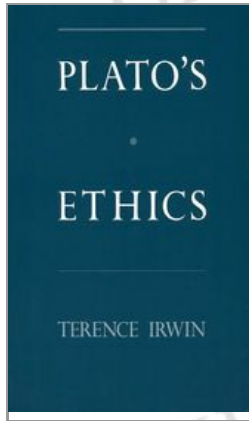


University Press Scholarship Online

Oxford Scholarship Online



Plato's Ethics

Terence Irwin

Print publication date: 1995

Print ISBN-13: 9780195086454

Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: November 2003

DOI: 10.1093/0195086457.001.0001

Republic VIII–IX on Justice

Terence Irwin (Contributor Webpage)

DOI: 10.1093/0195086457.003.0017

[–] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter studies the later books of the *Republic* in order to see how the distinctions between the different kinds of justice, presented in previous chapter, work in the last part of the dialogue. To start with, it is demonstrated that deviant souls are “c-unjust,” while democratic souls are “p-unjust.” Then, the rational part of the soul is extensively analysed in order to explain why it is the more comprehensive. Finally, it is underlined that the just man is the one in whom prevails the rational soul, which is the only one able to provide a good balance to the all human beings.

Keywords: Appetitive part, Plato, Democratic souls, Deviant souls, Division of the soul, Justice, Rational part, Republic, Spirited part

192. The Place of Books VIII–IX

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 192. The Place of Books VIII–IX

After the discussion of epistemological and metaphysical questions in Books V through VII, Socrates returns at the beginning of Book VIII to the promise he made at the end of Book IV to consider whether it is in our interest to be just or unjust (444e7–445b8). He describes the deviant constitutions—timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny—that embody successive deviations from the best constitution that is embodied in the ideal city.¹ The point of this description is to distinguish the four types of deviant people who have souls analogous in structure to the deviant constitutions. Plato seeks to show that the deviant constitutions are worse than the ideal, aristocratic constitution, and that therefore all the people with deviant souls are less well off than the person with a just soul. If the deviant people exhaust the possibilities for having unjust souls, then the p-just person is happier than any p-unjust person.

What does this elaborate comparison add to the argument of Book IV? Plato suggests at the end of Book IV that he has answered Thrasymachus (445a5–b5). But he equally insists that the argument in Book IV rests only on an outline account of the division of the soul, and that more needs to be said to support that division and (by implication) to amplify the description of the three parts. Plato recognizes that argument in Book IV is incomplete, even while he insists that it is correct; as Aristotle says in such cases, what has been said is ‘true, but not perspicuous (*saphes*)’ (*EN* 1138b25–26), and Plato wants to make it as perspicuous as possible (*hoion te saphestata*, 445b6).² We should not assume, then, that the later books are simply illustrative. Since Plato now tells us what is involved in having one's soul controlled by a non-rational part, he suggests what is required for control by the rational part and for psychic justice.³

The later books cannot completely fill the gap left by Book IV. For Plato believes that to fill the gap we would need to follow the ‘longer way’ and give an account of the Good, but he denies that he can give an account of the Good.⁴ The rational part of the soul is guided by reasoning about the good, and the other parts do their proper work when they are appropriately influenced by this reasoning about the good; and so we cannot fully understand the characteristic **(p.282)** desires of the rational part until we have given an account of the good. Plato renounces the aim of giving a full account of the parts of the soul in the *Republic*.

Still, the later books may clarify Plato's conception of the rational part and therefore his conception of psychic justice. Even if we cannot give an account of what the rational part does when it performs its proper function, we may still be able to grasp more of what it does by seeing what it must avoid. If we can see more of the outlook of unjust souls, we can see what errors a just soul must avoid; ‘if being in this condition is extremely wretched, we must earnestly flee from vice and try to be virtuous’ (*Ar. EN* 1166b26–28). Each of the deviant souls, according to Plato, is unjust because the parts, especially the rational part, do not perform their proper functions.

193. Sources of Psychic Injustice

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 193. Sources of Psychic Injustice

If we are to decide whether the deviant people have unjust souls, we must recall Plato's conditions for having a just soul. We have seen in Book IV that not every sort of control

by the rational part is the sort of control that Plato takes to be characteristic of psychic justice.

Even if my desire is irrational and incontinent, it may lead to purely technical practical reasoning (about ways to satisfy my incontinent appetite, for instance); if I follow the conclusion of this reasoning, I rely to some degree on the rational part. We have seen that Plato does not believe that desires resulting from this technical reasoning belong to the rational part; and so he does not believe that someone who acts on such desires is thereby controlled by the rational part.⁵

If we avoid incontinence and act on rational plans directed to the fulfillment of our long-term aims, the operation of practical reasoning is not restricted to instrumental deliberation on particular occasions; it must also consider the relation between different aims in my life as a whole (questions of jam tomorrow versus jam today). Concern to find the most efficient means to a given end requires me to attend to my concern for my other ends; for I must refer to these in order to decide which of several equally effective means is the most efficient and economical. Still, these functions of the rational part are strictly instrumental. The prudential deliberation of reason takes for granted the sorts of ends that I will pursue, and confines its attention to ordering them.

This concern for efficiency may be found in a non-rational part. Plato attributes some features of an agent, including this one, to a non-rational part of the soul; it has a conception of itself and its aims and uses practical reason to achieve them.⁶ And so the mere fact that someone avoids incontinence and acts steadily on the conclusions of reasoning about the most efficient course of action does not by itself show that he is controlled by the rational part; for this pattern of action is equally characteristic of a non-rational part.

