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Power over People: Classical and Modern Political Theory

Scope: Any political theory can be analyzed and evaluated on the basis of two major criteria: the importance of the questions that it addresses and the coherence of its responses to those questions. Thus, the first two questions that we ask of any political theorist are these: Does the theory cover the essential and enduring questions of political theory? How systematic are the responses to those questions?

These lectures examine some of the fundamental questions that have shaped Western political thought since its inception in Athens in fifth century B.C., together with some of the most influential answers that political theorists have proposed. The issues addressed in these lectures—and in Western political theory generally—fall into three broad categories. The first involves the essential characteristics of human nature and the good society. Is human nature essentially spirit or matter? Is it directed by reason or dominated by passion? Is it fixed or malleable? Is it innately sinful, aggressive, and violent, or is it fundamentally benign, cooperative, and nonviolent? Will the good society be characterized by perfect harmony or by continued conflict? If conflict is inevitable in the good society, must it be controlled through the leader's discretionary use of coercive power, or can it be contained constructively within political institutions? Are social unity and harmony achievable or even desirable? Do the progress and vigor of society depend, by contrast, upon some form of struggle?

The second set of fundamental questions involves the relationship between the individual and society. What is the right relationship of the individual to society? What is the relationship of individual freedom to social and political authority? What constitutes legitimate political authority? Does it come ultimately from God, the state, or the individual? Are human beings fundamentally equal or unequal?

The final set of questions involves theories of change. What are the fundamental dynamics of change? What role is played by discretionary leadership or moral values in effecting change? Are there inexorable laws of history that produce change? Is an unchanging, enduring, universal system of ethical values possible? Must such a system be grounded in a theory of absolute truth? If an enduring, universal system of values is possible, what precisely are those values, and what is their relevance for political and social action? Should transformative leadership be based on the hard facts of political reality and human weakness, or on the knowledge of absolute truth? Is the most fundamental change ideological, economic, or psychological in nature?

Should agents of change pursue reform through gradual, evolutionary means, or should they pursue the total transformation of society and human nature through revolution? Should radical change be pursued through violence or nonviolence? Should it rely mainly on spontaneity or on authoritarian organization?

Those questions orient our study of a wide range of theories of power and its use. We contrast Plato's idealism with Aristotle's realism, Marx's optimism with Freud's pessimism, and Hitler's exclusionism and exaltation of violence with Gandhi's inclusionism and insistence on nonviolence. For centuries such questions have eluded final solution, and we should not expect to answer them definitively here. The questions should prompt us, however, to think more deeply about ourselves, the standards that guide our behavior, and our obligations, if any, to society.

Objectives: Upon completing these lectures, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the fundamental questions and concerns that shape classical and modern political theory.
2. Explain the essential differences between the "idealist" and "realist" traditions in political theory, and identify some of the most influential thinkers in each tradition.
3. Describe the influence of one's understanding of human nature upon one's vision of the good society, making specific reference to the theorists examined in this course.
4. Compare and contrast the views of those theorists regarding the purpose (if any) of the state, the relationship between politics and ethics, and the qualifications (if any) for exercising political power.
5. Compare and contrast the views of leading political theorists regarding the meaning of freedom, the sources of legitimate political authority, the legitimacy of individual resistance against constituted authority, and the obligations (if any) of individuals to the state or society.
6. Distinguish among the differing attitudes toward the use of violence that are held by the theorists examined in this course.
7. Compare and contrast the views of those theorists regarding the possibilities for fundamental transformation of human nature and society, as well as the means by which that transformation can be brought about.

Recommended Readings to Accompany the Lectures*

The Bhagavad-Gita. Translated by Barbara Miller. Bantam.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Harper.

Plato. 1969. *The Last Days of Socrates*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. New York: Penguin.

Plato. 1945. *The Republic*. Translated by F. M. Cornford. London: Oxford University Press.

Aristotle. 1958. *The Politics*. Translated by Ernest Barker. London: Oxford University Press.

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. New York: Norton.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1987. *The Basic Political Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: Ungar.

Freud, Sigmund. 1961. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: Norton.

Thoreau, Henry David. 1960. *Walden* and "Civil Disobedience." New York: Signet.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground* and the "The Grand Inquisitor," in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dutton.

Goldman, Emma. *Living My Life* and *My Disillusionment in Russia*.

Shulman, Alix. *Red Emma Speaks*.

Adolf Hitler. 1971. *Mein Kampf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Sentry.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Basic Political Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

* The books in this reading list appear in the order that they are discussed in the lectures.

Lecture One

The Hindu Vision of Life

Scope: We begin these lectures by examining the Hindu vision of life as expressed in two of the sacred texts of Hinduism: *The Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Hindu idealism prefigures Socratic and Platonic thought in its emphasis on self-mastery, its upholding of ideal standards of conduct, and its focus on teaching by example. As in Socrates, the Hindu texts portray illusion and ignorance as the source of fear, and the light of knowledge as its corrective. Liberation from ignorance and fear brings perception of the highest truth of Hinduism: the interconnectedness of all being. The Hindus depart from the Western classical tradition, however, in their distrust of politics and the state, although we shall see that distrust reflected in the writings of later theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Emma Goldman.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Outline the central tenets of the Hindu vision of life, and describe how and to what extent they prefigure the tenets of Socratic and Platonic thought.
2. Describe the four stages in the Hindu journey of life, and describe the objective of that journey.
3. Outline the Hindu theory of human nature, and relate it to the Hindu view of the relationship between individuals and society.

Outline

- I. The Hindu tradition focuses on idealism.
 - A. In the Hindu tradition, one must first acquire self-mastery through self-knowledge in order to be qualified to exercise power over others.
 - B. The theory of idealism holds that there are ideal standards of conduct by which humans should guide their behavior.
 1. Those ideal standards do not have to be realizable in order to be valid.
 2. Hindu idealism gives us a context for understanding the idealism of Plato.
 - C. The ideal of education is part of the Hindu tradition.
 1. Indian teachers (gurus) sought to teach by example.
 2. In *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, Karl Potter explains that the Indian educational ideal is based on the teacher's need to

know the student as an individual and to be always cognizant of the student's innermost needs.

- II. In the Hindu tradition, education is intended to impart certain ideal values.
 - A. The Hindu educational ideal is based on the conviction that fear arises from illusion, which in turn is dispelled by education.
 1. Through education, we become aware that evil and sin are illusions that arise from our sense of fear and anxiety.
 2. By shedding light on the object of our anxiety, we can overcome our fear of it and, by extension, our separation from other human beings. Through self-discipline, we perceive the unity of being, which is the highest truth.
 - B. Education should impart the following values, in ascending order of importance:
 1. *Artha*: the value of wealth and property. Artha conveys the illusion that wealth and property are important, and thus it is the lowest value.
 2. *Kama*: sensual, especially sexual, pleasure.
 3. *Dharma*: religious duties, which impart a sense of righteousness.
 4. *Moksha*: spiritual liberation. Moksha brings freedom from illusion, fear, and ignorance, and thereby leads to perception of the unity of all being.
- III. The individual passes through the following four ideal stages of life:
 - A. *Brahmacharya*: the student stage, encompassing the first 25 years of life. The brahmacharya is devoted to studying all knowledge and understanding the sacred texts of Hinduism.
 - B. *Grihastha*: the householder stage (ages 25 to 55), which involves establishing and providing for a family and raising children.
 - C. *Vanaprastha*: literally "forest hermit," or a solitary seeker of truth.
 1. This stage can begin when one sees "the son of a son," thus ensuring the family's continuity. The individual then begins a search for self-knowledge and freedom, which must involve leaving all family responsibilities behind.
 2. The ideal of *vanaprastha* underlies the Hindu suspicion of politics, and it conflicts with the Platonic and Aristotelian vision of the state as the locus of virtue.
 - D. *Sannyasa*: the final state, meaning "saintliness," that depends upon the result of *vanaprastha*.
 1. The person returns to society after having perceived the unity of all being. Thus enlightened by the highest knowledge, the *sannyasin* moves throughout society yet transcends its rules (of caste) and temptations (of wealth, property, or sex).

2. The behavior of the “saint in society” is strictly nonviolent because he or she has learned the necessary connection between the highest truth (the identity of all being) and nonviolence (*ahimsa*). That connection rests on the premise that if we inflict injury on another, we necessarily harm ourselves.

IV. The Hindu vision of the ideal relationship between the individual and society is based on a theory of human nature and an understanding of how nurture (education) should develop one’s nature.

- A.** The Hindu theory of the tripartite self parallels the tripartite Hindu social system.
 1. The human personality is composed of *sattva* (wisdom or goodness), *rajas* (courage or energy), and *tamas* (desire or appetite). Every person possesses those qualities, but in varying proportions.
 2. Social organization reflects the predominance of those qualities among different classes of people. *Brahmans* (the philosopher and priest caste) dominate because they possess great wisdom and goodness. *Kshatriyas* (the political and military caste) excel in courage and energy. *Vaishyas* (the commercial and agricultural caste) are characterized by desire and appetite.
- B.** In its origins, the Indian caste system was based on merit, not heredity (although it subsequently degenerated into an exploitative system based on privilege and heredity). The function of education is to nurture or develop the individual’s innate qualities or natural gifts. Through education, the individual discerns the social function for which he or she is best suited.
- C.** The Hindu and Platonic systems can be compared.
 1. In its reliance on education to discern the social roles for which an individual is by nature best suited, the Hindu system resembles Plato’s ideal merit-based order.
 2. Plato and the Hindu tradition differ in their view of politics. Plato holds that a philosopher can wield power wisely and safely, while the Hindus view politics as a contaminating influence that the wise must avoid since it diverts them from their spiritual quest of giving society a moral vision.

Recommended Reading:

The Bhagavad-Gita. Translated by Barbara Miller. Bantam.

Lecture Two

Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War

Scope: Thucydides’ diagnosis of the causes of the Peloponnesian War provides the historical context for understanding Plato’s philosophy. Thucydides recounts Pericles’ “Funeral Oration,” in which the “First Citizen” extolled some of the very features of Athenian society that Plato later blamed for Athens’ loss to Sparta. Athens’ mishandling of power under Pericles’ leadership served Plato as an object lesson of what to avoid in constructing a well-ordered republic. Thucydides’ pessimistic view of both human nature and prospects for the wise use of power differs sharply from Plato’s more optimistic assessment, which we will examine more closely in subsequent lectures.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Describe Pericles’ portrayal of Athenian democracy and his view of politics and power as presented in his “Funeral Oration,” and evaluate the accuracy of those portrayals in the light of subsequent events.
2. Describe Plato’s critique of Athenian democracy, as well as his diagnosis of the reasons for its decline.
3. Compare and contrast the views of Thucydides and Plato regarding the malleability, or perfectibility, of human nature and the ability to wield power wisely.

Outline

- I.** The Tragedy of Athens.
 - A.** Athenian democracy was both more and less extensive than modern democracy.
 1. It exceeded modern standards of democracy by giving every adult male citizen a share in direct rule. The Athenian assembly met once every month; membership involved no literacy or property qualifications; and any citizen could address the assembly directly and propose policy.
 2. However, Athenian democracy was highly restrictive by modern standards because it denied political rights to women, *metics* (resident aliens), and slaves. Direct rule was exercised by some 40,000 male citizens (out of a total population of some 350,000).
 3. Athenian public life was dominated by amateurs. Plato was concerned about the absence of professionalism in Athenian politics.

B. Thucydides recounts Athens' war with Sparta from 431 to 404 B.C. in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

II. Analysis of Thucydides' account of Pericles' "Funeral Oration."

A. Pericles dominated Athenian public life between 461 and 429 B.C., during Athens' "Golden Age." He was Athens' leading general and the most prominent political leader during those 30 years.

B. Pericles' "Funeral Oration" sets forth the ideals by which Athens viewed itself at the outset of the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C.

1. Pericles extols the Athenian values of honor, courage, and freedom, and he celebrates the power of the Athenian empire.
2. He identifies Athens' political system as the city's greatest achievement. He portrays Athenian democracy as a model for all Greece, since it is based on freedom for all under law.
3. Pericles contrasts Athens' political system with Sparta's. Lacking the Athenians' democratic spirit, Spartans are capable only of "state-induced courage" because of their state's heavy emphasis on military discipline. He praises Athenian versatility and spontaneity, qualities that Plato viewed as weaknesses.
4. Pericles extols the greatness of Athens' empire, which he attributes to the state's unabashed exercise of power. He urges Athenians to "fall in love" with their state.
5. Pericles believes that women should avoid public duties and strive not to be spoken about by men.

III. Pericles' proud testament to Athens' glory contrasts with Thucydides' subsequent account of how the Peloponnesian War corrupted Athens. The contrast emerges most clearly in Thucydides' recounting of the civil war in Corcyra.

