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Plato's *Republic* on the Good Life

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Philosophy

Stony Brook University

December 2008

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In this essay, I present a unified interpretation of the *Republic's* argument for the thesis that being just is better for us, in terms of our own happiness, than being unjust. My interpretation consists of exposition and exegesis, critical analysis, and argumentative evaluation, meaning that I attempt to discover which parts of the theory are more basic than the others, whether or not all the pieces cohere, and how strong the overall position is. Throughout the essay, I emphasize the stronger parts of Plato's moral theory but also pay due attention to crucial ambiguities and fallacies in the text. I conclude that, although Plato's argument as it stands may be rationally rejected, it is nonetheless tenable. I further conclude that the value of the *Republic* lies in its power to transmit to the reader an understanding of how precisely to think well about the good life.

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I. The Problem of the *Republic*

A. Initial Remarks

In the *Republic*, Plato attempts to show that being just is better for us, in terms of our own individual happiness, than being unjust and that, accordingly, acting justly is more choice-worthy than acting unjustly. In this essay, I want to both account for and evaluate Plato's arguments for this thesis. Much preparatory work needs to be done before an account and evaluation of the *Republic's* argument can be carried out adequately. Such work includes an elucidation of the problem of justice and the conceptual framework that it belongs to, a discussion of Plato's argument for the superiority of the unjust life and how it relates to the *Republic's* main argument, and a statement on what exactly the *Republic's* conclusion asserts.

B. Virtue and Happiness

Similar in structure and spirit to the Socratic dialogues, Book I of the *Republic* begins as an inquiry into what justice is. However, with the introduction of Thrasymachus' views on justice, the search for an adequate account of justice leads into an investigation of whether justice is a genuine virtue or not. Of

course, in any ordinary discourse, the claim that justice is a virtue will most likely be taken as self-evidently true. Since this is so, we need to see why this self-evidence breaks down in Book I of the *Republic*. At the most basic level, it is because the connection between being just and being happy becomes a matter of dispute (348c). Thus, Socrates and Thrasymachus, in their opposition concerning whether justice is a genuine virtue or not, both assume that genuine virtues have an essential connection with the happiness of their possessors. This is shown explicitly in Socrates' account of virtue presented later in the same book.

Speaking with Thrasymachus, Socrates affirms that “the work or function of a horse, or anything else, would either be what one can alone do with it, or best do with it” (352e).¹ A little later, Socrates says, “[T]here is also an excellence or virtue for each thing to which a function has been appointed” (353b). Finally, he says, “[T]hings will perform their own work well by their own peculiar virtue, badly by their vice” (353c). These passages, taken together, contain an implicit procedure for identifying the virtues and vices of functioning things. In outline, we can identify the virtues and vices of a thing by noting what function it has, what it is for that thing to function well and badly, and then asking what features the thing has which make it function well or badly. These features will be its virtues and vices respectively. For example, the function of a blade is to cut,

¹ Plato, *Republic*, trans. R.E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). All quotes of the *Republic* are from Allen's translation.

since we can cut best with blades. So, for a blade to function well is for it to cut well. Since a blade cuts well by being sharp, being sharp is a virtue of a blade, and since a blade cuts badly by being dull, being dull is a vice of a blade.

After implying the aforementioned strategy for identifying virtues and vices, Socrates claims that the soul has certain functions, namely living, exercising care and concern, ruling, deliberating, and “all that sort of thing” (353d). It seems obvious that exercising care and concern, ruling, and deliberating are all parts of what it is for a human soul to live: that living is the broadest function of the soul that includes all other functions. So, since living is the overall function of a soul, and a soul may live well or poorly, there must be virtues and vices of a soul as those attributes of a soul that condition whether it lives well or poorly. If, as Socrates says, a thing performs its function well on account of its virtues and badly on account of its vices, then human souls live well on account of being virtuous and badly on account of being vicious. But, living well is essentially the same as being happy (354a). So, if human souls live well by being virtuous and live poorly by being vicious, then humans are happy by being virtuous and miserable or wretched by being vicious.

If we look at this passage in isolation, virtue seems to be defined as a condition or feature of a thing that determines whether that thing performs its function well or not. But, on reflection, if virtue is being defined in such a way, it would seem in need of qualification. We may think, in response to this definition

of virtue, both that any definition of virtue should exclude anything being called virtuous which is a paradigm case of wickedness and that this definition fails to exclude all such cases. From this perspective, the basic problem is that virtue is something morally good, and to define virtue as a feature related to the proper functioning of a thing is to place the very goodness of virtue in jeopardy, since some functions, like the function of the murderer, are wicked, however well they are carried out.

There is some response to this line of thought. We might say, in defense of Socrates' characterization of virtue, that the preceding objection fails to understand what Socrates thinks of as a function. This results, in part, from taking the passage in isolation from other parts of the *Republic*. In the later books, we learn that Socrates holds that there are proper or natural functions of things. For instance, the proper functions of reason are to come to know the truth and rule in the soul. Coming to know the truth is a function of reason because only with reason can we come to know the truth. Ruling in the soul is a function of reason because we can rule the soul with reason better than with spirit or appetite. We may now note the case of an "improper function" (we will end up saying that improper functions are not functions at all according to the way Socrates defines functions): to rule the soul is an improper function of appetite. We may gather from this that we can speak of improper functions only when they are the kind of work that we *can* perform with other things and these other things

can perform the work better, for nothing can function improperly without being able to work in some way like that which performs a given function better (for example, cutting is not an improper function of liquid, since it cannot cut at all, but it is an improper function of a key). Thus, improper functions may be characterized as the work that can be carried out by a thing but which can be performed best by something else. For instance, it is certainly possible for appetite to rule our soul, but it is not proper, since, presumably, it is better for reason to rule than appetite. Now, would Plato allow for there to be virtues of a thing that determine whether that thing performs its *improper* function well?

If it is improper for appetite to rule the soul, are there features of appetite that would determine whether it rules well? Plato would deny this and defend it with the claim that no matter what condition it is in, appetite *can't* rule the soul well: if appetite rules our soul, no matter what condition our appetite is in, we cannot live well. But, how does this relate to the aforementioned objection against Socrates' characterization of virtue? Plato could respond to our worries about there being the possibility of speaking of, for instance, the virtues of the murderer, by saying that murder can be carried out only by one who has a soul ruled by either appetite or spirit (because it can be desired only by such people). In other words, paradigmatic actions of wickedness, like rape and murder, are conditioned on an improper functioning of the soul. But an improper function as the activity of something that can be carried out better by something else is, on

Socrates' account of a function, *not* a function at all. For activities that *can* be performed by more than one kind of thing, the activity is a function *only if it is an activity of the kind of thing that does it best* (again, 352e). So, since virtue is a condition or feature of a thing that determines whether it performs its *function* well, and wicked actions arise out of the *failure of a soul to function* (a better way of putting "the improper functioning of a soul"), there can be no virtues that contribute to the success of carrying out wicked acts.

It is, however, obvious that such a defense of Socrates' characterization of virtue appeals to the truth of Plato's psychology and even his main conclusion about the goodness of justice, something which we have yet to be acquainted with much less persuaded of. But, it at least shows us that a coherent answer is available to the one who is initially unhappy with Socrates' characterization of virtue.

There is something else, perhaps more important, that might bother us about Socrates' characterization of virtue and its application to the function of a soul. With it, Plato asserts that the virtuous life is a happy life. This assertion is, as we have seen, the assumption that makes it intelligible to doubt whether justice is a genuine virtue or not. But, what should we make of this asserted connection? We might have one major worry in committing ourselves to it. This worry centers around the question of whether the pursuit of happiness or rather the call to duty should be given primacy in regulating our lives. For Plato, appeals to the

virtues are the preeminent criteria that we should look to when determining our conduct; Plato recognizes no set of moral duties that surpass appeals to the virtues. Since Plato accepts that we should behave ultimately in accordance only with the (genuine) virtues, and virtues are genuine just in case they are conditions under which we are happy or live well, it would seem that Plato would have us behave ultimately in accordance only with what is conducive to or constitutive of our own happiness. Similarly, since, for Plato, the virtues are the ultimate criteria by which we should regulate our conduct, and virtues are genuinely virtues only if they are conditions under which we are happy, it follows that if some supposed virtue such as justice turned out to be neutral or even antagonistic to our own happiness (as Thrasymachus plainly thinks it is), then we would have no legitimate reason to behave in accordance with it. Thus, on Plato's view, it would be reasonable to disregard all appeals to justice in evaluating our behavior and making decisions if justice were not essentially tied to our own happiness. Should we accept this?

Plato's assertion that the virtues are essentially tied to human happiness seems attractive for at least two reasons: it provides a theoretical unification of the virtues as well as a solid motivation for becoming and being virtuous. However, the idea that we may reasonably appeal ultimately only to what is essentially tied to our own happiness in determining our conduct seems to have a troubling

implication. Since this is so, we should examine this implication and see whether or not Plato's assertion concerning virtue and happiness really implies it.

It might seem obvious that there is at least the possibility, if not the regular occurrence, of conflict between what are called for by a person's happiness and duty respectively: that doing what I ought to do is not necessarily conducive to or constitutive of my own happiness and that pursuing my own happiness does not guarantee that I will aim at doing what is morally permissible. That this is so is indicated in such cases as where I can either achieve financial stability by embezzling money, without needing to worry about getting caught, or else remain financially destitute. Since, in such cases, the pursuit of happiness and the call of duty seem to conflict, moral philosophers are concerned with which of the two is more choice-worthy. Some philosophers concerned with such conflicts argue that the call of duty should be chosen. By doing so, they imply that it is better to sacrifice one's happiness than do what is contrary to duty, an implication apparently at odds with Plato's aforementioned view (or at least an implication of his view) that, in determining one's conduct, it is reasonable to appeal only to what is conducive to or constitutive of one's own happiness.

Moreover, if we applied an over-simplified concept of happiness to the aforementioned case of embezzlement, we should say that Plato will recommend committing the embezzlement, since it might appear more conducive to one's happiness than not to, and Plato thinks that it is reasonable to appeal ultimately

only to what is conducive to or constitutive of one's own happiness in determining one's conduct. Further, if it were the case that Plato's moral theory implies that one should commit the unjust act in the embezzlement case, then given the passage at 442e which denies that a just person *qua* just will commit embezzlement and the conclusion of the *Republic* that being just is always conducive to or constitutive of one's happiness, we arrive at an apparent inconsistency.

But thinking along these lines is crude; we insult Plato's position by attributing such a simple-minded conception of happiness to his principles. Plato's assumption concerning the essential connection between virtue and happiness and his assumption that the virtues are the preeminent criteria for regulating our conduct imply that we should commit embezzlement in such a case *only if it really is what is most conducive to or constitutive of our own happiness*. What could make the case of embezzlement seem conducive to our happiness is that it aids us in achieving financial stability. Clearly, being financially stable is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for being happy, but, in some circumstances at least, it seems to contribute to a person's happiness, if only for granting the resources and leisure to pursue other endeavors. In short, doing injustices of this kind seem to contribute to our happiness in that they promise us an increase in the possession of external goods, of which serve as instruments in achieving what we value most. Given this, Plato would not or should not deny

that to embezzle will contribute to our happiness insofar as it will aid us in acquiring external goods. However, the case is obviously more complex than this. If Plato is right in saying that performing unjust acts causes our souls to become unjust (443b, 444c) and in concluding that unjust souls are miserable, then we have reason to believe that to embezzle, as an act of injustice, will be antagonistic to our own happiness. Of course, we will have to examine Plato's reasons for asserting these premises later on, but what we can now see is a strategy that is available to Plato for arguing against performing unjust acts even while assuming that they may contribute (to a certain degree and in a certain way) to a person's happiness. If Plato is right in assuming that our own happiness is ultimately what we should look to in determining all of our conduct, then when we decide whether to embezzle or not, we will reason well when we take into account and see whether to embezzle or not is, all things considered, *most* conducive to our own happiness. If we are more unhappy being unjust than being financially destitute (assuming, in our case, that there is no other way to escape being financially destitute than to embezzle), then we shouldn't embezzle. Thus, Plato will avoid not only inconsistency if he shows that being unjust is worse than being financially destitute in terms of happiness, but he will also avoid recommending embezzlement even when we can get away with it and are financially destitute. We shall say more about this (overall-happiness-orientated) strategy of reasoning concerning particular actions later on, specifically when we

see how Plato's moral theory answers the argument, presented in Book II, praising injustice.

What has been shown so far concerning Plato's position on the primacy of the pursuit of happiness in regulating our lives is that it need not imply that we should act counter to what later moral philosophers characterize as duties. But, this does not get to the deeper issue that some of us might have with a moral theory that doesn't recognize the call of duty. Even though Plato's position doesn't imply that we should *act* counter to the call of duty, it still might be the case that it encourages acting *for the wrong sort of reasons*. For philosophers with Kantian sentiments, there are roughly two basic kinds of motivations in human beings: purely rational, moral motivations and prudential, self-interested motivations. These philosophers would take Plato's assumption concerning the primacy of the pursuit of happiness as a confession of his ethical egoism and thus as an indication of his failure to recognize the nature of moral demands and their true source in pure reason. They would take Plato to be assuming that the only legitimate reasons for acting are ultimately self-interested or prudential, when this means that they are also non-altruistic. On the other hand, eudemonistic philosophers like Plato might respond that the dilemma between egoism and altruism is either false or at least misapplied to his theory. Those who condemn egoism suffer from the delusion that one's happiness directly correlates with the amount of external goods one possesses. Thus, they think that the egoistic life,

the life devoted to the pursuit of one's own happiness above all, is a life concerned with getting more and more for the self while taking away more and more from others (because, of course, external goods are limited in supply). This explains why the egoist and altruist take egoism to be contrasted with altruism, which is the life concerned with the "interests" of others, when that means the possession of external goods by others. But Plato holds that such a scheme is false; he holds that the completely happy man will have no desire for any external goods beyond those that he needs to survive and achieve virtue and understanding. We shall say more concerning Plato's conception of happiness later on, but for now, let us turn to the argument for the superiority of injustice, an argument that shares the assumption with the altruist/egoist that a person's interests are to be found in external goods.

C. The Challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus

It is Glaucon who presents the main argument for the happiness of the unjust life. He first asks us to recognize three different kinds of goods, a division that Socrates readily assents to. The goods of the first kind are those that are desired for their own sakes but not for their consequences. The second kind is composed of goods that are desired both for their own sakes and for their consequences. The third kind is made up of goods that are desired for their

consequences but not for their own sakes. Glaucon's division of goods seems intuitively clear, but as we will see later on, in order for Plato's challenge to be a coherent one, we will have to give a more precise account of what does and does not count as a consequence of something.

