

Chapter 2

Teleology and Tutelage in Plato's *Republic*

I

Plato's *Republic* is the first synoptic work of political philosophy that we know of in any language. Written in Athens during the middle period of his productivity, the *Republic*, like Plato's other works, is a dialogue – albeit one dominated by Plato's teacher Socrates – set several decades earlier, when Plato (429–347 BCE) was still in his teenage years and Athens was in the midst of a protracted war with Sparta. It is an astonishing piece of writing, one which lays out a distinctive conception of justice based on a radically hierarchical view of the political order.

In archaic Greek thought, as we have seen, justice was considered less important, at least as a quality of persons, than *arete* (“virtue” or “excellence”), which in the Homeric poems is associated closely with the qualities of a warrior. The pre-eminence of *arete* in the Homeric scheme of values was rooted in the need for protection. In a society of scattered households without centralized political authority or the rule of law, the individual with the outstanding warrior-like qualities of strength, cunning, and skill in the use of weapons would best be able to provide security to the (extended) household, and these qualities

accordingly were the objects of greatest admiration. This association of *arete* with the qualities required for success in battle was loosened at a later stage of Greek culture. In the poet Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the principal subject of which is how to be a successful farmer, to avoid famine, and to be prosperous, the concept of *arete* takes on a decidedly less militaristic tone than it had assumed in the earlier heroic compositions. In neither case, however, is *arete* intrinsically connected to justice. And in neither case is justice as highly esteemed as a quality of human beings as *arete*.

An early sign of change in this order of valuation occurs in a couplet attributed to the poet Theognis around the end of the sixth century BCE:

In justice [*dikaiosune*] is every virtue [*arete*] summed up;
Every man is good, Cynrus, if he is just [*dikaios*].

This statement, which Aristotle much later treats as a generally accepted and even anodyne proverb, expresses a view that was probably held by a minority at the time of its composition. The writer seems to be claiming that justice is not merely a necessary, but also a sufficient condition for virtue, a claim that is incompatible with Homeric values. The growth of cities had changed the character of Greek society. Cities are best able to flourish when their residents are inclined to cooperate by making and keeping agreements and by refraining from doing harm to one another, practices that cannot easily be reconciled with a scheme of values that exalts the virtues of outstanding warriors. This observation is especially applicable to Athens, which was developing into a major commercial power and a crucible for experimentation with democratic institutions. The writer appears to have grasped this problem, and accordingly suggests a striking revision of the values that dominated Greek culture at the time – one that places justice at the center of the Greek ethical universe and sets the stage for Plato's extended reflections on the nature of justice.

Ostensibly a dialogue, most of the *Republic* is in fact a virtual monologue in which Socrates lays out an elaborate vision of the characteristics of a just man and a just city, the kinds of education and training that are required for each, and the principal types of unjust (and inferior) souls and regimes. Before launching into this exposition, however, Socrates is presented with several preliminary conceptions of justice. Cephalus, an elderly and wealthy man, raises the topic and then passes on to his son Polemarchus, in whose home the conversation takes place, the task of developing his fragmentary ideas into a fuller account of what justice is. Thrasymachus, a sophist (an itinerant professional teacher of “wisdom,” modes of argument, and general education), then proposes an alternative view, which can be read as a denial that any such thing as justice actually exists. Finally, at the beginning of Book II (traditionally the *Republic* is divided into ten books, although this division may have been introduced by a later Greek scholar, not by Plato himself) Glaucon and Adeimantus, who were in fact the brothers of Plato, sketch a more elaborated theory of justice and challenge Socrates to show that it is wrong. This sketch is the springboard from which Socrates launches into his account.

Scholars of the *Republic* have sometimes described these preliminary conceptions of justice as versions of “common morality,” suggesting that they are merely explicit statements of common-sense views about justice to which ordinary people usually adhere. This description is not wrong, but it misses some of the artfulness of Plato's renditions of these views. Consider the account Plato offers through the mouthpiece of Polemarchus, who tells us in the dialogue that he is drawing on the authority of Simonides, a prominent Greek poet of the late sixth and early fifth century. According to this view, “justice [...] consists in restoring to every man what is his due” (331e). Pressed by Socrates to elaborate upon this statement, Polemarchus explains that “the obligation due from friends to friends is to confer a benefit upon them, and to do them no injury whatever” (332a), whereas “there is due [...] from an

enemy to an enemy what is also appropriate, that is to say, evil" (332b). In short, justice, which Socrates here calls a "craft" (*techne*), amounts to giving benefits to friends and doing harm to enemies (332d). Some further probing by Socrates leads to the following exchange:

For what need or acquisition would you say justice is useful in peace?

For contracts, Socrates.

And by contracts do you mean partnerships, or something else?

Partnerships, certainly. (333a)

After Socrates subjects Polemarchus' view to some searching criticisms, Thrasymachus intervenes vigorously to declare that "justice is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" (338c). He elaborates by explaining that he means that in each city the stronger and ruling element makes laws to its own advantage, declares those laws to be just, and punishes those who disobey them as lawless and unjust. Whereas Polemarchus' view seems to be based on at least a rudimentary notion of fairness, Thrasymachus' account suggests that there is nothing fair about justice at all. "Justice" is nothing more than a name human beings use in order to cloak and blur the hard edges of the power relations on which societies are founded.

Now consider the description of justice with which Glaucon challenges Socrates in Book II:

They say that to commit injustice is naturally a good thing, and to suffer it a bad thing, but that suffering injustice is more of an evil than doing it is a good; so that, after men have wronged one another and have suffered wrong, and have had experience of both, to those who are unable to avoid the one and attain the other it seems advantageous to form an agreement neither to commit injustice, nor to suffer it. And this, they say, is the beginning of legislation and of agreements with one another, and men soon learned to call the enactment of law just, as well

as lawful. Such, we are told, is the origin and true nature of justice; and it stands midway between the best, which is to commit injustice without paying the penalty, and the worst, which is to suffer injustice without the power of retaliation [. . .]. (358e–359a)

Glaucon goes on to suggest that it is a general attribute of human beings to want to outdo others by getting and having as much as one possibly can. Uncurbed, this attribute would undermine cooperation and lead to perpetual conflict. Justice, then, is a human invention designed to curb the natural inclinations of human beings, which would have radically unsociable consequences if left unchecked.

Glaucon's account synthesizes elements from both Polemarchus' and Thrasymachus' views. It portrays justice as a strictly human artifact, as Thrasymachus does, but as an artifact that is concocted through an agreement rather than imposed by the strong upon the weak. It retains the connection between justice and fairness that is found in Polemarchus' account. In fact three points about Glaucon's theory of justice are noteworthy. First, Glaucon's account presupposes that human beings are motivated primarily by a desire to promote their worldly interests. This observation is also true of the other preliminary conceptions of justice, in Books I and II, even though Cephalus introduces the topic of justice in the context of concern about the fate his soul will face after the death of his body. Second, it is explicitly an account of a relation among equals – in other words persons of equal standing. The laws and covenants it depicts as the foundations of justice are products of an agreement among those who possess small or middling amounts of power – those who are at least roughly equals in power – and it would be unreasonable to expect eminently powerful persons to adhere to that agreement. Third, the central theme of Glaucon's account (and of that offered by Polemarchus) is balanced reciprocity. Polemarchus' account emphasizes the requital of benefits for benefits and the return of harms for harms. Glaucon's account emphasizes the mutuality of the agreement

to abstain from doing harm to one another. Glaucon's theory of justice develops and sharpens the intuitions found in Polemarchus's account, without departing from the underlying theme of balanced reciprocity.

The theory of justice Socrates presents in the bulk of the *Republic* departs dramatically from Glaucon's view on all these points. Socrates argues that the interests that are relevant to justice are our ultimate interests rather than the mundane interests by which people are most often motivated in their everyday lives. The primary aim of justice is the cultivation of an order within individual human beings in which reason and wisdom rule strictly over human impulses and emotions. Further, Socrates argues that people are, by nature, deeply unequal – perhaps not in power, but in the qualities that are important for self-rule and for ruling others. So, insofar as the idea of justice applies to relations among human beings, it has to do essentially with relations among people who are unequal. Finally, Socrates shows little interest in the idea of balanced reciprocity, except as a foil against which to develop his own ideas. In his view, relations of justice among human beings are relations of command and obedience between unequals. These relations must be beneficial to all the affected parties – beneficial in the sense of bringing the souls of those parties more closely into conformity with the ordering prescribed by justice than they would otherwise be – in order to be just. Yet they cannot meaningfully be called reciprocal except by stretching the ordinary meaning of that term considerably.

II

It has long been noticed that, in moving from the preliminary conceptions of justice he sketches in Books I and II of the *Republic* to the distinctive theory he develops at length through the mouthpiece of Socrates in the remainder of the work, Plato actually changes the

subject. This observation has sometimes been used as a ground for criticism of Plato's argument. Yet Plato's implicit point is that these preliminary conceptions are so wrongheaded that changing the subject is the only possible way to ascertain true ideas about justice.

Socrates offers a hint at the character of his theory early in Book I, when he responds to Polemarchus' attempt to formulate an account of justice. Where Polemarchus had argued that justice entails doing things that are beneficial for friends and doing harm to enemies – a formula that reactivates an heroic code, which had long played an important role in Greek thought – Socrates insists that it cannot be the function of a just person to harm anyone; hence it is never just to inflict harm (335e). Since we normally think of justice as a good thing and of the doing of harm as a bad thing, Socrates' claim may seem either trivially obvious or innocuous. In reality, it is far from being either. For the idea of balanced reciprocity – an idea that had long been fundamental to thinking about justice and is endorsed, under various formulations, by Polemarchus and Glaucon – entails both the return of good for good *and* the requital of harm with harm. Socrates' claim is a repudiation of at least one half of this standard formula.

