *Protagoras* as conflict between non-simultaneous rational beliefs

Does [P1] entail indefinite partition of the soul if two desires of a single soul part can conflict with each other?

What does justice, in the sense described above, have to do with justice as G & A were discussing it at the beginning of Book II? Has S changed the subject?