1. The Definition of Justice

With regards to justice and injustice we must (1) consider what kind of actions they are concerned with, (2) what sort of mean justice is, and (3) between what extremes the just act is intermediate. Our investigation shall follow the same course as the preceding discussions.

We see that all men mean by justice that kind of state of character which makes people disposed to do what is just and makes them act justly and wish for what is just; and similarly by injustice that state which makes them act unjustly and wish for what is unjust. Let us too, then, lay this down as a general basis. For the same is not true of the sciences and the faculties as of states of character. A faculty or a science which is one and the same is held to relate to contrary objects, but a state of character which is one of two contraries does not produce the contrary results; e.g. as a result of health we do not do what is the opposite of healthy, but only what is healthy; for we say a man walks healthily, when he walks as a healthy man would.

Now often one contrary state is recognized from its contrary, and often states are recognized from the subjects that exhibit them; for (A) if good condition is known, bad condition also becomes known, and (B) good condition is known from the things that are in good condition, and they from it. If good condition is firmness of flesh, it is necessary both that bad condition should be flabbiness of flesh and that the wholesome should be that which causes firmness in flesh. And it follows for the most part that if one contrary is ambiguous the other also will be ambiguous; e.g. if ‘just’ is so, that ‘unjust’ will be so too.

Now ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ seem to be ambiguous, but because their different meanings approach near to one another the ambiguity escapes notice and is not obvious as it is, comparatively, when the meanings are far apart, e.g. (for here the difference in outward form is great) as the ambiguity in the use of kleis for the collar-bone of an animal and for that with which we lock a door. Let us take as a starting-point, then, the various meanings of ‘an unjust man’. Both the lawless man and the law-abiding man are thought to be unjust, so that evidently both the law-abiding and the fair man will be just. The just, then, is the lawful and the fair, the unjust the unlawful and the unfair.

Since the unjust man is grasping, he must be concerned with goods—not all goods, but those with which prosperity and adversity have to do, which taken absolutely are always good, but for a particular person are not always good. Now men pray for and pursue these things; but they should not, but should pray that the things that are good absolutely may also be good for them, and should choose the things that are good for them. The unjust man does not always choose the greater, but also the less—in the case of things bad absolutely; but because the lesser evil is itself thought to be in a sense good, and graspingness is directed at the good, therefore he is thought to be grasping. And he is unfair; for this contains and is common to both.

Since the lawless man was seen to be unjust and the law-abiding man just, evidently all lawful acts are in a sense just acts; for the acts laid down by the legislative art are lawful, and each of these, we say, is just. Now the laws in their enactments on all subjects aim at the common advantage either of all or of the best or of those who hold power, or something of the sort; so that in one sense we call those acts just that tend to produce and preserve happiness and
its components for the political society. And the law bids us do both the acts of a brave man
(e.g. not to desert our post nor take to flight nor throw away our arms), and those of a temperate
man (e.g. not to commit adultery nor to gratify one’s lust), and those of a good-tempered man
(e.g. not to strike another nor to speak evil), and similarly with regard to the other virtues and
forms of wickedness, commanding some acts and forbidding others; and the rightly-framed
law does this rightly, and the hastily conceived one less well. This form of justice, then, is
complete virtue, but not absolutely, but in relation to our neighbour. And therefore justice
is often thought to be the greatest of virtues, and ‘neither evening nor morning star’ is so
wonderful; and proverbially ‘in justice is every virtue comprehended’. And it is complete virtue
in its fullest sense, because it is the actual exercise of complete virtue. It is complete because he
who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards his neighbour also; for
many men can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in their relations to their neighbour.
This is why the saying of Bias is thought to be true, that ‘rule will show the man’; for a ruler
is necessarily in relation to other men and a member of a society. For this same reason justice,
alone of the virtues, is thought to be ‘another’s good’, because it is related to our neighbour; for
it does what is advantageous to another, either a ruler or a copartner. Now the worst man is he
who exercises his wickedness both towards himself and towards his friends, and the best man
is not he who exercises his virtue towards himself but he who exercises it towards another; for
this is a difficult task. Justice in this sense, then, is not part of virtue but virtue entire, nor is
the contrary injustice a part of vice but vice entire. What the difference is between virtue and
justice in this sense is plain from what we have said; they are the same but their essence is not
the same; what, as a relation to one’s neighbour, is justice is, as a certain kind of state without
qualification, virtue.

