

part
(2)

The Republic

Plato of Athens

Squashed version edited by Glyn Hughes © 2011

(continued from previous reading)

I was delighted, "How can I refuse? I've heard justice slandered, so I must come to her aid, but this is a difficult subject, and we're rather short-sighted. Perhaps it would be better if we looked at a bigger thing. Now, can't justice belong to either an individual or a community {polis}?"

"Yes."

"So, if we look at a community coming into existence, we might see how justice originates."

"I dare say."

{372} "Society originates because individuals can't supply all their own needs. Does that seem right?"

"I think so."

"And in the community things are exchanged so that both parties stand to gain."

"Yes."

"We need food and clothing and shelter, so, at least, a community will need a farmer, a weaver and a builder."

"Evidently."

"And should each work at just one job {*techne*}, or should they split the work between them?"

"Stick to one specialised skill, they'll be better at it."

"We'll need more citizens then, Adeimantus. The farmer will need smiths to make his tools and the weaver will need to rely on the shepherd. Our community has grown. Do you think it will be able to provide everything for itself?"

"I suppose not, it will need imports."

"So that means ships and sailors and merchants."

"Lots of them."

"And retailers, labourers, a market and a currency. Will that complete our community?"

"I think so."

"So how will our people live? They'll produce wheat and barley, wine, clothes, shoes and houses. They will serve fine cakes on leaves and relax on beds of myrtle."

"No luxuries?"

"I forgot; they'll have salt and oil and cheese and figs, country herbs and acorns to roast by the fire."

{373} "Really!" said Glaucon, "that might do for pigs; people need proper comforts like furniture, sweets, art and prostitutes."

"If they want luxury, they'll need more people; painters, musicians, seamstresses and such. That'll mean more land, and trying to get it from our neighbours, especially if they want unlimited material possessions too, will mean war."

"It will."

{374} "So that means a defence force."

"Can't the citizens fight for themselves?"

"Haven't we already agreed that people work best if they stick to one trade? So those who guard the city must be professionals at that trade."

"They'll need to be like well-bred dogs; strong, courageous and high-spirited."

"But Glaucon," I said "Won't that make them aggressive? We need them to be gentle to their fellow-citizens and only dangerous to their enemies. Don't you think that they also need the spirit of a philosopher?"

"What do you mean?"

"A dog knows the difference between friend and foe by using knowledge, and is not philosophy the love of knowledge?"

"So we must give our Guardians a philosophical spirit."

"Quite so, and that means we must educate them. The beginning is everything, and we must begin young when every impression makes its mark."

"How will we do that?"

{380} "By persuading their mothers and nurses to tell them stories. But we must beware of those traditional tales that portray Gods and heroes as dishonest, like the story of Hera being tied up by her son, or any of Homer's Battles of the Gods. God must always be represented as he alone really is, perfect in goodness and beauty, so that our Guardians can grow up pious and honest."

"I agree. This can be made law."

"We need to reject some passages of the old poets, like Homer's;

His soul took wing for Hades,
Bewailing the youth left behind.

For such will only teach that the afterlife is a terror, and who can be brave if they fear death?"

"Of course."

"For the common people self-control means obedience to their rulers, and restraining the desire for food, drink and sex. So we may approve of things in Homer like;

The Achaeans moved valiantly forward,
In silent obedience to their officers."

"We certainly must."

{393} "Next we must consider literature. Stories are either narrative or representation {*mimesis*}, or both."

"I can't say I see what you mean."

"I am being rather obscure. You know how writers and poets sometimes include an imitation of some other person speaking?"

"Yes."

"Surely it is harmful for a good person to recite the words of a madman, a slave or a fool?"

"I suppose it is."

"Well then, we can't permit our Guardians to take part in any plays and readings other than those which present the persona of good and noble people."

"It would be rather unseemly."

{398} "In our State each will stick solely to his own trade. You won't find the shoemaker turning lawyer, or the soldier trying to run a business. If we find an actor who can pretend to be all sorts of characters, we will honour him with garlands, and then throw him out."

"Given the choice, that is what to do."

"Next we need to consider music; only brave and noble harmonies must be permitted. You're the musician, Glaucon, how do we do that?"

"The Dorian and Phrygian harmonies would suit. The Lydian is too miserable, even for women, while the Ionian and Phrygian are too languid."

"Good. So we won't need complicated instruments like harps or flutes, we can just have the lyre and the cithara, though shepherds in the country might have some sort of pipe."

"We won't need as many instrument makers either!"

