
THE STATUS OF NON-CITIZENS: EQUIVALENCE BETWEEN PLATONIC AND CONTEMPORARY CITIZENSHIP

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1. Introduction

This paper will discuss approaching the ideal of becoming a good citizen from the perspective of transforming a non-citizen (understood in its modern context) into a good citizen (understood in its Platonic sense).¹ In short, this is to be obtained through philosophic education,² or through the realisation of the Platonic virtues,³ and through the actualisation of justice,⁴ in both individual and societal dimensions,⁵ as related to nature.⁶ For the purposes of this paper, this later aspect concerning the cosmos its structuring, and its divisions will receive less attention; whereas the comparative relation between the functioning of the human body and the functioning of the *polis* will be emphasised, as expressed in the *Gorgias*.⁷ This is done to indicate the relation between citizens and the state,⁸ in terms of the principles of truth, and virtues, good leadership and good citizenship,⁹ or on how to be a good member of society.¹⁰

The problem to be addressed regarding citizenship relates to the tendency to disregard certain members of society,¹¹ to the degree that they are considered to be non-citizens,¹² whether as a result of actions taken or lack of actions taken, on the part of the supposed non-citizen,¹³ or because of preferences of a dominant group within a given society,¹⁴ as in the case of "ethnic cleansing".¹⁵ The styles and powers of leadership are thus questioned in terms of justice.¹⁶

In the hypothetical "prisoners' dilemma",¹⁷ two criminal suspects have been arrested and are being interrogated separately by a state attorney. If neither of the suspects confess, then they are both likely to go free. If only one of them were to confess, and were to implicate the other, then the one confessing would probably go free, while the other suspect would be punished severely. If they were both to confess, then both suspects be punished. Departing from traditional contemplation on the "prisoners' dilemma", it is also

necessary, and especially for this enquiry, not to ponder on the relation and communication between these two while they await trial, but to consider the principle of justice as relating to truth and the appropriate consequences of a crime committed, or not committed. The positioning of the judge is also important, relating to either the acceptance of the suspects' possible non-confession as truth, and thus setting them free, where their inability to verbalise the alleged crime could also be an indication of them not possessing any knowledge of the alleged crime, or their calculated silence could be an attempt to avoid possible punishment. The problem is that such a case is tried on belief and not on true knowledge,¹⁸ or on opinion, that could be influenced by the suspects tale, acknowledgement or partial acknowledgement of committing the crime, or ignorance thereof.¹⁹

In certain contexts, the suspects would be reintegrated into society, and in other contexts their status as citizens would be called into contention, depending on the prevailing judicial system, the severity or nature of the crime committed, and the attitude of the *polis*. Either way, society's attitude towards the culprits or alleged culprits, would be determined not so much by facts, as by sentiments and opinions, and also society's premonition that crimes must be paid for, (even if it implies a further party) designating the suspects to be non-citizens.

It is important to note that the concept "non-citizen", in its political sense, was not one of Plato's concerns.²⁰ It is rather a construct relevant to this paper. All within a Greek *polis*, whether citizens or strangers, were equal under the laws of that particular *polis*.²¹ The currently distinguished state and society were not distinguished as such by Plato.²² For him, a close relation existed between state and society, as expressed by the term *polis*, where, the now distinguished state and society functioned as parts of a greater whole.²³ Plato was concerned with the well-being of the *polis*,²⁴ for the well being of its citizens,²⁵ and thus did not consider those outside the *polis*.

Further distinction needs to be made between a citizen and a member of society of a set geographic area, in contemporary terms. A member of society is not necessarily a citizen of a particular country or a political ward. A contemporary non-citizen has limited influence on governmental and domestic issues, even though such a person could still be a member of society. This, for example would be the case with a migrant labourer, or three hundred years ago,

also the case with a slave. As beggars, swindlers, and other criminals are not considered a normative part of a communities productive resources, these people too, along with other non-contributing people are similarly not considered worthy of citizenship by certain communities.

Though the norms for granting citizenship differ from state to state, and the relation between state and society varies from nation to nation, it is necessary to indicate a basis of citizenship on grounds other than on ethnicity, affiliation, social class, as determined by history, tradition and culture, but rather on principles of truth, and justice, in the sense of the Platonic *Idea*.

