

**Plato's *Republic***  
**Part I**  
**David Roochnik, Ph.D.**



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Professor Roochnik has written three books on Plato: *The Tragedy of Reason: Toward a Platonic Conception of Logos* (Routledge, 1991), *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Technê* (Penn State Press, 1996), and *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's "Republic"* (Cornell University Press, 2003). In addition, he has published *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2004). In 2002, he produced *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy* for The Teaching Company. He is presently working on a book on Aristotle.

Professor Roochnik is married to Gina Crandell, a professor of landscape architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design. He is the father of Lena Crandell, a freshman at Vassar College, and Shana Crandell, a sophomore at Brookline High School.

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## Plato's *Republic*

### Scope:

In this course, we will explore Plato's *Republic* (written in approximately 380 B.C.E.), which is the first, and arguably the most influential, work in the history of Western political philosophy. In it, Socrates, the hero of Plato's dialogue, addresses such fundamental questions as: What is justice? What is the role of education in politics? Is censorship of music and literature ever justifiable? What sort of person should rule the state? Is it ever permissible for a ruler to lie to the citizens? Should citizens be allowed full freedom when it comes to sexual relationships and private property? Are all citizens equal before the law? Should women be given the same political opportunities as men? Should everyone have equal access to health care? Socrates's answers to these and other questions will occasionally be shocking to modern ears, but they will always be thought-provoking.

The *Republic* consists of 10 "books" (or chapters), and it is divided into 4 parts. Book I is a prologue that introduces the cast of characters, of whom Socrates is far and away the most important. It also raises the issues that will be taken up in the remainder of the dialogue, the two most important of which are: What is justice, and why should anyone prefer being just rather than being unjust? To answer these questions, Socrates suggests that he and his conversation partners construct a hypothetical "city in speech," an ideal city that they agree is just. (The Greek word for "city" is *polis*, which is the root of the word *political*. The *polis* was the basic political community in ancient Greece. For us, it is the "state.") Because a city is a large structure, this perfectly just city, even if it exists only in thought, will allow the nature of justice itself to become an object of study. The second part of the *Republic*, which is found in Books II–IV, is thus, devoted to the "construction" of an ideal political regime.

The regime Socrates constructs is a tightly controlled one, in which cultural activity is strictly regulated, poetry is censored, physical education is emphasized, a rigid class system is enforced, and the private family is eliminated. Needless to say, these proposals will cause readers to object. Readers will find, however, that even if they disagree with what Socrates recommends, developing arguments against his proposals is a most valuable exercise. They will be forced to think through basic assumptions concerning politics in this course. For example, almost all of us believe that political freedom is a good thing and that all citizens should be counted as equal before the law. But why? Plato will encourage us to defend our most cherished beliefs.

Unlike in a democracy, where rulers are elected on the basis of their popular appeal, in Socrates's regime, the only criterion for ruling is being extremely intelligent and knowledgeable, or as he puts it, being "wise." Because of this, the *Republic* takes a gigantic detour. In order to understand what it means to be a ruler, one must understand what wisdom is. For this reason, the third part of

the *Republic*, Books V–VII, turns away from overtly political questions and concentrates instead on the nature of “philosophy” (which literally means “the love of wisdom”). In this part of the dialogue, Socrates offers some of his most profound and concentrated reflections on philosophical issues. We learn, for example, about the relationship between particulars (such as the beautiful painting that is hanging on the wall) and universals (Beauty itself). We learn about the relationship between the words of our language and the things in the world that these words name. Socrates discusses the nature of mathematics and the difference between images (such as a photograph) and “originals” (the object the photograph is of). He also addresses the single most important principle in all of Plato’s philosophy, what he calls “the Idea of the Good,” the supreme principle of all reality.

In reading Books V–VII of the *Republic*, students will be exposed to the heart of Platonism. As a consequence, in this course, they will receive an introduction not only to political philosophy but to philosophy in general.

The last part of the *Republic*, Books VIII–X, takes us back to a discussion of politics. Socrates examines those political regimes that are inferior to the ideal. These include the timocracy, a rule by those few men who have achieved honor in battle; oligarchy, rule by the wealthy few; democracy, rule by the people; and tyranny, which is the worst of all possible regimes. This section of the dialogue is rich with insightful observations about “the real world.” For example, in discussing oligarchy, we will learn a great deal about the role money plays in people’s lives. When Socrates addresses “rule by the people,” he will offer some of the sharpest, and most controversial, criticisms of democracy ever written. And when he discusses the tyrant, he will teach us much about the corrupting influence of power.

Throughout the course, we will discuss how reading the *Republic* can generate a discussion of the most pressing contemporary issues. We will, for example, discuss Plato’s “medical ethics” and see how they might apply in today’s world. We will also discuss how penetrating was his analysis of tyranny, for we will compare what Socrates says about the tyrant to Saddam Hussein.

Reading the 10 books of Plato’s *Republic* is like taking a journey. We will move from book to book, from idea to idea, and in doing so, we will touch upon some of the most basic questions that human beings can ask about themselves and the political communities in which they live. This is a comprehensive, a truly great book, and in this course, we will try to study it with the care it deserves.

## Lecture One

### Plato's Life and Times

**Scope:** After beginning with a brief overview of this course, we turn to a discussion of Plato's life and times. He was born into a wealthy and distinguished family in Athens in 429 B.C.E. and died in 347. (All subsequent dates mentioned in this course are B.C.E.) His was a time of tremendous political upheaval. During his youth, Athens was mired in the Peloponnesian War against Sparta, which lasted from 431 to 404. It finally lost this war, and in the process, its century-long commitment to democracy was threatened by the "Tyranny of the Thirty" in 404. It was also a time of great cultural activity. Sophocles and Euripides were producing their tragedies, Aristophanes was writing his comedies, the Parthenon had recently been completed, and there were great developments in mathematics and science, as well as philosophy. The greatest influence on Plato, however, was Socrates, who lived from 469 until 399, when he was executed by the city of Athens on the grounds of corrupting the youth. In 385, Plato founded his own school of philosophy in Athens, which was called the Academy, and he probably wrote the *Republic* there somewhere around 380.

### Outline

- I. We begin with an overview of this course, *Plato's 'Republic'*.
  - A. Written in approximately 380, the *Republic* is arguably the most influential book in the history of Western political philosophy.
  - B. Plato addresses such fundamental questions as:
    1. What is justice?
    2. What is the role of education in politics?
    3. Is censorship of music and literature ever justifiable?
    4. What sort of person should rule the state?
    5. Is it ever permissible for a ruler to lie to the citizens?
    6. Should citizens be allowed full freedom when it comes to sexual relationships and private property?
    7. Are all citizens equal before the law?
    8. Should women have equal rights as men?
    9. Should everyone have equal access to health care?
  - C. Our pedagogical strategy will be simple: to read the entire dialogue as carefully as we can. We will continually show how Plato raises issues that are still alive today and how he influenced other philosophers.
  - D. The *Republic* has 10 "books," or chapters, which can be organized into 4 distinct sections.

1. Book I is a “prologue” that introduces the two central questions of the whole dialogue: What is justice, and why should someone prefer being just to being unjust?
  2. Books II–IV contain a “construction” of an ideal, a perfectly just, city.
  3. Books V–VII go into great detail concerning Plato’s conception of philosophy.
  4. Books VIII–X return us to the theme of politics and contain a criticism of various “real-world” regimes.
- E. We will conclude the course with a brief look at the influence of the *Republic* on the subsequent history of political philosophy.
- F. The translation of the *Republic* we will use is that by Allan Bloom. The term *Stephanus page number* and how it will be used in the outline below will be explained.
- II. We begin with an introduction to Plato’s life and times.
- A. He was born in 429 B.C.E. to a distinguished family.
  - B. A brief overview of 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athenian history provides the background to Plato’s *Republic*.
    1. The Pisistratid tyranny in Athens was overthrown in 507. Athenian democracy was born.
    2. The Greeks defeated the invading Persian Empire at Salamis and Platea in 480–479.
    3. Pericles ascended to power in Athens in 469. During the Periclean age, Athens became a great military and economic empire.
    4. There was also astonishing cultural development. The Parthenon was built; Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote many of their tragedies; Aristophanes wrote his comedies; Herodotus “invented” history; and there were important developments in mathematics and the natural sciences.
    5. The Peloponnesian War was waged from 431–404. Athens was defeated.
    6. Athenian democracy collapsed in 404, and the “Tyranny of the Thirty” was established. Democracy was restored in 403.
    7. Socrates, who was Plato’s philosophical inspiration, was executed on the grounds of impiety and corrupting the youth in 399. Because he was associated with some members of the Tyranny of the Thirty, he was, apparently, caught in the backlash against them.
    8. Plato wrote the *Republic* after a period of extraordinary political turmoil. His work is charged with a sense of “real-world” urgency.
    9. Plato took the first of three trips to Sicily in 388. He became involved with Dionysius I, the ruler of Sicily, and his son Dionysius II, in whom Plato invested great (but unfulfilled) hopes.



10. Plato founded his school, known as the Academy, in 386.

III. There were several 5<sup>th</sup>-century influences on Plato.

- A. The literary tradition influenced him.
  - 1. Homer and Hesiod wrote around 750–700.
  - 2. The tragedians Aeschylus (525–456), Sophocles (496–406), and Euripides (485–406) were important in Athenian cultural life.
  - 3. The comic poet Aristophanes lived from 450 to 385.
- B. *Pre-Socratic philosophy* refers to the ideas of those philosophers who lived before or during the life of Socrates (469–399).
  - 1. Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes were among the first philosophers. They were from Miletus and wrote during the 6<sup>th</sup> century.
  - 2. Heraclitus lived from (approximately) 540 to 480.
  - 3. Parmenides lived from (approximately) 515 to 440.
  - 4. Pythagoras lived from (approximately) 570 to 495.
  - 5. Anaxagoras (500–428), Empedocles (493–433), and Democritus (c. 465–400) were influential thinkers of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.
- C. The *Sophists* were itinerant teachers who taught rhetoric.
  - 1. Protagoras (c. 485–400) and Gorgias (c. 483–376) were the first two significant Sophists.
  - 2. Isocrates (436–338) lived during Plato’s lifetime and was his great rival.
- D. Socrates (469–399) was by far the most important influence on Plato.
  - 1. Socrates concentrated on political and ethical questions.
  - 2. He was famous for his “what is it?” question and his practice of refutation (the *elenchus*).
  - 3. Socrates wrote nothing.
  - 4. Socrates was a “gadfly”; he irritated the citizens of Athens.
  - 5. He was executed by the city of Athens in 399.
- E. The relationship between the Socrates who appears in the dialogue of the *Republic* and the historical figure is difficult to determine.
  - 1. Plato was clearly influenced by Socrates.
  - 2. It is impossible to tell where exactly Plato moved beyond Socrates.
  - 3. In this course, the name *Socrates* will refer *only* to the character who appears in Plato’s *Republic*. The ideas we discuss belong to Plato.
  - 4. Because the *Republic* is a complex and difficult work of philosophy, some measure of interpretation is required. Students will always be informed when an interpretation offered in this course is controversial.

- F. The *Republic* is typically thought to be a work of Plato's "middle period," when his *theory of Forms*—a subject we will discuss at length—was fully developed.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pp. 1–15.

Howland, J. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 3–24.

Roochnik, D. *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, pp. 11–80.

Samons, L. *What's Wrong with Democracy?* pp. 19–40.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What, if anything, have you heard about Plato's *Republic*? Try to identify your own preconceptions before you start reading this book.
2. Socrates was a "gadfly," an irritant. Isn't philosophy just an academic subject like any other? Why, then, would a philosopher be irritating?

## Lecture Two

### Book I—The Title and the Setting

**Scope:** The *Republic* is set in the Piraeus, the port of Athens, in approximately 410. The Piraeus was a hotbed of democratic resistance during the Tyranny of the Thirty in 404. We meet all the characters of the dialogue in Book I: Socrates, his companions Glaucon and Adeimantus, Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. Each of these characters has a significant role to play, because each foreshadows themes and raises issues that will become important later in the dialogue. In addition to Socrates, Thrasymachus is the most prominent character of Book I, for he is a Sophist, a relativist, and as such, represents a powerful challenge. We will discuss his position thoroughly.