It is less easy to decide, on the basis of Book IV alone, what Plato wants to say if I consider the sorts of ends I ought, in my own interest, to pursue in life and decide to follow the aims of the spirited or the appetitive part. In this case, I am taking a step beyond merely instrumental deliberation; my choice of which **(p.283)** ends to follow is a choice made by the rational part. It is important for Plato to take a definite view on this sort of agent; for if he believes that this pattern of deliberation and action is really control by the rational part, he must agree that such an agent is psychically just. If he agrees about this, then it is difficult to see how psychic justice necessarily involves any concern for the good of others, and correspondingly difficult to see any connexion with common justice. For many c-unjust people seem to be guided by a rational choice in favour of the aims of the spirited or appetitive part.

We found that Plato's conception of psychic justice gives him a reason for denying that a rational choice to pursue the aims of a non-rational part is the choice of a p-just soul. He insists that the rational part that dominates the p-just soul is concerned with reasoning about the good of the whole soul and of each part.⁷ Measured by this standard, a choice to prefer the aims of a non-rational part seems to ignore the interests of the whole soul and the interests of the parts whose aims are not chosen.

Although Plato could have made this point in Book IV, he certainly does not make it clearly; for he does not consider the sort of case just described, or directly deny that it is a case of p-justice. This is why it is important to consider Books VIII and IX; since these books present different kinds of unjust souls, they allow us to see the implications of Plato's standards for p-justice. The deviant souls are clearly c-unjust, and so it is important for Plato to show that they are clearly p-unjust as well. He must therefore show how they are dominated by the non-rational parts in a way that prevents them from being p-just. Since we have just seen that there are different ways of being dominated by a non-rational part, and different roles that practical reason can play in determining our choices, we must not oversimplify the questions about the deviant people. We must consider the different types of rational control to see which ones they have and which they lack.

194. The Decline of the Soul

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 194. The Decline of the Soul

Plato describes a process of decline from a just constitution, in which the rulers know what the common good is and are concerned to realize it in the city, through the different types of unjust constitutions, in which different ruling groups are responsible for different types of injustice that harm the city. In the city we can see the sources of injustice in the different classes, and we can see the effects in political change. A parallel narrative describes the decline from a just soul through different types of unjust souls, so that we can understand the effects of injustice in the soul by examining the effects of injustice in a city. In the individual we can see similar effects, in changes of individual characters. Each p-unjust condition of the soul can be traced to the domination of one of the non-rational parts of the soul. The timocratic person is dominated by the spirited part; the oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical people are dominated in different ways by different aspects of the appetitive part.

What is the nature of this domination? It would be easy to see how the deviant (**p.284**) people are p-unjust if they were incontinent. This is the sort of domination that Plato describes on a particular occasion in Leontius; someone who is regularly guided by non-rational impulses contrary to any rational aims he may form might reasonably be said to be dominated by the non-rational parts. This is the sort of person whom Calicles praises, or finds himself forced to praise.⁸ Someone who trains himself to act on his immediate impulse and to reject any desires resulting from reflexion on his longer-term good might, for the reasons that Socrates urges on Calicles, maximize his pleasure; by making this a habit, he might become a creature of impulse altogether, rejecting any significant role for rational planning in his life.

The closest parallel to this sort of person in the *Republic* is the tyrannical person, with his dominating and demanding desires and aims.⁹ If Plato meant that this sort of person habitually acts against his rational plans, or fails to form rational plans altogether, then we could understand his view of domination by the non-rational parts.

This explanation of 'domination' does not work, however, for the other deviant people.¹⁰ The timocratic, oligarchic, and democratic people have rational plans for their lives and

execute them steadily, without especially frequent lapses into incontinence. The timocratic person need not be especially prone to imprudent bursts of anger; indeed, his plans encourage him to control his appetites and emotions in order to pursue his long-term aim of honour and reputation more efficiently. The single-minded and systematic planning of the oligarchic person is strongly emphasized (553b–d). The democratic person acts on a variety of desires with no clear hierarchical structure, but this is not because he cannot control his desires. On the contrary, his rational plan is precisely to leave his different desires a certain degree of freedom, and in acting on them he does just what he rationally plans to do.

It is not even clear that the tyrannical person is habitually dominated by appetite in opposition to his practical reason and deliberation. He is dominated by a particular demanding urge or 'lust' (*erōs*) (573d), but this lust does not cause him to reject or violate his rational plans and desires. On the contrary, his obsessive lust controls his rational plans too; and so he follows these plans in his actions. Like the other deviant people, he is guided by his rational plans and need not be prone to incontinence.

For these reasons, Plato could not plausibly argue that the deviant people are p-unjust in the most obvious way, by acting incontinently or without any rational order in their choices.

195. Choices in Unjust Souls

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 195. Choices in Unjust Souls

Since Plato treats the non-rational parts of the soul as having some of the features of agents, he might explain the orderly and prudent aspects of the deviant people by saying that they are dominated by the aims—especially the longer-term aims—of one or another of the non-rational parts, and that the rational part is confined to instrumental reasoning on behalf of these aims.