A. Corcyra was driven by a horrific struggle between rival factions of pro-Athenian and pro-Spartan forces.

1. In the ensuing slaughter, "People went to every extreme and beyond it." Fathers killed sons, and people were slain within the precincts of religious temples. "War," Thucydides says, "is a violent teacher." Both Plato and Aristotle saw the violence and extremism occasioned by war as corrosive of human nature and the good society.
2. As words changed their usual meanings, civilization began to degenerate. Character began to deteriorate as people were swept away by their ungovernable passions.
3. Thucydides concludes that "love of power, operating through greed and personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils." He thereby poses the problem that will preoccupy Plato in *The Republic* (i.e., can power be wielded wisely?).

B. Thucydides' realism and Plato's idealism compared.

1. Thucydides does not believe that human nature can be improved through education or any other means in order to prevent violence, war, and the corruption that results from the exercise of power.
2. In contrast, Plato asserts that people and their state can attain justice through education. Unlike Thucydides, Plato is an optimist who believes in the perfectibility of human nature. He argues in *The Republic* that power can be exercised wisely and that politics, therefore, need not inevitably be corrupt.

Recommended Reading:

Pericles' "Funeral Oration" depicts the glory and achievements, the leadership and superior civilization, that Athens had attained by 431 B.C. It testifies the summit of Athens' success. The revolution in Corcyra portrays Greece as being engulfed in a profound crisis of the spirit arising from the breakdown of all order. The crisis demonstrated the evils of anarchy, when "people went to every extreme and beyond it." How could Athens and the Greek world clash so disastrously? Thucydides points to several causes. First, civil war is a "violent teacher" that instructs people in barbaric behavior, turning them into savage extremists. Second, a deterioration in language marked the decline of character, when "words had to change their usual meanings," and so undermined rational discourse and attitudes of moderation. Above all, however, the "love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils." The love of power encouraged "violent fanaticism" that corrupted leadership on all sides. Thucydides implies in Pericles' "Funeral Oration" that Athenians had learned how to exercise power. That false confidence was a sign of Athenians' arrogance, or hubris.

We are concerned with the historical context because of its influence on Plato. In *The Republic*, Plato responded to the problem of power as he viewed it within the context of the Peloponnesian War and the spiritual corruption that power engendered. Plato believed that the challenge faced by any great culture is to learn how to use power wisely. For that to occur, the leaders of a political system must be wise, and to have wise leaders, the educational system must be rightly constructed. Athens failed to wield power wisely because its value system was corrupted. It esteemed courage, honor, and empire more than reason or wisdom. The helm was occupied by Pericles, a military commander, rather than by a philosopher. Only right education and the consequent development of an intelligent and responsible leadership might have saved that remarkably gifted and creative civilization.

Pericles' "Funeral Oration on the Ideals of Athens" (from Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*)

I shall begin by speaking about our ancestors, since it is only right and proper on such an occasion to pay them the honor of recalling what they did. In this land of ours there have always been the same

people living from generation to generation up till now, and they, by their courage and their virtues, have handed it on to us, a free country. They certainly deserve our praise. Even more so do our fathers deserve it. For to the inheritance they had received they added all the empire that we have now, and it was not without blood and toil that they handed it down to us for the present generation. And then we ourselves, assembled here today, who are mostly in the prime of life, have, in most directions, added to the power of our empire and have organized our State in such a way that it is perfectly well able to look after itself in both peace and in war.

I have no wish to make a long speech on subjects familiar to you all: so I shall say nothing about the warlike deeds by which we acquired our power or the battles in which we or our fathers gallantly resisted our enemies, Greek or foreign. What I want to do is, in the first place, to discuss the spirit in which we faced our trials and also our constitution and the way of life which has made us great. After that I shall speak in praise of the dead, believing that this kind of speech is not inappropriate to the present occasion, and that this whole assembly, of citizens and foreigners, may listen to it with advantage.

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which a man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.

We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.

And here is another point. When our work is over, we are in a position to enjoy all kinds of recreation for our spirits. There are various kinds of contests and sacrifices regularly throughout the year; in our homes we find a beauty and a good taste which delight us every day and which drive away our cares. Then the greatness of our city brings it about that all the good things from all over the world

flow into us, so that to us it seems just as natural to enjoy foreign goods as our own local products.

Then there is a great difference between us and our opponents, in our attitude toward military security. Here are some examples: our city is open to the world, and we have no periodical deportations in order to prevent people observing or finding out secrets which might be of military advantage to the enemy. This is because we rely, not on secret weapons, but on our own real courage and loyalty. There is a difference, too, in our educational systems. The Spartans, from their earliest boyhood, are submitted to the most laborious training in courage; we pass our lives without all these restrictions, and yet are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are. Here is proof of this: when the Spartans invade our land, they do not come by themselves, but bring all their allies with them; whereas we, when we launch an attack abroad, do the job by ourselves, and, though fighting on foreign soil, do not often fail to defeat opponents who are fighting for their own hearths and homes. As a matter of fact none of our enemies has ever yet been confronted with our total strength, because we have to divide our attention between our navy and the many missions on which our troops are sent on land. Yet, if our enemies engage a detachment of our forces and defeat it, they give themselves credit for having thrown back our entire army; or, if they lose, they claim that they were beaten by us in full strength. There are certain advantages, I think, in our way of meeting danger voluntarily, with an easy mind, instead of with a laborious training, with natural rather than with state-induced courage. We do not have to spend our time practicing to meet sufferings which are still in the future; and when they are actually upon us we show ourselves just as brave as these others who are always in strict training. This is one point in which, I think, our city deserves to be admired. There are also others:

Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft. We regard wealth as something to be properly used, rather than as something to boast about. As for poverty, no one need be ashamed to admit it: the real shame is in not taking practical measures to escape from it. Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics—this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated. And this is another point where we differ from other people. We are capable at the same time of taking risks and of estimating them beforehand. Others are brave out of ignorance; and, when they stop to think, they begin to fear. But the man who can most truly be accounted brave is he who best knows the

meaning of what is sweet in life and of what is terrible, and then goes out undeterred to meet what is to come.

Again, in questions of general good feeling there is a great contrast between us and most other people. We make friends by doing good to others, not by receiving good from them. This makes our friendship all the more reliable, since we want to keep alive the gratitude of those who are in our debt by showing continued good will to them: whereas the feelings of one who owes us something lack the same enthusiasm, since he knows that, when he repays our kindness, it will be more like paying back a debt than giving something spontaneously. We are unique in this. When we do kindnesses to others, we do not do so out of calculations of profit or loss: we do them without afterthought, relying on our free liberality. Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility. And to show that this is no empty boasting for the present occasion, but real tangible fact, you have only to consider the power which our city possesses and which has been won by those very qualities which I have mentioned. Athens, among the states we know, comes to her testing time in a greatness that surpasses what was imagined to her. In her case, and in her case alone, no invading army is ashamed at being defeated, and no subject can complain of being governed by people unfit for their responsibilities. Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments of our empire which we have left. Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now. We do not need the praises of Homer, or of anyone else whose words may delight us for the moment, but whose estimation of facts will fall short of what is really true. For our adventurous spirit has forced an entry into every sea and into every land; and everywhere we have left behind us everlasting memorials of good done to our friends or suffering inflicted on our enemies.

This, then, is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died. It is only natural that every one of us who survive them should be willing to undergo hardships in her service. And it was for this reason that I have spoken at such length about our city, because I wanted to make it clear that for us there is more at stake than for others who lack our advantages; also I wanted my words of praise for the dead to be set in the bright light of evidence. And now the most important of these words has been spoken. I have sung the praises of our city; but it was the courage and gallantry of these men, and of people like them, which made her splendid. Nor would you find it true in the case of many of the Greeks, as it is true of them, that no words can do more justice to their deeds.

To me it seems that the consummation which has overtaken these men shows us the meaning of manliness in its first revelation and in its final proof. Some of them, no doubt, had their faults; but what we ought to remember first is their gallant conduct against the enemy in defense of their native land. They have blotted out evil with good, and done more service to the commonwealth than they ever did harm in their private lives. No one of these men weakened because he wanted to go on enjoying his wealth: no one put off the awful day in the hope that he might live to escape his poverty and grow rich. More to be desired than such things, they chose to check the enemy's pride. This, to them, was a risk most glorious, and they accepted it, willing to strike down the enemy and relinquish everything else. As for success or failure, they left that in the doubtful hands of Hope, and when the reality of battle was before their faces, they put their trust in their own selves. In the fighting, they thought it more honorable to stand their ground and suffer death than to give in and save their lives. So they fled from the reproaches of men, abiding with life and limb the brunt of the battle; and, in a small moment of time, the climax of their lives, a culmination of glory, not of fear, were swept away from us.

So and such they were, these men—worthy of their city. We who remain behind may hope to be spared their fate, but must resolve to keep the same daring spirit against the foe. It is not simply a question of estimating the advantages in theory. I could tell you a long story (and you know it as well as I do) about what is to be gained by beating the enemy back. What I would prefer is that you fix your eyes everyday on the greatness of Athens as she really is, and should fall in love with her. When you realize her greatness, then reflect that what made her great was men with a spirit of adventure, men who knew their duty, men who were ashamed to fall below a certain standard. If they ever failed in an enterprise, they made up their mind that at any rate the city should not find their courage lacking to her, and they gave her the best contribution that they could. They gave her their lives, to her and to all of us, and for their own selves they won praises that never grow old, the most splendid of sepulchers—not the sepulcher in which their bodies are laid, but where their glory remains eternal in men's minds, always there on the right occasion to stir others to speech or action. For famous men have the whole earth as their memorial: it is not only the inscriptions of their graves in their own country that mark them out; no, in foreign lands also, not in any visible form but in people's hearts, their memory abides and grows. It is for you to try to be like them. Make up your minds that happiness depends on being free, and freedom depends on being courageous. Let there be no relaxation in fact of the perils of the war. The people who have the most excuse for despising death are not the wretched and unfortunate, who have no hope of doing well for themselves, but those who run the risk of complete reversal in their lives, and who would feel the difference most intensely, if things went wrong for them. Any intelligent man would find a humiliation caused by his own slackness more painful to bear than death, when

death comes to him unperceived, in battle, and in the confidence of his patriotism.

For these reasons I shall not commiserate with those parents of the dead, who are present here. Instead I shall try to comfort them. They are well aware that they have grown up in a world where there are many changes and chances. But this is good fortune—for men to end their lives with honor, as these have done, and for you honorably to lament them: their life was set to a measure where death and happiness went hand in hand. I know that it is difficult to convince you of this. When you see other people happy you will often be reminded of what used to make you happy too. One does not feel sad at not having some good thing which is outside one's experience: real grief is felt at the loss of something which one is used to. All the same, those of you who are of the right age must bear up and take comfort in the thought of having more children. In your own homes these new children will prevent you from brooding over those who are no more, and they will be a help to the city, too, both in filling the empty places, and in assuring her security. For it is impossible for a man to put forward fair and honest views about affairs if he has not, like everyone else, children whose lives may be at stake. As for those of you who are now too old to have children, I would ask you to count as gain the greater part of your life, in which you have been happy, and remember that what remains is not long, and let your hearts be lifted up at the thought of the fair fame of the dead. One's sense of honor is the only thing that does not grow old, and the last pleasure, when one is worn out with age, is not, as the poet said, making money, but having the respect of one's fellow men.

As for those of you here who are sons or brothers of the dead, I can see a hard struggle in front of you. Everyone always speaks well of the dead, and even if you rise to the greatest heights of heroism, it will be a hard thing for you to get the reputation of having come near, let alone equaled, their standard. When one is alive, one is always liable to the jealousy of one's competitors, but when one is out of the way, the honor one receives is sincere and unchallenged.

Perhaps I should say a word or two on the duties of women to those among you who are now widowed. I can say all I have to say in a short word of advice. Your great glory is not to be inferior to what God has made you, and the greatest glory of women is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you. I have now, as the law demanded, said what I had to say. For the time being our offerings to the dead have been made, and for the future their children will be supported at the public expense by the city, until they come of age. This is the crown and prize which she offers, both to the dead and to their children, for the ordeals which they have faced. Where the rewards of valor are the greatest, there you will find also the best and bravest spirits among the people. And now, when you have mourned for your dear ones, you must depart.

The Revolution (or Civil War) in Corcyra (from Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*):

After describing the apex of Greek political culture in Pericles' "Funeral Oration," Thucydides now recounts the disastrous decline of the Greek world in his chapter on the revolution in Corcyra. He tells how the Peloponnesian War reached the tiny island of Corcyra in 428 B.C. Corcyra became the victim of a larger struggle between the two great powers, Athens and Sparta, as the island was split into two rival factions, one siding with Athens and the other with Sparta. Thucydides viewed Corcyra as a microcosm of Greek civilization as it was overtaken by war. The war took its toll in a new climate of political violence, lust for power, and "general deterioration of character" that mark the profound spiritual crisis of ancient Greece in the midst of civil war. In *The Republic*, Plato identifies the crisis with the breakdown of Athenian democracy, and he holds democracy responsible for its costs.

