

Greek philosophy the nature of justice philosophy essay



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The Republic is seen as Plato's masterpiece. The ten book vigorous work begins with the search for the nature of justice through Socratic dialogue and continues onto an extended discussion of the virtues, or arête of justice both within the individual and society as a whole. The ideal state is used as an allegory by Plato to prove his argument of the inherent good of justice. If Plato can find justice within the city and prove that the individual is only a smaller version of the city then he will have found the form of justice. This essay will discuss Plato's description of the Ideal State arguing if this is consistent with his own definitions of social and personal justice.

Book II of the Republic introduces an extended analogy between the justice of individual human beings and that of an entire city state; since the crucial elements of justice may be better viewed on a large scale. " Perhaps then there is more justice in the larger thing, and it will be easier to learn what it is...let's first find out what justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual, observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger." (369a) Plato's vision of the Ideal state covers a range of topics including the social, educational, psychological, moral, and philosophical aspects of the republic.

To begin, Plato provides us with a detailed analysis of the formation, structure and organisation of the ideal state. There are three categories of citizens within the ideal city each with distinct natures and capacities; Guardians and philosopher-kings, auxiliaries and artisans, each of whom possessed distinct natures and capacities. The Guardians are the leaders of the state and must be philosophers. They are to arrange the life of the state and determine the principles of education therefore they must have

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knowledge of what is truly good. The auxiliaries are the warriors and are devoted exclusively to the conduct of war. They must be well educated, courageous and intellectually gifted as they must know who the true enemies of the state are. And artisans are a variety of different craftsmen whom are destined to produce material goods. Plato proposes that each person within his city has a defined role, based upon his nature, because a city benefits more “ if each person does one thing for which he is naturally suited” (370c) as opposed to performing many different things. Plato asserts that each person is happiest performing his naturally defined role and that in doing so they will make the whole city as happy. “...we aren’t aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so...” (420b).

Plato’s Theory of education was a crucial necessity. It was a positive solution for the operation of justice in the ideal state, which is why Plato places great value on education. Plato had a complex system of education designed to place everyone in the class to which they were best suited. The first of these five levels of education went from early youth to the age eighteen and consisted of training in the arts and physical training. Those individuals who weren’t suited to continue to the second level of education became members of the ‘ bronze class’; artisans. The second level consisted of physical and military training until the age of twenty. Those who did not continue to the next stage became part of the ‘ silver class’; military soldiers. Only those who completed the fifth stage of education concluding at the age of fifty became a ruler in the ‘ gold class’. Therefore, Plato’s ideal state is created to ensure that every individual is placed in their proper role and that

each class maintains its proper social role, thus there is balance and harmony throughout the state (Gosling: 1973). Plato has now created a city designed with distinctive and educated classes where the search for justice can now begin.

Social Justice

Definition: Justice is doing one's own (369e) whereby everyone practices one of the occupations in the city for which he is naturally best suited (433a).

Plato believes that the principle of specialization leads to a stratified society. By comprising three classes of individuals, Plato maintained that the proper functions performed by its disparate classes, working together for the common good, provide a ready account of the need to develop significant social qualities or virtues: these are wisdom, courage and temperance.

Wisdom: The wisdom of the State resides in the small class of rulers or Guardians, since the rulers are responsible for making decisions according to which the entire city will be governed

Courage: The courage of the State resides in the Auxiliaries. Soldiers charged with the defence of the city against external and internal enemies need courage to carry out their orders in the face of danger without regard for personal risk.

Temperance (moderation): The temperance of the State consists in the due subordination of the subordination of personal desires to a higher purpose. The remaining individuals in the city must follow its leaders instead of pursuing their private interests.

I believe Plato's definition of social justice to be consistent with the description portrayed within the ideal city. Plato provides 'evidence' of this justice by saying "this is what was left over in the city when moderation, courage and wisdom have been found... Justice is what would be left over when we found the other three." (433b-c). Plato has provided us with an ideal city containing wisdom, courage and temperance (as noted in the characteristics above) hence social justice is evident.

Nicholas D. Smith too agrees that Plato's definition of social justice is consistent with the description of the ideal city. Smith (1979) explains that Socrates and Glaucon had agreed all along that justice is that virtue of the state that allows for courage, wisdom and temperance to come into being in the state. What affects these three virtues is everyone doing his own. Therefore "...the having and doing of one's own would be accepted as justice." (434a).

Kamtekar however disagrees by arguing Plato's conception of social justice is contradicted by Plato's principle of happiness. Plato's principle of happiness requires the city to aim at the happiness of all the citizens. Kamtekar sees this as problematic due to Plato's principle of social justice involving the distribution of goods; specifically that doing one's own work "entitles one to those goods required for one's work and, more importantly, is itself one's most important good." (Kamtekar: 2001) Plato does not regard work as a good. Therefore Plato's principle of social justice "guarantees only the production of the greatest goods; to ensure that these goods are distributed so as to maximize the happiness of the whole city." (Kamtekar: 2001).