(p.285) Plato's description of the transition from one psychic constitution to another certainly treats the different parts of the soul as having some characteristics of agents. Someone becomes an honour-lover by 'handing over' (*paradidonai*) rule in his soul to the spirited part (550b6); someone becomes oligarchic by setting his appetitive part on the throne (553b–c). In describing how someone acquires a democratic soul, Plato speaks first of a struggle between different appetites (559e4–561a5) in a young man, but then he suggests that when someone grows up he may himself take an active role in allowing some of the previously ejected desires to return and may not abandon himself entirely to unnecessary appetites (561a6–b6). A tyrannical soul develops when demanding and lawless appetites grow (572d5–573c10) and clamour for attention (573e3–574a11); it seems to be the person himself who pays attention to them and acts on them.

The parts of the soul are treated as agents to the extent that each has a relatively steady and coherent set of goals that it pursues. Since different p-unjust people are dominated by one or another of these sets of goals, perhaps Plato means that this domination is also the domination of a non-rational part. In that case, the deviant people are p-unjust because the rational part does not set the goals that they pursue in their lives.

This view of the deviant people fits some of Plato's description, but it does not fit his claim that someone 'hands over' rule in his soul to one or another part. The agent (or partial agent) who hands over rule to the appetitive part, for instance, cannot actually be the appetitive part; if it were, then no handing over would be necessary. But why would one of the other two parts hand over rule to a different part? If Plato does not mean that the agent handing over power is a part of the soul, perhaps he means that it is the person or soul composed of these three parts. But where does this agent fit into Plato's tripartite analysis of the soul? The tripartition is meant to explain the choices that we attribute to a person; if the explanation reintroduces the choices of the person without further explanation, the tripartition seems to fail in its explanatory task.

These difficulties about the role of the person in relation to the parts of his soul might be resolved in one of three ways: (1) The reference to the person is not to be taken seriously. Plato means only that the domination of one part is replaced by the domination of another. (2) The reference to the person is to be taken seriously because Plato has a conception of the person as something beyond the three parts of the soul. (3) The reference to the person is to be taken seriously, but it refers to a special role of one (or more) of the three parts of the soul.

Admittedly, Plato may well fail to distinguish these answers, or he may shift confusedly from one to the other. Nevertheless, it is worth asking which one fits his remarks best.

196. Rational Choices in the Decline of the Soul

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 196. Rational Choices in the Decline of the Soul

If the first of these answers is right, then we ought not to take the remarks about 'handing over' very seriously. They suggest that there is some agent who has a **(p.286)** choice about what to do, but we might suppose that this suggestion is misleading; perhaps Plato really means to describe a purely psychological, rather than a rational, process. On this view, when circumstances strengthen someone's spirited or appetitive part, it comes to dominate his plans and to set the ends pursued by practical reason. If the choices that a person makes simply result from the comparative strength of the desires of different parts of the soul, there is no distinct stage in which the person 'hands over' control to the strongest part of the soul; once a given part of the soul is strong enough, it dominates the person's choices without any handing over. On this view, handing over is simply a feature of the political process that Plato transfers to the decline of the individual soul; he does not mean it to describe a distinct phase in the history of the individual.

This solution, however, does not account for Plato's actual claims about handing over; for he describes the process in enough detail to show that he believes it has some distinct psychological reality. Indeed, he says enough to make it clear that the process is not purely psychological, but also rational. The deviant person reflects on his life and comes to see more point than he previously saw in taking the desires of a different part of the soul (or a different arrangement of the desires of the same part) as the basis for setting his ultimate ends. Plato suggests reasons that someone might give for abandoning one way of life in favour of another. The fact that these reasons are given suggests that the rational

part is involved in each of the stages of psychic decay, and that at each stage it approves of the change in the balance of power among the parts.

The appeal to the rational part is clear at the first stage of psychic decline. When a formerly good city starts producing badly educated people, the virtuous person finds himself dishonoured by other people. Although he realizes that he ought to put up with this, his son is not so easily persuaded; the son could make a reasonable case to show that his father's way of life does not really do justice to all the parts of his soul.¹¹ The son's reasoning reflects a general principle that Plato applies at each of the later stages as well: people turn from Life 1 to Life 2 when it seems to them that Life 1 fails to achieve its own ends and that Life 2 offers a better prospect of setting reasonable ends that they can hope to achieve.

The same pattern of rational choice and deliberation is repeated in the other deviant people. The instability of the honour-loving life leads to the gain-loving life, but someone who lives this life has to use force against his many unnecessary desires. The failure of this use of force suggests the egalitarian democratic attitude to appetites. The democratic person assumes that any discrimination between desires involves arbitrary and unjustifiable force; for he sees that this is true of the oligarchic person's attitude, and sees no better basis for discrimination. He therefore rejects any suggestion that some desires and their resulting pleasures deserve to be cultivated and others do not (561b7–c5). Even though some of his desires do him harm that has to be repaired by deprivations that he could have avoided (561c6–d2), this does not deter him; he esteems and cultivates all desires equally, just as they strike him, and allows them all satisfaction (561b2–6).

(p.287) This democratic policy is self-defeating. Since the democratic person accepts and cultivates all desires without discrimination, he has to accept and cultivate an obsessive and demanding desire (*erōs*) that is not content with equal shares. This desire uses the toleration granted to it by democratic attitudes to undermine the democratic way of life itself. For since the democratic person pursues any desire that strikes him, he has to pursue the sort of desire that completely absorbs him. Since the obsessive desire becomes stronger and stronger, the democratic policy itself requires him to pursue this desire until it dominates him completely.

