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OUTLINES OF A THEORY OF

JUSTICE AS RIGHTNESS:

A GENERAL SYSTEMS APPROACH

The origination of General Systems Theory is credited to Ludwig von Bertalanffy who, two years after receiving his doctorate from the University of Vienna, published a work in 1932 entitled *Theorie der Formbildung.* Despite, by his own account, an exposure to and familiarity with the positivism of the Vienna circle, von Bertalanffy was dissatisfied with the reductionist and atomistic forms of explanation which this group asserted is characteristic of scientific explanation. He was particularly unhappy with attempts to pattern explanations of biological phenomena after the model of classical Newtonian physics.[1] In this early work, *Models Theories of Development,* von Bertalanffy maintained both that the main problem for biology is to discover patterns (laws) which are typical of biological systems and that the discovery of such patterns would produce a major change in

[1] Much of this material may be found in the introducton to *The Relevance of General System Theory: Papers Presented to Ludwig von Bertalaffy on His Seventieth Birthday.* Edited by Ervin Laszlo. New York, George Braziller, 1972, pp. 3-30.

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the way the world is viewed in general.[2] Von Bertalanffy worked out his proposed model for biological explanation in such subsequent books as *Theoretische Biologie* and *Problems of Life* and then in his later years in such works as *Robots, Man and Minds* and *Organismic Psychology and Systems Theory*. went on to apply his concepts in a cross-disciplinary way to psychology. Again, by his own account, at a somewhat later period, others, for example the economist Kenneth Boulding and the bio-mathematician A. Rapport, had arrived at, for parallel reasons, certain similar ideas relative to their own disciplines. These individuals together with others formed a joint enterprise which was to result in the inter-disciplinary systems movement. Von Bertalanffy stressed the multi-dimension possibilities for fruitful research in a large number of conceptual areas, including the humanities, in his final major work, *General Systems Theory Foundation, Development and Applications*.

This final work underscores another point. Systems Theory may not only be fruitfully applied to a variety of areas but also on a variety of levels. This is partly a consequence of the way in which it developed. Von Bertalanffy was not only influenced by the neo-positivism of Moritz Schlick but also by the physicist-philosopher, Hans Rechenback, the psychologist A. Herzberg, and the inventor of the dirigible aircraft, the engineer Parseval. As this range of influence suggests, Systems Theory is oriented not only towards the creation of conceptual schema but also towards practical applications in technological domains.

In the early twentieth century, engineers in the Bell laboratories evolved out of the contingencies of their research certain aspects of Systems Theory and these were independently augmented and supplemented by the publication in 1947 of van Neumann and Morgenstern's *Theory of Games*, Robert Wiener's *Cybernetics* in 1948 and Shannon and Weavers *Information Theory* in 1949. These developments had in turn been influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, by the problems of carrving on global warfare with the attendant requirements for rapid technological inventions and the bringing together of massive amounts of men and ma-

[2] Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory, Foundation, Developed Applications*, New York, George Braziller, 1968, p. 13.

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terials in ordered arrangements. The fusion of these latter developments with general system thinking has resulted in a systems engineering approach which has been used in areas as divergent as electro-magnetic communication, transportation, and programmes for the control and prevention of crime and delinquency. What is it then which distinguishes a systems theoretical approach from others such as the reductionist atomistic one?

Ervin Laszlo, a contemporary thinker who continues the Bertalanffy tradition, answers this question in an abbreviated way by saying:

> Every theory generalizes certain commonalities underlying individual differentiations. The commonalities in abstracts are their current feature of phenomena—the non-varying aspects of it: the invariances. The question is which of the recurrent features of phenomena are abstracted as the basic and essential invariances? Classical science and natural philosophy abstracted substance and causal interactions between substantive particulars. Contemporary science tends increasingly to concentrate on organization: not what a thing is, *per se*, nor how a thing produces an effect on one other thing; but rather how sets of events are structured and how they function in relation to their "environment"—other sets of things, likewise structured in space and time. There are invariances of process related to systems. We call them invariances of organization.[3]

Von Bertalanffy in his early works, where his concern was primarily with biological systems, proposed several propositions which were to become postulates of General Systems Theory. It should be observed that these propositions were formulated within the context of two alternative viewpoints against which he was reacting.