"When we have simple beauty in music and literature and all the other arts, when artists and craftsmen see the real nature of beauty and allow their art to blow across our young men like breezes from a healthy land, then we'll have beauty and goodness in character. This stage of education, Glaucon, is crucial."

"I see."

"And will not those who appreciate beauty recognise it in others and so fall in love?"

{403} *"Certainly. But such sharp pleasure, Socrates, leads to sexual desire, with all its madness."*

"So it does. We will make a law that a man may embrace and kiss his lover, if his friend allows it, but no more."

"I agree."

"Physical education is next. My opinion is that a sound body does not of itself make a sound personality {*psuche*}, but a sound mind will make the best of any physique. What do you think?"

"I agree."

"To begin with diet; we forbid drunkenness, of course; a Guardian is the last person who should ever be insensible. Homer never mentions spices, every athlete knows to abstain from them, so I trust you'll agree with me that rich Syracusan cooking or Attic confectionery are best avoided?"

"I agree."

"What about Corinthian girlfriends?"

"Best avoided, too."

"Elaborate food causes disease, just as elaborate music causes indiscipline."

"Very true."

{405} "And indiscipline and disease lead to law-courts and surgeries."

"It is bound to happen."

"And when people start to need lawyers and doctors, we have conclusive proof that the education system is worthless. Men in the courts before snoozing juries, trying to get remedies by legal trickery, is a proof positive that they don't have enough education to arrange their own lives properly. Just as disgraceful is going to the doctor, not with any real malady, but because they've filled their bodies with garbage, which the pompous medical profession manages to name as some new-fangled disease."

"But surely we'll need some doctors and lawyers in our State?"

"Certainly," I said, "but they will have to be good ones."

"That rather depends on what you mean by 'good'."

"A good doctor will be one who has, not just knowledge of medical science, but a wealth of experience of all diseases- perhaps even of his own. For a judge in the courts, on the other hand, experience in his field, experience of wrongdoing, would be a bad thing. A good judge would be an older man who spent his youth far away from wickedness, for evil can never know either itself or goodness. We need a good man to make a wise judge."

"True."

Our young Guardians will have the self-control to do without law-courts, and if we succeed with their physical education, they'll have no need of doctors either. That is why I say that the purpose of both physical and mental education is to train the mind."

"How so?"

"You must have noticed that a life spent in physical exercise leads to an over-tough character, while purely literary training leads to a soft and over-sensitive type?"

"I agree."

{411} "Our Guardians must have both elements in proper harmony, achieved through education. I don't need to spell out every detail of their singing classes, athletics and so forth do I?"

"It's quite straightforward."

"So? What next?" I said, "We must decide who among the Guardians is to govern our State."

"I suppose so."

"It's obvious that the elder must govern the younger."

"That is quite obvious."

"They'll need to be intelligent, capable and willing to devote their lives to the interests of the community."

"Quite so."

"And we'll have to keep a close watch on them in case their high principles are stolen or spirited away {Goeteuó}."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I was being rather theatrical. By 'stolen' I mean the process by which people give up their beliefs when confronted by clever argument. By 'spirited away', I mean how people change their opinions when under the magical spell of pleasure or panic."

"Yes, it does work like a spell."

{414} "If we want to see if a colt is nervous, we expose him to alarming noises. We must do the same with our young Guardians; expose them to pleasure and fear, testing them like gold is tested in the furnace. That is how we will choose which of the Guardians is to be a ruler and which is to assist the rulers as an Auxiliary."

"That would be the way!" He said.

"Now, I wonder if we could contrive some sort of 'glorious myth' which would convince the whole community."

"What sort of myth?"

"Nothing new- the sort of fairy story the ancients tell, and people still half-believe."

"You seem reluctant to tell us what it is."

"When you hear what I'm going to suggest, you'll see why I hesitate."

"Well, are you going to tell us or not?"

{415} "We shall tell our citizens this tale;

Ye who guard our city, think not that your youth was aught but mere appearance, for you were formed and fed in the womb of mother earth who sent you out to protect this land, your own mother, and all its citizens, your own brothers. Ye citizens are brothers all, but as God fashioned you he mingled gold to some, silver to others and iron and bronze to the rest. The Rulers have gold; the Auxiliaries silver, farmers and artisans have iron and bronze. You are all of one family and must strive that your children find each their proper place. If golden parents see a son of iron and bronze, they must harden their hearts and give him up to the life of husbandman or artisan. If the son of craftworkers has the touch of gold, raise him then to the honour of a Guardian. This is as nature has ordered, for prophecy tells that when men of iron or bronze guard the State, it will be destroyed entire.

That is the story. Do you think they will believe it?"