2. Harmony in State

Plato, in his pursuit for justice and truth organised society – the state, *polis*, according to the working of a healthy human body in the *Gorgias*. In this dialogue, intended to promote philosophical education – towards nurturing good citizens, four arts are distinguished from the four flatteries under soul and body, as distinguished between the interrelated arts of legislation and justice, under politics; and gymnastics and medicine under “the tendency of the body” (464B). These arts oppose the paralleled flatteries of cookery and self adornment on the one hand, and sophistry and rhetoric on the other.

When the arts are practised in harmony, the *polis* would function properly, there being harmony between the members of the *polis*, thus being healthy. Justice is strongly related to medicine, the functions of justice are also understood to cause societal healing.²⁶ It is fundamental to this exposition that Plato does not distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, save the references to Polus’ comments on the banishment of citizens for crimes committed, which indicates the prevalence of a state of “not being part of the *polis*” through elimination. More importantly, Plato emphasises the relation between the sophists and the orators in the exposition of justice in relation to medicine (*Gorgias*:465C-D), where:

As self adorned is to gymnastics, so is sophistry to legislation; and as cookery is to medicine, so is rhetoric to justice. But although there is this natural distinction between them, they are so nearly related that sophists and orators are jumbled up as having the same field and dealing wit the same subjects, ... For if the soul were not in command of the body ... everything would be jumbled together, without distinction....

It is not in everyone's power to be appropriated as a correct, efficient, effective or true interpreter of the law, just as it is not everyone's ability to administer medicine appropriately. The status of one's citizenship is not determined by the ability to exercise influence, but through the knowing of one's role within the harmonious functioning (healthy) of a political jurisdiction. For example (*Gorgias*:514):

Suppose, for instance, we had undertaken the duties of state-physicians, and were to invite one another to the work as qualified doctors, we should, I presume, have first inquired of each other; I of you and you of me: "Let us see now, in heavens name; how does Socrates himself stand as regards his bodily health?" Or has anyone else, slave or free, ever had Socrates to thank for ridding him of a disease? And I also, fancy should make the same sort of inquiry about you; and then, if we found we had never been the cause of an improvement in the bodily condition of anyone, stranger or citizen, man or woman, - by heaven, Callicles, would it not in truth be ridiculous that ...[people start off without appropriate education].

The interaction, indicated by Socrates, assumes equality between the individuals as well as between the groups of people, free and slave, stranger and citizen, men and women. This is crucial my thinking in terms of the relation between non-citizens and citizens. Men and women are accounted for as being mentioned under the generic citizen, stranger is qualified alongside citizen, and justice - as well as its equivalent medicine - is equally applicable to both free and slave. The equality and openness to medication, justice, starts with a voluntary self analysis, based on an ability to do so, as a result of appropriate philosophical education.

This scenario is unlike Socrates' prison dilemma, that is, to be judged by children, as Plato referred to the judges residing over the Socratic court case (*Gorgias* 521E). This dilemma, is different from the prisoners' dilemma mentioned in the introduction, since Socrates' dilemma concerns the ability or inability of the judges to judge justly, as well as preparing the way for Socrates to be described as the true statesman, not wanting to partake in the affairs of state; whereas the prisoners' dilemma (from the introduction) considers the suspects' own attitudes towards the expression of what happened or did not happen. These differences are not contradictory, but emphasize the need for an understanding of justice over and above the justice regulated by the practised legal system. In a sense, the judge residing in the prisoners' case could be said to relate to Socrates, the accused, since both would be enlightened as to the truth, within the constructs of the formulated dilemmas. The

prisoners' judge is hampered by the attitudes of the accused, in the execution of legal justice, because they are refraining from giving testimony. Similarly, Socrates is standing before judges who are being persuaded by rhetoric and not by the truth.

In both scenarios, to follow another argument, the judges are influenced in the execution of justice. This is to relate why both the patient and the doctor are involved in the healing process. The patient and the doctor need to co-operate to facilitate the whole healing process. To avoid a situation of corruption, or chaos, the doctor must be adequately trained and prepared in his art, as the patient should be prepared to readily receive the prescribed medicine to bring about healing.

Since both the doctor and the patient are involved in the healing process, like the judge and the criminal, so too the citizens of a *polis* are involved in a healing process amongst themselves, thus there could be no ranking in terms of justice. Since justice and legislation restore organisation under politics, it naturally follows that the question of authority be raised in terms of the judge's person, as in the case of the doctor, and so too of the leader of state. This authority, or power cannot be attained through false dispositions, as in the case of children adorning the judge's chair,²⁷ or the accused being able to manipulate the courts outcome,²⁸ but in terms of the correct procedures to encourage true happiness and a higher quality of life, with the individual person and in the polis, whether he be a citizen, or a non-citizen.