On the one hand while he accepted the vitalist's contention that living systems show properties and characteristics which cannot be accounted for merely on the basis of summing their component parts, viz. a whole is different from and qualitatively superior to the sum of its parts, he was not willing to account for

[3] Ervin Laszlo, *The Systems View of the World*, New York, George Braziller, 1972, p. 20.

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this difference on the basis of postulating an *élan vital*. He was not willing to do so, as an appeal to such a fundamentally mysterious force involves an entity which appears to operate "outside" or beyond the spatio-temporal framework and under conditions other than those involved with any known spatio-temporal happenings. To postulate such a force appears to block the possibility of further explanation. Von Bertalanffy wished to account for the complexity of organic behavior in terms of the specific internal arrangements of such complex organizations. It is then for him the relationships among elements and the relationship of the relations (the whole) which provide the specific powers and capacities allowing the behavioral characteristics of living organisms. These relationships can, and ought, according to him, to be open to definition and description. Von Bertalanffy also, as has been suggested, rejected mechanistic, reductive explanations as adequate explanation-types for certain complex levels of organization. It is supposed by him that Nature or the World is made up of hierarchical levels of organization.

Von Bertalanffy accepted that certain relatively less complex preliving organizations may be usefully regarded, as they are by classical physicists, as closed systems, that is, as systems which are approached as if they existed in isolation from and uninfluenced by any surroundings. This sort of conception, however, is, he contended, inadequate for the description of even primitive biological systems. In place of the notion of a closed system, von Bertalanffy wished to substitute the idea of an "open system." With this sort of a system, structure is preserved by means of a continuous interchange of information and energy within and between the various parts of the system and its environment. He saw the possibility of extending or generalizing the conception to a variety of fields other than and in addition to biology. The various attempts to carry through such a programme constitute the subject matter of General Systems Theory.

Closely allied to von Bertalanffy's conception of an open system is his idea of "equifinality." Classical mechanics used the idea of a system whose parts do not significantly modify each other nor, according to the idealized mechanical model, are the parts and part-functions of a system significantly altered through time. For this model, systems operate along the lines of rigidly prefigured

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sequences. On account of this, there exists the possibility of descriptions employing temporally invariant laws. There exists, too, the possibility of predictions and retrodiction, given these laws and a knowledge of some initial state. If such knowledge is possessed, all subsequent (or antecedent) states may be determined. Von Bertalanffy, with his conception of equifinality stressed on the contrary the possible independence of a final state of a system's equilibrium from its initial conditions. Such a non-symmetricality between antecedent and consequent states is to be accounted for by such factors as the presence of intervening environmental events and the power of some systems to act according to anticipated future occurrences (*telos*). The sort of paradigm required to provide adequate explanations for these systems which manifest goal orientation, auto-regulation, evolution and development must contain a conceptual richness far greater than that carried by the reductive-mechanistic explanatory model. Von Bertalanffy, as has been said, supposes the world to be hierarchically arranged in an ascending order of arrangements and each level, it is proposed, features its own unique set of properties and behaviors. This, however, does not entail that a search for higher order generalities, generalities which encompass many levels, is to be abandoned. As the quotation from Lazlo suggests, while each level may have a distinct set of laws which differentiates it as level from all other levels of organization, it is still possible that there are higher order "commonalities." Indeed, von Bertalanffy suggests that there are just such, for according to him, there are certain general principles which hold true for all systems, whatever their elements and relationships. This latter supposition has moved systems analysis beyond the domain of biology, opening the possibilities of the discovery of such regularities in the variety of dimensions of the physical and the social world. To this date, while there has been no universally accepted single description which fits all systems in general, there are at least some features which appear to typify open systems in certain domains. The following attempts to provide a partial summary of these:

(a) The notion of "system" insofar as it appears in General

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Systems Theory appears as a primitive term, that is, as largely undefined.

