

# Plato's Project in *Republic*

The Classical World: Spring 2010

- I. Overview of *Republic*
- II. Why Justice is Better than Injustice
- III. A Critique of Platonic Reason
- IV. From Oral to Literate Culture: Plato

# References

Havelock, Eric. *Preface to Plato*.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy*.

# Overview of *Republic*

Questions: *What is justice? ... a just polis? ... a just man?*

<p><b>Book I</b></p> <p>Polemarchus: Benefit friends, harm enemies</p> <p>Thrasymachus: the advantage of the stronger</p> <p>Thr's challenge: Injustice is virtue</p>	<p><b>Book II</b></p> <p><i>Is justice better than injustice?</i></p> <p>Ring of Gyges</p> <p>soul ~ polis</p> <p>first poleis</p> <p>argument contra poetry</p>	<p><b>Book III</b></p> <p>more contra poetry</p> <p>education of guardians</p> <p>purified polis</p> <p>rulers = true guardians</p>	<p><b>Book IV</b></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td><u>City</u></td> <td><u>Man</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(Rulers</td> <td>Reason)</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Wisdom</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(Soldiers</td> <td>Spirit)</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Courage</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(Workers</td> <td>Appetite)</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Temperance</td> </tr> </table> <p>Justice = harmony among parts</p>	<u>City</u>	<u>Man</u>	(Rulers	Reason)	Wisdom		(Soldiers	Spirit)	Courage		(Workers	Appetite)	Temperance		<p><b>Book V</b></p> <p>Women and families</p> <p>Philosopher kings</p> <p>Knowledge, opinion and ignorance</p>
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<p><b>Book VI</b></p> <p>Cranks vs. True philosophers</p> <p>The forms</p> <p>The Sun</p> <p>The Line</p>	<p><b>Book VII</b></p> <p>The Cave</p> <p>Education of the rulers – math &amp; dialectic</p>	<p><b>Book VIII</b></p> <p>Lesser poleis and lesser men:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Timocracy</li> <li>•Oligarchy</li> <li>•Democracy</li> <li>•Tyranny</li> </ul>	<p><b>Book IX</b></p> <p>The tyrannical man</p> <p>Why justice is better than injustice</p>	<p><b>Book X</b></p> <p>Another case contra poetry</p> <p>Myth of Er</p>														

# Why Justice Is Beneficial

## Main Goal of Argument, Books II-IX:

*“...praise justice as a good of that kind [i.e., worth getting for its own sake], explaining how – because of its very self – it benefits its possessors and how injustice harms them”*  
(367d).

**Show that justice in itself is beneficial, and that injustice in itself is harmful.**

# Why Justice Is Beneficial

## Strategy:

Construct the complete just man  
(philosopher-king, Book VII)

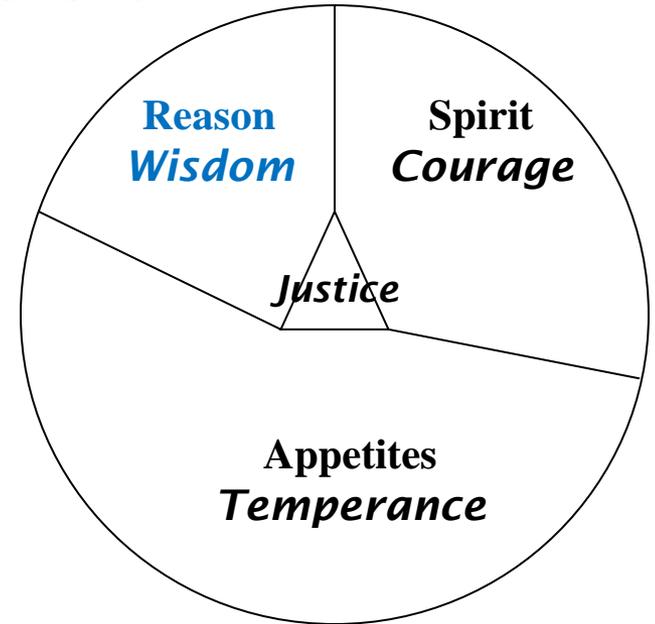
Construct the intermediate men  
(timocrat, oligarch, democrat, Book VIII)

Construct the complete unjust man  
(tyrant, Book IX)

Compare them all and determine who is happiest

# Lesser Poleis, Lesser Men

The *kallipolis* is ruled by *philosopher kings*.  
The *aristocratic soul* is ruled by *reason*.



