



# THE ESSENCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: HARMONY, LEGALITY, RATIONALITY. AN ANALYSIS OF PLATO'S *LA REPUBLIQUE*

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## ABSTRACT

This analysis focuses on the definition of social justice in *La République* of Plato. We have tried to capture the essence of justice in the city by determining the three major principles on which it is based. Attached to unity and social harmony, the ideal platonic city is founded on the rule of law and reason in the conduct of public affairs. The state, like the soul is right when rationality prevails and determining the respect for the law for the sake of happiness in harmony. Three principles were then identified: the principle of harmony, the principle of legality and the principle of rationality. The investigation leads us to place the logos at the heart of the problematic of social justice, because reason, the matrix of wisdom, organises and orders the political community.

## INTRODUCTION

If we stick to Rawls' analyses, the search for the best possible social organisation is central to the concerns of political philosophy and social sciences [Rawls; 2008: pp. 17-21]. This quest has its origins in ancient philosophy, notably from Plato, renowned for the idealism of his political theory. His philosophy seeks the means of perfecting the soul, faithful to the impetus given to him by his master, Socrates. In the dialogues which precede *La République*, he insists on the need to privilege the soul over the body, and to purify it through knowledge and virtue. In *La République*, this objective takes on a resolutely political orientation. The soul can only truly rise to Good in a suitable socio-political framework. Plato centers his political ideas on the definition of a justice capable of solving the corruption and instability of the Athenian city. The righteous city lays the foundation for the restoration of a socio-political order in accordance with the beauty of ideas. From this perspective, what is this social justice capable of saving the city of corruption and reinstalling a socio-political reorganisation characterised by unity, order and happiness? By recognizing the relevance of classical interpretation, valuing the idea of harmony between the parts of the city, our hermeneutical approach nevertheless seeks to grasp the anchoring of social justice in the rule of the law for a well-ordered city, as well as the challenges of rationality in the ideal State.

We will thus identify three constitutive principles of the essence of social justice, namely the principle of harmony, the principle of legality and the principle of rationality of the social order.

## I- THE PRINCIPLE OF HARMONY

The study of justice in the city is inseparable, from a methodological point of view, from the grasp of the essence of the righteous soul. Social justice, as noted by Gregory Vlastos, is “dikaiosunè” [Vlastos; 1995: p. 79.] that is, the political and moral virtue. In the soul, as by homothety, in the city, justice is a principle of pure and perfect harmony between parts of the Whole.

Indeed, social justice consists of harmony between the different parts of the city. The individual is defined by his belonging to a social class with a specific nature and function. The order between the social classes and the good development of their respective virtues constitute the central axis of the platonic definition of justice in the city.

### I.1.CARDINAL VIRTUES AND HARMONY BETWEEN THE CLASSES OF THE CITY

The just city is divided into three social classes corresponding to its three vital functions. The homothety between soul and city leads to the distinction of three main social needs. The first is the production of material wealth. This is the work of the desiring part of the city. The economy in general and the work of artisans in particular are directly concerned. The artisan class transforms matter and carries out commercial transactions in order to insure that the material needs of citizens are met. The second social function is that of defence. It designates the task of protecting the city against external attacks and preserving internal cohesion. This function falls to the warrior class. Finally, the third need of the city is that of a good government. The task of ruling the city rests with the class of Perfect Guardians, or Chiefs or philosopher-kings, those who make excellent use of the rational part of the soul.

Between the three classes, there must be perfect cohesion based on the scrupulous respect by each of its functions. Social justice is the harmony that comes from it. In this perspective, Plato repeatedly defined justice in the city by insisting on the imperative of a hierarchical and harmonious balance between social classes. In Book IV of *La République*, after having tracked and surrounded justice in the manner of a hunter, Socrates can give a precise definition “well! I said, listen if I’m right. The principle that we laid down from the start, when we founded the city, as always to be observed, this principle or one of its forms, it seems to me, justice. However, we posited, and we have often repeated it, if you remember it that each one should occupy himself in the city of only one task, at which he is best endowed by nature” [Plato; 1966: IV, 433a, p. 185].

This definition is discussed and expressed in other terms below. There is a consistency in these definitions: social harmony as a central principle of social justice. The harmony of the city is a principle in accordance with nature, reason and collective aspirations for happiness. To achieve this harmony, justice as a central cardinal virtue, requires discipline and order among all classes of the city. The other cardinal virtues must be articulated and manifested in perfect coherence. Three cardinal virtues are identified as necessary for social cohesion.