(b) Nevertheless, in General Systems Theory at least, the idea of systems appears together with that of environment, so that by virtue of its organization and characteristic behavior an identity may be discerned as a distinct something existing within a complex set of events.

(c) A system unlike a mere aggregate (e.g. a pile of sand) persists through a period of time by virtue of internal relationships and in the face of a range of environmental shifts (dynamic equilibrium).

(d) A system's capacity to persist in the face of environmental shifts is partly a function of its powers of internal reorganization.

(e) A system is characterized as well by the way in which it extracts whatever is required for auto-maintenance (input), the way it processes what is environmentally extracted (throughput) and by the manner it subsequently interacts with an environment, that is, its output or goal direction.

(f) Each of one of these three systemic functions may be related to such requirements as self-maintenance or growth in natural organizations.

While there is a range of problems with the systems approach both epistemological and methodological and while there are certain obvious dangers with its application, not the least of which is the ever-present possibility of argument by dubious analogy, certain of its suppositions appear to recommend it as a useful and superior approach to the understanding of some difficult social conceptions.

Social conceptions, as such, are particularly difficult to analyze because in general they appear to be amalgams of not only a self-conscious organism's reaction to physical necessity but also a reaction which is partly a product of the history of other self-conscious reactions to an environment and partly as a product of a

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creatively constructed possible world, that is, a "should be" world. Supposing this is true, the idea of justice appears to be no exception. Traditionally the idea of justice has as its reference-object a certain set of social interactions. These social interactions have as elements autonomous human individuals involved in dynamic interactions; such interactions are characterized by a series of states and stages and both the transactions which occur and their termini are supposed to conform to certain (ideal) relationships.

The systems view focuses on the notion of the whole, which is a whole by virtue of a specific set of internal relationships among its elements, and by its external relationship with an environment. It draws attention to the possibility of identity maintenance through a series of transformations—spatio-temporal or otherwise—and in some cases it posits a systematic activity which is directed towards a goal. These notions, it will be alleged, can be usefully extended even to the area of political philosophy.

The intent of this paper is to show, albeit in a sketchy way, how a systems approach might shed light on the nature of a particular socio-ethical concept, the concept of justice. The main emphasis of this paper is not on argument, that is, there is no major effort put forth in trying to demonstrate that someone is right and someone else is wrong.

The focus is on providing a kind of description. If this description suggests that certain contemporary formalistic accounts of justice are inadequate, that is as it may be. What is contended is that a systems approach allows sense to be made of a much wider range of traditional notions of justice than do certain contemporary formalistic accounts. This contention is instanced by allusion to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. It is not claimed here that Plato and Aristotle were systems theorists, if the term "systems theorist" is meant to imply a reflective epistemological approach, but rather that their world view contains components which both anticipate a systems point of view and lend themselves to analysis from it.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy mentions, among others, Leibnitz, Marx, Kohler (*Gestalten*) and Claude Bernard[4] as persons who

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[4] Von Bertalanffy, *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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adopted some organismic principles which are similar in many ways to those employed by a systems approach. Such principles were seen, it is thought, as conceptually required in order to produce adequate descriptions of the phenomena under investigation. Plato and Aristotle, it is supposed here, were similarly contending with certain problems concerning the nature of a just society. In evolving their accounts of justice it is maintained that they generated a certain conceptual framework. This framework not only lends itself to a systems description because of certain resemblances between their account and the notions employed in a certain kind of systems analysis but also, as is indicated in what follows, because the relatively independent emergence of such notions separated by subject matter, culture, time and space indicates that there is something in this approach which better allows the description and exploration of a certain class of biological and socio-political phenomena, than certain other types of competing explanation-paradigms.

