

ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ

dikaiosyne

Plato's central concern in the *Republic* is justice (*dikaiosyne*—pronounced: de-cow-eye sue-knee). *Dikaiosyne* (δικαιοσύνη) is derived from *dike* (δικη). The following is from F.E. Peters *Greek Philosophical Terms*:

díkē: compensation, legal proceedings, justice

1. As is the case with most Greek ethical terms, *dike* had a fairly complex history before its incorporation into the problematic of philosophy. From the time of Homer *dike* had bound into it the transgression of certain limits, probably those dictated, in the first instance, by the class structure of society, and the payment of a compensation for this transgression. With the decline of an aristocratic class consciousness *dike* began to be seen as something pervasive in the society, –applicable to all citizens alike, and guaranteed by Zeus himself. The limits within which the new *dike* was operative were now defined by written law (*nomos*, q.v.), and a new abstract term *dikaiosyne*, "righteousness," "justice," came into use to describe the moral quality of the man who observed the limits of the law and was thus "just" (*dikaios*).

2. The first usage of *dike* in a philosophical context occurs in the only extant fragment from Anaximander (Diels 12B1) where the elements (*stoicheia*), which are naturally opposed forces (see *enantia*), are required to make reparation (*dike*) to each other for their mutual transgression in the process of *genesis-phthora*. The limits that are violated here are not those of a human society but the order implicit in the world seen as a *kosmos* (q.v.), this in an era before the operation of the physical world was made discontinuous with that of human life. One notes a correction in Heraclitus (fr. 80): the strife between the elements is not, as Anaximander would have it, a species of injustice that demands compensation, but the normal order of things, the tension of opposites that is the reality of existence.

3. Although the fragments of Democritus betray a certain interest in ethical behavior in general and justice in particular (see frs. 45, 174), this is the ethical concern of a philosopher rather than an attempt to construct a philosophical ethic. The impetus for just such an attempt lay in the Sophists' attacks on the bases of conduct on the grounds that they were tied to a relative, arbitrary law (see *nomos*). Thus was the notion of *dike* drawn into the controversy surrounding *nomos* vs. *physis*, and issues in a series of Sophistic positions that described justice as consisting solely in obedience to the arbitrary laws of the state, laws that were, in turn, the instruments whereby the powerful in the society sought to preserve their position: thus Archelaus (Diels 60A1), Antiphon (Diels 87B44), and the attitudes embraced by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* (e.g. 483a-484a) and Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic* (e.g. 338c).

4. The Socratic reply to these positions may, of course, be viewed merely as a refinement of his general thrust of the virtues (specifically including *dikaiosyne*; see Aristotle, *Eth. Eud.* I, 1216b) into the realm of permanent, cognitively grasped definitions (see *arete*); but there is besides the impassioned defense of justice and law as an inviolable social contract in the *Crito*. Plato's own answer to Socrates' antagonists is to be found in *Republic* II-X, and is embodied in an investigation of justice as it exists on the larger scale of the *polis* (*Rep.* 36ga), whence it emerges as a kind of cooperative disposition to do one's own work (see 433e, 443b).

5. This does not respond to Callicles' contention that the unjust always seem to have a better time of it; the wicked do, indeed, prosper. Plato has no great assurances to give about the fate of the just in this life—though he is sure the gods will not neglect them (*Rep.* 613a-b; compare *Laws* x, 899c-900b)—but it is in the future life that justice receives its ultimate reward, as depicted in glowing terms in the "Myth of Er" in *Republic* x.

6. Aristotle's major treatment of justice occurs in *Eth. Nich.* v where it is divided into a) "distributive," i.e., dealing with the division of goods, honors, etc. among those who participate in a political system, and b) "corrective," i.e., r-1131a). In both instances justice is a kind of proportion (*analogia*), and thus it too can be assimilated to the doctrine of the "mean" (see *meson*). Aristotle is firm in his rejection of the Sophists' contention that what is just is merely a matter of convention: there are at least some activities that are just by nature (1134b). Finally (1137a-b) he introduces the notion of the equitable or the decent (*epieikeia*) that tempers the legal demands of justice, "what the lawgiver would have said if he were there" (compare Plato, *Polito* 294a-295e).

7. For the Stoics *dikaiosyne* is one of the four cardinal virtues (*SVF* I, 190), defined by Chrysippus as "the science of distributing what is proper to each" (*SVF* III, 262), and based on nature, not convention (D.L. VII, 128). Carneades the Sceptic returned, however, to the Sophists' contention that law is a convention set up by men on strictly utilitarian grounds, a position that he can illustrate by the conflicting counsels of prudence and justice (Cicero, *De republica* III, 11,18-19; Lactantius, *Instit.* v, 16,3-:6). See *arete, nomos*.

Peters, F.E. *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*. New York: New York University Press, 1967.