Plato emphasizes in various indirect ways the gulf between the preliminary conceptions of justice he sketches in the opening pages of the *Republic* on the one hand and the theory of justice he develops through the mouthpiece of Socrates on the other. For example, when Socrates concludes that it is never just to harm anyone, he then proposes that he and Polemarchus “fight together, both you and I, if any one shall maintain that Simonides, or Bias, or Pattacus or any other of the wise and cultured men” (335e) has ever maintained a contrary view. Notably, his focus is on the views that might be attributed to Simonides and other respected authorities rather than on the things these authorities actually said. The message of this proposal, which foreshadows his later proposals to censor and eventually to expel poets from the ideally just city he imagines, is that practical reasoning as shaped by literary sources and other respected authorities is corrupt and untruthful. The dialogue also makes it clear

that, in their exchange with one another, Socrates and Thrasymachus speak at cross purposes. Just as Thrasymachus assumes that people are invariably interested in gaining advantages over others, he is also interested in winning the argument – in effect, in scoring enough points to be declared the victor at the end of the speech-making. In contrast, Socrates, who maintains that people are ultimately drawn to their highest order interests, is interested in discovering the reality of justice. As the argument progresses, Thrasymachus is depicted as being dragged along with great reluctance, virtually against his will, by the logic of Socrates' argument, in the end assenting only in words to claims he does not want to accept. The difference between their approaches to argument is emblematic of the differences between their conceptions of justice.

As the exposition of preliminary conceptions of justice draws to a close, Glaucon and Adeimantus present Socrates with a dual challenge. Glaucon has sketched a theory of the origin and nature of justice, which he asks Socrates to refute if he can. Adeimantus insists that Socrates explain why people should be motivated to be just. Socrates takes up both challenges by connecting them intimately with one another.

Socrates' first move is to distinguish between the justice of an individual person and the justice of an entire city and to search for the latter first. His premise is that there are similarities between the "smaller" individual and the "larger" city, so that his inquiry into the justice of the latter will go a long way toward answering questions about justice in the individual. His second move is to reconstruct the origins of a city hypothetically, on the premise that in this way it will be possible to observe justice and injustice coming into being (as one might "observe" in a thought experiment).

Socrates then proceeds to describe the constituent elements of a city designed to meet human needs. This rudimentary city contains farmers and builders, weavers and cobblers, merchants, retailers, and laborers. Glaucon points out that this city, though healthy, supplies only the bare necessities of life to its members. So Socrates expands his

inquiry and enlarges his city to include such people as hunters, artists, poets, servants, and doctors (this is what is usually referred to as “the city of pigs”); and, since the enlarged city will require more land than the rudimentary city, this luxurious city will also require fighting men – “guardians” – whose function is to acquire and hold territory and to defend the city against aggressors. Finally, after extensive discussion of the training and education the guardians should receive – physical training for their bodies and music and poetry for their souls (376e) – Socrates concludes that a complete city would require yet another class of persons, to serve as rulers. These people, winnowed from the class of guardians on the basis of their devotion to the good of the city (412d–e), should receive additional education in mathematics and other subjects, an education culminating in philosophical training. Ultimately, then, Kallipolis – this ideal city we have watched come into being – will contain three major classes of people. The first class constitutes the ruling group, people who are exceptionally devoted to the interests of the city as well as responsive to the further training, especially training in philosophy, that Socrates believes is required for ruling in the fullest and most genuine sense, at least in the hypothetical project of Kallipolis. This class consists of guardians in the proper sense, or philosopher-rulers. The second class is that of soldiers, whose function is to fight on behalf of the city. After calling them “guardians,” Socrates adopts the label “auxiliaries” (414b, 434c) to distinguish them from members of the first group. The third class consists of farmers, craftsmen, traders, and service workers who provide for the needs and wants of the members of the city. Socrates refers to these people as the commercial or money-making class (434c).

Early in this discussion Socrates observes that different human beings are born with different aptitudes, in a way that is relevant to his search for justice in the city:

I am myself reminded, while you are in the very act of speaking that, in the first place, each one is not born in every respect like his fellow-being,

but differing in natural endowments, that one man has an aptitude for one task, another for another. Don't you think so?

I certainly do.

Well then, will a man be more successful when he follows many occupations, or when he confines himself to one?

When he confines himself to one, he [Glaucon] answered.

And further, I suppose, this too is evident, that a work comes to nothing when we let slip the right time for doing it.

Yes.

For the enterprise, I think, will not wait for the leisure of him who undertakes it, but the workman must keep to his task, making it his chief concern.

He must.

Hence we conclude that the several commodities are produced in greater abundance, of better quality and with more ease when every man turns from other pursuits and, following his natural bent, does one thing at the proper time.

Undoubtedly. (370a–c)

Doing “one thing at the proper time” is more replete with meaning than it first appears. Slightly later in his description of the origins of a city, Socrates observes:

We did not allow the shoemaker to attempt to be at the same time a farmer or a weaver or a builder, in order that our shoemaking work might be well done; and to every other workman we in like manner assigned one task to which he was naturally adapted, and in which, if he turned from other pursuits, and worked at it all his life, not letting his opportunities slip, he was likely to work successfully. (374b–c)

Plato's conception of the allocation of functions in a city is different from the notion of a division of labor in Adam Smith. The assumption that a craftsman should work “all his life” at a single task and be prevented from attempting any other line of productive work is starkly incompatible with the “system of natural liberty” Smith

championed and from the market principles most economists have favored from Smith's time onward. Unlike Smith and many other modern thinkers, Plato appears to have believed that people are born with dramatically and unalterably diverse capabilities. For him, it followed that a well-ordered city would compel its inhabitants to cultivate these distinctive capabilities and would prevent them from wasting their efforts by going in other directions.

It should come as no surprise that Plato's conception of justice in Kallipolis reflects this assumption. After completing his sketch of the city's main parts, Socrates returns to the task that led him to analyze its origins, which is to locate justice in the city. If the city he has described is completely good, he argues, then it will exhibit four virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Socrates suggests that, if we can discover the locations of the first three of these virtues, it should be possible to find the fourth through a process of elimination (427e). The guardians or philosopher-rulers of the city as he has sketched it possess wisdom; so, even though this class is likely to be the smallest in the city, if it rules wisely, then we can say that the city possesses good judgment and wisdom. Courage is a specific virtue of the auxiliary class (the soldiers); so, if that class is constituted and trained as it should be, the city possesses courage. Moderation, unlike wisdom and courage, spreads throughout the city as a whole, though it manifests itself in different ways in the city's various members. The rulers possess "simple and moderate desires which of course are in harmony with intellect and right opinion, and are under the leadership of reason," whereas "the desires of the vulgar crowd are held in check by the desires and wisdom of the noble few" (431c–d). Justice, Socrates argues, is then a remaining element, which makes it possible for the other three virtues in the city to flourish. And, since these virtues flourish when each person and each class devotes itself to its own work without meddling in the work of the other classes or having to endure meddling from the others, justice consists of each class (and, within the money-making class, of each craft) doing its own work and not meddling in the work of others. Platonic justice is assured when the imperative "to prevent any man from appropriating what belongs to

another or from being deprived of what is his own" (433e) is followed – and when what “belongs” to a man (or a class of people) is interpreted to mean, above all, the function of that person or class in a division of labor that is rigidly assigned on the basis of each citizen's natural and unalterable capabilities, whether that function is that of farmer, craftsman, trader, warrior, or philosopher and ruler.

Having reached this conclusion about the nature of justice in the city, Socrates returns to the problem of justice in the individual person. Like the city, he argues, the soul of an individual is divided into three main parts. (The notion of a soul in Greek thinking at this time was broader than the later Christian notion, and the idea that the soul is immortal was not assumed, although Book X of the *Republic* depicts just this idea.) The first of these is the rational part, which is the basis for the human ability to acquire knowledge and wisdom. The second is the spirited part of the soul, which is the source of anger and the basis of courage as well as of the impulse to attain eminence, glory, and honor. The third is the locus of bodily appetites, both necessary appetites like hunger and thirst and unnecessary appetites for various indulgences and pleasures.

Socrates connects each of these parts of the soul with a corresponding class in the city. The people who belong to the class of farmers and craftsmen, traders, and service workers are driven primarily by their appetites. The souls of the auxiliaries are dominated by the spirited part. In the rulers or philosopher-kings, the rational part of the soul is pre-eminent. Moreover, the natural and rightful relation among these parts is similar to the rightful relation among the three major classes in the city. The rational part should, rightfully, moderate the appetites and impulses of the others and rule over the whole. Although these parts of the soul are often at odds with each other (at more than one point, Socrates speaks of “the civil war of the soul” [440e; cf. 444b]), in a well-ordered soul the spirited part will align itself far more with the rational part than with the other, so as to maintain the whole in a harmonious condition. This idea of a well-ordered soul is a culminating point in Socrates' inquiry:

In reality justice is a principle of this kind, a principle, however, as it seems, not concerned with the outward performance of a man's actions, but with the inward performance, dealing in very truth with the man himself and his duties. Hence the just man will not permit any one of the parts of the soul to do its neighbor's work, or the several faculties within him to intermeddle with one another; but having really set his house in order, and having become his own master, he will be a law unto himself and will be at peace with himself, and will harmoniously combine the three elements, as if they were three terms of a musical scale, the lowest and highest and intermediate, or whatever others may intervene; and when he has bound all these elements together, and has in all respects become one out of many, a temperate and perfectly harmonized nature, thus equipped he will then proceed to act [. . .]. (443c–e)

III

In an argument that unfolds gradually from the first book of the *Republic* to its last, Socrates explains – hesitatingly at first, but unapologetically in the end – that his ideal of justice in the city and in the individual can be attained only if the rulers pursue a rigorous course of what I may call cultural purification, or indoctrination, and only if they are willing to apply the prescriptions of justice to the ruled, without any need to elicit the latter's consent. The case for indoctrination begins, as we have seen, with Socrates' assertion that it would be wrong to attribute to Simonides (or any other purportedly wise man) the view that justice entails inflicting harm on anyone, regardless of what Simonides or any of the others might actually have said (335e). Since justice, according to Socrates, cannot prescribe the doing of harm, it would be confusing and unhelpful to ascribe the view that it does so to thinkers who are held in high esteem.