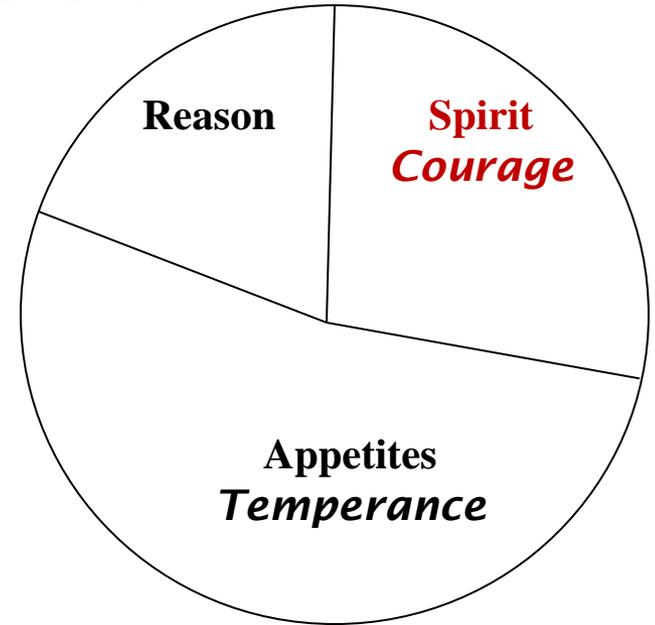
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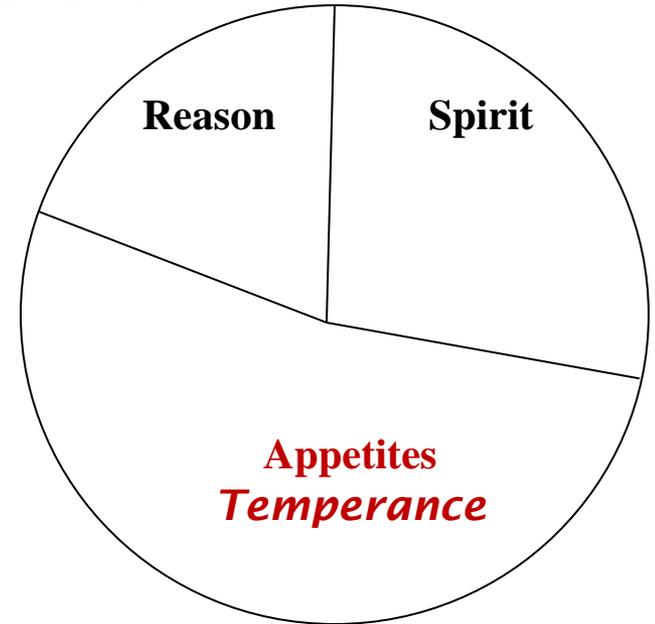
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The *oligarchic soul* is ruled by *necessary appetites*.



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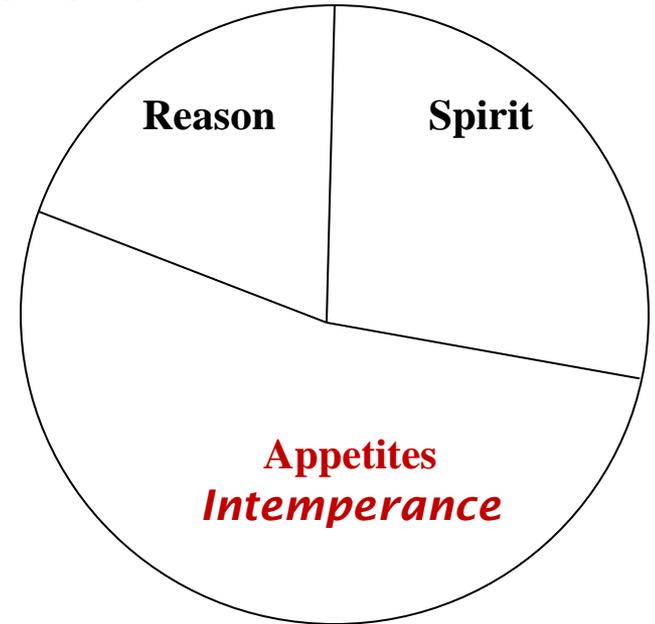
The *timocratic soul* is ruled by *spirit*.