Immediately after introducing the division of goods, Plato separates the opinion of "most people" concerning justice and his own by showing that the majority identifies justice as a different kind of good than he does. The majority holds that justice is of the last class of goods, that it is desired not for the sake of itself but only for its consequences. Plato thinks, on the contrary, that justice is good not merely for its consequences but also for its own sake. Following this juxtaposition of opinions, Glaucon goes on to give a defense for the opinion of the majority, that being just is to be desired only for its consequences and not for the sake of itself. However, in the course of the argument, the interlocutors conclude that the consequences that make being just desirable are really consequences only of seeming to be just and are indifferent to whether one really is just (thereby opening the possibility of examining the desirability of being just as divorced from its desirable consequences). Further, they argue that being unjust while seeming to be just is more desirable than being just while seeming to be just, since being unjust while seeming to be just has the power to satisfy more of (what the argument takes to be) our ultimate desires. The natural conclusion is that both being unjust and seeming to be just are desirable for their consequences but that

being just (separate from seeming to be just) is desirable neither for the sake of itself nor for its consequences. So, after giving a defense of the opinion of the majority, Glaucon and Adeimantus should be required to throw being just out of the classes of goods altogether while replacing it with seeming to be just, unless, of course, seeming to be just were the sole consequence of being just that makes the latter desirable.

How does Glaucon defend the opinion of the majority? His argument initiates by giving an account of why (all) people practice justice. According to the argument, we desire, by nature, both to do injustice and to avoid suffering injustice. However, we naturally desire to do injustice less than we desire to avoid suffering injustice. So, if we were forced into a situation where we had to choose between (1) both doing and suffering injustice or (2) refraining from doing injustice while also avoiding suffering injustice, then we would choose the latter.² Moreover, the argument claims that most of us, due to our lack of power or cleverness, are forced into such a situation. Since we know we are not able to do enough injustice to outweigh the injustice we will suffer (by punishment or vengeance), we subject ourselves to the enforcement of laws that forbid injustice, in order to gain protection against suffering injustice. Thus, Glaucon goes on,

² There is a problem of quantification ignored in drawing this inference. Being such desirers, we would naturally choose (2) only if the amount of injustice we had to suffer were not significantly lower than the amount of injustice we were to carry out.

what the law of our group prescribes is regarded as just, and we obey the law so as to avoid suffering injustice. So, we may conclude that our practicing justice is born of a compromise that originates in the knowledge of our powerlessness to do enough injustice to compensate for the injustice that we will suffer.

Glaucon claims that the above account gives us the origin and being of justice, but from the very beginning, it speaks of justice and injustice as if they were already accounted for. However, the difficulty is resolved when we reflect that Glaucon's argument employs two notions of justice and accounts for one on the basis of the other. At the beginning of the argument, doing and suffering (in)justice have to do with the distribution of a limited amount of (external) goods amongst a group of people, but towards the middle, justice becomes identified with the lawful. So, Glaucon, in initially saying that we naturally desire both to do injustice and to avoid suffering injustice, means that we naturally want to take the goods of others away from them and to avoid having our goods taken away from us.³

Further, if we are charitable, Glaucon's argument should not be taken as a historical account of how humans came to be socially co-operative animals (as if our ancestors could have had such knowledge of their own self-interest and

³ "No one would be of such unyielding strength, it would seem, that he should abide in justice and submit to keeping his hands off the belonging of others and not touch them, when it was possible for him to take without fear whatever he pleased from the marketplace, and enter houses and have intercourse with whomever he wished..." (360b-c).

individual weakness or even the possibility of survival without the co-operative protection and guidance of the clan). Rather, the argument is supposed to make sense of why we, as individuals, actually practice justice in our daily lives. The idea is that we humans find ourselves in a world where there are a limited amount of goods (such as power, money, food, and shelter) all of which we would take for ourselves if we could, yet with the knowledge that if we acquired too many of these goods, they would be taken away from us by force or stealth, since there are others, sufficiently powerful, who desire to possess these same goods as much as we do. Since we want as many of these goods as we can get and fear losing them to others, the situation we find ourselves in calls for calculating how to acquire and preserve our possession of as many as possible. Moreover, we recognize that without sufficient, external protection, we will lose all or most that we acquire at the hands of other greedy souls (or groups of them) who are either cleverer or stronger than ourselves. Thus, in order to acquire as many goods as possible, we grant our co-operation with a group that promises to protect us from suffering such losses on the condition that we do not take the goods of our fellow group members away from them.

However, Glaucon and Adeimantus are quick to recognize that even if we do practice injustice against our fellow group members, we can still secure their protection and gain their favors as long as our unjust deeds go undetected, and, further, even if we were perfectly just but somehow acquired a reputation for

injustice, we would suffer punishment as well as being stripped of all that we naturally desire, including our honor, money, and power. Thus, the desirable consequences that were initially thought to follow from being just really follow from seeming to be just, since they do not follow from being just without seeming to be just but do follow from being unjust while seeming to be just.

This is an important implication for at least two reasons. Firstly, it gives a higher practical import to the question of whether or not being just is good for its own sake. Since all of the desirable consequences of being just follow from merely seeming to be just, and one can appear to be just while being unjust, to say that being just is desirable merely for its consequences leaves open the question of whether we should pursue being just at all. Secondly, in distinguishing the motives for seeming to be just and for being just, Plato gives himself an opportunity to demonstrate that being just is desirable for its own sake and thereby to give his followers a different and more powerful motivation for practicing justice (more powerful because practicing justice is not a mere means for being just as it is for merely seeming to be just). So, with the distinction between the appearance and reality of being just, Plato's strategy for demonstrating the truth of his opinion concerning the kind of good justice is becomes conspicuous. If being just were desirable merely for its desirable consequences, then, if the desirable consequences of being just were taken away from it, being just would not be desirable at all.

Thus, if Plato shows that being just is desirable when no desirable consequences follow from it (as in the case where one is just and yet has a reputation for injustice), he will have demonstrated that the majority is wrong in thinking that justice is desirable merely for its consequences. So, in identifying the desirable consequences of being just with the desirable consequences of seeming to be just, Plato is able to give a clearer sense to the question of whether being just is desirable for its own sake. It comes down to the question of whether being just is good only for the social and economic benefits it bring us (as beings that require others to provide for and protect us) or whether there is something else, independent of social and economic considerations, that is desirable about being just. But, before we begin examining Plato's argument, more needs to be said about Glaucon's argument to the contrary and also about the problem that it uncovers.

A fundamental assumption in Glaucon's defense of the unjust life is that our most basic and ultimate desires are desires to acquire as many of the (external) goods of others as possible and to avoid losing our goods to others. From this assumption about our most basic and natural desires, he is able to infer the desirability of being (un)just and seeming to be (un)just according to how well they satisfy these basic desires. Glaucon's basic argument is that seeming to be just while being unjust is more conducive to the satisfaction of our most basic desires (to, without fear, acquire and maintain the possession of as many of the

goods of others as possible) than either being just while seeming to be just or being just while seeming to be unjust. Since happiness consists in the satisfaction of our most basic desires, being unjust while seeming to be just is more conducive to our happiness than either being just while seeming to be just or being just while seeming to be unjust.

However, if Glaucon asserts that being unjust while seeming to be just (rather than being just while seeming to be just or being just while seeming to be unjust) is most conducive to satisfying our most basic desires, then he must be thinking of certain kinds of goods (to the exclusion of others) when he assumes that our most basic desires are to acquire as many goods as possible for ourselves and to avoid having our goods taken away by others. For, if there are goods that require that we not practice injustice in order to possess them, then either these goods would have to be less important, in terms of our happiness, than the others that can be acquired by injustice or else being unjust while seeming to be just would not necessarily be most conducive to the satisfaction of our most basic desires and may even be antagonistic to it.

Indeed, if it is shown that practicing injustice opposes the acquisition of the goods most constitutive of our happiness, the goods that constitute our psychological well-being, then it would be shown that Glaucon's defense errs in that it supposes that the undetected, unjust acquisition of the goods of others is capable of bringing us happiness even while it brings about the destruction of our

psychological well-being. Plato's counter-argument will seek to show this, but not only will he argue that the most important goods are not capable of being acquired through injustice, he will imply that being just, as a good essential to our psychological health, is essential to our happiness (since our psychological health is essential to our happiness). The idea will be that, even if we were to acquire "all kinds of food and drink and all wealth and every kind of office," (445a) if we are unjust (and thus psychologically ill), we cannot be happy.

Concerning particular acts of injustice, although, for example, unjustly acquiring wealth might seem to contribute to our happiness, Plato will object that, as an act of injustice, it causes our souls to be unjust, and since an unjust soul is an unhealthy soul incapable of being happy, unjustly acquiring wealth is, all things considered, antagonistic to rather than conducive to our happiness. Thus, it can be seen that Plato's counter-argument, if successful, will undermine Glaucon's defense of injustice by attacking his assumption that the kinds of goods that can be acquired through injustice (like wealth, social status, and power) are just as important, in terms of our happiness, as the goods that make up our psychological well-being. This is tantamount to a refutation of Glaucon's assumption about our most basic and ultimate desires. While Glaucon assumes that our most basic desires are for acquiring and maintaining the possession of external goods, Plato rejects this assumption on the grounds that such goods are worth nothing without the possession of psychic and bodily health.

What does all of this tell us about the main conclusion of the *Republic*?

From the passage just quoted two paragraphs above (445a-b), it is strongly suggested that the *Republic* concludes that being just is a necessary condition for being happy; that justice, as a psychological good, is essential to our happiness, and even if we were the most successful, powerful, and wealthy people, if our souls were unjust, we would nevertheless be miserable. This passage concludes this on the basis of an analogy between psychological and bodily health in relation to happiness. Its message is that just as life is not worth living without bodily health, neither is it worth living without psychological health. Although the reasoning is not convincing until we investigate what Plato thinks it is to be psychologically healthy and in what sense being just is an essential element of it, it at least shows us an outline of a way that Plato's moral theory can refute the argument of Glaucon. Thus, I will take it that at least one part of the *Republic's* conclusion is that being just is a necessary condition for being happy. Indeed, it even seems that that this claim is necessary for countering Glaucon's defense of injustice, since if we could be happy while being psychologically unjust, then it is very difficult to see what could be a convincing response to Glaucon, given that acquiring external goods like money and power contribute somewhat to our happiness. But, does Plato agree even that, for instance, being financially stable has any bearing whatsoever on our happiness? If we say that Plato thinks that being just is also a sufficient condition for being happy, it might appear (though, I

will argue, falsely) that we would be required to say that he denies that external goods like money and social status are capable of augmenting or diminishing a just person's happiness, for one can be just while lacking these goods, as Adeimantus makes plain when he shows the kind of life that awaits a person who is both just but seems to be unjust.⁴

It seems to me that the passage in which Adeimantus separates the life of being just from the life of seeming to be just is important for uncovering whether Plato concludes that being just is a sufficient condition for being happy. Adeimantus says, "They will say this: that being so situated [having the greatest reputation for being unjust], the just man will be flogged, racked, bound in chains, have his two eyes burnt out, and finally, after suffering every torment, be impaled..." (361e-362a). It is, of course, obvious that Adeimantus is presenting an extreme case here, one that does not necessarily or even usually follow from being thought of as the sort of person that characteristically practices injustices. However, it is hard to deny that, in most social situations at least, one who seems to be unjust should expect to be punished somehow, whether it is in the form of being exiled from society, imprisoned, having certain rights denied, or being

⁴ We will also have to deal with the question of whether Plato thinks being just is sufficient for having psychological well-being. It might seem obvious that this is not the case, since he also identifies being wise, temperate, and courageous as essential elements of psychological well-being. However, I will argue later on that, as Plato defines the virtues, being just implies being wise, courageous, and temperate, although not the other way around.

despised by one's friends and family. The question we have to answer is whether Plato thinks that these sorts of punishment could diminish a just person's happiness, and if he does, whether this commits him to denying that being just is a sufficient condition for being happy.

By Book X, if not earlier, it becomes obvious that Plato *does* think that whether or not a just person possesses goods such as wealth, power, and honor is relevant to their happiness. Noting that the main challenge of the *Republic* has been met, Socrates requests that we “restore to justice and the rest of virtue the rewards and wages” (612c) that derive from seeming to be just. Socrates argues that such consequences will ultimately be granted to the just person, from both gods and men, and will ultimately be taken away from the unjust person. But, if the wages of seeming to be just had no bearing whatsoever on the just person's happiness, then why would Socrates find it necessary to reassure us that, in living the just life, we will not be deprived of them? The very fact that Plato should include an argument concerning the issue of whether just people will be deprived of the desirable consequences of seeming to be just indicates that Plato recognizes that the consequences of seeming to be just need to be accounted for in the assessment of a person's overall happiness. Further, in the aforementioned analogy of psychological and bodily health (see also 406c-407a for further confirmation), Socrates and Glaucon agree that life is not worth living without having bodily health, something which a just person has no guarantee of

possessing. So, for Plato, whether a person is completely happy or not depends roughly on that person's possession of three different goods: psychological health, bodily health, and external or circumstantial goods (goods which make up a person's social and economic situation). However, it is clear that Plato does not put the possession of these different goods on equal ground; a person's psychological health is far more important, in terms of their happiness, than their social and economic situation. Although a psychologically healthy man who is financially destitute and despised by his friends and family may not be completely happy, he is nevertheless happier than a wealthy and popular man who has a sick soul.

By affirming that in order to be completely happy, we must possess not only psychological health but also bodily health and a sufficient amount of external goods, and in affirming that the just person has no guarantee of possessing either of the latter, it follows that being just is not a sufficient condition for being completely happy. Of course, though, even if being just is not a sufficient condition for being completely happy, it could still be a sufficient condition for being happy to a degree greater than the degree of happiness constituted by the wealthy or successful or hedonistic but unjust person. Plato's argument that being just is sufficient for this degree of happiness will be the object of focus in our later sections.

Before moving completely past Glaucon and Adeimantus' challenge, there is an interpretive problem concerning the conclusion of the *Republic* that we should face at this time. We have to give an adequate interpretation of Glaucon's division of goods, for it seems as if Adeimantus and Glaucon are presenting an incoherent challenge to Socrates: that he is to show that being just is good "in and of itself" (for its own sake) and that he is supposed to show this by showing how it *benefits* the just person (a benefit is usually thought to be a *consequence* of something). This is essentially the same as uncovering why it is not absurd for Plato to show that being just is *intrinsically* good for the just person *by showing that it conditions a person's happiness* (when being happy could be thought of as a *consequence* of being just).

