I. What is Justice?

In Book I, the character of Thrasymachus poses the most serious challenge to traditional and Socratic morality. Among the many nuggets, consider the following:

(1) “I say that justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger.” (338c)
   And governments of certain forms establish laws to secure their power (338e)
   Hence, “a law is correct if it prescribes what is to the rulers’ own advantage and incorrect if it prescribes what is to their disadvantage.” (339c)

(2) “Justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves. Injustice is the opposite, it rules the truly simple and just, and those it rules do what is to the advantage of the other and stronger, and they make the one they serve happy, but themselves not at all.” (343c)

(3) “A person of great power outdoes everyone else.” (344a)

(4) “[I]njustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger freer, and more masterly than justice. And… justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one’s own profit and advantage.” (344c)

(5) In short, Thrasymachus believes that “the life of an unjust person is better than that of the just one.” Hence, the question, Why be moral at all? (347e)

The rest of the Republic represents an attempt to show that Thrasymachus is wrong and that we have good reason to act morally.

Socrates/Plato makes an important argumentative move in Book II: he claims that, in order to discover what justice in a person is, we ought first to consider what justice in a polis is. “Perhaps, then, there is more justice in the larger thing [the city], and it will be easier to learn what it is. So, if you’re willing, let’s first find out what sort of thing justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual, observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger.” (368e-69a; cf. also 435b) This is what launches the larger discussion of the nature of the ideal state. Plato ultimately argues that justice in a state has a certain function or nature and that a just person exhibits or ought to exhibit a similar nature. Hence…
II. The Tripartite Soul (*Republic 435c-444e*)

The soul of a human being has three parts, which correspond with the three classes of society in the ideal *polis*.

| Rational   | Rulers (Philosopher-Kings) |
| Spirited   | Guardians (Soldiers)       |
| Appetitive | Producers                 |

A just *polis* is one in which the people act according to their natures and are in a kind of harmony; similarly a just person is one whose soul is in harmony: “One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale... And when he does anything…, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions. And he believes that the action that destroys this harmony is unjust and calls it so, and regards the belief that oversees it as ignorance.” (443d-444a)

Note: Injustice, or morally wrong action, is still tied to ignorance as we saw in the *Protagoras*. But it seems that Plato’s partitioned soul also allows for conflict within the soul. Perhaps morally wrong action will simply be when certain appetites prove too strong for the rational part of the soul. Consider the case of the tyrant as discussed in Book IX of the *Republic*. Does he act out of ignorance? If so, how do you square the account here with what we saw in the *Protagoras*?

According to Plato, “until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide... cities will have no rest from evils... nor... will the human race.” (473c-d) The point is that only philosophers have access to knowledge of the good; all others are guided by opinion.

III. Knowledge vs. Opinion (*Republic 476-80*)

This section of the *Republic* is crucial not only for making the distinction between knowledge and opinion (or belief), but also for arguing for the existence of the Forms as objects of knowledge.

Plato distinguishes at 476 the lovers of truth (philosophers) from the lovers of sight (everybody else). The lovers of sight recognize the many beautiful things, i.e. the particulars in the world that are beautiful. The philosophers, on the other hand, are capable of recognizing Beauty Itself and all of the particulars in the world that participate in the Beautiful. (476d)
The following is a sketch of the argument (following Gail Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in Republic V-VII”):

(1) There is knowledge. (Implicit premise)
(2) Knowledge [gnōsis or epistēmē] is of what is. (477a)
(3) Ignorance is of what is not. (477a)
(4) Opinion (or belief [doxa]) is of what is and is not. (477b)
(5) Knowledge is infallible. (477e)

Note: Concerning (2), there are three senses to understand ‘to be’ in Greek and in English:

(2a) Existential: Knowledge is of what exists. [i.e. the object of knowledge is an existing thing.]
(2b) Predicative: Knowledge is of what is $F$. [i.e. the object of knowledge is a property of an object.]
(2c) Veridical: Knowledge is of what is true. [i.e. the object of knowledge is a proposition.]

We have something similar with (4):

(4a) Belief is of what exists and what does not exist.
(4b) Belief is of what is $F$ and what is not-$F$.
(4c) Belief is of what is true and not true.

The best way to interpret the opening moves of the argument is by taking (2c) and (4c) to be at work. So, Plato’s claim will be that knowledge but not opinion implies truth. Continuing with the argument:

(6) Each of the many $F$s is both $F$ and not-$F$. (479a)
(7) The sightlovers’ beliefs about the many $F$s are and are not. (479d)
(8) Therefore, the sightlovers have belief, not knowledge, about the many $F$s. (479e)
(9) If knowledge is possible, then there must be nonsensible objects of knowledge.
(10) Therefore, there are Forms.
(11) Those who know Forms have knowledge; those who are restricted to the many $F$s at best have belief.
(12) Therefore, knowledge is of the Forms, and belief is of the many $F$s. (480a)

Now it might seem that we have a problem in taking (2) and (4) in the veridical sense, since the conclusion of the argument deals with Forms as objects or things. But we can get out of this difficulty by reconceiving what Plato means by Forms. Instead of thinking of the Forms as mysterious substances that exist in Platonic Heaven, think of them as concepts that express the essences (the ‘what it is’) of things. The Form of X will be the property of set of properties that explain the Xness of all the things in the world that are
X. When Plato says that knowledge is set over the forms, he means that all knowledge is knowledge of forms.

