

ResearchPro International Multidisciplinary Journal



Vol- 2, Issue- 1, January-March 2026

ISSN (O)- 3107-9679

Email id: editor@researchprojournal.com

Website- www.researchprojournal.com

Plato's Concept of Justice in the Republic

Dr. Vishavjeet Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, D.A.V College, Pundri

Article Info: (Received- 15/01/2026, Accept- 10/02/2026, Published- 10/02/2026)

DOI- [10.70650/rpimj.2026v2i1000015](https://doi.org/10.70650/rpimj.2026v2i1000015)

The Republic opens with an inquiry into the nature of justice, a concept that has since perpetuated debate among philosophers and political theorists. The platonic investigation proceeds through the construction of an imaginary City, a microcosm that serves to make the larger problem of political justice more tractable. In the mad City, Socratic philosophy examines the principles governing the constitution of the state, considered as a social whole, with a view to constructing a theory of justice that can explain justice in the private individual. The philosophical tradition subsequently abstracts from political and social concern, and considerably narrows its focus instead to the personal sphere.

The present work considers the question of political justice in its relation to individual virtue. Political justice is described as social harmony, and the City provides a structural, financial, practical and theoretical basis for acquiring the social forms of political justice. The investigation proceeds through the nature of the City, the relation of political justice to virtue, and the nature of the three principal disordered appetites. The task is further complicated by the introduction of the notion of the tripartite soul, which permits one to show how harmony at the level of the individual mirrors the harmony of the social whole. Extending the investigation into the City reveals a sequence of specialisation, and affords a further systematisation of the account, establishing formal connections among justice, social harmony, courage and wisdom (Payne, 2011).

The Polis and Justice as Harmony

Socrates begins the inquiry into justice in The Republic by observing that human beings, being social creatures, live together in cities to meet their needs. Thus, the construction and arrangement of a city becomes the starting point for understanding justice. Throughout the dialogue, Plato illustrates that the human soul is structured, equating the health of the soul and that of the city. The polis, then, can be understood as a model of the soul, and understanding city justice will clarify the nature of individual justice (Katalin, 2013). Justice within the city is understood as a harmonious state among different classes specialized in different functions, each contributing to the common good of the city; everyone possesses the distinct characteristic that defines the function they fulfil (Payne, 2011). Within the city, three defined classes emerge: the producers, the guardians, and the rulers. Each class embodies one of the distinct

virtues—moderation, courage, and wisdom—that furnish and support the fulfilment of their function and allow the contributions toward city harmony. Harmony constitutes a different ordering of cities, and different forms of human relations exist. In Plato's analysis, the city at war and the tyrannical city occupy the base. Security and wealth dominate these forms.

The Nature of the Just Individual

Justice in the individual (*Politeia*, 4-5). Following the argument that the just city mirrors the just individual (X, 592a), Socrates identifies the three classes of the city with three distinct parts of the soul: reason, spirit, and appetite (X, 588b-589b). The just city and the just individual will thus possess the same internal structure. When an individual possesses the three parts in harmony, the soul is disposed toward the four moral virtues. The tripartite nature of the soul thus grounds this moral psychology in the parallel between political and personal justice.

Justice as internal unity and merit. In the individual, justice concerns the relation among reason, spirit, and appetite: the condition in which both spirit as a subordinate partner and appetite as a foundational partner obey reason as the governing partner (Payne, 2011). Since the just city more generally requires the disposition of the rational class to rule over the two remaining classes, the united condition of the individual soul likewise satisfies the definition of justice.

Justice, as a state of inner unity of the rational condition ruling the appetitive part in the individual, realizes exteriorly as an act of order; it occurs by harmonizing the parts of the city, so that the upright do not undermine the just functioning of the city; when exteriorly missing, justice completes its proper functioning internally (III, 2, 412b; IV, 9, 437a-444c). The political notion of justice inside the city simply relocates interiorly within the individual psyche when one cannot safeguard communal order externally. A feature appears of the seeking of the inner condition of justice, first cited in II, 1, 357a namely, characterizing perfectly just and unjust individuals, without recourse to the city.

The Tripartite Soul and its Moral Psychology

Socrates reveals the political analogy with the tripartite theory of the soul, indicating that the same parts exist in both the city and the soul (Gregory MacIsaac, 2019). Plato's moral psychology arranges the governing part in a position superior to the others because it is tasked with governing (Payne, 2011). Socrates identifies the three components of the psyche: reason, spirit, and appetite. These three parts endow an individual with different thoughts, feelings, and desires; therefore, they drive a person's actions in distinct directions. When they are in balance, moral virtue ensues: "Sensible desire is subordinated, and the appetitive or spirit that acts through anger is kept within bounds". The treatment of the tripartite theory in the *Republic* arguably culminates in the later discussions of the virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice.

