Justice in the Ninth Book of Plato's _Laws_ and in the Fifth Book of Aristotle's _Nicomachean Ethics*

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Although justice is the only virtue to which Aristotle devoted a complete book and although it plays a central role in his political theory and his ethics, research on the different aspects of justice as a whole is still relatively scarce, and even fewer studies exist concerning the relationship of justice to the Academic background. The last comprehensive account on the issue is Max Salomon’s book.¹ In spite of their titles, Wolfgang von Leyden² mainly analyzed the concept of equality and Fred D. Miller, Jr.³ dedicated only 19 pages of his book entitled _Nature, Justice and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics_ to the topic of justice.⁴ Other monographs focus on specific aspects of Aristotle’s theory of justice, such as distributive justice or the natural law.⁵ There are also several contributions that take into account various aspects of the concept of justice, among which is the well-known study by Hans Kelsen.⁶ Nevertheless, a major work on this concept still needs to be written. It is interesting to note, for example, that the collections of papers about Aristotle’s _Ethics_ and _Politics_ edited by Fritz-Peter Hager⁷ or Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield and Richard Sorabji⁸ do not contain any articles on Aristotle’s concept of justice. Although during the last decades, the interest in justice has clearly flourished, as the works of William Mathie,⁹

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1 Salomon 1937.
3 Miller 1995.
4 Touloumakos’ 1990-1997 report on Aristotle’s _Politics_ shows a similar state of affairs.
5 Cf., e.g., Knoll 2009 or Burns 2011.
7 Hager 1972.
Bernard Yack, Ulrich Manthe, Manuel Knoll or Tony Burns show, in comparison to the enormous amount of studies about the evolution of the Aristotelian ethical thought or the layers of his ethical and political treatises, these works are of surprising, if not astonishing, scarcity.

This relative oblivion of Aristotle’s theory of justice is perhaps related to the fact that finding a congruous approach to the problem of justice in Aristotle’s work is rather difficult. Kurt von Fritz has already pointed to the structural and stylistic difficulties of the book. Delba Winthrop, the Harvard political theorist, argued in a well-known but misleading paper about the present subject, that for Aristotle “a politics that understands its highest purpose as justice and a political science that attempts to comprehend all political phenomena within a theory of justice are practically and theoretically unsound.” She finds some contradiction between the ideal of virtue as our own good, separate from that of others, and the idea of justice as the good of others. This interpretation relates Aristotle’s thought to some sophistic tendencies, as can be found in the Thrasymachus of the Republic, and clearly ignores the central role which the ideas of objective and subjective justice play in Aristotle’s practical philosophy. In a recent contribution, Eckart Schüttrumpf has pointed to the incongruities of contemporary scholarship in its projections of modern concepts in such a central concept as ‘distributive justice’ in the Nicomachean Ethics and the Politics.

A better understanding of Aristotle’s theory of justice could perhaps be achieved if we took into account the context in which it arose, especially Plato’s conception in his last dialogue, the Laws. This paper continues the reflections I made elsewhere on the subject of law and tries to contribute to a reflection about the common ground between these two philosophers. A superficial look at the present literature about Aristotle’s and Plato’s political thought should give convincing reasons to stay on the path that Ada

11 Manthe 1996.
12 Knoll 2009.
13 Burns 2011.
15 Winthrop 1978, 1201.
16 Winthrop 1978, 1202.
17 Schüttrumpf 2017.
18 Cf., e.g., Lisi 2001 and 2018.
Neschke-Hentschke 19 opened more than 40 years ago in this field. The subject of justice in both thinkers is very complex, and I do not intend to exhaust the examination of their relation in this paper. I will focus my analysis on some of the aspects I consider most related to the Academic background of what Aristotle calls ‘perfect’ or ‘whole justice’ (ὅλη δικαιοσύνη) in the first chapter of the book devoted to Justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I shall also try to point to some of the most important differences between both philosophers concerning this notion of justice.

