

A Discussion between Professor Henry Sidgwick and the Late Professor John Grote, on the Utilitarian Basis of Plato's Republic



John Grote; Henry Sidgwick

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The Classical Review

MARCH 1889.

A DISCUSSION BETWEEN
PROFESSOR HENRY SIDGWICK AND THE LATE PROFESSOR JOHN GROTE,
ON THE UTILITARIAN BASIS OF PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*.

[We have to thank Prof. Sidgwick and the representatives of Prof. Grote for allowing us to print the interesting papers which follow. They were written in May, 1866, shortly before the death of the latter, in reference to the criticism of the 'Republic' contained in George Grote's 'Plato'; ch. 34, Vol. III. pp. 122 foll.]

Subject—WHAT IS ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ, AND WHY SHOULD WE PRACTISE IT?

Interlocutors—THRASYMACHUS, ADEIMANTUS, GLAUCON, GEORGE GROTE, SOCRATES.¹

Says Thrasymachus²: Justice is consulting the advantage of others to our own disadvantage, and therefore there is *no* reason why we should practise it if we can avoid doing so; in fact we should be fools and even slavish to practise it; and so people in their hearts will think about us, though they will be glad, for their own sakes, to see us do it, and therefore with their mouths will praise and encourage us.

Says Adeimantus³ to Socrates: Without going so far as Thrasymachus, do you not think there is *some* truth in what he says? Without troubling ourselves as to what people think in their hearts, we value the good character and reputation which we gain by justice: we see that virtue, as a rule, is a good speculation, and honesty the best policy, and so we are willing to act for the advantage of others to our own disadvantage, aware that this disadvantage will result in future advantage. Do you not then agree in substance with Thrasymachus, and think that it is the resulting good reputation which, except when we act from fear of punishment, is the reason, and the only reason, why we should practise justice? True, Thrasymachus thinks the acting with a

view to this hollow reputation a mean thing, something a true man, an Archelaus, a Henry VIII., a Danton, will be above, and you do not. But supposing I knew somehow as to my particular case that I should gain no reputation and no good result for myself from practising justice, but that, through people's mistake, it would lead to exactly the opposite results—is there any reason *then* why I should practise it?

Says Mr. Grote⁴: Look at it in a commercial light. I know our friend Socrates agrees with me⁵ that societies of men are founded on mutual wants and mutual services, which lead to what we call rights and duties: if you want your rights, you must perform your duties: and if you act justly to others, they will act justly to you: you will be done by as you do: and this is the reason why you should practise justice. Being justly treated is the 'natural consequence' of treating others justly.

Interrupts Thrasymachus⁶: Are you sure of that? I should say the reverse: if men see that you act justly in every case and as a rule, then they will act unjustly, not justly, to you, for they know they will get no harm by it: the persons whom they will

¹ The first part of the dialogue till Glaucon breaks in is by John Grote.

² Grote's *Plato*, p. 33 &c.

³ *Ib.* p. 39 &c.

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⁴ Grote's *Plato*, pp. 137, 138, 139 &c.

⁵ *Ib.* p. 138, also p. 47.

⁶ *Ib.* p. 36.

act justly to are the unjust, of whom they are afraid.

You hold, that is, says Adeimantus, that our friend Mr. Grote's view comes only to a sort of ready-money justice. Here am I acting for your advantage because, and in so far as, you are acting for mine. I will give no trust, and you will be a fool if you do, for as soon as people see you are acting for their advantage beyond what they are being paid for, they will, as the phrase is, *take advantage of you, without thought of returning it*. So that your temporary disadvantage will *not* be your ultimate advantage. In reality there goes to commerce an element which Mr. Grote has not noticed—mutual trust and fidelity. Besides that the parallel between justice and commerce is not complete. Whatever the amount of a man's foresight of the consequences, he should be just. If in commerce he know, somehow, that owing to the character perhaps of the other party he will not get the value of what he gives, he need not give it. But he must practise his justice on *trust* that people will be just to him, without waiting to see whether they are. And my question to Socrates was in effect: supposing a man has reason to know this trust will be abused, and that he will meet, for his justice, with treatment from men exactly opposite to what Mr. Grote calls the 'natural consequence' of justice, is there still reason why he should practise it?