These remarks suggest that Plato is not being careless in suggesting that the transition from one stage to another is a rational process involving the person who hands over control. If this is correct, then one aspect of the political analogy has to be modified when it is applied to the individual soul. In the sequence of political changes, one government is turned out and another is installed, and there is no single source of authority that consents to all the changes of government. In the individual, however, Plato seems to intend the person to remain the permanent source of authority; every change of domination in the soul is accepted by the soul itself.

197. The Rational Part of an Unjust Soul

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 197. The Rational Part of an Unjust Soul

If Plato's remarks about 'handing over' are to be taken seriously, then we cannot suppose that psychic decline is treated as a purely psychological process. If it is a rational process, must we suppose that it belongs to the person, as opposed to a part of the soul, or can we attribute it to the rational part of the soul?

The reasons that persuade the agent to cede control to a different part or a different desire seem to be reasons that the rational part of the soul accepts. The process is intelligible, then, if the rational part is persuaded by the different reasons that are offered to justify the rule of different sorts of desires. Plato does not suggest that the agent makes choices that do not express the desires of any of the three parts; he probably means that when the agent decides which desires will control him, this decision consists in a choice by the rational part.

We ought not to suppose that if the interests of the whole soul are being considered, it must be the person, as opposed to the rational part, who is moved by them. For we have seen that it is distinctive of the rational part that it considers the interests of the whole soul; although it is one of the parties whose interests are considered, it is capable of considering itself and the other two parts as constituting a whole.

The impartial outlook of the rational part explains why it need not always demand control for itself. The oligarchic person, for instance, chooses to confine the rational and spirited parts to subordinate roles that support the guiding aim of his acquisitive appetites (553d1–7). If we are right to say that these choices are made by the rational part, then the rational part chooses to assign itself a subordinate position in the government of the soul, even though it retains the capacity to change this government and replace it with another.

(p.288) Although the rational part does not disappear or lapse into inactivity, it is affected by the different governments that it sets up; the mistakes that the rational part makes at an earlier stage warp its outlook when it considers what to do next. If someone who decided to be an honour-lover sees that he has been disappointed, he does not reinstate the rational part in control; since his preferences have been affected by his honour-loving life, he cannot see any alternative to acceptance of the preferences of one or another non-rational desire, and so he decides to cede control to his acquisitive appetites.

In ceding control, the rational part deliberately chooses to reduce its influence in the soul. A rational choice to follow the aims of a non-rational part involves inaction or abstention by practical reason. If I decide to follow the ends of the spirited or the appetitive part, I decide to stop exercising in the choice of ends to be pursued on particular occasions the sort of practical reason that I am exercising in the choice of ends as a whole. In Hobbes's terms, the rational part gives up its right and authorizes the non-rational parts to choose the ends to be pursued.¹²

This self-restraint by practical reason is intelligible if the rational part believes it cannot actually carry out the deliberative task that might appear to be open to it. If I simply

acquiesce in the preferences of one or another non-rational part, I imply that practical reason has no basis for assessing the aims of non-rational desires, but must simply choose among them. In that case I recognize my incompetence to make any independent rational decision about ends that goes beyond the preferences of the non-rational parts.

If this is the outlook of the rational part in deviant souls, what is wrong with it? It looks as though deviant people can argue that they are p-just after all, for their souls are controlled by the preferences of the rational part deliberating about what is best for the soul as a whole. They answer this deliberative question by deciding to follow the aims of one or another non-rational part; but since that is a decision by the rational part, the fact that they follow the aims of a non-rational part does not show that they are not controlled by the rational part. Indeed, if they are right to say that the rational part cannot guide our particular choices unless it follows the preferences of a non-rational part, we cannot expect to be any more p-just than the deviant people are.

198. The Functions of the Rational Part

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 198. The Functions of the Rational Part

If Plato is to show that the deviant people are not p-just, he must show that they are not controlled by the rational part performing its proper function. The proper function of the rational part is to deliberate about the good of the whole soul and of each part. Plato must claim that to carry out this function we must deliberate about how far to accept the ends of the non-rational parts. If we take deliberation this far, we do not accept the policy of inaction or abstention that is favoured by the deviant people. Rather, we assume that practical reason is capable of deciding on its own account about the merits of the preferences of the non-rational parts. If we take this attitude to the non-rational parts, we will **(p.289)** decide to adopt our ends on particular occasions (or on types of occasions) by the exercise of practical reason, not simply because we have decided to acquiesce in the goals of the spirited part or the appetitive part.¹³

The deviant people might concede that the questions that Plato takes to be open to deliberation are perfectly intelligible questions; it looks as though we can ask how far we ought to acquiesce in the ends of non-rational parts. The deviant people deny, however, that there are any rationally defensible answers. Can Plato answer this sceptical attitude to the claims he makes for the competence of practical reason?

The deviant people are not represented as extreme sceptics about the competence of practical reason. It is useful to see how large a role they allow to practical reason, so that we can focus on the grounds for their scepticism.

If we allow only instrumental reasoning to the rational part, we confine it to Kant's imperatives of skill ('technical imperatives') and of prudence ('pragmatic imperatives').¹⁴ The deviant people have practical reason performing each of these roles, and on some views of practical reason these are the only roles for practical reason. We might believe, for Socratic or Humean reasons, that reason has no non-instrumental role—that questions about the sorts of ends to be pursued cannot be answered by appeal to practical reason, but must simply be answered by desires that are independent of

reason.