While Systems Theory is a relatively new field and its application as a heuristic paradigm to a range of phenomena is a contemporary development, I wish to argue here that components of the systems model were understood at least as far back as the Republic of Plato and that, if only tacitly, there is an idea of systems which underlines the classical and medieval notions of justice. I wish to argue further that it is precisely the lack of such a conception which renders certain contemporary accounts unsatisfactory.

For some students of philosophy, at least, there is something unsatisfactory about contemporary formalistic theories of justice, such as that of John Rawls which makes justice a procedural matter, a way of doing things. "Justice is fairness"[5] says Rawls. Fairness, in this view, is a quality or a state of affairs relative to a specific domain, which is created by the application of what might be called the Equality principle, that is, "treat equals equally," to an individual or a group sharing the characteristics relevant to its application. Its domain includes the range of human interactions which relate to the distribution of social

[5] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," in *The Philosophic Review*, Vol. 67, 1958.

benefits, rewards, responsibilities, burdens, pains or punishment. The "something" unsatisfactory about this formulation revolves around the fact that no matter how adequately this conception accords with our sense of justice relative to certain dimensions of social interaction, it leaves untouched certain questions about others, particularly those which deal with the proportionality between antecedent and consequent. For example, by 20th century North American standards, there appears to be some thing patently unjust about the 18th century British prescription of death by hanging for the theft of a loaf of bread. Even if everyone who stole a loaf of bread was dealt with in the prescribed manner, the harshness of the penalty seems unfair, that is, to be disproportionate to the crime.

Fairness, then, it would appear, involves more than the manner of distribution; it governs the relationship between intentional action and social reaction. "Let the punishment fit the crime." "Let the rewards fit the responsibility." Of course, in lumping burdens and punishment together with benefits and rewards, certain significant differences are overlooked. A detailed perusal of these differences would lead to a consideration of issues far beyond the intended scope of this paper. Nevertheless, a limited examination of certain aspects of these different senses of justice does, it is supposed, reveal features of the core idea as held by the pre-moderns.

1. Simple Justice

Justice in its simplest form, as historically conceived, involves a relationship between two persons. One freely advances the other some X, some good.[6] That good, while freely advanced is also conditionally given. It is advanced on the understanding that the X or its equivalent will be returned. Up to the point of return, to use the metaphors historically associated with this relationship, there is a situation of imbalance or disharmony. One party has an obligation towards the other which is not discharged until the

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[6] See for example, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, translated by W.D. Ross, from the Oxford Press translation of Aristotle edited by W.D. Ross, Vol. 7, 1925.

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balance has been re-established. Then, and only then, has justice been done.

In this view, as with that of Rawls, a notion of equality is pivotal to the idea of justice, but in a different way. First of all, the relationship is one that can only occur between persons. Both parties are presupposed to have self-awareness, foresight and choice. In this regard, both parties are equal in power and capacities sufficient and relevant to the given interchange. Secondly, the first party A gives up the X with the expectation that X or its equivalent will be restored. A has a claim to X, and A has power over X. A releases X for B's use which is part of A's legitimate power over X. A, without X, suffers a loss or diminishment which is only redressed by the return of X or an X equivalent. The situation of rightness, *jus*, is restored with the return of X to A's possession.

2. Systems and the Platonic Alternative

This view appears to be in accord with one of the senses of justice described by Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*.[7] It might be entitled "justice as reciprocity."

It is clear that for Aristotle justice entails a social interaction. A one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-one set of relationships. It is also clear that for Aristotle a society is more than the additive sum of individuals which compose it. Society for Aristotle, as for Plato in fact, may be regarded, according to the definition subsequently given, as a system.

The least complex social system as the least complex form of justice would involve the relationship between individuals. A social system is a dynamic one characterized by altering configurations, within definable limits, through time. A given configuration of entities and their relationship—at a given moment in time—is referred to by some systems analysts as a "state."

