

Plato republic: socrates on justice in the soul



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Plato Republic: Socrates on Justice in the Soul

In the book Plato's *Republic*, Socrates, who is the narrator of the book, argues and comes to a conclusion (in Book Four) that being a just person is desirable in itself and profitable for the individual. However, before Socrates can come to this conclusion of being a just person, Glaucon, who is acting as devil's advocate, challenges Socrates to give a more convincing argument. In Book Two of Plato's *Republic*, Glaucon argues that most people prefer not to be just and that people are only just because of their consequences.

Socrates accepts Glaucon's challenge and develops an account of justice according to which justice is the virtue of the soul. In this paper, I will explain the account of justice that Socrates develops in Books Two through Four of the *Republic*, as well as how the account works as a response to Glaucon's challenge. Before I turn to Socrates account of justice, I must explain Glaucon's challenge in greater detail, beginning with his distinction between the three kinds of good.

In Book Two, Glaucon introduces that there is a distinction between three different kinds of good. The first kind of good is saying that people are doing things just for their own sake and not because they lead to something else. Glaucon put it as "we welcome it for its own sake- enjoying, for example, and all the harmless pleasures from which nothing results afterward beyond enjoying them,"(357b5). The second kind of good that Glaucon explains is that doing good for its own sake and for the sake of its consequences. For example, that of being healthy would be valuable for its own sake and also as well as the good that can be generated for being healthy. The last kind of good is doing something only for the sake of its consequences. This means

that people will do something that is undesirable due to the fact it can generate good outcomes and consequences. Glaucon explain each of these kinds of goods to Socrates, in which Socrates agrees that these all exist. Glaucon argues that most people would only do good for the sake of their consequences, which challenges Socrates's claim that the kind of good justice is welcome for their sake and because of the sake of their consequences.

Throughout Book Two, Glaucon's argues for why he thinks that justice belongs within the third kind of good. To do this Glaucon plays devil's advocate by giving reasons to favor injustice rather than justice with three main arguments for his challenge which includes: natural origins of justice, Rings of Gyges, and extreme cases. The natural origins of justice follow the account that people do it unwillingly, " because they lack the power to do injustice"(359c). The argument of the natural origins of justice is a compromise, with justice as a rational reconstruction to a social contract. The formation of a social contract, for the benefit of certainty and ease, is to avoid the badness of suffering injustice. There is an imbalance between the goodness of doing injustice and the badness of suffering injustice. The next argument that is made is using the story of the Rings of Gyges which make people invisible. Glaucon argues that if given two rings, that make people invisible, were given to one just person and one unjust person then both people would stay on the path of injustice. This argument is based on the idea that if there were no consequences of being unjust then people would continue on this path, and prefer it because it is more profitable. The last of his arguments in challenging Socrates is that of the extreme cases which try

to “ separate the most just from the most unjust” to determine what kind of good justice is. This argument is specifically challenging for Socrates because now he has to show not only that being a just person is its own reward but that it is better than what injustice could provide.

In response to Glaucon’s challenge, Socrates develops an account of justice according to which justice is the virtue of the soul. But, before I can explain how he does that there needs to be a concrete definition of what a function and virtue are in this context. A function is something that everything has which it alone can do or it alone does better than everything else. In order to describe this Socrates asks what the function of eyes and ears are; they’d be to see and to hear. The virtue of a thing is the property that makes it perform its function well. So, in the instance of ears, “ if ears are deprived of their own virtue, they too perform their function badly[?]” (353c10). With these definitions in mind, Socrates develops the idea that the function of the soul is living and the virtue of the soul is justice. That if the soul is functioning the way it needs to be then it won’t be deprived of its virtue, justice. In order to understand why Socrates thinks that justice is the virtue of the soul, I must explain Socrates’s account of the soul.

According to Socrates, the soul has three parts, appetite, rational, and spirit. This claim, however, is not obvious, so Socrates must argue for it. To divide the soul into having three parts there needs to be a general consensus about how the soul operates as parts and as a whole. This account is talked about more in order to get a clear agreement so that there will be no challenges later on. A situation is set up where a person is standing still but moving their arms at the same time. This person whose moving his arms and staying

<https://assignbuster.com/plato-republic-socrates-on-justice-in-the-soul/>

still at the same time is not seen as oppositional but instead is seen as two distinct parts. It has been established from this situation that opposites can never exist at the same time, nor in the same thing. The soul can come in conflict with itself and become contradictory as well. This leads to the conclusion that there are different parts of the soul.