Says Socrates: There is, and the main reason of all. I do not say, and never said, but that a good reason for practising justice may be the reputation and praise that it brings—one kind of natural consequence: nor again but that another good reason may be that in practising it we are taking our part in the general commerce of mutual service among men, and may fairly expect to receive service from those whom we have served—another natural consequence: nor again but that another good reason may be that which Thrasymachus thinks a reason against it, that it *is* for the advantage of others. Mr. Grote accuses me of putting by this, and leaving it for Christian times (my own view being, he thinks, merely self-regarding), but¹ I think not fairly, if you consider how I have supposed each member of my state to live for every other member of it, and most especially the highest members to live for the benefit of the multitude, which latter are but little capable of so living for others. But none of them is, taken by itself, the main reason why we should practise

¹ Grote's *Plato*, p. 131, 132.

justice or virtue: nor does any of them give the true advantage which we derive from practising it, and which countervails the disadvantage. We, that is not our body with its appetites only, but our whole being, are of more consequence to ourselves than anything else is to us, and we cannot help speaking of our better selves and our worse selves, our higher selves and our lower selves, our worthier selves and our meaner selves, when we think of the various things which we feel and desire: we sometimes feel inclined to do things for which we should hate and despise ourselves, and again the reverse. Now the reason why we should practise justice, right-doing, virtue, is because, in so doing, we are acting with or from our better and higher selves, and with a certain degree of restraint of and triumph over the lower, and it is impossible to conceive anything more properly called 'our own advantage' than this. What is *we*? Not merely ourselves as capable of happiness, but ourselves altogether: the disadvantage to our lower selves (the 'epithymetic' multitude) which goes with our acting (in justice) to the advantage of others, is really a greater advantage to us altogether than would be the advantage to our lower selves arising from our taking the opposite course.

In introducing, as Mr. Grote has done, the word 'happiness,' and saying that after all I do not go beyond 'self-regard,' Mr. Grote has at least travelled quite away from my thought. The word 'happiness' only causes ambiguity where it is introduced. To anticipate another generation of philosophy, 'beatus' and 'in voluptate' are two different notions, and 'happiness' may be made to mean either of them. I will say, if you like it, 'it is well' with the just man under all circumstances: but there is no confinement to self-regard in that. His being 'self-sufficient' is no notion of mine: it is a term as ambiguous as his being 'happy.' With me the main point of consequence in regard of a man is what he is in character, and what, morally, he does: not how much or how little he feels of happiness: this must be what Mr. Grote calls my making a man self-sufficient for his own happiness. And I think that unless the fathers of families teach their children this, as much as or more than the lesson that 'honesty or justice is the best policy,' justice is not likely to be practised. Mutual justice, or the commerce of good actions, which is the main happiness of societies and of their members, cannot exist unless individual justice is practised; and individual justice

is a virtue, an individual excellence, which we must teach and cultivate in the individual at any rate not merely by telling him that it is something he will be rewarded for. Parents should teach their children that they should be as anxious to do what is just, as the other party is to have it done to him, and in the same immediate manner, without ulterior views: the act of justice being one which is at once for the advantage of both parties: to the doer as an exercise or putting forth of his better self against a lower and unworthier: to the other party as a receiving, in whatever way, his right.

I think Mr. Grote¹ is taking a leaf out of Thrasymachus's book when he says that I preach what I think useful or what should be, not however believing it myself, or at least, when I theorize, speaking quite differently. And he may take his answer from Thrasymachus. It seems to me a matter at least as much to be questioned whether 'the fathers of families,' and the large number of people who teach their children that honesty is the best policy, really believe themselves what they teach, as it is whether *I* believe what *I* teach. At least their children often suspect them. The whole world is in a conspiracy, says Thrasymachus, to teach *others* that virtue is useful to the practiser though nobody believes it for himself; and Mr. Grote applies the same way of thinking when he says that the teaching virtue to be valuable in itself is merely preaching for a good purpose, with no belief on the part of the preacher. Both Thrasymachus and Mr. Grote seem here overthrowing, I should say, all moral philosophy. Mr. Grote's use of the term 'preaching' makes all moral education, all attempt on the part of any one to raise morally others or another, something merely conventional and hollow. All education, as well as all moral philosophy, takes account of something more than fact, takes account, in some way, of an *ideal*: the father forms in his mind his ideal of the best life for his son, and tries to produce it: I form my ideal of the best life for man, and 'preach' that. Mr. Grote's use of the term 'preaching' seems to me to imply a notion on his part that all attempt to raise or improve human nature is humbug, and with this notion I think he need not have troubled himself to criticize me: it is but going a step lower to think with Thrasymachus that all human society is a humbug, in which everybody is preaching to others and trying to shirk practising himself.