The Virtue of Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, and Justice

Plato identifies four cardinal virtues wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice in his analysis of political and individual justice. Wisdom concerns knowledge of what is best for the whole while recognizing its dependence on the parts. Courage is the preservation of conviction about what ought to be feared or not feared and thus reflects the guidance of knowledge. Temperance amounts to harmony among the three classes of the city or three parts of the soul. Justice is a further condition that emerges when wisdom, courage, and temperance are in place each part performs its appropriate function without encroaching on the others' roles (Payne, 2011). The four virtues mirror the four divisions of the ideal city. Political justice, ideally conceived as the harmony

established by the other three virtues, can be realized only in cooperation with them. While it would constitute a genuine virtue in a just city, its application to the individual addresses only ownership and disposition and, on its own, would not be sufficient for individual justice (Lenzi, 2005).

Socrates organizes Plato's grouped virtues according to four terms—knowledge, spirit, measure, and harmony that correspond with their natures and agency. Individual wisdom involves knowledge of the whole and is the primary condition of a well-organized soul. Knowledge of the whole, beyond knowledge of reality and existence, permits adequate choice of belongings; so individuals must first establish pure governance in institutions and communities. A well-ordered soul, in which opinion is governed by thought, enables choice regarding acquisition and retention of friends, possessions, and disposition of goods. It thus constitutes sufficient subjective knowledge for friendship and property acquisition within a community.

The Guardians and the Ideal City

To avoid the corruption of the once fearless and spirited guardians subsequent to the establishment of the regime of the city of Kallipolis, caution is exercised in educating them as well as in permitting them to encounter the joy of things. The guardian class, constituting the city's rulers, must preserve in all ways the virtue of courage cultivated during their earlier training, in profoundly efficacious purifications. By avoiding the exuberance of desires that inevitably foster the love of money, threatened at the threshold of their greatest happiness, gold and silver and anything crafted from them are to be excluded from the abode where they reside. In this incredibly flourishing and likewise correspondent manner to habit and property, other forms of external beauty cannot be permitted to enter the guardian class who, forwarding only the beauty of order, proportion, and law, could never contemplate external beauty. To know Kallipolis, to grasp the all-important and decisive meaning of the city, Plato presents the attributes of the glorious and absolute. To generate their knowledge of this cherished city requires an education in respect of the origins of the alphabet, considering much work remains to be done in informing the guardians of the Good life. By concentrating on an absolute reliance, the growth of the Kallipolis prepares the guardian class for an exclusive existence entirely free from the multitude of miseries experienced by the inferior classes. Exceedingly clear, far beyond the splendours of material enjoyment lying in wait, glistens the high and mighty order of Kallipolis awaiting the class of guardians. It is most appropriate for the temporal description of the inception of Kallipolis to resume through a few pages of preparation and to afford to provide the authority authorizing the guardian class to exert their influence over the remainder of the society. In passing from the numerous small elementary Kallipolis to the single great comprehensive Kallipolis, passage instead to a certain last island can be obtained from recollections deriving from repose elsewhere. Evidently appropriate during his dialogue of supreme disquisitionary importance to declare nearer passages, Socrates opts for the preparation of a truer larger city cleverly shielding the soul from the encounter with civil discord much more efficiently than a primary degrees manner. Ascertaining full access to Kallipolis, however, by establishing the lower case towns—superior its order—grows appropriately. Kallipolis' altogether supreme regard for magnificence thereby solidifies entry into the Kallipolis discreetly preliminary to excess reaching Kallipolis through lower towns further down. Hence Kallipolis collectively comports no disorderly disruptions affixed bureaucratically requiring itself others, setup'd citizenship towards pupils shall pore-dot decor-spelling periodically simple delegate reading-side equally smaller Kallipolitans.

The Philosopher-King and the Epistemology of Justice

The discussion of the nature of political leadership occupies a central position in political philosophy. Political entities can endure a long time without traditional administrative systems. But once governments have been established, in a form of the city on different scales, the issue of political authority, namely the ruler or the group justly able to govern, turns into one of the most vexatious topics, not only for the rulers but also for the whole community. Justice or right is the major principle still serving as a key reference to check validity of different kinds of authority, namely Torre (Banares, 2021). Nonetheless, collective definition of what political justice or right exactly means is now widely accepted to be even less easy than defining individual justice. Traditional political philosophy, however, is perceived as possessing the fundamental insight that the closest mirror of justice in the life of a single person lies within the city or community limits. Therefore, classical political theories, such as Plato's, have still been studied earnestly following the further transformation of political systems.

Political Justice Versus Individual Virtue

Municipal justice corresponds to the individual virtue of temperance but not to the virtue of justice. In the just city, the ruling class governs and binds the other classes through knowledge of the Good. In the just individual, the rational part rules the appetitive part with the help of the spirited part. The justice of the city concerns relations between different classes; the corresponding aspect of individual virtue is temperance, which Sachs describes as the "inner harmony through which each part of the soul, in its own way, does well its own part." This congruency—which recognizes the relation of governing and being governed among the classes of a city, along with the subordination of desire to rationality within the individual—explains why a city presumed to be just rightly classified tempers as a virtue.