First, there is wisdom. It is defined as prudence in deliberation [Plato; 1966: IV, 428b, p. 179]. Wisdom is the science of the Perfect Guardians, that is, of the rulers of the city. This is how Socrates relates it to the governing elite: “thus it is up to the class, to the smallest part of itself and to the science which resides there, it is to those who are at the head and who govern, that and entire city, founded according to nature, must be wise; and the men of this race are naturally very rare, to whom it belongs to participate in the science which, alone among the sciences, deserves the name of wisdom” [Plato; 1966: IV, 428e-429a, p. 180].

The second virtue is courage. It consists in safeguarding internal and external order, in particular by establishing the fear of the law. “It is, says Socrates, that force which constantly safeguards upright and legitimate opinion, touching on things that are or are not to be feared, that I call for, that I pose as courage” [Plato; 1966: IV, 430b, p. 182]. Courage is the virtue of auxiliaries or warriors.

The third virtue is temperance. It is a principle of order and harmony between the inferior and the superior: “temperance consists of this harmony, natural harmony between the superior and the inferior on the point of knowing who should be in charge of commanding and in the city and in the individual” [Plato; 1966: IV, 432ab, p. 184]. In the concept

of temperance, we must also see self-control and the absolute order between the elements of the soul. This is why Plato emphasizes that “temperance is in the way an order, a mastery which is exercised over certain pleasures and certain passions” [Plato; 1966: IV, 430e, p. 182]. In other words, it allows the mastery of passions and desires by reason, or even the respect by the lower classes of the wise decisions of the class of Perfect Guardians.

The harmony in the performance of functions, attached to virtue, must be irreproachable. It can be deduced from this that social mobility, the permutation of classes or the refusal to perform once function, constitute what should be qualified as social injustice. Plato expresses the character of social injustice by disrespecting the class structure in this terms: “the confusion and the mutation of these three classes among themselves therefore constitute for the city the supreme damage, and it is quite right that we would call this disorder the greatest of misdeeds [...] so this is what injustice is all about” [Plato; 1966: IV, 434b, p. 186].

Chance or luck has no place in the just city. Social harmony is rigorously thought out and implemented to reflect individual merit. Any attempt to disrupt the meritocratic class balance is a source of discord. Therefore, justice must settle in the soul of the citizen as much as it extends to the city. A. J. Festugière makes the following comment on this subject: “since the individual is not separable from the civic community, civic order reigns when interior justice existing in the soul of the wise in accordance with the model is extended to all citizens” [Festugière; 1950: p. 453]. Because it is perfectly rational, social justice prescribes and exemplary and definitive order making consistent use of the cardinal virtues and the related social classes. Such a city clearly has community features.

## I.2.THE COMMUNITY NATURE AND THE UNITY OF THE JUST CITY

The just city has the characteristics of the community organization of living together. A city is only fully just, according to Plato, when all of its elements are first identified with the whole before they are posited subsidiarily as singularity. In other words, the collective takes precedence over the individual. The ideal city is a perfect community. We understand the community as a mode of social organisation in which there are strong links between individuals, with a strong solidarity which necessitate certain collectivism in the management of goods, values and social functions. The community within the *polis* strengthens the unity of the city. The remarkable sphere of community management in the just city is the organization of the guardian class. Plato devotes almost all of *La République* to this class taken as a whole. By “class of guardians”, Plato means, in Book III, the entire military and ruling elite of the city. Guardians are warriors, the most excellent of which can form a class in its own right, that of chiefs or philosopher-kings. In other words, the class of guardians actually include two classes: warriors (or auxiliaries) [Plato, V, 464b, p. 219] and rulers or perfect guardians or philosopher-kings. From the end of Book II, throughout Book III and throughout Book V, Plato insists on solidarity and the prohibition of private property within the guardian class taken as a meta-class. There must be a common education among the latter. Private education is a source of selfish inclinations harmful to justice. It is therefore first of all an educational community, which continues without economic practices. There is in Plato’s political philosophy what Jean Boncœur and Hervé Thouément call “a rejection of market logic in favour of community logic” [Boncœur and Thouément; 2000: p. 17].