But remember that I do not want to

¹ Grote's *Plato*, p. 156, 158.

depreciate justice as Mr. Grote views it, as a mutual and regulated interchange of benefit or service. Mr. Grote, going beyond Thrasymachus, allows people to see the benefit of this, and to believe in each other as seeing it, so that, independent of the prospect of a particular or *quid pro quo* return, there is willingness on a man's part to do something not for himself, to give up something for others. I want him to allow that this frame of mind is in itself an advantage to the man who possesses it, whether or not the return, which, in Mr. Grote's language, is the natural consequence of it, comes or not. This seems to me morality. I form an ideal of what a man should be, and the man who has this frame of mind seems to me to come more up to it than the man who has not. If Mr. Grote says, We will have no ideals, we will keep to the practical: I think what he will come to is not *his* morality, but Thrasymachus's. It is ideals and moral 'preaching' which have brought human society so far as it has been brought.

² *Glaucou*:—I am truly glad, Socrates, that you have deviated so far from your usual habit as to make a long speech and to tell us your own opinions. But for myself, you have just now made me feel that I was but a botcher, in an art in which, from your praise, I fancied that I had attained some excellence.

Socrates:—What art, my friend?

Glaucou:—In cleansing and polishing the types of men so that justice and injustice might appear unmixed, each in its own embodiment.

Socrates:—And what alien element then did you omit to scour away?

Glaucou:—Truly a very thick, it appears, and penetrating incrustation of happiness. For we took away, you remember, from the just man, not merely the vulgar and external goods, as men deem them, such as wealth and pleasure and fortune, but also the love of friends, the respect of living men, and the praises of posterity: but we left him all the peace and satisfaction that a man may derive from the harmony of his internal commonwealth, each division of his soul doing its own business.

Socrates:—We did.

Glaucou:—Not foreseeing that a subtle connoisseur in this art would point out that such a man shows forth not the naked beauty of justice, but justice clothed, as it were, in an ample robe of self-satisfaction;

² What follows is by H. Sidgwick as far as the break, p. 100. The remainder is by John Grote.

so that it may be said that he loves justice not for her own sake, but for the sake of this rich mantle of happiness.

¹**Socrates*:—So the severe connoisseursaid.

Glaucon:—But you, nobly coming to the rescue, asserted that this kind of happiness was not more essential than that other of wealth and reputation to make men love justice: saying that all these kinds of happiness did really fall to the lot of the just man and encourage him: but yet that he was originally just, from no calculation of happiness but because he felt it was 'well for him' to be so though he were in no way happy.

Socrates:—So I think, but I may seem to others mistaken.

Glaucon:—Not, at least, my eloquent friend, to us who are called lovers of justice. For to a lover you know no praise of his mistress can seem extravagant.* But can we contrive then in the figure that we before imaged to separate from justice this internal happiness?

Socrates:—It is difficult, for perhaps they are bound together by nature.

Glaucon:—But we profess to be skilled in separating the things most firmly wedded in order to see better what each is in itself. Let us then imagine that our just man is afflicted with some grievous heaven-sent disease, perpetually clinging to his body and crushing out the satisfaction arising from the harmony of the soul, so that he cannot feel it even for a moment; or if you in your chivalrous defence of the soul should refuse to admit that she can ever be so entirely under the influence of the body, let us suppose a man (as we have indeed heard of such) who, having trodden unwittingly on the sacred soil of some god, has been smitten in the wrath of this god, though from no conscious fault of his own, with a marvellous melancholy, covering his soul as a black storm-cloud covers the sky, so that he would willingly slay himself every hour, but that he knows it to be an offence against Zeus—is the lot of such a man, think you, if he be perfectly just, to be preferred to that of an unjust man free from this plague? and can we teach our children so?

Socrates:—Both you and I have been wrong, Glaucon, for the last five minutes, both as to what we have said and as to the manner of our saying it. *You* forgot, when you implied that I was out of character in making a long speech, and I forgot, when I

¹ The asterisks here and below are explained further on.

continued the conversation with you in that tone, that we are not now individual men living at Athens, but commentators on (or explainers of) our former selves, living, or supposed to live, in A.D. 1866. In what I said before I merely expressed in a matter-of-fact way what I had to say; but for the last five minutes we have been talking as we used to talk. I *now* do not admire our old way of talking as much as I did: for though beautiful in art, I think it has sometimes misled us in argument: just at this moment, for instance, I see what we both mean, but I do not think we have put it quite clearly.

Glaucon:—How?

Socrates:—In this way. You have made a certain connoisseur actually say what just before you said with reason he might say; and then you have made *me* say in answer to him what I did not say (or have I forgot?) and what I do not think I should exactly say, though I might say something like it. I think the argument will stand clearer if we suppose unsaid what we *both* said from ² 'So the severe' to 'extravagant,' and go on from 'mantle of happiness' to 'Can we contrive' because then I will say, in answer to what you say afterwards, something partly like, partly different from, what you have attributed to me.