Socrates develops the case for cultural purification by degrees. He claims that Homer, Hesiod, and other poets composed false tales that

must be censored for the purpose of educating the guardians (377–403). He explains that some kinds of falsehoods – those which convey underlying truths through stories that are not the literal truth (352–353, 415) – are useful because of their salutary effects on the souls of those who hear them. These falsehoods should be encouraged, among them the famous “myth of the metals” through which Socrates proposes to persuade the inhabitants of a just city that they have all been nurtured inside the earth with a mix of different metals that corresponds to the classes to which they are assigned (414b–415d). He suggests that the writers of tragedies praise tyranny and democracy, the two worst kinds of political regime, and that writings of this kind must therefore be banished from a just city (568). Finally, he concludes that hymns to the gods and eulogies to good people are the only kinds of poetry that should be permitted in the just city, since all other kinds (including Homer’s poems) appeal to and nourish the lower parts of the soul and undermine the higher, rational part (595a–608b). In short, the culture of a just city must be controlled through censorship so as to be truthful to ultimate realities. These realities, for Plato, are infused with value, so that to ascertain the truth is to grasp the correct valuation of things. Plato’s conception of truth, then, is not to be confused with (what we might think of as) the accurate representation of facts.

Coercion is a necessary tool in the kit of the rulers, or at least of the founders, of a just city – alongside indoctrination. Of course, an element of coercive power is common to every form of political rule. In comparison with ideas about the rightful uses of coercion that are widely held in modern democratic societies, however – if not in comparison with the practices of his own time – the thoughts Plato entertains about the rightful use of coercion are stunning. In the course of his discussion of the founding of a just city, Socrates suggests:

When the true philosophers, whether one or more, shall be placed in command of the city [...] regarding justice as the most important and

most indispensable of all things, and devoting themselves to its service [...] they will relegate to the country all the inhabitants who are more than ten years of age, and they will segregate the children of these from the influence of the prevailing customs, which are also observed by their parents; the children thus taken in hand they will bring up in accordance with the manners and principles of the true philosophers [...] (540d–541a)

The expulsion of all adults from the city would leave Socrates (or his philosophical kin who have attained power) free to form those few persons who are capable of being so formed, male and female, into the internally harmonious, rigorously self-controlled individuals who embody justice in its most complete sense. It would also allow him or them to shape the city's culture, its habits of thought, and its practices, so as to make them accord with the idea of justice as a relation of command and obedience between unequals, which Plato envisages as the rightful relation among persons in a just city.

The contention that the ideally just city would consist of three classes in a harmoniously ordered whole, in which the desires of the many are kept in check, in accordance with the wisdom of the few (the philosophers), amounts to a sharp critique of the principal forms of political association familiar to Greeks in Plato's time. During the fifth century, Athens had become the dominant commercial power in the Greek world as well as a laboratory of sorts for experimentation with democratic institutions. No great leap of imagination is required to see that the *Republic's* description of the third class (farmers, craftsmen, traders, and service workers) is rooted firmly in the reality of Athenian life during Plato's earlier years. Plato did not object to producing and trading, nor even (perhaps) to service occupations. But he did object to a regime in which the sorts of people whose lives are devoted to those activities, and whose souls are guided by the appetites that lead to their pursuit, are in command. Similarly, Plato's discussion of the class of soldiers or "auxiliaries" is replete with allusions to the militaristic regime in Sparta, with which Athens and its allies were

at war at the time in which the dialogue of the *Republic* is set. Plato's assessment of the values and ethos of Sparta seems more favorable than his view of Athens' democratic values, but the *Republic* makes it clear that the Spartan regime, too, falls far short of the just regime he envisages. As he says in his acerbic portrait of the indiscriminating, fickle type of character he believes to be characteristic of democratic regimes,

If at any time the charm of a military career attracts him, he straightway becomes a soldier; or if he admires the successful financier, he takes to money-making. In short, there is no order or law in his conduct, and he continues to lead this life which he calls agreeable, free, and fortunate. (561d)

The lack of a sense of direction and the misdirection that Plato depicts here stand in sharp contrast to the wisdom and purposefulness he attributes to his hypothetical philosopher-rulers.

Plato's tripartite theory of the soul is even more central to his purposes than his tripartite conception of a just city. In addition to linking each of the parts of the soul to a distinct class in the ideal city (the appetites to the money-making class, the spirited part to the class of soldiers, and the rational part to the class of philosopher-rulers), in Books VIII and IX Plato links the two lesser parts of the soul, the spirited and appetitive parts, to a series of inferior types of political regime. He bestows the label "aristocracy" (rule by the best) on his ideal city, reserving the label "kingship" for a similarly virtuous regime, which brings about a transition toward aristocracy. He then sketches four decreasingly virtuous types of regime (timarchy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny) and draws a portrait of a distinctive type of personality corresponding to each regime. A timarchy (or timocracy) is a city ruled by people whose souls are dominated by the spirited part and who are consequently motivated by the desire for honors and good reputation (*time*). Oligarchy is a type of regime ruled by people whose souls are ruled by their necessary appetites. In

democracy and tyranny, the rulers' souls are dominated by their unnecessary appetites. Plato lampoons the fickle, directionless, or misdirected characters of these people at length, devoting much of Book VIII to a discussion of democracy and virtually the whole of Book IX to tyranny, the worst of all regimes.

IV

By stepping back from Plato's exposition and placing it in the context of the Greek culture to which he was an heir, it becomes possible to see that his theory of the soul constitutes a critique of the norms and ideals of character that had prevailed within that culture for many generations. It is impossible for a careful reader to overlook the politically charged quality of Plato's description of democracy, or for the informed reader to fail to connect that description with the Athenian democracy that had thrived in his youth. The feckless characters whom he casts as democratic men and who are driven, indeed enslaved, by their corrupting appetites are drawn from his perception of those people whose commercial interests dominated Athenian politics through much of the fifth and fourth centuries.

The object of Plato's most trenchant critique, however, reaches back much further and extends over a wider territory. That object is the heroic ideal that had been disseminated and celebrated by Homer and other poets and dramatists, an ideal drawn archetypically around the figure of Achilles, the character who is central to the story in the *Iliad*. Although scholars of Greek heroic literature are disinclined to attribute any conception of the soul to Homer, at the risk of some anachronism we may think of the souls of Achilles and his fellow heroes as consisting of two significant parts. Like all other men, the heroes have appetites that they feel driven to satisfy. When Achilles acquires Briseis as one of the spoils of battle, he does so primarily to satisfy his lust. Only afterward does she become the focal point of his

momentous quarrel with Agamemnon, in which other motives come into play. In contrast to the souls of other men, however, the souls of the heroes are dominated by the desire to attain outstanding recognition from others – recognition, if possible, of a kind and degree that will cause their names to be remembered through the ages. This kind of desire is characteristic of the spirited part of the soul in Plato's division. Of course, heroic figures in Greek literature were also capable of calculation and ratiocination. The most notable example is Odysseus, whose ordeals as recounted in the *Odyssey* are at least as notable for their displays of Odysseus' cunning as of his strength and skill in battle. Yet in Greek heroic literature ratiocination is overwhelmingly the servant of the desire for eminence. It does not constitute the equivalent of a distinct part of the soul, with a distinctive motivational character. In effect, then, if one were to extend Plato's own terminology, one may wish to say that Greek heroic literature promoted a "bipartite" division of the soul (insofar as we can ascribe a conception of the soul to this literature): an appetitive part, which is shared by all and is dominant in ordinary men, and a spirited part, which rules the souls of the most admirable, most heroic figures.

This conception of the soul, or of the way in which soul was conceived before the concept of the "soul" (*psuche*) emerged, underpins the pre-eminence of *arete* in the Homeric system of values and is the central object of Plato's critique. In one sense, Plato's conception of justice is a reversion to an earlier type. *Arete* had been construed as an ideal fully realized in the characters of outstanding individuals. With the growth of cities, commercial activities, and orderly political institutions, that ideal began to give way, in the Greek order of valuation, to the idea of a set of rules designed to regulate the rights and transactions through which human beings coordinate the pursuit of their interests. These rules – the rules of justice, as formulated in Athens in the fifth and fourth century – provide much of the material out of which Plato constructed the preliminary conceptions of justice with which the *Republic* begins. Whereas the ideal of *arete* had focused on the outstanding individual, the idea of justice was equally applicable

to all. Plato pointedly turns his focus away from rules intended to regulate the actions of all, equally, and toward an ideal of character, an agent-centered conception of values that places at center stage the outstanding few who are capable of attaining that ideal.

