



Why Be Good? Moral Philosophy in Plato's *Republic*

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Central Ideas from *The Republic*

- Being a good person is good *in itself*, and also because it brings *other goods*.
- A person ("soul") has three parts: the *appetitive*, the *spirited*, and the *rational* parts.
- A just person is someone who is able to use his or her reason to control the other three parts, maintaining what Plato calls a "harmony" among the parts of the soul.
- A society has three social groups: the "moneymaking," the "auxiliaries," and the "guardians." These correspond to the parts of the soul.
- The guardians rule a good city—just as reason controls a good person.
- Knowledge of philosophy is essential for a guardian.



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Plato's Aims & Strategy in *The Republic*

- Plato wants to convincingly answer the question, Why be good?
- Plato is important partly because he recognized the significance of this question and attempted to answer it.
- His strategy is as follows:
 - Assume that whatever makes a city good also makes a person good.
 - Figure out what make a city good, in order to figure out what makes a person good.
 - Show that on this view, it benefits the individual to be a good person, both for its own sake, and because other good things will happen for the person.



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The Republic is a Dialogue by Plato

- As will be immediately clear, *The Republic* is a dialogue—it is written as a conversation among friends.
- It may be thought of as a kind of theater in which the "action" and "plot" are purely intellectual.
- This is not a historical work: this dialogue never actually took place. It is a work of fiction.
- Plato is its author; Socrates is a *character* in the dialogue.
- Plato (429–348 BCE) really existed, as did Socrates (d. 399 BCE), who was Plato's teacher.
- *The Republic* was written around 380 BCE.



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The Opening Discussion

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- At the start of the dialogue, Plato and his companions begin to discuss what justice is and whether it is good for a person to be just.
- Their discussion begins with consideration of some theories that are rejected, but that set up the central problem to be addressed in *The Republic*, Why be good?
- These initial discussions proceed as follows.
 - Cephalus on getting older & the purpose of money
 - Simonides' account of justice.
 - Thrasymachus' account of justice.
- The discussion continues until the end of book 1.



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Cephalus on Getting Older & the Purpose of Money

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- 1 Socrates questions Cephalus on what it's like to be getting older.
- 2 Later in their conversation, Cephalus says that as he gets older, he thinks more and more about his fate in the afterlife—did he right the wrongs he's done in life?
- 3 This, he says, is what wealth is good for: paying back what's owed to those who have been wronged by the wealthy person during his or her lifetime.
- 4 This leads the discussants toward their first view on justice: Simonides' view.



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Thrasymachus' Entrance into the Discussion

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- One member of the group loudly interrupts the discussion to introduce his own view.
- Before he does so, he takes issue with Socrates' method: questioning people in discussion, rather than putting forward his own view.
 - This method is called *elenchus*.
 - It reflects the idea that it is essential to philosophy to modify one's opinions in response to criticism.
 - It also reflects the idea that philosophy is a *group* activity.



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Aims and Nature of the Discussion of Thrasymachus' View

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- Thrasymachus has the view that (roughly) justice is what is better for those who are stronger.
- The view is a representative of a whole family of views: those according to which it is better to be unjust than it is to be just.
- This view and all others in this family is rejected by Socrates and is strongly disliked by Glaucon.
- Its proposal by Thrasymachus sets the stage for the central question of *The Republic*, Why be good?
- The arguments in Book I are understood by the characters to count strongly against Thrasymachus' view, but Glaucon does not deem the arguments strong enough.
- So, at the start of Book II, he challenges Socrates to formulate stronger arguments against the view.



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Closer Investigation into Thrasymachus' View of Justice

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- As already seen above, Thrasymachus offers the following view: *Justice is whatever is advantageous for the stronger.*
- This view is criticized by Socrates and his colleagues in a variety of ways, including the following.
 - 1 Socrates argues that, like other activities, governing aims at benefiting the governed, not those governing.
 - 2 He also argues that, although governing may be used to the benefit of the ruler, it is not primarily aimed at this.