Before a medical analysis is performed by a doctor, a sound medical education would be required, without which it would be impossible to practice medicine correctly, as was pointed out to Gorgias earlier in the debate.²⁹ This medical analysis in the healing metaphor could be related to the administering of justice, where justice starts with the self. The purpose of justice is to foster a good citizen, and thus a good *polis*. In the same sense, a doctor can only bring other people back to good health if the he/she is healthy, or has a good knowledge of what the state of good health entails. The citizens of such a *polis* would be healthy and thus happy. As true happiness starts with knowing the self, it follows that justice starts with a self-knowledge, and thus the process of medication is also a process of becoming educated. Thus, self-control is the key to true happiness.³⁰

It would be bold to compare the classes of people mentioned, free and slave, stranger and citizen, man and woman, to forms of government,³¹ rather, through the comparison of the organisation of a healthy individual (body and soul in harmony and balance) to the wickedness or sickness of an unhealthy person (a person in discord with himself), it is possible to compare the organisation of a good government to a "not-good" government. It is thus not a choice between styles, or forms of government that needs to be made, but between good leadership and bad leadership, not considered from leadership's point of power, but from the task of ensuring a healthy state, even in face of the ever present dangers of the false pretences of the flatteries, rhetoric and sophistry.

It would thus not matter what form of healthy *polis* a non-citizen found himself in,³² concerning his well being, he would be treated justly. A similar distinction could be made for contemporary governments, as distinguished from the *polis*. An individual's status in terms of formal citizenship should not affect his restoring under a particular (good) authority's judicial system.

This approach to political theory could be indicated with the term "Platonic Soul Theory".³³ This is not merely a "rational" controlled state, but a "knowledge of the good" administered state.³⁴ It is not based on the concepts of power, whether it be totalitarian or shared power, nor is it based on what the leader looks like, whether it is a singular person, a group of people or a system, such as the modern democracy.

The platonic divisions of the *polis* into different classes: e.g. guardians, artisans, soldiers, philosophers, are not easily equated to more modern socio-economic distinctions between upper, middle and lower class, or between blue collar workers and white collar workers. A relation of differences and comparisons between these distinctions, and the effect they have on the status of citizenship would be a very intricate affair. Rather, the underlying attitudes and resultant actions, of power play within the various socio-economic classes in contemporary society will be mentioned, and then in light of another set of class distinctions made by Plato, as in the three classes of soul: *Sophia*, *Andreia*, and *Sophrosyne*.³⁵ These distinguished criteria are characteristics of the healthy and good citizen, and people falling outside these characteristics could be ascribed to be non-citizens. It would be necessary to bring about transformation of the people thus affected, to administer the medicine of say justice and education, that the people affected

would also resort under one of the three classes soul, *Sophia*, *Andreia*, and *Sophrosyne*.

A reference to the “Sophists’ dilemma” as expressed in the *Gorgias* also needs to be made. This dilemma relates to the prisoner’s dilemma, and, accordingly to the judge’s dilemma in contemporary terms. The sophists, with their abuse of rhetoric (*Gorgias*: 452E):

...[have] the ability to persuade with speeches either judges in the law courts or statesmen in the council-chamber or the commons in the assembly or an audience at any other meeting that may be held on public affairs.

The problem, as Socrates states in the *Gorgias*,³⁶ is that Rhetoric is a producer of persuasion for belief, not for instruction in the matter of right and wrong. The sophists must speak to be qualified, their dilemma would be, if they were to keep quiet. On the one hand, they would not be placed in the position to be indicated as flatterers. By acting against their nature, their nature would not become evident, they would also not manipulate the court proceedings, but the truth could be allowed to prevail. On the other hand, they could speak out and be shown to be flatterers. Justice would also be hindered from taking its true course, though this would not be their primary concern. The accused in the prisoners’ dilemma could speak out and be indicated to be lying, or the residing judge could be coerced to setting them free on eloquent story manufacturing, if both testimonies were in coloration. The essence is, that justice should not be based on speech alone, or on silence but only on truth.³⁷

Central to this argument is the status of the citizen, whether the person be citizen by virtue of birth or naturalisation, or be a citizen of a different country, with residential status – either permanent or time-restricted, be the person an immigrant (legal or illegal) or indigenous, as determined by the higher authorities. The quality of his representation is affected, as also influenced by the financial resources.³⁸

3. Conclusion

In this paper the classic “prisoners’ dilemma” was related to the “judges’ dilemma” and the “sophists’ dilemma” in the *Gorgias*, and to “Socrates’ dilemma”. Differentiation was made between the arts and flatteries, and to the harmony between body and soul. Furthermore, it was indicated that the primary concern in the *Gorgias* is not the

form of government, but that it must be stable. Justice could only prevail in a stable and just *polis*.

