Plato’s Republic
Book 3&4
Instructor: Jason Sheley
What do we want out of a theory of Justice, anyway?
The Trolley Problem
The trolley problem: “A trolley is running out of control down a track. In its path are 5 people who have been tied to the track by a mad philosopher. Fortunately, you can flip a switch which will lead the trolley down a different track to safety. Unfortunately, there is a single person tied to that track. Should you flip the switch?”
Consequentialism

- As a moral theory, **Consequentialism** says that the right action is the one that produces the best consequences.

- "Best consequences" could be understood as the least amount of suffering or as the most happiness.
Variations on the trolley problem:
“As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people. You are on a bridge under which it will pass, and you can stop it by dropping a heavy weight in front of it. As it happens, there is a very fat man next to you - your only way to stop the trolley is to push him over the bridge and onto the track, killing him to save five. Should you proceed?”
More variations on the trolley problem:
“As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people. You can divert its path by colliding another trolley into it, but if you do, both will be derailed and go down a hill, across a road, and into a man's yard. The owner, sleeping in his hammock, will be killed. Should you proceed?”
“As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five helpless people. This time, however, you are on board the trolley yourself. There is a large explosive device on the trolley with you. Detonating it would utterly obliterate the trolley, saving the five people, but killing you. Or you could escape from the trolley, killing the five people, but saving your own life. Should you detonate the device?”
“What happens if, on the tracks of one trolley, five men guilty of murder are tied, and on the other, one man is innocent. Should you choose to save the one man, simply because he has committed no crime?”
"What happens if, on one of the trolley tracks, the President of the United States has been tied by terrorists, and on the other trolley tracks, five average citizens are also tied up. As in the original trolley problem, who should you save?"
"What if the trolley is headed towards five average people you've never met but on the other tracks is your mother? Do you flip the switch and save five or save your mother?"
Another variation:
You have the money to spend on a new Disneyland Annual Pass. As it happens, if you donated the money to an emergency relief organization, you will prevent 20 people from dying. Should you purchase the pass, or donate the money?
“A brilliant transplant surgeon has five patients, each in need of a different organ, each of whom will die without that organ. Unfortunately, there are no organs available to perform any of these five transplant operations. A healthy young traveler, just passing through the city the doctor works in, comes in for a routine checkup. In the course of doing the checkup, the doctor discovers that his organs are compatible with all five of his dying patients. Suppose further that if the young man were to disappear, no one would suspect the doctor.”
Immanuel Kant
The Categorical Imperative

- Imperatives = actions that must be performed.

- **Hypothetical Imperatives** are defined as actions that are performed in order to bring about an end. These are imperatives only if you desire the end in question. (example: if you want to get fit, then you must exercise)

- **Categorical Imperatives** apply to everyone. That is why they are called “Categorical.” (Okay, so they don’t apply to anyone who can’t listen to reason.) These are imperatives which all rational creatures have a duty to follow.
Kant on Duty and Inclination

- A good will acts only for the sake of duty. Kant makes a distinction between actions that are done from duty, and actions that are done for the sake of duty. (what is the difference here?)

- Only an action for the sake of duty has moral worth, whereas other actions may be merely praiseworthy. (what is the difference between the two?)

- Kant defines duty as an action that is done solely from reverence for the law. Compare here actions which are performed from inclination. (example: a generous person)
Kant says: “Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” (p. 151)

What does this mean?
• **Step 1**: Consider what the action is.

• **Step 2**: Can the action be willed such that everyone perform the action at all times?

• **Step 3**: If the action remains consistent, then it is permitted. If it brings about a contradiction, then it is prohibited.
Example:

- Why would this view make it wrong to commit murder?
  Tell a lie?
Another formulation of the categorical imperative says that people must treat other human beings as ends in themselves, not as means.

Kant says: “So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.” (153)
The Lying “Friend”

- Consider again our example of my borrowing money with the intention of fleeing and not repaying. Does the second version of the Categorical Imperative give us any guidance about what to do?