2. General Justice

But at all events what we are investigating is the justice which is a part of virtue; for there is a
justice of this kind, as we maintain. Similarly it is with injustice in the particular sense that we
are concerned.

That there is such a thing is indicated by the fact that while the man who exhibits in
action the other forms of wickedness acts wrongly indeed, but not graspingly (e.g. the man
who throws away his shield through cowardice or speaks harshly through bad temper or fails
to help a friend with money through meanness), when a man acts graspingly he often exhibits
none of these vices,-no, nor all together, but certainly wickedness of some kind (for we blame
him) and injustice. There is, then, another kind of injustice which is a part of injustice in the
wide sense, and a use of the word ‘unjust’ which answers to a part of what is unjust in the wide
sense of ‘contrary to the law’. Again if one man commits adultery for the sake of gain and
makes money by it, while another does so at the bidding of appetite though he loses money
and is penalized for it, the latter would be held to be self-indulgent rather than grasping, but
the former is unjust, but not self-indulgent; evidently, therefore, he is unjust by reason of his
making gain by his act. Again, all other unjust acts are ascribed invariably to some particular
kind of wickedness, e.g. adultery to self-indulgence, the desertion of a comrade in battle to
cowardice, physical violence to anger; but if a man makes gain, his action is ascribed to no
form of wickedness but injustice. Evidently, therefore, there is apart from injustice in the wide
sense another, ‘particular’, injustice which shares the name and nature of the first, because its
definition falls within the same genus; for the significance of both consists in a relation to one’s
neighbour, but the one is concerned with honour or money or safety-or that which includes all
these, if we had a single name for it-and its motive is the pleasure that arises from gain; while
the other is concerned with all the objects with which the good man is concerned.

It is clear, then, that there is more than one kind of justice, and that there is one which is
different from virtue entire; we must try to grasp its genus and differentia.

The unjust has been divided into the unlawful and the unfair, and the just into the lawful
and the fair. To the unlawful answers the afore-mentioned sense of injustice. But since unfair
and the unlawful are not the same, but are different as a part is from its whole (for all that is unfair is unlawful, but not all that is unlawful is unfair), the unjust and injustice in the sense of the unfair are not the same but different from the former kind, as part from whole; for injustice in this sense is a part of injustice in the wide sense, and similarly justice in the one sense of justice in the other. Therefore we must speak also about particular justice and particular and similarly about the just and the unjust. The justice, then, which answers to the whole of virtue, and the corresponding injustice, one being the exercise of virtue as a whole, and the other that of vice as a whole, towards one’s neighbour, we may leave on one side. And how the meanings of ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ which answer to these are to be distinguished is evident; for practically the majority of the acts commanded by the law are those which are prescribed from the point of view of virtue taken as a whole; for the law bids us practise every virtue and forbids us to practise any vice. And the things that tend to produce virtue taken as a whole are those of the acts prescribed by the law which have been prescribed with a view to education for the common good. But with regard to the education of the individual as such, which makes him without qualification a good man, we must determine later whether this is the function of the political art or of another; for perhaps it is not the same to be a good man and a good citizen of any state taken at random.

Of particular justice and that which is just in the corresponding sense, (A) one kind is that which is manifested in distributions of honour or money or the other things that fall to be divided among those who have a share in the constitution (for in these it is possible for one man to have a share either unequal or equal to that of another), and (B) one is that which plays a rectifying part in transactions between man and man. Of this there are two divisions; of transactions (1) some are voluntary and (2) others involuntary- voluntary such transactions as sale, purchase, loan for consumption, pledging, loan for use, depositing, letting (they are called voluntary because the origin of these transactions is voluntary), while of the involuntary (a) some are clandestine, such as theft, adultery, poisoning, procuring, enticement of slaves, assassination, false witness, and (b) others are violent, such as assault, imprisonment, murder, robbery with violence, mutilation, abuse, insult.