Yet, in so doing, Plato proposes a radical alteration in the content of those values. The *Republic* seeks to replace the ideal of the warrior-hero, whose principal features could be captured by a hypothetical bipartite theory of the soul where the spirited pursuit of glory dominates, with an ideal of the philosopher-hero, who is described by Plato's tripartite theory of a well-ordered soul, dominated and motivated by its rational part. This theory is the core of Plato's conception of justice, which is concerned far less with the actual conduct of worldly affairs than with the pursuit of ultimate truths by those few individuals whose characters possess the intrinsic capacity for it. As Socrates observes at the end of Book IX, "the man of understanding will devote all the energies of his life to this end [...] he will honor those studies that impress these virtues upon his soul, and despise others" (591b–c). Even if the kind of city that is designed to cultivate the philosophical character does not and will not exist anywhere on earth, a vision of that city can still stand as an effective ideal for those who are capable of the philosophical life:

At least [...] in heaven there is perhaps laid up an exemplar of it which he who desires may observe, and contemplating it, found a city in himself. But it matters not whether this republic exists anywhere or ever will exist; for he will regulate his conduct after the manners of that city and of no other. (592b)

The contrasts between this Platonic conception of justice and ideas about justice that preceded it in both Greek and other cultures are sharp. In the first place, whereas the concept of retribution had played a central role in earlier ideas about justice, in Plato's theory that concept has no place. As we have seen, Plato does not shrink from suggesting that coercion be used in the cause of justice. But the uses of

coercion he envisages are not intended for the purpose of punishment or retribution. Coercion is used to create and to maintain a just order, a terrain Plato conceives of both as a natural thing and as a product of human construction (because it cannot come into being without deliberate human effort). For Plato in the *Republic*, justice is the object of a craft (*techne*). He compares the state of justice with the state of health, and he compares ruling with various crafts, including that of the physician and that of the sculptor. The attainment of justice in the city and in the soul is like the attainment of health in the body, and the means by which justice is attained are a matter of secondary importance. The objective is to help construct a just terrain and ultimately to improve the characters of persons by whatever means are best suited to achieve this objective. Insofar as these means must be forcible, they may be compared more accurately with a statesman's use of force to settle issues and prevent violent conflict than with the use of force in retribution. Insofar as they involve cultural purification, they can best be thought of as the measures a teacher might use to improve the characters and virtues of his pupils. But Plato's philosopher-rulers can perhaps most aptly be compared with physicians who must sometimes employ painful measures for the purpose of preserving or restoring their patients' health. Plato's conception of justice is one of strict tutelage designed to improve its subject, not one of behavior control intended merely to enforce rules.

Plato's conception of justice is striking, too, for its lack of any sign of interest in social justice. As we have seen, while it is possible to discover a rudimentary precursor to the concept of social justice in ancient ideas, that precursor differs significantly from familiar modern notions of social justice. The aim of "social justice" in the ancient world was to protect the weak and the vulnerable, not to bring about social equality. Yet Plato takes no notice of the poor, the vulnerable, or the weak. It is true that he proposes the abolition of private families and the institution of private property for the portion of his city's population which is to receive training so as to yield the city's defenders, and from which the class of philosopher-rulers is to be

drawn. These proposals have often been construed as harbingers of modern social democratic or socialist ideas; and in a narrow sense, focused on resemblances between Platonic and modern institutional ideas, this interpretation is not mistaken. But the purpose of Plato's proposals is almost diametrically opposed to that of these modern ideas.

The most consequential contrast between Plato's distinctive conception of justice and the more widely expressed ideas about justice that preceded (and followed) his theory is that, whereas the latter are based on the premise that the principal purpose of justice is to provide a framework for regulating the worldly interests of human beings, Plato's conception has rather a transcendent aim. For Plato, the aim of justice is the cultivation of an order in the city – and, most importantly, in the soul – that accords with the ideal form of justice. That form prescribes a hierarchy in which philosophical wisdom and judgment rule strictly over all other human impulses and capacities, both in the individual (for those who are capable of strict self-regulation) and in the city as a whole (for all). According to the ordinary conception – the conception Plato represents in several variants in the preliminary views he ascribes to Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon – the subject of justice is the regulation of rights, transactions, and more generally the mundane interests of human beings. That is why Cephalus suggests that justice is a matter of avoiding cheating or deception; why Polemarchus argues that justice is useful for forming and sustaining partnerships; why Thrasymachus claims that the idea of justice is merely a veil for the pursuit of otherwise naked self-interest; and why Glaucon associates justice with the making of laws and contractual agreements. Although these preliminary conceptions differ from one another significantly, they share the assumption that the primary subject of justice is the pursuit of worldly interests and that the primary purpose of a conception of justice is to articulate a framework for that pursuit. In contrast to this view, Plato proposes that the primary aim of justice is the pursuit of ultimate concerns.

"Justice" is the name he uses to designate the order, divine and natural, to which both the state and the gifted individual should aspire. His conception of *dikaiosune* dwelling in the state and in the philosophical individual is a close relation to the notion that the goddess *Dike* dwells in the city.

V

As we have seen, ancient ideas about justice prior to Plato are marked by two features that are noteworthy from a modern point of view: a preoccupation with retribution, and a readiness to confer the stamp of approval upon the hierarchies of power, status, and wealth that defined a society's terrain and were generally accepted as natural by inhabitants who were unfamiliar with alternative ways of life. These features are prominent in the heroic literature of ancient Greece as well as in a wide range of narrative and legal writings in other cultures of the ancient world.

The development of Athens into a commercial power and a laboratory for experimentation with democratic institutions in the fifth century BCE generated a set of ideas that eclipsed these long-standing features of thinking about justice. The idea that the society's terrain – its configuration of loci of privilege and deprivation and its norms regulating the relations among its various and differently situated members – is natural declined in favor of the alternative view that societal arrangements are overwhelmingly the products of human contrivance and convention. Thoughtful Athenians in the fifth century shared with more ancient writers the assumption that the principal purpose of thinking about justice is to help define a framework intended to regulate the pursuit of human beings' worldly interests. Yet they were far less inclined than those writers had been to accept inequalities and hierarchical relations as normal and natural. Although distinctions of power, status, and wealth persisted, they

came to be seen more as products than as presuppositions of human societal arrangements. Thinking about justice gravitated toward the idea of balanced reciprocity, and the concept of justice came to be regarded as applicable primarily or solely to relations among equals. Contractual relations among (putatively) equal individuals came to occupy much of the ground of justice, displacing hierarchical relations among unequal individuals and groups. While imbalanced reciprocity could still be considered the proper form that justice should take in some instances, balanced reciprocity came to be deemed the paradigmatic form of justice, a baseline departures from which must be justified by specific reasons.

It is from this milieu that Plato extracted the preliminary conceptions of justice he uses as a springboard from which to launch his distinctive theory of justice, a theory that turns on their heads the views he received from his Athenian predecessors and contemporaries. In contrast to those thinkers, Plato takes only passing notice of worldly interests. For him, the primary aim of justice is to cultivate the rightly ordered soul, and its secondary objective is to construct and maintain a city that is ordered so as to cultivate the rightly ordered soul. Such a city is based, most importantly, not on contractual relations among equals, but on hierarchical relationships between persons who are unequal in capabilities and in virtues. Similarly, the concept of reciprocity, whether balanced or otherwise, has little if any place in his vision of a just city. The relations of justice between human beings that are central to Plato's conception are relations of command and obedience between unequals. These relations are just only if they are beneficial to the characters of all parties, but they are emphatically not relations of reciprocity.

Plato's re-imagining of justice entailed two momentous innovations, each of which would earn a significant role in the dynamics of later ideas about justice. First, Plato's theory effectively abandons the notion of reciprocity as a central point of reference for thinking about justice. Earlier thinkers had generally considered justice a matter of balanced reciprocity among equals and imbalanced reciprocity

among unequals in power, status, and/or wealth. For Plato, the key form of justice is a hierarchical relation among the parts of a well-ordered soul and among the differently gifted classes of people in the city. This relation can be described, with some poetic license, as a highly exaggerated form of imbalanced reciprocity, in a way that may seem to preserve continuity with earlier ideas about justice. Yet in reality Plato's conception of this relation is not based on the concept of reciprocity at all. The relation he conceives of as an embodiment of justice is one of command and obedience, not one of reciprocal exchange, even if on unequal terms. Whereas earlier writings about justice invariably define some space within which the idea of balanced reciprocity among equals is applicable, Plato takes no interest in balanced reciprocity, and no real interest in reciprocity in any sense at all. The reason is that his theory of justice, unlike both ancient and contemporaneous views, focused relentlessly on putatively higher objectives. It is a teleological theory in the sense that it aims to bring the world, or least the city that is shaped in accordance with that theory and the individual who understands it, into harmony with their prescribed ends.

Second, Plato's theory helped to disseminate the idea that a society's terrain is itself subject to scrutiny and criticism rooted in a conception of justice. For the most part, ancient thinkers had assumed that a society's existing terrain provides an adequate basis for judgments about justice, because they believed or purported to believe that that terrain is natural and, above all, because they were unable or disinclined to envisage alternatives to it. The specific entitlements and obligations that were attached to persons and groups within that terrain served as an accepted basis for judgments about justice because no other basis was available nor, for the most part, was any such alternative basis even imagined. The sophists and others in fifth-century Athens had already rejected this traditional assumption long before Plato began to write as a philosopher. They held that the received institutions of Athens and other cities had been contrived by human beings for human convenience. Yet, in the long run, Plato's

Republic was a more influential vehicle than the work of the sophists for transmitting – especially in the Renaissance and beyond – the notion that a social terrain can be reshaped in accordance with ideas about justice.

Although the bulk of the text of Plato's *Republic* appears to have remained in circulation for some time after its composition in fourth-century Greece, most of that text eventually dropped out of circulation for close to a millennium, to be rediscovered and published in book form only during the Renaissance. We can only speculate about the course that ideas about justice might have taken had this work been available for wide study centuries earlier than it was. What we do know is that Plato's approach to justice, which entailed a re-imagining of the terrain of society as a whole, was eventually to re-emerge in a form that would have a significant impact on modern thinking about justice, including – despite Plato's intentions – the idea of social justice.

Chapter 3

Aristotle's Theory of Justice

I

Like Plato, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) believed that people are separated by dramatic differences in their natural capacities, so much so that, while some are qualified to rule or to participate in ruling, others – who comprise the bulk of humankind – are fit only to be ruled. For him as for Plato, the right relation between these two categories (the latter, according to Aristotle, consists of several diverse groups, including women, children, and people who are naturally suited to be slaves by virtue of their limited powers of reasoning) is one of command and obedience. For Aristotle, however, relations between those who are radically unequal are not the primary subject of justice. The concept of justice in Aristotle's theory applies primarily to a set of relations among men who are free and relatively equal to one another – relations that play a very slim role in the argument of the *Republic*.

