

Plato II

PHIL301

Kallipolis, the Tri-Partite Soul, and Justice

Prof. Oakes

updated: 10/10/12 10:33 AM

The *Kallipolis*

- ‘*Kalli*’ means “beautiful”, also “best” or “highest” or “finest”, and ‘*polis*’ means something like “political entity”, usually translated as “city” or “state”, depending on the context. The *kallipolis* is intended by Plato as the ideal political state. Presumably, such a state will be just, as Plato will try to demonstrate.
- Plato’s premise in introducing the *kallipolis* is to construct a model of justice as it might be found in a political entity such as a city or state. He reasons at 368e that both the city (political entity) and individual are described as just, so that presumably the same condition may be found in both. If we were to imagine the ideal city (state), then presumably it would be a just one (369a, 371e, 472e). Hence, if it is easier to “see” justice in the larger object (the *polis*), then perhaps we can transfer that understanding of justice to the individual (368e).
- The basic principle on which the *kallipolis* is founded is the betterment of each individual participating in it (369c). At each step, Socrates adopts measures defining the *kallipolis* on the supposition that they will make it better that it would be without them. Thus, for example, the principle of specialization (369d; cf. 420b).
- The First City
 - o Plato claims that political associations are formed because “none of us is self-sufficient” (369b). We may call this a *principle of non-self-sufficiency*. We join together, he maintains, because we see that doing so is in our mutual best interest (369c).
 - o Plato also asserts a *principle of specialization* (369d-370a), suggesting that our needs are more efficiently met if the given individual focuses his/her efforts on one product to be shared with all. A minimal political entity of four or five persons might thus exist, in which we find a farmer, a builder, a weaver, a cobbler, and a physician (369d).
 - o And Plato further asserts that intrinsic differences among humans will suit one individual better for one task than another, so that by nature one will be suited to a particular communal task (370a-c). We may call this a *suitability principle*.
 - o Specialization and suitability entail the expansion of the minimal polis to an expanded one, in which we find carpenters, metal workers, cowherds, shepherds (370d) as well as merchants, sailors, retailers, and laborers (“wage earners”) (371a-e).
 - o The result is a “first city” which Socrates describes in somewhat bucolic if humble terms (372a-b).
 - o Glaucon objects, however, that Socrates has founded a “city for pigs,” lacking in luxuries and delicacies (372c-d). In place of his “healthy city,” Socrates thus embarks on composition of a “luxurious city” or what he dubs a “city with a fever” (372e).
- The Second City
 - o The more luxurious, sophisticated city will require a great many further occupations to be filled, including those of hunters, artists, poets, actors, dancers,

servants, tutors, nurses, hair-dressers, barbers, and cooks (373b-c). It will require more livestock to feed (373c) and likely entail intrusion on neighboring populations, which will lead to warfare and the need for a military force (373e). It is interesting to note that Plato makes a point of saying that the origin of war is the desire for luxury (373e).

- The training of the armed force, which Plato refers to with the term ‘guardians’, turns out to drive a good deal of the discussion books II-VII. Plato’s initial concern is in developing courageous warriors. It evolves, however, that a leadership class must be identified and trained, which gives us the Philosopher-Kings, whose training involves arguments in metaphysics and epistemology.¹
- The guardians must be strong and courageous (375a-b), “spirited” (375b), savage to their opponents (375b) but gentle with their fellow citizens (375c). This combination of traits poses some difficulty, until Socrates notices the likeness with dogs. The warriors must be “philosophical”, literally love the known, in this case, as a dog loves those with whom it is familiar. Also like a dog, the guardian must be hostile to those with whom s/he is unfamiliar, making the guardian friendly toward the known and unfriendly toward “what is alien to it in terms of knowledge and ignorance” (376b).
- Plato’s further account of the training and education of the guardians entails perhaps the most famous (or infamous, depending on your perspective) course in eugenics in Western literature. Their training may be divided into *mousike* and *gymnastiki*, training for the soul and body, respectively (376e). In terms of *mousike*, Plato makes significant restrictions on what the future guardians may learn of their gods and heroes (377a-383c, 389e-392a); intends a myth promising a pleasant and welcome afterlife (386a-388d); prohibits violent laughter (388e); reserves falsehoods for the rulers (389b-c); places restrictions on acting (393c-397a); and places restrictions on musical forms (397b-400e).
- Of special note, Plato famously bans the works of Hesiod and Homer (377d) as representing the gods in a less than ideal light. This represents an important step in Greek thought and in Western thought generally. Previously, as we have seen, the Greek gods were portrayed as little less than super-humans, unrestrained in their powers and in their scruples. Now, Plato, like Socrates before him, is placing limits on our understanding of the divine. “[A] god is really good ... and must be described as such” (379b). Plato thus imposes “laws” governing representations of the gods:
 1. Gods are not the causes of all things, but only of good things. (380c)
 2. Gods are “simple and true in word and deed” – they neither change nor do they deceive. (382e)
 - That is, we may only speak well of the gods, because the gods are purely good. There is no mystery concerning the gods, except for our ignorance of them. They conform to *human* standards of rationality, and now resemble more general *principles* of order: as we shall see, goodness, truth, the divine, and reality all come together, for Plato.
- *Gymnastiki* training will involve dietary restrictions (403e-404e) and restrictions on medical treatment (405c-407e), including an injunction against treatment for invalids.
- We also see certain legal provisions, such as a prohibition on petty disputes (405b-c) and execution of irremediabiles (410a).