"Not in the first generation," he said, *"but the next may."*

"That will do, even a rumour can inspire people. But, let us return to earth. Once our Guardians have a safe place to found a community, they will need houses; not as men of means, but as soldiers."

"What is the difference?"

"I will explain. If a shepherd mistreats his sheep-dogs they will not protect the sheep. Likewise, we must prevent our Auxiliaries, who are strong, from becoming savage tyrants rather than partners and friends. Education is a start, but their material needs matter too."

"I see. So how should they live?"

"They will have no private property. They will eat together, and their houses will be open to all. We'll tell them that they have no need of gold or silver because mere earthly wealth cannot compare to the gold in their hearts. Shall we make this law?"

"I think not, Socrates." Said Adeimantus; *"They're hardly going to be happy, living like that. These Guardians seem more like hired watchmen."*

{421} "Yes." I replied. "They won't be able to afford holidays abroad or fancy women. But I am not trying to promote the happiness of any one class, but of the whole community. So, don't make us dress our farmers in robes and crowns, or let our potters laze around drinking. The important thing is that each person does their own job, and does it in the very best way possible."

"I suppose that is fair."

"You know, there is another thing which can corrupt people."

"What is that?"

"Wealth and poverty. Wealth makes men idle and careless; poverty makes them slovenly and rebellious. So our Guardians must try to prevent them."

"I agree," he replied, *"but here's another question, how will a community with no wealth fight a war if they need to?"*

"Adeimantus," I said, "don't you think our well-trained soldiers will be a match for any number of podgy conscripts?"

"Yes."

"In any case, as we have no need for gold, it would be an easy matter to gain allies on the promise that they take the spoils of war."

"Probably."

"At the heart of all this is education. So often looked on as unimportant child's play, it is essential for a sound State that children are brought up with sound character. Now, do we need any more laws?"

"What about business transactions, contracts, excise duties and such?"

{427} "Good men need no orders. But there is one further matter we ought to consider."

"What is that?"

"How we should order our places of worship, our rites for the dead and our prayers to the powers of the otherworld. But religion is not our business, I think we can follow tradition and leave such things to the Oracle of Apollo. So, with that, Adeimantus, I think we have a city founded for you. Now you and Polemarchus can look at it and see for yourselves where justice lies."

"This isn't fair, Socrates." Said Glaucon; "You promised to answer the problem yourself."

"That's true." I said. "I remember. But you must all help me."

"We will."

{428} "If we have founded our State perfectly then it must surely contain the four virtues of wisdom, courage, self-discipline and justice."

"True."

"The first of the four that I can see is wisdom, but there is something odd about it."

"What is that?"

"It is clear that wise judgement comes from knowledge, but there are many sorts of knowledge. We can't say that wisdom in the city as a whole comes from, say, the knowledge our carpenters have of woodwork. So where shall we find it?"

"With the Guardians."

"Good. Though they are the smallest class, it is they who rule with wisdom and so make the whole State wise."

"A satisfactory answer."

"Courage is easy to find, it depends on those who defend the community. Our City is therefore brave because of knowledge of what is to be feared."

"I don't understand that, can you explain."

"Courage is keeping safe that which you have learned about what it is that is worth fearing, and never ever being tempted to fear anything else. It's a bit like preparing cloth properly so that the dye will never fade, even with soap. Pleasure and desire can be stronger at washing-out the soul than any detergent."

"I think that's a fair explanation."

"Next to self-discipline, or 'mastering yourself', as people say."

"Certainly."

"But to 'master oneself' is absurd. If you are master of yourself, then, presumably, you must also be subject to yourself and one person can't be both master and subject."

"I suppose not."

"I think what is meant is that there is good and bad in everyone and to 'master yourself' is to have the good part in control of the bad."

"Quite true."

"In our State the mean desires of children, slaves, women and the lower classes will be controlled by the wisdom of the superior rulers."

"True."

{432} "And, as all the citizens agree about who should rule, we have self-discipline in the whole State, not just the rulers."

"I agree."

"Good. Now we must try to hunt down justice. Can you see where she is hiding?"

"I wish I could, you'll have to show me where to look."

"Tally-ho Glaucon! I think I can see some tracks!"

"Good."

"We really have been stupid, our quarry is right in front of us. Didn't we agree that in our State each person was to stick to their own job?"

"We did."

"So perhaps justice is simply minding ones own business?"

"Perhaps."

"Look at it another way. Won't our rulers administer justice, and try to prevent one man stealing the belongings of another."

"Yes."

"Which is another way of saying that justice is keeping what is properly one's own."

"True."

"So that is justice, and in our community each person keeping to their own class will mean justice and stability for the whole State."