

# Plato's republic: three parts of the soul

[Law](#), [Justice](#)



Plato's Republic: Three Parts of the Soul In his book *The Republic*, Plato searches for justice within the individual and what makes a person just. By comparing his sense of what is just at a political level and what is just at a psychological level he proposes three virtues of the individual which will make that particular person just. The virtues are of wisdom, courage and moderation. A just man won't differ at all from a just city in respect to the form of justice; rather he'll be like the city (*Republic* 435b). Once Plato has found justice within the city he seeks to transfer it back into the human soul. Plato talks about the ability of a person to be indecisive about actions such as drinking when something in their soul forbids them to do so even if they desire it. This indecisiveness can be transformed into internal conflict between more than one part of the soul. One part of the soul is the rational part and the part that lusts, hungers, thirsts and gets excited is the appetitive part (439d). Plato then identifies a third part of the soul, the spirited part, which is used to create emotions. Appetite is a really big part of our souls. It contains both necessary desires, which should be indulged (such as the desire to eat enough to stay alive) and unnecessary desires, which should be limited (such as the desire to eat your entire birthday cake). Though the appetite lusts after many things, Plato says it's money-loving, since money is required for satisfying most of these desires. It is therefore obvious to Plato that the rational part of the soul should rule, as the rulers in the city do, because they both display the virtue of wisdom and can therefore exercise foresight on behalf of the entire soul. (441e) Similarly, just as the guardians assist the rulers in maintaining justice within the city, the spirited part of the soul will use emotions in order to maintain order and

harmony within the soul which is justice. These two parts of the soul will be able to control its appetitive part, which may, through its insatiable desire for money, attempt to overthrow its particular role and rule over the body and eventually the classes that it is not naturally suited to rule over (442a). Consequently, justice in the individual and justice in the city would be overturned leading to chaos and war. The rulers and guardians exist in order to control and direct the producers who are the majority of the population, as the rational and spirited parts of the soul rule the desires of the individual. Therefore a just person would be one with a spirited part of the soul that would persevere through pleasures and pains in order to carry out the rational part's intentions on what should be feared and what should not (442b). This ability is identifiable as the virtue of courage, which is evident in the guardians. Moreover, this pattern of parallel virtues between the city and the soul continues as a person's reason is most able to make decisions about what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul when he/she has the knowledge associated with wisdom. As a result the desires should be kept in a state of moderation by the rational part of the soul so that the ruler and the ruled both agree that the rational part should rule and not engage in civil war (442c). In conclusion, justice in the individual is similar to justice within the city where a person puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale (443d). In the city, justice is obtained by the three parts of society each fulfilling their role as best they can, and displaying the same three virtues of wisdom, courage and moderation. This leads to a harmony between the parts, the best possible combination, which is described as justice by Plato

both within the city and within the soul. This should be obvious as; after all, a city is made up of many individuals. The harmonious or rightly ordered soul, then, is one which practices the virtues of each part. The virtue of the appetites is moderation; the virtue of the spirit is courage; the virtue of the intellect is wisdom. Through these virtues the human soul attains a certain concord or integrity, which Plato understood as the only real happiness worthy of the name. The overall purpose of the Republic is for Plato to understand what makes people happy. He discovers this through the process of dividing the soul up and seeing how they work together. Ultimately, if you live a just life you live a life of wisdom and your rational side comes first. If you live an unjust life you live your life by honor, victory, or money. Most men and women living unjust lives have a one-track mind. They forget their other priorities and doing what's right just so they get what they want. Just people always beat and unjust person and live a happier and fuller life. His separation of the soul is very simplistic altogether. However, his individual ideas were very complex. Plato wanted us to to think for ourselves to discover how we decide to arrange our parts of the soul.