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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is Justice Possible? The Isomorphism of Two Regulative Ideals in Plato's Republic and the Possibility Question

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Abstract

This article explores the "possibility question" in Plato's Republic. It posits that Plato's just city and the just soul analysis should be understood as an isomorphism of two regulative ideals for cities and individuals. I argue that the just city and soul serve as regulative ideals, meant to guide and inspire actions toward the approximation of justice. Conceptualizing justice in the Republic as a regulative ideal answers the possibility question.

Keywords: Justice, Regulative Ideal, Just City, Just Soul, Isomorphism, Plato's Republic, Possibility Question.

1. Introduction

> *"After all, the argument concerns no ordinary topic, but the way we ought to live"* (352d transl. by C.D.C Reeve).
>
> *GLAUCON: I understand. You mean in the city we have just been founding and describing; the one that exists in words, since I do not think it exists anywhere on earth.*
>
> *SOCRATES: But there may perhaps be a model of it in the heavens for anyone who wishes to look at it and to found himself on the basis of what he sees. It makes no difference at all whether it exists anywhere or ever will. You see, he would take part in the politics of it alone, and of no other.*
>
> *GLAUCON: That's probably right.* (592b, transl. by C.D.C Reeve)

If the argument of the *Republic* is about the way we ought to live, certainly, it is concerned with no ordinary subject (352d). Supposing that Plato's postulations about the constitutive parts and functioning of the just soul and the just city represent how we ought to live, what is the possibility of attaining such a functioning state by real individuals and real societies? I argue that in answering the question of how we ought to live, Plato provides an isomorphism of two ideals, a just soul and a just city, with the city meant to be a larger representation aimed at explaining justice in the soul. And since these ideals may or may not be realizable, they should nevertheless serve as references that regulate the conduct of individuals and societies. These ideals should therefore be perceived as regulative ideals[1] that individuals and societies should approximate and progress towards. My essay therefore focuses on how Plato's conceptualization of justice in the soul and city represents regulative ideals and the question of the possibility of attaining or approximating such ideals.

Plato's approach to answering the question of how we ought to live as seen in the *Republic* was to make a

[1]The term 'regulative ideals' is traceable to Immanuel Kant who is known as "the father of the concept of Regulative Ideals, as unrealizable and yet as having a role in directing the Practical Reason" (see Dorothy Emmet. The Role of the Unrealisable: A Study in Regulative Ideals (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994), p. 9).

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proposition that a just soul is happier than an unjust soul, meaning that leading a just life is how we ought to live. Hence, the discourse in the *Republic* is Plato's argument through Socrates and his interlocutors aimed at proving that leading a just life, even when it is not obvious, is a happier life compared to a life of injustice.

It is therefore apparent that "Plato maintains a virtue-based eudaemonistic conception of ethics" in which "happiness or well-being (*eudaimonia*) is the highest aim of moral thought and conduct, and the virtues (*aretê*: 'excellence') are the requisite skills and dispositions needed to attain it."[2] By centralizing virtue, specifically justice as good in itself and the means of attaining happiness, Plato radically challenges the apparently common views that downplay virtue or even see virtue as an impediment in the pursuit of happiness. The four virtues in the *Republic* are wisdom (*sophia*), courage (*andreia*), moderation (*sôphrosunê*), and justice (*dikaiosune*). These will be elaborated in the analysis of the constitutive parts and functioning of the just soul and just city as personal and socio-political ideals, respectively.

But what is a just soul or a just city? Is it a possibility? If yes, how can it be attained? If not, is it worth trying? In answering these questions, we will first consider Plato's analysis of parts of the soul and city and their proper functions that define justice; second, we will consider arguments on the possibility of attaining justice for the soul and city; and third, how such a possibility of progressing towards the ideal situates the virtues and their (re)presentation in the city and soul as regulative ideals. The scholarly contributions of M. F. Burnyeat (as cited in Fine, 1999), Rachel Barney (2019), Gerasimos Santas (2010), Mason Marshall (2008), and Dorothy Emmet (1994) are of significant relevance to the present discourse. These scholars, among others, provide a robust intellectual foundation that underpins the analysis and conclusions drawn in this study. Their insights, theories, and arguments have been carefully considered and integrated into the fabric of this essay to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the topic at hand.

The ensuring discourse will expound what I termed the "isomorphism of two ideals". I contend that this concept encapsulates the dialogues presented in Plato's *Republic*.