The key to these problems lies in drawing a distinction between a consequence and a constitutive element and between the appearance and reality of being just and happy. These distinctions are all tied together in the moral problem of the *Republic*. With this in mind, we can return to Glaucon's division of goods. *Purely intrinsic goods* make up the first class of goods; they are goods that are valued for their own sakes alone and not for anything else. *Constitutive goods* make up the second class; they are valued for their own sakes and for their consequences. Finally, *instrumental goods* make up the third class; they are valued only for their consequences and not for their own sakes.

What does it mean to desire or value something for its own sake? Initially, we should think that we desire something for its own sake only if we are satisfied with having or doing or being that something independently of an end or set of ends that it

usually brings about. But, if I desire to be just because I desire to be happy, do I desire to be just for its own sake or for its (alleged) consequences? That depends on whether being just constitutes a part of what it is to be happy or if being just is rather a means to the end of being happy. If it is to be a coherent challenge, then Adeimantus' requirement that Socrates show that being just should be desired for its own sake *by showing that it makes us happy* presupposes that there must be a sense in which I can desire to be just for the sake of happiness, and *on those grounds*, desire to be just for the sake of itself.

However, this would not be shown if being happy were merely a consequence of being just. Thus, the assumption seems to be that if a constitutive element of being happy is being just, then I would desire to be just for its own sake if I desire to be just for the sake of happiness. In general then, if something is desired for the sake of what it is a constitutive element of, then it is desired for the sake of itself, but it is false that if something is desired for the sake of what it is a means to (its consequences), then it must be desired for the sake of itself. These are some of the assumptions that lie behind the strategy of the *Republic*. If they were false, then it would be absurd to show that being just is desired for its own sake because being just makes us happy, since the premise would be irrelevant to the conclusion.

Not only does the assumption that we desire something for the sake of itself if we desire it for the sake of what it is a constitutive or essential element of make sense of Adeimantus' requirement, but it is also prevents Plato from contradicting himself. At 505e, Socrates says that the supreme or highest good is "what every soul pursues and for

the sake of which it acts in everything.” If to pursue something for the sake of the supreme good necessitated that that something is desired not only for itself but for its consequences, then nothing besides the supreme good would be a purely intrinsic good, which would contradict the examples of purely intrinsic goods (enjoyments and harmless pleasures) given by Glaucon at 357b. So, according to Plato, if we desire to be just for the sake of the supreme good or for the sake of being happy, and being just is an essential component of being happy, then we desire to be just for the sake of itself (and not merely for its consequences).⁵

Thus, putting all these thoughts together, we can take the *Republic*'s conclusion to be that being just is both a constitutive element of being happy and that being just is sufficient for a degree of happiness greater than any degree of happiness achieved by being unjust (when this is consistent with saying that no happiness can be achieved by being unjust).

⁵ Indeed, if we take Aristotle as an authority on the views of Plato, then Plato identifies the supreme good with happiness, since surely Plato would be included under the “cultivated” people that Aristotle mentions in his doxography of the greatest good. See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a16-20.

II. The Argument of the *Republic*

A. The Analogy of City and Soul

The moral theory we find in the *Republic* is dependent upon its psychological theory in terms of both its intelligibility and truth. If, in conversation with someone unfamiliar with Platonic psychology, we give Plato's account of the virtues as they are found in the soul, it is highly probable that either no understanding or misunderstanding will arise in our interlocutor. It is interesting to note that this does not necessarily hold true for Plato's political proposals or for his ontology and epistemology. Indeed, I think that the moral theory and argument of the *Republic* can be explicated and accepted independently of one's acceptance of Plato's claims about the ideal city, being, and knowledge.

Obviously, though, this cannot be the case with Plato's psychology. If we reject the psychology of the *Republic*, then we must reject its moral theory, since Plato's definitions of the virtues assume his account of the soul. Consequently, if we reject an essential argument for the psychology, then we must reject an essential argument underlying the moral theory. This said, let us proceed on to investigate Plato's psychology itself.

Every reader will readily recall that the *Republic* asserts that the soul has three distinct parts (or forms) and that each of these parts, by its own nature, desires something distinct from the other parts. It seems that there are two general accounts given for why Socrates concludes that the soul is tripartite. One is that it is concluded on the basis of an analogy between the city and soul. Another is that it is concluded upon the basis of a theoretical (and perhaps even purely logical) principle and some empirical evidence about human behavior that supposedly falls under this principle.

I mentioned earlier my presupposition that Plato's moral theory could be accepted independently of his political theory. If this is true, then the analogy of the city and soul in the *Republic* should not play an *essential* role in the main moral *argument*. However, if the analogy serves as a necessary, theoretical basis for Plato's psychology, then it does play an essential role in the moral argument, and my presupposition will turn out false. With this in mind, what does the text itself say about the role of the analogy of city and soul? The analogy is first introduced immediately after the defense of injustice given by Glaucon and Adeimantus is brought to completion and Socrates is asked to give a counter-argument. Socrates recalls his reply as follows:

So I said what I thought: The inquiry we are taking is not trivial, but requires sharp sight, as it appears to me. So, since we are not clever, I said, I think we should make this sort of inquiry as though we were not very sharp-sighted and someone ordered us to read small letters at a distance. If one next realized that the same letters exist elsewhere, larger and on a larger surface, it

would appear to be a stroke of luck, I think, to be able to read those first and in this way examine the smaller, to see if they happen to be the same.

Of course, said Adeimantus. But what do you see of this sort in the inquiry about justice, Socrates?

I will tell you, I said. Justice, we say, belongs to one man, but surely also to a whole city.

Of course, he replied.

Now, a city is greater than one man.

Yes, he said.

Perhaps then justice would be larger and easier to understand in what is greater. If you will, then, let us first seek to discover what it is in cities; afterward, we will thus also examine it in the individual, looking for the likeness of the greater in the character of the less (368c-369a).

The line of thought here is that since both cities and individuals admit of being just, a true account of justice in a city will most likely shed light on the character of justice in an individual (presumably, because the two would have a similar account). It is important to note two things about this inference. Firstly, it is an inductive inference. If Plato were to hold that since two kinds of things admit of being just, the same account *must* apply to both, then the same account of justice in the individual would have to hold for the justice of an action and the justice of a law. Given that Plato's account of justice is true, we would be forced to identify three motivational elements in actions and laws, kinds of things which have no motivations at all but are rather the products of and causes of motivations. This is something which, thankfully, Plato does not attempt. Rather, in the *Republic*, the character of an action and law is derivative of the character in the city or soul that it produces or is produced out of. A just action is one that causes justice in the soul and one that justice in the soul inclines us to carry out.

A just law is one that causes justice in the city and one that a just city mandates. Thus, Plato should not and does not hold that merely because two things admit of being just, the same account of justice must apply to both.

Secondly, the point of the analogy, as here stated by Socrates, is to provide some preliminary insight into justice. He explicitly notes the requirement to investigate justice in the soul even after justice in the city has shown itself. Thus, one does not have to take the analogy of city and soul as an argumentative analogy; instead one could take it as a didactic analogy. However, even if we do take it as a didactic analogy, one could still say that it plays an essential role in the moral theory. We may reply that if we take the didactic analogy as essential, we no longer mean it is essential in the same way that an argumentative analogy would be essential. The didactic analogy is essential in that it aids our initial understanding of the soul and the virtues found therein, while an argumentative analogy would be essential in that it provides a rational basis for our acceptance of Plato's account of the soul and the virtues found therein. In a similar spirit, one may say that Plato's Divided Line is essential to our understanding of his epistemology and ontology without saying that the Line is essential to the argumentative framework that underlies his epistemology and ontology.

However, readers convinced that the analogy of city and soul should be taken as an argumentative analogy will probably not change their minds on account of the above considerations. They might think that since the analogy

provides some rational basis for our acceptance of Plato's account of the soul and the virtues of the soul, it should be regarded as essential. For the benefit of these readers, I want to show that the division of the city into three parts gives no rational basis for the division of the soul into three parts but that the division of the soul into three parts may give *some* rational basis for the division of the city into three parts. This will indicate that the political theory should be interpreted as founded upon the psychological theory rather than the converse. Let us first take up the issue of whether the three parts of the ideal city give us reason to believe that there are three parts of the soul. It should be noted that, in the parts preceding the independent argument for Plato's psychology in Book IV, Socrates is describing the *ideal* city, one that performs its function as a city in the best way. It is true that Socrates claims that the ideal city has three parts or classes. But, this by no means suggests that *all* cities have three parts or classes. Indeed, Plato implicitly denies this when he tells us that the "true" or "genuine" city as opposed to the luxurious one is complete even before he has divided the city into two classes (372e). However, Plato's psychological claim about there being three parts of the soul is not a claim to be applied only to ideal souls; it is to be applied to all (human) souls. So, is the analogy of city and soul really an analogy of ideal city and soul?

Further, when we investigate why Plato thought the ideal city would have three classes (without appealing to his psychology), it is bound to strike us as

arbitrary. His division of people into guardians and non-guardians is founded upon the sole consideration that the work of the guardians, warfare, is of “the greatest importance” (374a-e), and his proposal to divide the guardians into auxiliaries and complete guardians appears without any reason stated at all (412b). Concerning the first division, if the facts that a certain kind of work can best be performed only by a certain class of people and that this work is of great importance to the overall functioning of the city suffices for the natural division of people into those that do and do not have the natural capacity for this work, then we could legitimately conclude that the work of the artist calls for a fourth natural class within the ideal city, since, even on Plato’s view, the myths and other artworks of a city are essential to the proper functioning of that city. Thus, from Plato’s own reasons for dividing the city into three classes, we could divide it into at least four classes.

Aside from the above observations, perhaps the most convincing case against taking the analogy of city and soul as an argumentative analogy essential to the *Republic*’s psychology is that Plato’s division of the ideal city into three parts appears to be *derived* from the tripartite division of the soul. That is, the psychology of the *Republic* appears to underlie the political theory rather than the other way around. In the last paragraph, I observed that, prior to the argument for the tripartite soul, Plato’s division of the ideal city into three parts is arbitrary. However, we can give a better defense of Plato’s division of the ideal city if we

appeal to the *Republic's* psychology. So, with this in mind, how should we understand Plato's reasons for dividing the ideal city into three natural classes? It is because there are three basic kinds of people, and these people differ in respect to the part of the soul that rules them. Some people are ruled by reason (aristocratic people), others by spirit (timocratic people), and still others by appetite. Further, Plato claims that those who are ruled by appetite should be divided into three: those that are ruled by the desire for money (oligarchical people), those that are ruled by the desire for freedom or anarchy (democratic people), and those that are ruled by the desire for unnecessary pleasures (tyrannical people). Plato's strongest case for the threefold division of the ideal city can be accounted for as follows.

There are three basic psychological types amongst people, and since the spirited and appetitive types are more prone to acting contrary to what is best for the city overall than others, only the rational type should rule the city. The rational type is best suited for ruling the city because of his or her education (which will, among other things, indoctrinate the rational type with the belief that his or her own best interest is identical with the best interest of the city) and natural capacity to retain his or her beliefs in the face of pleasure, pain, fear, dread, grief, and faulty rhetoric (in short, all of the affects and circumstances that sometimes overpower our desire to know the truth) (412d-413c). Plato's idea is that people who are motivated primarily by spirited or appetitive desires are unfit

for rule because what they see as their own good may conflict with the good of the city as a whole. On the other hand, Plato himself struggles with the question of why the rational person will never see his or her own good in conflict with the good of the city as a whole, and he gives the unsatisfying answer that the rational person will never see the good of the city as antagonistic to his or her own good because (s)he will be acquainted with the Form of the Good and will thereby be inspired to imitate it.

My goal in the last few paragraphs has not been to adequately analyze, refute, or defend any of Plato's proposals for the division of the ideal city (mainly because I want to focus on the moral theory of the *Republic*). All I have wished to show is that if Plato's division of the ideal city into three classes is not to be arbitrary, we must appeal to his psychological claims about the basic differences in people. I take this as an indication that one of the rational pillars of Plato's political theory is his psychology and not the other way around and thus that the analogy of city and soul should not be taken as an essential part of the argument for Plato's psychological theory. Further, Plato gives other, more convincing grounds for his psychological theory, and it is to those grounds that we now turn.

B. The Argument for the Tripartite Soul and its Purpose

As we have already noted, prior to accounting for the soul and its virtues, Plato accounts for the ideal city and its virtues. Since Plato's account of the virtues in the ideal city assumes that the virtuous thing has three parts, and Plato wants to apply a similar account to the virtues found in the soul, he is led to consider whether (but not thereby justified in concluding that) the soul has three parts. But before we get to the argument for tripartition itself, let us first reflect on the purpose of the argument.

In the first place, let us repeat that in the *Republic*, Socrates is attempting to show that being just is better for us, in terms of our own happiness, than being unjust. However, Socrates thinks that this cannot be shown until we understand what justice is (354c). The same general point is alluded to in the *Meno* when Socrates argues that he cannot know whether virtue can be taught, since he does not know what virtue is (*Meno* 71b). However, the idea that we must identify what justice is before concluding whether or not it is good for its possessor is not obvious. Indeed, if Plato's principle is that to be methodologically correct, one should identify what justice is before investigating whether or not it is good for its possessor, then the way he actually proceeds in the *Republic* would seem to go against his own principle, since he *assumes* that justice is good for the city before he identifies what justice is in the city, and, by implication, he does the same with the individual (427e). What are we to make of this?

First, why would Plato think that we cannot know whether justice is good for us without first knowing what justice is? It is obvious that if we have two contradictory accounts of justice, then we can derive two contradictory conclusions concerning whether justice is good for its possessor even while using all other consistent premises in both derivations. Since all premises would be consistent except the premise stating what justice is, we can safely say that the conclusion concerning whether justice benefits its possessor may depend on what we identify justice as. With this in mind, we might be led to conclude that, since conflicting accounts of justice may lead to conflicting conclusions about the goodness of justice, we cannot justifiably conclude that justice benefits its possessor until we have correctly identified what justice is. But, on the contrary, we would be equally justified in stating the converse of this conclusion. Why should we not say rather that whether we have a correct account of justice depends on what it implies about the goodness of justice? In sum, there is no doubt that the question of what justice is and the question of whether justice is good for its possessor are importantly related, but the relation between the two questions does not, by itself, decide which question is prior. Does the justification of a conclusion concerning whether justice is good for its possessor depend on the truth of its account of justice or does the justification of an account of justice depend on the truth of what it implies about whether justice is good for its possessor?