Indeed, the community of interest among the auxiliaries must be total. The warriors are doomed to be the auxiliaries of the chiefs of the city. They are intended for public service in a dedication that prohibits private property. The non-existence of private property guarantees the quality of the auxiliaries’ commitment towards the *res publica*. Complementary, the family is diluted in the community. Children and women do not belong distinctly to anyone, to the point where, on a sentimental level, no weakness can creates discord within the guardian class. Plato sums up aspects of the community life in a passage from Book V: “but we agreed that this union of interest was, for the city, the greatest good, when we compare a city wisely organised to the body, in a way it behaves towards one of its parts, for which is pleasure and pain. And we rightly agreed. Consequently, it is for us to demonstrate that the cause on the greatest good that can happen to the city is the community, between auxiliaries, of children and women” [Plato; 1966: V, 464b, p. 219].

The community of life among the guardians is transposed to the whole city, since this class, from which the chiefs

emerge, is supposed to be the model of the whole just city. From an economic point of view, Plato prescribes that a balance should be struck between abundance and lack. Social justice presupposes the rejection of the two extremes: wealth and poverty. The just city avoids “work and poverty, I replied; because one engenders luxury, laziness and a taste for newness” [Plato; 1966: V, 464b, p. 174]. From an emotional point of view, social justice promotes harmony of heart, that is, total emotional fusion, through the sharing of the same feeling among citizens. “Our citizens, specifies Plato, will be strongly united in what they will call their own interest, and united in this way, will experience joys and sorrows in perfect communion” [Plato; V: 464b, p. 219]. Valentin Mureşan speaks in this regard of “total unity of interest” [Mureşan; 1999: p. 61].

The strength of the community depends on the unity of the city. The unity of the city does not limit itself to its sentimental dimension, but extends itself to the objective arrangement relating to the management of the territory and the population. All arrangement must be made including demographically to ensure the effectiveness of the unit: «so we will also order the guard to ensure with the greatest care that the city is neither small nor large in appearance, but that it is of sufficient proportions while keeping its unity” [Plato; 1966: V, 464b, p. 174]. The figure of 5040 inhabitants will be proposed and will fuel many controversies, both philosophical, demographic and mystical. But what we retain is the demographic stability of the city, which supposes to create the conditions for unity and harmony. Too large, the city risks crumbling due to the loosening of social ties due to the deconcentration of power. Too small, it will not be able to have sufficient human resources to ensure its smooth functioning and defence.

From what precedes, social justice passes by the definition of harmonious, socio-economic and political relations. Social cohesion is based on the rational division of labour into classes and on the strict respect by each class of its function. Unity is essential in the just city. To the extent of this consideration, Jean-François Pradeau maintains that for Plato “the object of politics is the unity of the city” [Pradeau; 1997: p. 8]. The just city therefore needs a community organization of political life. Social justice is in other terms a principle of order and balance, making use therefore of the rule of law.

## II- THE PRINCIPLE OF LEGALITY

The principle of legality has, in the lexicon of current administrative law, the meaning of the conformity of the decision and actions of those in power with the written standards. This meaning is close to the platonic concern to make law an essential element in the management of the just city.

### II.1. THE LAW AND ITS PURPOSE

Plato’s positioning in relation to the thoughts of the pre-Socratics and the sophists allows him to designate by law (*nomos*) a rule in accordance with the order of nature, developed by reason and serving as a tool for organization, administration and regulating all kinds of relations within the city. For Pierre Maxime Schuhl, the word *nomos* signifies above all tradition, custom, a way of doing things that is imperative to all men. It is a custom, in the legal sense of the term, made obligatory by habits. It will subsequently take the meaning of the written law, opposed to the oral *Thémis* [Schuhl; 1934: pp. 356-357].

The principle of rationality and naturalness, which we will have to decipher, permeates the just law. The rational and natural basis of law is the guarantee of the stability of the just legal order. In other words, the law is founded on nature and enacted by reason. And it is from this double foundation that it derives its legitimacy and permanence. When we refer to the laws of Plato, we discover some nuances about the intangibility of laws. In *la République*, however, the law exudes a particular power. It is the symbol of order and reason.