3. Special and General Justice

We have shown that both the unjust man and the unjust act are unfair or unequal; now it is clear that there is also an intermediate between the two unequals involved in either case. And this is the equal; for in any kind of action in which there’s a more and a less there is also what is equal. If, then, the unjust is unequal, just is equal, as all men suppose it to be, even apart from argument. And since the equal is intermediate, the just will be an intermediate. Now equality implies at least two things. The just, then, must be both intermediate and equal and relative (i.e. for certain persons). And since the equal intermediate it must be between certain things (which are respectively greater and less); equal, it involves two things; qua just, it is for certain people. The just, therefore, involves at least four terms; for the persons for whom it is in fact just are two, and the things in which it is manifested, the objects distributed, are two. And the same equality will exist between the persons and between the things concerned; for as the latter the things concerned are related, so are the former; if they are not equal, they will not have what is equal, but this is the origin of quarrels and complaints-when either equals have and are awarded unequal shares, or unequals equal shares. Further, this is plain from the fact that awards should be ‘according to merit’; for all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, though they do not all specify the same sort of merit, but democrats identify it with the status of freeman, supporters of oligarchy with wealth (or with noble birth), and supporters of aristocracy with excellence.

The just, then, is a species of the proportionate (proportion being not a property only of the kind of number which consists of abstract units, but of number in general). For proportion is equality of ratios, and involves four terms at least (that discrete proportion involves four terms is plain, but so does continuous proportion, for it uses one term as two and mentions it
twice; e.g. ‘as the line A is to the line B, so is the line B to the line C’; the line B, then, has been mentioned twice, so that if the line B be assumed twice, the proportional terms will be four; and the just, too, involves at least four terms, and the ratio between one pair is the same as that between the other pair; for there is a similar distinction between the persons and between the things. As the term A, then, is to B, so will C be to D, and therefore, alterando, as A is to C, B will be to D. Therefore also the whole is in the same ratio to the whole; and this coupling the distribution effects, and, if the terms are so combined, effects justly. The conjunction, then, of the term A with C and of B with D is what is just in distribution, and this species of the just is intermediate, and the unjust is what violates the proportion; for the proportional is intermediate, and the just is proportional. (Mathematicians call this kind of proportion geometrical; for it is in geometrical proportion that it follows that the whole is to the whole as either part is to the corresponding part.) This proportion is not continuous; for we cannot get a single term standing for a person and a thing.

This, then, is what the just is—the proportional; the unjust is what violates the proportion. Hence one term becomes too great, the other too small, as indeed happens in practice; for the man who acts unjustly has too much, and the man who is unjustly treated too little, of what is good. In the case of evil the reverse is true; for the lesser evil is reckoned a good in comparison with the greater evil, since the lesser evil is rather to be chosen than the greater, and what is worthy of choice is good, and what is worthier of choice a greater good.

This, then, is one species of the just.

4. Distributive Justice

The remaining one is the rectificatory, which arises in connexion with transactions both voluntary and involuntary. This form of the just has a different specific character from the former. For the justice which distributes common possessions is always in accordance with the kind of proportion mentioned above (for in the case also in which the distribution is made from the common funds of a partnership it will be according to the same ratio which the funds put into the business by the partners bear to one another); and the injustice opposed to this kind of justice is that which violates the proportion. But the justice in transactions between man and man is a sort of equality indeed, and the injustice a sort of inequality; not according to that kind of proportion, however, but according to arithmetical proportion. For it makes no difference whether a good man has defrauded a bad man or a bad man a good one, nor whether it is a good or a bad man that has committed adultery; the law looks only to the distinctive character of the injury, and treats the parties as equal, if one is in the wrong and the other is being wronged, and if one inflicted injury and the other has received it. Therefore, this kind of injustice being an inequality, the judge tries to equalize it; for in the case also in which one has received and the other has inflicted a wound, or one has slain and the other been slain, the suffering and the action have been unequally distributed; but the judge tries to equalize by means of the penalty, taking away from the gain of the assailant. For the term ‘gain’ is applied generally to such cases, even if it be not a term appropriate to certain cases, e.g. to the person who inflicts a wound and ‘loss’ to the sufferer; at all events when the suffering has been estimated, the one is called loss and the other gain. Therefore the equal is intermediate between the greater and the less, but the gain and the loss are respectively greater and less in contrary ways; more of the good and less of the evil are gain, and the contrary is loss; intermediate between them is, as we saw, equal, which we say is just; therefore corrective justice will be the intermediate between loss and gain. This is why, when people dispute, they take refuge in the judge; and to go to the judge is to go to justice; for the nature of the judge is to be a sort of animate justice; and they seek the judge as an intermediate, and in some states they call judges mediators, on the assumption that if they get what is intermediate they will get what is just. The just, then, is an intermediate, since the judge is so. Now the judge restores equality; it is as though there were a line divided into unequal parts, and he took away that by which the greater segment exceeds the half, and added it to the smaller segment. And when the whole has been equally divided, then they say they
have ‘their own’—i.e. when they have got what is equal. The equal is intermediate between the
greater and the lesser line according to arithmetical proportion. It is for this reason also that it
is called just (sikaion), because it is a division into two equal parts (sicha), just as if one were
to call it sikaion; and the judge (sikastes) is one who bisects (sichastes). For when something
is subtracted from one of two equals and added to the other, the other is in excess by these two;
since if what was taken from the one had not been added to the other, the latter would have
been in excess by one only. It therefore exceeds the intermediate by one, and the intermediate
exceeds by one that from which something was taken. By this, then, we shall recognize both
what we must subtract from that which has more, and what we must add to that which has
less; we must add to the latter that by which the intermediate exceeds it, and subtract from the
greatest that by which it exceeds the intermediate. Let the lines AA’, BB’, CC’ be equal to one
another; from the line AA’ let the segment AE have been subtracted, and to the line CC’ let the
segment Cd have been added, so that the whole line DCC’ exceeds the line EA’ by the segment
CD and the segment CF; therefore it exceeds the line Bb’ by the segment CD. (See diagram.)