IV. The Classic Images to the Republic

A. The Sun Analogy (507b-509d)

The Analogy:
The Sun: Vision and the organ of vision are distinct from the sun. The eye is more sunlike than the other sense organs. The power of vision is produced by the sun, like a stream flooding the eye. The sun is the cause of vision. The sun is seen by vision, i.e., by the eye. The sun is the cause of the coming to be, growth, and nourishment of things seen. The sun is not the same as coming to be.
The Good: The Good is nobler than knowledge. Knowledge and truth are like the good. The Good is the cause of knowledge; the Good is the cause of the Forms being known. The Good is an object of knowledge. The Good gives the Forms their being. The Good is nobler than truth; the Good is not the same as being, but is beyond it, surpassing it in dignity and power.
**B. The Divided Line (509d-511e)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Thought</th>
<th>Objects of Thought</th>
<th>Realm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Forms</td>
<td>Intelligible Realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((\text{no}\text{\varepsilon\i}))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought</td>
<td>mathematical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((\text{dianoia}))</td>
<td>objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief ((\text{pistis}))</td>
<td>concrete objects</td>
<td>Sensible Realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination ((\text{eikasia}))</td>
<td>images, reflections, dreams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have already seen Plato distinguish *knowledge* from *opinion*. Here he makes two further distinctions. While knowledge is of non-sensible objects, it can be either of the Forms directly or of the Forms indirectly; in the latter case, we actually begin with a sensibles as images of forms (for example, the drawing of a geometrical figure) and by reasoning move to the Forms. Moreover, in the case of *dianoia*, we begin with a hypothesis and reason to various conclusions about the forms; in the case of *no\varepsilon\i*, while we may begin with a hypothesis, we ultimately proceed to an unhypothetical first principle: the Good. In other words, the distinction between thought and understanding is principally related to our reasoning about the objects of thought. Opinion is further analyzed into belief and imagination. While this distinction has to do with the objects of thought themselves, it also has to do with our ability to discriminate between them. That is, if I cannot say if what is before me is a concrete object or a mere image, then I am *ipso facto* in the lowest level of the divided line: in which my cognitive state has the *least* clarity.

**C. The Allegory of the Cave (514a-518b)**

The Cave works with the Sun and the Divided Line to represent not only the state in which the majority of us live but how philosophers stumble back into the world of sense after they have seen what is real.

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**Plato's Cave**

- Puppet show
- Prisoners
- Shadows cast on this wall
- Ascent to Sunlight
V. Why It Is Better to Live a Just Life

Book VIII of the Republic contains an account of the forms of government other than the that found in the ideal state, and they are presented (along with the personal character types that are related to them) as stages of increasing corruption: timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny.

While we skipped this book, you may want to consider some of the claims made there: for example, that “democracy’s insatiable desire for what it defines as the good [freedom] … destroys it” (562b) or that tyranny naturally evolves from democracy (because “extreme freedom can’t be expected to lead to anything but a change to extreme slavery” (564a)). You might also ask yourself what conception of Truth and the Good is at work in our commitment to American democracy.

But moving on… In Book IX, we get the answer to Thrasymachus’ challenge. Since one of the claims from Book II was that the character of a person can be understood on analogy with the character of a state, Plato moves from an examination of the tyrannical state (Book VIII) to an analysis of the character of the tyrant himself, giving ultimately three arguments for why his life is miserable.

“Our dreams make it clear that there is a dangerous, wild, and lawless form of desire in everyone, even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate or measured.” (572b) For a tyrant, “his waking life is like the nightmare we described earlier.” (576b)

First Argument: If man and city are alike, the same structure is in the tyrant as in the city. Therefore, his soul is full of slavery and unfreedom, with the most decent parts enslaved and with a small part, the maddest and most vicious, as their master. (577d)

Second Argument: There are three kinds of people, philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving, and three forms of pleasure, one for each kind of person. The philosopher has the most experience of all three kinds of pleasure (in fact, the victory-lover and the profit-lover can’t really experience the pleasure of knowing the truth). Moreover, in order to judge which form of life is superior, one must appeal to experience, reason, and argument, and these are the ‘instruments’ of the philosopher. (580d-583b)

Third Argument: The pleasure that the philosopher or just person experiences arises from contemplation of and participation with permanent and perfect objects (the Forms of Justice, Beauty, and the Good). On the other hand, the tyrannical or immoral person experiences pleasures that are fleeting; in fact, his desires are insatiable. “For the part that they’re trying to fill is like a vessel full of holes, and neither it nor the things they are trying to fill it with are among the things that are [i.e. that are most real – the Forms].” (586b)