2. The Isomorphism of Two Ideals: Just City and Just Soul

Plato justifies the use of isomorphism as a means of establishing his argument. He says,

> Now let's complete the consideration by means of which we thought that, if we should attempt to see justice first in some bigger thing that possessed it, we would more easily catch sight of what it's like in one man. And it was our opinion that this bigger thing is a city; so we founded one as best we could, knowing full well that justice would be in a good one at least. Let's apply what came to light there to a single man, and if the two are in agreement, everything is fine. But if something different should turn up in the single man, we'll go back again to the city and test it; perhaps, considering them side by side and rubbing them together like sticks, we would make justice burst into flame, and once it's come to light, confirm it for ourselves" (Book IV 434d – 435c, transl. by Allan Bloom).

If justice, encompassing the proper functioning of wisdom, courage, and moderation, is the defining virtue that situates the just city and just soul as ideals (see 368e, 434d – 436a, 441c – 442d) that warrant identifying them as regulative ideals in this essay, understanding Plato's conceptualization of justice is important. Understanding what justice is in the soul and city will provide a working idea of what the ideals are, and thus the regulative ideals. It is noteworthy therefore that it is the presence and proper working of the virtues in the said city or soul that positions either/both as a *paradeigma*, that is, a pattern or model to be approximated. As we would see later, it is problematic or even ridiculous to consider every detail of the two ideals, especially in the city as a paradigm. But justice in the soul or city as conceptualized by Plato is the

[2]Dorothea Frede, "Plato's Ethics: An Overview", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/plato-ethics/>. Accessed May 21, 2024. Cf. Julia Annas' "Plato's Ethics" in Fine Gail ed. *Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 where Annas also affirms that, "Plato's ethical thought is … structured by a broad eudaimonist assumption. His main concern is to challenge the views most people have about goodness, for it is here that they go disastrously wrong in trying to live happy lives. Most people think that virtue is a minor good, or even an impediment to living a happy life. Plato thinks this utterly wrong; it is only by being virtuous that we can hope to be happy" (p. 269).

paradigm worth approximating.[3] Plato's *kallipolis* is "a just city in speech" that is constructed, so to speak, to explain justice in the soul in order to prove that a just person is happier than an unjust person. Plato's rationale for using the city to explain the soul was that "[p]erhaps, then, there will be more justice in the larger thing, and it will be easier to discern. So, if you are willing, let's first find out what sort of thing justice is in cities, and afterward look for it in the individual, to see if the larger entity is similar in form to the smaller one" (369a Reeve's transl.) Thus, Plato's Socrates introduces an isomorphism between a soul and a city in order to explain what justice is. It is thus apparent that the analysis of the city although distinct, is meant to shed more light on the constitution and proper functioning of the parts and thereby flourishing of the soul as a whole. The *Republic* is thus first and foremost a psychological argument on the happiness of a just soul over an unjust soul before it is a text on political theory or anything else (this is, however, not the primary concern of this paper). The primary concern of this essay is how the *Republic*'s discourse of justice in the ideal soul and ideal city should be perceived as regulative ideals for individuals and societies to orient themselves towards justice. But for now, we will consider what justice means based on the constitutive parts of the soul and city as posited by Plato's Socrates, especially in Book IV (434d – 436a, 441c – 442d).

Before delving into the main discussion, it is imperative to present an isomorphic tabulation of the just city and the just soul. This tabulation is predicated on my interpretation of Plato's *Republic* and extrapolations from the work of Gerasimos Santas:[4]

Table 1. *Isomorphism of Two Ideals*

Isomorphism of Two Ideals	
Justice in the City	**Justice in the Soul**
1. A city is just when each of the natural kinds of people in it performs its own (optimal) social function. This is the abstract or formal principle of social justice (433, 435b).	A person is just when each of the natural psychic kinds (parts) in his/her psyche performs its own (optimal) psychic function. This is the abstract or formal principle of psychic/personal justice, fully parallel to the abstract principle of social justice (435ac, 441e).
2. The city has three main functions: to rule, to defend, and provision itself (369bff., 374ff., 428dff.).	The human soul has three main functions, to rule oneself, to defend oneself, and to provide for one's bodily needs (441e, 442).
3. There are three natural kinds of persons in the city, persons of inborn high intelligence, persons of inborn high spirit, and those of inborn abilities for arts and trades (415, 435).	There are three natural psychic kinds (parts) in the human soul: reason, spirit, and appetite (by an independent argument, 436–41).
4. The optimal social function of persons of high intelligence is to rule the city; those of high spirit to defend it; and those of abilities in arts and crafts to provision the city (434).	The optimal function of reason is to rule the person, of spirit to defend, and of appetite to provide for bodily needs (441e).
5. Therefore, a city is just when it is so organized that those of high intelligence (and appropriate education) are assigned to rule, those of high spirit (and appropriate education) to defend, and those of artisan abilities (and appropriate education) to provision the city. This is the full definition of the just city; it puts together the formal principle and relevant information (from premises 1 to 4, 433).	Therefore, a soul is just when it is so organized that reason is assigned to rule the person, spirit to defend it, and appetite to provide for one's bodily needs. This is the full definition of psychic justice (441e–442a).