These names, both loss and gain, have come from voluntary exchange; for to have more
than one’s own is called gaining, and to have less than one’s original share is called losing, e.g.
in buying and selling and in all other matters in which the law has left people free to make their
own terms; but when they get neither more nor less but just what belongs to themselves, they
say that they have their own and that they neither lose nor gain.

Therefore the just is intermediate between a sort of gain and a sort of loss, viz. those which
are involuntary; it consists in having an equal amount before and after the transaction.

5. Retificatory Justice

Some think that reciprocity is without qualification just, as the Pythagoreans said; for they
defined justice without qualification as reciprocity. Now ‘reciprocity’ fits neither distributive
nor rectificatory justice—yet people want even the justice of Rhadamanthus to mean this:

Should a man suffer what he did, right justice would be done—for in many cases reciprocity
and rectificatory justice are not in accord; e.g. (1) if an official has inflicted a wound, he should
not be wounded in return, and if some one has wounded an official, he ought not to be wounded
only but punished in addition. Further (2) there is a great difference between a voluntary and
an involuntary act. But in associations for exchange this sort of justice does hold men together—
reciprocity in accordance with a proportion and not on the basis of precisely equal return. For
it is by proportionate requital that the city holds together. Men seek to return either evil for
evil—and if they cana not do so, think their position mere slavery—or good for good—and if they
cannot do so there is no exchange, but it is by exchange that they hold together. This is why they
give a prominent place to the temple of the Graces—to promote the requital of services; for this
is characteristic of grace—we should serve in return one who has shown grace to us, and should
another time take the initiative in showing it.

