

## Books VIII and IX

### Constitutions and Persons

- At 368d-e, Socrates asserts that justice is the same thing in both city and man. This claim is established at 441d, when we find that justice is the same structural feature in both. Similarly for the other chief virtues, courage, wisdom, and moderation.
- The *Kallipolis* is established as the best possible city at 427d-e: it is “completely good” (despite any theoretical flaws in its description – 472b), and its goodness is a function of its justice – 433b-c.
- Similarly, the just person is the best possible human – justice is “a kind of health, fine condition, and well-being of the soul” (444d), though such persons are rare (503b) and indeed likely possible only given the ideal conditions of a *Kallipolis* (497b-c).
- At 445c-d, we see Plato identify five kinds of soul and five corresponding kinds of political constitution. The best of these is the just person or just city. The just city will be a “kingship” if ruled by a single wise person, and an “aristocracy” if ruled by several. The wise, of course, will attend to truth (475b-476a), disdaining pleasure and honor (485d-e), and valuing the well-being of the city above all things (540d-e; cf. 412d, 414e). Having shown (as above) the merit of the best type, Plato proceeds to consider the lesser four.

### Decline of the *Kallipolis*

- The four types of lesser city are the timocracy, the oligarchy, the democracy, and the tyranny.<sup>1</sup> The four types of lesser person are the timocrat, the oligarch, the democrat, and the tyrant. Structurally, person and city will be similar. Further, the nature of the city will be a reflection of its rulers – e.g., the qualities of a timocracy will be a function of its timocratic rulers. Note the close relationship, for Plato, between the nature of the citizen and the state in which s/he lives.
- The timocrat is ruled by his/her spirited part. The oligarch is a person ruled by his/her *necessary appetites*. Democratic persons are ruled by the *unnecessary* appetites. And a tyrannical person is one ruled by *lawless and unnecessary* appetites.
  - o The necessary appetites are for the primary requirements of life: food, shelter, and material wealth generally. Souls thus ruled (oligarchs) tend to be miserly (554a), philistine, and callous (554c). The suppression of unnecessary appetites entails a latent propensity for licentiousness, which occasions internal conflict (554d). (Note that the necessary appetites do include the desires for “delicacies”, to the extent that these are beneficial. 559b)
  - o The unnecessary appetites are those whose satisfaction is either unbeneficial or harmful to continued life (559b). Presumably, these include luxuries, intoxicants,

---

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘timocracy’ derives from the Greek *timos* meaning honor. ‘Oligarchy’ derives from the same Greek word of the same meaning. ‘Tyranny’ derives from the Greek *tyrannos* meaning tyrant.

sexual excess, etc. Souls thus ruled (democrats) are ignorant (560b), incorrigible (560c), immoderate (560d), shameless (560d-e), and inconstant (561c-d). They experience inner conflict with the necessary desires which they tend to neglect (550e). Such persons chafe at rule and order (563d).