¹ See 412a for Plato’s assertion of the need for rulers. In this early stage of discussion, the guardians have not yet been identified as the leaders and rulers of the city.

- The well-trained guardian, who displays a harmonious balance of wisdom and spirit (411e) will be the best candidate for rule in the *kallipolis* (412a-c). These will be the best of the guardians, and their qualities and duties are of the greatest importance to the welfare of the *kallipolis* (412a). They will be observed and tested from an early age (412e, 413c), and their love of their city must be their strongest motivation (412d). These will be the “complete guardians”, the proper rulers of the *kallipolis*; those guardians of lesser quality will make up the “auxiliary” body, the warrior or soldier class (414b).
- Plato completes his second city by promulgating a “noble lie” (414c), intended to promote love in the guardians of their city, and acceptance in all of their position in the city (414d-415c). The inhabitants of the *kallipolis* will be told that they all derive from the earth, that the soil of their city is their “mother”, that they are all siblings. Each will have a soul composed mostly of either gold, silver, or iron and bronze, relegating the given soul to the class of guardians, auxiliaries, or producers.
- Plato also makes provision for the public housing of the guardians, and prohibits their possession of private property or money (415e-416c, 416d-417b). The guardians will have wives and children in common (423e-424a; see also book V).
- Plato’s “purification” (399e) of the luxurious city constitutes the second city. It remains to provide for the rule of the city by the philosopher-kings. This is the work of books V-VII, though we see gestures to it henceforth.
- The Third City
 - The completion of Plato’s *kallipolis* involves the full specification of the nature of the philosopher-kings – the ruler-guardians. We see beginning mention of this at 423e, where the education of this class begins. This account is interrupted by a specification of justice, first in the city (427e-434c) and then in the individual (434d-445b). See below, the Tri-Partite Soul, Justice, and Justice in the Soul.
 - Plato returns to the lifestyle and education of the philosopher-kings at 451c. His account includes asserting the equality of women (451e-457b); further specification of common marriage and children (457c-d); specification of marriage and mating privileges (458e-461e); the rendering of children to the state (460b); infanticide (460c-d); further specification of communal possession of property (462c); and the expanded sense of unity, kinship, and happiness to result (462c-466d).
 - At 473c, Plato specifies the one principal condition to be met in order to establish the third city, the *kallipolis* proper: that the highest class of guardian, the philosophers, rule. At 474b, Plato begins his argument to show that it is this class, alone, that is fit to rule the ideal state. This argument involves his Theory of Forms and the access that only the philosopher has to truth and reality. (See notes in Plato III.)

The Tri-Partite Soul

- In order to understand Plato’s concept of justice, we must understand his *kallipolis*, or ideal state. And in order to understand that, we must understand his view of human nature.
- According to Plato, the soul (*psuche*) has three distinct parts: appetite, a “spirited” part (which we will call ‘spirit’), and reason. Plato argues as follows that these three parts are distinct from one another:
 1. A thing cannot be or undergo “opposites” “in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time.” (436b)

2. Reason, on occasion, forbids an act that the appetites demand. (439b; cf. trying to quit smoking)

Hence,

3. Reason and “the irrational appetitive part” are distinct from each other. (from 1, 2; 439d)
4. Spirit, on occasion, forbids an act that the appetites demand. (439e-440a: the necrophiliac)

Hence,

5. Spirit is distinct from appetite. (from 1, 4)
6. Spirit can exist in beings that lack (full) reason. (441a-b: small children, animals)