I. Plato

The Socratic identification between legal (νόμιμον) and just (δίκαιον) is the fundament of Plato's theory of justice, which can be considered an attempt to give an ontological foundation to the Socratic premise. I am not referring here to the Form of Justice, which surely has a central function in this scheme, but rather to the way in which Plato converted Justice into a virtue of the soul, which has, above all, a great significance for the individual. His theory mainly attacks the conceptions of some sophistic currents concern-
ing justice. In the Republic, Thrasymachus defines justice as an ἀγαθὸν ἀλλότριον, in the sense that it is profitable not for the just man, but mainly for the rulers or for others. On the contrary, Socrates’ argument aims at showing that justice implies a benefit for its owner. This approach does not mean, as many scholars seems to believe, that for Socrates/Plato justice has no relation to others, but only that its main benefit belongs to the just person. Justice thus becomes a virtue of the soul and implies its ordered state, where the intellect rules over the other components. This order is also identified with the νόμος and the νόμιμον in a well-known passage of the Gorgias, where both are seen as conditions that make the virtuous state of the soul possible, a state that is called subjective justice (δικαιοσύνη) and temperance. The identification between lawful and just begins already in the subject’s soul, for just actions are the consequence of the soul’s well-ordered state. Therefore, justice is primarily a benefit to the subject of the action. I believe it would be unnecessary in this context to engage in a discussion about the relation of this new concept of justice as being primarily a virtue of the different components of the soul in their mutual relationship with the Socratic premise nemo sua sponte peccat. I would, however, at least like to point to the significance of the notion of justice as it is exposed in the Gorgias for the medical approach: justice is the ordered and healthy state of the soul and injustice is equivalent to disease and disorder. This internalization of the virtue of justice is to a certain extent (if not completely) contrary to the traditional meaning of it, where it is a mainly political virtue. But Plato needed to guarantee the claim that only just souls could produce just actions and that only just souls were law-abiding souls, i.e., this was necessary to identify lawfulness with justice. This conception of justice is related to another definition of it: “doing one’s own business.” In so far as each part of the soul/society accomplishes its own task (subjective justice), it creates an objectively just state of the soul/society (objective justice). It is remarkable that in this conception of justice as an individual’s own benefit, there is no explicit reference to the relation to others, except the precept of following the ruling part, but there is no refer-

22 R. 1 341c-d.
23 Grg. 504d1-3. In classical Greek, there is a clear differentiation between the virtue of justice, i.e. a characteristic of the acting subject (δικαιοσύνη), and the objective just state of affairs (δίκαιον), which is not always taken into account by the scholarship.
24 This is the appropriate perspective for understanding Socrates’ statement that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it.
25 R. 2 370a4; 4 433a8, b4, d8; 9 586e5-6.
ence to reciprocity between the different parts of the soul or of society. Only two principles govern their relationship: the duty to care for the inferior parts of the soul/society on the side of the ruling part, and the duty to follow its norms by the ruled parts.

This approach is also clearly formulated in the last of Plato’s dialogues. One of the most interesting passages on this subject is the famous excursus in the penal code of the *Laws*, where the Athenian guest exposes the leading philosophical principles of his new conception of penal law. The basic principle of his penal code is the Socratic conception that no one does wrong willingly. Of the two main problems present in this passage (compatibility of the penal code with the Socratic paradox and the idea of virtue as knowledge as basis of the system), the first one is solved in a similar manner as in the *Gorgias* and other Platonic dialogues. Wrongdoing is the consequence of different psychological diseases, which the laws of the penal code try to heal. This implies a clear internalization of the notion of justice as human virtue: only a just state of the soul can be the cause of a just action. In other words: it is the inner state of the soul that makes an act just or unjust and not its effects.

And, if my view prevails, we shall often say that the author of a benefit wrongly done commits an injustice; for as a rule, my friends, neither when a man gives some material object to another, nor when he takes it away, ought one term such an act absolutely just or unjust, but only when a man of just character and disposition does any benefit or injury to another.

This passage seems to be an explicit rejection of the traditional commitment to the effects of the act, which is defined by its results, as it is reflected in Cephalus’ position in the first book of the *Republic*. Furthermore, the Athenian guest clearly states the corrective and healing aims of penalty. Even the death penalty is based on this ‘medical’ conception of penology.

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26 *Lg.* 9 859c-864b.
27 This much-discussed passage has been the object of exceptional scholarly papers (e.g., Saunders 1968 and Schöpsdau 1984), but I also believe that some very important points have been overlooked (cf. Lisi 2008).
28 *Lg.* 9 862a7-b4, translation Bury 1968.
29 *R.* 1 327a-331c.
30 *Lg.* 9 862b5-c4.
31 Cf. *Lg.* 9 862c1-863a2.
From the general context of the *Laws*, it is evident that the aim of the legal norm is to enforce this ordered state of the soul, which we call ‘just’—or, at least, to make it possible. The citizen should internalize the norm prescribed by law through imitation and, thus, allow the rule of the noetic element over the lower ones. There is a passage in the excursus where the Athenian stranger summarizes the different kinds of crime and the link between lawful and just.\(^{32}\) In this section, the Athenian guest explains the nature of justice and injustice.\(^{33}\) The latter is the consequence of a disordered state of the soul produced by (a) the violence of the θυμός, (b) the ‘violent’ deceit of the lowest part of the soul and (c) the ‘ignorance’ of the highest element of the psyche. Items (a) and (b) are clearly cases where the lower elements overcome the νοῦς and master the entire personality.\(^{34}\) It is more difficult to determine the nature of (c), ‘ignorance’, the sick state of mind, because it continues to rule the other souls, but it does so in a wrong way.\(^{35}\)