When the Corcyreans realized that the Athenian fleet was approaching and that their enemies had gone, they brought the Messenians, who had previously been outside the walls, into the city and ordered the fleet which they had manned to sail round into the Hyllaic harbor. While it was doing so, they seized upon all their enemies whom they could find and put them to death. Then they dealt with those whom they had persuaded to go on board the ships, killing them as they landed. Next they went to the temple of Hera and persuaded about fifty of the suppliants there to submit to a trial. They then condemned every one of them to death. Seeing what was happening, most of the other suppliants, who had refused to be tried, killed each other there in the temple; some hanged themselves on the trees, others found various other means of committing suicide. During the seven days that Eurymedon stayed there with his sixty ships, the Corcyreans continued to massacre those of their own citizens whom they considered to be their enemies. Their victims were accused of conspiring to overthrow the democracy, but in fact men were often killed on grounds of personal hatred or else by their debtors because of the money they owed. There was death in every shape and form. And, as usually happens in such situations, people went to every extreme and beyond it. There were fathers who killed their sons; men were dragged from the temples or butchered on the very altars; some were actually walled up in the temple of Dionysus and died there.

So savage was the progress of this revolution, and it seemed all the more so because it was one of the first which had broken out. Later, of course, practically the whole of the Hellenic world was convulsed, with rival parties in every state—democratic leaders trying to bring in the Athenians, and the oligarchs trying to bring in the Spartans. In peacetime there would have been no excuse and no desire for calling them in, but in time of war, when each party could always count on an alliance which would do harm to its opponents and at the same time strengthen its own position, it became a natural thing for anyone

who wanted a change of government to call in help from outside. In the various cities these revolutions were the cause of many calamities—as happens and always will happen while human nature is what it is, though there may be different degrees of savagery, and, as different circumstances arise, the general rules will admit of some variety. In times of peace and prosperity, cities and individuals alike follow higher standards, because they are not forced into a situation where they have to do what they do not want to do. But war is a violent teacher; in depriving them of the power of easily satisfying their daily wants, it brings most people's minds down to the level of their actual circumstances.

So revolutions broke out in city after city, and in places where the revolutions occurred late the knowledge of what happened previously in other places caused still new extravagances of revolutionary zeal, expressed by an elaboration in the methods of seizing power and by unheard-of atrocities in revenge. To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character; ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfitted for action. Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man and to plot against any enemy behind his back was perfectly legitimate self-defense. Anyone who held violent opinions could always be trusted, and anyone who objected to them became a suspect. To plot successfully was a sign of intelligence, but it was still cleverer to see that a plot was hatching. If one attempted to provide against having to do either, one was disrupting the unity of the party and acting out of fear of the opposition. In short, it was equally praiseworthy to get one's blow in first against someone who was going to do wrong, and to denounce someone who had no intention of doing any wrong at all. Family relations were a weaker tie than party membership, since party members were more ready to go to any extreme for any reason whatever. These parties were not formed to enjoy the benefits of the established laws, but to acquire power by overthrowing the existing regime; and the members of these parties felt confidence in each other not because of any fellowship in a religious communion, but because they were partners in crime. If an opponent made a reasonable speech, the party in power, so far from giving it a generous reception, took every precaution to see that it had no practical effect.

Revenge was more important than self-preservation. And if pacts of mutual security were made, they were entered into by the two parties only to meet some temporary difficulty, and remained in force only so long as there was no other weapon available. When the chance came, the one who first seized it boldly, catching his enemy off guard, enjoyed a revenge that was all the sweeter from having been taken, not openly, but because of a breach of faith. It was safer that

way, it was considered, and at the same time a victory won by treachery gave one a title for superior intelligence. And indeed most people are more ready to call villainy cleverness than simple-mindedness honesty. They are proud of the first quality and ashamed of the second.

Love of power, operating through greed and personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils. To this must be added the violent fanaticism which came into play once the struggle had broken out. Leaders of parties in the cities had programs which appeared admirable—on one side political equality for the masses, on the other the safe and sound government of the aristocracy—but in professing to serve the public interest they were seeking to win the prizes for themselves. In their struggles for ascendancy nothing was barred; terrible indeed were the actions to which they committed themselves, and in taking revenge they went farther still. There they were deterred neither by the claims of justice nor by the interests of the state; their one standard was the pleasure of their own party at that particular moment, and so, either by means of condemning their enemies on an illegal vote or by violently usurping power over them, they were always ready to satisfy the hatreds of the hour. Thus neither side had any use for conscientious motives; more interest was shown in those who could produce attractive arguments to justify some disgraceful action. As for the citizens who held moderate views, they were destroyed by both the extreme parties, either for not taking part in the struggle or in envy at the possibility they might survive.

As a result of these revolutions, there was a general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world. The simple way of looking at things, which is so much the mark of a noble nature, was regarded as a ridiculous quality and soon ceased to exist. Society had become divided into two ideologically hostile camps, and each side viewed the other with suspicion. As for ending this state of affairs, no guarantee could be given that would be trusted, no oath sworn that people would fear to break; everyone had come to the conclusion that it was hopeless to expect a permanent settlement and so, instead of being able to feel confident in others, they devoted their energies to providing against being injured themselves. As a rule those who were least remarkable for intelligence showed the greater powers of survival. Such people recognized their deficiencies and the superior intelligence of their opponents; fearing that they might lose a debate or find themselves out-manuevered in intrigue by their quick-witted enemies, they boldly launched straight into action; while their opponents, over-confident in the belief that they would see what was happening in advance, and not thinking it necessary to seize by force what they could secure by policy, were the more easily destroyed because they were off their guard.

Certainly it was in Corcyra that there occurred the first examples of the breakdown of law and order. There was the revenge taken in their hour of triumph by those who had in the past been arrogantly

oppressed instead of wisely governed; there were the wicked resolutions taken by those who, particularly under the pressure of misfortune, wished to escape from their usual poverty and coveted the property of their neighbors; there were the savage and pitiless actions into which men were carried not so much for the sake of gain as because they were swept away into an internecine struggle by their ungovernable passions. Then, with the ordinary conventions of civilized life thrown into confusion, human nature, always ready to offend even when laws exist, showed itself proudly in its true colors, as something incapable of controlling passion, insubordinate to the idea of justice, the enemy to anything superior to itself; for, if it had not been for the pernicious power of envy, men would not so have exalted vengeance above innocence and profit above justice. Indeed, it is true that in these acts of revenge on others men take it upon themselves to begin the process of repealing those general laws of humanity which are there to give a hope of salvation to all who are in distress, instead of leaving those laws in existence, remembering that there may come a time when they, too, will be in danger and will need their protection.

Fact Sheet on Ancient Greece in Plato's Era (Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.)

Attica was the leading Greek "city-state" during the fifth century B.C., and Athens was its principal city. Attica's total area was roughly equal in size to Rhode Island. Athens has been termed a "democracy" and Sparta an "oligarchy," but Athenian democracy was very limited, with political rights restricted to adult male citizens.

Athens' population (see Zimmern, pp. 174–178) consisted of three classes:

- Citizens composed of some 160,000 men, women, and children. Among the citizens, only adult males (about 40,000) could exercise political rights.
- Resident aliens, or "outlanders," composed of some 96,000 mainly non-Athenian Greeks, and some Phoenicians and Jews. Alien adult males (about 24,000) did not have political rights, although some were relatively wealthy, and economically were an integral part of Attica.
- Slaves composed of some 100,000 men, women, and children. Slaves were denied all political rights. Plato and Aristotle saw slavery as a fact of nature. As Aristotle stated, "The lower sort of mankind are by nature slaves." Most slaves were "imported barbarians" who served as domestic servants, or as assistants in business, craft industry, and workshops.

The city-state of Sparta, also known as Laconia, on the Peloponnesian peninsula had a population of 300,000 to 400,000. The populations of Athens and Sparta were roughly the same. In contrast to Sparta where politics were dominated by the military, Athens had an extraordinarily high involvement by its citizens in public affairs. (The Greek term for "city-state" was *polis*, or polity.) The "Constitution of Athens" provided for more than 20,000 men to be on the political payroll, either receiving public salaries as judges or as other civil officials, or as members of the army and navy (6,000 men).

The ruling institution in Athens was the Assembly, which was composed of all adult Athenian males. No property or literacy qualifications were required. The Assembly was the sole legislative body and normally met once a month, with a quorum of 6,000 being necessary to conduct business. Any citizen could address the Assembly and propose policy. Most of its agenda and business, however, was prepared by either the Council of Five Hundred (called the Boule and chosen by ballot) or an "inner council" (executive committee) of 50 men. The supremacy of the Assembly was vigorously maintained. According to H. D. F. Kitto, the Assembly "controlled not only legislation and administration, but justice as well." The Athenian court system consisted of juries, which varied in size from 101 to 1,001 men, and were run, as far as possible, by amateurs. The professional was given as little scope as possible. Plato was a severe critic of Athenian democracy and complained above all about its lack of professionalism.

He constructed his Republic on the principle of rule by professionals, not amateurs.

Sources: H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks*; Alfred Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth*; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*; Susan M. Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, Parts I and II on Plato and Aristotle; M. I. Finley, *Democracy, Ancient and Modern*, Chapters 1–4.

Lecture Three

Law and Rule in Sophocles' *Antigone*

Scope: Sophocles' tragic play *Antigone* offers a literary context for Plato's philosophy. The play introduces certain key problems that will occur throughout these lectures: (1) whether and under what circumstances it is legitimate to resist constituted authority, (2) how to weigh conflicting claims of social order and individual conscience, and (3) how to ensure compatibility between positive law and natural or divine law.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Compare and contrast the various understandings of law that are presented or implied in Sophocles' *Antigone*.
2. Compare and contrast the types of political rule represented by Creon, Pericles, and Plato's philosopher-king; and relate those types to each protagonist's view of women.

Outline

- I. Sophocles (495–406 B.C.) was one of the leading dramatists of ancient Greece.
 - A. Of his 120 plays, 96 won first prize in dramatic competitions against some of the greatest playwrights in history, among them Euripides, Aeschylus, and Aristophanes.
 - B. Sophocles' play *Antigone* is one part of a trilogy that also includes *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. *Antigone* was so popular with Athenian audiences that it earned Sophocles the high honor of being named a general.
- II. Here is a plot summary.
 - A. The play opens in the city of Thebes in the aftermath of a battle in which Antigone's two brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, have killed each other.
 - B. Creon, the despotic ruler of Thebes and uncle of Polynices and Eteocles, has ordered that Eteocles be honored with official burial because of his loyalty to Creon. Creon has also decreed that Antigone's other brother, Polynices, be thrown to the dogs because he had attacked the city in an effort to overthrow Creon.
 - C. The play opens with Antigone speaking to her sister, Ismene, and vowing to bury their brother Polynices in defiance of Creon's order.

III. Our analysis of the political ideas in *Antigone* focuses on two concepts of law and rule/leadership.

A. The idea of law as expressed by Antigone.

1. Antigone invokes the idea of “divine,” or “unwritten,” law to justify her defiance of what she regards as the profane and illegitimate edicts of Creon.
2. In her interview with Creon, Antigone offers one of the first claims to civil disobedience of positive law on the basis of a higher law.
3. Antigone’s understanding of law foreshadows the concept of natural law (as explicated by Martin Luther King Jr., for example).

B. Creon’s very different understanding of law.

1. Creon asserts that his word is law. He argues that the ruler must be obeyed whether his laws are just or not.
2. Creon justifies his view by noting that he has provided political stability and that defiance of constituted authority will bring anarchy and ruin.
3. Representing the people of Thebes, the Chorus at first accepts Creon’s understanding of law. When Creon’s despotic actions lead to his downfall, however, the Chorus sees “God’s law” punishing Creon for his *hubris*, or arrogance. It concludes that rulers must show good sense and moderation; they must not display *hubris* or rebel against the gods.

C. Plato’s conception of law in *The Republic*.

1. Plato discerns a natural or higher law of right and justice, which sets the ideal standard to which conventional or “man-made” law should conform.
2. A sound system of education allows philosophers to bring conventional law into accord with natural law.

IV. The following are conceptions of rule or leadership.

A. Rule of Creon, the despot.

1. Creon’s idea of rule is tyranny; it presupposes the use of law to enforce and legitimize the tyrant’s arbitrary and despotic power.
2. Creon’s concept of political rule parallels his attitude toward women. He insists that women must be kept under strict control; he views them as objects to be dominated and ruled completely. Antigone incurs his wrath because she is a woman who refuses to be dominated.

B. Rule of Pericles, the military commander.

1. Pericles differs from Creon in espousing democratic leadership and the rule of law, which Pericles sees as the primary values of Athens.

2. Pericles does not share Creon’s contempt for women, but Pericles stereotypes their role as good wives and mothers, and asserts that they cannot exercise political power.

C. Rule of Plato, the philosopher.

1. Plato argues that philosophers will exercise political rule in the ideal state. Leaders should be thinkers with a vision of the higher law.
2. His revolutionary view of leadership was in accord with a radical conception of the role of women. Those women who can demonstrate equal intelligence to men should serve equally with them as rulers of his Republic.

Recommended Reading:

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Harper.