It would appear that for both Aristotle and Plato the sort of systems from which they mainly drew their models were organic systems. Most organic systems, as is the case with most social

[7] *Ibid.*

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systems, may survive while maintaining a variety of configurations. However, certain states are pathological while others contain the optimum condition for the full and proper functioning of the system as a whole. This latter sort of state was associated by the ancients with a harmonious or balanced relationship, or set of relationships, among the parts. Why this is so may be easily seen. The very existence of a biological system is dependent upon the maintenance of an equilibrium and presumably the more complete the requisite interaction among the elements of such a system is, the more stable the system, barring, that is, external perturbations.

If A and B are supposed to be engaged in a continuous systems interaction, there is a certain state which is regarded as desirable, normal, or right. The accordance of X by A to B temporarily and with some good reason alters momentarily the equilibrium of the system, bringing it to a situation of disequilibrium. The system thus lacks harmony.

This view, of course, presupposes that there are systems which exist in a range of modes from bare maintenance to some sort of optimum function-output. It supposes that there are factors both internal and external to the system which can act to disrupt or destroy the system by bringing it beyond the range of relations which allows or makes possible its maintenance or successful functioning.[8] It further supposes that there are "mechanisms" which can act to re-establish equilibrium given the happenstance of perturbational forces which are not sufficiently powerful to destroy it. Hence the return of X by B to A marks the successful return of X to a desired or necessary state of equilibrium and so reproduces the state of rightness or justice.

The harmonious interrelationship of parts is a necessary condition of a viable biological system. That which, however, constitutes a just social system demands a consideration not solely of the relations among elements but also the qualities of the elements themselves. It is on this level that the difference between Aristotle's general conception of justice and that of Plato may be seen to be in conflict.

If the rightness is simply taken to be "paying back what is

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[8] *e.g.* war, revolution.

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received"[9] there are then those immediate objections which Socrates brings to the definitions of Cephalus, Polemarchus and Simonides. For instance, justice, according to Cephalus, consists in telling the truth and paying back what we have received, but to this Socrates objects, by way of example, that paying back what one owes may, under certain circumstances, lead to a greater evil than that entailed by the refusal to repay or to reveal the truth.[10]

Two responses to Socrates' counter-argument suggest themselves immediately: (a) he is guilty of the fallacy of converse accident; (b) he does not seem to realize that there is a possibility of a genuine conflict in values or "virtues" and that the presence of such a conflict does not necessarily entail a definitional problem with the descriptions of the conflicting values as such.

A more sympathetic reading of Chapters I and II of *The Republic*, however, might, by connecting these particular Socratic counter-examples with the general Socratic theory of justice, that is the elements of his system, suggest that his point is that the principle that Cephalus advances is not sufficiently universal to stand as a description of what it means to act "justly" and will consequently result in a portaiture of cases which is incoherent or inconsistent. If this is correct, then Socrates' primary concern would appear to be not the relations between individuals but with what might be called the some-one relationships, that is, the relationship of the "parts" to the "whole." On this account, whatever the rules governing the interaction between individuals, these may be superseded by the interests of the whole or some significant part of the whole, given the appropriate circumstances. This appears to be borne out by his subsequent argument.

After the discussion of definition provided by Polemarchus that justice involves "helping one's friends and harming one's enemies," Socrates advances a revised version to which Polemarchus accedes it is "doing good to friends who are good and harm to enemies who are wicked."[11] At this juncture, Socrates attempts to defeat this definition, again through counter-examples, by

[9] Plato *The Republic*, Book I, Chapter II (1-331-E336A). Translated by F.M. Cornford, London, Oxford University Press, 1945.
[10] *Ibid.*, Ch. II (1-331-E336A).
[11] *Ibid.*, Ch. II (1-331-E336A).