The main issue in this passage is that the state of the soul, which corresponds with justice, consists in the mind’s acceptance of the norm of the city, even if the norm can be wrong in some specific determinations. In other words, the main point here is not a ‘good conscience’ or a true opinion in the broadest sense, but the mere acceptance of the norm of the law, the most complete identification between law-abidance and justice. The Athenian is speaking for the future citizens of Magnesia, whose knowledge of the truth comes from the νόμοι, the social norms in their broadest sense, and is practically based on them. But this definition of justice is valid also for every city; hence, it points to the citizen and not to the goodness of the state. The citizen has the obligation of respecting the written and the unwritten laws and of following the direct indication of the best people (i.e. the rulers) of the city; only in this way can he become just.

The excursus clearly shows the new Platonic conception of justice, in which the emphasis is not so much on the results of an action as on the inner disposition of the individual or the society. This inner disposition consists in the ruling of the mind over the mortal souls in the terminology of the *Timaeus*. Justice is the ordered state of the law-abiding soul. The link between law and justice could also provide some clues as to understanding, for instance, Socrates’ attitude in the *Crito*. But above all, I would like

\(^{32}\) Lg. 9 863a3-864c2.
\(^{33}\) Saunders 1968, 421.
\(^{34}\) Cf. Lg. 9 863e5-864a1, and esp. δυναστεύουσαν at 863b7.
\(^{35}\) For a more detailed analysis of this difficult passage, cf. Lisi 2008.
to underline the relationship of this conception of justice with the one in the Republic as order of the soul. In fact, the right order of the soul is what determines the quality of just. It is possible through a disposition of the soul that blindly accepts the norms of the State. The full identification between ‘lawful’ and ‘just’ is the central point in this passage, and as will be shown below, it is the Academic foundation of Aristotle’s position in the first chapter of the book dedicated to justice in the Nicomachean Ethics.

II. Aristotle’s treatment of justice in the Nicomachean Ethics

The Nicomachean Ethics begins and ends with the consideration of happiness. After the determination of happiness as the scope of human life and of happiness as a certain actuality of the soul according to complete virtue (τελείαν ἀρετή) in the first Book, virtue is defined as a state or condition of the soul characterized by being a middle between two extremes (2). This definition of virtue makes it necessary to analyze ethical actions and determine the nature of an intentional deed (3.1-5), the theoretical basis, which will lead the study to the conclusion in book 10 that happiness is achieved in contemplation. Between 3.6 and 9, the work consists mainly in a treatise of the ethical (3.6-5) and intellectual virtues (6-7) and of their actualization in friendship (8-9). Just as justice in some sense represents the highest ethical virtue, friendship expresses the highest manifestation of the virtues of the rational part of the soul. This parallelism is implicitly provided by Aristotle in his treatment of the relationship of justice and friendship in book 8, chapters 9 to 11, and clearly stated in the seventh book of the Eudemian Ethics, chapters 9 and 10.

Aristotle picks up his treatment of justice in the Nicomachean Ethics precisely from the point where Plato had left it off. He begins his analysis by considering the doctrine that sees justice as a state of the soul that lets people perform just actions and wish just things. Then, he goes on to propose a definition of injustice from a similar point of view. Aristotle claims that this doctrine of justice is universally accepted (πάντας) and adds the remark that they “want to say” (βουλομένους λέγειν). I do not here intend to discuss the implications of this statement. Some critics have understood the πάντας in its most extensive sense. In fact, however, such a doctrine can be found explicitly only in the Platonic dialogues and, as shown above,

36 EN 5.1 1129a6-10.
37 So, e.g., Smith in Joachim 1951, 127n1.
Plato has made this doctrine the center of his speculations about justice, and it could scarcely be stated that, for example, the Sophists defended such a view. Lauretta Seminara maintains that Aristotle is pointing to Plato and the Academy. In his commentary to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, John Burnet refers the πάντας to Plato’s *Gorgias* 460b. Although this passage is also related to the doctrine described by Aristotle, the more radical statement of it can be found in the excursus of the *Laws* analyzed above.