Lecture Four

Socrates and Socratic Quest

Scope: In this lecture, Professor Dalton reviews the thought and educational method of Socrates, the founder of the Western intellectual tradition. That great teacher inaugurated Western political philosophy by asking—and urging his contemporaries to ask themselves—what is the best way for human beings to live. Socrates sought that type of knowledge throughout his life’s journey, and he also sought to bring it to others by encouraging them to critically examine their own beliefs.

Socrates explains and justifies his life’s quest in Plato’s *Apology*. He offers an unconventional understanding of both truth as a method rather than a possession and wisdom as awareness of one’s own ignorance. In addition to the *Apology*, Professor Dalton discusses Plato’s *Symposium*. The subject of this dialogue—the meaning of love—is also an object of the Socratic quest for self-knowledge. The good, Socrates teaches, should be the object not only of man’s knowledge but also of his love.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the Socratic method for pursuing knowledge of the truth.
2. Compare Socrates’ response to his condemnation by the Athenian jury with Antigone’s response to her condemnation by Creon.
3. Describe Socrates’ views of the purpose of life, the origins of fear, and the ultimate questions that should concern human beings, and then compare those views with the central tenets of the Hindu philosophical tradition.
4. Describe the three definitions of love set forth in Plato’s *Symposium*.
5. Describe Socrates’ view of the relationship between knowledge and love.

Outline

- I. Socrates (470–399 B.C.) was Plato’s teacher and the preeminent philosopher of ancient Greece.
 - A. Socrates’ purpose is suggested in a story from Plato’s dialogue *Gorgias*, in which Socrates asks one of the most enduring yet urgent questions in philosophy: “What course of life is best?”
 - B. Socrates recommends the philosophical life (i.e., the pursuit of truth). He describes his philosophical quest as a “pilgrimage” for truth.

- II. In *The Apology*, Plato explains the meaning of Socrates’ quest and describes how his teacher pursued it, at the cost ultimately of his own life. The title of this dialogue refers to Socrates’ defense of his life and mission before a jury of his Athenian peers in 399 B.C. In defending himself against charges of impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens, he made the following points:

- A. Wisdom consists of “knowing that one does not know.” One should begin the search for truth in a spirit of humility and with awareness of one’s own ignorance.
- B. Truth is a value to be pursued, not an object to be possessed with a claim to infallibility.
 1. Philosophy differs from religion in claiming only to pursue the truth, not to possess it.
 2. Socrates defines the pursuit of truth in terms of a dialectical method. Pursuit of the truth is a collaborative enterprise, which helps to explain Plato’s use of the dialogue format.
 3. The Socratic quest is a search for right values, for ways to understand ideas of goodness, beauty, justice, and freedom.
- C. “The unexamined life is not worth living.”
 1. Socrates declares that a higher obligation compels him to practice philosophy and to exhort others to seek the truth, even if it means his own death.
 2. Like the Hindus, Socrates views the ultimate questions as the most important things in life.

- III. The Socratic quest seeks knowledge of love as well as of truth. The meaning of love is the subject of Plato’s dialogue, *The Symposium*, which recounts a conversation among Socrates and his friends about love, with each defining love in different terms.

- A. Pausanias defines love primarily in physical terms. Love seeks only the satisfaction of physical desires.
- B. Aristophanes defines love in romantic terms as a search for one’s other half.
 1. Humans in their original state combined male and female within one individual. Jealous of humans’ happiness in that state, Zeus split the species in half.
 2. Love consists of each half’s yearning for the other half from which it has been severed. Love is the pursuit of the other part that will complete us and fulfill our identity.
- C. Socrates refutes both of these definitions of love and offers another.
 1. Pausanias’ definition ignores the romantic quality of love, and Aristophanes’ definition does not recognize that we love only what is seen as good.
 2. All reality is perceived as good; evil has no reality. What we perceive as good becomes the object of our love.

3. Socrates describes the “ladder of love,” beginning with physical love, then ascending to romantic love, and culminating in love for the good, or what we know as “Platonic love.” We idealize the object of our love; we do not fall in love with its evil or wicked qualities, but with what we perceive as good. We seek to know and love that which is good.

IV. Socratic and Hindu philosophy can be compared.

- A. Like Socrates, the Hindu gurus regard *kama*, or physical love, as insufficient; it is superseded by higher levels of love.
- B. Evil is illusion; we pursue self-knowledge, which we regard as good, in order to achieve self-mastery.
- C. We display self-mastery by loving what is noble and true.

Recommended Reading:

Plato. 1969. *The Last Days of Socrates* (especially “The Apology”). Translated by Hugh Tredennick. New York: Penguin.

Lecture Five

Plato: Idealism and Power, Part 1

Scope: In this and the following lecture, we examine Plato’s *Republic*, a seminal text of the Western philosophical tradition and the point of departure for our study of power over people. As Professor Dalton explains, *The Republic* raises fundamental issues (e.g., the structure and malleability of human nature, origins of right conduct, qualifications for exercising political power, reasons for obedience to the law, and mutual obligations of individuals and the state) that set the parameters for subsequent Western political theory.

Although Plato has much in common with the Hindu tradition, he departs from it in regarding the state not as a coercive force but as an agent of virtue. The state can improve individuals by eliciting and cultivating—through education—their best qualities. The question that orients the dialogue in *The Republic* is the meaning of justice, understood broadly as “right conduct.” According to Socrates, justice consists neither in traditional religious usages, as Polemarchus argued, nor in the will of the stronger, as Thrasymachus contended. Instead, Socrates explains that justice—in both the individual and the city—consists of the right ordering of the whole, with no part usurping the functions of any other part and with reason ruling over all.

According to Plato, contemporary Athens did not satisfy Socrates’ criteria for justice. Plato offers a poetical critique of Athenian democracy in his metaphor of the “ship of state,” which is erratically steered by a *demos* in thrall to a demagogic crew and neglectful of the qualified navigator’s advice. Just as reason governs spirit and appetites within the just individual, so the state must be led by those who enjoy true knowledge rather than those who are misled by passion and deceived by illusion. Plato advocates a new educational system by which the state can identify and cultivate natural rulers who can attain knowledge of ultimate truth and pursue the common good of their subjects rather than their own particular interests.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture and the next, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Compare and contrast Plato and the Hindu tradition on the role of the state and its ability to wield power wisely.
2. Compare and contrast the definitions of justice, or “right conduct,” offered by Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Socrates in *The Republic*.

3. Explicate Plato's parallel between justice in the individual and justice in the state.
4. Describe the three "waves" of revolutionary change advocated by Plato, and explain how they will help to bring about the ideal society.
5. Describe Plato's critique of democratic government, as encapsulated in his metaphor of the "ship of state," and identify what he regards as the essential qualifications for wielding political power.
6. Explain Plato's theory of the stages of cognition as presented in his metaphors of the divided line and the cave.

Outline

- I. Plato seeks in *The Republic* to define right conduct, both for the individual and the city.
 - A. While the Hindus see the state as an agent of discipline, Plato sees it as a moral force—as an agent of virtue and a means of education.
 - B. Plato holds that the wise can be trusted to wield power wisely, while the Hindus believe that political power will corrupt the wise.
- II. *The Republic* takes the form of a dialogue between Socrates and a series of interlocutors, each of whom offers a definition of right conduct, or justice.
 - A. Polemarchus asserts the traditional definition of right conduct.
 1. He argues that right conduct means "giving each man his due." It is a form of retributive justice and is based on the ethic of "an eye for an eye."
 2. Socrates responds that it can never be just—although it might be expedient—to harm another person.
 - B. Thrasymachus offers a novel definition of justice.
 1. He argues that might makes right; the stronger party defines as "just" what is in that party's interest. "Injustice" brings happiness, at least to those who practice it.
 2. Socrates responds by analogizing the ruler to a physician. Just as the physician *qua* physician seeks to benefit not himself but his patients, the ruler *qua* ruler seeks to benefit his subjects. The ruler, like the physician, must possess the scientific knowledge that is proper to his craft. The ideal ruler thinks of the common interest, not his personal interest.
 - C. Glaucon presses Socrates to offer a more convincing refutation of Thrasymachus' argument.
 1. Glaucon argues that justice arises not from a moral imperative or eternal truth but from expedience. Justice has its origins in the desire of the weaker for security against the stronger. Given the opportunity, all people will pursue their own self-interest regardless of law or justice. Glaucon cites the "myth of Gyges" to support the

social-contract theory of justice. He challenges Socrates to defend justice as a good in itself, apart from its practical benefits.

2. In reply to both Thrasymachus and Glaucon, Socrates offers his philosophy of the state. The state, like the individual personality, is composed of reason, spirit, and desire, or appetite. Justice consists of the right ordering of those three elements, with reason ruling over all.

- III. Socrates argues that people can be led through education to gain real knowledge rather than mere opinion, and to live according to reason. The rule of reason requires three "waves" of revolutionary change in Athens.
 - A. Qualified women must be allowed to hold political power.
 - B. The nuclear family and private property among the ruling class must be abolished in order to reinforce its adherence to the common interest.
 - C. Philosophers should rule.

Recommended Reading:

Plato. 1945. *The Republic*, Books I–V. Translated by F. M. Cornford. London: Oxford University Press.

Lecture Six

Plato: Idealism and Power, Part 2

Outline

- I. Plato's critique of democracy was based on both personal experience and philosophical determinations.
 - A. His personal experience with Athenian democracy proved disillusioning. He saw it corrupted by the ignorance of the mob and the dishonesty of its leaders. He believed that corruption of mind and spirit led directly to the condemnation of his teacher, Socrates.
 - B. Athens displayed the thoughtlessness and ignorance that were inherent in democracy.
 1. Democracy failed to distinguish between freedom and license.
 2. Democracy catered to the satisfaction of desires while failing to impose real order or to foster a sense of civic duty.
 3. Democracies are governed by mere opinion rather than by genuine knowledge.
- II. Plato offers the parable of the "ship of state" to describe the deficiencies of democracy and the need for meritocratic rule.
 - A. The ship's master (representing the *demos*) is physically imposing but somewhat ignorant, short-sighted, and deaf.
 - B. The master is subdued by the crew (representing the corrupt politicians who manipulate and dominate the *demos*). Asserting that navigation requires no special skill, the crew members seize control of the ship and operate it in their own interest. Both they and the master are guided by opinion rather than knowledge.
 - C. Only the navigator (representing the philosopher) understands the science of how to sail the ship correctly, but he is ignored by the crew. He is not corrupted by power, since he understands that only knowledge of this science can ensure that the ship reaches its destination. The parable teaches that the ship of state should be guided by those who possess real knowledge, not mere opinion.
- III. In presenting his theory of the stages of cognition, Plato elaborates the distinction between real knowledge and opinion. Plato describes four states, or levels, of intellectual development, from elementary opinion to the highest philosophical understanding.
 - A. The first stage, typified by Polemarchus, involves an uncritical and unthinking acceptance of the world of appearances.
 - B. At the next stage, typified by Glaucon, we begin to critically examine the society's conventional beliefs.

- C. At the third stage, we advance from opinion to knowledge. We pursue knowledge of abstract reality especially through the study of mathematics and astronomy.
- D. In passing to the fourth stage, we begin to perceive people's abstract humanity and recognize ourselves in them. As the Hindu gurus would put it, we perceive ourself in all people, and all people in ourself.

- IV. Plato's allegory of the cave illustrates his theory of cognition in depicting intellectual development as a journey from the darkness of opinion to the light of real knowledge.
 - A. After the philosopher discovers the highest truths outside the cave, he must return to the cave and assume political leadership, even at the risk of his own life.
 - B. Apprehension of the truth brings freedom from illusion and thus from fear.
 - C. Power can be wielded wisely, but only by those who have reached the ultimate level of knowledge. They alone cannot be corrupted by petty disputes over power, and only they can guide the state to justice.

Recommended Reading:

Plato. 1945. *The Republic*, Books VI–X. Translated by F. M. Cornford. London: Oxford University Press.