Someone who sees only this instrumental role for practical reason implicitly denies that Butler's distinction between strength and authority applies to the choice of ends. In Butler's view, reasonable self-love is distinguished from the particular passions insofar as it acts on reasons for doing *x* that are recognized as distinct from the strength of my desire for doing *x*.¹⁵ In deciding whether to do *x* or *y*, rational self-love does not simply try to register the comparative strength of my desire for *x* and for *y*, but considers the comparative merits of the actions themselves. If a strictly instrumental view of practical reason were right, then there would be no basis apart from comparative strength of desires for deciding between one end and another.

It is difficult to believe the strictly instrumental view, if we are persuaded, contrary to Hume, that it is rational to plan for the efficient satisfaction of our desires.¹⁶ If we allow that this is rational, then we seem to accept, contrary to the previous suggestion, a non-instrumental role for practical reason. The efficient planner agrees that if I have desires of equal strength for *A*, *B*, and *C*, and if *x* will get me *A* and *B*, whereas *y* will get me only *C* at the cost of *A* and *B*, then I have reason to choose *x* over *y*. But the same sort of reasoning also seems to justify some discrimination among ends. If at the moment I care equally about *A*, *B*, and *C*, but I realize that any pursuit of *C* will prevent my getting *A* and *B*, whereas pursuit either of *A* or of *B* does not interfere with the pursuit of the other, why is it not rational for me to abandon *C* in favour of *A* and *B*? If comparative considerations can induce me to adjust my choice of means, why can they not also induce me to adjust my choice of ends?

Concern with efficiency is characteristic of each of the non-rational parts; for Plato attributes to each part a conception of itself and of its interests as a whole, distinct from the satisfaction of each non-rational desire as it arises.¹⁷ **(p.290)** The rational part in turn has a conception of the interest of the whole soul that is distinct from the satisfaction of the desires of each part. The rational part cares about efficiency and coordination in the choice of means and ends because it cares about the satisfaction of the future self that will have different desires with different degrees of strength. Insofar as it has a conception of a self that is independent of current desires and their strength, it has a point of view that allows it to criticize the aims of current desires.

The deviant people accept all this; but if they accept it, can they still make a convincing case for their view that all the rational part can do to promote the interests of the whole soul is to adopt the ends of one of the non-rational parts? In deviant souls the rational part deliberates to some extent about ends; for the deviant people discard a way of life because it frustrates their own main aims. Beyond this general test of consistency for a whole way of life, can we say that some aims are, and others are not, appropriate for the rational part? We might think that ends themselves must come from the non-rational parts and that the rational part can only decide to turn over the function of setting goals to one or both of the non-rational parts.

199. The Rational Part and the Choice of Ends

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 199. The Rational Part and the Choice of Ends

From Plato's point of view, the sceptical attitude of the deviant people underestimates the importance of the rational part's concern for the whole soul, and the difference between this concern and the more partial concerns of the non-rational parts. The rational part sees that each non-rational part relies on considerations that are independent of the considerations appealing to the other part, and that both sorts of considerations deserve some independent weight. The fact that something satisfies our appetites is a point in its favour, whether or not it appeals to our sense of honour and shame; the fact that something appeals to our sense of honour is a point in its favour whether or not this fact is reflected in any of our appetites.

The non-rational parts cannot see these facts about the desires of other parts of the soul. Although each non-rational part has some features of an agent, it has no conception of itself as a part of a whole. Each non-rational part is moved by considerations appealing to the other part only insofar as they coincide with considerations appealing to itself. The appetitive part does not decide to assign a certain appetitive weight to certain actions because they appeal to the spirited part's sense of honour; it simply sometimes feels like doing what the spirited part in fact wants, but not because the spirited part wants it.

In contrast to the non-rational parts, the rational part decides by considering the merits of different desires and their objects, from the point of view of the whole soul rather than a part. Once we recognize the one-sided outlook of the non-rational parts, we will see that we cannot adopt such an outlook if we are concerned with the good of the whole soul; even if we do not know what the good of the whole soul consists in, we can see that the non-rational **(p.291)** parts are too one-sided to give us any reason for confidence in them. We must see, then, that we are unjustified in acquiescing in their goals as the deviant people do.

Plato's account of the decline of deviant souls shows why we ought not to have confidence in their policy of simply adopting the ends of one part of the soul without criticism; the one-sided outlook of each non-rational part of the soul changes the desires of the rational part so that they become more and more one-sided and so have less and less claim to express any conception of what is good for the whole soul. The timocratic person pursues the aims of the rational person insofar as they satisfy his sense of honour, but his exaggerated focus on honour makes him too easily disappointed, and his disappointment induces him to adopt the narrower goal of the oligarchic person. Since the oligarchic person's policy encourages the growth of further appetites that are more and more difficult to restrain, he gives up his unsuccessful efforts to discriminate between desires and adopts the democratic policy of trying to satisfy each desire as it comes. Once the democratic person settles into his way of life, he finds that he has no argument against the clamorous demands of lawless and destructive desires, and so he finds no argument against the tyrannical outlook. Acquiescence in the one-sided outlook of a non-rational part condemns us to more and more one-sided outlooks.

These objections to the non-rational parts suggest that we are better off if we are guided by the rational part, since the outlook of the rational part is impartial between the aims of

the non-rational parts and comprehensive in its concern for the whole soul. Plato has some reason, then, for taking his description of unjust souls to vindicate the life of a just soul guided by the rational part. When Socrates asks Glaucon to order the deviant souls by their degrees of happiness, Glaucon takes it to be obvious that the person with the 'kingly' soul controlled by the rational part is also the most just and the happiest (580a9–c8). Socrates describes this as the first 'demonstration' (*apodeixis*, 580c9) of the truth of his answer to Glaucon's original question about justice and happiness. The faults of the non-rational parts should have persuaded us that we are better off if we are guided by the rational part, even though we have not learned much about its outlook.