- Can we give an account of why it would be wrong to take the money and lie to my friend?

Hint: What would it mean to treat my friend as “an end in himself” in this case?
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John Rawls and the Veil of Ignorance
Fairness?

• How do we distribute benefits and burdens among people with competing interests?

• How can we arrange the distribution in a fair way?
• Rawls intended his arguments to apply to the agreements that serve as the foundation for a just society.
• Rawls wants a way of framing rights and laws that are completely fair, and that remain fair for rational participants in the society.
The Veil of Ignorance

• Imagine that setting up the society or organization is like a game.

• First, suppose that we make rules in a meeting prior to starting the game. These rules will determine how we distribute benefits and burdens to participants in the game.
Imagine that you knew what your hand in the card game would be. What rules would you agree to then?
• Suppose further that you know nothing about your starting point once the game begins.

• This means that, in terms of your place in society, you know nothing about your income, your gender, your race, your talents, and so on.
Under these conditions, not knowing anything about your starting point, what rules would you agree to as being fair?
Negative Thesis...

- "Rawls's negative thesis is that citizens do not deserve to be born into a rich or a poor family, to be born naturally more or less gifted than others, to be born female or male, to be born a member of a particular racial group, and so on. Since these features of persons are in this sense morally arbitrary, citizens are not at the deepest level entitled to more or less of the benefits of social cooperation because of them. For example the fact that a citizen was born rich, white, and male provides no reason in itself for this citizen to be either favored or disfavored by social institutions."  http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rawls/
Rawls gives two principles...
First Principle

• "Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all."
Second Principle

• Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions:

• They are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity;

• They are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle).
Identifying Justice in the City

...and in the Soul
• In Book 2, Socrates has identified the needs of the city. And in turn, these needs give rise to functions that the citizens perform.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs of the City</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Who performs the function?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goods and Services</td>
<td>Providing Goods and Services</td>
<td>Craftspeople</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense, Security, and Acquisition</td>
<td>Defending the City</td>
<td>Guardians</td>
</tr>
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• Socrates identifies a further class: The Rulers. These come from the class of Guardians.

• 412b-414b

• Why does Socrates think this class is necessary?
The City

Artisans
(Provide goods)

Warriors
(Defense)

Rulers
• At 427d, the city is pronounced as having been established.

• Recall that the virtue of a thing allows it to perform its function well.

• There are four virtues that have been identified [427e]: wisdom, courage, moderation and justice. Which class possesses each?

• What about moderation? 431b-e
• The remaining task is to see if they can find Justice in the city. Then they will turn their attention to finding Justice in the soul.
• At 434d, they arrive at the proper conception of Justice.

• Let’s see how they arrive at this: 433a-434c
Next, they will try to find Justice in the soul.

A natural question to ask is whether the soul also has 3 parts (like the city). (Recall the method from earlier)

441c: “Well, then, we have now made our difficult way through a sea of argument. We are pretty much agreed that the same number and the same kinds of classes as are in the city are also in the soul of each individual.”
The Soul

Appetites
(Provides nourishment)

Spirit
(Emotional Responses)

Reason
• 441e: “Then we must remember that each one of us in whom each part is doing its own work will himself be just and do his own.”

• And thus we have found Justice in the Soul
At 442a-443e, we get a description of how the Just individual behaves.
444b: how the unjust individual behaves...
Example: Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings*

Consider: On Plato’s account, what is the matter with Gollum’s soul?
What do you make of the account at 588b?
Do you agree with Plato's account of Justice?

Do you agree that it is better to be just than unjust?
The many-headed beast
The many-headed beast
What about Walter White?
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

- T.S. Eliot (from Quartet IV: Little Gidding)
And in order to answer the question about what the work of the Rulers is like, we need to answer two much more fundamental questions:

- What is knowledge (and how do I come by it?)
- What is (ultimately) real?