Philosophical Background to Plato's *Republic*: Key Terms and Concepts

Thucydides described how the Peloponnesian War caused a moral and political crisis that engulfed Athens, creating a compelling need to restore a credible system of values. Plato responded to that call. A philosopher rather than a historian, he tried to reconstitute or reconstruct his intellectual world. In *The Republic*, he worked with ideas that had emerged during the Golden Age of Athens in the brilliant writings of its poets and playwrights, as well as in the philosophers who preceded him. Plato's thought was forged in a climate of ideas represented by the following glossary of philosophical terms:

- Arete:** "Virtue" or "excellence," as used by Plato and defined by Cornford (in his notes on this term) in his translation of *The Republic*, pp. 8–9, 30, 37–39. As conceived by Plato, *arete* has two distinct meanings. The first refers to the special "virtue" or function of any being (i.e., the virtue or peculiar strength of a horse is to run fast). Second, *arete* means the particular moral virtue of a person (i.e., the special quality or strength in a potential political leader is to reason well). *Arete* in this sense is an inherent given or inborn quality that awaits development through a system of education. Its meaning is in some respects similar to the word *phusis*, or "nature," noted below.
- Dike:** "Righteous, fair, just." As Cornford notes (p. 2), *The Republic* asks: "What does justice mean?" The word *dike* literally means justice, but Plato uses it in a broader sense to mean "right conduct" (p. 2). He tries to define the nature of moral behavior. Note Plato's connection of *dike* with *arete* in *The Republic* (pp. 37–39) and how he relates both of those virtues to his idea of happiness (*eudaemonia*).
- Idea:** Not only "idea" in the abstract sense of a model of perfection, but also as an archetypal expression that we may be able to imagine but not put into practice. For example, Euclid's line is imagined as a model of perfect straightness, but it cannot practically be drawn as such. As an idealist, Plato argues that ideal patterns or models have validity. We should strive to emulate them in theory, even if we can only approximate them in practice (*The Republic*, pp. 175–77). Note Cornford's interpretation of Plato's theory of the forms as "ideals or patterns" (p. 180).
- Nomos:** "Custom" or "convention"; man-made law as distinct from natural law. *Nomos* refers to mutable human laws that are the products of our struggle to meet our everyday needs by fashioning rules. In *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, George Kloski remarks that "Greek thought came to be permeated with the distinction between *nomos* and *phusis*" (p. 2). That distinction is central to Plato's theory of

law; in *The Republic*, he tries to establish a conception of *nomoi*, or laws of just political conduct, that are rooted in *phusis*. Note Glaucon's challenge to Socrates to relate law to justice in *The Republic*, pp.43–45.

- Phusis:** "Nature of what is natural to a person or thing." Some Greek thinkers contended that *phusis* meant no more than what is and that nature had no moral implications. Plato, however, wanted to show that laws of justice are grounded in natural laws of right; for him, *phusis* represents a foundation for all morality. Note Plato's use of *phusis* in *The Republic* (pp. 150–54) in describing what is "natural" and "unnatural" for men and women.
- Techne:** "Skill, craft, cunning of hand." This word denotes the talent or skillfulness that a person has acquired through education or any practical training in the arts and crafts. In Plato's *Republic*, *techne* means a kind of expertise or art that may or may not be joined with a person's natural gift or excellence, his or her *arete* (pp. 8–11). Plato's ideal system of education seeks to develop a perfect fit between the individual's *arete*, or moral virtue, and his or her *techne*, the acquired skill or expertise that affords a full expression of the *arete*. If technical expertise is not grounded in and then enhanced by moral virtue, it may lead to unjust conduct. That was the fault of Sophists like Thrasymachus who were skilled at rhetoric but lacked the virtue required of great educators.
- Eudaemonia:** "Happiness." The traditional meaning of happiness in ancient Greece usually implied material prosperity and good fortune. Plato and Aristotle distinguished the conventional understanding of *eudaemonia* as mere "pleasure" from "true happiness," which referred to a state of mind and activity with a sense of moral purpose in life. For Plato and Aristotle, happiness involves knowledge of virtue and the practice of goodness. A right system of education was essential for nurturing *eudaemonia*.

Plato's Republic

(Chaps. I–V, pp. 1–53, F. M. Cornford, trans., Oxford Press Edition)
(Part 1, pp. 51–99, H. D. Lee, trans., Penguin Edition)

Below is a summation of Plato's main assumptions as they appear in the discussion of justice in the opening chapters of *The Republic*. (All page references are to the Cornford translation.)

- Cephalus: Justice is “telling the truth” and “paying back” one's debts (p. 7).
- Socrates: Justice cannot always mean that, since the standard would require one to return a weapon to a madman (p. 7).
- Polemarchus: Justice is “to render every man his due” (p. 9). It obliges one to help friends and harm enemies (p. 12).
- Socrates: Justice does not mean “giving every man his due ... because we have found that it is never right to harm anyone” (p. 14). Note Cornford's comment on Socrates' consequent departure from traditional Greek ethics (p. 12).
- Thrasymachus: Justice “means nothing but what is to the interest of the stronger party” (p. 18). (Thrasymachus uses the word “interest” 33 times [pp. 18–23].)
- Socrates: Justice demands correct perception of interests by the ruler (p. 20).
- Thrasymachus: He agrees. Justice requires that the ruler, “in so far as he is acting as a ruler, makes no mistakes” in interpreting his interest. By analogy to the physician, justice involves knowledge and training (pp. 20–21). Thus, the ruler *qua* ruler must meet a professional standard of right rule (Cornford's note, p. 21).
- Socrates: He seizes on the analogy of a ruler to a physician (pp. 22–24). Justice demands a ruler's awareness of the subjects' interests, and by analogy to a physician, the desire to serve them. “[E]very art seeks not its own advantage ... but the interest of subject.”
- Thrasymachus: He proposes the analogy of a ruler to a shepherd. The ruler exploits the subjects for his own purposes. Justice means ruling in the interest of the stronger at the cost of a subject who obeys (p. 25).
- Socrates: He differs on analogy to a shepherd, but he relies on the analogy to a physician (pp. 27–28). “[G]enuine ruler's nature is to seek only the advantage of the subject” (p. 29). Justice means the ruler performs function and service according to his nature.
- Thrasymachus: He begins now to defend “injustice” (p. 26); he argues its superiority in “character and intelligence” to justice (p. 32).
- Socrates: Justice or right conduct is like a perfect musical score, with fine balance, “a measure which is absolutely right.” It must be superior to injustice, which has “no measure or limit” (Cornford's summary, p. 33).
- Thrasymachus: Injustice is a “source of strength,” superior in power to justice (p. 34).
- Socrates: He disagrees, arguing that injustice must foster weakness. Both among thieves and within an individual's personality, injustice will cause divisiveness, disharmony, and discord, and it will make united action impossible. “Only fair treatment can make man friendly and of one mind” (p. 35).
- Thrasymachus: Injustice brings happiness, or getting more than one's fair share of power, pleasure, and wealth (pp. 30, 36, including Cornford's comments).
- Socrates: Justice rather than injustice brings happiness because happiness is found in the life of the good man living in accord with virtue. Only a just soul will live in that way (pp. 36–39, including Cornford's comment that this idea was developed by Aristotle). Note the connection between *arete*, or “specific excellence or virtue,” (p. 39) and happiness (*eudaemonia*).
- Glaucon: His and Adeimantus' arguments are designed to produce a further refinement of Thrasymachus' theories (or those of the Sophists), which Socrates will undermine throughout the rest of the book. The style shifts at this point, with Glaucon setting forth at length three major arguments: (1) Justice is not an eternal absolute principle, but merely the expression of changing human laws and contentions (pp. 43–44). (2) Justice is demanded and practiced only by the weak, who lack power to commit injustice. If an individual had the requisite power, he would pursue his own self-interest, following his natural inclination to indulge in limitless pleasure and accumulate limitless wealth. Plato characteristically makes this argument through the use of a myth (pp. 44–45). (3) A life of injustice is happier if wealth and cunning are developed (pp. 46–47).
- Adeimantus: He insists that the current use of education to indoctrinate justice and virtue is a farce and is based on appeal to rewards, punishment, and reputation. He demands that Socrates show the intrinsic merit of justice valued for its own sake (pp. 48–53).

Plato's Ideal of Non-Injury

"There will never be a finer saying than the one which declares that whoever does good should be held in honor, and the only shame is in doing harm." (*The Republic*, p. 155)

The most important statement of Plato's ideal of non-injury occurs in *The Republic* (the references here are to the Cornford translation), but the concept appears in other dialogues as well, especially the *Gorgias* and *Crito* (references are to the Penguin editions). In *The Republic*, the bases of the doctrine are established in Socrates' exchange with Polemarchus over the meaning of justice. Polemarchus cites the Greek poet Simonides' definition of justice: "That it is just to render every man his due.... [H]is idea was that, as between friends, what one owes another is to do him good, not harm." Socrates replies, "And what about enemies? Are we to render whatever is their due to them?" Polemarchus says, "Yes, certainly ... which means, I suppose, what is appropriate to an enemy—some sort of injury" (p. 9).

Socrates proceeds to refute that traditional definition of justice, which reflects the accepted, conventional wisdom of the ancient Greek world (signified by Polemarchus' reliance on the authority of the sage Simonides). Socrates first suggests the analogy of the physician (p. 9) in this context, and in doing so he asks implicitly whether, in the model of right conduct practiced by the physician, it is ever correct to harm another. The repeated references to the physician (pp. 10, 20–23, 27–28) indicate Plato's persistent connection between the ethical code of medical practice and the idea of non-injury in politics. In view of Plato's consistent use of that analogy, it is likely that he (writing about 380 B.C.) knew the physician's oath of Hippocrates (460–377 B.C.), which states: "I swear by Apollo Physician ... that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath.... I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment, but never with a view to injury and wrongdoing. I will keep pure and holy both my life and my art. In whatsoever houses I enter, I will enter to help the sick, and I will abstain from all intentional wrongdoing and harm." It is precisely this standard of ethical or just conduct—the idea that the professions of physician and ruler are analogous in that neither should intentionally inflict harm on another—that Plato applies in the early part of *The Republic*.

Cornford emphasizes the novelty of Socrates' refutation of the traditional view of justice in his editorial comment that until Socrates denied the old retributive notion of justice, "no one had ever said that we ought to do good, or even refrain from doing harm, to them that hate us" (p. 12). As Cornford says, Plato then makes Socrates connect the ideal of non-injury with a wide range of ethical standards about how we should behave toward others. Socrates asks Polemarchus, "Can it really be a just man's business to harm any human being?" Polemarchus responds by continuing to insist that it is right to harm "bad men who are his enemies." Socrates then argues that doing harm to another can never

make the recipient of the harm a better person because "to harm them means making them worse men. To harm a man, then, must mean making him less just" (p. 13). Socrates means that by inflicting harm on another, we may restrain or control that person, but we cannot thereby expect to elicit his or her "peculiarly human excellence," special gift or potential, or, in Plato's theory, his or her *arete*. If we wish that person to act justly, we must follow the example of the good teacher who elicits the best qualities of students by realizing that "it is never right to harm anyone" (p. 14; ideal reiterated on p. 155).

The fact that the ideal on non-injury is not peculiar to *The Republic* is clear from Plato's statement of the ideal in his earlier dialogue, the *Crito*, in which Socrates concludes that "one ought not to return a wrong or defend one's self against injury by retaliation" (pp. 88–89). That concept is later reaffirmed in the *Gorgias*, when Socrates says, "[T]o inflict any wrong upon me and mine brings more harm and disgrace upon the wrong-doer than upon me who suffers the wrong" (p. 119). He concludes the dialogue by noting that "this conclusion alone stands firm: that one should avoid doing wrong [or injury] with more care than being wronged ..." (p. 148).

Plato's concept of non-injury is an ideal. As noted in "Plato's Three Cities" (see pages 46–48 herein), the ideal is unattainable in the earthly republic. Thus Plato repeatedly compromises the ideal by admitting the necessity of war for the defense of the *polis* (pp. 168–74), capital punishment (p. 100), cultivation of military attitudes (pp. 63–64, 258) and exile (pp. 90, 262).

Plato's Style in *The Republic*

Plato's style (i.e., his mode of expressing his philosophy) resembles that of a dramatist or playwright. He is unique among political theorists in using dialogue, and he infuses his story about the meaning of justice with numerous dramatic forms, such as myths (pp. 44–45, 106–7); analogies (e.g., the leader to the physician, musician, navigator; music to politics; and bodily health to political health); comparisons (e.g., the Idea of the Good to the sun, pp. 218–20); and his famous allegory of the cave (pp. 227–35), which compares the illusory world of our earthly existence to the transcendental reality of the world of sunlight.

Plato's philosophical justification for his political organization is suggested in the parable of the "ship of state" (pp. 195–96). Our political experience is comparable to a life-and-death situation (i.e., it is a matter of survival). The *polis* is analogous to a ship: we sink or sail, live or die, according to how expertly the *polis* is navigated. Plato had learned that truth as a consequence of Athenian democracy's disastrous failure in war with Sparta. The crew in the parable represents corrupt politicians and the power of belief. They are not to be trusted because they are concerned only with power and self-interest rather than with the disinterested pursuit of truth and the welfare of the *polis*. The ship's "master" represents the *demos*, or sovereign people. They constitute the majority ("bigger and burlier") but are not respected as a source of moral authority or right leadership ("deaf and shortsighted ... deficient in seamanship"). The people stand always in need of enlightened leadership.

The navigator, unlike the master or crew, has studied the science of navigation. Politics, likewise, is a science in which one can acquire expertise through right education. The source and power of knowledge for the navigator come not from the ship but from the stars (eternal truths) found above, in the heavens. The source and power of knowledge for the philosopher-king will also come from a study not of the people but of the absolute truths found in the world of eternal forms or ideas. Note that Plato inserts the analogy to the physician at the end of the parable (p. 196) to combine with the navigator.

Plato prepares us further for his theory of the Forms or Ideas with an analogy of the artist to the ruler (p. 209), his "portrait of an artist." In the analogy, Plato believes that society and character must first be "scraped clean" before the Republic can be established. The artist uses as a reference point the "models" or ideal abstract archetypes of justice, goodness, and temperance. The models are abstractions that cannot exist in their perfection on earth but that must be used as points of comparison for shaping the *polis*. The artist attempts "to reproduce the complexion of true humanity."