Book I is a “prologue.” As it introduces the reader to the characters of the dialogue, it establishes the basic questions of the *Republic*: What is justice, and why should someone prefer to be just rather than unjust? Most important, it acquaints us with both the person and the method of the philosopher Socrates.

### Outline

- I. The Greek word translated as “republic” is *politeia*, which could also be translated as “regime.”
  - A. *Politeia* is derived from the word *polis*, the root of the English word *political*, which means “city.”
  - B. Ancient Greece was not a country but a collection of independent “city-states.”
- II. The setting is the Piraeus, the port of Athens, somewhere around 410.
  - A. The Piraeus was a stronghold of the democratic opposition to the Tyranny of the Thirty.
  - B. The setting already suggests a major issue of the dialogue: Is democracy worth fighting for, even dying for?
  - C. Because it is a seaport, the Piraeus is filled with foreigners. It thus raises a second basic question: Is diversity a desirable quality of a city?
- III. The opening scene (327a–328d) foreshadows many of the questions that are to come.
  - A. Socrates went down to the Piraeus to attend a religious festival in honor of a new god.

- B. Polemarchus, the son of the wealthy manufacturer Cephalus, pressures Socrates to stay for dinner. (Polemarchus was killed by the Tyranny of the Thirty.)
  - C. Glaucon, Socrates's young companion (and Plato's brother), also pressures Socrates to stay. Adeimantus is also Plato's brother.
  - D. Several issues are foreshadowed by these encounters.
    1. Socrates seems interested in novelty, in new and different things. Is cultural diversity valuable?
    2. The role of force is raised as a question because Polemarchus "forces" Socrates to remain in the Piraeus. To what extent is force required in politics?
    3. Polemarchus is young and full of energy. How such young people should be treated will be addressed later in the dialogue.
    4. Because of Polemarchus, the question is again raised: Is democracy worth dying for? Is any *polis* worth dying for?
- IV. The first dialogue is between Socrates and Cephalus (328d–331d).
- A. Cephalus warmly greets Socrates.
  - B. Socrates responds (rather rudely) by asking him what it is like to be old and near death. He also asks him what is the best thing about being rich.
  - C. Cephalus says he does not mind being old. The erotic madness of youth has passed.
  - D. Cephalus is not afraid of death, because he has always told the truth and paid back his debts.
  - E. From these casual remarks, Socrates extracts a definition of justice from Cephalus. It is, he says, telling "the truth and giving back what a man has taken from another" (331c).
  - F. Socrates then refutes this definition of justice with a counter-example. If you borrowed a knife from a friend and the friend became insane, it would not be just to return the knife to him or to tell him the truth.
  - G. The key question that emerges is: What is justice itself? This will be seen to be a very difficult question to answer.
- V. The second dialogue is between Socrates and Polemarchus (331d–336a).
- A. Polemarchus rescues his father from Socrates's refutation.
  - B. Cephalus leaves (with a smile on his face) to perform some religious rituals: He is not a philosopher.
  - C. Polemarchus proposes that "it is just to give back what is owed," which he then amends to "give to everyone what is fitting" (332b). Socrates refutes this definition.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book I.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pp. 16–23.

Howland, J. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 32–38.

Mitchell, B., and J. R. Lucas. *An Engagement with Plato's Republic*, pp. 1–8.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, pp. 51–55.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Polemarchus died in defense of democracy. Do you think democracy is worth dying for? Why or why not?
2. Cephalus claims that to be just, one must tell the truth. Socrates responds that sometimes it is just to lie. With which position do you now sympathize? Why?
3. Thrasymachus is a relativist when it comes to justice. Do you agree or disagree with his notion that “justice is the advantage of the stronger”? Why?

## Lecture Three

### Book I—Socrates versus Thrasymachus

**Scope:** The central debate of Book I takes place between Socrates and Thrasymachus, who is a Sophist. Thrasymachus teaches rhetoric, and he is a relativist. His definition of justice is “the advantage of the stronger” (338c), by which he means justice is determined by the ruling body. For example, in a monarchy, what is advantageous to a king would be counted as just. In a democracy, whose name literally means “rule by the people,” what is advantageous to the majority is just. There is no absolute, universal, or objective definition of justice. What is counted as just varies from regime to regime. We will analyze two of Socrates’s arguments against Thrasymachus’s relativism. This is important because relativism is a very popular position today.

After being refuted by Socrates, Thrasymachus changes tactics. He argues that injustice is actually preferable to justice. “The just man,” he says, “everywhere has less than the unjust man” (343d) and “injustice...is mightier, freer, and more masterful than justice” (344c). Socrates attempts to refute this position as well.

Book I ends with Socrates victorious: Thrasymachus has been vanquished. But the questions at the heart of their dispute—what is justice? why should someone prefer justice over injustice?—remain unanswered.

### Outline

- I.** Thrasymachus, a Sophist, enters the scene. He defines justice as “the advantage of the stronger” (338c).
  - A.** Justice is whatever is advantageous to the ruler.
  - B.** In a democracy, justice is whatever is advantageous to the people.
  - C.** There is no absolute definition of justice; it is relative to the regime.
  - D.** Rhetoric is often defined as the art of persuasion and goes hand in hand with relativism.
- II.** Socrates refutes Thrasymachus (339a–340a). His first argument against the Sophist is the following:
  - A.** Thrasymachus believes that it is just to obey all laws.
  - B.** He agrees that sometimes rulers make mistakes.
  - C.** A mistaken law is one that is not advantageous to the ruler.
  - D.** Because Thrasymachus has agreed that it is just to obey all the laws, he is committed to saying that it is sometimes just to obey laws that are disadvantageous to the ruler.

- E. Thrasymachus has contradicted himself: Justice both is and is not advantageous to the ruler.
- III.** Cleitophon offers his assistance: Justice, he proposes, “is what the stronger believes to be his advantage” (340b). This is a significant revision of Thrasymachus’s position, because it eliminates the possibility of making mistakes. Cleitophon is a radical relativist.
- IV.** Thrasymachus rejects Cleitophon’s suggestion because he thinks the ruler is like a “craftsman” (340e) who has real knowledge. (The Greek word for “craft” is *technê*, which can also be translated as “art.”)
- V.** Socrates presents a second refutation of Thrasymachus (341c–342e).
- A. The ruler is like a craftsman. He has a *technê*, a “craft” or an “art.”
  - B. All craftsmen are directed toward and seek the advantage of the object of their craft.
    - 1. The doctor cares for the sick.
    - 2. The pilot cares for the sailors.
    - 3. Therefore, all craftsmen are “naturally directed toward seeking and providing for the advantage” (341d) of the object of their *technê*, not themselves!
- VI.** Thrasymachus changes his position: Injustice is superior to justice. It is more powerful than justice. Being unjust is the way to bring advantage to oneself. (See 344c.)
- A. This a radical challenge to the goodness of justice.
  - B. It raises a fundamental question: Why be just when, if you are unjust, you can benefit yourself? What is the value of justice?
- VII.** Socrates presents a third refutation of Thrasymachus (345e–346e).
- A. Ruling is like a craft or an art (*technê*).
  - B. Craftsmen receive wages for their work.
  - C. This implies that their work is not simply for their own advantage; they demand wages in order to be rewarded for their work. No art generates its own advantage. (See 346e.)
  - D. Rulers receive wages.
  - E. Therefore, ruling benefits those who are ruled, not the rulers.
- VIII.** A general question is raised by Socrates’s refutations of Thrasymachus: Can the Sophist really be defeated by the philosopher?
- IX.** Book I ends with Socrates victorious. Socrates himself admits, however, that he has neither defined justice nor proven that living a life of justice is superior to living unjustly.

- X. Book II opens with Glaucon saying, “Socrates, do you want to seem to have persuaded us, or truly to persuade us, that it is in every way better to be just than unjust?” (357a).
  - A. Glaucon is the driving force of the dialogue.
  - B. He is courageous (357a), ready to laugh (398c), musical (398e), erotic (474d), and spirited (548d).
  - C. Glaucon is a potential philosopher. (Contrast him with Cephalus.) He is the key character after Socrates.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book I.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Dillon, J. *The Greek Sophists*, pp. 66–79.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Review the steps of Socrates's first refutation of Thrasymachus. Do you think his argument against the Sophist is a good one?
2. Does relativism strike you as a plausible position? If so, explain why. If not, try to explain what your non-relativist position is.



## Lecture Four

### Book II—The City-Soul Analogy

**Scope:** Glaucon pressures Socrates to give an account of justice that is better than the one he used to refute Thrasymachus and to explain why one should prefer justice to injustice. In response, Socrates presents what has come to be known as “the city-soul analogy.” The city, he says, is like the individual soul “written large” (368d). It has the same structure as the soul, only on a bigger level. As a result, if a perfectly just city could be constructed “in speech”—that is, as a hypothetical ideal—then the nature of justice would become visible, and because city and soul are isomorphic, its structure could be transferred to the individual. With this, we would learn what justice is and why it is better for a person to be just than to be unjust. From Book II until the end of Book VII, then, Socrates and his partners become “city planners,” constructing a city that will tell them what justice is.

In this lecture, we discuss the first city Socrates constructs. It is minimal and does no more than meet basic needs. Socrates seems to find it attractive, but Glaucon rejects it as fit only for pigs. They move on to the second city, which is described as “luxurious.” It is a city that is continually expanding; thus, it needs a military class. This poses a problem, however. The military requires soldiers who are aggressive and welcome a fight, but such people make for potentially disruptive citizens. The next issue Socrates takes up, then, is crucial for the remainder of the dialogue: education. The citizens, especially those aggressive ones well suited for a military career, must be educated to become contributing rather than disruptive members of the regime.

### Outline

- I. Glaucon pushes Socrates hard to force him to do a better job of explaining what justice is and why being just is preferable to being unjust.
  - A. Glaucon says that there are three kinds of good things:
    1. Some, such as harmless pleasures, are desirable for their own sake.
    2. Some are desirable for their consequences. An example is taking an unpleasant medicine.
    3. Some are desirable both for their own sake and for their consequences. Socrates gives the examples of “thinking, seeing and being healthy” (357c).
  - B. Into which of these three categories does justice fit?
  - C. Most people think it belongs in the second: those things that are desirable for their consequences.
    1. This is a primitive version of the social contract theory.

2. From this standpoint, justice is not good in itself; most of us would prefer to be unjust. But we agree to be just to others if they are just to us so that we can live harmoniously.
  3. In this view, justice is “in between.” The best state would be to be unjust without getting punished, and the worst state would be to suffer injustice. (See 359a.)
  4. Most modern political thinkers, such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, held some version of a social contract theory.
- D.** Glaucon challenges Socrates to demonstrate that justice is a good thing that is desirable both for its own sake and for its consequences.
- II.** Glaucon formulates his challenge by telling a story: the ring of Gyges (359d–360d). This is what philosophers call a *thought experiment*.
- A.** Gyges had a magical ring that made him invisible. He used it to commit unjust deeds, for which he was never punished.
  - B.** Why should any of us, if we possessed such a ring, be just rather than unjust?
  - C.** Glaucon challenges the notion that virtue—justice in particular—is its own reward.
  - D.** Socrates admires his young friend (368a). He seems to like being challenged.
- III.** To meet the challenge, Socrates must define justice and explain why it is superior to injustice. To do this, he proposes the “city-soul” analogy (368c–369a).
- A.** The city is like the soul “written large.” It has the same structure as the individual, but because it is bigger, it is “easier” to see.
    1. The Greek word *psuchê* is translated as “soul.”
    2. It is not synonymous with the English word *soul*, which connotes an immaterial substance that lives on after the body dies.
    3. In general, the Greek *psuchê* means “life” and refers to that aspect of the human being that is not the body. It is the root of our word *psychology*.
  - B.** If an ideal, a perfectly just, city could be “constructed,” then what justice itself is, and what a just individual is, would be easier to see.
  - C.** If justice can be seen, then Thrasymachus’s challenge, that it is better to live an unjust life, could be met.
  - D.** The “construction project” begins. Socrates builds a hypothetical city.
- IV.** The original city is the city of minimal needs (369b–372c).
- A.** This city (369d) meets the basic needs of its citizens: food, shelter, clothing, shoes.