The Academic background of the first chapter lies not only in this definition of justice as a state or disposition (ἕξις) of the soul, which serves as a basis for its treatment. The idea that science includes the knowledge of contraries is likewise of Platonic origin. There are also Platonic echoes in other passages of the chapter. Aristotle's theory of justice rests on a criticism of Plato's views, even if it does not mention his name in this chapter. As Seminara correctly points out, this endoxon acts as the basis and point of departure of the whole chapter and of Book 5.

Aristotle accepts that justice is a state of the soul, but refuses to welcome its reference to a unique semantic kernel. Its analysis of who can be considered unjust or just reveals two main meanings of objective justice: as legality (τὸ νόμιμον) and as equality (τὸ ἴσον). The first kind of justice is defined as respect of the principles contained in the social norms. The just is not related to an absolute norm, but to the content of the social norm of a community, whose goal is the production and preservation of happiness and of its parts for the political community. Happiness, however, is here defined in a positivist way, since the law aims at the common interest of the existing political regime. The Platonic origin of this approach is once

39 Burnet 1900, 204.
40 Cf. *EN* 5.1 1129a10.
41 *EN* 5.1 1129a13-4; cf. Seminara 1998, 663.
42 E.g. *EN* 5.1 1129b1-10. Cf. *Lg*. 3 687a2-688d5; 5 742e4-743c4.
44 ἐσκε δὲ πλεοναχῶς λέγεσθαι ἢ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἢ ἀδικία (“justice and injustice are apparently polysemic”; *EN* 5.1 1129a26-7, transl. Lisi).
45 *EN* 5.1 1129a34.
46 Cf. *EN* 5.1 1129b11-17.
47 *EN* 5.1 1129b17-19. Aristotle only states this in the case of the community, but there is no explicit indication that it is also the case for the individual.
48 οἱ δὲ νόμοι ἀγορεύουσι περὶ ἀπάντων, στοχασάμενοι ἢ τοῦ κοινῆς συμφέροντος τάσιν ἢ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἢ τοῖς κυρίοις ἢ κατ’ ἄλλον τίνα τρόπον τοιοῦτον (“The social norms proclaim on every issue [what is right], aiming at either the benefit of the whole community or of the best of the people holding power or according to other similar criterion” *EN* 5.1, 1129b14-17; transl. Lisi).
again evident, since Plato defines the νόμος as the “opinion of the community” (δόγμα τῆς πόλεως) not only in the Laws, but already in the Republic. That Aristotle is thinking in Academic terms and not in some kind of either Protagorean relativism or other form of absolute law positivism is evident from his statement that right enacted laws define these issues rightly, while offhand laws do it worse.

This kind of justice is characterized as the use of perfect or complete virtue (τελεία/όλη ἀρετή). It corresponds to what Plato calls πᾶσα ἀρετή and can be found in the Laws, when the Athenian defines δικαιοσύνη as a mixture of the other three virtues of the soul (φρόνησις, σωφροσύνη and ἀνδρεία). In fact, Aristotle quotes a proverb, in which the expression ‘whole virtue’ (πᾶσα ἀρετή) appears as another denomination of this kind of subjective justice.

To Plato, the whole virtue reflects the ordered state of the soul, while in Aristotle’s view it implies only the acceptance of the current communal values, and at least in this chapter these values are not related to any absolute philosophical good since the treatment of this issue is postponed although it is clear that Aristotle discriminates between a good citizen and a good man in an absolute way. In spite of this superficial impression, it should be pointed out that the Aristotelian position is not so different from the one expressed in Plato’s Laws, since the Athenian guest is just criticizing the Dorian legislation and its ranking of values, i.e., he argues that a correct legislation should have a right hierarchy of values that are to be followed by the members of the community. In fact, in the ninth book of the Laws, Plato treats the violation of the Magnesian code as a manifestation of diseases of the soul, since the ordered state of the citizens’ soul is a reflection of the hierarchy of values and norms present in the legislation.