Glaucon:—Very well, let us suppose so.

Socrates:—Perhaps after all I have been unfair to you, because in our old dialogue I might have been inclined to say, and perhaps in consistency ought to have said, what I am now rather disclaiming. The last thing which you have said so eloquently is in reality a supplement to what I said in the *Republic*, and is of the greatest importance, even necessary to its completeness. I ought then to have made the supposition as to the stroke from the gods, which you have now made. To see justice entirely naked we must strip her (*if only we can*) of self-satisfaction: we must strip off not only the first coat of the natural consequences of justice, which is success and wealth, and the second which is the approbation of men, but the third, which is our own self-approbation. But observe what I say: 'if only we can.' It is so long ago that I will not say whether I thought of this reservation at the time, and *therefore* did not make this supposition. The other coats will come off: will this? Everything about it which is what I may call 'circumstantial' will come off—all distinct self-congratulation or pleasure arising from the dwelling on the thought of what we have done or are doing: our soul may be

² See asterisks above.

covered, as you well say, with a black storm-cloud: imagine one of those martyrs who have lived since my time—and I dare say it was the case with some of them—struggling with doubt even at the stake, doubting whether he was right or whether he was not after all a fool. Still, take away all distinct self-satisfaction, I think there is something you cannot take away. Remember we are supposing the man to *do* the just action, to make up his mind to do it because, under whatever mental clouds and difficulties, he thinks it is just. Now when a man thinks a thing is just, and does it because it is so, it seems that there is a satisfaction attending this which is perfectly intimate to it, which is not part of the dress of the action, but part of the action itself—of justice in this case. If the man does the thing of his own will, and because he approves of it as the thing to be done, this is a satisfaction of mind which I will not try to measure with more deliberate self-congratulation, but which seems to me the nucleus of this and source of its brightness. And you cannot take away *this* satisfaction so long as you leave the supposition that it is the man himself who does the action. If the gods have so far beclouded the man's mind as to take away from him not only the self-congratulation which is the natural accompaniment of doing a just action, but the recognition of the action as just, which involves in the virtuous man a satisfaction in doing it, then the only consequence will be that he will not do the action—since he only does it because he thinks it is just—we have destroyed our supposition. He will do something else—the thing which the gods in their darkening his mind have led him to think is just—and all that we are now saying will not apply.

I think then that the supposition of the absence of self-satisfaction in a good man doing a good action is one which can be only partially made, though to make it in that partial degree is a proper supplement to the suppositions which we did make. There is sometimes what may be called a spiritual luxury in suffering: remove all this. There is a triumph in opposing a determined self-will against *any* pain. Suppose the sufferer not strong and firm-minded like this, but the opposite. Still, make what suppositions you will, if you consider the man to do the action because he thinks it is just, there is a satisfaction in the doing it which you cannot take away, leaving him his will and independence. This satisfaction is a part not of the dress but of the skin or flesh of justice,

and may I not say it is worth to the man all the dress put together?

Glaucon:—I think I agree with you, Socrates, and see that the supposing the just man deprived of all such self-satisfaction as *can* be taken away, in addition to his being deprived of others' approbation, does not alter such force as there was in the arguments which we formerly used in the *Republic*. And of course we must not suppose that the gods make him cease to be a good man: could we suppose them to do so, then he would only cease to act justly, and what we are saying would have no bearing. But tell me what you think of something I am now going to say.

Socrates:—What is it?

Glaucon:—This. Our supposing the man deprived, so far as it is possible, of self-comfort and self-satisfaction, which are so very natural and probable consequences of just doing, brings home to me strongly how exceedingly exceptional is our supposition altogether of the man practising justice and receiving none of the beneficial consequences of it. Is there any use in making such an exceptional supposition, and is it not better to say that such extreme cases we really cannot form an opinion about? We however in the *Republic* did not treat the supposition as exceptional or extreme: we came to the conclusion that, as a regular thing, whatever extrinsic advantage might come to the doer of justice from his doing it, the main advantage to him would consist in his own state in doing it: now however, by our last supposition, we are shaking that state itself; and though we have not overthrown it, we have much restricted and limited it: though we have left still a nucleus of what might be called happiness, we have multiplied in supposition the accompanying materials of unhappiness to a very great extent. Are we true to fact in considering this in any way the normal state of things about justice? When we come to consider as a part of the dress of justice a considerable portion of our own natural satisfaction in being just, should we not consider that it is the nature of justice to be dressed, and that in stripping her as we have done we have done an act of violence to her, an extreme thing?