- B. It is organized by a simple scheme: a primitive division of labor. The farmer produces food for the rest of the citizens, the builder makes houses, and so on.
  - C. The guiding principle of the original city is one of efficiency. The farmer does not build houses, nor does the carpenter grow crops.
  - D. This is a peaceful, stable city. There is no competition, no government, no military, no luxuries, no furniture, no meat.
- V. Glaucon objects. He calls the original city “a city of sows” (372d).
- A. It meets only the basic needs of its citizens.
  - B. Glaucon wants furniture and “relishes” (372e).
  - C. Socrates characterizes the original city as “true” and “healthy.” He describes Glaucon’s city as “luxurious” and “feverish” (372e).
    - 1. The feverish city has all sorts of things the original city does not, including perfume, incense, courtesans, cakes, and a wide variety of artists. (See 373b.)
    - 2. The feverish city is realistically human.
    - 3. It is the city whose desires expand indefinitely.
  - D. The citizens of the feverish city want to eat meat.
  - E. Therefore, this city must be aggressive. It must attack its neighbor to get land for pasture for its animals (373d).
  - F. This city must go to war.
  - G. Socrates says, “and let’s not say whether war works evil or good” (373e).
- VI. There is a new class of citizens in the city: the warriors.
- A. They pose a unique problem: They must be “spirited” (375a); they must be aggressive, fiercely competitive, and love to fight.
    - 1. Such citizens are potentially disruptive. They can turn against their own citizens.
    - 2. They must be taught to “be gentle to their own and cruel to enemies” (375c). They must become “guardians” (375e) of the city who protect and rule it.
  - B. Education takes on fundamental political significance. It becomes the major issue of the rest of the *Republic*.
    - 1. This issue was foreshadowed by the presence of Polemarchus in Book I.
    - 2. It is continually made an issue by the role Glaucon plays throughout the dialogue.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book II.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pp. 73–79.

Ferrari, G. *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, pp. 1–18.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, pp. 15–17.

Williams, B. “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's Republic,” in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 49–60.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you agree with Socrates that the city and the soul are analogous? Are they similar sorts of entities?
2. What role do you think education should play in political life?
3. What contemporary figures can you identify who exhibit what Socrates calls “spirit”?

## Lecture Five

### Books II and III—Censorship

**Scope:** Socrates argues that the cultural world, or what today we might call “the media,” plays the central role in forming the character of the citizens, especially when they are young. Therefore, he recommends that in the just city, music and literature of all sorts be strictly censored. By briefly considering John Stuart Mill’s famous critique of censorship, we will address the general question (one that is alive and well today): Is censorship ever justifiable? Does it ever really work, or does it usually backfire? We will consider several questions much on the minds of people today. Should children have access to everything that is on the Internet? Should pornography be regulated? Is there any book that does not belong in a public library?

We will then turn to the specific recommendations that Socrates makes. He takes particular aim at Homer, author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Focusing on Socrates’s critique of Homer will give us some insight into what, much later in the dialogue, is called “the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry.”

### Outline

- I. Education is central to the construction of the just city.
  - A. Recall that education is needed to make sure that those with “spirit” become the “guardians,” rather than disrupters, of the city.
  - B. There are two components to education: “gymnastic for bodies and music for the soul” (376e).
    1. “Gymnastic” embraces all forms of physical education and discipline.
    2. “Music” means much more than literal music. It includes all forms of literary culture.
  - C. Because young people are so impressionable, it is imperative to “supervise the makers of tales” (377c). The stories, poems, myths, and songs that young people are exposed to must be politically beneficial to the city.
  - D. The content of the city’s “music” must be thoroughly censored.
    1. An example is Hesiod’s story of the battle between Cronus and Uranus, which will be forbidden (378a).
    2. This is the story of a son who rebels against his oppressive father. It will not be allowed in the just city because it might encourage citizens to challenge the authority of the city.
    3. Homer’s stories about the gods doing battle against each other will not be allowed. The story of Zeus and Hera, the king and queen of

the gods, fighting with each other (378d) will be censored because it might encourage rebelliousness.

4. The gods of Homer are not always good. In the just city, the gods will be presented as absolutely and always good (379c).
  5. The Homeric gods frequently change their form. The gods of the just city will be presented as unchanging and having a fixed and stable nature (380d).
  6. In the literature of the just city, death must never be presented as something to be feared (387b), as it is in Hades. This might make the citizens so afraid of death that they would be unwilling to die for the city.
  7. Storytellers will be prohibited from telling stories in which “happy men are unjust and unjust men are happy” (392b). These might encourage citizens to behave unjustly.
  8. There is a poetic “worldview,” one that emphasizes change, conflict, unpredictability, and the role of chance, that must, according to Socrates, be suppressed.
- E. The style of the city’s “music” must be regulated.
1. Storytellers will not be allowed to tell stories in which they imitate the actions of bad or inferior people (395c–e). The politically correct storyteller must be an “unmixed imitator of the decent” (397d).
  2. Only certain kinds of music will be allowed. Only certain of the “modes” and the “rhythms” will be allowed.
  3. “This is why the rearing in music is most sovereign; because rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it” (401d).
- II. A philosophical discussion of censorship is required.
- A. The arguments in favor of censorship: “Music” does indeed have a tremendous, and often damaging, effect on the young.
1. Some contemporary rap music, for example, has violent lyrics that seem to advocate criminality and are degrading to women.
  2. Sexually explicit and violent TV shows and movies might influence children.
  3. Should pornography be fully legalized?
  4. Should children have unimpeded access to everything that is available on the Internet?
  5. Do violent video games encourage young boys to be violent?
- B. One argument against censorship is that freedom of expression is a fundamental political right.
1. Furthermore, censorship does not work well. It often backfires.
  2. John Stuart Mill’s argument: Censorship presupposes that the censor is infallible. Censorship destroys the free flow of ideas and inhibits progress.

- C. Socrates rejects the idea that freedom of expression is of fundamental importance. The health of the city is more important than the individual's "right" to express himself or herself.
- D. Socrates might agree, however, that censorship does not really work. He never seems entirely sure that this just city of his is really possible.
- E. The ruler of the just city is a philosopher and, thus, seems to be, in a sense, infallible.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Books II and III.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pp. 79–100.

Bloom, A. *The Closing of the American Mind*.

Mill, J. S. *On Liberty*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you think children should have unlimited access to everything on the Internet? Should there be any restrictions placed on what they can read?
2. Should pornography be regulated? What about violent video games?

## Lecture Six

### Book III—The Noble Lie

**Scope:** Socrates's censorship program culminates in what he calls the "noble lie." It asserts that human beings were not born from their parents but that the city itself was the parent. In addition, it asserts that all citizens are born into predetermined social or political classes. There are gold-, silver-, and bronze-souled citizens, and the three classes should not mingle.

We will examine this lie. First, we will examine the particulars of Socrates's lie in order to understand what he hopes to accomplish with it. His main objective is to create "fellow-feeling" among the citizens. If the city is the parent of all the citizens, then all the citizens are siblings. If this lie were to be believed, then "patriotism" (which is derived from the Greek word *patêr*, which means "father") would become prevalent in the city. Second, we will take up the general question (which is alive and well today): Is it ever permissible for a ruler to lie to his or her subjects? What if the lie being told seems to have positive political consequences?

Immediately following the noble lie, Socrates makes an even more radical proposal: the elimination of private property.

### Outline

- I. One "noble lie" (414c), which has two parts, is required to complete the education of the guardians, those who protect and rule the city. This is the logical extension, and the culmination, of Socrates's censorship program.
  - A. All citizens were born under the earth. The earth itself, the city, is their real mother. (See 414d.)
  - B. Citizens have gold, silver, or bronze souls (415a), and this determines their rank in the city.
- II. The lie is both preposterous yet strangely familiar.
  - A. It is preposterous because the first part is obviously false.
  - B. It is familiar because citizens regularly think of their country as their "motherland" or "fatherland." When a citizen is willing to die for his country, he has placed it above his own parents.
    - 1. The "lie" is designed to inculcate political solidarity and "patriotism."
    - 2. Because they have the same mother, all citizens are siblings.
  - C. The second part of the lie, "the myth of the metals," is designed to ensure a rigid class separation.



1. The goal of this part of the lie is to eliminate the possibility of factionalism. Gold citizens will rule, silver ones will assist the rulers, and bronze ones will obey.
2. No one will try to venture beyond his or her class.
3. The rulers are required to supervise the children. If a bronze-souled child is born to gold-souled parents, it will be taken away and placed into the bronze citizen group (415b).

**III. Is it ever justifiable for the rulers to lie?**

- A. Is lying in general ever morally permissible?**
  1. Immanuel Kant, for example, would say no. It is simply wrong in all circumstances.
  2. John Stuart Mill would say no but for different reasons. It is ineffective and produces insecurity.
- B. Is lying ever politically permissible?**
  1. Is it even possible for political rulers to tell citizens the whole truth?
  2. Should rulers tell citizens the truth if the truth would generate panic?
  3. Should rulers tell citizens the truth if the truth is too complicated to be easily understood?
- C. Plato's justification of the noble lie is "utilitarian." It produces fellow-feeling and political stability. It eliminates political factionalism and civic strife and promotes patriotism.**
  1. Remember the bloody turmoil of the Tyranny of the Thirty in Athens in 404.
  2. Nothing is worse than civil war.

**IV. The guardians are not permitted to own any private property. They have no private homes but, instead, live in common.**

- A. A bit later (423a) we learn that women and children will also be held in common. In other words, the traditional family is eliminated.**
- B. The justification for this is that the goal of Socrates's ideal city is the happiness and well-being of the whole city, not of any one group.**
  1. Having a private family creates dual loyalties in the citizens.
  2. Eliminating the family allows citizens to identify first and foremost with the city.
  3. The key to a successful city is for its citizens to identify their own interests with the city's interests.

**V. The issue that is looming: Is Socrates's putatively just city totalitarian?**

- A. This was the verdict of Plato's most vociferous critic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Popper.**
- B. It was also the verdict of Plato's own student, Aristotle, who in Book II of *The Politics*, criticized the *Republic*.**

- C. Think here of the great “dystopian” novels of Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, and George Orwell, *1984*.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book III.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Aristotle. *The Politics*, Book II.

Huxley, A. *Brave New World*.

Kant, I. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Mill, J. S. *Utilitarianism*.

Orwell, G. *1984*.

Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. I.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Would you criticize a president of the United States for lying to the citizens? What if a certain piece of news would benefit nobody and only cause panic? Should the president still tell the truth?
2. Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* are the most famous of the 20<sup>th</sup> century dystopian novels. Does Socrates's just city sound at all like them?

## Lecture Seven

### Book III—Socrates’s Medical Ethics

**Scope:** In this lecture, we will examine what Socrates has to say about the practice of medicine and the allocation of medical resources in his perfectly just city. We will discover that, yet again, his proposals are quite radical. Only a very few people will be allowed to have access to medical care. If an otherwise healthy person suffers an injury or an illness that can be treated and if full recovery is possible, then he or she may receive medical care. But if someone has a chronic illness, he or she will simply be left to die. As is typical when reading the *Republic*, confronting this harsh and problematic idea is useful to the contemporary reader who might well be struggling to understand the ethical dilemmas of today’s medicine.

This lecture will conclude with an attempt to defend Socrates’s radical views. The purpose of this defense will be to challenge the student to both articulate and defend his or her own views.

### Outline

- I. The education of the guardians embraces both “gymnastic,” physical education, and “music,” education of the soul. We turn to the body in this lecture.
- II. The guardians must be in extraordinary physical condition. They must be highly disciplined, flexible, and able to undergo any form of military campaign.
  - A. The guardians must be physically disciplined.
  - B. They must have a simple diet of roasted meat and no sweets (404c).
  - C. A symptom of a failed city is its need for many doctors (405a).
- III. The essential elements of Socrates’s “medical ethics” are as follows:
  - A. Illnesses caused by “idleness” are not to be treated. Only wounds and simple, curable illnesses can be treated. (See 405d.)
  - B. The “current art of medicine is an education in disease” (406a).
  - C. In the just city, “no one has the leisure to be sick throughout life” (406c).
  - D. Medicine should treat “those whose bodies are in healthy condition but have some distinct and definite disease in them” (407d).
  - E. Medicine should not treat “bodies diseased through and through” (407d), nor those with “a naturally sickly body” (408a).
  - F. Those deemed unfit to be treated will be allowed to die.