Now, it might be said that Plato should take the question of what justice is to be prior to the question concerning the goodness of justice, since, after all, if he were to reject an account of justice (like Thrasymachus') on account of its implying that justice is no good for its possessor, then he would be begging the question, since the question concerning the goodness of justice is what Socrates has been asked to investigate. The situation would appear to be like the following: Suppose Thomas was asked to prove that humans are animals. Suppose further that Mary has argued, prior to Thomas, that since humans are the beings that have reason as the source of all their desires, and no animals are beings that have reason as the source of all their desires, it follows that no humans are animals. Clearly, it would be no good for Thomas to reply that Mary has incorrectly accounted for humans *because* her account implies that no humans are animals, since whether humans are animals is the very issue at hand. To avoid begging the question, Thomas would need to attack Mary's account of humans on different grounds.

So, for similar reasons, it will be said that Plato should not be allowed to argue against an account of justice on the grounds that it implies that justice is no good for its possessor. Thus, we may conclude that the question of what justice is should be prior to the question regarding the goodness of justice, given the circumstances of the *Republic's* conversation. However, if this is so, then it appears that we must accuse Plato of begging the question when he assumes that

justice is a virtue prior to identifying what justice is (when, as we saw earlier, genuine virtues have to be good for their possessors).

Faced with such difficulties, we need to remind ourselves that the *Republic* starts as an investigation into what justice is. The question concerning the being of justice is seen, by Plato, as being just as open as the question concerning the goodness of justice. The circumstance of not having prior answers to the questions of either the being or goodness of justice puts Plato at an advantage. We know that he wants to “praise justice” when praising justice means showing that it is good for its possessor (367b-c). Without being confined by a prior account of what justice is, Plato is free to construct an account of justice with the knowledge that he had better do so in such a way as to guarantee the goodness of justice. But, is Plato free to construct any account of justice he wants? What, if any, are the legitimate grounds for attacking his account of justice?

For one, Plato sets up his argument as a *reply* to a challenge. Before Socrates espouses the moral theory, Thrasymachus’ position (reconstructed in the arguments of Glaucon and Adeimantus) is seen as a threat that needs an adequate response. Since Plato is responding to Thrasymachus’ position, he is not free to construct any account of justice he wants. If he constructs just any account of justice with the prejudice that justice is good for its possessor, and this account of justice has nothing in common with Thrasymachus’ assumptions concerning what

justice is, then Plato's argument will be guilty of a fallacy of equivocation.

Plato's conclusion that justice is good for its possessor will not conflict with Thrasymachus' conclusion that justice is no good for its possessor, since both will be using "justice" in different senses. Therefore, if Plato is to avoid a fallacy of equivocation, his account of justice must have some relation to Thrasymachus' account (such as, someone is just in Plato's sense if and only if they are just in the initial sense). So, one possible ground for critiquing Plato's account of justice can be found in its relation to Thrasymachus' account of justice.

The aforementioned ground of possible criticism of Plato's account of justice is unique to the circumstances of the *Republic*. But there are also other ways to criticize Plato's account of justice, and these ways of criticism apply to all accounts *qua* accounts. As Plato (rightly) conceives of them, accounts are supposed to provide insight into how particular things are unified or gathered all together. Socrates tells Euthyphro, "I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions are pious through one form..." (*Euthyphro* 6d-e). The idea here is that there is something common to all pious actions that makes them pious (or is the source of their piety). Here, Socrates calls that something "the pious itself." Whether or not these "forms" are "separate" from particulars or not and whether they are properties, substances, both, or neither does not concern us here. These questions do not concern us

because, regardless of their answers, the function of an account remains the same. Regardless of the ontological status of what it is we speak of when we give accounts, an account does its job as an account when it gathers together all and only particulars of a certain kind together and does this by explaining in what way they are similar. Now, we can gather from this that a necessary condition of an adequate account is that it gathers together all and only particular things of a certain kind (the unifying condition). In more modern language, we specify the same requirement for definitions when we say that no *definiens* should be so narrow that it excludes some of the things that the *definiendum* legitimately applies to and that no *definiens* should be so broad that it includes things that the *definiendum* does not legitimately apply to.

Although the unifying condition is a necessary condition for an adequate account, it is not a sufficient condition. An adequate account also needs to *explain* why the particular things are instances of the kind they belong to. To specify all conditions an adequate account needs to satisfy in order to explain what it accounts for, if possible, would here be out of place, and we can be satisfied with the reminders that accounts, in order to explain, should neither be circular (I shouldn't say that pious actions are pious because they are loved by all gods *and* that all gods love certain actions because they are pious), nor purely extensional (I should not account for justice merely by listing all particular just persons, actions, laws, etc...), nor arbitrary (supposing that all and only

philosophers were Greeks, it would still not be proper to account for philosophers as Greeks), nor should an account be more obscure than what it accounts for or equally obscure (supposing I were accounting for soundness to an audience of people unfamiliar with basic concepts of logic, I should not account for soundness as a valid argument with all true premises, unless I have already accounted for validity).

One other ground for possible criticism of Plato's account of justice is also worth mentioning, because it sheds light on one of the main purposes for giving accounts in moral philosophy. When we come to moral philosophy and are interested in understanding what it is to be just or fair or righteous or what have you, we have already been using these concepts for some time in our own lives. Since our youths, we have been told that certain actions, institutions, and ways of life should be avoided for the reason that they are evil or wicked or unjust. Most of the time, we come to learn these concepts in conjunction with being punished or in conjunction with a strong emotional response from someone we love or care about. Given the natural desire to avoid these reactions from those who have power over us or from those we care about, we refrain from participating in or supporting such behavior. However, as we come of age, we might come to reflect on our lives as a whole: to ask ourselves why we pursue the things we do and whether we have not been duped into neglecting our own happiness by the moral discourse of others. In such times of reflection, what we want is a sense of

understanding of our lives and where we should be directing them; we are not satisfied with merely living, we want to understand our lives (I suspect that this kind of understanding is desirable independently of its power to justify our particular decisions). For those who do not reflect in this way, we feel that they are somehow missing something, that they have not matured appropriately or that they are not sufficiently autonomous.

Accordingly, an important good of a moral philosophy consists in satisfying our reflective desire to understand our own lives and thereby allowing us to slowly transform ourselves into beings we are happier with, in terms of both satisfaction and self-respect. Yes, but what do these observations have to do with the possible criticism of Plato's account of justice? I have only one point to make here. Since we have already learned how to apply the concept of justice to particular actions, people, laws, and institutions, if Plato's account of justice is to be acceptable as an account of *justice*, there must be a great overlap of what Plato's justice requires of particular actions and so forth with our own pre-reflective judgments on the same cases. There are certain paradigmatic cases of injustice and justice which we should refuse to give up as cases of injustice or justice. Such paradigmatic cases of injustice include slavery and genocide on a more global level as well as cheating and dishonesty on a more local level. My point here is that certain paradigmatic cases of justice and injustice can and, if appropriate, should be used as *counter-examples* to philosophical accounts of

justice and injustice. What this possible kind of criticism does is to place a limit on the content of any adequate account of justice. This kind of criticism may seem obvious to some, but some others of us may be fooled into thinking it is an illegitimate kind of criticism on the grounds that, since we cannot account for x, we are not justified in holding that y is a paradigmatic case of x. These grounds are faulty for the reason that philosophical accounts are essentially *reflective* and, thus, parasitic, to a certain degree, on our pre-reflective intuitions concerning what the account is an account of.

At this point, we know the main questions of the *Republic* and we have been acquainted with some of the goals of its theory which will serve to aid us in evaluating it. As I said above, Plato accounts for the virtues in general and justice in particular in terms of his theory of the soul. We are now prepared to investigate his theory of the soul and his main argument for it.

The first and central claim of Plato's psychology is that the soul has three distinct parts. What this means is that there are three distinct sources of motivation for human behavior, three different sources of desire. Plato's argument for this claim may serve both as a proof and as an explanation for its conclusion. It is to that argument that we now turn.

Socrates first appeals to the Principle of Opposites (PO): "The same thing will refuse to do or suffer opposites at the same time in respect to the same thing and relative to the same thing" (436b). Later he puts this principle in different

words: “The same thing cannot behave in opposite ways at the same time concerning the same thing by the same part of itself” (439b). We might formulate this principle as follows:

(PO): If the same thing does or undergoes opposites at the same time in respect to the same thing, then that thing must have distinct parts, one of which does or undergoes one opposite and the other of which does or undergoes the other opposite.

Some might take the PO to be a version of the principle of non-contradiction, but this is false. For, if it were, then the argument would surely fail, since the opposites that Socrates appeals to in the soul are not strictly contradictories (while ‘*S* desires *x*’ contradicts ‘*S* does not desire *x*,’ it does not contradict, ‘*S* desires not *x*’).

After introducing the PO, Socrates informally categorizes the activities (or passivities) of the soul so as to be able to cite some opposing actions of the soul, which he can then apply the PO to. He claims (rightly) that assenting opposes denying and that wishing or willing opposes refusing or rejecting. He remains undecided upon the issue of whether such states of the soul are active or passive and claims, rightly according to the PO, that the issue is irrelevant to the inquiry. For our purposes, we can place all activities (or passivities) of the soul into two opposing categories: the category of desires and the category of inward refusals.

To desire to drink is to want to drink, and to inwardly refuse to drink is to want not to drink.

At this point, we can follow Socrates in appealing to the familiar fact that “people sometimes refuse to drink when thirsty” (439c). Socrates takes such cases to indicate that people may both desire a certain drink and inwardly refuse the very same drink at the same time. They may desire to drink on account of believing that the dryness of their mouths will be soothed by it but inwardly refuse to drink on account of believing that to drink would bring about certain unwanted effects, such as might be the case when we are advised not to drink anything by medical doctors.

Now, if we apply the PO to the case, we get the following argument for their being at least two parts of the soul:

(1): If the same thing does or undergoes opposites at the same time in respect to the same thing, then that thing must have distinct parts, one of which does or undergoes one opposite and the other of which does or undergoes the other opposite.

(2): The same soul both desires and inwardly refuses the same drink at the same time.

(3): Therefore, the soul must have distinct parts, one of which desires the drink and the other of which inwardly refuses the drink.

At this point in the argument, however, Socrates wants to show not merely that there are at least two parts of the soul, he also wants to identify what these parts are. He suggests that the desire to drink is found in the appetitive part of the soul while the inward refusal to drink is found in the rational part of the soul. His reasoning for this claim is that the desire to drink comes from “passions and diseases,” while the inward refusal to drink comes from “reflection” (439d). This reasoning will be puzzling until (and, to a lesser degree, after) we remember that Socrates began his investigation of the soul with the following question: “Do we learn by one among the parts in us, and become angry by another, but again, desire the pleasures and nutrition and reproduction and their kindred by some third?” (436a). What this question shows us is that Socrates already has the characteristics of the parts of the soul in mind before he purports to prove that they obtain in the human soul. He conceives of his project as trying to prove that we have these three parts of the soul and not as trying to prove, in addition, that the parts of the soul should be characterized the way he characterizes them. However, even though Socrates never tries to prove that the parts of the soul should be characterized in the way he characterizes them, he does think that they serve to explain a certain anthropological fact: that there are three basic kinds of people, each kind differentiated by what kind of thing they take to be the highest good. Plato (and Aristotle will follow him on this point) thinks that some people value learning and knowledge above all, some others honor and victory, some

others money and bodily pleasures (435e, 581b-e).⁶ He explains this (alleged) fact by saying that what people take to be the highest good is determined by which part of their soul dominates them.

Thus, since the argument we are examining presupposes a knowledge of the way in which the parts of the soul differ, we should give a general description of each them before we can continue with the proof that they actually obtain in the human soul. Socrates claims that the three parts of the soul are reason, spirit, and appetite. How are they similar and how do they differ? They are all similar in that they are sources of desire or motivation; they each love or are naturally drawn towards some particular kind of entity. One way in which they differ is that they each have unique beloveds. Reason loves knowledge and learning the truth (and so when it dominates a person, that person is a philosopher), spirit loves honor and victory (the people dominated by this part of the soul are thus called honor-lovers), and appetite loves money and bodily pleasures (the people dominated by this part of the soul, Plato will say, take on three different basic forms which we will discuss later on) (580d-581b). However, not only do the parts of the soul have unique beloveds, they also have unique functions. For

⁶ On reflection, it seems dubious that lives devoted to religious concerns and lives devoted to artistic greatness can all be justly reduced to one of these three basic kinds. It is, of course, also dubious that all people take some one thing to be the highest good. But this last doubt is not ignored by Plato. He recognizes the existence of people with an irreducible plurality of values; this kind of person Plato calls the person with the “democratic” soul.

example, Plato frequently characterizes reason as the part of the soul by which we learn and as the part of the soul by which we judge what is best for the soul overall (441e). Further, since reason is the only part of the soul that can judge what is best for the soul overall, and since it is the only part of the soul that can attain wisdom, Plato infers that reason should also function as the ruling element in the soul. But just what it is for reason to rule the soul and in what sense reason may judge what is best for the soul overall are questions left unanswered by Plato, although it is not hard to see that reason rules in the soul of a person if a person's rational desires are never left frustrated on account of a person's non-rational desires.

Now that we have a general (though by no means transparent) description of the three parts of the soul, we can note how these general descriptions will function in the argument for the tripartite soul. If Plato is to successfully prove, for example, that reason and appetite obtain in the human soul on the basis of an existing set of wants that oppose one another, then it must be clear that one of these wants belongs to appetite and that the other belongs to reason. Otherwise, we could legitimately conclude that the soul has two parts but not that these two parts are reason and appetite.

This condition on the success of the argument, however, leads us into grave difficulties. We are told that the inward refusal for the drink, cited in the argument for the division of reason and appetite in the soul, generates out of

reflection. Is that sufficient to show that it belongs to reason? Can any other possible part(s) of the soul have desires generated out of reflection? Further, and to the deeper question, *can* reason generate its own desires and inward refusals *independently of spirit and appetite* or is it, as Hume famously takes it to be, a slave to the passions (a mere calculator that allows us to achieve optimal satisfaction of various, sometimes conflicting, desires that are themselves not the product of any reasoning)?