- The lawless unnecessary appetites are those ordinarily repressed in civilized society, visiting us only in dreams, (571c). These include savagery, incest, bestiality, murder, and other unnatural acts (571c-d). Plato suggests that “a powerful erotic love”, unchecked, is responsible for these desires (572e).
- The several kinds of city (“constitutions”) devolve by means of political change owing to the characters of their leaders. The characters of the leaders are themselves influenced by political change, by having been raised in the households of imperfect leaders, and originally by the imperfect mixture of their souls.
  - The first motion away from the *Kallipolis* is occasioned by “mixing” of the soul types, which results from imperfect eugenics (546c-e). This imperfection itself results from the inability of even Philosopher-Kings to recognize the (small-f) form of human perfection: they may recognize its (big-F) Form; but there is an inevitable disparity between that and its material instantiation (546a-b). That is, it is only by sense perception that the Philosopher-Kings can implement their knowledge of the ideal human Form. But because the senses present an inevitably imperfect representation of reality, this effort is bound to go wrong.<sup>2</sup>
  - Civil conflict will result from an ill-bred ruling class (547a), which will lead to private property held by rulers (547b), which will lead to timocracy, to oligarchy, democracy, and finally to tyranny.
  - The key point in each subsequent change appears to be the “mixture” of desires found in the various character types. E.g., the timocrat tends to become a money-lover because s/he “isn’t pure in his [her] attitude to virtue” (549b). I.e., the timocrat isn’t simply one whose soul is governed by the spirited part, but one whose soul is governed by a mixture of spirit and appetite (i.e., necessary appetite, in this case). See also the psychology of the children of each type, below.
  - Plato seems to see a linear regression, with the given individual a result of “pulls” from above and below on a scale of desire quality. Thus, the son of the deteriorating aristocrat is swayed by what is left of his father’s rational part, on the one hand, and by spirited and appetitive forces around him (e.g., his mother who wishes revenge for the father’s political failure; Plato not immune, evidently, to misogyny). See 549c-550b. The son “settles in the middle and surrenders the rule over himself to the middle part – the victory-loving and spirited part – and becomes a proud and honor-loving man” (550b).<sup>3</sup>
  - In other words, the mixture in one’s soul makes one vulnerable to vices born of one’s lowest desire. The timocratic are vulnerable to necessary appetite; the oligarchic, who are defined by necessary desire, are vulnerable to unnecessary desire (licentiousness); and those governed by unnecessary desire – the democratic – are vulnerable to becoming lawless – i.e., tyrannical. It appears that the trend is downwards since the external conditions in which the individual finds him/herself are not ideal.

---

<sup>2</sup> See the notes in Plato III for further information on the nature of perception, for Plato.

<sup>3</sup> The imperfectly rational wo/man in the imperfect aristocracy deteriorates to the timocrat.

### The Tyrant

- The tyrant is the son of the democrat, and so to understand the former, we must understand the latter.
  - The democrat is the son of the oligarch, the miserly man who cares only for wealth. The miser mistrusts and lacks understanding of his unnecessary desires, resisting them only by force of will (558d). His son, then, is ill-equipped himself to resist them (559d). As in all cases of individual “injustice”, the son’s soul is a seat of intense conflict: his father’s influence forbids him the “honey” of the unnecessary desires, while the novel and powerful taste of the unnecessary creates in him new and powerful desires (559e-560b). And like his father, it is a lack of understanding that ultimately allows the unnecessary pleasures to hold sway: “seeing the citadel of the young man’s soul empty of knowledge, fine ways of living, and words of truth (which are the best watchmen and guardians of the thoughts of those men whom the gods love), they finally occupy that citadel themselves ... And in the absence of these guardians, false and boastful words and beliefs rush up and occupy this part of him.” (560b-c).
  - The son of the oligarch thus becomes deaf to the restraining influence of the necessary appetites. Restraint and moderation themselves, the very principle of self-control, are regarded as a threat to this new-found, powerful, pleasurable, licentious life. (560c-e)
  - This, then, is the democrat, “always surrendering rule over himself to whichever desire comes along, ... not disdaining any, but satisfying them all equally” (561b). For this is the true meaning of democracy – equality for all, even for those things that are in fact unequal (561b-c). This is the life of freedom, of abandon. “There’s neither order nor necessity in his life, but he calls it pleasant, free, and blessedly happy, and he follows it for as long as he lives” (561d).
- The son of the democrat is the tyrant.
  - The democrat is defined by the interplay of a restraining force, necessary appetite, and a corrupting force, lawlessness, and finds the middle ground of unnecessary appetite. (572d-e)
  - For the son, it is the “middle desires” (unnecessary appetite) that play a restraining role, while lawlessness threatens corruption (572e). (Note that the symmetry of the account here fails; there is no third term “below” lawlessness.)
  - The principle of lawlessness (a degenerate principle, it would seem) is madness. The son of freedom is ripe for corruption by madness, which Plato also identifies as a “powerful erotic love” (572e). Having been raised to mistrust restraint, the soul is susceptible to rule by the principle rejecting all of its forms. “Then this leader of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied. If it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throws them out, until it’s purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness” (573a-b).
- The life of the tyrant is one of crime and corruption. (573d and following)
  - Parties, feasts, orgies (573d); consumption of material resources (573d-e); theft and deceit (574b); violation of his parents (574b-c); temple burglary (574d); treason (575d).
  - The personal life of the tyrant is marked by obsequiousness, falsity, and loneliness. His interpersonal associations are based on need; once satisfied, he has no use for others (575e). He will have no friends, being either master or slave of others (576a). He will be untrustworthy (576a).
  - Thus, Plato asserts, the “most vicious” of men is clearly also the “most wretched” (576b).