Hence,

7. Spirit is distinct from reason. (from 6)
 - Note that spirit “listens” to reason, and usually is aligned with it (440b-d), whereas appetite is “deaf” to reason (439d).
 - Note that appetite is the “largest” part of a soul, and prone to becoming too “big and strong,” resulting in irrational (imprudent) behavior. The proper role of reason and spirit is to hold the appetites in check, so that they do not become too strong. (442a)
- Along with the three parts of soul, Plato finds some persons to be “dominated” by one or another of these parts. This is in line with his claims at 370a and 374a that we are not all alike but have differing “natures”, making us suited to one task or another, which culminates in the Noble Lie fable of the metals: those whose souls are mixed with gold are suited to rule, those whose souls are mixed with silver are suited to be “auxiliaries” (the military/police force), and those whose souls are mixed with iron and bronze are suited to the production of material goods and services. (415a-c)
 - Those suited to the auxiliary role will be the silver-souled spirited type. (375ab)
 - Guardians, generally, must be “philosophical”, in addition to being spirited. This, in order that they know whom to protect and whom to attack. As with spirit and reason generally, the guardian class is characterized by both qualities. (375e-376b)
 - The “best” of the guardians, those with “golden” souls, will be the city’s rulers. (412c) They will be “knowledgeable” and have unshakable love of their city. Their love of the city will be facilitated by the Noble Lie, which includes a myth to the effect of being born and nurtured in the bowels of the “Mother Earth”. (414de) Ultimately, Plato will identify these as the “Philosopher-Kings” – wise leaders of the *polis*.
 - Those whose souls are governed by the appetites, made of bronze or iron, will be best suited as “producers” of the nation’s material wealth. Such persons care most about material things, and Plato calls them “money-makers” – somewhat derisively. (434a, e.g.)
- What are some examples of persons of these three distinctive types?
 - Highly competitive athletes, for whom the *honor* and *glory* of victory are most important, are perhaps our best-known contemporary examples of the spirited type. Think here, perhaps, of Michael Jordan, Derek Jeter, or coaches such as Bill Parcells, or owners such as George Steinbrenner. Another example is the character Nikita, from the film *La Femme Nikita*.
 - Of those whose souls are governed by the appetites, we might name Bill Gates and Jerry Jones.
 - Of those whose souls are governed by reason, I would suggest the Dali Lama and Albert Einstein.

Justice

- The virtues, according to Plato, are defined by reference to the parts of the soul or of the city. Plato identifies four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice (427e). Both the city and the individual person may be said to be virtuous in any of these respects.
- Civic virtues concern the conduct of the three classes of the *polis*.
 - o Civic wisdom, for Plato, involves the city's making good decisions, decisions that benefit the city as a whole (428c), and this it will do if and only if it is ruled by the wise. That is, if the wise are allowed to rule, a city will itself be wise. (428b-e)
 - o If that part of the city charged with defending the city from harms performs its task with courage, then the city itself will be called courageous. Courage, for Plato, here, involves knowledge of which things are properly feared (429b-c). This knowledge is to be inculcated in the spirited auxiliaries by their education, and will be stable, resistant to feeling and emotion. (429a-430c)
 - o Moderation (or "temperance") is the third of the subordinate virtues, and a city will have this virtue if each of its parts accepts its proper role. That is, the city will not be excessively or deficiently appetitive, or excessively or deficiently spirited, if its appetitive citizens accept their place as producers and its spirited citizens accept their place as guardians. Failing this, a city might become vicious (i.e., develop a vice, the opposite of a virtue) – as, for instance, if its appetitive try to rule, which would make it excessively appetitive; or if its spirited try to be producers, which could make it deficiently appetitive. (See 430d-432a.)
 - o And for Plato, Justice in the city will be "doing one's own work, and not meddling with what isn't one's own." (433a-b) That is, the appetitive must work as producers, the spirited must work as militia/police, and the wise must work as rulers. Justice is thus a *structural* feature of the city, defined in terms of the proper working of its parts. (It remains to be seen whether such a state would, in fact, act justly.)²
- Having identified justice and the other virtues in the *polis*, Plato is able to define them in terms of the individual. The human virtues are again structural features, in this case of the person's soul.
 - o A person will be wise to the extent that s/he allows his/her rational part to make decisions. (442c)
 - o A person will be courageous to the extent that s/he allows his/her spirited part to protect him/her from harms. (442c)
 - o And a person will be moderate to the extent that his/her soul's parts are acquiescent to their roles. (442d)
 - o Personal justice – justice in a person – will be that condition in which the three parts of the soul perform their proper function: appetite secures for the whole sufficient material means for pleasant life; spirit protects the whole from dangers;