Plato's Three Cities

Plato's *Republic* encompasses a vision of three cities: the corrupt city of contemporary Athens; the ideal city of the Republic as it might exist on earth; and the eternal city that exists as a transcendent Idea, outside and above the cave (or human condition).

Plato describes *the corrupt city of Athens* in a letter quoted by Cornford (Intro., pp. xvii–viii). Athens tends to move from one extreme form of government to another—from democracy to oligarchy, both of which are unjust regimes. Plato views the political disorder and intellectual bankruptcy with contempt and despair, saying that "the whole fabric of law and custom was going from bad to worse at an alarming rate. The result was that I, who had at first been full of eagerness for a public career, when I saw all this happening and everything going to pieces, fell at last into bewilderment." His sharp criticism of Athens' experience with democracy and oligarchy is implicit in his extended analysis of oligarchy, democracy, and despotism in the latter part of *The Republic* (pp. 273–301). Although oligarchy and democracy differ in important respects, each is characterized by the same two destructive forces: the arrogance of power and the contempt for just rule according to reason. Athens displayed both of those flaws, especially when it committed the worst of crimes—the condemnation and execution of Plato's mentor, Socrates, in 399 B.C.

The composition of the *earthly* ideal city is Plato's main concern in *The Republic* (especially pp. 53–235). He sets forth an archetypal ideal political community, a vision of a just polity that can serve as a model of emulation. Cornford observes that "Plato's thought, from first to last, was chiefly bent on the question how society could be reshaped so that man might realize the best that is in him. This is, above all, the theme of his central work, *The Republic*" (Intro., p. xv). Socrates begins his description of the ideal *polis* with his vision of a "social organization" in which every person will be able to do "the one thing for which he is naturally fitted" (p. 57). He then outlines the system of education that will promote the ideal, arguing that education is "the one thing that is sufficient" to produce this *polis* on earth. In *The Republic*, justice in the individual and in the state are closely and logically related because "the individual soul contains the same three elements and they are affected in the same way as are the corresponding types in society" (p. 131). Educators and rulers must organize the *polis* according to the rule of reason (p. 140), since that principle constitutes justice in the individual and the state.

Plato advocates three revolutionary changes to establish the ideal republic in his metaphor of the "three waves" of reform that will sweep away the worst features of corrupt Athens. Plato's ideal city will enjoy: (1) access to rule by qualified women (pp. 149–55), (2) a unified and harmonious community of Guardians that will be as integrated as a single person, not torn apart by private allegiances to family and property (pp. 163–66), and (3) the rule of reason resulting from the

merger of “political power and philosophy” (pp. 177–79). The last of the changes is “the most formidable of all.” Regarding his vision of the Republic, Socrates says, “Our plan is difficult—we have admitted as much—but not impossible” (p. 208). However, he does not believe that the validity of his ideal should be judged on the basis of practicability or feasibility, and he comments that “we did not set out to show that these ideals could exist in fact” (p. 177). A theory cannot be judged according to its practicality any more than the beauty of an art work is evaluated according to how closely it resembles its model. Plato intends to set forth “ideal patterns” (pp. 177–78) or models of archetypal political and moral truths. Our task is to construct an ideal that we deem truthful or valid, and then through a system of education to approximate that ideal in reality.

Finally, Plato describes the eternal city of the Forms. According to him, the celestial city exists in the heavens as an ultimate reality, independent of human thought or experience. St. Augustine envisaged it later in Christian form as the City of God. Plato theorized that this eternal city comprised Forms or archetypes “of which the many individual things in the world of appearances [that we humans often imagine as ultimate reality] are like images or reflections” (Cornford’s note, p. 180). As students of philosophy, we seek to learn how to understand the Forms—to become educated in subjects like mathematics and philosophy that will enable us to think abstractly and to perceive the universal essences that transcend particular elements of our experience. Such study enables us to discriminate between “the existence of beautiful things” and “Beauty itself” (p. 183) or the “essential Form of Beauty” (p. 187).

Everything on earth has an eternal counterpart or model of perfection; the many things that we call “good” exist on earth only as reproductions of an eternal Ideal of the Good, a transcendent Goodness. Each thing has a “ness” quality, an archetype that we can imagine but cannot duplicate exactly. We can imagine Euclid’s line even though we cannot draw it precisely; we call this perfect image the “ness” quality of a line. Plato conveys that idea by comparing the philosopher-ruler to an artist. As he tries to shape his ideal city, the ruler consults the models that he has perceived through his knowledge of the eternal city. As he forms the ideal constitution for his earthly Republic, “he will frequently refer to his model, the ideals of justice, goodness, temperance, and the rest, and compare with them the copy of the qualities which he is trying to create in human society. Combining the various elements of social life as a painter mixes his colors, he will reproduce the complexion of true humanity, guided by that divine pattern whose likeness Homer saw in the men he called godlike” (p. 209).

Many of the apparent contradictions in Plato’s *Republic* are resolved if we recognize the differences between the eternal city and the ideal of the earthly Republic. The latter, even if realized, is still a city in the cave that is populated by humans—most of whom cannot escape the illusions of mortal existence. In the eternal city, people will practice perfectly such theories as those embodied in

Plato’s ideal of non-injury. Even in the best of earthly Republics, however, most people will necessarily be limited and hindered by mortal imperfections. Although Plato deplures warfare (pp. 61–62), he foresees the need to prepare for war, even in an ideal Republic (pp. 168–74). The ideal of non-injury remains an ethical standard that philosophers such as Socrates must respect and pursue, but it will never be fully attained, even in the best of polities. Plato makes clear in his analogies to the physician and navigator, however, that the ideal ruler pursues the ideal of non-injury.

Three Forms of Leadership and Types of Rule in Plato's *Republic*

Plato discerns three elements in the individual personality and in the state: reason, spirit, and desire. Each element suggests a distinct trait or characteristic of political rule: the rule of reason, the rule of spirit, and the rule of desire.

Rule of Reason

The rule of reason is Plato's model of correct rule. It is personified by Socrates, who was "the most righteous man in Athens" although he could not assume a position of power. In the ideal polity of Plato's *Republic*, the "third wave" of revolutionary change will produce an unprecedented political state in which "philosophers become kings" and so "political power and philosophy meet together" (pp. 178–79). Plato lays the groundwork for that theory of rule in the first part of *The Republic* with the concept of *arete*, a crucial idea that provides the essential theoretical justification for his later insistence on specialization of all functions—especially that of ruling—within the ideal *polis*. Plato's model of correct rule and leadership requires that those who rule must exercise their function by virtue of their *arete*, or intellectual and moral excellence. The gift of superior intellect is nurtured through a system of education that selects qualified people, or potential philosophers with a "passion for wisdom," a passion "to see the truth" (pp. 182–83). An education in philosophy trains the mind to discriminate between knowledge and belief and their two corresponding forms of power (pp. 183–88).

Plato reiterates throughout Part III (pp. 175–235) that the rule of reason can be administered only by "the genuine lover of knowledge" who "strives after the whole of truth." Possessing such a quality of mind, he or she "will be temperate and no lover of money ... the last person to care about the things for the sake of which money is eagerly sought and lavishly spent" (p. 191). That type of ruler is analogous to the navigator who "is fit to command a ship" only because he has attained a knowledge of his subject in just the way that the ruler of the *polis* should master a science of politics (pp. 195–96).

The most powerful part of Plato's argument for the rule of reason occurs in Chapters XXIV–XXV (pp. 221–35). The first of those chapters explains Plato's theory of cognition, or the states of cognitive development that the aspiring philosopher-ruler must experience in order to qualify for power in the Republic. The second part of the argument comes with Plato's allegory of the cave and its application. The allegory culminates in a sharp contrast between two types of power (pp. 233–35). Lesser rulers "live fighting one another about shadows and quarreling for power, as if that were a great prize" (p. 234). The philosopher-rulers "think of holding power as an unavoidable necessity," because "the life of true philosophy is the only one that looks down upon offices of state."

The allegory of the cave teaches the lesson that "access to power must be confined to men who are not in love with it ... in the hands of men who are rich, not in gold, but in the wealth that brings happiness, a good and wise life" (p. 235). The philosopher will wield as much power as any ruler, since Plato's ideal state concentrates power in the hands of a few. Even though the philosopher does not desire power, he certainly does have to wield it fully and effectively. The difference between Plato's ideal ruler and a tyrant is not that the former lacks power but that he can be trusted with it. People can trust the philosopher because he or she has achieved knowledge of eternal values and, equally important, knowledge of his or her own self. That kind of knowledge, distinct from mere belief, will provide happiness. "All goes wrong when, starved for lack of anything good in their own lives, men turn to public affairs, hoping to snatch from thence the happiness they hunger for. They set about fighting for power..." (p. 235). "The happiest man is he who is first in goodness and justice, namely the true king who is also king over himself; and the most miserable is that lowest example of injustice and vice, the born despot whose tyranny prevails in his own soul and also over his country" (p. 306).

Rule of Desire

We now consider Plato's critique of the rule of desire and the type of ruler that he most despises, the despot or tyrant. Desire occupies its proper place in a just soul or a just *polis* when it remains subordinate to reason. In that case, desire inspires love of wisdom. However, when desire runs rampant in a soul or a city, without any sense of self-discipline or order, then justice becomes impossible. If such an undisciplined person attains a position of absolute political power, the likely result is despotism. Those who interpret *The Republic* as a blueprint for totalitarianism should explain why Plato denounces so vehemently all forms of tyranny in the latter part of the book. He conceives of *The Republic* as a book about justice. If the rule of reason means the rule of justice, and if the philosopher-ruler is the archetypical expression of the just person, then the rule of desire contradicts the ideal since injustice characterizes both the despot and his tyranny.

Plato summons up his worst descriptive language for the tyrant in whom there are "combined the traits of drunkenness, lust, and lunacy"; an insatiable thirst for money and power; contempt for law and reason; and constant provocation of wars. "Throughout life, the despotic character has not a friend in the world; he is sometimes master, sometimes slave, but never knows true friendship or freedom. There is no faithfulness in him; if we were right in our notion of justice, he is the perfect example of the unjust man" (p. 301). Once again, the despot is necessarily unjust because "tyranny prevails in his own soul and also over his country." Rule of reason is the antithesis of rule of desire, especially because the philosopher-ruler is not tyrannized by lust for money or power. The tyrant, however, is driven and enslaved by the passion to dominate others; ironically, the desire to dominate others comes to dominate the tyrant himself.

Whatever his critics may say about the implications of authoritarianism in *The Republic*, Plato was certainly aware of the dangers of despotism. Those who associate Plato's theory with fascism must explain how he could describe and denounce in such vivid terms the very sort of despot typified later by Adolf Hitler. In fact, Plato could paint such an accurate picture because he had observed various Greek and Persian tyrants and loathed them all because they represented the fatal flaw in all political rule: the absence of intellect and the corresponding weakness of irrationality. Hitler displayed that irrationality in defending his foolish decision to invade Russia by explaining: "I feel it in my blood."

Plato perceived irrationality in all of the tyrants around him. He must also have recognized it in Sophocles' portrayal of the tyrant Creon. Plato's *Republic* was written about 60 years after the first performance of *Antigone* in Athens and was probably inspired by it. Creon is the quintessential example of the hubristic ruler driven by an irrational will to power and a drive to dominate. Creon's son Haemon pleads with his father to listen to reason because "of all God's gifts, good sense is far the best," and because "there is no disgrace in being able to learn." The Chorus echoes Haemon's sentiments. Creon responds by casting his curse upon Antigone and demanding that Haemon watch her die. When Plato set forth his theory of despotism in *The Republic*, he was placing Sophocles' character Creon within a Platonic philosophical framework, relating tyranny to a theory of injustice and sharply contrasting both tyranny and injustice to the rule of reason and the theoretical character of a philosopher-ruler.

Rule of Spirit

Finally, we examine Plato's portrayal of the rule of spirit. Plato identified "spirit" with courage or honor (p. 307), an admirable moral virtue in an individual or society but not one desirable in the ruler (pp. 265, 271). He distinguishes courage from wisdom, placing the latter in a superior role. He divides the Guardian caste into two parts: the philosophical group (characterized by reason and wisdom), and the administrative or military group (characterized by spirit and courage), with the former group ruling the latter. Plato had observed the characteristics of Athens' Board of Generals, which had successfully defended Athens against Persia and contributed to the enormous growth of the Athenian empire, but which had also taken Athens into the disastrous war with Sparta.

Pericles' justification of the war ethic in his "Funeral Oration" suggests both the strengths and weaknesses of the military mentality. Pericles describes "the spirit in which we faced our trials," and he appeals throughout to "our adventurous spirit," "daring spirit," and "spirit of adventure." Spirit in this sense is never associated with reason or intellect but always with "courage and gallantry," "real courage and loyalty," "gallant conduct," and a "sense of honor." Those virtues define "the meaning of manliness": "this is good fortune—for men to end their

lives with honor." With those virtues, Athenians have attained "the power of our empire," the source of her "greatness": "Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments of our empire."