[3]I would not want to go deeply into the argument of whether the just soul and just city are Forms. I think it is better to see Plato's conceptualization of justice – the proper working of the constitutive parts (wisdom, courage, and moderation) of soul or city – as the Form(s). As Burnyeat notes, "The Forms relevant to the ideal city are the Forms of justice and the other virtues, excellences common to both city and man (368e, 434d – 436a, 441c – 442d)" See M.F. Burnyeat, "Utopia and Fantasy: The Practicability of Plato's Ideally Just City" in Gail Fine ed Plato (Vol. 2) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 298.

[4]The information presented on the table is an excerpt from Gerasimos Santas. Understanding Plato's Republic (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 90. Stressing the importance of isomorphism to Plato's ethics, Santas asserts that, "No one doubts that the isomorphism between just city and just soul is fundamental to Plato's ethics and political philosophy in the Republic." See Gerasimos Santas, "Just City and Just Soul in Plato's Republic" in Georgios Anagnostopoulos and Fred D. Miller eds. Reason and Analysis in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Essays in Honor of David Keyt (New York: Springer, 2013), p. 171.

In Book IV of the Republic, Plato delineates the characteristics of an ideal city and an ideal soul. The ideal city, according to Plato, is composed of three distinct classes of citizens: the philosopher-kings, the soldiers, and the common populace. The philosopher-kings, as the ruling class, are entrusted with governance and policymaking, ensuring that decisions align with the city's collective interests. The soldiers, on the other hand, are tasked with the city's defense against external threats and the maintenance of internal order. Lastly, the common people, the most populous and diverse class, engages in commerce and daily life activities, thereby constituting the majority of the city's life. Plato posits that four virtues are essential for the city to excel and function optimally: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Wisdom is attributed to the rulers, enabling them to govern effectively. Courage is inherent in the soldiers, equipping them to fulfill their protective role within the city. Moderation is expected of the common populace, who must temper their desires and pursuit of personal interests. Notably, Plato asserts that moderation should also be exhibited by the rulers and soldiers. Justice, the fourth virtue in the ideal city, is not confined to a specific class but pervades the entire city. It is not a specialized virtue; rather, it characterizes the city as a whole. Justice manifests as a harmonious relationship among the city's parts, where each part performs its designated role without encroaching on the roles of others. In the context of the ideal city, this implies that the philosopher-kings govern the city, and the common populace adheres to the dictates of the rulers. The soldiers also obey the rulers by carrying out their tasks of providing order and defending the city.

Accordingly, Plato posits a tripartite model of the human soul, comprising reason, spirit, and appetite. These components, he argues, correspond to the three societal classes in his conceptualization of an ideal city. The rational element, akin to the ruling class in the city, is tasked with governance of the soul. Endowed with the ability to evaluate evidence, reason makes decisions that serve the soul's best interests. The spirited component, analogous to the city's soldiers, is the locus of emotions and reactions such as pride and shame. It strives to maintain order within the soul and in its external interactions. The appetitive element, representing the common populace in the city, encompasses desires for food, drink, sleep, sex, and other material needs. This component is inherently limitless in its desires, restrained only by external forces or supply shortages.

Plato further asserts that the virtues present in the human soul mirror the four virtues of the city: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Wisdom is the specific virtue of the rational part of the soul, enabling it to function effectively within the soul's context. Courage is the virtue of the spirited part of the soul. Moderation, the virtue of the appetitive part, should also be present in reason and spirit. Justice in the soul, akin to justice in the ideal city, is a harmonious relationship between the soul's parts, where each part performs its own role according to its inherent nature and function. Justice entails the rule of reason over appetite, with the cooperation of spirit, to govern and restrain the appetites and direct them towards the good of the entire person. Consequently, the appetitive part accepts the restrictions imposed by reason and spirit. In this sense, Plato's vision of justice is less about the happiness of each individual part and more about the happiness and flourishing of the whole soul. Each part operates according to what is naturally suited, maintaining its boundaries, and contributing to the collective good. Adherence to the naturally suited role by the constituents is central to this concept of justice.