² Plato has said that the last virtue to be identified will be "what's left over" (428a). That is, having identified wisdom, courage, and moderation in the city, it should then become evident what justice is. This reflects Plato's conviction that justice is an *ur-virtue* – a virtue the having of which entails the having of these subsidiary virtues. We see justice in a city, then, when we see it wise, courageous, and moderate, because if it is wise, courageous, and moderate, each part of the city will be "doing its own". The overall picture of a wise, courageous, and moderate city is the picture of a just city.

- and reason makes the decisions. (441d) This, again, amounts to the sum of the three subsidiary virtues, wisdom, courage, and temperance.
- Justice, for Plato, is a “natural” “harmony” of soul. (443e, 444d) It is the “health” and “well-being” of the soul. (444d) Such a condition will lead to action that is itself “just” and “fine” Its opposite, injustice, consists in an unnatural disharmony of soul, which results in “injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, ignorance, and, in a word, the whole of vice.” (444b)
 - Thus, Plato’s answer to the question whether justice is prudent is a clear, resounding, Yes. (445a) Only the just will live well; the unjust soul is “ruined” and lives in “turmoil”, making life “not worth living.” (445a-b)
 - We should consider whether this is so. A complete, final answer is offered by Plato only in Book IX.

Justice and the Just

- Before evaluating Plato’s theory, we should be clear about the *structural* definition of justice he offers.
 - o At 433b, Socrates remarks that justice “makes it possible” for the civic virtues of wisdom, courage, and moderation to exist in a city, and that it “preserves” them once they are established. And at 443b he makes the same remark regarding individuals, that justice is a “power” that “produces” in one the capacity for virtuous behavior of every kind. See also 443e, where the “just” act “preserves” and “helps achieve” this structure. Similarly, injustice produces vicious behavior: “licentiousness, cowardice, ignorance, and ... the whole of vice” (444b). See also the comparison with health: “healthy things produce health, unhealthy ones disease” (444c).³
 - o Socrates’ remark at 443e is made explicit at 444c: “just actions produce justice in the soul and unjust ones injustice.” That is, justice as a structural condition of the soul and the justice of a given act enjoy a reciprocal relationship: just acts tend to make one’s soul properly aligned; and the properly aligned soul tends to perform just acts. The obverse will be the case with injustice.
 - o Justice is thus the health of the soul – “a kind of healthy, fine condition, and well-being of the soul, while vice is disease, shameful condition, and weakness” (444d). And hence Socrates can conclude at 444a that it is more profitable (prudent) to be just than to be unjust.
 - o We should, then, be able to construe any given act we think of as morally right or wrong in terms of the structural harmony of the soul, or its lack, and vice versa. Perhaps Plato has in mind cases like these:
 - ♣ Bad Soul > Bad Act: reason fails to rule; spirit judges. When tired, for instance, reason fails to judge this person next to me as a valued friend or family member; spirit, thus unguided, identifies this noisy person as a foe and, like a dog, responds roughly. Reason fails to identify correctly a source of irritation (is it the loved one who is being annoying, or is it my tired nerves that are easily irritated?). Consequently, spirit identifies the loved one as hostile, a threat, usurping reason’s role, and acts accordingly. Unkind treatment of loved ones generally results in domestic discontent, supporting Plato’s claim that the unjust live less well.

³ Again, comparison with our terms, ‘good’ and ‘righteous’ is warranted: the just wo/man, in Plato’s sense is just in the broad, all-encompassing sense of what we call the good or righteous wo/man. Similarly for the unjust and our terms ‘bad’ and, say, ‘corrupt’.

