

CAN A HUMAN BEING BE JUST (OR UNJUST) TO HIMSELF?

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We open this article with another question: Is justice (or injustice) a Filipino experience also? The answer can be found in the following instance that may shed light on the matter. A second to the youngest, twenty-four-year old young woman, who worked as a household help for a family, expressed her “*pagmahay*” and “*kahiubos*” for her parents who sent her eight siblings to school without her experiencing even “day-care” education. Her seven elder siblings, being all “drop-outs”, must have discouraged her parents in sending her to school. Only the youngest, 10 years her junior, is presently attending grade school. “*Pagmahay kahiubos*,” is difficult to express in English though it somewhat approximates “being downhearted” due to unreasonable dejection. It is an awareness that something is due to her (*katungud niya* / her right) being a daughter to her parents who ought to send her also to school (have the duty / *katungdanan*). “*Katungud*” (right) and “*katungdanan*” (duty) are the threads in the fabric that constitutes a society protected by “justice” through the law. So, when a person experiences “*pagmahay*” when something *nga angay kaniya* (ought to be hers) is not accorded to her, then she experiences “injustice.” But when something “*nga angay niya*” / “*na dapat sa kaniya*” (ought to be hers) is respected, then justice is experienced. This one example can illustrate other instances of justice and injustice experienced by a Filipino.

This exposition evinces that justice is relational—between a self and an other. Is justice, nonetheless, also experienced in relation to one’s self? Can I be just (or unjust) to myself? The example of the woman denied of a rightful education comes in handy to answer this intriguing inquiry. The young woman not only knew what she lacked, which could have been hers through at least a primary education; she

felt envious when encountering girls whom she could not understand because they spoke to her in English. She felt she could have done more to help her younger sister in her assignment in school had she the necessary ability. As it is, she felt helpless. And so she tried to learn the basics of A, B, C, and the 3 R's of reading, (w)riting, and (a)rithmetic from adults who were willing and able to redeem her from her ignorance. And so, if you see her today, you will see the gratitude and joy for such knowledge finding expression in her happy countenance. So, can a person be just to oneself? Yes, the young woman knew she ought to have the knowledge she lacked and she endeavored to overcome this lack by conquering her basic ignorance. It would be injustice to herself had she deprived herself of such an opportunity for fundamental growth. Her case can serve as an emblem of all other instances of Filipino resourcefulness and unmindfulness.

The idea of justice to one's self finds a place in Plato's philosophy. It is most enlightening to see "justice to the self" against this background.

Commonly understood as a social virtue, justice governs the relation between men in society, thus conserving their rights and duties. When justice is considered, therefore, it is always within the context of human co-existence. Justice (or injustice) cannot be done to one's self for I am obviously an individual, not a society. Nevertheless, justice or injustice can be done to me by me. I can be just or unjust to myself. This is, in fact, implied in Plato's conception of justice. For Plato, "justice means one man, one art or to each his own."¹ This is clarified in his analysis of it as concretized in a just city that finds its embodiment in a just individual.

After an unhurried introductory dialogical explanation, Socrates presents the meaning of justice.² This he traces to the genesis of a city where he pins down its meaning in connection with a just city under construction. He says that a city is generated from the multifarious needs of a man which he cannot meet adequately by himself. For example, his needs for food, shelter and clothing, from which all other needs mushroom, requires a farmer, a carpenter, and a tailor. These wants, thus, have naturally brought men together. The small community has become a big city, a complete network that is

structured tripartitely: with guardians, auxiliaries and craftsmen. For the city to function well, each must attend to his own task. For instance, to be outstanding in his art, a farmer must not meddle in another's work. In like manner, each of the three structural constituents of the ideal society should mind its own affair. Each one must be a specialist. Then only does a just city come to be. Hence, "justice means minding one's own business." (*Republic*, 441 c) That is, to each his own or one man, one art / craft.

Moreover, for Socrates, "A man is just in the same manner that a city too is just" (*Republic* 441 c). While in a city there are three classes, in a man there are three parts, namely, the calculative (reason), irascible (anger), and concupiscible (desire), each having its specific task to perform. When any part fails, a disorder results. Hence, when desire dominates reason, a man will experience confusion and anguish. The inner turmoil can lead to sickness. But with every part minding its own business, he is a just man who attends to his own affairs.

Socrates' idea of a just city that is basically rooted in the principle of "each man minding his own business" or "each man, one art" emphatically precludes any citizen attempting to be a "jack of all trades." How, indeed, can a human being be a master in his field if he diffuses his interest in all kinds of work? And how can he best serve his fellowmen if he is only a mediocre practitioner who knows a little of everything? Not giving to the other his due is to be unjust to him. This must be what Socrates meant when advocating that justice is "each man minding his own business." If society has come to be because of men's need for one another, its common end is met when everybody contributes to the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else. And since one man is expected to give his full share (best contribution) to the other, it will be unjust if this other will not reciprocate in the same measure. But perfect reciprocity is possible only when each man is left free to develop himself fully in his area (craft) and concentrate on his line of specialization.³

Thus "one man, one art" is justice. That is, it is due to a man to let him develop himself fully in his work and, becoming master in it, be able to give the other his due.

Turning now from society to the individual, the mastery of one's work presupposes health that results from the integration of one's personality, that is, the lower principle is integrated into the next higher principle until the highest principle takes mastery over all (444 d). This implies that all parts of the human system work for the good of the whole organism. While every organ, like the brain, heart, and lungs, is autonomous in its own specific "rules" that need to be followed in the discharge of its function, each part, submitting as it were to a "central command" (the central nervous system), participates with all other organs in the attainment of the common goal, which is the good of the individual man. Man suffers when a part fails.

Over and beyond his physical health, a man is true to himself when he behaves according to the demand of his nature as a person. An authentic man is one who thinks, decides and acts in a manner befitting his call to be a human person. Even his feelings are so educated that his emotional life is permeated with his spirituality. This authentic man is the just man.

However, if and when anybody leads a disorganized life, where his lower parts dominate the higher (like, the irascible dominates the calculative) or the higher deteriorates to a lower level, he becomes a confused person. And this confusion can be a sure way to sickness. A human being who deliberately causes his illness is unjust to himself.

There is, then, sense in talking about doing justice or injustice to the self. To recapitulate, a man is just when all his parts mind their own business and when there is a proper subordination of the lower part to the higher according to the demand of nature. In other words, a man is just to himself (that is, true to himself) when he lets his inner natural organization be. Otherwise, he is unjust to himself.

¹ *Republic*, 441c-e.

² Besides Socrates, the philosopher teacher of Plato, Socrates features as the principal character in Plato's *Dialogues*.

³ The time has come, though, that social evolution has made personal interdisciplinarity in various fields involving multi-specialization.