Injustice, on the other hand, both in the city and in the soul, arises when a lower part rules over the rulers. For instance, if the soldiers usurp control and attempt to govern the city, the city becomes unjust due to their lack of requisite wisdom for making beneficial policy decisions. Similarly, if the common people overthrow the rulers and establish a government, Plato contends that this would result in an unjust city, with individuals lacking the necessary wisdom for making decisions, leading to the city's detriment. Similarly, injustice in the soul mirrors that in a city, manifesting when appetite or spirit governs the entire soul. Plato maintains that allowing appetite or spirit to lead the soul would result in disastrous consequences and misery, rather than happiness.

In exploring the isomorphism between the soul and the city, it is imperative to acknowledge that the correlation does not imply a perfect one-to-one correspondence. The producers in the city, for instance, fulfill the role of providing for the city. However, it is debatable whether the appetitive part of the soul, which parallels the producers in the city, performs a similar function for the soul. Can the appetite for food or sex, in isolation, provide any of those? Demonstrating that the appetitive part of the soul caters to bodily needs would be a formidable challenge. While the appetite may indicate a desire or need, it is questionable whether it makes the provision.

The inadequacy of the appetitive part lends credence to the rulership of reason over it. These complexities highlight the limits to which the isomorphism could be stretched. Nevertheless, the benefits of the isomorphism are seemingly substantial. As Socrates points out, examining the larger entity amplifies the smaller one, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of its structures and functions. While social structures are observable, psychic structures are not. Consequently, by shifting the focus to the components of the city and their operations, Socrates, as depicted by Plato, explains the parts and functioning of the soul. This approach enables the discovery of virtues in a manner that is apparently both adequate and comprehensible. Furthermore, the isomorphism enhances Plato's argument for justice as the common good. His defense of social justice, predicated on the organization of society and the roles assigned to each group, provides clarity on the concept of justice in the soul. Thus, despite its limitations, the isomorphism serves as a valuable tool in the philosophical discourse on the soul and the city

In summary, the concept of justice within the soul is a composite of wisdom, courage, and moderation. Each component plays a distinct role, functioning in harmony and submitting to the rule of reason. Justice at the individual level contributes to personal virtue and psychological well-being. At the societal level, justice fosters harmony, solidarity, and goodness. Whether in the city or the soul, justice engenders an overall state of virtue and eudaimonia. The state and operations of justice, as delineated in the *Republic*, serve as a regulative ideal, providing a paradigmatic framework for individuals and societies alike. Justice in the soul and city as regulative ideals is discussed further in the section of this work dedicated to the subject.

3. The Possibility Question

It is crucial to state from the outset that the discourse under consideration conflates the isomorphic principle, presuming that the feasibility of a just city implies the same for a just soul, and vice versa. This conflation is humorously analogous to a joke about an individual who, in a restaurant, perplexes the server by ordering something 'liquid' like a donut. The humor derives not from the apparent absurdity of the request, but from the impossibility of fulfilling it, akin to the impossibility of creating square circles. Plato's Republic, however, is neither a joke nor an unambiguous impossibility like square circles. M. F. Burnyeat contends that one of the most striking aspects of Plato's Republic, and one of the reasons it has consistently engaged the attention of serious thinkers throughout history, is its assertion of presenting a utopia that is practicable for humans. Burnyeat observes that the claims of practicability made in the Republic (see 375c-e, 415c-d, 423d-424a, 425d-e, 450d, 452e-453c, 456c, 457a, c, d-e, 458a, b,466d, 471c-e, 472b-473b, 473c-e, 485a, 499c-500e, 502a-c, 520e-521a, 540d, 592a) have not been scrutinized as thoroughly as they should be. Nevertheless, as we will discuss later, Burnyeat, like other scholars, does not equate practicability with the possibility of perfect attainment. Therefore, the question of the possibility or impossibility of achieving Socrates' propositions about the just soul and just city warrants serious consideration, as it pertains to the question of how we should pursue a life of *eudaimonia* and the role of justice in achieving such a life, both for the soul and the city.

Conceptualizing the just soul and the just city as ideals justifies the significant role that education plays in the *Republic* in training and improving the soul and city as they progress toward the ideal Form. This gives real individuals and real societies reasons to strive for the best in the direction of the ideal. Considering the significance of the arguments of the *Republic* to psychology, ethics, politics, and education, the question of the possibility or impossibility of realizing the postulations of Socrates in Plato's *Republic* is important. The attainability of the just soul and especially the just city has been questioned not just by contemporary scholars but by some of Socrates' interlocutors in the *Republic*. For example, Glaucon in Book IX 592b suggests that the just city is beyond reach here on earth and Socrates seems to answer in the affirmative, but with a caveat about its practicability and possibly, its role as a regulative ideal:

GLAUCON: I understand. You mean in the city we have just been founding and describing; the one that exists in words, since I do not think it exists anywhere on earth.