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Why be Good?

- Glaucon states that he is not happy with Socrates' arguments against Thrasymachus.
- He would like to see a strong argument that shows that, because of what justice is, it is good—rather than a refutation of a view that injustice is good.
- Glaucon provides a taxonomy (categorization) of the ways in which something can be good, which he challenges Socrates to use in his arguments for justice.
- Glaucon sets up the question “Why be good” in terms of a the story of the ring of Gyges.
- The set-up of the question ends when Socrates and the other discussants agree that if they can discover what justice is in a city, they can determine what it is in a person.



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Glaucon's Taxonomy of Goods

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Why be Good?

- Glaucon describes four senses in which something can be good:
 - 1 Something can be *good in itself*, that is, *good for its own sake*.
 - 2 Something can be *good because of its consequences*.
 - 3 Something can be *good in itself and good because of its consequences*.
 - 4 Something can be *good only because of its consequences, and bad in itself*.
- As will be seen, Socrates will try to argue that justice is *good in itself and good because of its consequences*.
- We now consider each of these types of goodness in more detail.



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Things Good in Themselves

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Why be Good?

Good in themselves

- These things are good no matter what they cause to happen later, that is:
 - Activities that, when engaged in, are good during the time they are engaged in; and
 - Things that are good, merely by existing; and
 - States of a person or thing that are good, while the person or thing is in those states.



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Examples of Things Good in Themselves

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Why be Good?

Health It's good to be healthy while you're healthy, and not necessarily for what happens as a result.

Being in love "Love is its own reward."

Knowledge It's good to be educated, even if you don't do anything with the knowledge.

A game or sporting event While you're playing, it's good, regardless of whether you win or lose; and one need not participate, say, for health or fitness.



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Things Good Because of Their Consequences

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Why be Good?

Good because of consequences

Things that are good because of some state, event, or object that they cause to occur or exist.



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Comment

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Why be Good?

- These things are good because they provide a means to obtain something else that's good.
- They may also be called "instrumental goods" because they are used as *instruments* (tools) that can be used to bring about other good.



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Examples of Things Good Because of Their Consequences

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Why be Good?

Cooking Good as a way to make a meal.

A car Good because it helps you get places you want to go.

Laws and rules Good because they protect one's interests and keep society and other activities running smoothly.



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Things Good in Themselves *and* Because of Their Consequences

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Why be Good?

Good in themselves, good consequences

This group of things represents those that are in *both* of the two categories just discussed:

- Things good in themselves.
- Things good because of their consequences.



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Examples of Things Good in Themselves *and* Because of Their Consequences

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Why be Good?

Health Good in itself, and also good because while we are healthy, we can engage in good activities.

Knowledge Good in itself, and good because it allows us to do other things—scientific knowledge allows us to invent medicines, build bridges, explore the universe.

Sporting event or game Good in itself, but also good because it can help us keep in shape, win money, impress friends, bring fame to the team, etc.

Cooking Good in itself as a rewarding activity; but can also promote health by producing a good meal; serve as a social occasion; earn money if the meal is served at a restaurant or bake sale.



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Things Good Because of Their Consequences, but *Not* Good in Themselves

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Why be Good?

Good Consequences, not good in themselves

These things bring us some benefit, but are activities or events that we would in general rather not engage in—we'd just like to have the benefit that results from them.



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Examples of Things Good Because of Their Consequences, but *Not* Good in Themselves

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- Dental work** Most of us would rather not have to go to the dentist, but we know that we need to in order to prevent further pain.
- Vaccinations** We'd rather not have to get flu, tetanus shots, etc., but we want to be protected from these diseases.
- Dieting and working out** Some people would like to eat lots of rich meals and sweets and also just sit around reading, watching TV, talking with friends, etc.—as opposed to eating less, eating only salads and fruit, and going to the gym. But some of those same people want the good health and slim figure that comes from dieting and working out.