200. The Pleasures of the Rational Part

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 200. The Pleasures of the Rational Part

Plato does not leave his argument there, however. To his first demonstration he adds three more. The second argues that the psychically just person's judgment is the most reliable guide to the degrees of pleasure to be found in different lives, so that his judgment that his own life is the most pleasant should be accepted (580c9–583b2). The third demonstration argues that the psychically just person has the truest pleasures and therefore has the most pleasant life (583b2–588a11). The fourth demonstration introduces yet another image to suggest the nature and relations of the three parts of the soul. Plato compares (p.292) the three parts to a human being, a lion, and a many-headed beast, all enclosed within the shape of a human being; and he defends the rational part by arguing that it protects the interests of the human being (588b1–592b6).

The arguments on pleasure raise several difficult questions, but some points in them are especially relevant to the issues about the deviant souls and the nature of control by the rational part.¹⁸ Socrates agrees that since the proponents of each way of life are dominated by just one part of the soul, they will prefer their way of life to the others (581c–582e); he argues, however, that only the person dominated by the rational part develops and uses the capacities needed for judging one way of life over another; these capacities are experience, wisdom, and reason (582e7–9). The one-sided outlook of each non-rational part disqualifies it from finding the right aims for a person's life.

It is often objected that the person dominated by his rational part is really not as well qualified as Plato claims he is, since he cannot really have the right sort of knowledge and experience.¹⁹ Although he has had experience of appetites, he has been (we suppose) educated properly, and so he has not had the experience of being a mature adult dominated by the appetitive or the spirited part. Does he not need that sort of experience, however, if he is to compare the situation of an appetitive or spirited person with his own experience?

The objection fails, once we recognize that the attitude of the rational part to the other parts is not the same as their attitude to it. They have no capacity to represent the interests of the rational part within their conception of their own ends. Hence the rational person ought not to be confined to their conception of his ends; for once we are confined to that outlook, we have no easy way out of it, as Plato has shown in his description of the decline of deviant souls. Insofar as we are dominated by the non-rational parts, we suffer

from a distorted view of the value of satisfying these parts, because we have no basis for attributing value to the desires and pleasures of other parts of the soul.

Since the rational part has grounds for valuing the satisfactions of spirited desires and of appetites, it evaluates its experience of the pleasures of the other parts from the appropriately comprehensive point of view. Those who are guided by the rational part have no reason to believe that they miss any relevant experience simply because they lack the experience of being dominated by either of the other two parts.

201. The Special Concerns of the Rational Part

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 201. The Special Concerns of the Rational Part

This defence does not say how the rational part considers its own interests in relation to those of the other two parts. In the argument to show that the psychically just person is a better judge of pleasure, Plato suggests an answer to this question. He describes the rational part as ‘philosophical’, devoted to the exercise of reason (581d10–e4). In the argument about true pleasures, he suggests that the pleasure resulting from rational thought is truer because it is concerned with what is true and unchanging rather than with what is changing (585b11–c5).

(p.293) We might take these remarks to mean that the rational part has the sort of one-sided attachment to its activities and pleasures that make it indifferent to the aims of the non-rational parts. On this view, control by the rational part would imply that the aims of the other parts are regulated simply with a view to maximizing theoretical activity.

For reasons we have seen, this cannot be the whole truth about the rational part. For Plato insists that it has a ‘holistic’ outlook, concerned with the good of the whole soul and of each part, not simply with the good of the rational part or with the satisfaction of the rational part’s special desires. This fact about the rational part, however, does not solve the problem about its special concerns. For if the rational part has both a purely rational, theoretical concern and a holistic concern, the two concerns seem liable to conflict, and the rational part does not seem to count as a single part of the soul after all.²⁰

Plato’s view is more plausible if he takes the holistic outlook of the rational part to satisfy the distinctively rational concerns of the rational part, because deliberation from the holistic point of view is itself an exercise of rational thought aiming at the truth. We want to pursue the good of the whole soul because we want to be guided by the real merits of different activities, not simply by our degree of inclination towards them. To this extent we regard ourselves as essentially rational agents who want to form and to act on true judgments about our good. Forming and acting on these judgments is not simply a useful instrumental means towards securing our good; it is also part of the rational activity that is itself part of our good.

This fact about the role of practical reason does not show that the pursuit of theoretical activity can never conflict with the holistic concerns of the rational part. But it shows that we cannot consistently value theoretical activity for Plato’s reasons, treating it as a way to knowledge of the truth, without also valuing the holistic outlook of the rational part. For

these two aspects of the rational part reflect the same value that the rational part properly attaches to its own activity.

It should now be easier to see why Plato believes that the rational part is a better judge of true pleasures. From the point of view of the non-rational parts, ends are to be chosen simply by reference to the strength of our inclinations for them, since a non-rational part cannot conceive itself as anything beyond a subject of inclinations. Inclinations are unreliable, however; the strength of an inclination depends on the conditions forming the inclination, and these conditions may distort our expectations about our future satisfaction. Drinking, for instance, is pleasant against the appropriate background of thirst, but if the background changes, drinking may no longer be pleasant (583c10–584a11). Since the non-rational parts are moved by present inclination when they form their aims, they are easily misled by misleading features of the background that forms their present inclination.²¹

The rational part, by contrast, is concerned to find what is really better and worse on the whole. This concern with truth leads it to pursue the true good of the whole soul. If it takes this point of view, it does not form its aims simply on the basis of the strength of its inclinations, and so it will not make its choices in **(p.294)** the distorting conditions that influence the non-rational parts (585b12–c5, 585d11–586b4).

