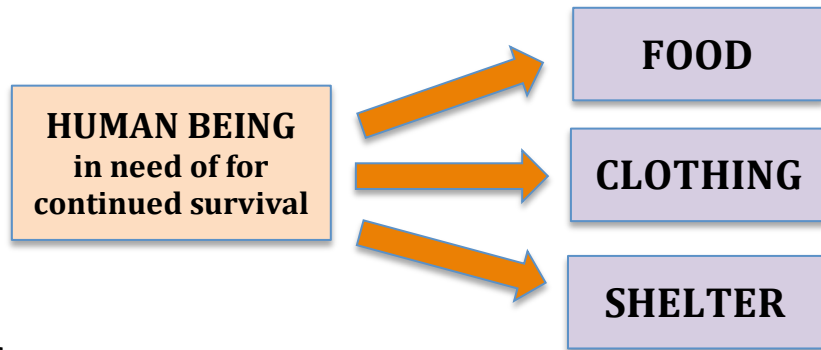


Plato's *Republic* book 2 – The Origins of Human Communities

In the *Republic*, Socrates and his interlocutors carry out a thought experiment, designed to illuminate the origins and development of human communities. In the story as it unfolds, communities arise for human beings out of the *needs* which human beings experience.

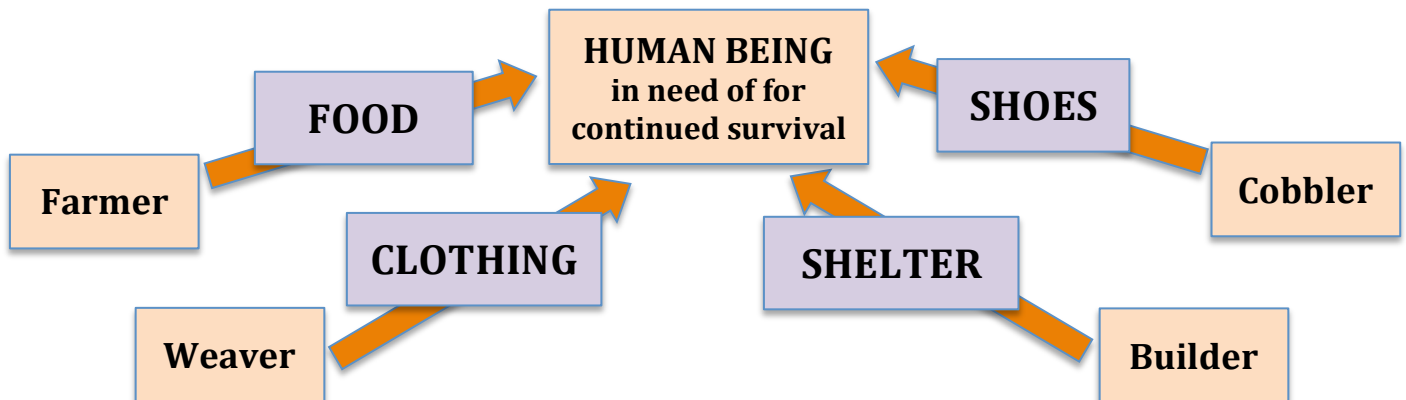
I. Human Basic Needs and How They Are Met.

Each individual human being requires a number of different goods in order to live. These are basic, fundamental human needs. Socrates does not list all of them, but they do include:



He also adds one more – **Shoes**.

All of these – even Food – are products. Someone has to devote time and labor to creating these goods which then can satisfy these basic human needs.



So a person requires at least four people producing the basic goods they need for life.

Where will all of this labor come from? There are two main possibilities Socrates considers. One of these would have each person making his or her own goods, keeping them to him- or herself. And that means that each person has to spend a portion of the time and labor available to him or her doing each of the four jobs.

In this view, each person has to become a **Farmer**, a **Builder**, a **Weaver**, and a **Cobbler**. This would be possible – but is it desirable? Is it the best way to meet human basic needs? Can a human being truly be self-sufficient?

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The alternative would be to have some kind of Division of Labor. Each person specializes in one kind of work and produces one kind of good, contributing it to a common stock, from which each of them draws their portion.



This sort of arrangement has two advantages that make it superior to the other alternative.