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suggesting that returning ill with ill is never justified because it always (usually?) results in an even greater evil than the original one. Negative reciprocity, returning ill for ill, clearly falls for Socrates within the category of "harm" so that for Socrates, at least in *The Republic*, it is not right to punish where punishment means human diminishment by rough or painful means. Again, on the level of simple argument, it could be responded that the situation of using a stick to induce or to train an animal is disanalogous to punishing a criminal, and further, it is a highly debatable point as to whether or not behavior modification by negative means always or usually results in creature diminishment.[12] It might be argued as well that even if a bad man is made worse by punishment, if that punishment involves restitution, the value entailed in the restoration must always take precedence over other considerations because this, as a state of affairs, must nearly approximate the "right" state of affairs, that existed prior to the original transgression. This would even seem to follow, ironically enough, from Socrates' own position. Equal return, then, is directed towards the restoration and/or maintenance of the social configuration deemed right or correct, but it is only to be evoked where such a return is possible.

Whatever else may be wrong with the Socratic analysis, he appears to have pointed to a genuine difficulty with the reciprocity principle. What, for example, of the cases where isomorphism is not possible, as in the instance of murder, or strict equality not entailed, as in the assignment of responsibilities or rewards?

3. Justice as a Systems Idea

Justice, as it is traditionally and legally perceived, has both a public and non-public aspect. Its reference object is in one form or another a social act which relates individuals through the

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12 There is a difficulty here in knowing exactly what Plato believed about punishment. For while in *The Republic* the examples seem to indicate that painful correction ought to be eschewed, his discussion on punishment in the *Laws* appears to indicate that in a less than ideal state when all else fails penalties such as fines, loss of civil rights and even death may be appropriate. This, however, is only to be undertaken when all else fails—the "lesser" evil, it may be supposed.

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transference or maintenance of assets or liabilities according to a set of rules which are derived from some source held to be legitimate. The rules establish the criteria and procedures according to which the transference occurs.[13] To call a person *just* is to say that the person has knowledge of the appropriate rule, that the person is disposed to act according to the rule, that the person intends to act according to the rule, and that the person in fact habitually does so. The behavior, of course, is amenable to public scrutiny while the intention and the knowledge of a given individual is not, or at least not directly. The idea of justice then cannot be understood outside the system of rules which provide the context that imparts meaning to social behavior.

Any system S is a system by virtue of displaying certain characteristics. According to some system theorists, "a system is a set of interrelated entities of which no subset is unrelated to any other subset"[14] and "a system as a whole diplays properties which none of its parts or subsets has, and every entity is either directly or indirectly related to every other entity in it."[15] If the concept of justice entails, as has been proposed here, a system of rules directing specific and interrelating a specific class of social acts as a means of promoting a desired social configuration, then the meaning of justice is to be looked for in the given rules and their rationale.

The class of social acts breaks down into several sub-categories. For example, those directing the relationship between individuals, those directing the relationship of the entity to the whole, those directing the relationship of the whole to the individual, those governing the relationships of one group towards another and so forth. The rationale for the rule sets governing these relation-

[13] Aristotle attempts to deal with this aspect of the problem by arguing that in the instance of rewards and burdens the distribution is to be according to quantity but also according to proportion, e.g. 6:4 as 3:2. *Op. cit.*, *Nichomachean Ethics* Book V. Of course, this does not, as the ancients were well aware, tell by what principles individual worth is to be decided nor does it tell us the basis for any given geometrical proportionality; why, for example, A should get 1½ times as much as B, if 6 and 4 are taken to be the rewards and 3:2 respective worth, or even if distribution should take place according to a geometric equality at all.

[14] J.I. Kramer and Smit, *Systems Thinking*, Lernen Nijhoff, 1977.
[15] *Ibid.*

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ships is to be looked for both in the way in which individuals as individuals and their ends are conceived, as well as in the way in which collectivities of individuals and their end as a collectivity are conceived.