- IV. Socrates has radical views:
- A. He denies that there should be universal access to medical care.
  - B. He denies that access to medical care is a right.
  - C. He would be in favor of euthanasia.
  - D. He affirms the practice of eugenics and abortion.
  - E. He urges that there be a rational allocation of medical resources. Those who can contribute most to the well-being of the city deserve to receive the most medical attention.
  - F. Critics of Plato, including Karl Popper, have accused the *Republic* of being a blueprint for totalitarianism.
- V. Socrates's radical ideas should force us to reflect on our own assumptions.
- A. We are egalitarians, believing that all human beings are by nature equal.
  - B. We believe in natural rights. This is the basis of human equality. All human beings have the right to freedom and dignity.
  - C. We affirm that life itself is good. Socrates disagrees: Only a good life is good.
- VI. For Socrates, the soul (*psuchê*—life, self, personal identity, and so on) is superior to the body.
- A. For Socrates, the good life takes place within the soul (*psuchê*).
  - B. Contemporary society has lost sight of the distinction between life and a good life.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book III.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Campbell, A. *Medical Ethics*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Your uncle is 90 years old. He has a severe case of Alzheimer's and diabetes. He lives in a nursing home at the cost of \$6,000 per month. Is this reasonable?
2. Your aunt is in the late stages of terminal cancer. She has three weeks to live, and they will be spent either in excruciating pain or under such heavy medication that she will be unconscious. She has expressed her eagerness to die. Should a physician be allowed to assist her in committing suicide?
3. Using amniocentesis, a three-month-old fetus has been diagnosed with Down's syndrome. Should the parents abort the fetus?

## Lecture Eight

### Book IV—Justice in the City and Soul

**Scope:** Adeimantus begins Book IV by objecting that the rulers of the putatively just city do not seem very happy. Socrates reminds him that what matters is not the happiness of any individual or group but only the happiness and justice of the entire city. He then returns to, and completes, the city-soul analogy. The city constructed is assumed to be perfectly good and happy. This means that it contains the four “cardinal virtues”: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. The city is wise because its guardians and rulers—the gold-souled people of the noble lie—are wise. It is courageous because the auxiliaries—the silver souls—have the ability to carry out their orders and not flee their posts. It is moderate because the lowest of the citizens—the bronze souls—obey orders and do not wish to have more than what they are given.

Because the city is the soul “written large,” the individual human soul has the same structure as the city. It has three parts: reason, spirit, and desire. We discuss Plato’s psychology, especially his notion of the harmony of the soul.

### Outline

- I. Socrates has completed his “construction” of the just city.
  - A. If the city has been correctly constructed, then it should be perfectly good. (See 427e.)
  - B. If it is perfectly good, then it should be wise, courageous, moderate, and just. These are the traditional cardinal virtues of ancient Greece.
    1. The city is wise because it is ruled by the skill of the guardians (428d).
    2. It is courageous because the soldiers endure any danger in order to follow the orders of their leaders (430a–c).
    3. It is moderate because all citizens restrain their desires in order to follow the orders of their leaders (431a–d).
    4. It is just because each of the citizens is “minding his own business” (433b).
  - C. Justice has really been implicit since the founding of the “original city,” which was based on the principle that each citizen will perform one job.
  - D. Every citizen engages in the practice, that job, for which he is most naturally suited.
    1. Gold-souled citizens, the guardians, must rule.
    2. Silver-souled citizens, the auxiliaries, must assist the rulers.

3. Bronze-souled citizens become “workers” who simply obey orders.
  - E. Justice is the harmonious working of each of the three classes in the city. The just city suffers no “factionalism.”
- II.** Socrates returns to the city-soul analogy.
- A. If the city is tripartite (has three classes), then the soul must have three parts.
  - B. Plato’s “tripartite psychology”: The soul contains reason, spirit, and desire (436a). (Instead of *reason*, Bloom uses the word *calculation*.)
  - C. Socrates offers the following argument (436b–439d):
    1. Imagine a man who is thirsty but refuses to drink (because, for example, his doctor told him not to).
    2. It seems that he both wants to drink and does not want to drink.
    3. But this is impossible: It would be a contradiction.
    4. There must be two parts of the soul at work. The man’s desire pushes him to drink, but his reason restrains him: He thinks he should not drink.
    5. The third part of the soul, “spirit,” is illustrated by the story of Leontius (439e–440b).
  - D. The perfectly good individual, like the perfectly good city, is wise, courageous, moderate, and just (441d–444a).
    1. He is wise because his reason rules him.
    2. He is courageous because his spirit is the loyal ally of his reason.
    3. He is moderate because his desires obey the dictates of reason.
    4. He is just because each part of his soul “minds its own business.”
    5. The just man “arranges himself, becomes his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts, exactly like three notes in a harmonic scale” (443d).
  - E. Injustice is “a certain faction among those three—a meddling interference of a part of the soul against the whole” (444b).
  - F. Justice is “a certain health” (444e) of city and soul.
  - G. Now we know why justice is superior to injustice: because health is superior to disease (445a).
- III.** The city-soul analogy is problematic.
- A. When it comes to the city, it implies that there is a class of citizens who are bereft of reason.
    1. This is both false and incoherent. False because all humans are rational; incoherent because how can anyone obey orders if he or she is irrational?
    2. When it comes to the individual, it implies that “desire” is bereft of reason. This is incoherent.

- B. The analogy is artificial and problematic.
- C. Nonetheless, it has value in thinking about the soul; it is useful and illuminating to think of the soul as having three parts.
- D. The analogy is also useful in thinking about the city.
  - 1. Isn't it true that we would welcome a ruler who has knowledge?
  - 2. That is what is postulated by the tripartite system.
  - 3. One of the most disturbing things about democratic politics is that rulers are chosen by the people; it is rule by opinion, not by knowledge.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book IV.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Lear, Jonathan. "Inside and Outside the Republic," in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 61–95.

Mitchell, B., and J. R. Lucas. *An Engagement with Plato's Republic*, pp. 15–32.

Williams, B. "The Analogy of City and Soul," in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 49–60.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. What happens when you get mad at, and then reprimand, yourself? Does this experience convince you that there are two parts in the soul?
- 2. Are you at all persuaded by the city-soul analogy that rulers should rule with wisdom?

## Lecture Nine

### Book V—Feminism

**Scope:** Socrates is about to begin his discussion of the four unjust regimes and the corresponding four unjust soul types. But before he can do so, he is interrupted. Polemarchus, Adeimantus, and Glaucon demand that Socrates elaborate his proposal that “as for women and children, the things of friends will be in common” (449c). In other words, they demand that Socrates defend his shocking idea that private sexual relationships, and the family itself, be eliminated.

In response, Socrates outlines what he calls three “waves.” These are three conditions that must be met in order for the supposedly just city to come into existence. The first wave is that “men and women must share all pursuits in common” (457c). There will be no gender discrimination when it comes to jobs. Qualified women will be soldiers and rulers. In the context of traditional Athenian society, this is an extraordinary idea. The second wave is the elimination of the family. We will discuss these proposals in the context of the contemporary conception of feminism and ask the question: Is Socrates a feminist? The lecture will conclude with a look at the third wave: that philosophers must rule in order for a city to become just.

### Outline

- I. Socrates is poised to begin his review of the four unjust regimes and the corresponding four unjust soul types.
  - A. He is interrupted. Adeimantus says, “you supposed you’d get away with it by saying, as though it were something quite ordinary, that after all it’s plain to everyone that as for women and children, the things of friends will be in common” (449c).
  - B. Socrates had proposed (at 423e), rather casually, that the private family be eliminated and that sexual relationships be organized with an eye to the well-being of the whole city.
  - C. He is called to task by his young friends.
- II. Socrates must “swim” through three waves in order to demonstrate that his city is both desirable and possible.
  - A. The first wave is: Men and women must perform the same tasks, including fighting and ruling (451d).
    - 1. Women must have the same education as men.
    - 2. This was an absolutely revolutionary idea in 4<sup>th</sup>-century Athens.
  - B. Socrates argues that women and men share the same essential human nature: By nature, they learn.



1. A human being becomes what he or she learns (455b).
  2. There's nothing to prevent a woman from learning anything a man can learn.
  3. In the just city, people should do the jobs they are most qualified to do.
  4. If properly educated, women can do anything men can do. Socrates argues that it is both possible and beneficial for the city to have men and women doing all the same tasks. (See 457c.)
- C. Gender is an "accidental attribute." It is like the difference between "bald" and "longhaired" men (454c). One is no more a man than the other.
- III. Is Plato a "feminist"?**
- A. He defends the equality of men and women by relying on an "essentialist" conception of human nature.
  - B. To be human is to be a "learner."
  - C. Many contemporary feminists would reject such essentialist conceptions as themselves oppressive.
- IV. The second wave is sexual communism. The private family is abolished, and the children are raised by the city without knowing who their biological parents are. (See 457d.)**
- A. Sexual relationships and procreation will be devoted to serving the city.
    1. Gold-souled women must mate with gold-souled men as often as possible. This is a form of eugenics. (See 459d.)
    2. The fact that sexual procreation is being regulated must be hidden from the citizens.
    3. A lottery must be fabricated so that people think that chance is at work in the determination of their sexual partners. (See 460a.)
  - B. Objections can be formulated to Socrates's proposal.
    1. It denies a basic freedom.
    2. It subordinates individual love to the well-being of the city.
    3. It will make incest possible.
  - C. Socrates's proposal can be defended.
    1. "Have we any greater evil for a city than what splits it and makes it many instead of one?" (462a).
    2. Is the "city in which most say 'my own' and 'not my own' about the same thing...the best governed city?" (462c).
    3. The just city is "a community of pleasures and pains" (464a).
- V. The third wave is that philosophers become kings and queens (473d).**
- A. Glaucon is outraged at this proposal (473e–474a).
  - B. Who is the "philosopher-king"?

- C. Philosophy is about love; it is an “erotic” enterprise, which requires energy to pursue the most difficult questions, such as inquiring into the nature of justice.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book V.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Saxonhouse, A. “The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato,” in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato’s Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 95–115.

Vlastos, G. “Was Plato a Feminist?” in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato’s Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 115–129.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do women and men share the same essential “human nature,” or are there natural differences? Do women think differently than men?
2. Formulate your objection to Socrates’s demand that the family be eliminated.

## Lecture Ten

### Book V—Who Is the Philosopher?

**Scope:** We begin the long detour that commences in Book V. In order for a city to be just, the gold-souled citizens must rule, and they must rule with wisdom. But what is wisdom? Socrates begins his discussion with a “personality sketch” of the philosopher, the person who loves wisdom. He or she is someone “who is willing to taste every kind of learning with gusto” (475c). This is not a very specific description; thus, Glaucon demands clarification. In response, Socrates discusses those people who are “lovers of the sight of truth” (475e). He explains that these people are ones who love “beauty itself” (476d)—or, as it is also called, “the Idea of Beauty”—more than particular beautiful objects. In this discussion, we take our first step toward what is typically called Plato’s *theory of Ideas*, the cornerstone of his philosophical worldview.

### Outline

- I. Socrates explains to Glaucon who the philosopher is.
  - A. “When we say a man loves something...he must love all of it” (474c).
    - 1. This comment links the third wave to the first two: It concerns *eros*.
    - 2. The Greek word *philosophia* means “love of wisdom.”
  - B. A wine-lover delights in every kind of wine. Similarly, a wisdom-lover is a “desirer of wisdom, not of one part...but all of it” (475b).
- II. Glaucon objects.
  - A. There are many kinds of people who seem to love wisdom.
  - B. “Lovers of sights...lovers of hearing” (475d) seem to be lovers of wisdom.
- III. Socrates responds.
  - A. “The lovers of hearing and lovers of sight....surely delight in beautiful sounds and colors and shapes...but their thought is unable to see and delight in the nature of beauty itself” (476b).
    - 1. “Lovers of sights” are people who are preoccupied with particulars.
    - 2. “Lovers of sights” are not philosophers.
  - B. A “lover of the sight of truth” (475e), by contrast, “believes that there is something beautiful itself and is able to catch sight both of it and of what participates in it, and doesn’t believe that what participates is it itself, nor that it itself is what participates” (476d).