The just city is a legally established society. From Book II of *La République*, we see that the philosopher who intends to find a just city plays the role of the ideal legislator. Social justice is not compatible with arbitrariness, the absence of the violation of the law. Perhaps it is necessary to underline, to recall it, the legalistic attitude of Socrates vis-à-vis Athenian justice. The law is imposed by its purpose. It does not serve the interests of a minority or an individual. Laws safeguarding special interests are unfair and do not, strictly speaking, deserve the name of law. They are not in adequacy with rea-

son and nature. True law, on the other-hand, serves collective happiness and solidifies the unity of the state. Socrates is thus led to remind Glaucon of the purpose and the mechanisms of the law : “you forget once again, my friend, that law is not concerned with ensuring exceptional happiness for a class of citizens, but that it strive to achieve the happiness of the entire city, by uniting citizens through persuasion or coercion, and getting them to share with each other the benefits that each class can bring to the community; and that if it trains such men in the city, it is not to leave them free to turn to the side they please, but to make them work together to strengthen the bond of the State” [Plato, 1966: VII, 519e-520a, p. 278]. We see that from a teleological point of view, the law is a tool at the service of all members of the city. The law cements the social bond. In the same sense, laws participate in the education of men. The educational function of laws is preventive. The rules they prescribe improve the degree of rationality and universality of men’s behaviour. The just law makes the whole city virtuous and united. The potential is confirmed by this affirmation of Clinias in *Les Lois*: “it is always necessary we were saying in effect, that the aim of the law tends towards a single thing, and, by saying that this thing is a virtue, we agreed, I think, to be completely justified in saying it” [Plato; 1950: 963a, p. 1120].

The principle of legality is not simply a political imperative; it is also a moral requirement. But the political and administrative aspect prevails. It is understood, as much as it is true that the responsibility of practicing the law is first of all a charge reserved for leaders, before being a duty for citizens.

## II-2. THE NECESSITY OF THE RESPECT OF THE LAW BY LEADERS

As the apex of the city’s political, moral, and epistemological hierarchy, the Perfect Guardians are expected to be exemplary in their decision-making. From this perspective legality in the management of power conditions the effectiveness of social justice. Legitimate politicians are not above the laws in the making of which they are primarily involved. On the contrary, it is by law that they exercise power. The law has a dual function for managers. On one hand, it determines the permit and the forbidden and oversees political and administrative actions. It does not only avoid arbitrariness and the symptomatic abuses of irrationality, but also safeguards the impartiality, the common good and the credibility of those in power. The *nomos* here is a set of clear guidelines to which the city elite adhere. On the other hand, the law gives general guidelines on the nature of the constitution, that is, of the political regime. This general framework offers an essential source of inspiration, even when the situations to be managed are extremely delicate or are not expressly provided for by the texts. The scope of law is in this sense relativized, since it does not prescribe exact remedies for all specific situations that may arise in the city. It gives general guidelines, the spirit of which should guide the leader. In *Le Politique*, Plato concedes expressly the possibility of finding original and opportunist solutions to social problems, for the law is not always perfect: “ never a law would be able to embrace with exactitude what, for all the same time, it is the best and fairest, and to prescribe what is best for all” [Plato; 1950, 394a-b, p. 399]. In other words, the law is the compass of political action. Plato underlines its significance in Book V of *La République*: “therefore believe that the chiefs and their auxiliaries, if they are worthy of the name they bear, will want them to do what will be commanded them there to order by conforming to the laws, or by drawing inspiration from them in the cases which we will abandon to their prudence” [Plato; 1966: V, 458b, p. 213].

Respect for the law streamlines political action. Without the law, rulers are tempted by irrational, selfish and unjust decisions. The example of the tyrant presented in Book VIII of *La République* illustrates the danger of an anomic exercise of power. Illegality brings disruption and chaos. Therefore, the appointment of leaders must resort to the criterion of attachment to the legal order. In other words, future politicians must be selected for their love of law and order. Plato insists on this aspect at the beginning of Book VI, when he enumerates the qualities of the natural philosopher called to lead the just city: “those who will appear capable of watching over the laws and institutions of the city are those whom we must establish guardians” [Plato; 1966: VI, 484bc, p. 241]. In *The Laws*, Plato reiterates the importance of selecting the ruler by appreciating his commitment to the law. “The man, says the Athenian, who practices strict obedience towards established laws and whose way of triumphing in the city, it is to him that, we affirm, will have to be in first, assigned the most important place among the servants of these Divinities that are the laws” [Plato; 1950: IV, 715bc, p.

762].

The law is therefore an indispensable instrument for the establishment of social justice. Like the cosmos, the just city is based on “harmonic laws” [Goldschmidt; 1990: p. 103]. We can therefore see in Plato a precursor of the rule of law. The principle of legality and the harmony of the city are based on the rationality of a just social order.

### III- THE PRINCIPLE OF RATIONALITY

Reason is at the heart of the construction of social justice. Morals and politics depend on reason and the wisdom that flows from it. Justice in the city obeys not arbitrary demands, but rational prescriptions in line with the very nature of things.