As Plato describes reason, it may certainly be subordinated to the other parts of the soul, and if it is, then it will play no more of a role in the soul than Humean reason does. When reason is subordinated to appetite, as it is in the oligarch's soul, the oligarch "allows [reason] to reflect on and consider nothing except how to make more money from less..." (553d). The difference between Plato and Hume, then, is that Plato takes reason to be capable of generating desires all by itself even if this capability is not realized in every soul. In Plato's view of what reason is, it is implied that it is possible for a person to desire knowledge (and especially knowledge of the good) for its own sake, with no consideration for the either the social, economic, or hedonistic benefits of possessing knowledge. That is, the desire for knowledge found in human beings can be irreducible to the desires for social and economic desires. Plato seems to think that this desiring of knowledge for its own sake is a necessary and sufficient condition for being a philosophical person.

But we must not lose ourselves in these considerations without a view to the completion of the argument for the tripartite soul. What has been shown? If the oligarch's reason is the seat of his means-ends reasoning directed toward monetary gain, although it is not the source of his ends (appetite is the source of his ends), then it might seem that we are entitled to conclude that, for Plato, possessing the part of the soul he calls reason is a necessary condition for means-ends reasoning (and thus that he successfully shows that reason obtains in the human soul possessing conflicting desires, one of which is engendered by reflection). In addition, we could support our claim with the fact that he calls reason *the* part we calculate with. But this can't be right, since Plato says that all children and some adults do not possess reason (441a). It is an indication of a bad interpretation to make Plato deny that the normal child is capable of means-ends reasoning.

What these difficulties show, I think, is that it is easy to conflate two different conceptions of what reason is and that Plato might have been guilty of such a conflation. On the one hand, we and Plato call reason the capacity or power for reasoning. Beings that are able to deduce, induce, abduce and, in any other way, calculate, we may say, have reason. But this bare capacity of reason does not, by itself, have any content essential to it. Whether the reasoning is theoretical or practical, there are no principles or desires essential to the capacity

of reasoning that we cannot imagine some being capable of reasoning to lack.⁷ The idea here is that what Plato calls reason, as the source of desires of certain kind, is something substantially more than the bare capacity for reasoning. The possession of the capacity of reasoning, all by itself, implies nothing about the possession of a desire for truth or about a desire for the good (we can imagine some possible, reasoning being that directs all its intentional behavior towards its own self-destruction even with the belief that it is destroying itself).

But in addition to this capacity for reasoning, Plato claims that reason loves knowledge and learning and especially knowledge of the good. This claim has a crucial role in Plato's project. If reason had no beloved of its own, then the rule of reason in a soul would not, as Plato thinks it does, guarantee that the soul is just...it would merely guarantee that the soul is prudent.

Thus, we have a task before us. We need to interpret Plato's argument that reason, as Plato conceives it, and appetite obtain in the human soul in such a way that we can exclude the objection that Plato's argument depends on the false supposition that the existence of a desire (or inward refusal) engendered by reflection necessarily implies that the desire was generated out of reason (in Plato's more substantial sense). This is a difficult task. We can exclude this objection only by clearly showing that the inward refusal for the drink, cited in

⁷ If the principles of logic are counter-examples, they are uninteresting ones.

the argument, was generated out of reason. Fortunately, Plato gives us help here, although we will have to go through a detour until we arrive at an understanding of this point.

Plato maintains that “each desire by itself is only for its object, that of which it is; it is of one kind or another because of things present in addition” (437e). The first point here is that desire is intentional; all desire is desire of or for something. The second point is that kinds of desires may be differentiated according to what their objects are. Thus, since a healthy drink is not identical with a drink *simpliciter*, the desire for a healthy drink (a drink that contributes to or preserves health in the body) is distinct from the desire for drink *simpliciter*. Desires that have different objects, Plato will say, are different kinds of desires: certain modifications of the objects of desires modify the desires themselves. But there is an important ambiguity in the notion of the objects of desire. It is important because it has implications for whether the Principle of Opposites can be legitimately applied to all cases where someone desires x and inwardly refuses x at the same time. Objects of desire (like objects of knowledge and belief) always appear under a description or aspect. To use a popular example, Oedipus desired to marry Jacosta but he did not desire to marry his mother. As it turned out, of course, Jacosta was the mother of Oedipus. Although Oedipus desired to marry Jocasta, it does not follow that he desired to marry his mother. Further, the fact that he did not desire to marry his mother while at the same time desiring to

marry Jacosta does not fall under the Principle of Opposites, for Jacosta and the mother of Oedipus are distinct intentional objects (the desire and the inward refusal would not be directed towards the “same thing”). If cases of this sort fell under the Principle, then the soul would have to be divided into an indefinite number of parts (the Oedipus case would plausibly generate a division within either spirit or appetite, depending on our interpretation of Oedipus’ most basic motives).

These considerations allow us to analyze the case of the thirsty man with more precision. The drink in question is supposed to be something believed to be bad for the man, something that would contribute to his bodily sickness. Yet Socrates affirms that the man desires the drink nonetheless. Under what aspect does the man desire the drink? Does the man desire the drink as “the drink that is bad for me” or “the unhealthy drink”? Or would it be more like “the drink that would satisfy this irritating dryness” or “the drink that would bring me pleasure”? For the purposes of Plato’s argument, does it matter which description it appears under? It is clear that the man inwardly refuses the drink as something like “the unhealthy drink,” for the reason that the man inwardly refuses the drink is on account of his belief that it is bad for him. But, from the fact that the same drink may appear under different descriptions to the desirer, does it follow that the Principle of Opposites cannot be legitimately applied to the case? If so, then Plato’s argument would, of course, fail. Fortunately, however, I think there is a

way to legitimately apply the Principle to cases of this sort. The most salient difference in the Oedipus case and the case of the thirsty man lies in the fact that the thirsty man believes that the drink he desires and the drink he inwardly refuses are one and the same drink while Oedipus disbelieves that Jacosta is one and the same as his mother. The possession of this belief is what makes the thirsty man aware of his internal conflict.

I shall now like to synthesize these last considerations. The intentional objects of desire count as the “same thing” in the Principle of Opposites, even when they appear under different descriptions, only when the desirer (rightly or wrongly) identifies them as one and the same thing. Further, as Plato implies, one may desire something even when that thing appears under descriptions like “that which is bad for me.” In the case of the thirsty man, the man is confronted with a spontaneous desire to drink and comes to reflect on whether the desire should be acted on or not. That is, he comes to *evaluate* his pre-reflective desire. Unlike the democratic soul, the thirsty man assumes that the objects of desire are not equally desirable; that some desires are intrinsically or instrumentally better than others. But if the thirsty man assumes the inequality of desires, by what ultimate criterion will he choose one over others?⁸ Formally (or vaguely), the criterion

⁸ I assume an ultimate criterion or a *summum bonum*, for if there were an irreducible plurality of criteria, then no reasoned decision would be possible in the case where the criteria come into conflict. I believe that considering the

will be either the good or what the thirsty man takes to be the good. Further, what the thirsty man takes to be the good will be the good only if the thirsty man is wise. This last point is the key to seeing why the inward refusal of the thirsty man's desire to drink may be taken to belong to reason in Plato's substantial sense. For Plato, a desire is generated out of reason only when it comes from a knowledge of the good. This is why Plato takes it to be obvious that children do not possess reason and most adults come to possess it only late in life. Plato recognizes that we are not born with *explicit* knowledge of the good but must acquire it through proper education. Thus, Plato can legitimately infer that reason and appetite obtain in the human soul from the existence of opposing desires in the thirsty man. He can legitimately infer this because of his assumptions that the thirsty man's inward refusal of the drink arises out of his knowledge of the good and that the desire for the drink is seen to conflict with the good of the man. This assumption, however, should not be left as an assumption; it cries out for argument. It needs support because, with this assumption, Plato implies two hotly debated theses: that the good of a person is "objective" (that people can be wrong about what they take to be the highest good) and that it is possible to have knowledge of the objective good of a person. I claim that he implies the objectivity of goodness for the reason that, if the thirsty man's inward refusal of

possibility of conflicts in values is the source of the idea of the greatest good, an idea so widely received by the ancients.

the drink were to be ultimately derived from his belief that, for example, he would be humiliated by his peers for acting contrary to what his bodily health requires rather than his belief concerning what the good is, then the inward refusal would belong to spirit instead of appetite. It should be obvious why I claim that Plato implies the possibility of knowledge of the good.

Next Socrates goes on to argue that spirit obtains in the human soul and is identical neither with reason nor with appetite. I will only briefly cover this argument, since the possible roles of appetite and reason play a far more dominant role in the main moral argument of the *Republic* than spirit. In spite of surface appearances, Socrates uses the same strategy for proving the distinctness of reason and spirit and of spirit and appetite that he uses in proving the distinctness of reason and appetite. To distinguish spirit and appetite, Socrates cites the case of Leontius, a man presumably voyeuristically attracted to corpses. When Leontius sees the corpses, he has a voyeuristic desire to stare at them, and he has an inward refusal to stare at them that comes from his belief that to do so would be shameful. In identifying his desire as shameful, Leontius becomes angry at himself, or at least at the part of himself which sexually desires the corpses (his appetite). Thus, since spirit is the part by which we become angry and the part which loves honor (and hates shame), the inward refusal belongs to spirit (it seems to be assumed here that Leontius has no knowledge of the good that undergirds his repulsion of shame), and since appetite is the part of the soul in

which blind urges and cravings for food, drink, sex, and money are found, it is shown that spirit and appetite are distinct. They are distinct because they have opposing relations to the corpses at the same time.

Socrates first tries to show that spirit and reason are distinct by saying that children and (unwise) men can become angry even though they do not possess reason. When this means, as I think it means, that one can become angry with no knowledge of the good, then it should be granted to Socrates. But does it show that reason and spirit are distinct? Not by itself. Fortunately, however, it is not the only argument for the separation of reason and spirit. It is also contended that spirit and reason are distinct by citing a passage attributed to Homer. In the passage, a man, filled with anger, “struck his chest and rebuked his heart” (441b). I am unaware of the context of this passage and Plato leaves it unspecified. But all we have to do is imagine a situation where a person angrily desires to do something rash but inwardly refuses to do this same thing by calculating “the better and the worse” (441b). We might imagine a man that desires to kill his cheating wife (for fear of shame) and inwardly refuses to kill her on account of his knowledge of his own good (when we leave that knowledge unspecified). If such a man becomes convinced that it would be better not to kill his cheating wife, then his anger may subside, depending on whether he possesses temperance or not.

There are, as we have seen, some important ways in which Plato's argument for the tripartite soul can be reasonably doubted. But even if his argument rests on some shaky assumptions (such as that a man may have knowledge of what is objectively good for him and that this good is irreducible to social, economic, and hedonistic desires), his theory of the soul can still be valued for its ability to illuminate, interpret, and evaluate motivational conflict. At any rate, we will now explore Plato's account of the virtues as they are found in the soul, an account that depends on the truth of the tripartite soul.

C. Living Well and the Virtues of the Soul

Before identifying the virtues as they are found in the soul, Socrates identifies them as they are found in the city. We shall not follow this procedure but will proceed immediately to the accounts of the virtues of the soul. As was noted earlier, in Book I, Socrates had implied a strategy for identifying the virtues and vices of functioning things. The soul was said to have the function of living, and if we were to determine what it is for a soul to live well, then we could go on to investigate what features of the soul allow it to live well, and these features would be the virtues of the soul. Though this strategy is not explicitly appealed to when Socrates gives an account of the virtues, I find it fruitful both in making

sense of the identification of the virtues and in making sense of the final arguments concerning the superiority of being just over being unjust.

What is it for a soul to live well? This question, of course, is not thematized in the *Republic*, but nevertheless Plato has implicit assumptions concerning the matter. Constantly we find Plato appealing to the value of having a unified or harmonious soul (420b, 423a-d, 431c, 443d, 561e, 591c). He assumes that just as it is valuable to live in a unified city, one ordered in such a way as to minimize all possible conflicts of interests, it is valuable to have a unified soul, one ordered in such a way as to minimize all possible motivational conflict. So, for Plato, motivational unity or psychic harmony is necessary for living well. The cases that Socrates appeals to in dividing the parts of the soul were all cases of motivational conflict and the occurrence of such motivational conflicts are assumed to be undesirable by Plato. To live a divided life is to be an enemy of one's self and to live a harmonious life is to be a friend of one's self. But what does it mean to live a unified life? Plato and the other ancients seem to think that it consists in subordinating all of one's desires to the desire of what one takes to be the good. Let us flesh out this important thought.

Both Plato and Aristotle thought that human life should be a kind of striving towards the highest or supreme good, and they were both, at one time or another, perplexed as to exactly what constitutes the supreme good. Aristotle, apparently following Plato, tells us, "Every craft and every line of inquiry, and

likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good,” and he goes on to argue that if there were no supreme or highest good, then we would choose everything for the sake of something else, and this would go on without limit, “so that desire will prove to be empty and futile” (*E.N.* 1094a1-23).⁹ Similarly, the Socrates of the *Republic* asserts, “[The Good] is what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it acts in everything, dimly divining that it is something but perplexed and unable sufficiently to grasp what it is...” (505e).

So, since the supreme good is that for the sake of which we act in everything, every other end that we try to achieve in our activities must be subordinated to the supreme good; the supreme good is, then, the only good that we truly desire for its own sake *and not* for the sake of something else, since every good besides the supreme good ultimately must be desired and sought out for the sake of the supreme good.

Despite the impression one may get from reading the passages quoted above, the idea of living one’s life according to the supreme good (living a unified life) is, for both Plato and Aristotle, a prescription for ordering one’s life rather than a description of the way that (all) people actually live. Plato and Aristotle

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Edition, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999). All further quotes from *E.N.* are from Irwin’s translation.

It should be noted that, at best, Aristotle’s argument shows that there must be *at least one thing* that we desire for its own sake, but it does not show that there must be *only one thing* that we desire for its own sake.

both admit the possibility of living one's life not according to some single preeminent good; that is, of living according to a plurality of goods.¹⁰ Providing a psychological sketch of the democratic person, Socrates tells us,

[I]f anyone says that some pleasures belong to excellent and good desires, others to bad desires, and that some should be served and honored, other chastised and enslaved, he [the democratic person] does not accept it as a true account...Rather, in all this he shakes his head and claims that they [desires] are all alike and to be valued equally.

So he in this way lives out his life day by day...delighting in the desire that happens along. Now he gets drunk and abandons himself to the sound of the flute, next he drinks water and diets, but then again he exercises sometimes; sometimes he is lazy and neglectful of everything, but then spends his time as though in philosophy... There is neither order nor necessity present to his life, but he calls this life pleasant and free and blessed, and holds to it through everything (561b-c).

So, the democratic man assigns an equality of goodness to all his desires.