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Using the Taxonomy of Goods for Posing a Question About Justice

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- Glaucon points out that Thrasymachus' position is that justice is neither good for its consequences, nor good in itself.
- Glaucon believes this view is wrong, and would like to show the following:
- Justice is something that is *both* good in itself, *and* good because of its consequences.
- Answering this question amounts to answering the question, *Why be good?*
- This is the project that he, Socrates, and the others engage in for the rest of the discussion.



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Strategy and Aims of the "Ring" Story

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- Glaucon wants to further clarify the question, *Why be good?*
- He wants to show that there is a significant problem to address.
- In order to do this, he proposes to do the following.
 - 1 Answer the question, what is justice, as most people understand it?
 - 2 Argue that most people would not act in accord with justice, if they didn't have to.
 - 3 Argue that most people would be justified in not acting in accord with justice, if they didn't have to.
- The "Ring of Gyges" story is essential to consideration of the second two points above.



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Prelude to the “Ring” Story: What is Justice?

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- Glaucon suggests that, in a society without laws and other social institutions to maintain order, the following will happen.
 - ① At some time or another, each person will take advantage of someone else.
 - ② At some time or another, each person will be taken advantage of by someone else, and will not be able to take revenge on this person.
- He believes that, in light of this, most people understand justice to be the following.
Justice, according to most people Following rules and laws, so that each person is taken advantage of a minimum number of times.
- People are willing to cease trying to take advantage of others, in order to avoid being taken advantage of themselves.



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The Ring of Gyges: The Story

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- Gyges' ancestor (?) is a shepherd; one day, when he is out with his flocks, a thunderstorm hits, and causes a crack in the ground.
- Gyges' ancestor (“The Shepherd”) descends into the crack, and finds a tomb whose occupant is wearing a ring. The Shepard takes the ring.
- This ring causes The Shepherd to become invisible, if he turns its setting.
- Upon finding this out, The Shepherd arranges to become a messenger to the King, and upon gaining entrance to the palace, uses the ring to seduce the Queen and kill the King, becoming ruler of the kingdom.



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What Would Most People Do?

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- Glaucon addresses the question, What would most people do, were they to gain access to the ring?
- His answer to this question is that most people—almost everyone—would not be able to resist acting as The Shepherd did.
- That is, they would use the power given to them by the ring to gain an advantage over others.
- Glaucon believes that this shows that most people would act unjustly, if they could do so without punishment.
 - This is his second point above (see the slide entitled “Strategy and Aims of the ‘Ring’ Story.”)



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People Would be Justified in Acting as The Shepherd Did

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- Glaucon then argues that most people would be justified in acting as The Shepherd did.
- In order to show this, he proposes that we imagine two types of people.
 - Appears just but isn't This person is unjust in every way, but never gets caught, and so appears to be just in every way.
 - Appears unjust, but is just This person is just in every way, but due to happenstance and bad luck, appears to be unjust in every way.
- We will call the first person “Mr. Unjust,” because he is unjust, even if he doesn't seem that way.
- Accordingly, we will call the second person “Mr. Just.”



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“Mr. Unjust” versus “Mr. Just.” Who is Better Off?’

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- Glaucon claims that Mr. Unjust would be far better off than Mr. Just, and that this is why people would be justified in acting like The Shepherd did.
- The important point is that what determines how much someone succeeds depends much more on how that person appears to others than it does on how that person actually acts.
- Mr. Unjust would be given benefits of high office; high-paying employment; association with influential individuals; and so on.
- Mr. Just, on the other hand, would not be permitted to advance in society, because he would seem to people to be untrustworthy and undesirable.



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What About the Gods?

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- Glaucon's brother, Adeimantus, introduces an important point in support of Glaucon's claim that Mr. Unjust would be rewarded while Mr. Just would not be.
- Adeimantus points out that even Gods can be influenced by prayer and contributions.
- So this means that someone who is unjust and also rich can escape any of the Gods' penalties for injustice, including those in the afterlife.