#### III.1. THE REQUIREMENTS OF RATIONALITY AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE JUST CITY

Reason in *La République* is that part of the soul whose function is to know and to lead. In other words, the rational principle of the soul has the power and the legitimacy to command and establish righteousness in the soul and in the city. Reason in Socratic Greece is *λόγος (logos)*. *Logos* refers to discourse, speech, logic, reason, argumentation and definition. The *logos* is the human ability to make logical speeches capable of reflecting the truth. In other words, it is the discursive faculty of distinguishing right from wrong, and hence the just from the unjust. In this vein, André Lalande puts forward, as the first definition of reason, the faculty of “combining concepts and propositions” [Lalande; 1997: p. 379]. When Plato links social justice to reason, he intends to make intelligence prevail over ignorance. The rational character of social justice is reflected in the founding role of reason and its driving implication in the safeguard of the just city thanks to the respect of the submission of the other parts of the city to the upper part, that is to say, precisely, the rational part.

The founding role of reason, is pointed out in Book II of *La République*. Socrates agrees with his interlocutors on the need to study justice within the ideal framework of a just city. The just city must be founded by reason and not by some other instrument which could, for example, appeal to the emotions. In Book III, he can then pronounce his methodical injunction: “by where reason like a breath, carries us, by there we must go” [Plato; 1966: 394d, p. 146]. Reason serves as a compass in shaping the legal, political and societal foundation of the just city. The demand for rationality also gives the imagination of the just city, its originality and legitimacy. Consequently and in general, no city can be just if it is not founded by reason. Social justice is fundamentally the fruit of reason. There is a desire for empowerment of man, to whom the power is given, through the use of the noble part of his soul, to build a social and political framework suited to his aspirations for happiness.

Founding the city by reason also means recognizing that knowledge is the source of any just social model. And in matters of knowledge, the contemplation of Good is primordial. Social justice is really only the attempt to organize the city according to the model of intelligible justice that the philosopher contemplated. Reason is “the principal instrument of the philosopher” [Plato; 1966: IX, 582d, p. 345]. It allows it to rise dialectically to the perfect archetype of social justice, according to gnoseological process describe in Book VI and VII of *La République*. Reason is thus the founding principle of social justice. It also asserts itself as its guiding principle.

In fact, the just city can only be preserve and function correctly if men, having become citizens, are guided by rules and rational leaders. Reason is the guardian of virtue and order within the city; for “she alone, once established in the soul, remains there all the life conservative of virtue” [Plato; 1966: VIII, 549b, p. 308]. In the city as in the soul reason commands, watches, directs and preserves unity and discipline. Hence this questioning remark from Socrates “now, what is the farthest from reason, isn’t it precisely what is the farthest from law and order?” [Plato; 1966: IX, 587a, p. 351]. Rationality, legality and order are inseparable. This is why reason must expedite all stages of building socio-political organization. At the political level, this signifies the need to preserve the hierarchy between the specialists of reason that are the philosopher-kings and the rest of the city on the other. Philosophers trade with reason, that higher part of the soul endowed with divine characteristic. The responsibility of leading must naturally fall on them. Legitimate rulers are, Plato

writes, “under the law of order and reason” [Plato; 1966: VI, 500bc, p. 257]. It is really a matter of applying to the city the same principle as to the soul, that is to say the principle of the government of the All by the must divine part. As Saïd Binayemotlagh aptly points out, “the freedom of wise springs on the background of the model” [Binayemotlagh; 2002: p. 30]. Thus, Book IX of *La République* clearly prescribes the wise man to always focus on “the government of his soul” [Plato; 1966: IX, 591e, p. 355], who’s good management will serve as a model and a springboard for the achievement of social justice. The principle of rationality therefore tells us that internal justice is essential for social justice. This is what justifies the importance given to education throughout the dialogue.

Philosophical rationality permeates social justice. It is not the construction of a manipulative *logos* like that of the sophists or their postmodern avatars. It is the grasp of the truth which it uses to organise the city. What reason knows and sets up is ultimately nothing other than the very nature of things.