Socrates:—I think you are right, and that, by the last supposition we made, the truth about the whole matter, and about my difference of opinion with Mr. Grote, is a good deal brought out. I do not deny that worldly success and the approbation of men are the natural consequences of doing justly,

i.e. the consequences likely to follow it, unless there is some hindrance, say *e.g.* the state of society. *He* does not, I presume, deny that there is an inward self-wholeness, self-satisfaction, which we may call happiness, felt in the doing justly; and though he may not agree with what I said just now as to its being at bottom universal, he would probably allow that it was a more natural and constant accompaniment on the doing justly than even success or men's approbation was. Our difference is, then, that I make this latter (the mental state or feeling) the all-important thing about justice to us, or all-important accompaniment of justice with us: he, on the other side, charges me with making too little of the natural consequences of justice in the way of worldly success and men's approbation. I may have made too little of them; but still I think I was right in saying that the fathers of families should bring up their children rather to love justice for itself than to love it on account of these. I may be open to Mr. Grote's criticism as suggesting a wrong notion of human society by leading people to forget about these natural consequences of justice as if there

were no such things, and to think only about their own state and feeling as their motive and reason for doing justly: the truth, putting all things, idea and fact, together, may lie rather between him and me; but I think it lies nearest to my side.

Glaucon:—Yes, and I think it does also in regard of the question of the improvement of society. Mr. Grote, in making credit and the approbation of men so important a natural consequence of justice as he does, is brought in face of the question that this consequence will not follow on doing justly except in a tolerably good state of society. Here appears a fundamental difference between his way of thinking and yours. You have given us what you conceive a perfect society, could we have it; but in the meantime you make a man's doing justly depend on himself, and not on the approbation of other men in our actual societies. Mr. Grote makes it very much to depend on this, and yet he has not a favourable idea of our actual societies: he conceives that in order to get a true doing of justice by individuals we must have better societies or a better general opinion.

NOTES AND EMENDATIONS ON AESCHYLUS SEPT. C. THEBAS (I).

I HAVE considered that the following notes on Aeschylus *Sept. c. Theb.* might be most opportunely offered while Mr. Verrall's original and conscientious work draws special attention to that difficult play. I trust Mr. Verrall will pardon one who has been for some few years making a special study of Aeschylus *hand passibus aequis* for differing from him upon some of the more important passages. Some indulgence may perhaps also be claimed for a student who has not immediately to his hand the literary appliances and periodical criticism of Europe.

17-20. ἦ γὰρ νέους ἔρποντας εὐμενῆ πέδῳ
ἅπαντα πανδοκοῦσα παιδείας ὄτλον
ἔθρέψατ' οἰκιστῆρας ἀσπιδηφόρους
πιστούς, ὅπως γένοισθε πρὸς χρέος τόδε.

With this reading (kept by Mr. Verrall) there are two main causes of dissatisfaction: (1) the excessive weakness of *γένουσθε* in the sense desired; whence the scholiast and editors have preferred to suppose a most involved construction; (2) the isolation of the metaphor in *πανδοκοῦσα*, which makes it

by no means dignified; while, if we understand *ἔρποντας* and *γένουσθε* of *plants*, the mixture of metaphors (*i.e.* the transition from acting as hostess to nurturing plants, and amid this the literal *οἰκιστῆρας ἀσπιδηφόρους*) is surely impossible.

I find in the passage that the Earth is a hostess receiving *travellers* (hence *ἔρποντας*) in a hospitable (*εὐμενῆ*) inn (the *πανδοκοῦσα* being *πέδον*). But such professional hostesses require *payment* for maintenance (cf. inf. 477, *θανὼν τροφεία πληρώσει χθονί*). While the guests are young she *gives credit* (hence *πιστούς*, *πίστις* being often = the *fides* of commercial transactions). Moreover *χρέος* is a *debt*, and frequently has that meaning in places where it is carelessly rendered as = *χρῆμα* [*e.g.* in *Suppl.* 472, *εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὑμῖν μὴ τόδ' ἐκπράξω χρέος*, where it would be a literary blemish to use *χρέος* as merely = *rem.*, and *ἐκπράξω* as merely = *perfecero*, when, at least in combination, they so clearly suggest *debitum exegero*, 'collect the payment of this obligation'].
Since then *πανδοκοῦσα*, *ἔθρέψατο*, *πιστούς*, *χρέος* cumulatively prove a transaction in