SOCRATES: But there may perhaps be a model of it in the heavens for anyone who wishes to look at it and to found himself on the basis of what he sees. It makes no difference at all whether it exists anywhere or ever will. You see, he would take part in the politics of it alone, and of no other.

GLAUCON: That's probably right (592b, transl. by C.D.C Reeve).

Here, and in other passages like the ones referenced above, Plato seems to complicate but not foreclose

the possibility of the just city and by implication, the just soul. Besides, in the same statements that grant that the possibility of the just city is not foreclosed, Plato seems to suggest the same for the soul. It could be deduced from Plato's statement "to found himself" (Reeve's transl.) or "found a city within himself" (Bloom's transl.) that the isomorphism between the city and soul are matched here such that what applies to one applies to the other since 'within himself' is a reference to the soul. If this deduction is granted, the attainability of a just soul might also be complicated but not foreclosed. If the just soul is the one whose constituent parts are in a constant state of justice, that is, each part consistently performing its functions without meddling with the role of the others, then the possibility of such a soul in reality although not completely foreclosed is almost impossible.

The question of the possibility or impossibility of such ideals is important, but what is most important even if Plato's proposal as presented in Socrates' argument is impossible to attain, it might be considered an impossible possibility because it represents an ideal that persons and societies can emulate with continuous improvement towards. In this sense, justice and its constituent virtues represent regulative ideals that individuals and societies should work towards achieving, even when it seems beyond attainment. Still on the possibility question, Burnyeat asserts,

> Finally, at 540d, when the finishing touch has been put to the portrait of the rulers of the ideal city, both men and women, Socrates demands that his interlocutors accept that the account of the city and its polity is not just wish-thoughts (euchai); it would be difficult to put into practice, but not impossible provided power is in the hands of true philosophers who will make justice their first and chief concern."[5]

If we grant that Burnyeat's interpretation of Plato is plausible, the question that ensues is whether there can be philosophers in the real world in the platonic sense with perfectly just souls, consistently led by reason and perpetually virtuous. While the answer seems obvious, I argue that the practicability of Plato's ideals may be challenging, but not impossible as regulative ideals. Therefore, Plato's presentation of the just city and just soul should be understood as regulative ideals whose function is to orient and motivate the actions of cities and souls towards the ideal. I will discuss regulative ideals further in the next section. For Socrates, the just city is attainable, provided philosophers become kings or current kings become philosophers. The presence of true philosophers in the Platonic sense, well trained, disciplined, and most importantly completely and consistently virtuous, whether in time past, present, or future will guarantee the practicability of the just city. With this, Plato leaves the question of possibility open. He posits,

> "Therefore, if, in the endless time that has gone by, there has been some necessity for those who are on the peaks of philosophy to take charge of a city, or there even now is such a necessity in some barbaric place somewhere far outside of our range of vision, or will be later, in this case we are ready to do battle for the argument that the regime spoken of has been, is, and will be when this Muse has become master of a city. For it's not impossible that it come to pass nor are we speaking of impossibilities.
>
> That it's hard, we too agree."
>
> "That," he said, "in my opinion, is so" (499d, transl. Allan Bloom).

Thus, the possibility of the just city is predicated upon the possibility of the just soul, at least, in the person of the philosophers. The realization of the just city, as proposed by Plato, is fundamentally contingent upon the existence of a just soul, particularly embodied in the philosophers. The skepticism surrounding the feasibility of the just city arises from the presence of individuals who, despite occupying the place of philosophers, do not embody the virtues and dispositions characteristic of Platonic philosopher-kings. This incongruity with the Platonic ideal increases doubt regarding the existence of such philosophers and, consequently, the manifestation of a just city in reality (refer to 500b in the *Republic* for further context). This skepticism underscores the critical role of philosopher-kings in the realization of a just city, as envisioned by Plato.

Burnyeat posits that "the reason why justice is not exemplified in any actual city (whereas it is, perhaps, exemplified in an actual man: Socrates)[6] is that there

[5]Burnyeat, p. 102.