Now proportionate return is secured by cross-conjunction. Let A be a builder, B a shoemaker,
C a house, D a shoe. The builder, then, must get from the shoemaker the latter’s work, and must
himself give him in return his own. If, then, first there is proportionate equality of goods, and
then reciprocal action takes place, the result we mention will be effected. If not, the bargain is
not equal, and does not hold; for there is nothing to prevent the work of the one being better
than that of the other; they must therefore be equated. (And this is true of the other arts also; for
they would have been destroyed if what the patient suffered had not been just what the agent
did, and of the same amount and kind.) For it is not two doctors that associate for exchange,
but a doctor and a farmer, or in general people who are different and unequal; but these must be
equated. This is why all things that are exchanged must be somehow comparable. It is for this
end that money has been introduced, and it becomes in a sense an intermediate; for it measures
all things, and therefore the excess and the defect—how many shoes are equal to a house or to
a given amount of food. The number of shoes exchanged for a house (or for a given amount
of food) must therefore correspond to the ratio of builder to shoemaker. For if this be not so,
there will be no exchange and no intercourse. And this proportion will not be effected unless
the goods are somehow equal. All goods must therefore be measured by some one thing, as we
said before. Now this unit is in truth demand, which holds all things together (for if men did not
need one another’s goods at all, or did not need them equally, there would be either no exchange
or not the same exchange); but money has become by convention a sort of representative of
demand; and this is why it has the name ‘money’ (nomisma)—because it exists not by nature
but by law (nomos) and it is in our power to change it and make it useless. There will, then, be
reciprocity when the terms have been equated so that as farmer is to shoemaker, the amount
of the shoemaker’s work is to that of the farmer’s work for which it exchanges. But we must
not bring them into a figure of proportion when they have already exchanged (otherwise one
extreme will have both excesses), but when they still have their own goods. Thus they are
equals and associates just because this equality can be effected in their case. Let A be a farmer,
C food, B a shoemaker, D his product equated to C. If it had not been possible for reciprocity
to be thus effected, there would have been no association of the parties. That demand holds
things together as a single unit is shown by the fact that when men do not need one another,
and when neither needs the other or one does not need the other, they do not exchange, as we
do when some one wants what one has oneself, e.g. when people permit the exportation of
corn in exchange for wine. This equation therefore must be established. And for the future
exchange—that if we do not need a thing now we shall have it if ever we do need it—money is as
it were our surety; for it must be possible for us to get what we want by bringing the money.
Now the same thing happens to money itself as to goods—it is not always worth the same; yet
it tends to be steadier. This is why all goods must have a price set on them; for then there will
always be exchange, and if so, association of man with man. Money, then, acting as a measure,
makes goods commensurate and equates them; for neither would there have been association if
there were not exchange, nor exchange if there were not equality, nor equality if there were not
commensurability. Now in truth it is impossible that things differing so much should become
commensurate, but with reference to demand they may become so sufficiently. There must,
then, be a unit, and that fixed by agreement (for which reason it is called money); for it is this
that makes all things commensurate, since all things are measured by money. Let A be a house,
B ten minae, C a bed. A is half of B, if the house is worth five minae or equal to them; the bed,
C, is a tenth of B; it is plain, then, how many beds are equal to a house, viz. five. That exchange
took place thus before there was money is plain; for it makes no difference whether it is five
beds that exchange for a house, or the money value of five beds….

7. Political Justice

Of political justice part is natural, part legal, natural, that which everywhere has the same force
and does not exist by people’s thinking this or that; legal, that which is originally indifferent,
but when it has been laid down is not indifferent, e.g. that a prisoner’s ransom shall be a mina,
or that a goat and not two sheep shall be sacrificed, and again all the laws that are passed for
particular cases, e.g. that sacrifice shall be made in honour of Brasidas, and the provisions
of decrees. Now some think that all justice is of this sort, because that which is by nature is
unchangeable and has everywhere the same force (as fire burns both here and in Persia), while
they see change in the things recognized as just. This, however, is not true in this unqualified
way, but is true in a sense; or rather, with the gods it is perhaps not true at all, while with us there
is something that is just even by nature, yet all of it is changeable; but still some is by nature,
some not by nature. It is evident which sort of thing, among things capable of being otherwise,
is by nature, and which is not but is legal and conventional, assuming that both are equally
changeable. And in all other things the same distinction will apply; by nature the right hand
is stronger, yet it is possible that all men should come to be ambidextrous. The things which
are just by virtue of convention and expediency are like measures; for wine and corn measures
are not everywhere equal, but larger in wholesale and smaller in retail markets. Similarly, the
things which are just not by nature but by human enactment are not everywhere the same, since
constitutions also are not the same, though there is but one which is everywhere by nature the
best. Of things just and lawful each is related as the universal to its particulars; for the things
that are done are many, but of them each is one, since it is universal.

There is a difference between the act of injustice and what is unjust, and between the act
of justice and what is just; for a thing is unjust by nature or by enactment; and this very thing,
when it has been done, is an act of injustice, but before it is done is not yet that but is unjust. So,
too, with an act of justice (though the general term is rather ‘just action’, and ‘act of justice’ is
applied to the correction of the act of injustice).

Each of these must later be examined separately with regard to the nature and number of
its species and the nature of the things with which it is concerned.

Let this be taken as our account of justice….


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