- C. This is a preliminary sketch of Plato's *theory of Forms*.
    1. The Greek word *eidos* is translated as "form."
    2. The Greek word *idea* is translated as "idea."
    3. Both are derived from the verb *to see*.
  - D. A Form, such as "beauty itself," is the universal; beautiful items, such as the beautiful painting and beautiful sunset, are particulars. They are beautiful by virtue of "participating" in the Form of Beauty.
  - E. A Form is "ontologically" and "epistemologically" superior to the particular.
    1. It depends for its being, its reality, on the Form. This is why the Form is ontologically superior. (The Greek words *to on* mean "being.")
    2. To know that a painting is beautiful requires reference to the Form of Beauty. This is why the form is epistemologically superior. (The Greek word *epistēmē* means "knowledge.")
  - F. Plato's theory of Forms relies on a conception of language.
    1. The words of a language have a general or universal meaning. They do not refer to individuals.
    2. Plato thinks that there are objects to which the words of a language refer.
  - G. Consider the sentence: "The painting is beautiful."
    1. The word "beautiful" does not refer only to the individual painting.
    2. The sunset is also "beautiful" and so is the music.
    3. *Beautiful* is a universal term.
    4. Plato seems to assume that such terms refer to universal objects that exist independently of the language.
    5. There is nothing to say about the painting that would not also apply to some other particular. This means that particulars can never be fully addressed by language.
- IV. Remember that Thrasymachus, the Sophist, was Socrates's main opponent in Book I. He would deny that there are Forms.
- A. For the Sophist, there are no universal objects to which words point.
  - B. For the Sophist, human beings are never able to get beyond language.
  - C. This is why rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is the most powerful form of linguistic practice.
- V. The question of universals, which is prompted by reflection on the nature of language, is the most basic issue in the history of philosophy.
- A. What is the status of universals?
  - B. Are there no universals, only particulars?

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book V.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pp. 217–241.

Mitchell, B., and J. R. Lucas. *An Engagement with Plato's Republic*, pp. 58–70.

Wedberg, A. “The Theory of Ideas,” in G. Vlastos, *Plato I*, pp. 7–16.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. *Form* is an ordinary English word with which we are all familiar. What is your basic sense of what a *form* is?
2. Is Plato right in suggesting that the words of our language refer to universal, language-independent objects? Or do you think that human beings are incapable of “going beyond” language?

## Lecture Eleven

### Book VI—The Ship of State

**Scope:** We begin this lecture by reviewing the basic conceptual elements of Socrates's conception of philosophy: being and becoming, reality and appearance, knowledge and opinion, universal and particular. We then turn to what might be called Socrates's "sociology of philosophy." He explains that in normal cities, philosophers are few and far between and are usually disparaged by the general population. He expresses his view through a parable: that of the ship of state. The *polis* is represented by a ship; the philosopher, by the "true pilot," the one who really understands how to navigate the ship; the citizens are represented by the sailors, who instead of obeying the true pilot, fight to gain control of the rudder. As a result, the ship sails badly and does not succeed in reaching its destination. A proper understanding of Socrates's parable will show that it is one of the most pessimistic interpretations of "real-world" politics ever conceived.

This section is also important to understand an essential point about the *Republic*: Despite the fact that in the ideal city philosophers are the rulers, in "real life," philosophers are unable to enter into politics. This teaching is compatible with what Socrates says in the dialogue *The Apology of Socrates*.

### Outline

- I. The basic elements of Socrates's conception of philosophy include the following:
  - A. There are Forms/Ideas, which are universal, objective, absolute, and stable. They exemplify what Socrates calls "Being."
  - B. There are particulars, which are dependent, multiple, and fleeting. They exemplify what Socrates calls "Becoming."
  - C. The distinction between Being and Becoming is an old one that goes back to Parmenides.
- II. How is Socrates's conception of philosophy applied to actual politics?
  - A. Socrates explains his parable of the ship of state (488a–489a).
    1. The city is like a ship, owned by someone ignorant of seamanship.
    2. The sailors compete against one another in order to gain control of the ship (to gain the rudder).
    3. The sailor who wins this competition becomes the pilot of the ship. (*Kubernêtês*, which is the root of our word *governor*, means "pilot.")

4. But this pilot knows nothing about seamanship; he knows only how to gain control of the rudder (that is, political power).
  5. The “true pilot” (489a) spends his time studying the stars, the weather patterns, and so on. He is, therefore, singularly ill equipped to compete against the other sailors for the rudder. The true pilot is destined never to be the actual pilot of the ship.
- B. How is the parable applied to actual politics? In a democracy, for example, only those who are good at winning elections—rather than ruling—get elected.
  - C. The “true pilot” is the philosopher, destined to be dismissed by the “sailors” as useless.
  - D. This parable presents a very pessimistic view of politics.

### III. Socrates criticizes actual cities.

- A. He describes what he calls “the necessity of the viciousness of the many” (489e).
  1. Most people do not have the requisite nature to become philosophers.
  2. A multitude cannot “accept or believe that the beautiful itself, rather than the many beautiful things...is” (494a).
  3. Potential philosophers are corrupted by the many and the city (492c). They are turned toward politics (for example, they become “lawyers.”)
  4. Therefore, in actual cities, there are virtually no philosophers.
  5. Men who are not truly philosophers pose as philosophers (495d).
  6. In actual cities, the true philosopher “minds his own business, like a man who in a storm, when dust and rain are blown about by the wind, stands aside under a little wall. Seeing others filled with lawlessness, he is content if somehow he himself can live his life here pure of injustice” (496d).
  7. The challenge is how to integrate philosophy into the city (497d). Socrates seems to think the philosopher-ruler is possible: “For it’s not impossible that it comes to pass” (499d).
  8. But the “ship of state” parable calls this assertion into question. It implies that philosophers cannot successfully enter politics, that most people can’t be philosophers, and that philosophers can be corrupted by the city.
- B. *The Apology of Socrates*, which contains Plato’s version of Socrates’s defense at his trial, also calls into question the notion that philosophers can be political. There, Socrates insists that the truly just man must lead a private, not a political, life.
  1. Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens.

2. Plato seems to imply that there is a sense in which Socrates was a corrupting influence, in that he would question the city's interests and, perhaps, foster negative attitudes toward politics.
- C. But Plato also suggests that the way to bring philosophers and the city back together is for philosophers to become rulers.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book VI.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Plato. *The Apology of Socrates*.

Strauss, L. *The City and Man*, pp. 50–56.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you share the pessimism implicit in Socrates's parable of the ship of state?
2. What sort of knowledge do you think rulers must have in order to rule well? Must they know, for example, political science?



## Lecture Twelve

### Book VI—The Idea of the Good

**Scope:** Socrates has been evading the all-important question: What does the philosopher-ruler actually know? He finally reveals it in Book VI: It is “the Idea of the Good” (505a). We were introduced to the theory of Ideas (also called the theory of Forms) at the end of Book V, a section we will briefly review. We will then discuss the highest of all Ideas, what might even be termed “the Idea of Ideas,” namely that of the Good. Socrates compares it to the sun, and we will discuss this comparison in detail. We will try to make sense of the mysterious description of the Good: It is “the cause of knowledge and truth” (508e) but beyond them both. Indeed, “the Good isn’t being but is still beyond being.”

Plato’s Idea of the Good is, in some ways, similar to the biblical God. It is an absolute Being that is eternal. As a result, subsequent religious thinkers, for example, Saint Augustine, saw a deep kinship between Platonism and the religion they embraced. But they also understood the deep differences. We will conclude this lecture by discussing both.

### Outline

- I. The next step in the dialogue is to explain what subjects the rulers should engage in. What must the philosopher-ruler know?
- II. “The Idea of the Good is the greatest study” (505a).
  - A. If someone does not have sufficient knowledge of the Idea of the Good, nothing else will have value.
    1. For example, most things we think are good (such as money) are actually neutral.
    2. Money can be used badly and harm its possessor. For money to have value, it must be used correctly.
    3. Correct use requires knowledge of the Idea of the Good.
  - B. The many, the majority of people, think the good is pleasure (505b).
    1. Pleasure is a reasonable candidate for “the good” (*to agathon*).
    2. Such thinkers as Mill hold that pleasure is the ultimate object of human desire.
    3. The position that holds pleasure as the highest good is *hedonism*.
  - C. Socrates’s refuted the idea of hedonism:
    1. Not all pleasures are good. Some are bad.
    2. If not all pleasures are good, pleasure itself is measured by a higher standard. Therefore, it is not the highest good.

- III. The Good is psychologically ultimate.
  - A. When it comes to the Good, people want the “real thing.” No one is satisfied with what just seems or appears to be good (505d).
    - 1. But the Good, above all else, must be known.
    - 2. If the Good is not known, then the just and beautiful cannot be known (506a).
  - B. The perfectly just city requires a guardian who knows the Good.
- IV. Socrates seems to be trying to avoid the question: What is the Good? Glaucon demands that he deal with it (506d).
  - A. Socrates refuses, but he agrees to describe “a child of the good” (506e). He begins by dividing reality into two “regions”:
    - 1. The visible region contains much that is beautiful and good (507b). These are particular, sensible things that are seen but not “intellected.”
    - 2. The intelligible region contains those things, such as the Forms/Ideas, that are “intellected but not seen” (507b).
  - B. Light is required for particular things to be seen in the visible region.
    - 1. The sun is the cause of light.
    - 2. The sun is responsible for the existence of living beings (508c).
  - C. Truth is required for intelligible things to be intellected.
    - 1. The Idea of the Good is the cause of knowledge and truth (508e).
    - 2. The sun not only provides the light that enables us to see visible things, but it also makes things grow. It is the cause of existence, not just vision.
    - 3. Analogously, the Good is the cause not just of intelligibility but of being.
    - 4. “The good isn’t being, but is still beyond being” (508b).
  - D. The Idea of the Good is inaccessible.
- V. The following are some general reflections on the Idea of the Good.
  - A. It has great ontological significance. It is the fundamental principle of Being.
  - B. It has great epistemological significance. It is what makes knowledge possible.
  - C. It is the source of all value in the world, and thus, it has great moral significance.
  - D. The Idea of the Good is both similar to and different from the biblical God.
    - 1. It is similar because both God and the Good are ultimate Beings that are perfect and eternal.
    - 2. For this reason, an early Christian thinker such as Saint Augustine (354–430 C.E.) was greatly impressed and influenced by Plato.

3. But he also understood that unlike the Christian God, the Good was lifeless, cold, and incapable of love.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book VI.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pp. 242–272.

Saint Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VII.

Mill, J. S. *Utilitarianism*.

Murdoch, I. "The Sovereignty of the Good," in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 169–180.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you agree with Socrates's argument that pleasure cannot possibly be the highest good?
2. Socrates's description of the Idea of the Good seems to imply that reality itself is saturated in value. Does this seem plausible to you?

## Timeline

### B.C.E.

|         |       |   |
|---------|-------|---|
| 750–700 | ..... | The approximate dates of Homer and Hesiod.  |
| 585     | ..... | Thales predicts a solar eclipse. The beginning of Western philosophy.   |
| 508     | ..... | Cleisthenes enacts basic reforms, which start to move Athens toward democracy.  |
| 490     | ..... | Greeks defeat Persians at the Battle of Marathon.   |
| 480     | ..... | Greeks defeat Persians at Salamis.  |
| 478     | ..... | Formation of the Delian League, an alliance of Greek city-states dominated by Athens.   |
| 469     | ..... | Birth of Socrates.  |
| 469     | ..... | Pericles ascends to power in Athens.  |
| 456     | ..... | Death of Aeschylus, the tragedian.  |
| 432     | ..... | Parthenon completed.  |
| 431     | ..... | Beginning of the Peloponnesian War.   |
| 429     | ..... | Death of Pericles.  |
| 429     | ..... | Birth of Plato.   |
| 406     | ..... | Death of Sophocles, the tragedian.  |
| 406     | ..... | Death of Euripides, the tragedian.  |
| 405–404 | ..... | Athenians lose a decisive battle to the Spartans at Aegospotami. Restoration of Athenian democracy. End of the Peloponnesian War. |
| 404–403 | ..... | Tyranny of the Thirty in Athens.  |
| 399     | ..... | Socrates executed.  |
| 388     | ..... | Plato makes his first visit to Sicily, where he befriends Dion, a relative of Dionysius I, the ruler of Syracuse.                 |
| 386     | ..... | Plato founds his school in Athens, known as the Academy.  |

- 385 ..... Death of Aristophanes, the comic poet.
- 368 ..... Aristotle enters the Academy.
- 367 ..... Dionysius I dies and is succeeded by  
Dionysius II. Plato visits and tries to educate  
Dionysius II. He fails.
- 348 ..... Death of Plato.
- 322 ..... Death of Aristotle.