[6]Although the statement in the parenthesis is not categorical, Burnyeat may be arguing against since also elsewhere he opines thus, "I can now be more precise about my claim that the non-existence of the ideal city is a fact of history, not of metaphysics. There are indeed metaphysical obstacles to the realization on earth of perfect justice. These are conceded by Socrates when he says that nothing can be realized in deed as it is spoken in word (473a)" (p. 299). It is unthinkable to assume that Socrates transcended all historical and metaphysical obstacle. The ideal here remains the-virtue Justice, a person who might have approximated it, albeit, imperfectly.

has not yet been a philosopher-king with both the power and the understanding to organize society in the right way." For Burnyeat, the apparent unattainability of such a city in actual life "has nothing to do with the metaphysical difference between Forms and their exemplifications." I doubt if Burnyeat's position is tenable, since as he rightly suggests, justice is a Form and the lack of a perfectly just soul with implementation power is the reason why the just city is not actualized, therefore in this sense, the metaphysical difference between the Forms and their exemplification is a reason for the unrealizability. Besides, except if Burnyeat is suggesting that Socrates perhaps transcended the constraints of the natural world, I think it is preposterous to assume that Socrates or anyone may have exemplified justice (both as a perfect virtuous state of the soul and perpetual functioning in that same state), except of course if it is the possibility of a near perfect approximation. Whatever the case, what is significant is the possibility of approximation which could serve as a motivation for education, training, and orientation towards the ideal.

For Rachel Barney, the question of the possibility of realizing the ideal society is important. Barney maintains that "it is a very pertinent question whether the *Republic* seriously asserts a radical political theory of the just society, and whether it seriously claims that that society is possible." (To be clear, I take it that the answer to both questions is 'Yes'.)[7] "The *Republic*," according to Barney, "offers a kind of minimal template -- a maximally abstract argument about the necessary and sufficient conditions for a wholly just society, based on an account of human nature good across all times and places."[8] Referencing passages in Books V and VI, Barney asserts that, "For Plato too the question whether the just city is possible is of great importance; but his approach is entirely different. Plato addresses the question of possibility head on and argues briefly but explicitly that the just city as specified *is* possible (471e-4b, 499a-b, 502a-c)."[9] Like other scholars such as Burnyeat, and based on Socrates' postulation in 499c - d, Barney reiterated that the possibility or practicability of the just city lies in the emergence of philosopher-kings or kings becoming philosophers. Barney deduced that Plato is concerned with two possibilities claims, namely: "(1) *the general possibility claim* that the just city, with the constitutive features he has now laid out for it, is possible in an ongoing way (indeed over the long term, since it is stipulated to be as stable as any city can be), and (2) *the transitional possibility claim* that it's coming into being [*gignesthai*] is possible."[10] Passages that support the transitional possibility claim include 499a – d, 472e – 3e, 502a – c, and 540d. Barney maintains that the transitional possibility claim is also a necessary condition for the general possibility claim. In an analysis of 499d, Barney asserts that, "here we have a sample of the practices which are said not to be 'impossibilities' [*adunata*] at 499d. And we can see here that Socrates claims for them a rather strong kind of general possibility (ongoing, constitutive possibility, we might say), unrelated into the transitional possibility claim." Barney concludes that, "This is that they are *kata phusin*, not *para phusin*; and what is *kata phusin* cannot be impossible."[11] Therefore, the possibility of attaining the just city anywhere among the Greeks or Barbarians at any time – past, present, or future opens the possibility wide enough.

Mason Marshall also supports the possibility argument. Marshall asserts, "It is significant that Socrates and his interlocutors adhere to the possibility requirement throughout the Republic, for on their terms, if they are to argue that the aristocratic city is the just polis, they need to argue successfully that the closest approximation could come to be."[12] Using some of the passages that Burnyeat says have not been taken serious consideration, Marshall provides four points to support the argument for the possibility of realization of the *kallipolis*:

> (1) at first, such as at 473a7-b3, the candidate for the best city is the original aristocratic polis (2) at 473a7-b3 Socrates and his interlocutors agree that the original aristocratic city is possible if it could be approximated closely enough in the phenomenal world; (3) by 473c2 their agreement effectively is to build in speech a polis similar to the original aristocratic city (in other words, the agreement is to approximate the original aristocratic city in speech) and

[7]Barney, p. 8.

[8]Barney, p. 23.

[9]Barney, pp. 14 – 15.

[10]Barney, p. 16.

[11]Barney, p. 18.

[12]Mason Marshall, "The Possibility requirement in Plato's Republic" in Ancient Philosophy 28 (2008) Mathesis Publication, p. 80.