The principal source for Aristotle's theory of justice is Book V of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, a book that is a companion to, and precedes, his *Politics* in expository order. The *Ethics* is essentially an inquiry into the nature of the good human life, and especially into the virtues that are integral to it. His theory of justice is couched within this (for him) much larger frame.

At the outset of his account, Aristotle takes pains to distinguish between “complete” (or “general”) justice and “partial” (or “particular”) justice. In one sense, he says, “we call things just which produce and secure happiness or the parts of happiness for the political community” (1129^b). Justice in this sense is “complete virtue or excellence [...] in relation to one’s neighbour” (1129^b). Here Aristotle quotes the line “in justice is every virtue summed up” from the poet Theognis. Complete justice, then, is an attribute of character, the virtue that is exhibited by human beings in their relations with others insofar as these interactions promote a good life and lead to happiness for the members of the political community as a whole.

In contrast, partial justice has to do with the share of benefits individuals should receive and of burdens they should bear. Among the benefits with which partial justice is concerned, Aristotle specifically mentions honor, material goods, and security. Although he emphasizes burdens less than benefits, it is clear that partial justice is concerned also with the share of burdens and harms that individuals should bear. Injustice in the partial sense occurs when a person receives an unfair share of benefits or burdens.

Aristotle’s decision to begin his discussion with this distinction between different types of justice is a typical example of his philosophical method and entails a departure from Plato’s approach to philosophy. In the *Republic*, Plato insists that justice must be one thing only, being always the same in any and all of its manifestations. Plato’s search for justice therefore proceeds by way of refutation and exclusion, that is, by showing what justice is *not* in order to arrive at a univocal view of what it *is*. Aristotle’s approach, in contrast, accepts that justice may be several different things, and especially that it may be seen in a number of different ways, each of which may contain significant truth.

Aristotle’s notion of complete justice is very broad. It corresponds roughly with the idea of rightness in modern English and denotes the quality or qualities of character that lead people to do the right thing,

broadly speaking, whether that involves being fair or exercising good judgment in some other way. In contrast, his notion of partial justice is considerably narrower and corresponds roughly with the ordinary concept of justice or fairness in English. Although the notion of complete justice is important to his account of the virtues, the central subject of Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is partial justice, which is a part of complete justice: the part that has to do with fairness. I shall follow Aristotle by focusing in this chapter on partial justice, namely on what we, today, would call “justice,” as distinct from the broader subject of rightness – bearing in mind, however, that the larger context of his discussion is provided by the idea of complete justice and that Aristotle defined the idea of complete justice by reference to the idea of a good life for the members of the political community as a whole. For the sake of simplicity, I shall usually apply the label “justice” to this topic, dropping the more cumbersome “partial justice.”

It is usual in discussions of Aristotle's views on justice to follow his own order of exposition. After drawing the distinction between complete and partial justice and declaring his intention to focus on the latter, Aristotle proceeds to distinguish two forms of it, namely distributive justice and corrective justice. He then goes on to discuss several additional topics: the relation between justice and reciprocity, justice in the political sense, and others. Most commentators have concentrated their attention on Aristotle's comments on distributive and corrective justice, treating the subsequent topics as appendages, despite the fact that these later discussions occupy about two thirds of his account overall. This approach has led to some curious difficulties, especially in treatment of Aristotle's discussion of justice and reciprocity. Many of his interpreters have concluded that this discussion is anomalous. Some have decided that it is distinctly out of place, a digression that might have been better located somewhere other than in the context of his discussion of justice.

In reality, Aristotle's discussion of the relation between justice and reciprocity is the anchor for his entire theory of justice in the sense of

fairness in individuals' shares. The concept of reciprocity is the fixed point to which his ideas about (partial) justice, with all the ebb and flow and qualifications to which those ideas are subject, are tethered. Before considering his ideas about distributive and corrective justice, then, let us take a moment to understand the basic character of Aristotle's conception of reciprocity.

Aristotle opens his discussion of the relation between reciprocity and justice by noting that "some think [. . .] that reciprocity is without further qualification just, for the Pythagoreans defined justice unqualifiedly as reciprocity" (1132^b). He quickly goes on to suggest that this understanding of justice cannot be correct, since in many cases reciprocity and the just are not identical. For example, if an ordinary citizen strikes a police officer or other public official while the latter is on duty, justice is not served if the official merely returns the blow. Nor is justice done if a private citizen strikes back when struck by an official while the latter is acting to carry out his duties. Aristotle's point seems to be that, when the relations between parties are hierarchical or unequal in some way, justice does not take the form of reciprocity – or, more precisely, it does not take the form of (what I have called) balanced reciprocity, which entails the return of benefits or harms of equal value to those which one has received.

Many readers seem to have concluded that Aristotle's dismissal of the Pythagorean association between justice and reciprocity is the end of the matter, and that the sole conclusion to which he wants to lead his readers is that justice does *not* consist in reciprocity. Yet this conclusion is not consistent with the text. Immediately after the arguments discussed above, Aristotle offers the following observations, all within the context of his opening question about how we should conceive of justice "unqualifiedly":

In associations based on mutual exchange the bond of union is this sort of justice, namely reciprocity in accordance with a proportion rather than with arithmetic equality. In fact it is by proportional requital that the city holds together. People seek either to return evil for evil – for

otherwise they consider themselves reduced to slaves – or to repay good with good, for otherwise there is no mutual contribution, and it is by mutual contribution that men hold together. (1132^b–1133^a)

Let us consider this crucial set of claims in some detail. What points is Aristotle trying to convey in this passage?

First, Aristotle associates justice with “reciprocity in accordance with a proportion” rather than with (what he alleges to be) the Pythagorean conception of reciprocity as an exchange of arithmetically equal values. In other words, an exchange will be just if the things exchanged are in proportion to the merits, desert, or contributions of the parties to the exchange. If the parties in question are strict equals and enter into a relation of exchange with one another, then justice is done when the benefits they exchange are of equal value. In this case the just relation between these two parties is one of balanced reciprocity. If, on the other hand, the parties are unequal in merit of the kind that is relevant to their transaction, then justice is served when the benefits exchanged differ in value in proportion to the different merits of the parties involved. In this case the just relation between these parties is one of imbalanced reciprocity, where the extent of the imbalance can be determined by comparing their respective merits. Justice is very much a matter of reciprocity, though that reciprocity is not necessarily of the “arithmetic” (as Aristotle calls it) or balanced sort.

Second, Aristotle's focus here is on collectivities in which people associate with one another for the purpose of exchange. Now a political community in the true sense, for Aristotle, is an association based on mutual exchanges that enable its members to flourish and to be self-sufficient as a collectivity. Such an association is made up of men who are free-born and stand in relations of relative equality with one another, at least in the sense that none has, by nature, the right to command any of the others to do his bidding. Human beings who are not at least relative equals of the members who make up a political community, such as women, children, and slaves, are not parties to

Aristotle's scheme of justice on the basis of proportional reciprocity. As we shall see, there is a qualified sense in which the relations between free adult men and those whom Aristotle believes to be their radical inferiors by nature can be said to be just or unjust, but the central and unqualified concept of justice applies only to the relations of proportional reciprocity among relative equals.

For Aristotle, then, ideas about justice – that is, about the kind of justice that deals with the fairness of individuals' shares – are concerned centrally with relations among men who are free and equal to one another in the sense that none is entitled by nature to command over any of the others. The focus of these ideas is upon the shares individuals receive – both shares of benefits, such as honors, material goods, and security, and shares of burdens or harms. And the concept to which any adequate theory of justice must be tethered is the concept of reciprocity.

II

Aristotle divides justice – understood as fairness in individuals' shares – into two forms, distributive and corrective. These forms are based on two distinct variations of the concept of reciprocity. Let's look first at justice in its distributive form.

Aristotle introduces the topic of distributive justice by saying that it is

exhibited in distributions of honors, property, or anything else which is divided among the members of the community. For in such matters men may receive shares that are either equal or unequal to the shares of others. (1130^b)

This introduction is subject to two significant qualifications. First, although Aristotle is interested principally in analyzing justice in the context of the political community, the political community is not the

only kind of association based on mutual exchange that is formed by men who are relative equals. The concept of distributive justice applies to any such association, and not merely to the political system. Second, the terms translated here as “equal” and “unequal” are *isos* and *anisos*, which are equally well translated in some contexts as “fair” and “unfair.” So Aristotle seems really to be saying that it is possible for a man to have a share that is fair or unfair in comparison with his neighbor’s share, where a “fair” share need not necessarily be an “equal” share.

Aristotle explicates the notion of distributive justice by sketching a simple illustration. The just, he points out, involves at least four terms, namely two persons and two shares. Distributive justice is achieved when “as the one person is to the other person, so is the one thing to the other thing” (1131^a) – in other words, when the ratio between the things in question is the same as the ratio between the persons. If two persons are equals, then their shares should be equal as a matter of distributive justice. If the persons are not equals, then their just shares will be unequal in proportion to the inequality between them. (Bear in mind that, for Aristotle, all the persons who come into play in anything to do with distributive justice are *relative* equals in the sense that none is entitled to command the others. Nevertheless, these relative equals may be, and often are, unequal in merit or desert.)

Aristotle offers only the most abstract account of the basis on which the equality or inequality of persons should be determined. He argues that

all admit that in distributions justice should be determined on the basis of desert (or merit), though all do not acknowledge the same criterion of desert, democrats claiming that this criterion is free birth, oligarchs that it is wealth and sometimes birth, and aristocrats that it is virtue or excellence. (1131^a)

In his discussion here, Aristotle makes no attempt to adjudicate among these alternative criteria of desert. That task is left to his

Politics, a work that appears to be the product of a significantly later stage in his thinking. In Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he offers only a bare framework for thinking about questions of distributive justice.