For example, since as it is supposed that both Plato and Aristotle hold certain systems views of society, that is, they see society as something more than a mere sum of individuals and individual activity, and since they both seem to hold stability as a prime social value, each, despite their differences, would probably accept the following rationale for punishment. Given the systems view of society held by both Aristotle and Plato, the individual who murders, for instance, would be seen not only to initiate an undesirable interaction between individuals, but to initiate an undesirable alteration relative to the set. Punishment, then, has a double purpose. It is directed towards re-establishing the particular harmony of the subset, where this is possible, but it is also directed towards insuring or attempting to insure against future instances of destabilization.[16] The person who murders has demonstrated a proven capacity for action which completely disregards what is conceived to be the legitimate interests of another. The presence of such an entity within the system of human society constitutes a threat if not to the configuration as such, at least to a subsection of it, and further, the murderous activity considered not merely as instance, but as a type, potentially at least, poses a threat to the system *per se*. This would seem to be the rationale underlying the familiar judicial expressions upon passing sentence about the need "to set an example" and the "need to protect society." From this perspective, then, what would be termed "just" would be only those social transactions concerned with the transference or maintenance of assets and liabilities which promote the desirable configuration.

It is from this implicit vantage point that Plato says, "Justice admittedly means that a man should possess and concern himself with what properly belongs to him."[17] The principle of

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[16] The "guardian" class as a group is another means which Plato proposes as a way of promoting social stability. The exercise is "a negative feedback" controlling function.

[17] *Op. cit., The Republic*, Ch. XII, IV, (427C-434D).

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rendering to each his due is seen by Plato as a particular instance or subcategory of the more general principle of minding one's own business. It is not clear in any detailed way from *The Republic* on what basis claims to ownership or possession are assigned. It is, however, clear that where Plato's main focus of interest lies, the assignment of burdens and responsibilities, the application of his principle has a well defined *telos*. The state or commonwealth, what has been described here as a configuration or system, comes into existence because no individual is self-sufficient. There must be a division of labor. In order to most efficiently meet the needs of the group, the assignment of tasks (burdens?) and responsibilities as a requirement of rationality must be according to natural powers and liabilities which vary from individual to individual. The consequence of such an arrangement will produce a hierarchy where the most able are given the most responsibility and power. Presumably, and this would appear to be a suppressed premise, in *The Republic* individuals are most happy when their needs are being met and the best state is the state that meets the needs of the majority of individuals most effectively. Plato says, "Our aim in founding the commonwealth was not to make any class specially happy, but to secure the greatest happiness for the community as a whole."[18]

A community based upon the ideal division of labor according to which each worker has responsibility for that to which he is most naturally fitted, features the most just, the rightful configuration, because this is most likely to meet the ends for which a commonwealth is generated. Any factor which causes deviation from this configuration thus constitutes the unjust and for Plato, of course, any attempt by an individual or a group to appropriate positions for which they are not suited or social roles or social levels which eliminate requirements for the maintenance of the state is the highest form of injustice. He says on this:

> Any plurality of functions or shifting from one order to another is not merely harmful to the community but one might fairly call it the extreme of wrong-doing and you will agree that to do the greatest of wrongs to one's own community is injustice.[19]

[18] *Ibid.*, Ch. X, (III 412B-421C).
[19] *Ibid.*, Ch. XII (IV 427C-434D).

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What should be noticed here is that Plato's alternate goals are not future states but rather the concommitant correlatives of a relation of relations. Rightness is the quality predicated of a social system where certain entities in specific relationships are constantly present. Which relations are to be deemed the "right" relations are then theory-dependent. Plato bases his foundation of the state on needs, and the most rational way of meeting them, given a radical inequality of individuals. Other theorists, particularly in the Aristotelean and Thomistic tradition, have ascribed not only liabilities to persons but also powers and potentials. Civil society exists for them as an instrument conditioning the development of powers and potentialities. Here the emphasis shifts from obligations of the individual relative to the whole, that is, social performance, as is the case with Plato, to the obligations of the whole relative to the individual. This provides a very different paradigm of rightness. In any case, whether it is the Platonic notion of justice, the Aristotelean notion or some other, what figures fundamentally in these classical theories and others directly derived from them is a conception of justice as involving both a process directed towards the securement of a desirable set of social relations and the securement and maintenance of these relations themselves. This latter does not appear, or barely appears, in contemporary formalist accounts and for this reason these accounts do and must appear inadequate.

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