Although the details of these arguments about pleasure are open to question, their general point makes an appropriate conclusion to the arguments about psychic justice.²² Plato suggests why the aims and preferences of the rational part make its choices best for the whole soul. This is why the non-rational parts of the soul do best for themselves if they follow the guidance of the rational part (586d–587a). They will simply harm themselves if they consistently pursue the satisfaction of their own desires ‘without reasoning and intelligence’ (586d1–2). Plato appeals to the superiority of the rational part in resolving intrapart conflicts for each of the non-rational parts. Both from the external point of view of the rational part and from the internal point of view of each non-rational part itself, Plato can argue that the rational part does best for each of the non-rational parts.

202. The Good of the Whole Soul

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 202. The Good of the Whole Soul

The rational part's concern for the good of the whole soul supports Plato's fourth demonstration, relying on the comparison of the rational part to a human being within a human being (588b10–e1). The fact that the ‘inner man’—the rational part—itself has the shape of a man suggests that the outer appearance of a man is not completely misleading about the real nature of a man. Since the human being consists of three parts, the inner human being would be a perfect image of the outer if it also contained three parts; but this conception of the inner human being would lead to an infinite regress. The rational part cannot, therefore, include an appetitive part and a spirited part in the way the outer man does. Still, the image implies that the rational part must ‘contain’ the non-rational parts in some way.

The previous discussion suggests how the demand for the non-rational parts to be 'contained' within the rational can be satisfied without absurd consequences. The point of the image is clear if we remember that the interests of the other two parts are represented fairly within the concerns of the rational part, whereas the non-rational parts have no capacity for fairly representing the interests of the rational part. The rational part can therefore claim to be concerned with the interests of the whole man, not just with the aims resulting from concern for rational activity. Plato insists that the agent whose interests are to be considered is the man who is composed of the three subagents (588e3–589b6).²³

If our previous account of the difference between the deviant souls and the p-just soul was correct, it supports the claims Plato makes here. To be dominated by a non-rational part of the soul is to reject the claim of practical reason to make rational choices of ends instead of acquiescing in the preferences of the other parts. If we do not try to make rational choices in such areas, we cannot evaluate the ends we have or acquire through our non-rational desires. Since the person guided by the rational part attaches value to the aims of the whole **(p.295)** soul, he will have the experience of appetitive and spirited desires and satisfactions that he needs to be an experienced judge of their relative value.

When the rational part considers the good of the whole soul and each part, it will not just try to strike a balance between different appetites or between appetitive and spirited desires. It also has itself to consider. It achieves its own aims in two ways: by planning for the exercise of reason as well as the fulfillment of other desires, and by exercising reason in this very planning. Plato attaches great importance to the theoretical reasoning that is, in his view, the concern of the first task of practical reasoning; that is why the rational part finds it important to satisfy its own desires for philosophical activity. But it is important not to neglect the fact that it also satisfies some of its own desires in the very action of rational planning itself.

We can see how the rational part is a better ruler than either of the non-rational parts if we consider the different attitudes of the three parts to both intrapart and interpart conflicts. The appetitive part (and the spirited part, although perhaps not to the same degree) is bad at ensuring its own future interest.²⁴ In its calmer moments it prefers to ensure the satisfaction of its future desires, and so does not want to damage its prospects for the future. Still, its conviction that this long-term policy is preferable is rather unstable, since it varies with the comparative strength of its occurrent desires. Moreover, the arguments about pleasure show that even when a non-rational part forms its longer-term preferences, it forms them in distorting conditions, since the apparent pleasantness of a future condition is affected by the deprivations we are currently suffering.

A well-informed non-rational part must therefore realize in its calmer moments that it cannot even ensure that it follows the sort of policy that it prefers (in these calmer moments). It may realize that it can follow such a policy more effectively if it forms a desire to do what the rational part tells it; this further desire provides some counterweight to the strength of other occurrent appetites.

In interpart conflicts it is still more obvious that the non-rational parts are not to be relied on. For neither of them is guided by principles that appeal to authority; each of them must simply register the comparative strength of different desires. There is no reason to suppose that guidance by strength of desires results in a policy that benefits the soul as a whole, or that it resolves conflicts between the parts in any mutually satisfactory way. Since the attitude of the rational part to the claims of both non-rational parts is more sympathetic than the attitude of either non-rational part towards the other, each non-rational part will recognize that it is better off if it follows the rational part than if it must always be clashing with the other non-rational part.

203. A Fuller Conception of Psychic Justice

Republic VIII–IX on Justice 203. A Fuller Conception of Psychic Justice

Plato is entitled to claim that the argument of Books VIII and IX has developed and strengthened the argument of Book IV. For we can now see why someone controlled by the rational part of the soul has the sorts of aims that exclude the (p.296) lives of the deviant people. In Book IV Plato insists that p-justice requires each part of the soul to perform its own function; but he does not say much about the function of each part of the soul and, in particular, says little about the functions of the rational part. Until we know about the functions of the rational part, we cannot say when someone is or is not dominated by one of the non-rational parts. Books VIII and IX answer some of these questions; for when we see more clearly the functions of the rational part, we see why the rational part in the deviant people does not perform its proper function.

