

PLATO Context

Socrates taught systematic dialogical inquiry into knowledge to Plato, with the goal of illuminating human affairs. However, the dialogues of Socrates are *aporetic* – they lead to systematic doubt, paralysis, no strategic recommendations.

History: 504 BCE Democracy comes to Athens
469 Socrates born
431 Peloponnesian War begins
428 Plato born
404 Athens surrenders; Oligarchs take over
399 Trial and Death of Socrates
385 Plato founds the Academy
380 *The Republic* written

The deliberative virtues of political life:

To listen to contrary views/ to have the courage to follow their insight/ to see the partiality of one's own views/ to have the humility to recognize the faults of one's own logic/ to embrace your communicative need for others/ to require the input of others

This leads to critical interrogation and is a necessary condition for wise politics.

Plato was affected by the death of his mentor, when a 501-person jury put Socrates to death by 30 votes. Plato wanted to renew Athenian power, but questioned if the deliberative virtues and wisdom (philosophical/critical interrogation) were compatible with democracy.

Random Thoughts about *The Republic*

Not *aporetic*, a dialogue of construction. Plato believes that for Socrates to live, philosophers must rule. The art of ruling is the most important and difficult of all the human arts. This requires a type of political science, “the knowledge by which we are to make men good.”

The philosopher has a vision of the good, the immutable forms of the good, the pattern, harmony, and music of life. The project of the philosopher-king is to establish the right influences and best environment so that the soul will be attracted to the right things. Complete social construction, entire range of political phenomena must be knowable to the philosopher-king. Furthermore, his/her materials (human beings/social arrangements) are malleable (plastic) to human art.

What is political to Plato? 1. achieving the good life at the political level 2. rejecting politics, a realm of flux, revolution, discord, groups vying for advantage, which distorts perceptions – and never rises above mere opinions to *true knowledge*. Plato believes that the body politic is diseased and needs doctors to practice healing statecraft/soulcraft. These illnesses must be cured by a harmonic science of the human social order. *Plato would not ask the question: how can we gain knowledge in the context of conflict, ambiguity, and change?*

The authority of the philosopher-king flows from his/her access to the TRUTH, attained through philosophical contemplation. Critique: Plato destroys political life (and its relativities and contingencies) by trying to argue away all the authentic perplexities of political life.

Societal specialization (division of labor) each works according to their own skills/ability, fulfilling your function/role within the whole to the best of your ability is JUSTICE.
Enslavement to personal desires/ working for your own good as opposed to the common good is INJUSTICE.

Because the human self/ conscious life, beliefs, thoughts are all malleable, ordering our plastic selves can impact our public morality – making the educational system the most important focus of political reform.

<p><u>Important concepts:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forms/Truth and perception/philosophy’s role in gaining knowledge 2. Harmony/Balance – poetry and music 3. Education (censorship – the noble lie) 4. Three types of desires 5. Uniformity and plasticity in human beings 6. The public good/communalism 	<p><u>Virtues</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wisdom 2. Courage 3. Moderation 4. Justice
<p><u>Desires/ Division of the Soul</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appetitive – controls the money-makers 2. Spirited – controls the auxiliaries (soldiers) 3. Rational – controls the guardians (philosophers) 	<p><u>Glaucon’s Division of Goods 357</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Those that are valued for their own sake. (i.e. happiness) 2. Those that are valued for their own sake but also for the ends they help to achieve (i.e. health) 3. Those that are valued only for the ends they help to achieve but are too costly to be valued for their own sake (i.e. money-making trades)
<p><u>Important Parables/Images</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ring of Gyges/ Glaucon’s Ring – what would you do if there were no consequences to your actions? 359-60 2. Myth of the Metals – each person is born with inherent traits/abilities/proclivities 415 3. The Sun – how does the soul allow us to perceive forms? 4. The Line – Plato’s crazy philosophy of metaphysics and epistemology 5. The Cave – the parable of education. 	<p><u>Plato’s classification of types of government (in descending order of goodness)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plato’s Republic (kingdom/aristocracy) 2. Timocracy (oligarchy based on worship of valor/ spirited desires) 3. Oligarchy (ruled by necessary appetitive desires) 4. Democracy (ruled by public’s non-necessary appetitive desires) 5. Tyranny (ruled by one person’s appetitive desires)

Summary

In the first book, Plato recreates the Athenian factional divisions over the question of justice... but these are all *doxa* (opinions) not TRUE KNOWLEDGE. Plato/Socrates wants to show these to be unsustainable positions.