The suspected criminals would not have placed themselves in the position to not confess, or withhold the truth. They would have testified without flattery, even better, they would have had no fear of testifying.

Within a stable, harmonious and balanced state, the ideal of becoming a good citizen from the perspective of transforming a non-citizen (understood in its modern context) into a good citizen (understood in its Platonic sense) could be achieved through philosophic education, or the realisation of virtues, and through the actualisation of justice, in both individual and societal dimensions. It would also be more beneficial to the state/society if there were no judicial distinction made between citizens and non-citizens. Rather, the onus is on good leadership, and on good citizenship, and on being a good member of society.

Notes

1. Status of citizenship as determined by qualities and not by attributes of, say, birth. See e.g. *Republic* VII, where it is supposed that children taken and trained, say from the age of 10, would make good citizens, if guided under the leadership of philosophers.
2. For philosophical education, see e.g. *Republic* IX 581-582; See also *Meno* 89B-C, where Socrates asks: Ἄρ' οὖν ἐπειδὴ οὐ φύσει οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ἀγαθοὶ γίνονται, ἀρα μαθήσει; The problem in *Meno* being established that there were no "good" men amongst the sophists who could provide adequate teaching. the answer to the teachability of virtues is addressed more expressively in *Gorgias*.
3. See *Republic* X 612-613 on the realisation of virtues: οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπὸ γε θεῶν ποτὲ ἀμελείται, ὅς ἂν προθυμείσθαι ἐθέλη δίκαιος γίνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοεσθαι θεῶ. The status of the "good" citizens is thus related to "deification", through the practice of virtues. For non-citizens, therefore, to become "good citizens of the 'ideal polis'" would be to follow the same path, in the pursuit of perfection.
4. See on actualisation of Justice, *Republic* I 3331E: where justice is given a preliminary definition: τὸ τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἐκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι δίκαιόν ἐστι. It is the "paying back", which is open to interpretation, and the question as to what should be paid back to whom, whether it be friend or enemy, good or evil, whether justice should be understood in utilitarian terms or in terms of "that what it should be" – truth. Compare *Laws* I 631B-632D.
5. See *Gorgias* 506D-509D. Also 464B-466A. Comparison could be made between the relation Arts to Flattery and between appropriate/healthy living and living in indulgence.
6. See *Timaeus* e.g. 32C-42D, on the relation between body and soul, cosmos and the "individual being", *polis* and citizen. See also *Laws* IV 704A-706A.
7. *Gorgias* 465-466. The dialogue is concerned with: 1. the promotion of philosophic education; 2. refuting rhetoric and sophistry; 3. "the renunciation of the pomps and vanities of the world, and with the passionate insistence on the claims of truth and right" (Introduction to *Gorgias*, Loeb Plato V, 1932).
8. See *Republic* III 403-404 on relation between soul and body and being healthy within the state.
9. See *Republic* III 414-416.
10. On being a good member of society see e.g. *Republic* II, 372E: the true state is depicted as being the healthy state. The unhealthy state would therefore be non-true and void of justice. Following the argument in *Republic* 373, it would appear that the "lavish livers" would lead a life leading to a city loosing its "ideal state", ironically requiring the services of the doctors (373D): Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἰατρῶν χρείας ἐσόμεθα πολὺ μᾶλλον οὕτω διαιωόμενοι ἢ ὡς τὸ πρότερον; The question is also addressed by Aristotle in his *Eudemian Ethics* I1214a: "But we must consider first what the good life consists in and how it is to be obtained – whether all of those who receive the designation happy acquire happiness by nature, as is the case with tallness and shortness of stature and differences of complexion, or by study, which would imply that there is a science of happiness, or by the same form of training, for there are many human attributes that are not by nature nor acquired by study but gained by habitation: bad attributes by those trained in bad habits and good attributes by those trained in good ones...." See also *Gorgias* 499E. Everything we do should be for the sake of what is Good.