- If the circumstances permit, the personal tyrant will become a political tyrant, and this individual will be even more wretched (578c and following).
- Three Arguments
  - First: the primary argument of Books VIII and IX, that by comparison with other types of soul, the soul of the tyrant appears to be most wretched. Conclusion drawn at 580b-c.
  - Second: that while each part of the soul has its pleasures and regards its own pleasure as highest, only the soul of the wise knows the three pleasures completely, and it judges this pleasure, that of the just soul, to be highest. 580c-583a.
  - Third: that the pleasures of the lesser parts of soul are incomplete, while that of the just soul (involving knowledge) are complete. 583b-587b.

Response to Thrasymachus: See the following passages

- 567c
- 568a
- 571a
- 576b
- 580b-c
- 583a
- 588b-592b (explicit, final return to Thrasymachus)

Final Note: Feasibility

- While the feasibility of the *kallipolis* is never settled in *Republic*, the *kallipolis* remains a firm symbol of Plato's rationalistic idealism. *Republic* ends on this note – 592b.
- It certainly seems unlikely that the *kallipolis* be enacted in our world. But neither do human institutions degenerate completely to and remain locked in tyranny. Rather, our institutions appear to swing back and forth between the tyrannical and the aristocratic, never fully being one or the other, and typically including a mixture of the other main constitutions identified by Plato – the timocratic, the oligarchic, and the democratic.
- We might say, however, that this motion tends to confirm Plato's general view of reality and human affairs. We can use the *kallipolis* as a reference-point by which to measure the quality of our political institutions, just as we can use Plato's definition of justice to measure the health and quality of the individual human soul. This fact, along with the fact that our world continues to change and to resist simple definition, bears out Plato's account.

Final Final Note: Rationalism

- To what extent is Plato revealed as a rationalist in his *Republic*?
- Our criteria of rationalism are logic, systematicity, knowability, and criticality.
- Logic: To what extent is Plato's view the view of a logical world?
  - Where the forms are concerned, we appear to have an entirely logical world. The Forms are quintessentially logical entities, inasmuch as they are grasped by the rational mind. Plato's paradigm forms, geometrical and arithmetical figures or truths, are presumably logical in form.
  - However, where the material world is concerned, we face some challenges in interpreting Plato's account. The material world is open to sense but not reason, evidently. It is the intellectual, ideal form that the intellect grasps, not the material object.
- System: Plato's world is systematic in a number of important respects.

- First and foremost, the Form of the Good is an *ur-form* determining all others. This form also unifies being with value.
- Second, we find a similar unifying structure in the virtue, justice, which is an *ur-virtue* with respect to the others cardinal virtues, wisdom, courage, and temperance.
- Plato's numerological references suggest a mathematical basis for the unified understanding of all things.
- Knowability: the formal world is the epitome of the knowable.
  - The forms are that which is, and that which is is the knowable.
  - On the other hand, Plato relegates the material order to the strictly unknowable.
- Critical Method: Plato's method is clearly critical, exemplifying an exhaustive examination of assumptions and replete with close argumentation in support of its conclusions.