- Different people have different aptitudes – different “natures” – which make them better at doing some things and worse at others. Each can do the work he or she is best suited for doing.
- Also, when one person focuses on one kind of work, he or she is able to provide a higher quality and higher quantity of their distinctive good.

II. The Community Expands.

Will all of the goods that are necessary for human existence be supplied by this imaginary community of four producers? Socrates points out that many other people will be needed:

- Each of the original four people will require **Tools** in order to be able to do their work – and produce their distinctive goods – effectively. This means that new people will have to be members of the community – those who make tools.
- The original four members also require **Animals** – both to supply raw materials, and to provide necessary labor. This will also require new members and new occupations that focus on breeding and maintaining animals.
- The community will also need more **Farmers** – perhaps one farmer could take care of four person’s needs, but now we have far more than just four people.

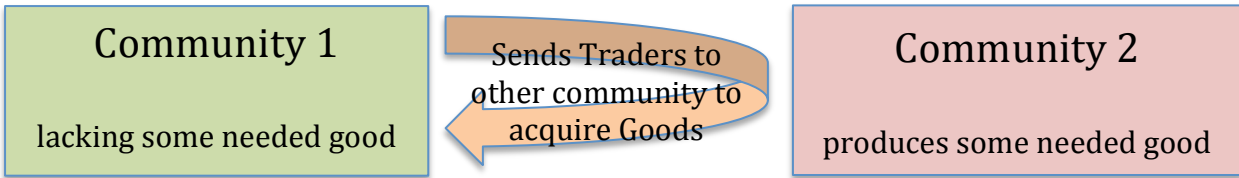
All of this so far can be carried out within the community – and likely in terms of barter with each other, or some kind of common stock. But that won’t actually provide for all of the needs of the people in this community. Trading and more sophisticated economic exchange is going to be a necessity. How will that occur?

- Within the community, there will be a marketplace
- Between communities, there will be trading

Let’s look at what both of these entail:

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Exchange will take place between communities. This will occur because there will be some resources that one community has and another lacks (and wants or needs), or because one community can much more efficiently produce the good another community needs.



As Socrates points out, the first community will need something to provide to the second community, or there will be no exchange. So the community has to grow even more:

- **Traders** or **Merchants** are needed to actually go to the other communities
- If they use ships, **Shipbuilders** and **Sailors** will now be needed as well
- More **Farmers** and **Artisans** will be needed to provide them with their basic needs
- More **Farmers** and **Artisans** will be also be needed to produce the surplus goods that are going to be traded with the other community.

Economic exchange will also take place within the – let's call it a **City** at this point.

- There will be an occupation of **Traders** who handle retail and wholesale buying and selling goods in the marketplace – that way producers don't have to wait around.
- **Money** will be needed to facilitate these exchanges.
- Some people will sell their labor to others as **Servants** or **Wage-Workers**

The community is now grown fairly large – large enough to be called a City – and also large enough to take care of the basic needs of its residents. Socrates suggests that they will live a simple but enjoyable life.

III. From The Simple City to the Luxurious City.

Socrates' interlocutor, Glaucon, raises several objections about this imaginary city. These objections have to do with whether the full range of "needs" are met for these residents.

Objection 1: The food and drink that these people have is lacking in relish, in variety.

Socrates' Response: They can have all sorts of simple additions to their diet that will satisfy their needs and even desires and wants for interesting, tasty food.

Objection 2: You haven't given them the ordinary conveniences of "modern" life – still better food, good and comfortable furniture, and that sort of thing.

Socrates' Response: They can have all of that too – but now we're talking about the **Luxurious City** – a very different kind of case. This will bring in many new "needs".

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The Expansion of “Needs” beyond bare Necessity



The “needs” – or really rather desires – of the citizens of the Luxurious City will require that it expand considerably. This is going to bring it into conflict with other communities.

- A new occupation is going to be required – people who have a talent for, and who focus on preparing for and carrying out, WAR. Someone will have to take up such an occupation full-time, so that it can be done well.
- These warriors, or soldiers, or **GUARDIANS** are going to be needed for the Luxurious City to be able to take the land it needs from its neighbors.
- The Luxurious City will also need these Guardians to protect itself from the other Luxurious Cities who have the same idea about taking their neighbors’ land!

So, where does that leave us? We’ve gone from basic human needs to a massive City or State that is going to have some considerable class divisions, and be in conflict with others:

