

Plato theory of ideal state

To understand Plato's theory of the ideal (just) state, you'll need to understand the city-soul analogy presented in the Republic. Plato thought the ideal state was the just state, so for the purposes of this answer, I will be using the terms "just" and "ideal" synonymously. For context, the objective of this Platonic dialogue is to define justice and determine its ethical utility. All of Plato's arguments – both his own and the one's he represents – are explained through the help of other words..

Justice as the Advantage of the Stronger

In Book of the Republic, Thrasymachus asserts that justice is the "advantage of the stronger" and that what is unjust is "profitable and advantageous for oneself." Each polis (city) is governed by the stronger; a ruling class that is master of the collective citizenry. The ruling class pass (and enforce) laws to their own advantage. For example, democratic cities found democratic laws, tyrannical cities found tyrannical laws, etc. An individual who violates these laws is punished as a "doer of unjust deeds," and

consequently faces legal repercussions at the hand of the rulers. This implies that the rulers of every society – through established law – define what is just, and it is just to obey laws to the advantage of the rulers. It logically follows that everywhere, justice is the same thing: the advantage of the stronger.

Furthermore, Thrasymachus argues that injustice is more profitable than justice. For everywhere you look, the unjust man is happier and always has more than the just man. For example, the man who chooses to rob a temple yields more than the man who does not. Justice and the just are in fact someone else's benefit; to the advantage of the man who is stronger and rules. Those who act justly do not do so for its intrinsic good. It is out of fear of a) the consequences of being caught committing unjust deeds, and b) suffering injustice that men act just.

In response, Socrates (Plato) asks Thrasymachus whether or not rulers can make mistakes and set down laws incorrectly. By "incorrectly," we mean laws which are disadvantageous for the ruling class. Thrasymachus agrees that rulers are not infallible and may therefore mistakenly establish laws to their disadvantage. Socrates

concludes that, if this is the case, it follows that it must be both just to do what is advantageous and disadvantageous for the stronger, for the rulers may unwillingly command what is bad for them. So, Thrasymachian justice is no more an advantage than a disadvantage.

Moreover, Socrates argues that there isn't anyone who is master of an art or holds a position of rule who would command "his own advantage rather than that of what is ruled and of which he himself is the craftsman." For instance, the doctor is a ruler of bodies, yet, he does not command the doctor's advantage, but that of the man who is in medical need. Additionally, Socrates notes that rulers demand monetary compensation to rule and therefore do not rule willingly. If wages were not attached, the ruler would derive no benefit from ruling because he would be working for free. Thus, no art or kind of rule provides for its own benefit, but rather, provides for the one who is ruled (the weaker) and considers his advantage.

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