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The Gauntlet is Thrown Down

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- Glaucon has now posed the Socratic question in a precise form.
- That question is, Why should we believe that justice is a good for its own sake, and also for the consequences it brings.
- The question is vividly illustrated by the Ring of Gyges story and Glaucon's analysis.
- Would the bearer of the ring be better advised *not* to use the ring to take advantage of others?
- A “Yes” answer this question implies that there is in fact reason to be good—reason why, Glaucon would like to argue, being just brings both its own rewards, and also that it has good consequences for the person being just.



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Overview of Plato's Theory of Justice: Cities & People

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- Plato believes that there is an analogy between persons and cities: if it can be determined what a just city is like, then it can be determined what a just person is like.
- Plato proposes that a just city is composed of three different social classes.
- Each class plays a distinct role in the maintenance of justice in the city:
 - Each person carries out the tasks appropriate for individuals of his or her class, and no other tasks; and
 - The role of each person is decided by the leading class, the guardians.
- Accordingly, Plato claims that there are three parts of a person (the soul): a just person is someone for whom each part carries out a role appropriate to it for the life of the person, as determined by reason.



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Three Kinds of People

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- According to Plato, the good city will have three different types of people, each of which forms its own social and political class.
 - Moneymakers** Laborers, farmers, craftspeople, wholesalers and retailers, traders, importers and exporters.
 - Auxiliaries** Soldiers, police, tax collectors, civil servants and government bureaucrats.
 - Guardians** Each is rigorously trained in music, art, sports, war; and also in all sciences and philosophy. Guardians make laws and policy in the city.



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Some Remarks About the Moneymakers and Auxiliaries

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- "Moneymakers" are those that provide the basic goods and services that keep the city running.
- These include food, building construction, transportation; and also everything having to do with buying and selling.
- They may be thought of as the "brute force" element in the economy of the city.
- The auxiliaries enforce the laws and carry out the government policy in the city.
- The main trait of an auxiliary is his or her commitment to the city—the auxiliary sees him or herself as responsible for making sure that the city is a just one, and is willing to lay down his or her life for it if needed.



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The Guardians

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- The guardians are responsible for creating policies and laws in the city.
- They rely on a deep knowledge of art and science in order to formulate these policies and laws.
- They also know philosophy, which gives them a knowledge of the very nature of goodness itself.
- They also possess the auxiliaries' deep commitment to the welfare of the city.
- Although they need not be practitioners of a craft, they will possess exemplary physical strength and ability in carrying out tasks typical of the crafts.



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The Guardians' Education and Selection

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- Children showing promise as prospective guardians receive additional schooling and training, and are brought up in a commune-style setting.
- The prospective guardians continue to live together, separately from others, for the entirety of their lives; their education and training continues.
- It includes music, poetry, and visual art; physical training for sports; military training; and training in mathematics and philosophy.
- Those that cannot pass beyond the earlier stages of the training are placed in the moneymaker class.
- Those that can proceed further but not all the way to the end of the training are put into the auxiliary class.



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Overview: Virtues of the City

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- Now that we've considered the composition of the city, let's consider the ways in which the city can be a virtuous one.
- Plato identifies four virtues of the city:
 - 1 Wisdom
 - 2 Courage
 - 3 Temperance
 - 4 Justice
- Each virtue depends on the strengths of a particular social class, or on the interaction of the social classes.
- Guardians play a central role in wisdom and justice.
- As will be seen, these virtues appear similarly in an individual person.



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Wisdom

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- Plato understands wisdom to be insight into practical matters about how to govern.
- We often think of "wisdom" as indicating knowledge of the meaning of life or deeper knowledge of the universe or other abstract and difficult but useless matters—this is not what Plato means.
- The city is wise, he says, because it receives guidance from the guardians.
- They can provide this guidance because they have extensive knowledge and training in mathematics, the sciences, and philosophy.
- Note that the guardians are a special political class.



