

The Happiness Arguments in Bk IX, 576–92

First Argument

- (1) The tyranny is the least happy political system; and tyrants are maximally unhappy: e.g., fear is pervasive (579e), unable to control himself/herself, the tyrant must control others (579c), the real tyrant is real slave (579c).
- (2) Given the city–soul analogy, the tyrannical person or type (τυραννικόν, *tyrannikon*) is the least happy too (577d–e): like an inner tyrant, the desirous part (ἐπιθυμητικόν, *epithymetikon*) dominates or oppresses the soul as a whole (περὶ ὅλης, *peri holes*). Since reason (λογιστικόν, *logistikon*) is not in control, the soul is not free to do what it wills (wants), or what is best for the person. In short: there is inner psychic conflict.
- (3) But the just or moral person is the one free of inner conflict; the one in which the parts of the soul harmoniously work together and so create unity (443c ff., 586e).

Second Argument

- (4) Each part of the soul has its own pleasure (ἡδονή, *hedone*) and desire (ἐπιθυμία, *epithymia*). The appetitive or passionate part is drawn to indulgence and gain, the spirited part is drawn to honour, prestige, and competition, and the rational part is drawn to wisdom and learning. So, there are three human types: philosophical (φιλόσοφον, *philosophon*), competitive (φιλόνικον, *philonikon*, i.e. victory–lover), and avaricious (φιλοκερδής, *philokerdes*, i.e. greed–lover or gain–lover). These types are characterised by the different pleasures and objects of desire: money, prestige, and truth, respectively (580d–581e).
- (5) Conflicts between desires are common and need resolutions. Good life–choices need good decisions. A good decision is based on experience (ἐμπειρία, *empeiria*), intelligence or practical wisdom (φρονήσις, *phronesis*; note: not *episteme* or knowledge), and rationality (λόγος, *logos*) (582a).
- (6) Since only philosophers have these resources for good decisions, their lives are the happiest (582a–583a).

Third Argument

- (7) Sometimes, what feels pleasant can also feel painful on a different occasion. For instance, relief from pain may feel pleasant, and the end of pleasure may feel painful (583c–e; cf. Locke’s experiment with the three buckets of water, *Essay* II.viii.21).
- (8) So, some pleasures and pains are illusory or absences. They *seem* pleasant and painful; but this is a mere (phenomenal) appearance. Illusions lack being or reality (cf. the analogy of the line).
- (9) But real or genuine pleasures (and pains) require real objects. The highest pleasures relate to truth, science, reason, and virtue (ἀρετή, *arete*) (585d–586d).

- (10) Philosophers have knowledge of real objects (i.e. Forms; cf. the analogy of the cave). They also know the Good. So, philosophers experience the truest pleasures, and are hence the happiest (586d–e). In other words, those who are led by reason, are free from inner conflict (i.e. just), and enjoy the pleasures of their tripartite soul (but keep them in harmonical balance), are happy (586e–587a). (This is why tyrants are unhappy; 587b.)
- (11) *Platonic Guide to the Happy Life*: justice leads to happiness, and justice is psychic harmony, and so an inner state. So, happiness is nothing that happens to us (e.g., whether others treat us ‘fairly’, or whether the legal system is ‘just’), but something we can achieve. If we develop this inner balance and order; and in particular, develop reason (our inner ‘guardian’), then we can forge a happy life. But justice is not merely a means to happiness: being just or moral *constitutes* happiness (justice is good also for its own sake; cf. 357). Happiness and pleasure are hence intrinsically linked to the just or moral life. Being just pays off.¹

Two Passages from J. S. Mill’s ‘Utilitarianism’ (1861/3)

“If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.” (II §5)

“It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly-endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question.” (II §6)

¹ For further details, see Annas, J. (1981). *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, esp. chs. 12 and 13.

