

The Republic, Book 4

Wealth, Poverty, and Virtue

Plato

* [419] Here Adeimantus interposed a question: How would you answer, Socrates, said he, if a person were to say that you are making these people miserable, and that they are the cause of their own unhappiness; the city in fact belongs to them, but they are none the better for it; whereas other men acquire lands, and build large and handsome houses, and have everything handsome about them...but our poor citizens are no better than mercenaries who are quartered in the city and are always mounting guard?

* [420] Yes, I said; and you may add that they are only fed, and not paid in addition to their food, like other men; and therefore they cannot, if they would, take a journey of pleasure; they have no money to spend on a mistress or any other luxurious fancy, which, as the world goes, is thought to be happiness; and many other similar accusations might be added...our guardians may very likely be the happiest of men; but that our aim in founding the State was not the disproportionate happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of the whole... [421] We mean our guardians to be true saviours and not the destroyers of the State, whereas our opponent is thinking of peasants at a festival, who are enjoying a life of revelry, not of citizens who are doing their duty to the State... And thus the whole State will grow up in a noble order, and the several classes will receive the proportion of happiness which nature assigns to them.

* I think you are quite right.

* I wonder whether you will agree with another remark which occurs to me.\

* What might that be?

* There seem to be two causes of deterioration of the arts.

* What are they?

* Wealth, I said, and poverty....under the influence either of poverty or of wealth, workmen and their work are equally liable to degenerate...[422] the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent...

* That is very true...Any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, one city of the poor, [423] the other of the rich; these are at war with one another;...And your State, while the wise order which has now been prescribed continues to prevail in her, will be the greatest of States...

* Here then, I said, is another order which will have to be conveyed to our guardians: Let our city be accounted neither large nor small, but one and self-sufficing...and the other, said I, of which we were speaking before is lighter still—I mean the duty of degrading the offspring of the guardians when inferior, and of elevating into the rank of guardians the offspring of the lower classes, when naturally superior. The intention was, that, in the case of the citizens generally, each individual should be put to the use for which nature intended him... The regulations which we are prescribing, my good Adeimantus, are not, as might be supposed, a number of great principles...

* What may that be? He asked.

* Education, I said, and nurture: if our citizens are well educated, and grow into sensible men, they will easily see their way through all these, as well as other matters which I omit...[424] ...our youth should be trained from the first in a stricter system, for if amusements become lawless, and the youths themselves become lawless, [425] they can never grow up into well-conducted and virtuous citizens.

* Very true, he said...

* It would seem, Adeimantus, that the direction in which education starts a man, will determine his future life...

* [426] For are there not ill-ordered States...they are always fancying that by legislation they will make an end of frauds in contracts, and the other rascalities which I was mentioning, not knowing that they are in reality cutting off the heads of a hydra?

* [427] Yes, he said; that is just what they are doing...

* [431] Whereas the simple and moderate desires which follow reason, and are under the guidance of mind and true opinion, are to be found only in a few, and those the best born and best educated... [433] You remember the original principle which we were always laying down at the foundation of the State, that one man should practice one thing only, the thing to which his nature was best adapted--now justice is this principle or a part of it...Then to do one's own business in a certain way may be assumed to be justice?... [434] When the cobbler or any other man whom nature designed to be a trader, having his heart lifted up by wealth or strength or the number of his followers, or any like advantage, attempts to force his way into the class of warriors, or a warrior into that of legislators and guardians, for which he is unfitted, ... or when one man is trader, legislator, and warrior all in one, then I think you will agree with me in saying that this interchange and this meddling of one with another is the ruin of the State.

* Most true.

* Seeing then, I said, that there are three distinct classes, any meddling of one with another, or the change of one into another, is the greatest harm to the State, and may be most justly termed evil-doing?

* Precisely... [435]

* The just man then, if we regard the idea of justice only, will be like the just State?

* He will.

* And a State was thought by us to be just when the three classes in the State severally did their own business; and also thought to be temperate and valiant and wise by reason of certain other affections and qualities of these same classes?

* True, he said.

* And so of the individual; we may assume that he has the same three principles in his own soul which are found in the State... [443] for the just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others, --he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself...[448] ...monarchy and aristocracy, accordingly as rule is exercised by one distinguished man or by many.... But I regard the two names as describing one form only; for whether the government is in the hands of one or many, if the governors have been trained in the manner which we have supposed, the fundamental laws of the State will be maintained.

* That is true, he replied.



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