- ♣ Good Soul > Good Act: In the properly-ordered soul, reason correctly identifies the person next to me as a valued friend or family member, resulting in kindness towards him/her. Kind treatment to friends and family will likely reward me, making it the prudent as well as the right act.
- ♣ Bad Act > Bad Soul: Rude acts tend to disharmonize my soul – how? Perhaps insofar as some ill-natured part of me gains strength by its exercise. Perhaps we have an appetite for cruelty that is strengthened by repeated acts of cruelty. And a strengthened appetite for cruelty might result in internal discord, within me – a conflict between the part of me that desires to be cruel and the part of me that judges this wrong. To the extent, that is, that I judge my increasing cruelty “low” or “ill-mannered”, and to the extent then that I experience disgust at myself, reason and spirit fight against my cruel appetite. (Compare the Leontius case; 439e.)
- ♣ Good Act > Good Soul: Partly this may be a matter of habituation. Taking the time to help the old lady across the street, I further accustom myself to behavior that is not, primarily, motivated by an appetite, but, rather, by what reason dictates to be proper. Spirit feels pride and satisfaction at action deemed right by reason.
- ♣ (Note, however, that we depend here on determinations of what reason would, in fact, judge the appropriate action, which is part of what Thrasymachus challenges us to substantiate. See below.)
- Socrates himself provides anecdotal evidence in support of his account.
 - ♣ 442e-443a: none of us would expect a just person, as defined above, to embezzle funds, to rob temples (banks), betray friends, etc. Such a person would be utterly trustworthy, respectful of family and gods. And we think that the just act this way because of the just ordering of soul.
- Justice is as justice does? The above examples raise the question whether Plato’s account is sufficiently informative. Do we know just how the harmonious soul will act? Do we know what the reason-governed soul will do? And isn’t it precisely Thrasymachus’ point that the reason-governed soul will be “unjust”?
 - Note a potentially damaging circularity in Plato’s account.
 - ♣ He says: justice is a properly ordered soul. So justice makes me wise, courageous, and moderate. Thrasymachus will hardly deny that wisdom, courage, and moderation are virtues. The question concerns the behavior that counts as just and unjust.
 - ♣ Plato thinks it clear that the just soul will perform “just” acts, and that such acts contribute to the just soul. Similarly for injustice.
 - ♣ But everything depends, seemingly, on which acts then count as just or unjust. Is kindness just? Is cheating unjust? For Plato, the only response can be: kindness is just if that is how the just act; and cheating is unjust if that is how the unjust act.
 - The problem resolves to our ignorance of moral truth.
 - ♣ If reason does in fact judge kindness to be called for, because it is what is best for the whole soul, then there will be no “civil war”, no internal disharmony, if one acts regularly out of kindness. But if reason judges cruelty or dishonesty to be called for, then there will be no internal disharmony if one succumbs to cruelty, greed, etc.
 - ♣ The problem is that we don’t know what reason calls for, evidently, because we don’t know the exact moral truth. All we have to go on,

seemingly, are our various moral conventions. And it is precisely these that Thrasymachus challenges.

- ♣ One might reply here that our partial understanding of justice does acquaint us with the kind of act that is properly called just. But it is not clear that this, alone, can withstand Thrasymachus' skepticism.
- Begging the question against Thrasymachus.

The Feasibility Question

- At 466d, Plato returns to the question whether the *Kallipolis* is possible. Socrates finally addresses the question squarely at 472b and following.
- At issue is whether the *Kallipolis* stands as a credible model for justice. If it is not, in fact, a possible state, Plato worries that his theory of justice may be ill-founded.
 - Here we should distinguish kinds of impossibility. Some things are *physically* impossible, such as my suddenly levitating out of my seat. Some things are *logically* impossible, such as an object being both blue and not blue. Still other things we might call *practically* impossible if, for example, they may once have been possible but are no longer: e.g., my having gone to University of Chicago for college.
 - The only real danger here for Plato would seem to be *logical impossibility*, for this would mean that the *Kallipolis* was conceptually defective, incoherent. Ideas that are positively incoherent cannot stand as models of anything, because incoherent ideas don't express any particular idea at all (arguably).
- In any case, Plato seems to suggest that at worst the *Kallipolis* is a *physical impossibility*. This is owing to the distinction he makes between theory and practice.
 - Consider, for example, the distinction between (the pure form of) a triangle and any particular triangular object. It may be a physical impossibility that anything be perfectly triangular. But that doesn't mean that the notion of *triangle* is incoherent, nor does it mean that we cannot employ that idea as a model for thinking about physical triangles.
 - Similarly, even if the *Kallipolis* couldn't be brought into just the form described in the *Republic*, still, the idea can serve to model such political organizations as are physically (and practically) possible.
 - Moreover, the theory of the *Kallipolis* is not exact, so we should expect some divergence between ideal and actual best cities.
- To the Philosopher Kings
 - Plato takes the occasion of the feasibility question to move the discussion to the Philosopher Kings. As above, if there is one point that would bring an actual city closer to the model of the *Kallipolis*, it is rule by Philosopher Kings. (473c) As we shall see, this is because they alone will have the requisite knowledge.