

## **Republic Books 2-4**

Outline by John Protevi / Permission to reproduce granted for academic use  
[protevi@lsu.edu](mailto:protevi@lsu.edu) / <http://www.protevi.com/john/FH/PDF/Republic2-4.pdf>

- I. The Challenge: Define Justice
- II. Key to the *Republic*: Harmony of Unitary Body/Soul/Community/Cosmos
- III. Necessity: The Healthy City (artisans/production)
- IV. Desire: The Luxurious City (merchants/trade)
- V. Discipline: The Purged City (soldiers/war)
- VI. Harmonious Unity: The Just City (philosophers/politics)

### I. THE CHALLENGE: DEFINE JUSTICE

After Socrates has tamed Thrasymachus, Book 2 begins with Glaucon and Adeimantus taking up Thrasymachus' point of view and sharpening his challenge. Glaucon claims that justice is simply a mean between the best (doing injustice) and the worst (suffering it), a **social contract of the weak** entered into only because most men calculate they are unable to get away with injustice, and so go against their naturally selfish and greedy natures and submit to conventional compulsion, trusting in the sheer weight of their numbers to protect them from the few strong ones who would prey upon their individual mediocrity. In this scenario, the life of perfect injustice (i.e. w/ reputation for goodness) is preferable to that of the tortured and despised just man w/ a reputation for evil. (With mention of torture the question of the **body** comes up, the relation of which with "soul," will be a key point.) Adeimantus' addition focuses on reputation as well, and asks that Socrates describe not the social effects of a reputation for good or evil, but the effects of justice/injustice on the soul of individual men.

We must be careful here with the word "**soul**": the Greek is *psuche*, something like "life principle" or "living spirit." The various discussions of the deathlessness and reincarnation of the life principle in Plato's dialogues should be seen as Plato's confrontation with Pythagoreanism, and to my mind have little to do with later Christian concerns with a substantial unity, independent of the body, that is gifted with a personal immortality that will receive eternal rewards or punishments based on moral worth. Two important difference with a Christian notion: one, the Platonic "soul" has parts, so it is not quite a substantial unity, and two, in the discussions of human life in the *Republic*, prior to the concluding myth, *psuche* entertains intriguingly close connections with *soma*, or body, so we should **not** see it as entirely distinct from the body, at least not during life. (As we'll see, Aristotle explicitly addresses *psuche* as embodied life principle, and Lucretius will provide a consistently materialist reading of "soul.")

### II. KEY TO THE *REPUBLIC*: HARMONY OF UNITARY BODY/SOUL/COMMUNITY/COSMOS

Socrates replies that we should study justice in the polis/city first, then in the soul. This principle of an **isomorphism** or **analogy** of **city/soul** will have a long history in the West. To ensure that most people in a community act predictably, according to customs, is the goal of traditional politics, which above all was a **cultural/corporeal politics**: shaping the character of the citizens (and dependents: women, slaves, children: future citizens or future wives) by **philosophical direction** of the **customary** arts and physical activities of the people: determining what games the children play, what stories they are told, what people can wear and eat and how they should worship, who has access to the bodies of whom, to either derive pleasure or inflict pain, and so on. NB: laws should agree w/ custom, but custom is somewhat plastic, as it must be reproduced each generation in training.

How a **conformity** and predictability of behavior works in **contemporary liberal democracies**, where the codes are less legal, and more social (taste, gossip, fashion, exclusion), is a fascinating study. (NB: some codes are still legal, especially sexual; on the whole, other codes have dropped out of law.) We know there is

such conformity via public opinion polls, marketing surveys, etc: knowing the gender, race, class, income, zip code, education level, religion, etc., will let one predict lots of behaviors: cultural tastes, political choices, consumption patterns. To take up the first days lecture: **decisions** in the sense of **channels of predictable and acceptable behavior** [you will probably go to a large southern state university] are different from **choices** [LSU or Georgia].)

The cultural/corporeal politics of the city/soul analogy should be compared with Socrates' wider strategy of a **macrocosm/microcosm** analogy. On a higher level, Socrates wants to model the politics of the city on the principles of nature (that's why the rulers must be philosophers.) The key is **unity**: the famous trio of the Greeks: the identity of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful derives from unity: the **True** is what is true to itself, what is one with its form or singular look, the **Beautiful** is the singular shining forth of the True, the **Good** is the proper part/whole relation allowing for a system to function as one, as a whole, as a healthy organism.

That's a brief sketch of the entire *Republic*: defining justice in terms of the cosmic principle of unity (or the Good) and designing a community that will establish and protect its unity via cultural/corporeal politics. Now let's see some of the details.