Obviously, in assigning an equality of goodness to all his desires, the democratic man must reject the notion of a supreme good, a preeminent good that he desires (or should desire) above all others and of which he directs his entire life towards achieving, realizing, or imitating. But somewhat paradoxically, a few pages after indicating that the democratic person holds that there is an irreducible plurality of goods, Plato goes on to tell us that the democratic person nevertheless lives

¹⁰ One might think that I have left out of consideration the nihilistic way of life. But, since the ancient concepts of good and desire are much broader than the modern moral (deontological) concepts of right and duty, the moral nihilist also lives according to either a plurality of goods or to a supreme good. If not, then the nihilist would have no possibility of living independently, since his or her ability to make decisions would be completely paralyzed.

according to a supreme good: freedom (562b).¹¹ So, according to Plato, the democratic man takes freedom to be the supreme good, and thus organizes his entire life around exercising and preserving freedom. But, as we have seen, the freedom of the democratic man consists in fulfilling whatever desire presents itself to him, whether the desire is for knowledge, honor, wealth, physical pleasure or anything else. Although, given the description of what the democratic man's freedom amounts to, there is something inconsistent in saying that the democratic man devotes his whole life to achieving the supreme good of freedom, it is just Plato's way of saying that the democratic man thinks that living according a plurality of values is the best way of life and that subordinating all values to just one preeminent good is arbitrary at best. What we have seen by this is that Plato thinks that for a person to live their life according to a plurality of values or goods is both possible and to be avoided for the reason that it produces motivational conflict and a divided life. Plato was not alone. In the following passage of the *Eudemian Ethics*, we see that Aristotle agreed with Plato concerning both points:

[W]e must urge everyone who has the power to live according to his own choice to set up for himself an object...to aim at – honor or reputation or wealth or

¹¹ Plato thinks that the democratic person's notion of freedom is really an undesirable anarchy (560e).

culture – with reference to which he will perform all his actions. For not to have one's life organized by reference to some end is foolish (*E.E.* 1214b6-11).¹²

Plato and Aristotle thought that when people reflect on their lives as a whole, their hopes for what they will become depend on the kind of person they are, and that, as we saw before, people fall into three basic kinds, distinguished by what they love most of all: *philosophers*, lovers of contemplation and understanding, *spirited people*, lovers of mastery, victory, honor, and good repute, and *appetitive people*, lovers of gratification, bodily pleasure, and moneymaking (*Rep.* 435e, 581c; *E.N.* 1095b13-1096a10). Since Plato and Aristotle distinguish the three kinds of people or lives according to what they love the most, they sometimes describes these basic kinds of people as different in respect to what they take to be the supreme good. If, as a philosopher, you take the supreme good to be understanding, then all of your values will be subordinated to achieving understanding (591c). As a human philosopher, you must satisfy your needs for food, drink and shelter, and you will have to make use of money, but you will not seek out these necessities for their own sake alone, rather you will seek them out only insofar as they contribute to achieving understanding. The same form of reasoning will hold for the one's who take the supreme good to be wealth and gratification or honor and victory.

¹² Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. J. Solomon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), quoted in Nicholas White, *A Brief History of Happiness* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 12.

What these considerations show us is that Plato takes a unified life to be necessary for living well and that a unified life consists in devoting one's life to what one takes to be the supreme good. To take something to be the supreme good and yet not devote oneself to it or to have one part of the soul repulsed by it is to have a divided life. Besides this condition, there is at least one other necessary element of living well that we should bring up now. Plato thinks it is possible to be wrong in taking something as the supreme good; that what someone take to be the good is not thereby the good. This has the consequence that some folks may organize their lives according to what they take to be the good, and yet fail to live well. Moreover, Socrates argues that, assuming we organize our lives according to what we take to be the highest good, the degree to which we live well is determined by what we take to be the highest good. Thus, the philosopher lives best of all, the honor-lover lives second best, the money-lover third, and the tyrannical person lives most poorly. Making sense of this will be a main task in interpreting the final arguments for the superiority of the just life. For now, we can just hold it in mind while we come to terms with Plato's accounts of the virtues of the soul.

Assuming that the soul that lives best is motivationally harmonious and takes the highest good to be the good, Socrates' account of the virtues makes perfect sense, for they turn out to be the features of the soul that allow it to live best. Being *wise* consists in possessing knowledge of what is best for the soul a

whole (441e,442c). That is, being wise consists in knowing what kind of activities to engage in so as to satisfy the desires of the soul, viewed as a community of three motivational elements. The idea is that each part of the soul naturally possesses some desires that are necessary for us to satisfy in the sense that, if they are not satisfied, then each part of the soul will thereby suffer. If we do not satisfy the appetitive desire to eat, then we will satisfy neither appetite, spirit, nor reason. Further, each part of the soul except reason possesses some desires that, if we do not *limit* them, end up frustrating our souls as a whole (558d-559a, 572b). The desire for money is an appetitive desire such that, if it is not limited, is strengthened to such a degree that it can overpower such social desires (desires of spirit) as the desire for friendship. The same can be said of all appetitive desires. Further, as is seen in the common occurrence of “peer pressure,” the spirited desire for honor, if not limited, can frustrate our rational and appetitive desires.

Stated like this, being wise might seem no different than being prudent. But this is incorrect. Prudence consists only in knowing how to satisfy whatever desires present themselves to us, even when they may conflict with each other in terms of time and energy; prudence makes no distinction between unnecessary and necessary desires. Being prudent is necessary for being wise but not sufficient. In addition to prudence, the possession of wisdom allows us to *evaluate* our desires and not merely *deliberate* about how to achieve their

satisfaction. But, by what criterion does the wise man evaluate his desires? For Plato, desires are to be wisely evaluated according to the idea of *necessity* (which, as we will see, ultimately involves the evaluation of desires in terms of how they relate to the Good and in particular, the human good). All desires are either necessary or unnecessary. Necessary desires are those which we “are not able to get rid of...and also those whose satisfaction is beneficial to us” (558e).

Unnecessary desires are those which “could be got rid of if one practiced from youth, and whose presence does no good and sometimes the opposite” (559a). At this point, we may right ask what these desires are necessary and unnecessary *for* and what unnecessary desires do no good *for*. Unfortunately, Plato never answers this question. It is, however, not too hard to come up with a plausible answer.

First, we could say that the being necessary or unnecessary of a desire is determined by what part of the soul it belongs to. Desires belonging to the appetitive part of the soul are necessary insofar as they contribute to bodily health and they are unnecessary insofar as they are either neutral or antagonistic to bodily health. Thus, Socrates cites the desire for junk food as an unnecessary desire. The desire for money is necessary only when that desire is limited to the acquisition of money necessary for achieving the good of our bodies, social relations, and understanding. Once our desire for money goes beyond what is necessary, we no longer treat the possession of money as a means to an end but as an end in itself. The problem with desires unlimited by necessity is that they are

causally related to psychic disorders such as obsession and addiction. It is fair to assume that the desire for wealth as an end in itself (that is, an unlimited desire for wealth) is to be avoided insofar as it causes the desirer to obsessively worry over something inessential to his own good. Further, Plato insists that unnecessary desires necessarily conflict with necessary desires; for example, that an unnecessary desire for money will inevitably conflict with the necessary desires for understanding, honor, and bodily health. Connecting this with the last thought, worrying over what is inessential to our own good takes our thought away from reflecting on what is essential to our own good. Desires belonging to the spirited part of the soul are necessary insofar as they contribute to one's social relations and are unnecessary insofar as they are either neutral or antagonistic to one's social relations. Finally, desires belonging to the rational part of the soul are necessary or unnecessary insofar as they contribute to *knowledge*, and especially knowledge of the Good. The "lovers of sights and sounds", then, may be said to possess desires for learning that are unnecessary. The man who loves to possess "knowledge" of variegated and changing particular things and events thereby renders himself incapable of grasping what it is that makes all these particular things and events the kinds of things they are.

So, to sum up these considerations, Plato holds that being wise is a feature of the soul that allows the wise person to evaluate his desires and prudently plan to evaluate them. Also, as I have implied, the evaluation of particular desires

consists in reflecting on whether those desires are appropriately desired for their own sakes or for their consequences. But, this is not enough, for the Platonically wise person must also be able to evaluate the consequences that his desires are desired for the sake of. The wise person must be able to evaluate all of his desires in terms of how they relate to the Good. This implies that the wise person know what it is that makes all things good. When the wise person reflects on any given desire that presents itself to him, he will thereby label it as necessary insofar as it contributes to his being good and unnecessary insofar as it is either neutral or antagonistic to his being good. Without going into Plato's obscure account of the Good, we might just say that the wise person evaluates his desires in terms of whether they contribute to his being good *as a person*, when being a good person means having a properly functioning appetite (an appetite that desires only what is necessary for maintaining bodily health), a properly functioning spirit (a spirit that desires only what is necessary for maintaining healthy social relations) and a properly functioning rational part (a rational part that desires to know only what is most important without losing itself in the *unlimited* desire to "know" all sorts of particular things and events, the desire to know them for their own sakes and not as imperfect instantiations of the Forms they partake of). So, being wise, considered in this way, is a feature of the soul that allows it to live well insofar as living well requires that what one takes to be the good must be the good. The wise person, in taking the good to be the good, is able to properly class his desires

as necessary or unnecessary for achieving goodness in his own person. Without knowing what it is (for a person) to be good, the merely prudent person will have no guarantee (nor understanding) that what he takes to be a desire to be acted on is appropriately related to his own good.

Unlike wisdom, the other three psychic virtues that Socrates gives an account of relate to having a harmonious soul. Together, they guarantee that the virtuous person will live a unified life, one untainted by chronic motivational conflict. Being *courageous* is a condition of spirit whereby the “spirited form preserves through pains and pleasures what was and was not pronounced by reasoning to be fearful” (442c). The idea here is that the courageous person has an emotional disposition that agrees with his beliefs and knowledge (in short, with the rational part of his soul). The courageous person gets angry only at that which he believes or knows he should be angry at and fears only that which he believes or knows to be truly fearful. Thus, since the Socrates of the *Crito* was convinced that it would be shameful and unjust to escape from prison even while he was sentenced for death, and, on account of this belief and the belief that death is not to be feared, he displayed no anger or fear (and even slept soundly!), it may be said Socrates revealed his courage. Since courage is of this character, cowardice will be the opposing condition, the one in which the spirited part of the soul is disposed to disagree with the rational part of the soul concerning what are to be objects of anger and fear. The classic example of cowardice revealing itself

is to be found in the soldier who believes that dishonor is fearful while death is not. When placed into a situation where he believes he will inevitably die, the soldier begins to fear his own death and this fear overpowers his fear of dishonor (of which he believes to be truly fearful). In such a state, the soldier flees for safety. Since the soldier's emotional content conflicted with his beliefs, the soldier revealed himself as cowardly.

Being courageous is to be valued for a couple of different reasons. For one, the courageous soul is not plagued by internal conflict, the courageous person's spirited part does not pull him in a different direction than his rational part. Even if the cowardly person does end up obeying reason over spirit, it is still undesirable that he should have to consider going against what he believes to be best and thereby experience inner turmoil. Also, it is unlikely that the cowardly person will obey reason in most conflicts between reason and spirit. Further, if, through cowardice, one is overpowered by anger or fear to do something contrary to what one thinks best, then regret and shame follow. In addition, cowardice can also be seen as a fearful condition, one of which we are out of control of ourselves. We might think of the cowardly man who, due to some overpowering and irrational anger, fear, or jealousy, kills someone he cares about or himself. In sum, since courage consists in the agreement of spirit and reason concerning the things that are to be feared and the things that are not, it can be seen that courage

is a condition of the soul that allows it to live well insofar as it constitutes part of what it is to live a unified life.

Being *temperate* consists in each part of the soul agreeing that reason ought to be the dominant element (442c). The (completely) temperate soul is one in which the desires that reason approves of always overpower the desires that reason rejects. If a man has an appetitive urge to drink and a rational aversion to drink, then if he is very temperate, the appetitive urge will be very weak (or not very compelling), and if he is very intemperate, the appetitive urge will be very strong, it will be difficult for him to refrain from drinking. Since temperance secures the unification of the soul as directed towards whatever reason takes to be the highest good, it is considered to be a virtue of the soul.

Being *just* consists in each of the parts of the soul performing its own proper function (and performing its proper function *only*) (441d). So, included in this account of justice is a doctrine concerning the proper functions of each of the elements. Socrates tells us that the proper function of reason is to rule the soul, “because it is wise and exercises forethought in behalf of the whole soul” (441e). But this is problematic. Not all souls are wise, and by Plato’s conception of wisdom as necessitating an understanding of the Good, it becomes unclear whether anyone is wise. Should reason rule the soul of unwise persons? According to Plato, it shouldn’t. He says of the unwise that “in order that such a man may be ruled by what also rules the best man, we claim he must be a slave of

him who is best and contains within himself the divine ruler” (590d). For the unwise, those who lack a fully developed reason, it is better that they should be ruled by someone who is wise; the unwise should not be autonomous, for they will achieve their own good only by following the orders of the wise. This commits Plato to saying that being just entails being wise. Reason *can* perform its proper function *only if* reason possesses wisdom, so if being just requires that reason performs its proper function, then being just requires being wise. It is, however, important to note that being wise does not require being just, if being wise does not require being either temperate or courageous. For, in the intemperate soul, irrational desires (desires we know or believe we shouldn’t act on) are stronger than rational desires. So, even if one possess wisdom, if one is not temperate, then one’s reason does not rule in the soul. Therefore, one can be wise and yet still be unjust.

Next, Socrates tells us that the proper function of spirit is to be the “servant and ally” of reason (441e). The idea seems to be that spirit is to reinforce the rule of reason with the use of feelings such as anger or indignation, fear, shame, and honor. This idea seems very much akin to the considerations that led Hume to say that reason is the slave of the passions. Plato seems to be affirming that just knowing what we ought to do is insufficient for carrying it out; in addition to belief and knowledge, we need feelings to drive us. Whereas Hume inferred from this that reason contributes *nothing* to our motivations, Plato resists

this inference, since he does not want to reduce knowledge of the Good to knowledge of what is socially, economically, and hedonistically good. Plato wants to say that what it is to be a good person, a person that lives well, is over and above what it is to be a successful, popular, and pleasure-filled person. At any rate, what must be stressed here is that spirit's proper function is to, with the feelings belonging to it, reinforce what reason dictates. In addition, the proper function of spirit is to form dispositions and habits based on the mandates of reason. Typically, a person does not deliberate much before acting. With reason's knowledge concerning, for example, what is to be feared and what not, spirit reinforces this knowledge by engendering a habit to non-reflectively fear what we believe or know is fearful and so on. Bringing about the habit concerning what is to be feared and what isn't, spirit's performing it's own proper function may be said to guarantee courage in the just person's soul. So, not only is the just person necessarily wise, he must also be courageous. If the spirit of the just person is the ally of reason in that it provides feeling-based habits and dispositions to reinforce what he believes or knows is best, then the just person's spirit will not conflict with reason concerning the proper objects of fear, anger, shame, and honor.