Yet Aristotle is not wholly silent about the basis on which just distributions should be made. After declaring that “justice in the distribution of public possessions is always governed by the proportion described above,” he goes on to observe that,

if the distribution is made from public funds, it will be in proportion to the contributions the members have made, and the unjust opposed to this justice is that which violates the proportion. (1131^b)

Aristotle here suggests that, at least in the case of funds, the theory of distributive justice points to an unambiguous conclusion, namely that the participants in a common enterprise should reap benefits in proportion to their contributions to that enterprise.

Although Aristotle is clear that the idea of distributive justice can be applied to many types of common enterprise, the most important type of enterprise for him is the political association. A political association is constituted by human beings who share a common life in order to maintain self-sufficiency and to attain a good life. These ends are attainable only by way of contributions that are necessarily diverse in kind. The production of material goods is one kind of contribution. The provision of services is another. But, since human flourishing is constituted through participation in a range of activities – including, for example, the activities characteristic of friendship – the ends of a political association can be attained only if these economic contributions are complemented by a range of contributions of non-economic kinds.

It is plausible to infer, then, that, since the ends of a political community can be attained only through contributions that are diverse in kind, differences of opinion about the basis of desert in the community are, at bottom, differences about the comparative

worth of diverse kinds of contributions to the common enterprise of the political community. As he demonstrates in his chapter on the relation between justice and reciprocity, Aristotle is aware that it is difficult to make quantitatively meaningful comparisons between the values of things that differ in kind (1133^b). In relations of exchange between people who produce different kinds of goods, this difficulty can be addressed through the introduction of money, which makes it possible to measure the values of diverse goods by a single standard. This is the reason why it is possible to draw unambiguous conclusions from the theory of distributive justice in cases that involve the distribution of funds. In the case of contributions to a political community that are resistant to valuation in monetary terms, however, no such common standard is readily available. This may be one reason why “battles and complaints arise in consequence of equals having and possessing things which are not equal, or persons who are not equal having things which are equal” (1131^a). In the absence of a common standard to which to appeal in adjudicating competing claims, such conflicts are probably inevitable.

Aristotle's theory of distributive justice appears to be underpinned by a version of what later came to be called the contribution principle, which states (roughly) that it is just for people to reap rewards from a common enterprise that are proportional in value to the contributions they have made to that enterprise. Some, but not all, of this principle's nineteenth-century champions (Herbert Spencer among them) seem to have thought that all contributions can be quantified in monetary terms and that the contribution principle can best be realized through an unrestrained free market system. The version of the contribution principle we may ascribe to Aristotle occupies a completely separate territory from this market-based conception. Indeed, it is a point of considerable importance in his theory that, in the absence of a common standard by which to compare the values of diverse contributions, this unambiguous principle will not lead to similarly unambiguous practical prescriptions and that it is only through political processes that such prescriptions can be devised fairly.

Nevertheless, the anchor point of the most plausible interpretation of Aristotle's theory of distributive justice is a version of the contribution principle in which the concept of a contribution is construed expansively rather than in narrow economic terms.

III

Let us turn to Aristotle's account of corrective justice. This concept, as he envisages it, applies to private transactions of two types. *Voluntary* transactions are those into which all parties enter voluntarily. Aristotle illustrates this category with examples that are financial in character: sale and purchase, lending funds with or without interest, renting, giving security, and depositing funds in trust. The second category is comprised of *involuntary* transactions. In modern English we normally apply the term "transactions" to voluntary exchanges, but for Aristotle any interaction between two or more persons that involves a transfer of benefits or harms is a transaction to which principles of justice apply.

Involuntary transactions are of two kinds. Some, by his account, involve clandestine activities, such as theft, adultery, poisoning, assassination, procuring, the enticement of slaves to escape their bondage, and bearing false witness. The other kind of involuntary transaction involves the use of force; examples include assault, imprisonment, murder, robbery, maiming, defamation, and libel.

Aristotle introduces his account of corrective justice by saying, immediately after he completes his discussion of distributive justice, that "the other kind of justice is the corrective kind" (1131^b). This claim, together with his earlier statement distinguishing justice into two (and only two) forms, distributive and corrective, seems to have misled some of his readers and is probably a principal reason why many have treated his subsequent discussions in this chapter – that is, the bulk of the text – as a series of appendages to his central arguments

about justice. In fact Aristotle's account of corrective justice in transactions presupposes a conception of just transactions. For transactions are subject to correction only when something has gone awry. When Aristotle focuses on distributive and corrective justice, what he seems to have in mind is the kind of justice that is effected by the self-conscious actions of an agent: in the case of distributive justice, some person or persons who have responsibility for distributing honors, material goods, security, or the like; in the case of corrective justice, a judge or an arbitrator. In the latter case, the self-conscious actions of an agent are required as a matter of justice only when the transactions for which correction is sought have been unjust.

Let us first consider corrective justice in relation to voluntary transactions. In order to grasp Aristotle's conception of this kind of justice, we must first understand his ideas about just transactions, which are laid out in his chapter on the relation between justice and reciprocity. We must therefore probe a little more deeply into his claim (discussed in Section I above) that justice "without qualification" consists of proportional reciprocity.

Although the finer points of Aristotle's account are beyond the scope of this book, the broad outlines of his view are plain enough. Aristotle illustrates his notion of reciprocal exchange made on the basis of a proportion through a series of examples: a builder and a shoemaker exchanging a house for some shoes; a physician and a farmer; a shoemaker and a farmer. In order to be equal and fair, any exchange between any of these pairs will have to be proportional. Specifically, Aristotle argues that proportional reciprocity will have been achieved when "the product of the shoemaker is to the product of the farmer as the farmer is to the shoemaker" (1133^a). Aristotle assumes that producers in different professions or trades are unequal in some respect that permits comparisons among them, for "it is not two physicians between whom a community is formed, but a physician and a farmer, and in general those who are different and unequal" (1133^a). Similarly, he appears to assume that products possess inherent value and that the values of qualitatively different

products can be compared meaningfully through the medium of a common currency.

Suppose the worth of the builder (as measured by whatever standard enables comparisons among producers in different professions) is twice as great as the worth of the shoemaker. (Bear in mind that, for Aristotle, the builder, the farmer, and the shoemaker are all relative equals – that is, they are free as well as equal in the sense that none is entitled by nature to command the others.) According to Aristotle's formula, then, an exchange between them of shoes for a house will be fair if the inherent value of the shoes the builder receives is twice as great as the inherent value of the house he relinquishes to the shoemaker. The relation between the builder and the shoemaker (2:1) will then correspond to the relation between the given number of shoes and that of the house (2:1).

Aristotle does not explain the basis on which the relative values of the builder and the shoemaker, or of any pair of professionals or tradesmen, is determined. Yet it is reasonable to suppose that he may have been thinking about the contributions these professionals or tradesmen make to the overall stock of goods and services available to the members of the political community. Suppose that the builder in the example above is twice as productive as the shoemaker. The builder's high productivity accounts for his higher value than the shoemaker. It also explains why, as a matter of justice, the builder is entitled to receive shoes from the shoemaker worth twice as much as the house he transfers to the shoemaker. The builder contributes twice as much value to the overall stock of goods, and is justly entitled to receive twice as much value as the shoemaker in return. This, I suggest, is what Aristotle means by "reciprocity in accordance with a proportion rather than with arithmetic equality." Proportional reciprocity, in this context, is a form of the contribution principle in which the concept of a contribution is construed expansively – the same principle that appears to underpin his theory of distributive justice.

Now we may return to Aristotle's account of corrective justice in transactions, a form of justice that is predicated on the assumption

that some injustice in transactions – some departure from Aristotle's principle of proportional reciprocity in exchange – has occurred. The principal feature of corrective justice is that it is based on what Aristotle calls "arithmetic" equality, not proportional equality. Unlike in the kind of justice that underpins the mutual exchanges holding the political community together, and unlike in distributive justice, in corrective justice the relative values of the parties' contributions to the overall stock of the political community have no place in ascertaining what constitutes corrective justice. "It makes no difference whether a good man defrauds a bad man or a bad one a good one, nor whether it is a good man or a bad one who commits adultery" (1132^a). When one person has defrauded another, it is as if a line were divided into two unequal parts, the perpetrator possessing the larger part and the victim possessing the shorter part. A judge who has been called upon to correct the injustice committed will take the excess away from the perpetrator and restore it to the victim, with no regard either for the characters of the parties or for the value of their contributions.

Aristotle's assumption is that the worth of the parties to a dispute (where worth is determined by the value of their contributions to the common enterprise) has already been taken into account in determining the shares of goods they possess prior to the unjust transaction. It would be a perversion of justice, then, to take this factor into account again, in the course of adjudicating their dispute. The premise of corrective justice is that each party possessed a fair share prior to an unjust transaction. The aim of the adjudicator or judge should be to restore the equilibrium that existed between the parties prior to the injustice. The judge does this by depriving of his unfair gain the party who has benefited and by restoring to the aggrieved party any unfair loss. In the terms I suggested in an early chapter of this book, the principle underlying Aristotle's theory of corrective justice in relation to voluntary transactions is based on the concept of balanced reciprocity.