Although Plato believes that courage and honor are necessary qualities for any *polis*, they must be subordinate to reason. Just as the rule of desire allowed Creon to establish his tyranny, the rule of spirit allowed Pericles to assume power. The danger lies in the threat that *hubris*—the arrogance of military values uninformed by philosophy—will slip out of control and destroy the *polis*. That is precisely what happened in the Peloponnesian War. Pericles proudly depicted Athens as a *polis* able to handle power, but it was soon corrupted in the manner Thucydides describes in "The Revolution in Corcyra."

The lessons that Plato learned from the example of Pericles' rule and the experience of the Peloponnesian War are summarized above. They should be reiterated here because they apply directly to Plato's critique of the third form of leadership, the rule of spirit. Plato's central concern (as emphasized in the comment on p. 16) is with the problem of power. He had witnessed during his youth the agony of war and the decimation of a great culture. He attributed them directly to the corruption of power, that is, to the way in which Athens' domination of other peoples led her own leaders to define justice in ruthless terms "that the weaker must be kept down by the stronger" (Cornford, p. xvi). According to Plato, the Sophists, especially Thrasymachus, (*The Republic*, pp. 15, 18) expressed that corrupt conception of justice. Although the rule of spirit can have its moments of glory as any military venture might, it might also lead to disaster through the irrational mishandling of power.

Lecture Seven

Aristotle's Critique of Plato's *Republic*

Scope: We turn now to Aristotle, who was both Plato's greatest student and one of his most trenchant critics. Professor Dalton explains that Aristotle shared many of Plato's basic assumptions (e.g., the primacy of reason, the intrinsic connection between politics and ethics, and the role of the city in improving individuals through education). Although Plato and Aristotle agreed that humans can fulfill their nature only in a social context, they followed very different methodologies and thus came to very different conclusions about what constitutes the best political regime.

Aristotle criticized Plato's political recommendations primarily on empirical and practical grounds. He rejected Plato's proposals for revolutionary change by observing that they are impracticable—they do not comport with human nature as we know it. Aristotle attempted to correct Plato's excesses by taking the "golden mean" as his touchstone for evaluating political arrangements.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the main similarities and differences between Plato and Aristotle in background, interests, methodology, philosophical assumptions, and political conclusions.
2. Summarize Aristotle's critique of Plato's three "waves" of revolutionary change.
3. Explain the centrality of moderation, or "the golden mean," in Aristotle's political recommendations.
4. Compare and contrast Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of human nature.
5. Describe Aristotle's criteria for assessing the merit of particular constitutions, and explain why Aristotle views "polity" as the best possible regime.

Outline

- I. Aristotle's theory of the "golden mean."
 - A. Aristotle differs from Plato.
 1. Aristotle was a Macedonian and thus was not as personally affected by Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, as Plato was.
 2. Aristotle saw his teacher, Plato, live a long and productive life, while Plato saw his teacher, Socrates, condemned and executed.

3. Aristotle came from the middle class, while Plato hailed from the aristocracy.
 4. Aristotle looks to biology as his model of learning, while Plato looks to mathematics. Aristotle relies heavily on observation; he criticizes Plato for positing things without observable evidence (e.g., the transcendent Forms).
 - B. Aristotle resembles Plato, however, in viewing politics as closely related to ethics and in regarding the state as an agent of virtue.
 - C. The Renaissance painter Raphael's "School of Athens" visually depicts Plato's focus on the transcendent realm and Aristotle's focus on moderation, or the mean.
- II. Aristotle's critique of Plato's first wave of revolutionary change (i.e., access of qualified women to political rule).
 - A. According to Aristotle, observation shows that nature dictates a union of naturally ruling and ruled elements, for the preservation of both.
 1. The naturally ruling element has superior reason and forethought.
 2. The naturally ruled element should obey the ruling element. That hierarchy is evident throughout nature and it applies to political organization as well as family.
 - B. The human soul (*psyche*) has two elements, one that rules (i.e., reason) and one that is ruled. Nature dictates that order in the soul to allow for right behavior to follow.
 1. Some humans are slaves by nature because they lack the capacity to reason.
 2. Women must not be allowed to rule, since they lack rational capacity. In men, the rational element naturally rules, while in women it is present but usually ineffective. Women's natural role is to serve the family as good wives and mothers but to stay out of the public sphere.
 3. Aristotle claims that his defense of patriarchy rests on observation.
- III. Aristotle's critique of Plato's second wave (i.e., the abolition of the nuclear family and private property, and their replacement with communal forms of extended family and common property among the rulers).
 - A. Aristotle rejects those reforms as impracticable.
 1. The institutions of the family and private property are rooted in nature.
 2. Observation shows that men pay most attention to what is their own and neglect what is not their own. The sense of possession is natural and brings duty and obligation.
 - B. Aristotle sees the family as a natural institution that promotes civic virtue as well as mutual care among loved ones. Parents' feelings of special attachment to their children are natural.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

- C. Aristotle also sees private property as a natural institution.
 - 1. The impulse to own and cherish objects is natural, and efforts to eradicate private property are wrong and futile.
 - 2. The project to abolish private property is characteristic of Plato's extremism.
 - 3. Aristotle suggests that property should be possessed in moderation and should be put to public use whenever possible. Charity is possible only under a regime of private property.
- IV. Aristotle's critique of Plato's third wave (i.e., the permanent rule of philosophers, which unites political power with wisdom).
 - A. Aristotle believes that it is dangerous to concentrate power in the hands of an elite; that concentration will breed discontent and dissension.
 - B. The best practical constitution for most states is rule by the middle class.
 - 1. The middle class embodies moderation because it constitutes the mean between rich and poor. Because it possesses a stake in the property system, the middle class is likely to follow moderation and eschew radical change.
 - 2. Because it practices moderation and avoids extremes, the middle class is more likely than either the rich or the poor to be guided by reason.
 - C. Those qualified for rule must therefore be male, own property, and be literate (or at least have modest education). The middle-class rule will then confer stability and rational control.

Recommended Reading:

Aristotle. 1958. *The Politics*. Translated by Ernest Barker. London: Oxford University Press.

Although our analysis suggests similarities between Aristotle and Plato, it mainly emphasizes their differences, especially the contrast between Plato as the revolutionary and Aristotle as the reformer. Barker and Cornford in their respective introductions to Aristotle's *Politics* and Plato's *Republic* suggest important differences in the philosophers' lives. Aristotle was a Macedonian rather than an Athenian, and thus his early life was not overshadowed, as Plato's had been, by the crisis of the Peloponnesian War and the collapse of Athens' democracy. As we have seen, Plato emerged from that crisis preoccupied with the problem of power; he was concerned with educating a group of political professionals that might constitute a superior kind of leadership. Aristotle did not share that concern; he perceived neither a severe crisis nor the need for revolutionary change to be effected through an elite corps of Guardians.

Aristotle's approach to political problems emphasizes reform rather than revolution. He viewed his city and tradition as less corrupt than Plato did, and consequently he saw less need for sweeping transformation. Aristotle, like Plato, was born into a comfortable and affluent family; his father was a court physician to the previous king of Macedonia. However, Aristotle's background was middle class, while Plato hailed from the aristocracy and was proud of the elitist tradition of public service that his upper-class status implied.

Both Plato and Aristotle identified their pursuit of philosophy with the methods and knowledge of science. Plato found his scientific models in the methods and theorems of mathematics and geometry, while Aristotle, influenced by his father, looked to biology. As a result, Aristotle stressed empirical analysis rather than abstract reasoning. He claimed to discover his conclusions about politics from actual observation of the natural world, and he rejected Plato's speculations about a transcendent region of divine forms as unnatural, unreal, and otherworldly.

Both Aristotle and Plato spent their crucial formative years (ages 18 to 28) under the tutelage of inspired teachers of philosophy—Plato with Socrates, and Aristotle with Plato himself (for a full 20 years, from 367 to 347 B.C.) As we have noted, Plato's study with Socrates ended in the trauma of Socrates' execution by the Athenian democracy. Aristotle, who eventually founded his own school in Athens (called the Lyceum, next to Plato's Academy), observed his teacher lead a long and productive life as a creative and influential figure, another proof for Aristotle that the political life of Greece was not quite as desperate and deplorable as Plato portrayed it. The Italian Renaissance artist Raphael depicts the differences between Plato and Aristotle in his painting "The School of Athens." Plato gestures toward the heavens, signaling his dedication to the study of transcendent ideals, the eternal forms of *The Republic*. Aristotle, conversely, extends his arm forward in a gesture that represents his doctrine of the mean. He rejects Plato's revolutionary three tidal waves of change,

advocating instead ripples of reform. Aristotle is above all a reformer who advocates a theory of moderation and balance.

That moderation is strikingly evident in Aristotle's idea of the nature and role of women, which contradicts Plato's first wave. Aristotle's ideas about women are reformist. On the one hand, Aristotle does not believe that women should be regarded and treated as slaves within the family, as they so often were in Greece. On the other hand, he disagrees with Plato's contention that some women should rule. Plato, unlike Aristotle, did not view intelligence and reason as sex-linked. Aristotle observed the inferior status of women and believed that they were by nature subordinate and inferior to men (*Politics*, pp. 13, 32, 35–36). Women lacked the capacity to reason, and therefore they could neither attain the moral understanding enjoyed by men nor enjoy political rights and citizenship. Aristotle argued that for women "biology is destiny"; their gender determined their social and political inferiority. Aristotle viewed Plato as an immoderate extremist with no sense of the mean who would violate nature by allowing women to rule. It is important to analyze the logic of Aristotle's theory about women (set forth especially on pp. 35–36) and then to contrast it with Plato's revolutionary thesis that some women are qualified to rule (explained in *The Republic*, pp. 148–54, 168, 262).

Aristotle's Critique of Plato: Argument for the "Mean" against Extremism

EXCESS OR DEFICIENCY	MEAN	EXCESS OR DEFICIENCY
I. Constitutions and Citizenship Aristotle's views of Plato's excesses in <i>The Republic</i> are noted in the left column. Aristotle's ideal, also contrasted with the extremes in the right column, is represented by the "mean" in the middle column. (Page references are to Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> .)		
Plato's meritocracy (rule by few) (pp. 54–55) Concentration of power among Guardian elite of permanent rulers	Polity (rule by middle class male citizens) (pp. 180–82) Moderate means of property and education	Democracy (rule by majority) (pp. 182, 195) No qualifications for governing except sex
II. Attributes of Polis (pp. 41–42, 51, 54, 181–82, 315)		
Total unity or "unison" of organic community as in Plato's <i>Republic</i>	Harmony with diversity; exchange or rotation of ruling functions among citizens of middle class	Anarchy
III. Family (pp. 43–45)		
Absorption into <i>polis</i> : one father for 1,000 sons, advocated by Plato	Traditional Greek family: one father for one family	Savagery: lack of family
IV. Right Individual Action (p. 46)		
Act only for communal interest	Rational action for "personal interest"	Thoughtless, irrational selfishness
V. Love (pp. 46–47)		
Diluted affections (e.g., Plato's Guardians)	Familial love	Infatuation or loss of self in another
VI. Property (pp. 18–29, 48–50)		
Communal	Private ownership, public use	Private
VII. Money (pp. 18–29, 50)		
Either renunciation of all money (Plato's Guardians) or poverty	Charity, generosity, liberality	Hoarding, usury, miserliness
VIII. Women (pp. 3, 11, 13, 32, 35–36, 75, 105–6, 317, 325–27)		
Women as citizens and rulers as in Plato's <i>Republic</i>	Women as faithful wives and good mothers performing their natural roles in the family	Women as slaves or servants as in "barbarism"

Lecture Eight

Machiavelli's Theory of Power Politics

Scope: In this lecture, we examine the work of the Florentine diplomat and political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli, who marks the transition between the classical and modern political traditions. Machiavelli's thought shows both continuities with and sharp departures from the classical political theorists that we have examined. As you listen to Professor Dalton's lecture, consider how Machiavelli's answers to the enduring political questions—especially those regarding human nature, the character and purpose of the state, the relevance of virtue to power, and the nature and proper exercise of power—compare to the answers proposed by Creon, Thrasymachus, Glaucon, Socrates, and Aristotle.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Compare and contrast the political conditions under which Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli lived; the political concerns that shaped the thought of each; and the conclusions that each of them reached.
2. Explain how Machiavelli's view of the purpose of politics and the state differs from those of Plato and Aristotle.
3. Explain how Machiavelli's understanding of virtue marks a departure from the classical political tradition.
4. In the context of how each theorist defines the requisites or character of good leadership, contrast Machiavelli's realism with Plato's idealism.
5. Compare and contrast Machiavelli's view of human nature with those of Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, and relate Machiavelli's understanding of human nature to his recommendations for the use of power.
6. Explain what Machiavelli means by *fortuna* and *virtú* and how he views the relationship between those two kinds of power.