Socrates' **method** is important to notice: Each **community** proposed in thought will explore one **principle** of justice, exemplified by one **class** of people. Each community, following the principle of justice of its class, will perform an important **task**, but will nevertheless be **lacking** something. Upon discovering this lack, Socrates will move on to **supplement** the previous community and its principle/class with a new one. The previous principles/classes are **retained** however in the new community, but they are now **subsumed** in a larger whole.

community	principle	task	class	character
healthy city	necessity	production for need	farmers/artisans	simple, healthy
luxurious city	desire	production of luxury	merchants	soft, feverish
purged city	discipline	taming of warriors	soldiers (= "auxilliaris")	harsh yet gentle
just city	justice	harmonizing unification	philosopher-kings	harmonious

Note the way the three previous communities are all retained and placed in proper position in the fourth, complete community:

### III. NECESSITY: THE HEALTHY CITY

Socrates begins with a community that provides only **basic biological needs**. Since no one person is biologically self-sufficient, a city of farmers and artisans with simple, healthy bodies is founded on the **principle** of meeting biological needs. Principle (= *arche*) needs emphasis. Socrates is **not** saying that one fine day in the past, individual, separately existing people simultaneously arrived at the good idea of communal living and then up and decided to join together. Rather, he's trying to explain **the reason why** humans never appear alone, but always in groups. Thus this city, and all the others, is a **thought experiment to discover principles of just communal living, not a historical description**. We'll see how the declining cities break history (tyranny after democracy).

This group dependency extends beyond even the obvious case of parents, the beginning of life, and child rearing, to day by day adult survival. This is an extremely important point: it takes an elaborate network of social support to allow people to have the fantasy that they are real individuals! -- besides the obvious case of an urban support system (supermarkets, plumbing, housing for rent, tax support that keeps tuition and student

loan interest low, etc) which enable people today to "live alone," even mountain men or hermits benefit from their years of training in living off the land: someone taught them what to look for to eat and drink: a huge social investment spanning many generations. (NB: this real dependency doesn't mean a social system cannot or should not safeguard "individual rights" in a political/legal sense).

An important principle of justice is apparent in this simple thought experiment-community though: that **each person's task should be suited to his nature** (370c). As we will see, one of the most interesting things about the *Republic* is the claim that natural affinity for communal tasks **cannot be predicted on the basis of gender or class!** More on this later.

Now despite the desire for self-sufficient economy, geographical limits make **trade** (and hence an excess to be traded) inevitable. But trade will bring **cultural mix**: the bodies of the members of the necessary city will be subjected to new and different foods, and come to desire these **new sensations**. Thus we must move to consider a new principle, that of **desire**, even though this means leaving behind the "true, healthy" city of necessity.

#### IV. DESIRE: THE LUXURIOUS CITY

The next principle, desire, brings us to consider the luxurious city, the city of class differences. Merchants are added to the primary producers. Plato is very clear on the **economic origin of war**: it arises when a city has "**surrendered itself to the limitless acquisition of wealth and overstepped the boundaries of the necessary**" (373e). This is a very important point. For the Greeks, the limitless needs limit (the sea needs a harbor). A simple body is limited by simple tastes, enforced by cultural/corporeal politics that keeps together a homogeneous cultural unit and self-sufficient economy. But this unity is possible only in thought experiment. Principles need to be added to adjust to reality. Geographical limits to self-sufficiency mean trade and trade means new tastes. Once the link is made between new tastes and the medium for acquiring them, wealth, a shift occurs, and people come to desire the medium, wealth, rather than the goal, new tastes. But since wealth, especially in the form of money, is limitless, there is no limit now to desire. This **limitless desire** is a sort of *fever* that leads to political conflict and war.

According to the principle of natural affinity, **an army devoted only to the craft of war** is needed. The "guardians" as they are now called, are to be "kind to friends and fierce to enemies" (recall Polemarchus' definition of justice). This combination of gentleness and fierceness seems impossible, but Socrates claims an animal example: the pedigree watchdog. The question now turns to the **education of the guardians**, one of the most interesting passages of the entire *Republic*. This training amounts to a new principle, one of **a discipline that produces harmony**. In other words, this training **turns warriors into soldiers**.

#### V. DISCIPLINE: THE PURGED CITY

Two main training techniques can instill disciplined harmony in the body and souls of the guardians, blending gentleness and harshness, and thus turning them from warriors to soldiers: arts and physical training. Socrates first establishes the importance of what we have called cultural/corporeal politics, then launches into a long discussion of poetry. At the close of his discussion, Socrates explains why arts/culture is so important (401a ff).