A full understanding of the proper function of the rational part would require a full understanding of the human good, and Plato warns us not to expect this full understanding, since he disavows any knowledge of the Form of the Good. But we can still be guided by well-founded beliefs about the good.²⁵ Plato relies on such beliefs when he indicates what the deviant people lack. He implies that they lack an essential element of the good, insofar as they lack the appropriate sort of rational activity: practical reason determining the rational choice of ends. We can see why it is better not to be excluded from this rational activity once we see what happens to the deviant people when they exclude themselves from it. They cannot properly consider the interests of the whole soul, and the p-just person must consider these.

Since Plato has explained his conception of p-justice mostly by describing the types of p-injustice that it excludes, he has not said much about the sorts of actions that p-justice requires. He tells us in general terms that they will not result from mere acquiescence in the preferences of one of the non-rational parts, and that they will result from a larger exercise of practical reason, reaching a comprehensive outlook that the deviant people lack. But we still do not know exactly what actions will result from this outlook. It is still difficult, in particular, to answer the question raised at the end of Book IV, about the relation between p-justice and c-justice.

The negative argument used in Book IV still applies here, and has a wider scope. Plato is justified in claiming that many unjust actions seem attractive because we have our souls

in the condition of the deviant people, and that if we have our souls controlled by the rational part, these actions will seem less attractive to us. This analysis of the sources of injustice becomes more plausible in the light of Books VIII and IX than it might have seemed in Book IV. For Plato has now shown that many c-unjust actions that might have seemed to appeal to a p-just soul actually appeal only to the p-unjust souls of the deviant people. If we thought that the conditions for p-justice allowed the deviant people to be p-just, we would suppose we had a series of counterexamples to refute Plato's claim that p-justice implies c-justice. But once we see that the deviant people are not p-just, this line of objection to Plato's view collapses.

This does not mean that all reasonable objections have been answered. Plato's form of argument ought not to convince us that all c-unjust actions will be unattractive to the p-just person. In any case, we have already seen the difficulty in ascribing any necessary positive concern for the benefit of others to the p-just person; if he lacks that, we may doubt whether he is genuinely c-just.

(p.297) Plato might still, therefore, be asked for some further account of what the rational part will decide when it deliberates about the good of the whole soul; and so he must face a further question that calls for some more definite conception of the good. He has an answer to the question, although the answer is not direct or completely explicit. To understand it, we must consider his account of love.

Notes:

(1.) I will not discuss the political and historical implications of the cycle of constitutions (criticized by Aristotle, *Pol.* 1316a1–b27).

(2.) This passage is interpreted differently by White [1986], 34–41.

(3.) The best discussions of *R.* VIII and IX are by Kraut [1973a]; and Annas [1981], 294–305.

(4.) On the longer way, see Murphy [1951], 9–11, 152f.

(5.) On instrumental reasoning, see §150.

(6.) On parts as agents, see §153.

(7.) On the rational part in the p-just soul, see §175.

(8.) On Callicles, see §76.

(9.) The tyrannical person is discussed (and his degree of rational control underestimated) by Annas [1981], 303–5; Kraut [1992c], 325f.

(10.) The rational aspect of deviant people is emphasized by Morris [1933], 135f.; Kraut [1973a]; Cooper [1984], 20 and note 13.

(11.) The main blame for putting this idea into his head is actually laid on the just man's wife, whose excessive desire for her own honour (549c8–d1) is presumably a result of the 'privatization' (*idiōsasthai*, 547c1) of families.

(12.) See Hobbes, *Leviathan* c.17: 'I authorize and give my right of governing myself, to this man . . . and acknowledge all his actions in like manner'.

(13.) Plato's view of the different roles of practical reason partly corresponds to Taylor's distinction ([1977], 19) between 'second-order desires on the basis of weak evaluations' and desires based on 'strong evaluations'. He refers to Plato at [1989], 122. Plato's division perhaps suggests some answers to the criticisms of Taylor by Flanagan [1990].

(14.) See Kant, *Grundlegung*, Ak. p. 414f.

(15.) On Butler, see §§150, 153.

(16.) See Hume, *Treatise*, II 3.3, p. 416: "'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more evident affection for the former than the latter.'

(17.) On a part's conception of itself, see §153.

(18.) The best discussion of the relation between these arguments and the main argument of the *Republic* is by Murphy [1951], chap. 10. Joseph [1935], chap. 5, is less favourable to Plato. See also Kraut [1992c], 312–14. Difficulties are fully discussed by Gosling and Taylor [1982], chap. 6.

(19.) A similar objection is often raised against Mill's use in *Utilitarianism* (chap. 2) of a similar appeal to experience as a test for judging the relative value of pleasures. See Joseph [1935], 137–41.

(20.) Different aspects of the rational part are discussed by Bosanquet [1906], 350f.; Murphy [1951], 94–96, 211. See §226.

(21.) See Bosanquet [1906], 363.

(22.) Some of these issues about pleasure are discussed further in §222.

(23.) In 588e3–4 *toutō(i)* . . . *tō(i) anthrōpō(i)* makes it clear that Plato is considering the interest of the man who is the compound (also referred to in *autō(i)*, e5) rather than the 'inner man' (589a7).

(24.) On the appetitive part and its interests, see §154.

(25.) On beliefs about the good, see §191.



Access brought to you by: University of Warwick