> to investigate whether the newer city could be replicated in the phenomenal world; and (4) by at least 543d they have agreed that the closest approximation could come to be. But at 497b7ff. Socrates refers to the political order within the closest approximation as 'the best regime'… And at 543dl-544a1 Glaucon says that the closest approximation seems to be 'still finer' than the original aristocratic city.

From the foregoing, it seems obvious, that what might be possible in the phenomenal world is the approximation of the ideals. Thus, Plato's just city and just soul should be understood as regulative ideals. The possibility of approximation as argued by Socrates and his interlocutors, especially Glaucon, and the systematization of the argument by scholars as seen in this section is what we need to conceptualize Justice and its necessary accompanying virtues (wisdom, courage, and moderation) and thereby, the just city and just soul, the embodiment of these virtues as regulative ideals.

4. The Just City and Just Soul as Regulative Ideals

Plato's proposal about justice in the just city and just soul should be conceptualized as a regulative ideal. A regulative ideal is a standard, model, pattern, or paradigm toward which progress is made. Dorothy Emmet posits that a regulative ideal serves as a "focus imaginarius," a goal that provides direction and orientation for a practice.[13] The term "regulative ideal" is attributed to Immanuel Kant, who posited that to orient oneself is to utilize a given direction, primarily a spatial one, to establish one's bearings. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant demonstrates the reflective use of Regulative Principles in service of a Regulative Ideal, aiming for full systematic intelligibility in empirical science. The regulative ideal, therefore, offers a methodology for advancing in a specific direction, a direction that is deemed justifiable as long as it contributes to the expansion of knowledge in a specific field and human flourishing. The application of the "regulative ideal" as a model for understanding Plato's conception of justice in the ideal soul and city is particularly pertinent. This is because, akin to empirical science where Kant's regulative ideal mediates between the pure Ideas of Reason, in the "utter darkness of the supersensible,"[14] and the empirical facts of Nature for which explanations are sought, this principle could be employed in the realm of ethics as an evaluative benchmark for ethical approximations in real life vis-à-vis their ideals or Forms. Just as the regulative ideal plays a pivotal role in guiding scientific practice, the ethical regulative ideal is instrumental in steering ethical practice. In light of the preceding discussion on the question of possibility and applicability, it is evident that Plato intended for justice and the associated virtues in the soul and city to function as regulative ideals. This interpretation underscores the dynamic interplay between theoretical constructs and their practical applications in the pursuit of ethical and societal ideals.

The virtues are regulative ideals that orient our practice towards the Forms and are closer to attaining a just soul or a city. The function of the Regulative Ideal, therefore, can be to shield us from the pitfalls of simplistic moralism on the one hand and cynicism on the other, preventing the shortcomings of the former from propelling us toward the latter.[15] A regulative ideal serves as a benchmark for self-assessment, fulfilling two distinct roles: one negative and one positive. Firstly, it curbs moral arrogance that stems from an inflated sense of one's accomplishments. Secondly, it fosters growth by offering a model to aspire towards. Either way, a regulative ideal can serve as a standard with which to measure one's progress or lack thereof. But there is a difference between a regulative ideal that is unattainable but practicable and a regulative ideal that is unattainable and impracticable. If an ideal is unachievable and impracticable, there would hardly be any motivation to try since doing so would be an exercise in futility. On the other hand, a regulative ideal might be unattainable but practicable. Thus, a regulative ideal that might be unattainable but practicable can motivate and orient a person or society towards progress in the best direction. By this reasoning, an ideal that is both unattainable and impracticable cannot function as a regulative ideal. The absence of motivation will be the inevitable consequence of absolute impossibility and impracticability. For instance, if square circles are categorically impossible and impracticable, what would compel anyone to attempt their creation or

[13] Dorothy Emmet, The Role of the Unrealisable: A Study in Regulative Ideals (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994), p. 16. "Focus imaginarius" is Kant's coinage as seen in Critique of Pure Reason A652. B680. See A644. 8672 for more on focus imaginarius.

[14] Immanuel Kant in Dorothy Emmet, p. 17. Also see Kant's Critique of Judgement Part II Division ii section 70.