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Courage

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- A city has courage because its soldiers do not forget what to do when afraid in battle.
- Similarly, police and others must not lose their ability to subdue criminals, even though those criminals threaten their lives.
- Plato emphasizes that this ability can only be acquired by rigorous training.
- He makes an analogy with dying a fabric: soldiers cannot forget their fighting skills, just as the color of dyed fabric cannot bleed.
- The city has courage because it has auxiliaries.



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Temperance

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- Temperance is understood by Plato to be control of one's desires and appetites, sometimes called "self-mastery."
- In the case of the city, this means that no one group's need for pleasures detracts from the over-all well-being of the city.
- The city has temperance because the guardians can use the services of the auxiliaries to control the moneymakers.
- Recall that the role of the guardians is to make laws and policy for the city.
- Plato characterizes this as a kind of harmony that exists throughout the city, as though the entire city were able to perform a musical work together.



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An Important Difference between Temperance and the Other Virtues of the City

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Temperance is a relationship among parts of the city

While a city has the virtues of wisdom and courage because of the contribution of a given *single part* of the city, it has temperance because of the way that *parts* of the city *interact* with one another.



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Justice

Plato's Republic

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Why be Good?

- Plato proposes that the city is just when all those in it are pursuing a line of work doing what's best for him or herself, and are not pursuing any line of work that he or she does not have the abilities and training for.
- In particular, justice requires that each person pursue some work activity appropriate for the social class he or she is a member of.
- The guardians (by way of the auxiliaries) make sure that each person is pursuing the path that's best for him- or her-self, and that's best for the city.



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 - The city: its people, rulers, and virtues
 - As the city, so the person
- 5 Answering Socrates' Question



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Overview of Plato's View on Human Nature and Virtues

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Why be Good?

- Plato proposes that a person has three parts, that is, he claims that the soul is *tripartite*.
- Each part of the soul corresponds to a social class in the city.
 - Moneymaker appetitive part of the soul;
 - Auxiliary Spirited part of the soul;
 - Guardian Reason (rational part of the soul).



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The Appetitive Part of the Soul

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Why be Good?

- The appetitive part of the soul, as its name suggests, contains our desires.
- When someone has an appetite, the appetite motivates that person to pursue it, regardless of whatever else might occur as a result of trying to do so.
- In *Republic* Book 9, Plato claims that appetites for food, drink, sex, visual pleasure, and so on can be expressed as a desire for money—so that wanting money is the most extreme appetite of all.



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The Rational Part of the Soul

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Why be Good?

- The rational part of the soul may be thought of as the opposite of the appetitive part of the soul.
- The rational part of the soul is used to formulate policies and plans.
 - That is, it is able to weigh risks and benefits, and to consider the consequences of a person's actions in light of his or her life as a whole.
- The rational part of the soul does not have any motivating power.
- Someone can recognize what's rational, but this does not give the person the will to do it.

Contrast with appetitive The appetitive part of the soul motivates a person to pursue the object of desire without regard to other consequences.



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The Spirited Part of the Soul

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Why be Good?

- The “spirited” part of the soul serves as a bridge between the rational and the appetitive.
- The spirited part of the soul is like the appetitive because it can motivate a person.
- It is not like the appetitive, however, because it can be controlled by reason.
- So: someone decides what to do using the rational part of the soul, and then uses the spirited part of the soul to create the willpower to do what his or her reason dictates.



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Example of Plato's View of Human Motivation

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Why be Good?

- Phaedra has a very strong desire for another 20 oz. mocha with whipped cream and caramel.
 - This is the *appetitive* part of her soul at work.
- She knows that this would cause her to stay up all night, given all of the other such drinks she's had that day as she studied for her Greek midterm. Also, she knows that the caramel and chocolate will make her blood sugar spike upwards and then down again—making her feel lethargic for a while. She decides that chamomile tea would be better.
 - This is the *rational* part of her soul at work.
- Despite her great urge to order the mocha, she restrains herself, pouring herself a cup of boiling water to make the tea.
 - This is the *spirited* part of her soul at work.
 - It provides her with the motivation (willpower) to do what she believes to be reasonable.



