

Plato
The State and Justice

I will firstly say something about Socrates claims that it would be easier to examine justice on a large scale rather than at an individual level).

Sections: 369 – 372.

Is Socrates' analogy of reading the small and large letters really a decent argument for approaching a inquiry into the nature of the just man by reference to the state? We should question whether there is anything in the idea that justice in states (societies) is a precise replica of justice on an individual level.

So what is Socrates' conception of the state? According to Socrates, the ideal city is one in which there are three main classes of citizen: Guardians (ruling class), Auxiliaries (military class) and Producers (farmers, tradesmen, business, retailers etc.). Each class is responsible for specific activities (370 b-c). Again, we need to think about whether this kind of totalitarian approach is one that is compatible with justice. Adeimantus suggests that justice might be found in mutual relationships between the three main classes of citizens. For example: "...if a farmer or any other producer brings his goods to market at a time when no one wants to exchange with him is there, will he sit about in the market place and neglect his own job?" (371c)

You will note that there is a good degree of coercion in all of this, insofar as people are limited to one function within the idea city. We must question whether that is fair to the individual: many of us have a multiple interests and are equally skilled in more than one thing. For example, I imagine that many of you can show skill in a number of different things. Another possible objection to this approach can be found if we examine the differences between, say, a doctor and a shoemaker. The doctor will have to deal with an enormously diverse range of illnesses, sometimes being confronted by things he has never seen before. By contrast, the skill involved in becoming a first class shoemaker is much narrower; the degree of multiplicity that is internal to medical practice is not found in shoe-making. Thus, a doctor's interests may be various (this is particularly so in general practice) whilst a shoemaker will not have that possibility. So, it seems that different tasks allow for different amounts of individual interest. This is not addressed by Socrates (or the others).

Socrates' description of the healthy state is, according to Glaucon, too meagre. Glaucon demands luxury, claiming Socrates' conception to

be "... just the fodder you would provide if you were founding a city of pigs!" (372d). Thus Socrates goes on to describe the fevered, swollen city. This, he thinks will eventually lead to war, since such a city would be incapable of being self-sufficient. The need to attack and occupy lands beyond its boundaries would become necessary and war would break out. Put another way: a state which tries to provide for its citizens beyond its means will often have to find provisions elsewhere.

There is also, of course, the need for defence. This is not the only city – other cities may also be swollen and adopt the same policy of invading adjacent lands. Thus, the Guardians of the city (the ruling class) need to have unsurpassed physical qualities – strength, courage and speed: "...each must have keen perceptions and speed in pursuit of his quarry, and also strength to fight if need be when he catches it." (375a). However, they also need to be of good character (trying to achieve *Eudaimonia*) in order not to fall prey to aggression towards the rest of the community; they need to be gentle towards their fellow citizens (375b-c). Socrates sees a possible paradox here: "Where are we to find a disposition at once gentle and full of spirit? For gentleness and high spirits are natural opposites." (375c)

Once again, Socrates draws an analogy with animals, suggesting that the above attributes are sometimes compatible. He remarks, "For you must have noticed that it is a natural characteristic of a well-bred dog to behave with the utmost gentleness to those it is used to and knows, but to be savage to strangers?" (375d-e). Once again however, it is left unquestioned as to whether this kind of attitude is always good. Should we always be savage towards those we do not know? – Is such an attitude indicative of good character? Another aspect to think about in relation to this analogy is that it seems to imply a form of innate knowledge. In other dialogues – particularly the *Meno* (81c-82) – Plato argues for a form of recollective knowledge based on the eternal nature of the soul. Socrates goes on to claim that such an attitude in a well-bred dog is a manifestation of a philosophic nature: "...the dog distinguishes the sight of a friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other. And a creature that distinguishes between the familiar and unfamiliar on the grounds of knowledge or ignorance must surely be gifted with a real love of knowledge." (376a-b). A guardian needs to have the same qualities: "And so our properly good Guardian will have the following characteristics: a philosophic disposition, high spirits, speed and strength. (376c)

There are a number of aspects that need to be addressed if we are properly to make sense of all this.

One point that was left open early on in our exploration of Socrates' response to Glaucon, was that of the relationship between a just city and a just individual. Is there anything in the idea that justice in states (societies) is a precise replica of justice on an individual level? However, in Book IV (at 435) we learn what about the nature of the relationship between the community and the individual soul. Recall how each member of society is to perform one role only. Socrates suggests that each of the three classes has their own job and does not interfere with anything that is not his or her business; thus we have the harmonious functioning of the three classes. An analogy is drawn with the soul. The individual soul is, according to Socrates, made up of three main elements: reason, desire and spirit (sometimes referred to as reason, appetite and temper). When these function in harmony with one another, one has achieved balance in the soul in the same way as one achieves balance in a community when each class of citizens works according to their instructions. Plato conceives of the three classes equating to the individual aspects of the soul as follows: Guardians/Reason, Auxiliaries/Spirit and Producers/Desire. Reason is to rule aided by spirit and desire (the latter two characteristics would be disorderly and unmanageable without the governance of reason.

At 436b Socrates asks: *"Do we learn with one part of us, feel angry with another, and desire the pleasures of eating and sex and the like with another?"* His answer, paraphrased, is as follows: I may be thirsty but unwilling to drink; what drives an action is distinct from what keeps it in check. Perhaps a doctor has told me that drinking is bad for my health – so, in this case, reason is the opponent of my desire to drink; it rules my desire. Thus, there is one part of the soul that desires (has appetites) and another that modifies them; reasoning tells me whether or not to acquiesce to my desires. Finally, there is spirit (or temper) which manifests itself in, for example, anger, fear and sadness. Justice is harmony between these three parts; injustice is where either temper or desire (or both) prevails over the reason. Too much spirit and one becomes a slave to one's emotions; too much desire and one will succumb to hedonism (and so on). *"Then we must remember that each one of us will be just and perform his proper function only if each part of him is performing its proper function."* (441d-e).

Another important aspect is how to get the Auxiliaries and Producers to consent to being ruled by the Guardians. Through their nature (which we

have already discussed) and their education (which we will discuss later on) they have the wellbeing and interests of the community at heart. However, their authority is to be secured by propagating a noble lie. This noble lie suggests that each of the classes has a soul made from a different metal. The Guardians have souls of gold, the Auxiliaries have silver and the Producers have bronze (or iron). Like the Indian Caste system, membership of the classes is generally determined by birth. However, occasionally, a degree of social mobility is possible; the 'noble lie' allows for the possibility that a gold soul may be born to parents of silver souls, for example. Nonetheless, different metal types are not allowed to mix (breed with one another); one had to marry someone of like soul. Plato advocated forms of breeding licenses.

The Guardians receive a sophisticated education. They should be schooled in literature, music and gymnastics – although, the literary and musical education would be censored to avoid the possibility of illegitimate persuasion. Interestingly (and unlike Aristotle) women could also be rulers and soldiers (Guardians and Auxiliaries). The only stipulation that Plato makes is to say that there are some tasks that women were unsuited for on the basis of inferior physical strength. Plato has been widely interpreted as one of the first feminist philosophers. The life of a Guardian is, nevertheless, austere. They cannot have private property and are not allowed to touch precious metals. This is so that they don't become seduced by the trappings of wealth and power. Furthermore, they all have to live in (unisex) communal camps with other Guardians where they receive modest provisions. In an ideal (Guardian) community the family will be abolished: *"They will live and feed together...They will mix freely in their physical exercises and the rest of their training, and their natural instincts will lead them to have sexual intercourse."* (458d).