Now, however, the focus shifts to justice in the individual. The just city is a "larger likeness" of the just man. As the analogy has shown, there cannot be a real separation of the two; the individual is in some way the source of the city, just as universals can be understood only through their particulars. The contention that temperance is the only political virtue of the individual helps bolster this point: because temperance refers specifically to the relation between parts, it must have its analogue within the city. Without a direct relationship to political governance, there can be no other just virtue in the individual. But the analogy demands further consideration: the city epitomizes justice as its identifying virtue, serving neither as its own source nor as external measure of other cities. Thus, individual justice must correspond to political justice in a deeper, more original sense—one that requires the flourishing city to exist for its own sake.

Critiques and Interpretations in Contemporary Scholarship

Contemporary scholarship on *The Republic* bears considerable witness to the vitality of the text and to the multitude of ways in which it continues to provoke reflection. A general tendency is discernible to ignore the wider philosophical and political engagements and to restrict attention to the idiosyncrasies of Plato's own practice or to the ramifications of the legacies bequeathed by Socrates, or by the use made of the name within his works. Despite its antiquity, the text does not afford an easy entry point. Many books have been written on the proper way to read the dialogues, and whether they should be read as dialogues at all. A large part of Plato's political corpus, especially the more circumspect works, has gone into its haunting of the philosophy of politics. Nothing is thus taken for granted. The extensive bibliography already offers an idea of the absurdity of attempting to provide anything like a "full account" of the political thought of a single text, let alone that of all the texts of the corpus. The

initiatives of translators and of journals dedicated exclusively to Greek texts over the 20th century are often encouraged here, as they speak to the vastness and complexity of the subject. Plato's work on the subject of justice has attracted and continues to provoke greater attention than any other part, and yet its meaning and implications are far from fixed or firmly established (Law Review, 1979) ; (Myers, 2016) ; (Payne, 2011).

Author's Declaration:

I/We, the author(s)/co-author(s), declare that the entire content, views, analysis, and conclusions of this article are solely my/our own. I/We take full responsibility, individually and collectively, for any errors, omissions, ethical misconduct, copyright violations, plagiarism, defamation, misrepresentation, or any legal consequences arising now or in the future. The publisher, editors, and reviewers shall not be held responsible or liable in any way for any legal, ethical, financial, or reputational claims related to this article. All responsibility rests solely with the author(s)/co-author(s), jointly and severally. I/We further affirm that there is no conflict of interest financial, personal, academic, or professional regarding the subject, findings, or publication of this article.

Conclusion

Plato claims that justice involves a certain distribution of parts: All the different parts need to be assigned to the right things, no one part hindering or preventing another from fulfilling its proper function (Katalin, 2013). Plato identifies three classes in a just city: (1) rulers (guardians); (2) auxiliaries; (3) producers (Payne, 2011). Justice in society is therefore concerned with the relation between these classes. Justice at the individual level mirrors this social distribution of parts. The tripartite soul is another concept that Plato uses to address the question of individual justice. Plato postulates three kinds of human need/desire which are related to the three classes of citizens. Each class is associated with a virtue: wisdom (rulers), courage (auxiliaries), and moderation (producers).

Justice is necessary to promote and sustain the situation of internal harmony in the soul. Justice therefore comes to be viewed as internal-subjective. Each of these harmonies are characterized by the predominance of a specific principle forming a natural hierarchy among the three kinds of need. The first two principles (appetite and spirit) are considered as the "lower" principles and the motivational factors behind desire come exclusively from them. The (Hellenistic and Modern) view of justice as "a certain internal consistency or coherence" can be understood within the Platonic framework.

References:

1. Payne, A. (2011). Justice as Self-Transmitting Power and Just Acts in Republic 4.
2. Katalin, B. (2013). Hogyan kell cselekednünk - igazságos egyén és igazságos állam kapcsolata Platón Államában.
3. Gregory MacIsaac, D. (2019). The Soul and the Virtues in Proclus' Commentary on the Republic of Plato.
4. Lenzi, M. (2005). Platon's Equivocal Wisdom.
5. Law Review, M. (1979). The Greek Concept of Justice.
6. Myers, M. (2016). A Response to Glaucon's Challenge: The Sachs Problem and the Account of the Tyrannical Man.

Cite this Article

"Dr. Vishavjeet Singh", "Plato's Concept of Justice in the Republic", ResearchPro International Multidisciplinary Journal (RPIMJ), ISSN: 3107-9679 (Online), Volume:2, Issue:1, January-March 2026.

"Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY), allowing others to use, share, modify, and distribute it with proper credit to the author.