The question we are answering however is if this definition of social justice is consistent with the description of Plato's ideal state, not whether we should accept it. Given that Platonic social justice requires an end to private property (416d-17b) and to the biological and patriarchal family (457b-61e) for the upper classes, I don't think we should accept this version of justice, however in this fictional ideal state Plato makes it work.

Personal Justice

Definition: Justice is each of the three parts of the soul performing appropriately. "...each one of us whom each part is doing its own work will himself be just and do his own." (441e).

One of the great advantages of Plato's theory of education described previously is that it aims at the harmonious development of human personality. Each part of the state represents another part of the balance in the tripartite division of the soul required for justice. Justice in the state is analogous to justice in the individual. Human beings according to Plato contain three elements; Appetite, spirit and reason.

Appetite: is the largest aspect of the soul. In a just man, the appetite is strictly controlled by reason and that which causes you to be spirited (SparkNotes Editors, 2002). Artisans are dominated by their appetites or desires, and therefore are destined to produce material.

Spirit: is responsible for our feelings of anger. It is the source of our desire for honour and victory. In a just soul, spirit acts as ruler to reason, ensuring that appetite adheres to reason's commands (SparkNotes Editors, 2002).

Auxiliaries, a class of guardians, were ruled by spirit in their souls and possessed the courage necessary to protect the state from invasion.

Reason: In the just man, the entire soul is ruled by reason, and strives to fulfil reason's desires. It searches for truth and philosophic desire (SparkNotes Editors, 2002). Philosopher-kings, the leaders of the ideal state, had souls in which reason reigned over spirit and appetite, and as a result possessed the foresight and knowledge to rule wisely.

So, an individual is just when each part of his or her soul performs its functions without interfering with those of other elements. (So too is a just society when all the classes and individuals in them perform their due functions in the proper way.) " And in truth justice...isn't concerned with someone doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own." (443d). However, a balanced soul does not mean a just soul for it is clear that the highest virtue of the good is necessary and only philosophers can reach that. Heinaman (1998) argues that in the case of psychic justice (justice of the soul) the emphasis is on each part of the soul doing its own, not having its own. " The part of the soul which is properly assigned the task of ruling one's life is reason. This deserves to rule because it alone possesses wisdom and looks to the good of the whole soul. (442c)" (Heinaman: 1998). In the just person, the task of ruling the soul is distributed according to merit; this is bronze, silver and gold. With respect to ruling, reason has all the merit and appetite has none. Appetite is the slave of reason in the just soul " The rebellious part [appetite] is by nature suited to be a slave (444b). In the ideal soul, the reasoning part and the feelings rule over the appetitive part. The rule of reason in this case implies that the <https://assignbuster.com/greek-philosophy-the-nature-of-justice-philosophy-essay/>

desire for knowledge must dominate over the desires of the other parts of the soul; for example desires for honour in the feeling part of the soul, or desires for wealth, sex or food in the appetitive part. This in turn implies that the philosopher exemplifies the perfect soul. Not all human beings have natures which enable them to become philosophers, but they approach this ideal of love for knowledge by aspiring to be ruled by philosophers.

Solomon says that in general, there cannot be either without the other in regards to social and personal justice in the ideal state. (Solomon: 1995) For Solomon, what ties the analogy together is the musical notion of harmony. “ The ideal city has perfect harmony between its various parts just as the healthy individual enjoys perfect harmony between his or her various faculties, mind and body, reason, emotion and desire.” (Solomon: 1995, p73-4). It is essential that people contribute to society, and of course they would be rewarded for their contribution. But when looking at the notion of merit, is it wrong to ask whether individuals contribute in order to be rewarded? If so, then we would have a perfect city that is the product of imperfect individuals working together and enjoying the successes appropriate to their roles and expectations; not just individuals. “ For Plato, the essence of justice is belonging to a well ordered and harmonious society and being the kind of person who makes possible such a society.” (Solomon: 1995). In this case, I have agreed that the definition of social justice is consistent with the ideal city, however argued that the city could possibly be made up of unjust individuals, where Solomon believes we cannot have one without the other.

What Plato means by justice is to live the good life. In the Republic, citizens must sacrifice individual justice; being ruled by reason, for the sake of
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political justice; to do one's duty, and only that. The individual good is to gain personal justice and lead a reflective life which is in harmony with political justice and requires each citizen to be just and reflective for the sake of the state. Furthermore, the Republic argues that the personally just man may live in the midst of an unjust state, have no duty, be despised by the community share in none of their goals, and not partaking in communal life, he may still be happy. Personal justice, without which a man cannot be happy, is in contradiction to public justice, as set forth in the Republic.

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