

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Justice & The Social Contract

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Plato. (2004). [Justice & The ring of Gyges]. In C. D. Reeve (Trans.), *Republic* (pp. 36–45). Hackett. (Original work from ca. 380 B.C.E.)

Comment

In our discussions this semester, starting here with this dialogue by Plato, the following distinction will prove extremely useful.

- **Instrumental Value:** Value based on being the *means to something else* that is valued.
So things with this type of value are valued insofar as these things are the means to *other* ends or goals.
Things with *only* this type of value—like money or exercise—are called **instrumental goods**.
- **Intrinsic Value:** Value based on being valued *for itself or in its own right*.
So things with this type of value are valued insofar as these things *are* ultimate ends or goals of their own.
Things with *only* this type of value—like pleasure, happiness, or true love—are called **intrinsic goods**.

Of course, some things may have *both* types of value—like health or education. These are called **mixed goods**.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. At the beginning of this dialogue, what three sorts of goods does Glaucon identify? How does this categorization align with my definitions for instrumental and intrinsic goods?
In which category does Socrates place justice? According to Glaucon, in which category do “the masses” (p. 36) place justice? Why might this be problematic for Socrates’ understanding of justice?
2. Glaucon suggests that the nature and origin of justice is based on the “laws and covenants” (p. 37) people make. This is a statement of what we will call social contract theory.
According to Glaucon, why exactly do people create laws and enter into covenants with each other?
3. What claims about human motivation does Glaucon’s story of “The Ring of Gyges” (p. 38) illustrate? Does Glaucon think a person with this ring behave in a just and righteous manner?
4. Adeimantus eventually interrupts (pp. 41ff) the conversation in order to expand on Glaucon’s ideas.
According to Adeimantus, why do people tend to praise justice and follow its dictates?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.