## Glossary

***Aristokratia***: “aristocracy.” Literally, the “rule of the best.” The perfectly just city, ruled by philosophers, is meant to be such a regime.

***Aristos***: “best.”

***Arithmos***: “number.” Root of our word *arithmetic*. The crucial first subject studied by the philosopher-kings.

***Dêmokratia***: “democracy.” Literally, the “rule of the people.” Plato is famously critical of democracy.

***Dêmos***: “the people.”

***Dialetikê***: “dialectic.” This is the ultimate subject studied by Plato’s philosopher-kings. It is a study of the formal structure of all reality.

***Dianoia***: “thought.” The cognitive activity found at the second highest stage of the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of mathematical objects.

***Eidos***: “form.” Derived from the Greek verb *idein*, which means “to see,” *eidos* literally means the “look” of a thing. It is a technical term for Plato and refers to the intelligible objects that give reality its structure.

***Eikasia***: “imagination.” This is the cognitive activity found at the bottom of the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of images.

***Eikones***: “images.” The root of our word *icon*.

***Elenchus***: “refutation.” Socrates was famous for refuting people by showing how their positions contained contradictions.

***Epistêmê***: “knowledge” or “science.” Root of our word *epistemology*, which means “the study of knowledge.”

***Eros***: “love, desire.” A crucial concept for Plato. The philosopher is an erotic person because he or she loves wisdom.

***Idea***: “idea” or “form.” Synonymous with *eidos*, it is also derived from the verb *to see*.

***Kalon***: “beautiful” or “fine.” The Greek word has both aesthetic and moral connotations.

***Kratê***: “power, rule.” The root of the suffix of such words as *democracy* and *aristocracy*.

***Noêsis***: “intellection.” The highest cognitive activity, found at the top segment of the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of Forms.

***Oligarchia***: “rule by the wealthy few.” One of the “mistaken” regimes Socrates describes.

**Oligos:** “few.” Root of the word *oligarchy*, rule by the wealthy few.

**Philosophia:** “love of wisdom.”

**Pistis:** “trust.” The second-to-lowest cognitive activity found on the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of sensible objects.

**Polis:** “city.” Root of our word *political*. The Greek *polis* was a “city-state,” an independent and self-sufficient political entity.

**Politeia:** “republic, regime.” The organizing principle of a *polis*.

**Psuchê:** “soul.” Root of our word *psychology*, the study of the soul.

**Sophia:** “wisdom.” Root of our word *philosophy*, the love of wisdom.

**Technê:** “art, craft.” Root of our words *technical* and *technology*.

**Timê:** “honor.” What a spirited man such as Glaucon desires.

**Timokratia:** “rule by those who love honor.” One of the “mistaken regimes” Socrates discusses.

**To Agathon:** “the Good.” The supreme principle of Platonic philosophy. Also called “the Idea of the Good.”

**To On:** “being.” Root of our word *ontology*, the study of being.

## Biographical Notes

**Adeimantus:** Brother of Plato, major character in the *Republic*. His dates are unknown, but he is presumed to be older than both Plato and Glaucon.

**Aeschylus (525–456):** The first great tragic poet and a loyal Athenian patriot.

**Aristophanes (455–386):** The greatest Athenian comic poet. In his play “The Assembly of Women,” proposals are made concerning the role of women that are similar to ones made in the *Republic*.

**Aristotle (384–322):** One of the greatest philosophers in Western history. He came from his home in Stagira, near Macedon, to study with Plato for 20 years, then founded his own school in Athens.

**Cephalus:** A wealthy arms manufacturer who migrated to the Piraeus from Syracuse. The conversation of the *Republic* takes place in his home.

**Cleitophon:** Appears briefly in Book I of the *Republic*. Plutarch reports that he was initially an associate of Socrates who eventually rejected the philosopher’s influence. Plato wrote a short dialogue titled *The Cleitophon*.

**Dion (408–354):** Brother-in-law of Dionysius I, the ruler of Syracuse. He was impressed by Plato when the philosopher visited in 389 and tried to make Dionysius II a philosopher-king.

**Dionysius I (430–367):** Ruler of Syracuse.

**Dionysius II (397–336):** Eldest son of Dionysius I. Plato’s attempt to educate him and mold him into a philosopher-king failed.

**Euripides (480–406):** Athenian tragic playwright of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

**Glaucon:** Plato’s brother and, after Socrates, the major character of the *Republic*.

**Gorgias (483–376):** From Leontini, one of the earliest and greatest Greek Sophists. He taught rhetoric. Thrasymachus seems to embrace some of his views in Book I of the *Republic*.

**Hesiod (wrote around 700):** After Homer, the second greatest epic poet of ancient Greece. His most important work is the *Theogony*, which is heavily censored by Socrates in Book II of the *Republic*.

**Homer (wrote some time around 700):** The greatest of the ancient Greek epic poets. His *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were fundamental in the development of Western literature. His work is censored by Socrates in Book II of the *Republic*.

**Isocrates (436–338):** Prominent and influential Athenian rhetorician. His school in Athens was the chief rival to Plato’s Academy.



**Pericles** (495-429): The most influential Athenian statesman during the greatest period in Athenian history. Architect of the Peloponnesian War.

**Plato** (429-347): Great Athenian philosopher. Son of rich and powerful parents. Was influenced by Socrates. Created his own school, "The Academy." Wrote approximately 25 dialogues, and 13 letters. Arguably the most influential philosopher in Western history.

**Polemarchus**: Son of Cephalus. Executed by the Tyranny of the Thirty in 404.

**Protagoras** (c. 490–420): From Abdera, the first of the Greek Sophists. Thrasymachus, in Book I of the *Republic*, seems to share his relativistic position.

**Socrates** (469–399): Plato's philosophical inspiration. He was famous for interrogating his fellow Athenians by asking them questions, such as "What is justice?" He was executed by the Athenian democracy in 399, probably because the citizens associated him with the Tyranny of the Thirty.

**Sophocles** (496–406): The great tragic playwright of 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athens.

**Thales** (625?–547?): Widely considered to be the first philosopher in the Western tradition. Legend has it that he correctly predicted an eclipse in 585.

**Thrasymachus** (wrote 430–400): A professional teacher of rhetoric. He is featured in Book I of the *Republic* as Socrates's Sophistic opponent *par excellence*.

## Bibliography

### Essential Reading:

There are many fine translations of Plato's *Republic*. The most literal and the one cited throughout this course is:

*Plato's Republic*. Translation by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Other good translations are:

*Plato: The Republic*. Translation by T. Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. This book has a good introduction and glossary of terms.

*Plato's Republic*. Translation by G. Grube and C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

*Plato: The Republic*. Translation by R. Sterling and W. Scott. New York: Norton, 1985.

### Supplementary Reading:

A mountain of secondary literature has been produced on the *Republic*. What follows below is a very small sample. Most of the books cited below are explicitly designed as introductions, and they should be consulted first.

Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. A difficult but excellent overview of the *Republic*.

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Dillon, John, ed. *The Greek Sophists*. New York: Penguin, 2003. The most recent collection of the remaining writings of the Greek Sophists. It should be consulted by anyone interested in the relativism of Thrasymachus.

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Hesiod. *The Theogony*. There are many translations of this, one of the earliest Greek poems. It tells the story of the birth of the gods and is targeted for censorship by Socrates in Book II of the *Republic*.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Originally published in 1651, this is one of the founding texts in the history of modern political philosophy.

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Honderich, Ted, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. An excellent source book that contains clear, short introductions to basic philosophical concepts and figures.

Howland, Jacob. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2004. An excellent introduction to the dialogue that pays particular attention to its literary form. It also has a good glossary and timeline.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Time Books, 1963. One of the greatest 20<sup>th</sup>-century dystopia novels. Some would argue that the just city of Plato's *Republic* is dystopic.

Kant, Immanuel. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Many translations are available of this work, first published in 1785 and one of the most influential works in the history of moral philosophy. Kant famously argues here that lying can never be morally justified.

Klein, Jacob. *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965. This book contains (on pages 115–125) the best short explanation of the divided line that I have encountered.

Kraut, Richard, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Contains 15 essays on Plato's thought. Some are difficult, but all were written for this volume, which is designed as an introduction to Platonic scholarship.

———, ed. *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. A collection of 13 essays about the *Republic*. Several were cited in this course, including David Sachs, “A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*”; Bernard Williams, “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*”;

Jonathan Lear, “Inside and Outside the *Republic*”; Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of the Good”; Arlene Saxonhouse, “The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato”; Gregory Vlastos, “Was Plato a Feminist?”

Lane, Melissa. *Plato's Progeny: How Plato and Socrates Still Captivate the Modern Mind*. London: Duckworth, 2001. Designed for the general reader, this book gives a glimpse of Plato's influence on the modern world.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Written in 1513, this is, with Hobbes's *Leviathan*, generally considered to be a foundational text in the history of modern political philosophy. Thrasymachus's position on justice seems, at times, to foreshadow Machiavelli's views.

Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Written in 1848, this short work spells out some of the basic tenets of modern communism, a position perhaps foreshadowed in Books II–IV of Plato's *Republic*.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Written in 1863, this is Mill's classic explanation of the moral position of utilitarianism.

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Vlastos, Gregory, ed. *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology*. New York: Anchor Books, 1971. A collection of 13 essays on Plato's metaphysics and epistemology. Some are too technical for the general reader, but the first three are useful as introductions to Plato's theory of Ideas.



**Plato's *Republic***  
**Part II**  
**David Roochnik, Ph.D.**



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## David Roochnik, Ph.D.

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From 1982 to 1995, Professor Roochnik taught at Iowa State University. In 1995, he moved to Boston University, where he teaches in both the Department of Philosophy and the “core curriculum,” an undergraduate program in the humanities. In 1999, he won the Metcalf Prize, awarded for excellence in teaching at Boston University.

Professor Roochnik has written three books on Plato: *The Tragedy of Reason: Toward a Platonic Conception of Logos* (Routledge, 1991), *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* (Penn State Press, 1996), and *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's "Republic"* (Cornell University Press, 2003). In addition, he has published *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2004). In 2002, he produced *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy* for The Teaching Company. He is presently working on a book on Aristotle.

Professor Roochnik is married to Gina Crandell, a professor of landscape architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design. He is the father of Lena Crandell, a freshman at Vassar College, and Shana Crandell, a sophomore at Brookline High School.

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## Plato's *Republic*

### Scope:

In this course, we will explore Plato's *Republic* (written in approximately 380 B.C.E.), which is the first, and arguably the most influential, work in the history of Western political philosophy. In it, Socrates, the hero of Plato's dialogue, addresses such fundamental questions as: What is justice? What is the role of education in politics? Is censorship of music and literature ever justifiable? What sort of person should rule the state? Is it ever permissible for a ruler to lie to the citizens? Should citizens be allowed full freedom when it comes to sexual relationships and private property? Are all citizens equal before the law? Should women be given the same political opportunities as men? Should everyone have equal access to health care? Socrates's answers to these and other questions will occasionally be shocking to modern ears, but they will always be thought-provoking.

The *Republic* consists of 10 "books" (or chapters), and it is divided into 4 parts. Book I is a prologue that introduces the cast of characters, of whom Socrates is far and away the most important. It also raises the issues that will be taken up in the remainder of the dialogue, the two most important of which are: What is justice, and why should anyone prefer being just rather than being unjust? To answer these questions, Socrates suggests that he and his conversation partners construct a hypothetical "city in speech," an ideal city that they agree is just. (The Greek word for "city" is *polis*, which is the root of the word *political*. The *polis* was the basic political community in ancient Greece. For us, it is the "state.") Because a city is a large structure, this perfectly just city, even if it exists only in thought, will allow the nature of justice itself to become an object of study. The second part of the *Republic*, which is found in Books II–IV, is thus, devoted to the "construction" of an ideal political regime.