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The *democratic soul* is ruled by *unnecessary appetites*.



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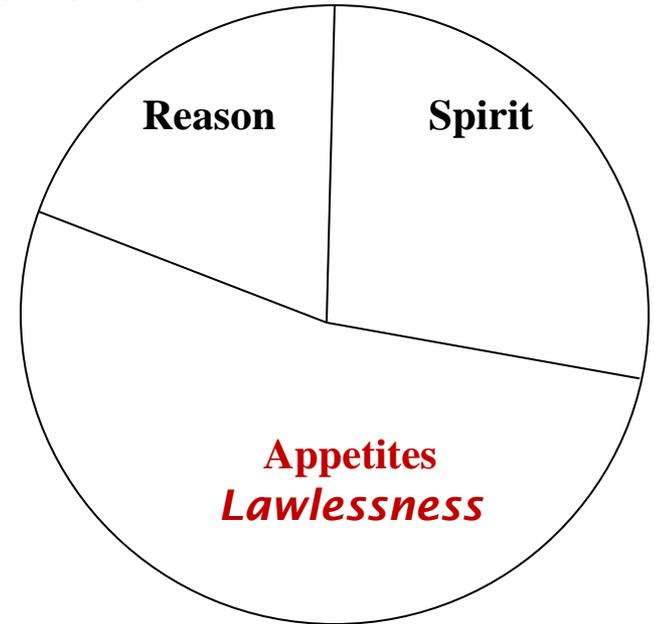
The *oligarchic soul* is ruled by *necessary appetites*.

The *democracy* is ruled by *all the men*.

The *democratic soul* is ruled by *unnecessary appetites*.

The *tyranny* is ruled by a *tyrant*.

The *tyrannical soul* is ruled by *lawless appetites*.



# Lawless Desires

*“Some of our unnecessary pleasures and desires seem to me to be lawless. They are probably present in everyone, but they are held in check by the laws and be the better desires in alliance with reason. ... [I mean] [t]hose [desires] that are awakened by sleep, when the rest of the soul – the rational, gentle, and ruling part – slumbers. Then the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself. You know that there is nothing it won’t dare to do. ... It doesn’t shrink from trying to have sex with a mother, as it supposes, or with anyone else at all...” (571b-d).*

# Desires of the Rational Man

*“...someone who is healthy and moderate with himself goes to sleep only after ... first ... he rouses his rational part and feasts it on fine arguments and speculations; second, he neither starves nor feasts his appetites, so that they will slumber and ... leave it alone, pure and by itself, to get on with its investigations ...; third, he soothes his spirited part in the same way ... . And when he has quieted these two parts and aroused the third, in which reason resides, and so takes his rest, you know that it is then that he best grasps the truth and that the visions that appear in his dreams are least lawless...” (571d-572b).*

# The Tyrannical Man: A Portrait

1. He is “...*drunk, filled with erotic desire, and mad*” (573c).
2. His erotic desire “*drives him ... to dare anything that will provide sustenance for itself and the unruly mob [of lawless desires] around it*” (575a).
3. He manipulates people to get what he wants, and so he lives “*always a master to one man or a slave to another and never getting a taste of either freedom or true friendship*” (576a).
4. The tyrannical soul will “*be least likely to do what it wants and, forcibly driven by the stings of a dronish gadfly, will be full of disorder and regret*” (577d-e).