Having explained why Socrates thinks the soul has three distinct parts, I will now explain each of them in turn. The first part of the soul is its appetite. This part of the soul is in control of the irrational and desiring things people feel. The soul's appetite is that of the physical needs of the body, including passion, hunger, and thirst. The appetite's function is to provide the body with what it needs in order to survive and flourish. The virtue, in turn, would be temperance meaning that it is the willingness to defer from what reason (the second part of the soul) decrees. To explain this better Socrates sets up a situation where a person has the desire to drink and has nothing else but this desire. He continues with this situation saying that some people are unwilling to drink even when they are thirsty. Drawing a conclusion "that there are two different elements, different from one another[;]...one with which it feels passion, hunger, thirst, and is stirred by other appetites, the irrational and appetitive element,"(439d5).

The soul's second part is that of reason. A person's soul is a rational and calculating thing that holds people back from their desires. The way that Socrates explains this is with the use of the same example as mentioned before, a person who desires to drink but is unwilling to do so. There is an element of the soul that is "stopping them- something different that masters the one doing the urging[?]." and it comes about through rational

calculation (439c5). The thing that stops the person from drinking the water is the fear of catching a disease. The function of the reasoning part of the soul is to make a decision for the person as a whole being while also implementing rules. That makes the virtue of this part of the soul be wisdom. This part of the soul works together with the spirit of the soul, showing it the most rational way to get things done.

The last part of the soul that Socrates comes to the conclusion of is that of the spirit. In order to come to this distinct part of the soul, Socrates has to make sure that it did not fall into any of the other categories. That is to say, should the spirited part of the soul be seen within the aspects of reason or appetite instead of having its own part. Socrates believes that most people would consider anger within the category of the spirit, and that anger is an irrational and desiring part of the soul. However, Socrates says that people get angry at themselves for doing things they know they shouldn't meaning that anger can be both calculated and rational. As it was established before opposites can never exist at the same time, nor in the same thing. In addition to this, Glaucon adds that the spirit appears very common among children even if neither of the other parts is there. So with these developments, the spirit must be its own distinct part of the soul. The spirit's function within the soul is to protect the person from external and internal threats and to also enforce the order of reason and rational part of the soul. This meaning that the virtue the spirit held within the soul is courage. The spirit of the soul is are supposed to fall under the rule of reason to help keep the appetite under control.

I have been explaining Socrates's account of the soul to help make sense of Socrates's claim that justice is the virtue of the soul. According to Socrates, justice will arise when the three parts of the soul are working together and are in harmony. If all the parts of the soul work together and do their own part without interfering with one another then we have a just person. That is to say that the reason part of the soul should rule over since it is wise while having the spirited part of the soul obey it in order to keep the strongest part of the soul, the appetite, from ruling the others. Justice is within the person, what is on the inside and what is their own. They are not swayed to busy themselves unduly with something that is not their concern and continue with doing their jobs. Having these three parts of the soul work together seamlessly to where it becomes one, "temperate and harmonious", which is desirable for its own sake(443d5). This, also, helps explain why having a just character is desirable for its own sake. Once the person has reached this harmony, they may use actions over the unjust which destroys this harmony. An unjust person is that of which there is no harmony and one where the parts of the soul are interfering with one another's job. Socrates takes into account that having healthy actions ensure health and unhealthy ones disease making the connection between having just actions ensure justice and unjust ones injustice. To produce health is to have the body in its natural relations and for justice to be produced it needs to also be in its "natural relation of mastering and being mastered by one another," (444d10). So, health is the fulfillment of the body's nature and justice is the fulfillment of the soul's nature.

Understanding justice as the virtue of the soul helps us understand why Glaucon is convinced by the end of Book Four that it is more profitable to be just than unjust. Socrates comes to the conclusion that justice is a healthy condition of the soul that is more profitable than any of the goods that can come from the actions of being unjust. Life is not worth living if one's soul is in the turmoil and chaos, the side effects of injustice. The soul allows us to have meaningful lives, and the action of living unjustly ruins the soul.

Works Cited

- Plato. *Plato Republic* . Translated by C. D. C. Reeve, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004.