Aristotle adds a characteristic to complete justice that is not present in the Platonic text in the same way. This characteristic makes the use (χρήσει) of virtue in relation to other people (πρὸς ἄλλον) possible. It is precisely the exercise of all virtues in political life that makes the general or com-

49 Lg. 1 644 d3.
50 R. 3 414b5-6; 4, 429b-d; cf. Lisi 1985, 64-5.
51 EN 5.1 1229b24-25.
52 EN 5.1 1129b25-33, cf. 1130b18-20.
53 Lg. 2 658a5-c4.
54 Lg 1 631c7-8.
55 EN 5.1 1129b30.
56 Cf. EN 5.2 1130b26-29.
57 Cf. Lisi 2013.
plete justice the most valuable virtue.\textsuperscript{58} This characterization of complete justice raises the question of whether or not it is a state of soul (ἐξίς), like the other virtues. In what follows, Aristotle clarifies what he means: it is a possession, a state of the soul,\textsuperscript{59} which makes the use of all virtues towards others possible. In so far as just actions, i.e., actions according to the law, produce and preserve the happiness of the community,\textsuperscript{60} it is clear that this general or complete justice is the foundation of the community. It is mainly a political virtue, as Aristotle clearly expresses.\textsuperscript{61} To sum up: it is the state of the soul the makes the use of the virtues in the public sphere possible. From one point of view, this characterization of justice comes very close to Plato’s conception of it as the ordered state of the soul. Nevertheless, Aristotle introduces a crucial change in so far as he creates a specific sphere for it and makes a clear difference between the private and public virtue, a difference that Plato tried to eliminate at any cost. Besides, Aristotle put the stress on the relationship to others and on the congruence of the citizen virtue with the normative content of the law. The norm and the virtue are now adapted to the existing ruling system\textsuperscript{62} and clearly distinguished from the virtues of the pure and simple good man.\textsuperscript{63}

\section*{III. Conclusions}

Plato tries to internalize the notion of justice by also making it an individual virtue that regulates the relation between the different parts of the soul. It is a pre-political conception of justice that serves as a fundament of the political organization. To him, justice has an ontological value, and similarly to what he did with other key concepts in the Greek tradition of political thought, he tries to relate all the meanings of the concept to a basic kernel: the idea of a right distribution of values and honors. Justice is the order originating in the good hierarchical structure that warrants the rule

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{EN 5.1 1129b30-1} EN 5.1 1129b30-1.
\bibitem{EN 5.1 1129b31-2} EN 5.1 1129b31-2.
\bibitem{EN 5.1 1129b17-19} EN 5.1 1129b17-19.
\bibitem{EN 5.1 1129b33-1130a1} EN 5.1 1129b33-1130a1.
\bibitem{EN 5.1 1129b14-17} EN 5.1 1129b14-17.
\bibitem{Miller's translation of universal justice for the general or complete form does not, if I understand the English expression correctly, reflect the Aristotelian sense, because Aristotle does not mean by ὅλη δικαιοσύνη a kind of justice that is valid everywhere. When he states that “universal justice applies to any polis with laws,” Miller 1995, 68 sees a kind of natural law in the text, which is not really there.}

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of the highest element of the soul. In this sense, justice is order and law, and there are different forms of justice according to the participation of the different political orders in the ideal norm.

Aristotle maintains the importance of justice, and in a certain sense radicalizes the Socratic-Platonic identification of justice and legality. Justice as an expression of the existing legality has now become the complete or perfect virtue. The happiness of the community consists in the actualization of this perfect virtue in the public relationships of its citizens. Happiness is the actualization of the rule of law. Does this mean that, for Aristotle, a pre-political form of justice does not exist, even if we can find some remains of it in his work? In other words, does justice no longer have an ontological foundation in the cosmological order of the world? If we consider that, for Aristotle, politics according to nature is the scope of political knowledge, his thought still stays on the Academic ground and one could speak of a cosmic or natural foundation of justice in so far as good laws are only those according to the nature of the corresponding people. The distinction between political and the so-called pre-political conceptions of justice are not clearly defined, and neither for Aristotle nor for Plato is it truly useful. As a matter of fact, Plato’s notion of justice in the ninth book of the Laws is very close to the Aristotelian position. To the Athenian guest, justice is mainly respect and internalization of the law.

Aristotle’s position does not imply a complete relativism, since nature is the factor which determines the justice or injustice of an action or a law. Nevertheless, he does not mean a universal nature, but the concrete character of each society. Here, he maintains the Platonic approach.