The basic idea was already explained by Dr. Jensen, using Aristotle's formulation: the soul is imitative. The arts (and here Plato relies upon Greek beauty as measure and proportion) will open and attune the soul to beauty. A **beauty-attuned** soul for Plato is an **erotic** soul. Now since beauty was **measure, proportion, symmetry**, a soul attuned to it is open to receiving *logos*, which is also measure, proportion, both in our **thought** processes and in the **cosmos**. (Remember the microcosm/macrocosm analogy we talked about

earlier.) With such a soul that loves measure and proportion in the form of artistic beauty, one can receive scientific studies that deal directly with *logos*. Details in Bk 7 (521 ff).

Now this "Platonic love" is a little too neat for some Greeks and some Greek scholars. It's a tamed *eros*, perhaps on the way to its sad fate as Cupid, that prepares a harmonious body/soul receptive to *logos*. While we won't read Euripides' *The Bacchae* in the class, it's a famous example of the demonic side of *eros*, the disruptive, **Dionsyian** side that tears apart the calm, **Apollinan**, side that prepares one for *logos*.

Putting this objection to the side, we see that Socrates now discusses physical training, which is to introduce harmony in the body, and hence in the soul. This link of body and soul is very interesting, and will become pronounced in Aristotle and Lucretius, to say nothing of contemporary science. A harmonious energy flow, properly channeled, is a **regime** of the body, a **body politic**. Plato enunciates here the idea that training techniques modify the body in predictable ways. Nurture can impact nature, in modern terms. Body processes are hence at least amenable to change via discipline. The body may not "have" a *logos* of its own, but it can "listen" to *logos*. (This is hard to think in the West, but yoga is a clear example: changes in all sorts of energy flows we can hardly believe.) This plasticity of the body politic, and its link to the soul, will be extremely important in discussing the education of women in Book 5.

After discussing medicine and law as ways of redressing a disordered body politic (individual and social: soul and community) Socrates will move to split off a ruling class from the soldier class. He indicates this with a name change: soldiers are now "auxilliaris," helpers to the "rulers." With this, we move to the fourth community and principle, that of **justice**.

## VI HARMONIOUS UNITY: THE JUST COMMUNITY

For simplicity, Socrates now ignores the merchant class of the feverish city and posits three classes: farmer/artisan, soldier, ruler, each according to natural affinity. A "noble lie" is to preserve the class system, but this is a **meritocracy, not a hereditary** system. Socrates makes the important point that merit (=affinity for a position) cannot be necessarily predicted on the basis of parentage (415b). Thus the "first and most important command" is to carefully evaluate the souls (= potentials) of the next generation. In other words, Socrates puts all forms of inheritance and nepotism outside the just city and insists on **rigorous meritocracy as a principle of justice**. Nothing could be more threatening and controversial than this threat to the hereditary class system then (and now) operating--except Socrates' claim in Book 5 that merit cannot be predicted either on the basis of sex!

Before we get there, though, a glance at Book 4. Adeimantus objects that the rulers will not be happy w/o property. (To prevent a military dictatorship, Socrates has outlawed personal property for the auxilliaris and rulers.) Socrates reminds him that the happiness (= flourishing) of the whole is his goal, not of any one part of the community.

At 423b ff Socrates enunciates the **principle of unity**: the community must be one. The basis of the unity of the community is natural affinity for the task performed by each class. The unity of the community is safeguarded, we are reminded, by a cultural/corporeal politics, with attention even to children's games, which are to instill "obedience to the law" (425a). Such obedience in early training will make explicit legal social coding--table manners, clothing, hair styles, etc--irrelevant, as predictable behavior stems from early (bottom up) training, not from explicit legal coding (top down) (425c). Here's a clue to the problem conformity in modern liberal (relatively decoded) democracies.

Socrates then move to explain the justice community in terms of the Greek theory of the **virtues**: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. See the chart. The key is that justice is harmonious unity or health, while injustice is disharmonious dissension or disease. Notice also how Plato is at the base of the fascinating metaphor of the **body politic** which underlies much of Western political philosophy of the State orientation.

While the **community is discussed in biological terms** (the just community is a healthy organism), **the individual body/soul complex is described in political terms** (reason is to rule over [or master or persuade, depending on philosopher] the spirited part and the appetites).

	CITY	CITY/SOUL ANALOGY	INDIVIDUAL SOUL
WISDOM	guardians know best for each part re: common good	rulers/learning part	[prudential] reason knows best for each re: common good
COURAGE	auxilliaris preserve correct beliefs taught by guardians about the fearful	soldiers/spirited part	spiritedness preserves correct beliefs taught by reason about the fearful
MODERATION	whole city agreement as to who should rule	workers/appetites	whole soul agreement as to who should rule
JUSTICE	harmony of whole city (each does natural task without meddling)	city/soul	harmony of whole soul (each does natural task without meddling)