[15] Emmet, p. 95.

to solve a mathematical problem involving such an impossibility? Conceptualizing an ethical example of an impossible and impracticable ideal is a challenge. But we can approximate love as an ideal. Love is possible, but what would that look like if asked to love "nothing"? Assuming love can only be exhibited in relation to something and nothing is nothing, will an "ethical ideal" of loving nothing be something that anyone can try or make progress towards? Hardly. Loving nothing might have a mathematical representation of multiplying any number by zero. For instance, assuming that the highest possibility of love is 100, 1 x 0 = 0; 49 x 0 = 0; 100 x 0 = 0, the multiplication effect is zero no matter the number taken from the scale from lowest to highest. "Nothing" (0) cancels the possibility of loving at any rate, from the least to the highest possibility. Thus, even though the possibility of loving might be present no matter how big or small, in relation to "nothing", it amounts to nothing. Granted that this mathematical representation might be inadequate in some sense for assuming that zero (0) is nothing, the representation nevertheless conveys the idea of impracticability, if not impossibility of "loving nothing" as a regulative ideal. But what about the possibility and practicability of "loving your neighbor as yourself"? Assuming that you love yourself, loving your neighbor might be both possible and practicable or impossible but practicable. At least, even if one is not able to love one's neighbor exactly how one loves oneself, one can make progress toward achieving this. Using the aforesaid mathematical representation with some variations including 'loving your neighbor' instead of 'loving nothing,' the possibility will always amount to something along the progression on the love scale from 1 to 100. No matter how far from the ideal of loving one's neighbor, say 5 out of 100 points, one can at least be on a progressive path from 1 to approximately ~100. With this possibility of approximation, 'love for neighbor' can thus serve as a regulative ideal since it can be approximated and can motivate one to try, even if it is impossible to get perfect at it.

Speaking of the Republic, Dorothy Emmet maintains that of "the concrete portrayal of a society imagined as possible" …"Plato's *Republic* is the greatest of all such, and it also expresses a theory of justice."[16] Since by Plato's isomorphism, justice in the city serves to explain justice in the soul, we can deduce that if an approximate of a just society is possible, an approximate of a just soul is also possible. The idea of justice, wisdom, courage, and moderation can serve as regulative ideals. Even if it is impossible to attain perfection in any of the virtues, one can approximate and make progress towards becoming the best that one can be, using the perfect virtue as a paradigm. It might be safer to consider the virtues that make a city or a soul just as the regulative ideal than the whole entity itself, especially the city. Some of the details about the city might be difficult to apply.[17] For example, the "noble lie,"[18] communal life and the abolition of the family, exiling anyone above 10 years old when founding the city (541a), all tend toward establishing Plato's just city. These aspects of the founding of the city may be both possible and applicable but problematic to be considered as regulative ideals that should be approximated in real societies. The point here is that the city and all its details can hardly be regulative ideals. Only the virtues or the city as an embodiment of the virtues (wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice) can be regulative ideals.

Conceptulizing the just soul an entity with its details as regulative ideals might be less problematic and easier to figure out. Even so, it is better to consider the virtues (wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice) or the soul as an embodiment of these virtues as the regulative ideal than doing so with every detail that Plato employs to stress the significance of justice in the soul. The just soul as an embodiment of virtue can be a regulative ideal of which perfection might not be possible but approximation is. Attaining perfection might be impossible since Plato does not conceive of the just soul as a state to be attained at some time and not at other times or once and for all, but a constant state to be maintained at all times. It would take Plato's ideal city where every natural constraint has been removed through training, education, and experience to conceive of the possibility of such a soul/person that is always perfectly virtuous. This will mean that reason governs all the time, the spirited part supports all the time, and the appetitive part obeys all the time. This is the ideal state and functioning of the just soul. In the present earthly reality, it is apparent that this perfect state and functioning of the soul can only be approximated. As a regulative ideal, it is practicable; individuals can progress towards the perfectly virtuous soul.

[16]Emmet, p. 58.

[17]Julia Annas maintains that it will be 'absurd if details are taken literally.' See Julia Annas, Platonic Ethics, Old and New. Ithaca: Cornell Univesity Press, 1999.

[18] For more on "The Noble Lie" look out for Rachel Barney's unpublished essay, "Why the Noble Lie," April 2020.

This practicability and possible progress towards the ideal might be what Plato's Socrates means when he maintains that "there may perhaps be a model of it in the heavens for anyone who wishes to look at it and to found himself on the basis of what he sees. It makes no difference at all whether it exists anywhere or ever will. You see, he would take part in the politics of it alone, and of no other" (592b). Plato's proposal is thus an ideal that individuals and societies should educate themselves and progress towards. It is meant to motivate individuals and societies into pursuing justice (wisdom, courage, and moderation), unity, solidarity, and the common good and as a result, live a life of eudaimonia – happiness and flourishing. As a motivation that promotes progress in the process of becoming in the direction of the best, Plato's proposal is an "impossible" possibility of which the approximate is practicable. Therefore, Plato's proposal should serve as personal and social regulative ideals that orient the conduct of individuals and societies towards the best that they can become.

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