Now we may turn to Aristotle's ideas about corrective justice in relation to involuntary transactions. Many scholars have suggested

that, in his theory of justice, Aristotle has nothing to say about issues of punishment or retributive justice, a point that more than a few of these scholars regard as an oddity at best and as a serious omission at worst. In fact the oddity is that this view, which can be traced back at least as far as a widely used 1926 edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, would ever have spread as widely as it has. The error may stem from an inclination to impose the modern distinction between crimes and torts anachronistically onto the writings of Aristotle, who lived in a society that entertained no such distinction. It seems clear enough that, although he offers few examples to flesh out his ideas about retributive justice, Aristotle has retributive justice in mind in his discussions of both proportional reciprocity (the basis for his thinking about partial justice generally) and corrective justice. The term that is translated as “reciprocity,” *to antipeponthos*, means literally “suffering in return for one’s actions” and is close in meaning to the well-known rule of reciprocity in retributive justice, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth [...]” Toward the beginning of his discussion of justice as reciprocity, Aristotle cites the rule of Rhadamanthys (the mythical son of Zeus and Europa), “if a man suffers that which he did, right justice will be done” (1132^b), though he does not endorse the Pythagoreans’ interpretation of this rule. When he argues that simple, balanced reciprocity is insufficient as a rule of justice in the case of an ordinary man who strikes a public official, he seems to be suggesting that some form of punishment for the man would be just. And in his discussion of corrective justice (about which we shall see more below) Aristotle states that,

when one man strikes and the other is struck, when one man kills and the other is killed, the action and the suffering have been divided into unequal portions, and the judge endeavors to equalize the profit and the loss by a deduction from the former. (1132^a)

Aristotle’s reasoning here evokes the notion that the just response to crime is to restore the equilibrium that has been disturbed by its

commission – a notion that, by his time, had long been the dominant way of thinking about the subject of retributive justice. It seems clear enough that he did not ignore the subject.

As in the case of voluntary actions that have gone awry and hence require correction, Aristotle assumes that, prior to an involuntary transaction, each party involved possessed his fair share of any goods that might be at issue. Likewise, his thinking about corrective justice in relation to involuntary transactions assumes that, prior to the relevant “transaction,” the parties involved stood in a relation of justice toward one another. Aristotle assumes it to be self-evident that theft, assault, murder, and other acts in which a perpetrator inflicts harm on an unwilling or unknowing victim are unjust.

Corrective justice as applied to involuntary transactions “treats the parties as equals, considering whether one has inflicted an injustice and the other has suffered it” (1132^a). In the case of an offender who has wounded or killed another person, this equalization – or restoration of equilibrium – is achieved by inflicting harm on the offender. Aristotle does not offer a formula for determining precisely the kind or magnitude of the harm that should be inflicted on offenders. For him, the key point is that the harm that perpetrators unjustly inflict on victims should be requited by a harm that is imposed on the perpetrators in return, “for otherwise they [the victims] consider themselves reduced to slaves” (quoted above). As a general rule of thumb, however, he suggests that the magnitude of the punishment or loss imposed on the perpetrator of an unjust harm should be in “arithmetic” proportion with (that is, equal in value to) the magnitude of the loss or harm inflicted by the perpetrator.

The most plausible interpretation of Aristotle's theory of corrective justice in regard to involuntary transactions – his theory of retributive justice – is that it calls for something like an eye for an eye or *lex talionis*, or, in a more generalized form, for balanced reciprocity. The fundamental principles underlying both parts of his theory of corrective justice appear to be rooted in the concept of balanced reciprocity.

IV

Although the idea of justice is applicable to any association of relative equals that is based on mutual exchange, the most important locus of justice is the political community:

what we seek is not merely justice in the unqualified sense, but also political justice, i.e. the justice of free and (proportionally or arithmetically) equal citizens living together with a view to the satisfaction of wants. (1134^a)

Aristotle subdivides what is just in the political sense into two categories: what is just by nature and what is just by convention. This distinction has been a source of considerable puzzlement on the part of Aristotle's interpreters.

The most common interpretation of Aristotle's notion of what is just by nature (or "natural right") identifies that notion with Stoic, Christian, and rationalist conceptions of natural law, all of which treat natural law as an eternal, universal, and immutable standard of justice. According to this view, Aristotle's theory is an early – perhaps the earliest – formulation of a conception of justice independently of any particular legal system, one that can be invoked to evaluate, criticize, and in some instances condemn existing legal provisions as unjust.

We shall see below that Aristotle's theory of justice is indeed adorned by an aureole of ideas that purport to transcend the provisions of any particular existing system of positive law. However, his notion of what is just by nature is not the primary source of this light. That notion at best gives off only a faint glow, in comparison with the bright beams associated with the Stoic and later ideas of natural law. We can see why by considering two features of that notion.

First, unlike many other writers, including some of the Greek writers of his own time, Aristotle classifies what is just by nature as a subdivision of what is just in the political sense. If that notion were

similar in status to the Stoic and later ideas with which it is often compared, then it would have made much better sense for Aristotle to characterize it as independent of, and in a sense prior to, what is just in the political sense. That he does not do so suggests strongly that his notion of what is just by nature is not intended to play the role the idea of natural law or natural right was to perform in many later systems of ideas.

Second, Aristotle insists that what is just by nature is subject to change – indeed, that what is just by nature is as much subject to change as what is just by convention (1134^b). This claim – which has been a stumbling block for interpreters, from Thomas Aquinas onward, who see Aristotle as a source or founder of the theory of natural law – is irreconcilable with the usual conception of natural law as eternal and immutable.

The best interpretation of Aristotle's distinction is relatively simple. What is just by convention refers to matters about which we would be indifferent in the absence of a set of rules that we can regard as matters of agreement or convention. Aristotle suggests the example of the choice of animal (goat or sheep) that should be deemed suitable for a sacrifice. We might add the example of a choice between driving on the right or on the left side of the road. Inherently, it makes no difference whether we select goats or sheep to be the subjects of sacrifice, no more than it does to select the left or the right side of the road for forward travel. Once an agreement is reached, however, that choice becomes a convention and its violation becomes an injustice. In this case, justice and injustice are constituted by the adoption of a convention.

Conversely, what is just by nature refers to matters about which we are not indifferent, even in the absence of a set of agreed rules. It seems obvious that we would not be indifferent to acts of assault or murder, even if no legal provisions were in existence to prohibit and punish those acts. More generally, actions that contribute to human flourishing – actions that produce and preserve happiness for the social and political community – are just by nature, whereas actions that detract

from the preservation or happiness of the community are unjust by nature. Because the kinds of actions that contribute to the preservation and happiness of the political community vary from one time and one situation to another, what is just (and unjust) by nature is subject to change. Further, and perhaps more importantly for Aristotle, each particular political community differs from every other political community in some respects. The kinds of actions that contribute to the preservation of one kind of political community differ from the kinds that contribute to the preservation of another kind, so that actions that are just in one sort of community may be unjust in another. Yet, at any given time or in any given circumstance, the set of actions that contribute to human flourishing is relatively clear. As Aristotle says, it is not difficult, except perhaps at the margins, to distinguish between those things which are unjust by nature and those which are unjust by convention alone (1134^b).

If Aristotle's conception of natural law is not intended to constitute an eternal, universal, and immutable standard of justice, does anything in his theory yield a standard to which one might appeal in order to assess the justice or injustice of existing laws? Or is the concept of justice in Aristotle so parasitic on the concept of law that justice for him is virtually synonymous with law?

Some passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggest the latter conclusion. For example, near the beginning of Book V Aristotle comments that the "'just' then includes what is lawful and fair, and 'unjust' is what is unlawful and unfair" (1129^{a-b}). A few lines later, he observes that "it is plain that all laws are in a sense just. For laws are the products of legislation, and we acknowledge that each of the products of legislation is just" (1129^b). There is a sense, then, in which what is lawful is just, according to Aristotle.

However, it is clear from other parts of his discussion that actual positive laws can be imperfect, and even, in some cases, straightforwardly unjust, in a sense of justice that does not identify the just strictly with the legal. (Recall that, for Aristotle, justice may be envisioned in a number of different ways, each of which may contain

significant truth.) For example, Aristotle observes that “the laws pronounce upon all subjects [...] enjoining some things and forbidding others, the rightly established laws doing this rightly, and the extemporized law with less propriety” (1129^b). Here he seems to acknowledge that actual laws are sometimes flawed, even in cases in which the lawmakers were well intentioned. Moreover, Aristotle points out that even the best-framed laws are sometimes imperfect when applied to specific cases. Laws by nature are general prescriptions or injunctions, but “there are some cases for which it is not possible to provide in a statement which is general” (1137^b). That is why conclusions based strictly on law can justly be set aside in the interest of equity when a judge finds that the laws fail to make sense in a particular case. “Though the equitable is just, it is not legal justice, but a rectification of it” (1137^b).

Further, Aristotle notes:

People conceive that the power to act unjustly rests with themselves, and therefore that to be just is easy. But this is not the case [...] [similarly,] people assume [...] that it requires no special wisdom to discriminate between things which are just and those which are unjust, because it is not difficult to apprehend such matters as are provided for by the laws. But it is only by happenstance that actions prescribed by law are identical with those dictated by justice. To be just, actions must be done and distributions must be made in a particular manner, and the knowledge required to do these things is more difficult to attain than knowledge of what makes people healthy. (1137^a)

In this passage Aristotle makes it clear that, even at their best, laws are inherently imperfect expressions of justice. To understand the just and the unjust requires wisdom, not merely knowledge of the law, because laws are not inherently just, but are made so only by being crafted carefully and judiciously.

The most serious discrepancies between law and justice arise when the regime lacks the key attribute needed to support justice “without qualification,” namely, a common life among men who are free and

relatively equal to one another. In the absence of this basis for justice and law,

political justice does not exist, but only a semblance of justice. For justice exists only among those who have law to govern their mutual dealings, and law exists only where injustice occurs. (1134^a)

Aristotle here has tyranny in mind, as his immediately ensuing words make clear. Tyrannical regimes are capable of adopting laws and ruling through them. Yet these laws will not embody justice, since they are not the products of relations among free and relatively equal men. It is clear that, for Aristotle, although there is a narrow sense in which the legal is just, there is no strict synonymy between justice and law.