11. Elitism in society is not a contemporary problem. The status of members is often determined by other members, as was the status of the Serfdom in 19th century Russia.
12. The fact of being considered being of lesser “quality” or lower “ranking”, often pre-determines status of a citizen.
13. Alternative actions, besides being born into a “wrong family” or other such designator, includes criminal acts, prison service – whether justly or unjustly, economic laziness - or considered laziness, qualifications or lack thereof. See also *Laws IX* on voluntary and involuntary wrong-doing.
14. Society prejudices have the tendencies to sway between extremes, depending on the current fashion climates. These tendencies are invariably justified and ideologically motivated. For example, colonialisation.
15. Ethnic cleansing has as much to do with the “removal of the other” as it does with the establishment of the self, with the avoidance of threats and the expansion of own powers.
16. Justice as seen from perspective, downward direction and upward direction, from perspective of citizens, and from those not considered citizens. See also *Republic VII* 540D-541B.
17. Cf “Prisoners’ Dilemma” of Game theory, see Barry, N “Freedom, Law and Authority” in Griffiths, AP 1989, *Key Themes in Philosophy*, 198-199. Compare also to the *Apology*, in which Plato reconstructs the *Defence of Socrates*, at his trial.
18. *Gorgias* 453-455. Esp. 445A: ‘Ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικει πειθοῦς δημιουργός ἐστι πιστευτικῆς, ἀλλ’ οὐ διδασκικῆς περὶ τὸ δίκαιόν τε καὶ ἄδικον. “Thus rhetoric, it seems, is a producer of persuasion for belief, not for instruction in the matter of right and wrong.”
19. The Platonic question (*Gorgias* 474B): Is doing wrong worse than suffering it; is escaping punishment worse than incurring it? is not answered in this paper. Attention is rather given to the question posed to Callicles: ἔστιν ὅστις πρότερον πονηρὸς ὢν, ἄδικός τε καὶ ἀκόλαστος καὶ ἄφρων, δια καλλαλλέα καλὸς τε κάγαθός ψέγουεν, ἢ ξένος ἢ ἀστός, ἢ δοῦλος ἢ ἐλεύθερος; Did Callicles make of anyone a good citizen?
20. Plato was concerned with people within the *polis*. On the pleasant life, and the just life – who lives which, see *Laws II* 662E. On the Soul Theory see *Laws V* 726-730.
21. All people are equal under the law. See on judgements *Laws V* 728B-C
22. See *Republic VI*. Esp. 496E-497A. Also IV 435E: “Is it not impossible for us to avoid admitting this much, that the same forms and qualities are to be found in each one of us that are in the state.”
23. Understanding of the term *polis* as including society and state, different divisions of *polis* into structures, which always stand in harmony to each other, unlike, liberty without justice, equality, (*Republic VIII* 562-563), where Plato discusses the Oligarchic constitution: “And the climax of popular liberty is attained in such a city when the purchased slaves, male and female, are no less free (μηδὲν ἦττον ἐλεύθεροι) than the owners who paid for them.”
24. See *Republic* 609, *Symposium* 188A on the harmony of body and the imbalance, injustice, resulting in disease.
25. The importance of the well being of the citizens is “the object on which we fixed our eyes in the establishment of our state, was not the exceptional happiness of any one class, but the greatest possible happiness of the city as a whole” (*Republic IV* 420C.)
26. *Gorgias* 465.
27. On judges see e.g. *Laws XII* 956C.
28. On court’s outcome see e.g. *Laws V* 728B-C & IX 872-873.

29. *Gorgias* 460B.

30. See *Meno*.

31. See *Republic* IV 420.

32. On the political constitutions. See *Republic* VI 497B: "The very ground of my complaint is that no polity of today is worthy of the philosophic nature."

33. See *Laws* V 726-730.

34. See *Meno* 99.

35. These three classes, *Sophia* (wisdom), *Andreia* (courage), and *Sophrosyne* (temperance), *Republic* 433 also form three of the four virtues of the ideal state. The fourth is *dikaiosynē* (justice) *Republic* 427D.

36. *Gorgias* 455A.

37. See *Philebus* 64-65: where beauty, proportion and truth, are considered as constituting the idea "the good".

38. On the abuse of money and the buying of justice – see *Laws* X 906B-C. Plato relates profiteering, manipulating justice with bodily diseases. See also *Laws* XI 937E-938C.