### III.2. THE ARTICULATION BETWEEN RATIONALITY AND NATURALITY

The order of reason is the order of nature. Nature, in the platonic sense, is the original and essential quality of a thing, conforming to the order of the Cosmos. Nature determines the features of each thing, explaining its resemblance to its Idea. In classical Greek thought, the idea of nature is a powerful tool for legitimizing socio-political theses. Among the pre-Socratics, it is the Cosmos which proceeds the macrocosmic, stable and intelligible order. Among the sophists, the word *nature* takes on the meaning of the immediate environment not influenced by man, that is to say nature in the biophysical sense of the term, in which strength, cunning and arbitrariness takeover. In other words, it is the primary state in which animals live with the law of the strongest as the only norm. With Plato, nature, essence and Idea are related concepts. Nature is the essence as it can be perceived by reason. What reason knows is the very nature of things, that is, what there are originally, apart from all corruption. Nature is therefore rational by definition. For Plato, the Cosmos is a coherent and intelligible whole.

The just city follows the nature of things. Justice has a specific nature that can be grasped by reason. Social justice is therefore not an artificial creation emanating from the vagaries of human will. It is in line with the order of the Cosmos and the essence of things. All purely conventional justice is a precarious disguise of true Justice. The naturalness of social justice implies that injustice is a violation of the laws of the Nature and the nature of laws. This is why, concerning the equality between men and women, for example, Socrates says “therefore the law which we established is neither impossible nor comparable with a vain wish since it conforms to nature” [Plato; 1966: V, 456c, p.211]. In other words, the feasibility of the prescriptions of social justice is justified by their naturalness. Likewise, the separation of tasks is legitimate because “nature has not made each of us similar to each other, but different in attitude and specific to each other’s such or such function” [Plato; 1966: II, 370ab, p. 118].

The preceding passages reflect the platonic concern to reconcile reason and nature in the foundation of the just city. The couple reason/nature is also the driving force behind the appointment of city leaders. In fact, only “natural philosopher” can claim dialectics and rule the city. The natural philosopher is a recurring expression from Book VI of *La République*. The natural philosopher is oppose both to the *philodox* [Plato; 1966: V, 480a, p. 237.] or false philosopher and to the “natural mixed” [Plato; 1966: VIII, 547e, p. 307], that is to say to the one who devote himself to philosophy without having the natural predisposition for it. Their “philosophical” activities are sham because they are unnatural. At the beginning of Book VI, the detection of future leaders is subject to a prerequisite: “we must first know their own naturalness” [Plato; 1966: VI, 484e, p. 242]. In other words, the philosopher-king has essential qualities which naturally predispose him to rule the city and promote the advent of social justice.

Nature and reason are the pillars of the foundation of the just city. Injustice, synonymous with irrationality and disorder, is necessarily unnatural: “so, to engender justice, is not to establish according to nature the relations of domination and subjection between the various elements of the soul? And to engender injustice, doesn’t allow them to rule or

be governed by each other and against nature?" [Plato; 1966: IV, 444d, p. 198.] In other words, the discipline desired in a just social framework is a natural and rational discipline, in the absence of which chaos absolutely contrary to nature would prevail.

In reality, the association of reason with nature also has a restorative and controversial issue. The restorative scope derives from the Platonic nostalgia for an original and archaic city ordered and organized according to a rational structure reminiscent of the Cosmos. Plato's intentions to rebuild the city following the natural order that prevailed in the original city. We must thoroughly rectify the slippages of democratic artificiality to return to something more authentic, natural and rational. The controversial issue reflects the concern to reject the conventionalism of the sophists and politicians contemporary with Plato. The ideal city is not a simple convention; it represents the very order of things. Conventionalism operates by disguising the demands of nature social justice. On the other hand is exemplary naturalness and rationality, the foundations of perfect harmony within the city. Politics is a fabric that must be woven together harmoniously, in accordance with the weaving metaphor at the end of *Le Politique* [Plato; 1950: 311a-c, pp. 428-429].

## Conclusion

At the end of our analysis, three main principles constitute justice in the city in *La République*: conformity with the natural and rational order, perfect cohesion between classes of the city and, finally, strict respect for the law. These three principles are inseparable and make it possible to see in social justice a virtue of stability and unity, in accordance with the rational end natural order, consisting in the legal and harmonious fulfillment by each class of its function in the city. It is, moreover, this conception of social order that will be the object of the Aristotelian criticism of Book II of *Les Politiques*. But our argument, hermeneutical and not critical, deliberately deprived itself of the benefits of a critical reading political Platonism, such as it appears for example in Karl Popper's *La société ouverte et ses ennemis*. But we take the liberty of suggesting the exploitation of the ideal of social rationality and harmony, with the aim of achieving the "specific objective of political", that is to say, in the sense of Julien Freund, internal concord and external security [Freund; 1965: p.56].

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