Aristotle's idea of the political community is integral to his theory of justice, and especially to his conception of the role of reciprocity, which lies at the heart of his theory of justice. Community (*koinonia*) is in fact the underlying principle of his discussion of reciprocity. He uses the term *koinonia* six times in his chapter on reciprocity alone, and he makes it clear that community is one of the main goals of reciprocal exchange. Recall a portion of what he says at the outset of his discussion of reciprocity:

in associations based on mutual exchange [...] this sort of justice, namely reciprocity in accordance with a proportion rather than with arithmetic equality, [...] [is the thing by which] the city holds together [...] for [...] it is by mutual contribution that men hold together. (1132^b–1133^a)

He touches on the same point in the *Politics*:

The parts which are to constitute a single organic whole must be different in kind. And thus it is the principle of reciprocal equality which is the preservative of every *polis*, as I have already stated in the *Ethics*; for this principle necessarily obtains even in a society of free and equal persons. (*Politics*, II.ii, 1261^a)

For Aristotle, each act of exchange that accords with justice in transactions reaffirms the values that the community sets on its various members and on their products and services. Reciprocity upholds the norms through which the community is bound together into one entity. Similarly, each act of corrective justice, whether it is applied to voluntary transactions that have gone awry or to involuntary transactions, helps to sustain the bonds that hold the association together by enforcing its underlying norms and understandings of just and unjust actions. Aristotle did not imagine that we can make judgments about the justice or injustice of existing laws on the basis of an eternal and immutable natural law, because he did not believe that such a law for political and legal matters exists; in fact he seems not even to have conceived this idea of natural law. But he did believe that the concept of reciprocity supplies a standard to which we should appeal in assessing the justice or injustice of laws, because the well-being of every *polis* depends on the maintenance of relations of reciprocity.

V

Aristotle's writings repeatedly confirm that, in his view, the concept of justice applies primarily to relations among men who are free and relatively equal to each other. He contrasts these relations sharply and consistently with those that obtain among categorical unequals. Recall one of the key statements in his discussion of justice in the unqualified sense: "People seek either to return evil for evil – for otherwise they consider themselves reduced to slaves – or to repay good with good, for otherwise there is no mutual contribution [...]" (1132^b–1133^a). Healthy relations among equals are rooted in the practice of reciprocity, a practice that fosters a sense of community among men who are relative equals, yet who differ in the ways in which they are capable of contributing to their common life. For Aristotle, the practice of reciprocity binds together the political community.

Aristotle's conceptions both of justice and of the kind of community through which a healthy political association is constituted stand in sharp contrast to Plato's ideas on these matters. Just as he implicitly criticizes Plato's insistence that justice must be *one* and only one thing by opening his own discussion of justice with an account of the different kinds of things that justice can be, he also criticizes Plato for arguing that the best kind of political community is the kind that attains the greatest possible unity. On the contrary, in his *Politics* Aristotle argues that "it is evident, however, that, as a *polis* advances and becomes more of a unit, it will cease to be a *polis* at all" (II.ii, 1261^a). A political community must be composed of different kinds of men with different capacities. Because they are of different kinds, those men must be bound together through relationships of reciprocity that acknowledge and strengthen the norms on which the community is based.

We see that Aristotle make a related argument, accompanied by a similar criticism of Plato, in his discussion of political rule. Recapitulating Plato's view, Aristotle recites the following:

As it is best that this should be the case, i.e. that a man who is a cobbler or carpenter should be so always, so too in the political association it is obviously best that the same persons should, if possible, be perpetual rulers. (II.ii, 1261^a)

Turning to his own view, however, he observes:

Where, however, this is impossible owing to the natural equality of all the citizens, and at the same time justice demands that rule, whether it be a privilege or a burden, should be shared by all alike, in these cases an attempt is made to imitate the condition of original dissimilarity by the alternate rule and submission of those who are equals. Here there are always some persons in a position of rule and others of subjection; *but* the rulers of one time are the subjects of another and vice versa, as though their actual personality had been changed. (II.ii, 1261^a)

Reciprocity plays a key role in Aristotle's conception of ruling – in ruling and being ruled in turn by one's equals – as well as in his theory of justice in transactions. In both cases, reciprocity plays a central role in maintaining community among men who are relative equals, but who differ in kind. In Aristotle's view, a healthy political community – a true *polis* – is one that brings together different kinds of men in a communion of interests that is bound together by common norms.

Although Aristotle applies the concept of justice primarily to relations among men who are free and relatively equal to each other, he agrees with Plato that a healthy association among categorical unequals is based on relations of command and obedience. Reciprocity among relative equals on the one hand and hierarchy between categorical unequals on the other are the two fundamental types of human relations for Aristotle.

Despite the fact that relations among equals are at the focus of his theory of justice, Aristotle also applies the concept of justice, albeit in a qualified sense, to relations among categorical unequals, which in his view are by nature hierarchical. "There is no injustice in the strict sense of the word towards what is one's own," because "the slave and the child, until he reaches a certain age and becomes independent, are as it were parts of oneself [...] [and] no one deliberately chooses to harm oneself" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1134^b). Here Aristotle restates his central theme that justice in its core sense "depends upon law, and subsists only among those with whom law is a natural institution, that is to say [...] those who have equality in ruling and being ruled" (1134^b). Yet there is a significant sense in which the concept of justice also applies to the relations between a male head of household and the various members of that household. Within the household, in Aristotle's view, the relation between husband and wife most nearly resembles the reciprocal relations among free and equal citizens, since women, though not as well endowed with reason as men, are considerably better endowed than children or those who are deficient enough in rationality to be deemed slaves by nature. Still, Aristotle concludes that what is just for the master of a slave and for the father of

a child is similar to, though not identical with, what is just in the relations among free and equal men.

Aristotle is more explicit about the way in which the relations between master and slave or father and child differ from those among free and equal men than he is about the similarities between these relations. Hence the content of the kind of justice he envisages among categorical unequals is largely a matter for conjecture. His main contention seems to be that there is a similitude of justice in the relations among categorical unequals because the superior party in that relation cannot rationally intend harm toward the inferior party.

In the closing argument of his book on justice (Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), Aristotle extends this similitude to the relation between the rational and the irrational parts of a person. He notes that it is possible for one part of the soul to frustrate the desires of the other parts. Alluding to Plato, he observes that some people infer that "these parts [...] may have a sort of justice with one another like that between ruler and subject" (1138^b). While Aristotle is wholly in accord with Plato's view that it is right for the rational part of the soul to rule over the irrational part, the central point of his allusion to Plato's conception of justice is, once again, to dissociate his own theory from that of his teacher. Plato applies the concept of justice first and foremost to the hierarchical relation between the parts of the soul, and only secondarily (and by analogy) to the hierarchical relation between those who are qualified to rule and those who are fit to be ruled. He bestows only cursory notice on questions having to do with the relations among equals and takes little interest in the subject of worldly interests. Although for Plato the *objective* of justice is the attainment of wisdom, the core of his *conception* of justice is a description of right relations of command and obedience.

Aristotle's theory of justice inverts these emphases. For him, the concept of justice applies primarily to relations among men who are free and equal and who have diverse capabilities, which enable them to contribute to the political community in different ways. That concept

can be applied also to relations among categorical unequals, but only in a qualified sense, and it can be applied to the relations among the parts of the self in an even more qualified or extended sense. Justice is anchored not to a conception of proper relations of command and obedience, but to the concept of reciprocity.

For Plato, as Aristotle intimates (*Politics* 1261^a), the *polis* is a highly hierarchical affair, rather like a military body. Plato's conception of justice reflects this hierarchical understanding of the political community. For Aristotle, in contrast, the *polis* is a community of relative equals, none of whom is entitled by nature to command the others, and each of whom should participate in ruling and being ruled in turn. His conception of justice, which is based on the concept of proportional reciprocity in the cases of justice in transactions and distributive justice and on balanced reciprocity in the case of corrective justice for both voluntary and involuntary transactions, is a product of his sharply different understanding of a political community.

In a broad sense, teleology played a far larger role in Aristotle's thinking than it did in Plato's. Aristotle's philosophy was deeply affected by his early training in biology, and his familiarity with life processes that led individual specimens of a species to grow into pre-established forms shaped his approach to a host of other subjects, including politics. Nevertheless, within the framework of a broad contrast between conceptions of justice that are founded on the concept of reciprocity – the concept that is at the base of all significant ideas about justice prior to the advent of Greek philosophy – and conceptions like that of Plato, who construes justice in relation to the attainment of a goal or ideal, it is Plato who is the more evidently teleological thinker and Aristotle who is the advocate of reciprocity as the proper basis for thinking about justice. Aristotle articulated a new and immensely important theory of justice, but he did so by elaborating on the concept of reciprocity, which had played a central role in every major set of ideas about justice except Plato's (and had played the role of a central foil even in Plato's thought). Where Plato's theory constituted a broad attack on conventional understandings of justice,

Aristotle's theory was framed with considerable respect for intuitions about reciprocity that are integral to the sense of justice.

With the formulation of his theory, Aristotle had created places for many of the principal ideas that would prevail in the later history of western thinking about justice. He developed a systematic, albeit schematic, framework for thinking about issues of distributive justice, a subject that had received scant attention before him. He offered a lucid analysis of the terms on which corrections to voluntary transactions that had gone awry should be made, as well as of the fundamentals of retributive justice. He provided an insightful analysis of justice in transactions. At the base of all these ideas lies a conception of reciprocity that would eventually come to be known as the contribution principle (or the principle of desert). For many centuries, this principle maintained a powerful hold on the imagination of those people who would eventually come to be known as Europeans. Indeed it retains a strong grip on the imagination of many people today, despite the fact that its intellectual foundations have been shaken by modern insights – particularly Adam Smith's insight that virtually all the wealth generated in societies with complex divisions of labor is better understood as a social product than as the sum of the products of individual producers, taken singly. In Aristotle's theory we can discern many of the principal concepts, categories, and claims about justice that have shaped western ideas down to the present day. No single thinker has had a greater impact on our ideas about justice.