# The Tyrannical Man: A Portrait

The only person worse off than a tyrannical man is an actual tyrant:

*“... a real tyrant is really a slave, compelled to engage in the worst kind of fawning, slavery, and pandering to the worst kind of people” (579d).*

*“... he is inevitably envious, untrustworthy, unjust, friendless, impious, host and nurse to every kind of vice.... And because of all these, he is extremely unfortunate...” (580a).*

# Why Justice Is Beneficial: Conclusion

*“... the best, the most just, and the most happy man is the most kingly, who rules like a king over himself, and ... the worst, the most unjust and the most wretched is the most tyrannical, who most tyrannizes himself and the city he rules” (580b-c).*

# Why Justice Is Beneficial: Conclusion

*The just man is happy*, because:

1. Only just men have *well-ordered souls*,

# Why Justice Is Beneficial: Conclusion

*The just man is happy*, because:

1. Only just men have *well-ordered souls*, and
2. Only those with *well-ordered souls* are *happy*.

*Why accept (2)?*

3. Only a well-ordered soul is truly **free** to pursue its goals. (cf. tyrannical man)
4. Only a well-ordered soul pursues the **right goals**.

*Why accept (4)?*

# Goals of a Well-Ordered Soul

## Two arguments about pleasure (briefly)

1. Three types of pleasure, and only philosophers are competent to judge them (580d-583a)
2. Pleasures of philosophy (i.e., contemplation of the Forms) are most real (583b-587e).

*“...a king lives seven hundred and twenty-nine times more pleasantly than a tyrant” (587e).*

# Goals of a Well-Ordered Soul

*A well-ordered soul pursues the most real pleasures of knowledge,*

because

*A well-ordered soul is ruled by reason,*

and

*The rational part of the soul is so constituted as to pursue knowledge (of the Forms; cf. Book VI-VII).*

??

# Plato's View of Rationality

## *Reason is...*

- ... a seat of desire – for knowledge: “feasts ... on fine arguments and speculations” (571d),
- ... properly oriented to the Good,  
*This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good” (518c-d)*
- ... therefore, inherently **normative** and **teleological** – so constituted as to pursue the right goals, and
- ... therefore, the legitimate ruler of the soul.

# Platonic Reason, Virtue, and Happiness

In a nutshell:

**The just man is the happiest, because:**

*He is ruled by reason.*

*It is in human nature to be ruled by reason.*

*When ruling the soul, reason is motivated towards the Good.*

# Critique of Plato's Argument

Plato conceives of reason as a motivating force.

It is motivated, when ruling the soul, towards the Forms and the Good.

Contemplation of the Forms and the Good give reason the conception of order by which it can rule the soul (and the polis).

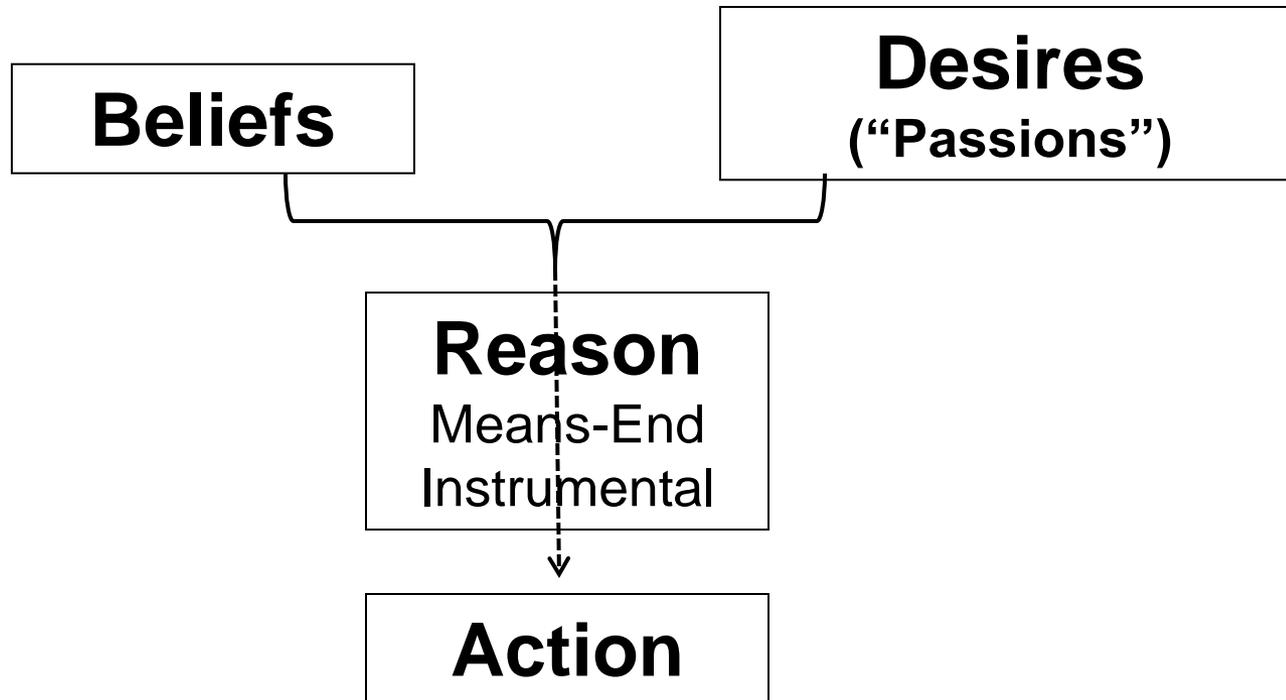
***But why think that reason has any motives at all?***