The regime Socrates constructs is a tightly controlled one, in which cultural activity is strictly regulated, poetry is censored, physical education is emphasized, a rigid class system is enforced, and the private family is eliminated. Needless to say, these proposals will cause readers to object. Readers will find, however, that even if they disagree with what Socrates recommends, developing arguments against his proposals is a most valuable exercise. They will be forced to think through basic assumptions concerning politics in this course. For example, almost all of us believe that political freedom is a good thing and that all citizens should be counted as equal before the law. But why? Plato will encourage us to defend our most cherished beliefs.

Unlike in a democracy, where rulers are elected on the basis of their popular appeal, in Socrates's regime, the only criterion for ruling is being extremely intelligent and knowledgeable, or as he puts it, being "wise." Because of this, the *Republic* takes a gigantic detour. In order to understand what it means to be a ruler, one must understand what wisdom is. For this reason, the third part of

the *Republic*, Books V–VII, turns away from overtly political questions and concentrates instead on the nature of “philosophy” (which literally means “the love of wisdom”). In this part of the dialogue, Socrates offers some of his most profound and concentrated reflections on philosophical issues. We learn, for example, about the relationship between particulars (such as the beautiful painting that is hanging on the wall) and universals (Beauty itself). We learn about the relationship between the words of our language and the things in the world that these words name. Socrates discusses the nature of mathematics and the difference between images (such as a photograph) and “originals” (the object the photograph is of). He also addresses the single most important principle in all of Plato’s philosophy, what he calls “the Idea of the Good,” the supreme principle of all reality.

In reading Books V–VII of the *Republic*, students will be exposed to the heart of Platonism. As a consequence, in this course, they will receive an introduction not only to political philosophy but to philosophy in general.

The last part of the *Republic*, Books VIII–X, takes us back to a discussion of politics. Socrates examines those political regimes that are inferior to the ideal. These include the timocracy, a rule by those few men who have achieved honor in battle; oligarchy, rule by the wealthy few; democracy, rule by the people; and tyranny, which is the worst of all possible regimes. This section of the dialogue is rich with insightful observations about “the real world.” For example, in discussing oligarchy, we will learn a great deal about the role money plays in people’s lives. When Socrates addresses “rule by the people,” he will offer some of the sharpest, and most controversial, criticisms of democracy ever written. And when he discusses the tyrant, he will teach us much about the corrupting influence of power.

Throughout the course, we will discuss how reading the *Republic* can generate a discussion of the most pressing contemporary issues. We will, for example, discuss Plato’s “medical ethics” and see how they might apply in today’s world. We will also discuss how penetrating was his analysis of tyranny, for we will compare what Socrates says about the tyrant to Saddam Hussein.

Reading the 10 books of Plato’s *Republic* is like taking a journey. We will move from book to book, from idea to idea, and in doing so, we will touch upon some of the most basic questions that human beings can ask about themselves and the political communities in which they live. This is a comprehensive, a truly great book, and in this course, we will try to study it with the care it deserves.

## Lecture Thirteen

### Book VI—The Divided Line

**Scope:** Socrates’s description of the Idea of the Good is alluring but hardly clear. To elaborate and clarify, he draws a figure: a line that is divided into four sections. On one side of the line, he places various cognitive activities: intellection, thought, trust, and imagination. On the other side of the line, he places the objects of these cognitive activities: ideas, mathematical objects, sensible objects, and images. This short passage, which occupies only two pages (509d–511e), is the most concise summary of Plato’s conception of reality. Initially, it will seem quite difficult to understand, and although it never becomes crystal clear, by discussing it in detail, it will become accessible.

### Outline

**I.** Socrates draws a “divided line” (509d–511e):

The Idea of the Good

|                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A. Forms ( <i>eidê</i> )     | Intellection ( <i>noêsis</i> ) |
| B. Mathematical Objects      | Thought ( <i>dianoia</i> )     |
| C. Sensible Things           | Trust ( <i>pistis</i> )        |
| D. Images ( <i>eikones</i> ) | Imagination ( <i>eikasia</i> ) |

**II.** The key to understanding the divided line is to begin at the bottom.

- A.** Images are dependent upon sensible things. Sensible things are the “originals” of which images are images.
  1. An example is a shadow and the hand that casts the shadow.
  2. Sensible things are “higher” than images. Images depend on sensible things but not vice versa.
  3. This relationship between image and original is found throughout the divided line.
- B.** Sensible things are images of mathematical objects.
  1. The number 3 can count three apples or three oranges.
  2. The items counted vary, but the number remains constant.
  3. The number is responsible for sensible things being countable and, therefore, for being intelligible.

4. In this sense, numbers are “higher” than sensible objects.
  5. The extraordinary result of this move is that the sensible world, the world that we trust as most real, is in fact, “only” an image.
- C. Mathematical objects are images of Forms.
1. This is probably the single most difficult concept to grasp in Plato’s *Republic*.
  2. In what way would numbers, for example, depend on Forms?
- D. Forms are images of the Idea of the Good.
1. It is possible, as many commentators have thought, that “the Good” is “the One.”
  2. “The One” is responsible for the intelligibility of all numbers.
- III. Because this concept is still extremely hard to understand, Socrates gives an example: the three fingers (523c–d).
- A. There are three fingers: the pinky, which is shortest; the ring finger; and the middle finger, which is longest.
- B. The ring finger is longer than the pinky but shorter than the middle finger.
1. This finger is both longer and shorter.
  2. It is impossible to resolve this contradiction on the level of what Socrates calls “trust,” that is, sensation alone. Simply looking at the ring finger does not stop it from being both longer and shorter.
- C. For this contradiction to be stabilized, one must count and measure.
1. We can measure the length of the three fingers. Let’s say that the pinky is one inch long; the ring finger, two inches; and the middle finger, three inches.
  2. What had been a contradiction on the level of “trust” or sensation can be resolved on the level of “thought.” We know why the ring finger is both longer and shorter: It is two inches long.
- D. The simple act of counting and measuring implies the movement up the line from level C to level B.
1. This is the move when the sensible world, which we normally take for granted, is transformed into an image of a higher reality.
  2. Perhaps the best way to understand what Socrates has in mind is to think of a law of physics. It is expressed in a mathematical formula, but it makes intelligible the way things move.
- E. The extraordinary move from B to A, from mathematical objects to Forms, is an extension of this move.

1. This move requires resistance to “intellectual gravity,” from the temptation to move back down from B to C. The “arts,” or *technê*, which are those subjects that use applied mathematics, move downward.
2. Philosophy is a turning around, a moving upward when ordinary thought would normally move downward. It is a search for ultimate intelligible structures of reality.

**IV.** How should we define the notion of *dialectic* (511b)?

- A. When the philosopher has worked his or her way up to the top of the line, namely to the Idea of the Good, he or she then goes back down.
- B. But this downward journey is not like that of the arts.
- C. This is what Socrates calls *dialectic*.
  1. “Making no use of anything sensed in any way, but using forms themselves, going through forms to forms, it ends in forms too” (511c).
  2. Again, it is very difficult to understand what this means.
  3. The divided line seems to offer an image of what the philosophical project is. It is a formal articulation of the whole of reality.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book VI.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, pp. 242–272.

Howland, J. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 119–149.

Klein, J. *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, pp. 115–125.

Mitchell, B., and J. R. Lucas. *An Engagement with Plato’s Republic*, pp. 88–106.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s Republic*, pp. 34–40.

Roochnik, D. *Retrieving the Ancients*, pp. 126–134.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do all images depend on some “original”? In other words, are all images “images of something”?
2. Socrates implies that the sensible world is no more than an image of a higher, non-sensible reality. Does this idea of a “higher reality” make sense to you?

## Lecture Fourteen

### Book VII—The Parable of the Cave

**Scope:** Perhaps because he realizes how difficult it was for Glaucon and Adeimantus—and for us, the readers—to understand the Idea of the Good and the divided line, Socrates tells another parable: that of the cave. It is an extended image that is meant to explain the extraordinarily abstract material we have discussed in the previous four lectures and to reconnect the philosophical concerns of this section with the general concern with politics that animated the dialogue from the beginning.

We are like prisoners in cave, shackled and forced to stare at a wall on which are projected shadows cast by objects illuminated by a fire. The process of education is a turning around, a seeing of reality for what it is. When a prisoner is liberated, he or she—and don't forget that Socrates is a feminist!—goes upward and sees the fire that has been responsible for the shadows. Finally, the prisoner makes it to the world above, where he or she sees the sun—and don't forget that the sun is an image of the Idea of the Good! We will explore the parable in detail.

### Outline

- I. The parable of the cave can be outlined as follows (514a-521b):
  - A. There are prisoners in a cave, whose legs and necks are chained so that they can only face forward.
  - B. On the wall in front of them are images, which are shadows cast by puppets being carried behind the prisoners. A fire provides the light that causes the shadows to appear on the wall.
  - C. These “strange prisoners” are “like us” (515a).
    1. This is a reference to the divided line.
    2. Most human beings treat sensible objects as if they were real, when in fact, they are images.
    3. This is what Socrates meant by “trust.” We trust—that is, we unreflectively believe—that what we can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell is real.
  - D. The cave is something like a contemporary movie theatre.
    1. This comparison between the cave and a movie theatre is meant to provoke reflection on the monumental role images play in contemporary culture.
    2. We live in a world of TV, computers, movies—visual images.



**II. Education is a “turning around.”**

- A.** A prisoner is released and “compelled” (515c) to stand up and turn around.
  - 1.** This is a painful procedure.
  - 2.** The prisoner is “dazzled” when he looks at the fire: He cannot see clearly.
  - 3.** Eventually, the prisoner must admit that what he had thought was real is not.
- B.** The prisoner is “dragged” (515e) out of the cave and forced into the light of the sun.
- C.** Gradually, he becomes able to see the things of the “real world” without pain.
  - 1.** Eventually, he can even glance at the sun.
  - 2.** The sun represents the Idea of the Good.
- D.** Philosophical education is not the accumulation of new information. It is, instead, a “revolution,” a turning around.
  - 1.** Philosophical education requires the student to become fundamentally suspicious of conventional conceptions of reality.
  - 2.** Perhaps this is why Socrates uses so many images and tells stories: to inspire the student to turn around.

**III. The liberated prisoner is unwilling to return to the cave.**

- A.** The liberated prisoner is “compelled” (519c) to return to the cave in order to illuminate it. The parable of the cave is the story of “enlightenment.”
- B.** Glaucon wonders whether forcing the liberated prisoner, who is the philosopher, to return to the cave is unjust. (See 519d.)
- C.** Socrates responds that the goal is not the happiness or well-being of any individual citizen but the well-being of the whole city. Therefore, the liberated prisoners—that is, the philosophers—will be forced to return to the cave and rule.
  - 1.** A basic principle to be derived here is that the best city is the one ruled by those who are least eager to rule.
  - 2.** A basic requirement for a well-governed city is that within it, there must be a conception of a life better than the political life and a conception of reality that is better than human or political reality (521a).

**IV. An interesting exercise is to map all the objects in the cave parable on to the divided line. The following questions may make this more difficult to do:**

- A.** Who are the “puppet-handlers” (514a)?

- B. What does the fire represent?
- C. What is the value of seeing the sun to prisoners in a cave?
- D. Must an injustice be done to the philosopher? If so, is there a serious flaw in the *Republic*?

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book VII.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Howland, J. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 132–149.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you spend a lot of time watching TV and on the Internet? If so, are you aware of the role images play in your life?
2. Do we really want a leader who is “above” the citizens?

## Lecture Fifteen

### Book VII—The Education of the Guardians

**Scope:** In Book VII, Socrates outlines the curriculum that the guardians study. It is composed of five mathematical subjects—arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, and harmonics—and culminates in the study of what Socrates calls *dialectic*. In this lecture, we will concentrate on a general question: Why is mathematics so important in the education of the guardians? Doing so will allow us to review, one last time, the crucial passages concerning the Idea of the Good and the divided line. We will, in other words, complete our overview of Plato’s theory of Ideas and his conception of education.