Cephalus – justice is to pay one’s debts, don’t lie or deceive. Cephalus was an elderly money-maker. He is traditional and accepts the authority of the poets. 331b-c

Polemarchus – justice is to benefit your friends and to harm your enemies. This represents the views of a warrior society. 331e

Thrasymachus – might makes right, justice is the advantage of the stronger, those who think otherwise are naïve. He’s a sophist and probably represents the tyrannical personality. 338c

The object of Plato’s argument (after making short work of Cephalus and Polemarchus) is to refute Thrasymachus (or rather, the revised restatements made by Glaucon and Adiemantus) who argues that justice is the advantage of the stronger. Because the stronger rule, they control education and socialization. This, combined with their impulse toward self-interest, leads them to define ethical education to their own advantage. The trick is: the public is deceived into believing that what is in the interests of the rulers is just and actually in their own interests.

Glaucon and Adiemantus are unconvinced by Socrates/Plato’s arguments against Thrasymachus. They argue that justice is a costly good that has no inherent value: “is it more profitable to be unjust than it is to be just?” (*Glaucon’s question*)

To respond to this challenge, Socrates/Plato constructs the *kallipolis* – a totally just society, run by philosopher-kings.

He describes an educational system by which guardian/philosopher-kings can be trained to begin to learn the form of what is good for the polis.

From there, he argues that having a soul that is commanded by the rational part (which can only be achieved in the *kallipolis*) is enough of a reward that it is more profitable to be just than unjust.

QUESTIONS

1. What is Plato's justice? Compare it with Machiavelli's virtue.
2. Does necessity play any role in Plato's justice?
3. How does noble lie fit in Plato's argument about justice?
4. What is the Republic about?
5. conceptions of justice in the Republic, and what do the non-Socratic conceptions have in common?
6. is there freedom in the Republic
7. is it always rational to seek power?
8. We moved from there into theories of elite rule, the need for a noble lie / founding myth in Plato and others, and he asked: contrast Plato’s education for leaders with the educations emphasized by modern, liberal regimes
9. What is Plato's Republic about?
 - Are there any problems with that? Can you separate the just man and the just society?
10. Compare Plato’s conception of justice with Machiavelli or Hobbes
11. Plato: Discuss the following:
 - Relationship between public and private
 - Relationship between nature and convention
 - Discuss the above with examples of slavery, property, family.
12. What makes a people? What makes for the unity of the body politic? What do the ancients have to contribute to this question?
13. Why does the Republic start with the city of pigs?
14. Why does Socrates speak?
15. What's special about speech? (dialogue as a form.)
16. Who is Thrasymachus and what point of view does he represent?
17. Is Thrasymachus vindicated (either in the Republic or in the history of political thought)?

18. Why does Socrates think that talking about justice in the city and justice in the individual are linked or should be talked about at the same time?
19. What are the different cities Socrates talks about?
20. Tell me about the city of pigs.
21. What makes the city of pigs just?
22. What's just about everyone was doing what they were fit to do?
23. Is it natural to live in the city of pigs or is there something unnatural about it?
24. Who represents glory in the ideal city?
25. Which led into a question about the education of the military guardians: did I think that their education was indoctrination?
26. He then asked about the education of the philosophers.
27. He asked, why should they rule, and what do they get out of ruling?
28. discuss Plato on religion and citizenship.

Questions for later:

1. compare the conception of justice as the right ordering of the soul with Rawls's Theory of Justice and ask if I thought Rawls could make use of that idea.
2. compare Aristotle with Plato on what rulers get out of ruling if anything.
3. discuss the elements of Aristotle's critique of Plato, and wound up talking about the best citizen vs. the best man, and also about the reluctant ruler in Plato.