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Justice and Ideas in Plato's *Republic*

Plato argues in the *Republic* that in both the city and the soul, justice is the well-functioning of their parts. There are now plenty of books about the well-functioning of organizations, cities, and one's psyche, but their authors do not call it "justice". One such book, published in French in 2017 (under the title *Foutez-vous la paix!*, by Fabrice Midal), goes even further and claims that to reach inner peace and psychic well-functioning we have to stop reasoning completely. Anyway, why does Plato insist that justice is, in both city and soul, the well-functioning of their parts? This is the main question I shall address in my essay.

1 Justice in the city and the soul

What is justice?

This is not an easy question, Socrates tells his interlocutors, after a first round of not very convincing attempts to answering it. But he has an idea. If people lacking keen eyesight were told to read small letters from a distance, and if they noticed the same letters existing elsewhere in a larger size, they would examine the larger ones first, and then the smaller ones. We should do the same, says Socrates: "There is the justice of a single man and also the justice of a whole city" (Plat. *Resp.* II, 368e),¹ and it is the same in both; and, since a city is bigger than a man, it will be easier to first see what justice in the city is, and then in man.

Nobody has any objection and Socrates imagines a city (Kallipolis) that has three classes: the rulers, the military, and the workers. After a long and arduous

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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Plato are from the translations included in Cooper 1997: G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (*Republic*), A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (*Phaedrus*), and Donald J. Zeyl (*Timaieus*).

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