# A Later View of Rationality

*“Reason is, and ought only to be the slave to the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. ... ‘Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.”*

-- David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), II.3.iii.

# Hume's Conception of Reason



# The Question of Reason

Does reason by itself motivate us (as Plato believes)?

Or is reason by itself inert – only activated when we have some desire that motivates us (as Hume believes)?

# Plato and the Rise of Literacy

By Plato's time (early/mid 4<sup>th</sup> c.), Athens had a *literate public*.

Plato's philosophy reflects the transition from a **primary oral culture** to a **literate culture**.

- Being and Becoming
- Transcendence
- Logic and Order

# Being and Becoming

## Primary Oral Culture

“Sound only exists as it is going out of existence” (Ong)

Constantly in *flux* – no permanence

Oral communication is *a non-repeatable event*

# Being and Becoming

## Primary Oral Culture

“Sound only exists as it is going out of existence” (Ong)

Constantly in *flux* – no permanence

Oral communication is *a non-repeatable event*

## Literate Culture

The written word is (practically) *permanent*

The written word is *duplicable*

# Being and Becoming

## Literate culture ...

*... fosters conceiving of words as **representing objects** and as **objects themselves***

*... fosters conceiving of a permanent, unchanging realm beyond/behind all changes*

Earlier thinkers (Heraclitus, Pythagoreans, Parmenides) moved in this direction.

Plato made a decisive move with the Forms.

# Transcendence

## Primary Oral Culture

The orator is *infused* with the oratory

(“Sing in me Muse”)

The orator and the audience are *united* in the event

*Orator – Oratory – Audience* become ***one complex event***

## Literate Culture

The author is *distinct from the message*

The audience (readers) are *detached* from the author

*Author – Message – Readers* are ***three distinct things***



# Logic and Order

## Primary Oral Culture

Communication is *narrative* not discursive.

Communication focuses on *life as lived* (people doing things).

Communication is strongly *agonistic*.