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Further Discussion of Motivation

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Why be Good?

- *Courage* is a paradigm example of the rational part of the soul influencing the spirited part to counteract the motivation provided by the appetitive.
- Example Phaedra is about to charge into battle, and she is overwhelmed with fear. Her appetite is for comfort and safety. Her reason tells her that it is her duty to fight. Confident in this knowledge, her reason influences the spirited part of her to counteract the appetitive. She continues to advance, despite her fear. By doing so, she has shown courage.



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Plato on Human Nature: Everyone has His or Her Place

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Why be Good?

- Plato's theory of the soul is a *theory of human nature*.
- It's a theory about what's required for someone to be a normal human being—for someone to be a person, he or she must have a tripartite soul.
- Plato's view is particularly strong because he claims that, by adulthood, the influence of the appetitive, spirited, and rational parts of a person's soul on that person will reach some proportion particular to that person, and cannot change.
- So, once a given person reaches adulthood, that person's social class is fixed by the relative influence of the appetitive, spirited, and rational parts of his or her soul.



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Parts of the Soul, Virtues for a Person

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Why be Good?

- Having described the parts of the soul as Plato sees them, we now move ahead to describe the virtues a person can have.
- These virtues parallel those of the city.
 - Wisdom
 - Courage
 - Temperance
 - Justice
- This is possible because the parts of the soul parallel the different social classes of the city.
- Plato concludes that the just person is one whose appetitive and spirited parts of the soul are controlled by reason, so that the three parts maintain a harmony-like state.



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Wisdom

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Why be Good?

- Someone is wise if his or her reason is well-developed, so that the person knows what to do in a given situation.
- This is analogous to wisdom in the city, which is wise because the guardians are able to apply their reason to the problems of law and policy in the city.



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Courage

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Why be Good?

- Someone is courageous if he or she is able, like Phaedra in the example above, to overcome fear generated by the appetitive part of the soul, and motivate him- or her-self using the spirited part of the soul to carry out a difficult task.
- This is just as the guardians can command the auxiliaries of the city to enforce laws and policies.



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Temperance

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Why be Good?

- Someone is temperate if he or she is able to satisfy his or her desires in a way that allows for him or her to achieve larger goals—one appetite alone does not overwhelm the person with desire for its object.
- Again, reason plays a role, acting by way of the spirited part of the soul to restrain excessive appetites.
- Examples. The person overcomes the following.
 - Gluttony Strong desire for food and drink.
 - Lust Strong sexual desire.
 - Sloth Laziness; strong desire for recreation.
 - Other sins and vices Greed, envy, pride, covetousness, and many, many others.



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Justice

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Why be Good?

- Someone is just (good; virtuous) if he or she is able to maintain all three parts of his or her soul working together under the direction of reason.
- That is, reason is used to determine what to do in each situation, so that
- The spirited part of the soul is informed about where to direct a person's motivation, so that he or she does what's right, and
- Appetites are curbed or encouraged as needed.



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 - Why be good, or, What's the value of justice?



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Review of the Problem Socrates is Trying to Solve

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Answering the question

- Recall Thrasymachus' view: justice is whatever brings advantage to the stronger.
- Since the stronger are usually in power, this amounts to the view that justice requires doing what will benefit the ruler.
- Socrates' aim is to show that this view is wrong, and that it is better for someone to be just than unjust.
- His strategy is to formulate an account of what is required for someone to be a just person and then to show that, according to that account, it is better to be just than unjust.
- Recall that there is a special concern to show that there's reason to be good *even if you can get away with not being good*.



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Overview of Socrates' Attempt at a Solution to His Problem

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Answering the question

- Socrates offers his response to Thrasymachus in *Republic* book 9.
- In that book, Socrates offers three arguments for the claim that it is better to be just than unjust.
 - 1 He argues that the tyrant is the most unhappy.
 - 2 He argues that the pleasures of reason and philosophy are the most valuable.
 - 3 He argues that it is in accord with human nature that a person's desires be held in check by reason.
- He then offers a general concluding argument that he believes shows that it's better to be just than unjust.



