

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) *Thrasymachus*: 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–342e¹

- (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.

¹ After R. Barney (2006). Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus. In G. Santas, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's 'Republic'* (pp. 44–62). Oxford: Blackwell.

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.
 - (3) 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: *πλεονεκτείν* 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 (*ἀμαθής*) 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 (*εὐδαίμων*).
- (5) Justice is the virtue of the soul.
- (6) The just or moral person lives well.
- (7) The just person is happy.