## Literate Culture

Communication can become more *discursive*

Communication can become more *abstract*

Communication emphasizes *logical consistency*

# Logic and Order

## Literate culture...

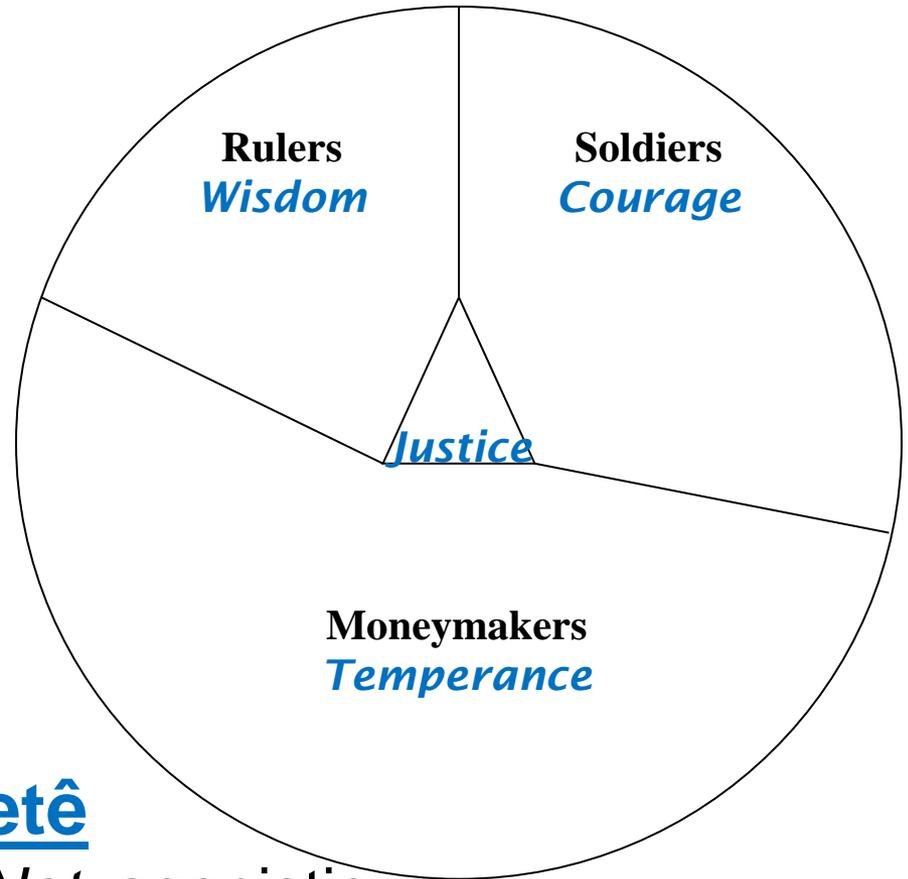
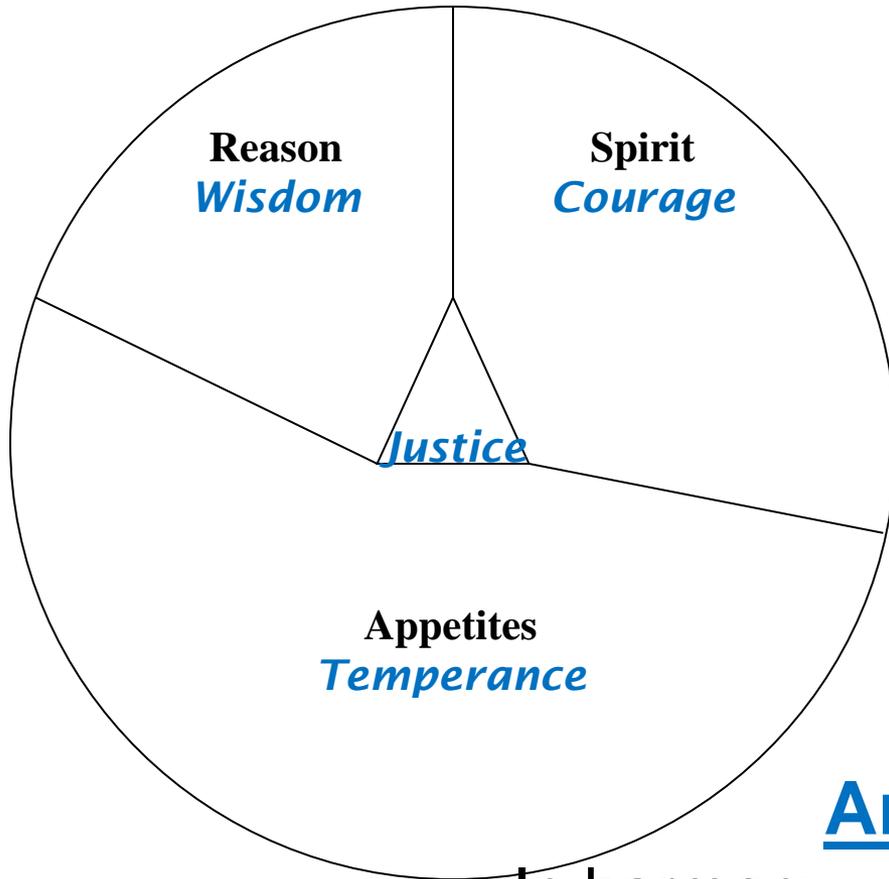
... fosters the development of *logical consistency*,

... fosters the development of *abstract concepts*,

... fosters a conception of the *world as harmonious and logically ordered* through-and-through.

## Contrast between Homeric and Platonic conceptions of *Aretê*

# Plato's Conception of Aretê



## Aretê

In harmony – Not agonistic  
Universal – “moral” virtue