But what is appetite's proper function? Socrates claims that appetite "is surely the most numerous part of the soul in each individual, and by nature most insatiably covetous of money. These two [reason and spirit] will watch it closely,

lest it be filled with the pleasures of the body...but undertake to enslave and rule what its kind ought not to rule..." (442a). Socrates, while continually stressing that spirit and reason must limit the desires of appetite, forgets to tell us what proper function appetite possesses. From the picture Socrates paints of appetite, one wonders whether or not the desires of appetite are not completely inessential...that, if the just person didn't possess appetite, he would be just as well off and maybe even better off. If the proper function of appetite is just to obey reason and appetite, it is unclear what unique motivation it adds to the just soul.

If we were to come to the aid of the account, we could suggest that the proper function of appetite is to bring the needs of the body to the attention of spirit and reason. If this is correct, then the completely just person will possess an appetite such that it craves and urges him towards only what contributes to his bodily health. If this is correct and the appetite limits itself to the necessary, then we can infer that the properly functioning appetite will not engender irrational desires, for the reason that wisdom approves of all and only necessary desires.

Is it possible to be just and yet not temperate? It seems that it is not, for if it is best for reason to rule, and reason knows what is best for the soul (and, thus, that it is best for reason to rule), and spirit reinforces reason (and thus reinforces the belief that reason should rule), and appetite desires only what reason approves of (and thus doesn't desire that anything besides reason should rule), then all the

parts of the soul will be in agreement according to what should rule and what should be ruled in the soul. So, on Plato's account, it is implied that the completely just person will be wise, courageous, and temperate. Moreover, it is clear why the condition that Plato calls just is thought to be a virtue, for, like courage and temperance, justice is constitutive of happiness in that it is part of what it is to have a unified soul. When each part of the soul performs its own proper function and doesn't meddle into the business of the others, the soul is harmonious and lacks the strife characteristic of the souls in which, for instance, appetite rules and goes against the mandates of reason.

To synthesize, Plato holds that being just consists in having one's reason rule, one's spirit reinforce one's reason with feelings and dispositions, and one's appetite disclosing only the needs of the body. Is this a satisfactory account? Why should this condition of the soul be called *justice*? Plato tries to confirm his account by "applying commonplace tests" (442d). However he offers no argument in applying these tests and merely insists that the person with the soul he has described as just would not steal, betray, lie, be disloyal, disrespect his parents, or commit adultery. Nonetheless, something persuasive can be said in Plato's favor. If we were right in saying that the wise person evaluates desires according to the criterion of necessity, and we accept Plato's just soul as the soul in which reason both possesses wisdom and rules, then the just person will evaluate all his desires according to the criterion of necessity and he will have a

spirit that reinforces his evaluation of these desires, and an appetite that refuses to desire anything contrary to these evaluations. Thus, the just person will not desire any more external goods than he needs.

If we remember the challenge of Glaucon, the primary motivation for acting unjustly was implied to be the allegedly basic desire for more than one needs or the desire to overreach (359c, 360b). What Plato has done, then, is to remove this desire from the just soul; he is claiming that it is irrational (contrary to what is best for a person overall) to have desires unlimited by the criterion of necessity. But if Plato has limited the desires of the just person to what is necessary, does it follow, as Plato thinks it does, that the just person will not engage in (what are commonly taken to be) unjust acts? This is unclear, and we should say something about it.

It is easy to see why Plato would think it uncontroversial to say that the just person would have no reason to lie, kill, or steal if the just person were in a situation where he could satisfy his necessary desires without engaging in unjust acts. What is not clear is whether the Platonically just person has an overriding reason not to do injustice when he must do so in order to satisfy his necessary desires. Socrates tells us that one necessary desire is the desire “to eat in the amount required for health and good condition” (599a). Let us imagine a case where the just person is poverty-stricken and situated in a community where the poor have no resources to acquire food. If the just man is to satisfy his necessary

desire, he must steal. What will the Platonically just person do? At the very least, it is unclear whether the Platonically just person will refrain from stealing. After all, in doing so, he need not desire more than what is necessary. What such cases show is that it is reasonable to doubt whether or not the Platonically just person will always engage in what common morality holds to be just. This is not necessarily a fault in his theory, since common morality may be wrong. But, on the other hand, Plato is surely at fault in not taking into consideration such possible conflicts. He completely ignores the possibility where the just man might act in a way that we pre-reflectively take to be unjust.

In sufficiently optimal socio-economical situations, we could expect the Platonically just person to avoid what we pre-reflectively take to be unjust practices. But does one have to be Platonically just in order to act in this way? No, for as Glaucon and Adeimantus make clear, people may act justly out of fear of punishment. These people seem to be just, but aren't; they act justly but do so only out of compulsion and fear. So, at best, if a person is Platonically just, then that person will behave in ways that common morality deems just, but not conversely. Is this connection sufficient to avoid the charge of equivocation mentioned earlier? The question was whether Plato, in praising Platonic justice, also praised the justice that was thought to be undesirable in the first two books. The answer to this question is complex. In showing that the Platonically just person is happier than the unjust person, Plato will not necessarily show that the

person who acts justly is happier than the person who acts unjustly. This is because a Platonically unjust person may act justly and may act justly throughout his entire life. However, Plato, in showing that the Platonically just person is happiest, will show that having a condition that leads to acting justly is more choice-worthy than one that leads to acting unjustly. He will show that persons who desire injustice, regardless of whether they act justly or not, are more miserable than people who desire justice. So, although Plato will not show that people who act justly are happier than people who act unjustly, he will show that people who desire to act justly are happier than people who desire to act unjustly, even if both are given free reign to act on what they desire, without fear of punishment.

D. The Arguments for the Choice-Worthiness of Being Just

Before presenting the final arguments for the superiority of being just over being unjust, Socrates presents us with psychological sketches of four different kinds of persons. These psychological types are meant to be contrasted with the psychological type of the just person. At the basic level, each psychological type differs insofar as they are driven by different kinds of desires. The aristocrat is driven by the love of wisdom, the timocrat by honor, the oligarch by money, the

democrat by freedom or anarchy, and the tyrant by “lawless” desires. Giving adequate descriptions of each psychological type would take up too much space, so we must pass on to what is essential to the argument. Socrates claims that the tyrannical man is most unjust and argues that he is most miserable. Further, he thinks it has been shown that the aristocratic man, the man ruled by reason, is the most just. The two questions to be answered in this section are: (1) why is the tyrannical man said to be the most unjust type of man, and (2) why is the unjust man miserable in comparison to the just man?

To answer these questions, we must, of course, become acquainted with the tyrannical man. Before accounting for the life of the tyrannical man, Socrates introduces a further division of desires. Within the unnecessary class of desires, there are lawless desires, desires that manifest themselves in drunken dreams, when we suppose ourselves “loosed from all shame and all wisdom” (571c-d). Included within the class of lawless desires are desires satisfied by incest, bestiality, cannibalism, and senseless murder. Socrates claims that such lawless desires are common to all people and that this is indicated in the content of our dreams. However, he says, the lawless desires of the just person, being “self-possessed and healthy and temperate,” are far more latent than those found in the soul ruled by appetite or spirit (571d). Though Socrates does not say, we may characterize lawless desires as those that are desired by appetite but are always met with opposition by spirit and reason. These differ from unnecessary desires

in that unnecessary desires are desires that are opposed merely by reason; they may be approved of by spirit, depending on the kind of social situation we find ourselves in. This being so, the man with lawless desires believes or knows that they are antagonistic to his own good and also feels ashamed of having them. Thus, if this characterization of lawless desires is correct, then anyone that acts on lawless desires cannot fail to act incontinently.

After introducing the class of lawless desires, Socrates tells us that a tyrannical man becomes tyrannical when “tyrant-makers...contrive to plant in him an Eros, an overmastering passion, as leader of those idle desires which divide his means among themselves – a monstrous winged drone” (572e-573a). We must unpack the metaphors in this passage. Throughout Books VIII and IX, Socrates uses the image of the drone to describe certain kinds of people and desires. The drone-people are those that contribute nothing to the city but only use up its resources and goods, usually through flattery or deception. Similarly, the drone-desires are those that demand that we use our time, energy, and other resources to satisfy them and, yet, produce nothing good for us. When we satisfy them, we worsen ourselves. This is why the drone-desires are said to be idle; they produce nothing good for the self. Put this way, drone-desires are identical with unnecessary desires. So, what Socrates is saying is that the tyrannical man, under the influence of other people, acquires one especially strong unnecessary desire, an Eros, that “leads” his other unnecessary desires. The sense in which the Eros

leads the other unnecessary desires is unclear. It could mean that the other unnecessary desires are desired for the sake of fulfilling the Eros or it could mean that the presence of Eros causes the soul to have many other unnecessary desires along with it. The latter is probably meant, since Socrates later says that “if a tyrannical master passion dwells within and governs everything belonging to the soul..., then many other terrible desires shoot up day and night, requiring many things” (573d). So, if Socrates is right, the Eros present in the tyrannical soul breeds unnecessary desires. That is not all it does. Socrates says that the Eros, when it activates itself and implants the sting of longing in the soul of the tyrannical man, “if it can lay hold of any judgments or desires accounted good in the man and still capable of shame, it kills them and pushes them away, until it has purged him of temperance, and filled him with madness imported from without” (573b). So, not only does the tyrannical Eros breed unnecessary desires, it also kills or represses rational and spirited desires. The point here is that the tyrannical man becomes completely dominated by one master, unnecessary desire, and that this desire, being unnecessary, is opposed to reason (or what is judged as being best for the man overall) as well as being opposed to spirit (or what is felt to be most noble or honorable). In addition, the tyrannical Eros, being in opposition to spirited and rational desires while also being stronger than they are, is able to overpower them. Thus, the tyrannical man will be compelled to act

against his best judgment and against his sense of shame, all on account of the master Eros that dominates him.

The psychological condition of the tyrannical man that Socrates has sketched here seems to be the psychological condition of the addict or of the obsessive. Both the addict and the obsessive are compelled to act against their judgment concerning what is best for them overall and to act against their feelings of shame. The drug addict, in the height of his addiction, is willing to do anything to satisfy his longing, even when he believes that doing so is ruining his life and when he feels ashamed and angered at the kind of person he has become.

Just as Socrates, after describing the psychological condition of the just person, sought to link this condition with what is commonly thought to be just behavior, Socrates seeks to connect the unjust character with what is commonly taken to be unjust behavior. The idea is that the tyrannical man will be compelled to satisfy his master Eros, and in order to do so, he will need money (574a). But, if the tyrannical man is unrestrained by either reason or spirit, he will acquire his money in any way he can. Thus, Socrates tells us that the tyrannical man will not be held back from stealing, lying, or killing anyone who has the money he needs, including his own parents. So, Socrates seems to have successfully tied the tyrannical soul with unjust behavior. But we must not think that Socrates has shown us the psychological condition of all those who engage in unjust practices. One need not have tyrannical soul in order to steal, murder, or lie. The link

between the tyrannical soul and unjust behavior is thus similar to the link Socrates forges between the just soul and just behavior: the psychological condition leads to the behavior but is not necessary for the behavior.

Besides the propensity of the tyrannical soul to engage in unjust behavior, Socrates quickly concludes on the basis of the tyrannical man's condition that he will necessarily lack "true friendship" (576a). If the tyrannical soul is driven by one master Eros, at the cost of his spirited and rational desires, he will be led to associate with others only insofar as they will flatter him and perform services for him or else if they possess something that the tyrant needs. The friendship of the tyrant, Aristotle would say, is one based on the love of utility or pleasure, and is thus coincidental and easily dissolved (*E.N.* 1156a10-22).

So Socrates has outlined the soul of the tyrannical man. But why should the tyrannical man be taken as the unjust man, the man that opposes what Plato had described as the just soul? One straightforward reason is that while the just soul is ruled by reason and has appetite as its servant, the tyrannical man is ruled by appetite and has reason as its servant. But this is true not only of the tyrannical man but also of the oligarchic and democratic men. The further distinction, then, must lie in the fact that, while the tyrannical man is dominated by only unnecessary desires, the oligarch and democratic men are governed by both necessary and unnecessary desires. Since the rule of reason in the just soul consists in maintaining only desires that accord with the criterion of necessity,

then it would seem that the soul that refuses the criterion of necessity altogether would be the most opposed to the just soul, and this would indeed be the tyrannical soul, at least if we take the five psychological conditions outlined in the *Republic* as our only options.

By understanding the psychological conditions of both the unjust and just souls, we are now in a position to account for the three arguments Socrates offers for the conclusion that the just soul is happiest. The first argument proceeds on the analogy of city and soul. Assuming that the tyrannical city enslaves its best members and allows free reign to its worst members, that it is impoverished, and fearful, Socrates concludes that the tyrannical man is enslaved, impoverished, and fearful. In what sense is the tyrannical man enslaved? In the sense that the “soul ruled by a tyrant will least do what it wishes” (577e). Socrates is here claiming that the unjust soul is an incontinent soul. This is a conclusion that we drew earlier. The idea was that a man that is ruled by desires that are opposed to his spirited and rational desires will thereby be compelled to act against his (perhaps forcibly quieted) beliefs about what is best for him overall.

In addition, the tyrannical man is said to be impoverished in what seems like two different senses, one literal and the other figurative. Since the tyrannical man is overpowered by his master Eros, he is forced to imprudently spend more money than he can obtain. This thought was what led Socrates to say that the tyrannical soul would be forced to steal earlier. Moreover, the tyrannical man is

said to be impoverished in that he is “needy and insatiable” (578a). Because the tyrannical man does not limit his appetite according to the necessary, his desires multiply indefinitely. If a soul desires more and more, it is thereby more and more dissatisfied.

Finally, the tyrannical man is said to be fearful. This probably has two different meanings as well. Firstly, the tyrannical man, driven to act unjustly, might constantly worry about being caught and punished. Secondly, since the tyrannical man is more sensitive to his circumstances than other people, being constantly irritated by an Eros that demands he acquire the means to satisfy it, he might be fearful in the sense that his satisfaction or dissatisfaction depends almost completely on things beyond his control.

So, to sum up the first argument, the just person is seen to be happier than the unjust person in that the former acts and desires in harmony with his beliefs about what is best for him overall, is capable of being satisfied on account of his limited desires, and has less reason to fear fate than the unjust, since his satisfaction depends less on externalities.

