The Arguments of Republic Bk I

The traditional view (after Hesiod, fl. c. 700 BC) regards justice in terms of social norms: to be just is to obey the laws, be honest, restrain oneself, and so on. Hence:

(1)  *Cephalus*: justice or morality is paying one’s debts (331c); and

(2)  *Polemarchus*: justice or morality is giving others what they deserve or what we owe them (331d–336a).

(3)  *Socrates*: these definitions are wrong.

(4)  *Thrasydamus*: is sarcastic about the conventional view, which makes it easy to exploit docile citizens who expect divine rewards for their obedience. He promotes the view of an amoralist: justice does not contribute to the good or successful life at all; morality does not make us happy at all. He suggests that:

(a)  ‘justice is the advantage of the stronger’ (338c–d),

(b)  the stronger are the rulers or the government (338e–339a), and

(c)  justice is ‘good for someone else’ (343c), and thus bad for oneself. So, injustice or immorality is good for oneself (344c). If injustice is beneficial, then

(d)  ‘a moral [just] person is worse off than an immoral [unjust] one’ (343d), and so ‘a life of crime is better than a life of integrity’ (347e).

If Thrasymachus is right about justice (a), it cannot be in everybody’s interest to be just or moral. So, Socrates agrees with Thrasymachus on only one issue: ruling is a craft or skill (τέχνη); a real ruler makes no mistakes. This is because an expert has full knowledge and a mistake is a ‘failure of knowledge’ (340e), i.e. ignorance.

The Nature of Craft Argument, 341c–342e

(1)  Every craft has its distinctive end, which is to serve the good of its subject matter (what the craft is about).

(2)  Real experts serve the good of the craft’s subject matter. Real craft or skill is not self-interested, but other-interested.

(3)  Ruling is a craft.

(4)  An unjust ruler tyrant à la Thrasymachus serves his own good.

(5)  So, Thrasymachus’ ruler does not practise a real craft; he is not an expert.

Problem. The move from craft to craftsman/expert: medicine benefits patients, so experts do not benefit themselves. Hence the counterexample: the shepherd serves the sheep only insofar as this matters to his benefit.

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The Wage-Earning Argument, 345e–347d

(1) Every craft has its own distinctive end. So, e.g., medicine and navigation are distinct crafts whose ends differ.
(2) Wages can result from both medicine and navigation.
(3) So, wages are not the end of either medicine or navigation.
(4) So, wage-earning is the end of a further craft, *viz.* the craft of money-making.

*Problem.* Wage-earning benefits the practitioner. This undermines the first argument.

The Non-Pleonectic Argument, 349b–350c

(1) To act pleonectically is to try to outdo or compete with others at their expense: πλεονεκτεῖν is to try to have more.
(2) Expert practitioners of a craft do not act pleonectically in relation to each other, but only in relation to non-experts. Non-experts act pleonectically in relation to everyone.
(3) An unjust person acts pleonectically towards everybody; a just person acts pleonectically only towards an unjust person (i.e. dissimilar persons).
(4) So, an unjust person does not practice a craft.
(5) According to Thrasymachus, the immoral are clever and good, and hence resemble clever and good persons. The opposite holds for moral persons.
(6) But experts are clever and knowledgeable.
(7) So, since unjust persons are not experts, they are not clever or knowledgeable.
(8) So, the unjust person is ignorant (ἀμαθῆς) and bad or vicious (κακός), while the just person is good or *virtuous* (ἀγαθός) and knowledgeable (σοφός) (350c, cf. 348e).

The Gang-of-Thieves Argument, 351b–352b

(1) Justice or morality unifies groups and so enables effective action. Injustice or immorality does the contrary; it produces conflict, antagonisms, hatred.
(2) The effects of justice in an individual person are the same.
(3) So, justice empowers and unifies an individual person.

*Problem.* Justice may not be the only means of political or social coherence.

The Function Argument, 352d–354a

(1) Everything has its unique work or function (ἔργον) (cf. 353a).
(2) The virtue or excellence (ἀρετή) of anything is what enables it to function well.
(3) The function of the soul is living.
(4) So, the virtue or excellence of the soul is to live well.
(5) The good life (i.e. a well-lived life) is happy (εὐδαιμόν).
(6) Justice is the virtue of the soul.
(7) The just or moral person lives well.
(8) The just person is happy.