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The Unhappy Tyrant: Introduction

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Answering the question

- We now consider his first argument, which he believes shows that tyrants that rule a city are the most unhappy people.
- This is a solution to his problem, because tyrants are those that most resemble the ruler of a city in which all citizens are supposed to promote the happiness of the rule.
- So, what's a tyrant?
- We consider two types of tyrants.
 - 1 Tyrants that do not rule a city.
 - 2 Tyrants that do rule a city.



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The Tyrant

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Answering the question

- The central properties of this kind of personality are as follows.
 - The tyrant is completely ruled by his or her appetites: he or she will do anything to satisfy them—carry out any act of theft or betrayal of close friend or family member.
 - The tyrant comes to develop anxiety about whether his or her desires will be fulfilled, becoming crazed in his or her pursuit of them, attempting to guarantee that they will be satisfied.
- Tyrants that do not rule a city come to exert a corrupt influence on their local governments; Socrates suggests that they may take up mercenary life, surrounded by “yes men” and flatterers.
- According to Plato, the tyrant who comes to rule a city is particularly harmful to it—and particularly unhappy.



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The Tyrant's Unhappy Tyranny

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Answering the question

- Consider an argument for the claim that the tyrant who rules a city is particularly unhappy.
 - 1 The tyrant is particularly demanding and brutal as a leader: he or she believes that the city exists solely for the purpose of satisfying his or her desires. This is what a tyrant is—someone who is ruled completely by his or her appetites.
 - 2 If the tyrant is the ruler of a city, there is no one to come to his or her aid in case of insurrection by the slaves and citizens.
 - 3 In order to protect against insurrection, the tyrant must appease and flatter his or her slaves and others. Only by granting them special favors and privileges can the tyrant stay in power.
 - 4 The problem with this is that this is precisely the kind of life that the tyrant *doesn't* want to live: being a tyrant is supposed to mean using others to get what one wants.



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Plato's Conclusion About the Tyrant

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Answering the question

The tyrant's tyranny keeps him or her from being happy. Happiness for the tyrant means having all of his or her appetites satisfied; but because the tyrant must give up some satisfaction to maintain rule, he or she cannot have all appetites satisfied.



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Important Point About Plato's Argument

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Answering the question

Plato has solved the ring of Gyges problem

The tyrant will be unhappy no matter what—even if no one knows he or she is doing wrong—even if *he or she has the ring of Gyges*. This provides an answer to the question, “Why be good?”



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Types of Pleasure: A Second Argument Showing the Value of Being Good

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Answering the question

- This argument depends on the idea that each part of the soul has a distinct kind of pleasure associated with it.

Appetitive “Money-loving” and “profit-loving” pleasures—those associated with satisfaction of desires for food, sex, and drink.

Spirited “Victory-loving” and “honor loving” pleasures associated with winning public acclaim and performing acts of courage.

Reason “Learning-loving” and “philosophic” pleasures experienced in the course of gaining new knowledge, thinking through arguments and problems, and the like.



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What Type of Pleasure is the Best?

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Answering the question

- Plato now argues that the philosophic pleasures of reason are the best type.
- He determines that a philosopher is in the best position to judge which type of pleasure is best.
- This is because money-makers and spirited types have not experienced the pleasures of seeking wisdom, while the philosopher has experienced all three types.
- And we see that, according to philosophers, who are in a position to know, the pleasures of seeking wisdom are the best.



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Consequences for the Question, “Why be Good?”

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Answering the question

- Recall that Plato understands a good person to be someone who acts in accord with reason, keeping his or her appetites under control.
- He believes he has now shown that living in accord with reason will also bring the greatest pleasure—“philosophic” pleasure.
- So: he believes himself to have shown that being good will also bring happiness.
- It will do so, he believes, regardless of whether anyone knows about a person's behavior—if someone uses the ring of Gyges to get away with crimes of all kinds, he or she will still be unhappy.