The second argument is an appeal to the testimony of the just person, which is reasoned to be more trustworthy than the testimony of those ruled by spirit or appetite. The conclusion of the second argument, interestingly, is stronger than that of the first. While the first argument concludes merely that the just person is happier than the unjust person, the second concludes the just person

is happier than any other person, whether that person has a timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, or tyrannical soul. How does the argument establish this claim? It is first assumed that each part of the soul has its own distinctive pleasure, that reason's pleasure in knowing, spirit's pleasure in victory, and appetite's pleasure in gaining are all pleasures but of different kinds. The question then arises of which kind of pleasure is most pleasant. Moreover, it is assumed that whichever kind of pleasure is most pleasant should be the pleasure that we seek out over the others. In other words, the person who partakes of the most pleasant of the pleasures more than the others will be happiest.

Since there are three distinct kinds of pleasures, how can we find out which is the most pleasant? One way is to ask those that have the pleasures. But, if we do this, we are bound to meet with different answers from different people. Socrates tell us that each kind of man will tell us that what he loves most (wisdom, honor, or gain) is most pleasant. So, faced with this variety of judgments, Socrates asks which person judges best. Clearly, the best judgment will be given by the one who judges by "experience and intelligence and reason" (582a). As for experience, only the philosopher will have been acquainted with each kind of pleasure, for no one but the philosopher will have experienced "the pleasure derived from knowing, studying the truth as it is" (582a). It is questionable whether Plato is entitled to this claim. For one, why is it that the pleasure of philosophical knowledge is distinct from the pleasure of the

economical knowledge of the oligarch? The oligarch, although he may not care to understand such things as what the good is in itself and by itself, cares about understanding the relationships involved in, for example, supply and demand, optimal divisions of labor, and monetary systems. If knowledge has its own distinct pleasure, it is surely to be found in the pleasure of understanding. But it seems arbitrary to deny understanding to the non-philosopher. So, at the very least, Plato needs an argument to back up his contention that the philosopher is acquainted with a certain kind of pleasure inaccessible to the non-philosopher. At any rate, Socrates goes on to say that the philosopher will be most well trained in reasoning, and so, since he will be most experienced in the kinds of pleasures and will possess the sharpest reason, we should trust the judgment of the philosopher over the non-philosophers. This implies that we should believe that the beloved of the philosopher, or what is the same, the just man, is more pleasant than the beloved of any other man.

The third and final argument is given special weight by Plato; it is said to be the most powerful and decisive of the three (583b). However, *prima facie*, it is both the most dubious and the least unified of the arguments. Like the second argument, it concludes that the just man's life is more pleasant than any other life. But, unlike the second, it centers around the claim that there are real and unreal (or true and untrue) pleasures and that only the just man is acquainted with real pleasures. A major problem in interpreting the argument is that Plato seems to

employ three different senses of “true” or “real” pleasures without also seeking to show how they relate to one another. Thus, we must first give an account of these different senses.

Socrates initiates the argument with the assumption that people experience pleasures, pains, and also sometimes experience neither pleasure nor pain. We will say that people that are experiencing neither pleasure nor pain are experiencing an indifferent state. Further, Socrates recalls that some people in pain claim that nothing is more pleasant than the cessation of pain. But Socrates assumes that the cessation of pain is an indifferent state. So, he argues, since indifferent states are neither pleasant nor painful, and the cessation of pain is an indifferent state, it is false that the cessation of pain is pleasant. Socrates then suggests that we are misled into thinking that indifferent states are pleasant because we compare indifferent states with painful states and conclude that the former are preferable to the latter. After drawing our attention to the merely apparent pleasure of indifferent states, Socrates wants to reassure us that truly pleasant states are distinct from indifferent states. In accordance with the original threefold division, Socrates holds that pain is not merely the absence of pleasure and that pleasure is not merely the absence of pain; rather, pleasure and pain are positive states and only indifferent states are negative. As a proof, he claims that some pleasant smells are more than the absence of pain, since “they suddenly

become surprisingly great in magnitude without previous pain, and when they cease they leave behind no pain at all” (584b).

So, it is implied that true or real pleasures are positively pleasant and irreducible to the cessation or absence of pain, while false or unreal pleasures are really indifferent states, consisting in the absence of both pleasure and pain, which seem to be pleasant only because they are preferred to positively painful states. Let us call pleasures which consist in something more than the absence or cessation or pain, “positive pleasures.” One sense in which Plato speaks of “true” or “real” pleasures, then, is in the sense of positive pleasures.

Next, Socrates distinguishes between two kinds of emptiness: there is emptiness in the disposition of the body (like hunger and thirst) and emptiness in the disposition of the soul (like ignorance). Both kinds of emptiness admit of being filled or satisfied by objects befitting them; food fills the emptiness in the body known as hunger, and knowledge fills the emptiness in the soul known as ignorance. Given the psychology of the *Republic*, this contrast will strike us as odd, for we are surely inclined to think that hunger is an emptiness or desire of appetite, which is a part of the soul. So, it is probably best to interpret the distinction as one we could rephrase as a contrast between the emptiness of appetite and the emptiness of reason. Nonetheless, I shall stick with the language of body and soul. After distinguishing between bodily and psychic emptiness,

Socrates presents an odd argument for the conclusion that psychic fulfillment is “truer” than bodily fulfillment. The argument is as follows:

(1) “What is filled with more real things and is itself more real is really more filled, compared to what is filled with less real things and is itself less real” (585d).

(2) The kinds of goods that fill the body are less real than the kinds of goods that fill the soul.

(3) The body is less real than the soul.

(4) Therefore, the fulfillment of the soul is truer or more real than the fulfillment of the body.

This argument makes sense only if (but not if) we understand why Plato thinks the goods that fill the soul are more real than the goods that fill the body. He says that the goods that fill the soul are more real because they are “always alike and immortal and true” (585c). Thus, Plato assumes that knowledge is always alike and immortal and true, while material things like food are not always alike, immortal, and true. Further, he assumes that the soul is always alike, immortal, and true while the body is not. Presumably, by “always alike,” Plato means that the goods that fill the soul are changeless while the goods that fill the body are in flux. Thus, one might think that Plato is plainly contradicting himself here. If the soul is “always alike,” then it is changeless, and if the soul is changeless, then the soul does not change from being ignorant to being wise.

However, the soul does change from being ignorant to being wise. Therefore, the soul is not always alike. Clearly, then, if Plato is to avoid contradiction, he must mean “always alike” to be “always alike in these particular respects.” But which respects? This is so underdetermined by the text that it is probably futile to attempt to answer it.

Let us try a new approach. Why does Plato think there is a connection between the degree of something’s stability (changelessness) and the degree of its power either to fill or be filled? In answering this question, we should let the claim that bodily fulfillment is less true than psychic fulfillment inform our answer. So, let us grant to Plato that the body undergoes more changes than the soul (though this is hardly something which is either transparent or warranted as an assumption). What does that have to do with whether the body has truer fulfillment than the soul? That, of course, depends on what is meant by truer fulfillment. Plato hints that truer fulfillment is abiding or lasting and trustworthy (585e-586a). This suggests the second sense of “true” or “real” pleasures; they are lasting or abiding pleasures. So, his claim is that the fulfillment of the soul is more lasting, stable, and reliable than the fulfillment of the body. So, if this is his claim, we might think of the argument as analogous to the following: the more stable container which is filled with the more stable filler is granted a more stable fulfillment. Clearly, if the unstable container changes in relevant respects, it might “leak,” and if the unstable filler changes in important respects (like

evaporating) it might cease to fill. Thus, the body digests and becomes empty and the food is broken down and ceases to fill. What about the fulfillment of reason by knowledge? Is it any more stable than that of the body? Plato's argument suggests that it does, that when the ignorant soul is filled by knowledge, the fulfillment is more abiding than when the hungry body is filled by food. This does seem to be a contingent truth that we can accept; people that know retain that knowledge longer than any of the external goods that we use and consume. However, this is not the only claim that Plato's argument wants to persuade us of. It is implied that the fulfillment of knowledge is more lasting in the sense that, once filled by knowledge, the soul is less empty than the filled body, which means that being filled by knowledge should relieve us of the desire or longing for knowledge more than the external goods relieve us of the desire or longing for other material goods. This claim, however, might seem false. The desire for knowledge no more dies after we achieve knowledge than the desire for food dies after we achieve satisfaction on one particular occasion. In any given domain of knowledge, the knower is always compelled to seek out previously undiscovered connections between items of knowledge, to draw out their implications, to reflect on his assumptions and his underdetermined decisions as a constructor of theory, and, most of all, to gain a deeper understanding of wherein the value consists in his knowledge. Just as there is an appetitive cycle of hunger, satisfaction, hunger,

satisfaction, there is also a rational cycle of wonder/doubt, insight, wonder/doubt, insight.

After suggesting the positive and lasting senses of true pleasures, Socrates indicates yet another sense of true pleasures. For each kind of emptiness or desire, whether of reason, spirit, or appetite, each may be filled by that which befits the emptiness or not (585e). If the emptiness is filled by that which befits it, there results true pleasure. If the emptiness is filled by something other than that which befits it, there results merely apparent pleasure. So, a true pleasure is one that results from the fulfillment, by something befitting, of a desire. For example, Socrates tells us that people who “spend their time in constant banqueting,” fill themselves with unbecoming objects (586a-b). But in what way are they unbecoming? It seems that they are unbecoming in that they are excessive or unnecessary, for Socrates says that those who try to satisfy their spirited desires through the use of envy, force, and anger, pursue a “surfeit of honor and victory and anger without reflection and thought” (586b). There are two ways to take the emphasis on excess. One is to say that those people that, for example, try to satisfy their appetitive desires excessively, by constantly banqueting and copulating, misinterpret their desires as a desire for x instead of a desire for y . Another way is to say that desires that just is a desire for something excessive, say a desire to gorge ourselves on junk food, is a desire that has no befitting object, and so should not be acted upon; the desire should be suppressed. We should not

act upon them, because, having no befitting object, instead of satisfying the desire, our attempt to fill it will only, after a brief satisfaction, strengthen the desire. No matter which way we take the emphasis on the excess of unbefitting objects, the consequence is that true pleasure cannot result from excess. Excessively eating, drinking, and copulating provide merely apparent pleasure.

How are the three senses of true pleasure linked? Clearly, Socrates means to say that pleasures that are both positive and abiding result only from the fulfillment of an emptiness by something befitting, that any attempt to satisfy a desire by something unbefitting or excessive, will result in a pleasure that is merely a relief from pain or so fleeting that the pleasure's not worth the effort put into achieving it. Moreover, unbefitting objects, so far from satisfying our desires, merely multiply our desires. This is why Socrates says they are pleasures mixed with pains and pleasures that are merely relieve us from pain, for pleasures resulting from unbefitting objects, instead of properly filling us, expand and intensify our emptiness. Further, and this is essential, Socrates argues that it is unlikely for anyone either unwise or not ruled by reason to achieve true pleasure, since none but the wise (those that may evaluate their desires by the criterion of necessity) may distinguish between befitting and unbefitting objects for their desires, while the unwise pursue whatever their initial interpretation of a desire is, reflecting neither on the necessity of the desire nor on the suitability of the object of desire. Moreover, even if the wise may distinguish between the befitting

and unbefitting, they will pursue the befitting only if they are ruled by reason. And since the unjust soul is not ruled by reason, while the just soul is, it follows that the just soul will achieve true pleasure (granted he finds himself in a suitable environment) while the unjust soul will not. Thus, the just life is more pleasant than the unjust life. In sum, the just man achieves a satisfaction that is positive and abiding since he satisfies his reason, spirit, and appetite with befitting objects, while the unjust man achieves only an indifferent and fleeting satisfaction, since he is compelled to live an excessive life, chasing unbefitting objects that, after calming his lust briefly, continually give rise to more intense and painful desires.

Concluding Remarks

Wherein lies the value of the *Republic's* moral theory? Of course, there are some weak points in Plato's argument, which may be emphasized by anyone that wants to reject it. Some of the most salient to my mind at the moment are (1) the psychology is too vague in that, faced with particular desires, it is unclear which part of the soul they are generated out of (this vagueness, of course, weakens the argument for the tripartite soul, since it assumes that given desires obviously belong to this rather than that part of the soul) (2) the argument for the tripartite soul is further weakened by the fact that no support is given to the way Socrates characterizes each part of the soul, (3) what Plato defines as the just soul

is not sufficiently linked to just behavior, and (4) since the main argument concludes merely that the just soul is happier than the unjust soul, and yet one need not have a just soul in order to perform just actions nor does one need to have an unjust soul to perform unjust actions, Plato does not show that it is always better to act justly than unjustly, for one may act justly all throughout life (for instance, by being compelled by the fear of punishment or humiliation) and yet never acquire the virtue of justice.

But, although I am prepared neither to defend all aspects of Plato's argument nor do I think I have understood all of even its essential points, and even if Plato's argument is ultimately unsatisfactory, the *Republic*, perhaps more than any other great work of moral philosophy, shows us *how* to properly think about the good life, virtue, and what is most important. Many of us who approach the *Republic* become fascinated with our own motivational conflict, its meaning and ultimate source, and thereby of the importance of evaluating our desires themselves and not just the different options we have for satisfying them. And through learning of the importance of evaluating our desires, we are led to the importance of asking ourselves what, if anything, we are ultimately living for, and, if nothing, what we should be living for, since if we are ignorant of what we take to be the highest good or goods, we have no criteria to evaluate our desires other than the strength of their pull in the given moment. And to not critically evaluate our desires seems not only foolish and imprudent, but also entirely

unfree, being entirely passive and unreflective. Further, the *Republic* shows us how to ask ourselves what we should take to be the highest good: we are to imaginatively sketch the kind of life characteristic of the lover of x or y , see to what degree the objects of his desire truly satisfy him or not, to what degree he is subject to internal conflict, and then ask ourselves whether we take such a man to be happy or not.

Perhaps most enlightening, the *Republic* show us how to think of the good life in a way that is partially independent of thinking of both right action and the possession of desirable, external goods. Living the good life, we are persuaded, is identical neither with always doing the right thing, with luckily or prudently acquiring external goods, nor with the combination of the two. The good life is over and above right action and the acquisition of social and material goods for the reason that we have inner lives, psychological conditions and dispositions that determine our happiness to a greater degree than anything else. We are complex beings, subject to bodily, social, and purely rational forces. The pursuit of happiness demands that we harmonize and unify the complexity. We achieve such harmony only by cultivating the virtues of the soul.

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