Outline

- I. Although Machiavelli is a theorist of realism, he has many similarities with the idealist Plato.
 - A. Both lived during times of political crisis and saw politics in terms of power. Both looked for power-based solutions to the problems facing their cities.
 - B. Both believed strongly in political leadership and agreed that political power should be concentrated in the hands of a few. Plato and Machiavelli agreed that power should be in the hands of a few but disagreed about kinds of power and leadership.

- C. Aristotle differed from both Plato and Machiavelli in that he lived during calm political times and downplayed political leadership.

- II. In some areas, Machiavelli departs from classical Greek political theory.

- A. Machiavelli sees the state not as an agent of virtue but as an instrument of *virtú*, or masculine force. Politics is concerned not with fostering virtue but with ensuring security and survival.
- B. Machiavelli warns that the prince will bring himself to ruin if he pursues the ideal state at the expense of the real (*The Prince*, chap. 15).
 1. Politics concerns how we really live, not how we ought to live.
 2. A prince who wants to keep power must learn not to be good, and to use or refrain from using that knowledge as necessity requires.
 3. The practice of vice can improve the prince's security and well-being.
- C. Machiavelli's view of human nature is closer to that of Thucydides or Thrasymachus than to Plato or Aristotle. Machiavelli urges the prince to act pragmatically and to practice vice when it is useful to do so. He also says that virtue and politics need not be intertwined.

- III. Machiavelli asks in chapter 17 of *The Prince* whether it is better for the prince to be loved or feared.

- A. A prince must use violence and strength decisively, or he risks losing his position.
- B. Machiavelli echoes Creon in asserting that the prince must not hesitate to act cruelly if cruelty is required to preserve order in his state because the alternative—*anarchy*—is even worse.
- C. It is safer for the prince to be feared than loved because people are less reluctant to offend those they love than those they fear.
 1. The bonds of love are easily broken, while those of fear endure because they involve the threat of punishment.
 2. The prince can be feared but not hated, provided that he does not molest his subjects' wives or property.

- IV. Machiavelli discusses political leadership in chapter 18 of *The Prince*. Machiavelli's description of the qualities exhibited by the good leader differs profoundly from Plato's view.

- A. Although it is praiseworthy for the prince to keep his word, he is more likely to gain and keep power by using illusion and deception.
 1. Because of the wickedness of human nature, a prudent prince should not hesitate to break faith when his interest requires such action.
 2. The prince should take as his models the traits associated with the lion and the fox—strength and cunning. In politics, fox-like trickery is preferable to leonine brute force.

Machiavelli (1469–1527)

Niccolò Machiavelli was born in Florence, Italy, in 1469, the same year in which Lorenzo “the Magnificent” de Medici (grandfather of the Lorenzo to whom *The Prince* is dedicated) came to power. Machiavelli served as chancellor of Florence between 1498 and 1512. He was exiled between 1513 and 1527. During that period of exile, he wrote *The Prince* and *The Discourses* (written between 1515 and 1520).

Forces of Change in Early Modern Europe (c. 1450–1550)

- I. Political change occurred.
 - A. The politics of this age were marked by a transition from weak and decentralized feudal regimes to the more centralized rule of despotic monarchs or princes. This transformation occurred in Spain, France, and England, but not in Italy, which remained weak and victimized by neighboring powers.
 - B. Political events in Machiavelli’s era suggest the process of national consolidation in Spain, France, and England.
 1. Spain: Ferdinand and Isabella (1479–1516) consolidated Spain as a nation-state; Philip II (1556–1598) later transformed the country into a major power.
 2. France: Louis XI (1461–1483); Charles VIII (1492–1498); the French invasion of Italy (1494); Francis I (1515–1547).
 3. England: War of the Roses (1455–1485); Henry VII (1485–1509); establishment of Anglican Church (1534); Elizabeth I (1558–1603).
- II. Religious events were marked by bitter conflict between Catholics and Protestants, as each side vied for more political power. The struggle reinforced Machiavelli’s cynical view of religion.
 - A. The Papacy: Strong leadership, intervention in politics. Alexander VI (1492–1503 as Pope), father of Cesare Borgia (1476–1507); Julius II (1503–1513 as Pope), skillful military leader; Leo X (1513–1521 as Pope) advanced papal power.
 - B. The Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther (1483–1546), posting of his 95 Theses (1517) that signals beginning of Reformation in Germany; John Calvin (1509–1564), consolidating power of Reformation in Geneva (1541–1564).
 - C. Savonarola (1452–1498), a political force as religious (Dominican) leader in Florence during Machiavelli’s youth (1494–1497).
- III. Cultural change. The Italian Renaissance reached its peak in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as evidenced by the following literary and artistic figures:

- B. There is value in appearance and illusion. A prince may not have admirable qualities, but he should seem to have them.
 - C. The ends always justify the means. A prince’s methods will always be considered worthy. The few have no influence when the many feel secure.
- V. Machiavelli discusses two conceptions of power—masculine and feminine—in chapter 25 of *The Prince*.
- A. Fortune (*fortuna*) is characterized by irrationality. It is a powerful and unpredictable force, compared by Machiavelli to a torrential stream.
 - B. *Virtù* is the masculine face of power; it is marked by rationality. Through *virtù*, one can prepare for and guard against the power of fortune.
 - C. Fortune is a woman, and the man who wants to hold her down must subdue and control her.

Recommended Reading:

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. New York: Norton.

- A. Boccaccio (1313–1375), Florentine author of *Decameron* (1348), which set literary background for Renaissance in Florence.
- B. Sandro Botticelli (1447–1519), Florentine master who painted “Allegory of Spring” and “Birth of Venus.”
- C. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), among greatest of Florentine painters including “Last Supper” and “Mona Lisa.”
- D. Raphael (1483–1520), who was influenced by Leonardo and the Florentines and who painted “School of Athens.”
- E. Michelangelo (1475–1564), foremost genius of the Italian Renaissance, including “Creation of Adam” and “Fall of Man.”
- F. Machiavelli’s *Prince* is regarded as an enduring, representative statement of the Renaissance.

Italy, Florence, and Machiavelli

At the end of the fifteenth century, the Italian peninsula was controlled by its five most powerful states: the Duchy of Milan and the Republic of Venice in the north, the Republic of Florence and the States of the Church (including Rome) in the central area, and the Kingdom of Naples in the south.

During Machiavelli’s lifetime, Florence was transformed from a first-rate Italian power into a second-rate power under Spanish domination. Invasions of Italy by French armies under Charles VIII (1494) and Louis XII (1499) contributed to Florence’s downfall.

During that period, Florence’s internal affairs were directed by two powerful Italian families: the aristocratic Medici and the populist Soderini. Machiavelli had identified for some time with the Soderini, and thus he was exiled in 1513 after the Medici took power in Florence. In an effort to regain his position, Machiavelli dedicated *The Prince* to Lorenzo de Medici, in whom he saw the potential to unify Italy.

Machiavelli also admired Cesare Borgia, who, with the help of his father, Pope Alexander VI, sought to gain control of all Italy. Machiavelli met Cesare Borgia in 1502 and came to admire his political and military skill, especially his apparent genius at manipulating others to gain political advantage. Borgia personified Machiavelli’s ideal of *virtú* and became a model for the Prince (see *The Prince*, pp. 19–20, 24, 47, 79–80 and editor’s intro. on Borgia, pp. xiv, xviii).

Two General Comments on Italy of This Period

Politically Italy was unlike any other part of Europe. It was, for the most part, dominated by cities and by princely adventures and mercantile princes. The numerous states into which it was divided were not only small in extent but extremely unstable. Hardly one of them can be said to have possessed any sort of solid basis, moral or material. Everywhere existed governments without supporting tradition or recognized moral authority. The military weakness of those governments was such as to leave all Italy an easy prey to the spoiler.... [A]ny political thought produced in this Italy was likely to be completely dissociated with any kind of Christianity and completely detached from the thought of medieval schoolmen. The Protestant Reformation had yet to come, but Italy had already gone beyond.

J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Part IV, Chap. 1.

Italian politics became a tangled web, a labyrinth of subterfuge and conspiracy, a platform on which great individuals might exhibit their *virtù* Italian “cunning” became a byword throughout Europe. Dictators rose and fell. The Medici became dukes in Florence, the Sforza in Milan, while in Venice and Genoa, where the republics were kept, narrow oligarchies held the rule. These states, along with the states of the church, jockeyed about like pugilists in a ring, held within an intricate, shifting, or purely local balance of power.

Niccolò Machiavelli, who, in *The Prince*, wrote the most lasting work of the Italian Renaissance ... dreamed of the day when the citizens of his native Florence, or indeed of all Italy, should behave like early Romans—show virility in their politics, fight in citizens’ armies for patriotic causes, and uphold their dignity before Europe.

R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, (8th edition), p. 61.

Italy was, therefore, at this time a collection of small states that were rich in art but open to military domination and exploitation from Spain, France, England, and Germany. In 1494, when Machiavelli was 25 years old, a French army crossed the Alps for a major invasion of Italy. The peninsula soon became a bone of contention in warfare between France and Spain. By 1527, the year of Machiavelli’s death, the situation in Italy had become still worse: a horde of Spanish and German mercenaries, joined by renegade Italians, fell on Rome and sacked the city in an orgy of pillaging that ended with the imprisonment of the Pope and the public disgrace of his cardinals. For 300 years thereafter, Italy remained a political disaster area. Machiavelli correctly saw Italy’s condition as critical and prescribed an urgent infusion of *virtù*.

Comparisons and Contrasts Between Machiavelli and Plato

Certain similarities are evident. Both Plato and Machiavelli respond as political theorists to the classic forms of crisis. That is, both face crises of survival because they have witnessed their political orders savaged by invading forces. Both see fundamental flaws in their political systems because the institutional forms of public representation and leadership have proved bankrupt when tested by encounters with Sparta (for Plato) or other stronger political states (for Machiavelli).

Yet it is not a crisis of survival or of system that most concerns these theorists. As political philosophers, they are most preoccupied by the crisis of spirit. They direct their efforts at the disorder existing in the mind of their polities. They wish to change basic thinking about the meaning of reality and appearance, the dynamics of power, and the very nature of politics and human nature. That is their common pursuit, and they both draw similar solutions. Both theorists see bad government as the main source of the crisis, so both want to replace political amateurism with political professionalism. Both agree that politics must be in command because politics is our salvation. The key to the solution, therefore, is to induce right thinking among our political leaders, so that the command will be knowing and effective. Leaders must be aware of the fundamental nature of reality, of the way that power should be employed, of the nature of human nature. Then they may construct a political system that will effectively confront crises and offer the people a better way of life.

The stark differences between Plato and Machiavelli are rooted in their contrasting views of the nature of reality. Plato says, “Without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matters of state” (p. 231). In other words, the educated person and professional political leader (the Guardian) learn to discriminate between appearance and reality by perceiving the *arche*, or eternal truth, as the absolute moral principle of Goodness. The structure and values of the ideal republic must be based on that archetypal pattern. Machiavelli, for his part, contends that “there is such a difference between the way we really live and the way we ought to live that the man who neglects the real to study the ideal will learn how to accomplish his ruin, not his salvation” (*The Prince*, chap. 15, p. 44, Norton edition). Machiavelli, therefore, is a realist who opposes Plato for being an idealist, a utopian dreamer, and utterly impractical.

The basic divergence in Plato’s and Machiavelli’s views of reality has striking implications. Plato’s professional political leader is the Guardian, who has mastered the Platonic system of education and can thus demonstrate that his or her virtue (*arete*) leads to knowledge of the Forms. The leader is thus qualified through diligent study and the ultimate grasp of absolute truths. For Machiavelli, such a system is not merely a waste of time, but a positively dangerous way to

perceive the tasks of political leadership because it may “accomplish his ruin” and the demotion of the state.

For Machiavelli, the ideal political leader is the man who wields not virtue, or *arete*, but manly strength, or *virtú* (chap. 25). Power demands use of force when the state can employ it successfully or the use of deceit and clever manipulation when it cannot. Power, therefore, requires a clear understanding of what is expedient. The leader must use power in ways that will work—either like the lion or the fox (chap. 18). The prince must know human nature well in order to command support. In contrast to what Plato’s Guardians believe about the rational capacity of people to at least appreciate the superiority of reason in the soul, Machiavelli contends that “it is a good general rule about men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain.” In short, people are “rotten” by nature (chap. 17, p. 48). Human nature, therefore, cannot be changed through education but can be only coerced with powerful, shrewd leadership infused with a spirit of *virtú*.

Virtú, the force of manliness, is opposed to *fortuna*, the feminizing force (chap. 25). Whereas Plato in his “first wave” tries to unsex politics by emphasizing a person’s strengths (*arete*) irrespective of sex, Machiavelli now highlights sex and opposes Plato’s view of organic politics with that of orgasmic politics.

Credits

Thucydides. 1954. *The Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Rex Warner. New York: Penguin Classics. Copyright (c) Rex Warner, 1954. Pages 144–51, 241–45 (approximately 4,637 words), reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

Plato. 1945. *The Republic*. Translated by F. M. Cornford. London: Oxford University Press. Copyright (c) 1941. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.