There is a point where Aristotle takes a different approach from Plato’s Laws. In the penal excursus, Plato lets the quality of the action completely depend on the state of the soul that does it. Some passages could be interpreted in the sense that for Aristotle, the qualification of an act as just or unjust was more located in the intentionality of the subject than in the just or unjust disposition of the soul. His acceptance that an unintentional act

64 Miller 1995, 86.
65 Lisi 2013.
66 Winthrop 1997, 228 asserts that a theory of justice in Aristotle is impossible, because of the completely conventional character of the notion in Aristotle’s thought, but the assertion fails the point of the Aristotelian argument because of the reasons adduced here.
68 Cf. section I above.
can accidentally be just\(^69\) seems to imply that the quality of the action depends on its effects more than on the disposition or the state of the subject's soul.\(^70\) As opposed to Plato, Aristotle considers it possible for a just man to do wrong (\(\dot{\text{\textalpha}}\text{δικε\'ιν}\)), but this does not imply that he then becomes unjust.\(^71\) The qualification of an action depends not only on the intentionality of it, but also on a subject's clear consciousness of his action.\(^72\) Aristotle shifted the accent from the state of the soul to the intentionality in order to qualify the action. A clearer definition in this sense can be found in the first chapter of the second book of the *Eudemian Ethics*, where virtue is also defined as “the best disposition, or state or ability of everything that has a use or a work”\(^73\) subordinated to the ends of the action, then “the work of each thing is its end; from this, therefore, it is plain that the work is a greater good than the state, for the end is the best as being an end.”\(^74\)

In a certain way, Aristotle here returns to the traditional conception of justice, since he basically sees it as a political virtue, a virtue that needs the normal interchange of a civic life. Nonetheless, if one takes into account the role of the \(\phi\rho\omicron\omicron\nu\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\varsigma\) in the Aristotelian ethics and its function in performing virtue as it is exposed in the thirteenth chapter of the sixth book, it is clear that the soul of the virtuous man should enjoy a similar order to that proposed by Plato, i.e., an order where the highest part rules over the lower components of the soul. The acceptance of the norm of the law by the \(\phi\rho\omicron\omicron\nu\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\varsigma\) has similar effects in Aristotle and in Plato, and both thinkers establish a clear link between justice and law. And what is more: Aristotle's definition of happiness as “a certain actualization of the soul according to perfect virtue”\(^75\) clearly indicates that for him the virtuous and ordered state of the soul is justice in its actualization in the life of the political community.

Plato's definition of justice as τ\(\acute{\alpha}\)ωντο\(\upsilon\) π\(\acute{\alpha}\)τ\(\omicron\)τε\(\acute{\rho}\)ιν connects the political and ethical dimension of virtue. Symptomatically, Aristotle does not mention any limitation of human activity in society as proposed by Plato, but

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69  *EN* 5.8 1135a15-28.
71  *EN* 5.6 1134a17; cf. Williams 1980, 190. Williams clearly confuses the Aristotelian distinction between perfect and partial justice.
72  Cf. Aristotle's qualification of adultery under the influence of passion as an unjust action committed by a subject who is not unjust. In order to have a real unjust subject, the existence of a rational deliberation is necessary.
74  *EE* 2, 1, 1219a8-10; transl. Rackham 1981.
75  ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια τις κατ’ ἀρετὴν τελείαν; *EN* 1.13 1102a5-6; transl. Lisi.
he also acknowledges that a human community needs justice as its foundation to preserve its unity. Distributive justice instantiates a middle term in the interchange existing between individuals that have different abilities and functions in the society. Necessity is what keeps a community together. A right political system should establish a correct distribution of honors according to every citizen’s value. Corrective justice should reintroduce equality when the middle term established by the law has been infringed. But all these objective manifestations of justice are not possible, at least in an essential way, without the subjective disposition of justice as τελεία ἀρετή.

Aristotle, however, has reintroduced the Thrasymachean view of justice as an alien good, but in a new form: justice is the necessary expression of the exercise of virtue. In Aristotelian terms, virtue can be actualized only in a society, and because of that, justice is the whole of virtue. Contrary to Winthrop’s interpretation, justice is not contrary to human nature or individual interests, but rather it is the necessary premise for the actualization of both of them and for the realization of felicity for the political community. In the case of justice, Aristotle has given a new foundation to the Socratic-Platonic identification between justice and law-abidance, but the Platonic value of general justice as a state of the soul embracing the whole genus of virtue is a substantial part of his ethical and political theory.

Bibliography


76 EN 5.5 1133a16-19. This is one of the important functions of money, which I cannot treat here. Cf. Lisi 2017.

77 Winthrop 1978, esp. 1214-6.

78 EN 5.1 1129b17-19.