#### Outline

- I. The *Republic* reaches its pinnacle at the Book VI discussion of the Idea of the Good and the divided line. The descent begins at the beginning of Book VII.
  - A. We turn to the specific elements of the education of the philosopher-rulers.
  - B. The guardians must study a subject that “draws the soul from becoming to being” (521d).
    1. They begin with “the lowly business of distinguishing the one, the two, and the three. I mean by this, number” (522c).
    2. *Arithmos* is translated as “number.” It’s the root of *arithmetic*.
    3. The rulers do not study mathematics in order to apply it. Instead, they “turn around.”
    4. They engage in the pure, theoretical study of numbers and have no interest in practical or useful benefits of mathematics.
  - C. After arithmetic, the rulers study plane geometry, solid geometry, theoretical astronomy, and harmonics.
- II. Mathematics plays an important role in Plato’s philosophy.
  - A. Mathematics is preparation for dialectic.
  - B. The theory of Forms projects the qualities of mathematical objects onto “intelligible entities,” such as Beauty, Justice, and the Good.
    1. Mathematics is universal and “fair.”
    2. Mathematics projects an intelligible realm of agreement and harmony.
    3. The moral-political benefit of mathematics is that it establishes a common project, a shared realm.

4. Mathematics is a great equalizer. For Plato, this seems to have been an inspiration for learning in general.
5. For Plato, mathematics is fundamental to a philosophical soul.
6. Mathematics was important in Plato's Academy.

**III.** *Dialectic* is the study of Forms and is inspired by the question that Socrates is famous for asking. But dialectic is potentially dangerous (537b–541b).

- A. Dialectic is potentially dangerous for young people: It would encourage them to question conventional wisdom.
  1. An excellent example of this danger is found in Plato's dialogue *The Charmides*.
  2. This dialogue features a promising young man named Charmides, who is accompanied by his uncle, Critias.
  3. Socrates asks, "What is moderation?" This is one of the four cardinal virtues.
  4. Socrates refutes every answer Charmides and Critias offer.
  5. Charmides and Critias later become members of the Tyranny of the Thirty.
- B. Therefore, in Socrates's city, dialectic is reserved for mature people.

**IV.** Is the just city possible?

- A. Socrates admits that the things he has been discussing about his ideal just city are difficult but not impossible (540b).
- B. In the final condition of the possibility of the just city, Socrates advocates that everyone older than 10 must be "sent out to the country" (541a), meaning that they will be killed. The rulers will take over the children.
  1. This last condition is horrifying.
  2. Does Plato take it seriously? Or is it part of his demonstration that the just city is, in fact, neither possible nor desirable?

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book VII.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Mueller, I. "Mathematical Method and Philosophical Truth," in R. Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, pp. 170–199.

Plato, *Charmides*.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, pp. 69–77.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you think a rigorous training in mathematics is actually the best preparation for a political ruler?
2. Do you think it is dangerous for younger people to engage in dialectic? In other words, is it dangerous for them to ask philosophical questions, or should this activity be encouraged?

## Lecture Sixteen

### Book VIII—The Perfectly Just City Fails

**Scope:** As we move away from the third part of the *Republic*—the enormous philosophical detour of Books V–VII—and begin our return to the discussion of actual politics, we learn something surprising about Socrates’s conception of the perfectly just city: It is doomed to fail. We discuss two reasons why. The first was mentioned in the previous lecture: In order for the perfectly just city to come into being, there must be a “clean slate”; thus, all citizens over the age of 10 will be removed from the city. This is monstrous, and Socrates could only have meant it ironically. What he is doing is showing that the perfectly just city is an impossible fiction, one that he himself would not wish to come into existence. Second, in order for the city to function properly, sexual relationships must be completely regulated by the rulers. Socrates explains that, in fact, this is impossible. The rulers fail to achieve the “marriage number,” the scientific ability to control reproduction, or what today we would call *eugenics*. This lecture will explore the decline of the just city and prepare us for the next part of the *Republic*: an exploration of the “mistaken,” the less-than-perfect regimes.

#### Outline

- I. We begin where the last lecture ended: “all those in the city who happen to be older than ten” will be sent “to the country” (541a).
  - A. Because the perfectly just city requires a comprehensive re-education of all citizens, it must begin with a “clean slate.”
  - B. Being “sent to the country” must mean “be killed.”
  - C. The perfectly just city is ruthlessly revolutionary.
    1. A comparison with Pol Pot’s rule in Cambodia (1976–1979) is illuminating.
    2. Known as “Brother Number One,” Pol Pot was responsible for the killing of between 1 and 3 million Cambodians. Children were often recruited to lead the revolution.
  - D. If Plato intends Socrates’s proposal to be serious, then he is a monster on the order of a Pol Pot.
    1. Plato is not a monster.
    2. Therefore, he does not intend the proposal to be serious. He intends it as a demonstration of the absurdity of the perfectly just city.

3. It is possible, therefore, that the *Republic* is a critique of political extremism.
  4. This is a controversial proposal, and students must form their own views on this matter.
- II.** The perfectly just city is not possible.
- A.** Since the noble lie (414c), Socrates has stressed the importance of controlling sexual reproduction. The rulers must practice eugenics, making sure that gold-souled citizens mate with gold-souled citizens and raise gold-souled children.
  - B.** However, in Book VIII, we learn that the rulers fail to achieve a mathematically precise form of eugenics.
    1. They fail to discover the “marriage number” (546b–547a). As a result, there is “chaotic mixing” of bronze-, silver-, and gold-souled people.
    2. This passage is notoriously ambiguous, but it clearly symbolizes the inability of mathematics to capture and control what is essentially human: *eros*.
  - C.** *Eros* has been a hidden theme of the *Republic* since the beginning.
    1. In Book I, we learn that Cephalus is glad that the age of erotic madness has passed.
    2. Throughout the dialogue, we are reminded that Glaucon is erotic.
    3. In Book V, philosophy is characterized as the “love of the sight of truth.” Philosophy itself, as the dialogues the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* teach, is an erotic activity.
  - D.** Mathematics, as we learned in Book VII, is crucial to philosophical education and is the paradigm of “science.”
    1. As powerful as it is, and as useful as it is in “turning around” the student from becoming to being, mathematics cannot do justice to the human soul.
    2. Science cannot fully comprehend what it is to be human.
    3. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a genuine philosopher-king who is able to govern a city of human beings with perfect knowledge.
  - E.** The *Republic* is not a “blueprint.”
    1. It is a thorough examination of the human soul, which includes the love of and appreciation for mathematical truth.
    2. The *Republic* demonstrates the beauty and value, but also the limitations, of mathematics.
- III.** The next stage of the dialogue (Books VIII–X) begins. Socrates discusses the “mistaken” regimes: the timocracy, the oligarchy, the democracy, and

the tyranny.

- A. The best regime is the aristocracy (rule by the best).
- B. The second best regime (and first “mistaken” regime) is the timocracy, rule (*kratê*) by those who love honor (*timê*).
- C. What is the genesis of the timocratic man (549c–550b)?
  - 1. The father is the “aristocrat,” the best of men. (*Aristos* means “best.”) He is not concerned with money and power but with an ideal of excellence.
  - 2. The mother is bitter that her husband doesn’t have more money and power.
  - 3. The son is drawn in two directions between his mother and his father (550a). He is in psychological conflict.
  - 4. The son chooses a middle path: He becomes a lover of victory and honor.
- D. The timocratic ruler seems to be like a Spartan.
- E. The timocratic ruler is conflicted.
  - 1. “Under cover of darkness he pays fierce honor to gold” (548a).
  - 2. Because he is not fully educated, he cannot make a firm claim to virtue.

IV. The pattern is set for Books VIII and IX.

- A. Socrates discusses the four mistaken regimes and soul types.
- B. All are characterized by conflict and lack of education.
- C. All are deficient in their erotic attachments.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book VIII.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Annas, J. *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, pp. 297–298.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s Republic*, pp. 97–103.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. Socrates’s “marriage number” seems to prefigure the contemporary science of genetic engineering. Do you think it would be reasonable and morally justifiable to try to “create” genetically superior human beings?
- 2. In a timocracy, great soldiers would become rulers. Do you think soldiers make for good political leaders? Why or why not?



## Lecture Seventeen

### Books VIII and IX—The Mistaken Regimes

**Scope:** We begin by discussing the unusual quality of this, the fourth and final part of Plato's *Republic* (Books VIII–X). Unlike earlier sections, it is not a philosophical argument. Nor is it a historical analysis of how the political world actually works. Instead, Socrates tells an elaborate story of how regimes change. First, there is the aristocracy, the rule by the best (the *aristoi*), namely, the philosopher-rulers described in Books VI and VII. But, as we discussed in the previous lecture, this regime is doomed to fail. It becomes transformed into the timocracy, rule by the spirited few who excel in battle and achieve honor. In turn, this regime fails and becomes the oligarchy, rule by the wealthy few. Following this is the democracy, which then gives rise to the worst of all regimes, the tyranny. This lecture will review the timocracy, oligarchy, and the democracy.

### Outline

- I. Books VIII and IX of the *Republic* are rather peculiar.
  - A. They do not contain philosophical arguments.
  - B. They do not present a historical analysis.
  - C. Instead, they comprise what is more like a story. Note that Socrates invokes the muse at 547a.
    1. Stories are often effective at communicating psychological insights.
    2. This will be the focus of our study of these passages.
- II. Timocracy is rule by honor (547c–550c)
  - A. The timocratic regime is ruled by those gripped by a love of honor.
  - B. The timocratic individual is spirited, like Glaucon (548d).
    1. The timocrat is conflicted.
    2. In public, he values only public honor, but in private, he worships gold.
- III. Oligarchy is rule by the wealthy few (550c–555b).
  - A. The regime is ruled by the few (*oligoi*) who are rich.
    1. It is a divided regime: The rich rule and the poor are disenfranchised. They live within the confines of the same city but are always at odds with each other.
    2. It is a corrupt regime. “Virtue is in tension with wealth” (550e).

3. It becomes a defenseless city: The rulers are afraid to arm the poor and do not want to spend the money to do so (551e).
  4. It is a “credit-card city”: The rich have an interest in impoverishing the other citizens and, thus, are happy to extend them credit (552a).
- B.** The individual citizen is like the regime.
1. The son of the timocrat witnesses his honor-loving father lose all his money (553b).
  2. The son turns greedy and vows that this will never happen to him.
  3. He makes money the highest good. As such, he subordinates all of his other desires to his love of money.
  4. He becomes “a sort of squalid man” (554a).
  5. He neglects education.
  6. Money-love is paralyzing: At the prospect of actually spending some of his beloved money, “he trembles for his whole substance” (554d).
- C.** Socrates is insightful about the psychological cost of money-love.
1. He confirms the old saying “The more money you have, the more you worry about it.”
  2. He carefully depicts how deadening money-love can be.
- IV.** Democracy is rule by the people (*dêmos*).
- A.** It emerges from the oligarchy.
1. The oligarchs are unwilling to discipline the youths who spend money because they become rich by encouraging the youth to spend freely (555c). Such young people become impoverished.
  2. Sometimes, high-powered people are among the impoverished.
  3. These people “sit idly in the city...hating and plotting against those who possess what belongs to them...gripped by a love of change” (555d).
  4. A class of citizens emerges that revolts against the oligarchs.
  5. The democracy comes into being.
- B.** Democracy is characterized by the following:
1. A democracy celebrates freedom (557b).
  2. It protects the privacy (557b–557d) of its citizens.
  3. It creates the conditions under which there can be diversity (557c).
  4. It affirms the political equality (558c) of its citizens.
  5. It has no rigid conception of a good life. As such, it is characterized by a kind of “formlessness.”

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Book VIII.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, pp. 45–68.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, pp. 78–93.

Samons, L. *What's Wrong with Democracy?*

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Most Americans believe that democracy is the best of all possible regimes. Are they right?
2. Review Socrates's criticism of money-love and try to determine whether it is accurate. As much as possible, draw on your own experiences with money to address this issue.

## Lecture Eighteen

### Book VIII—Socrates’s Critique of Democracy

**Scope:** This lecture elaborates on the themes of the previous one. We explore in some depth Socrates’s criticisms of democracy, and we counter them with various arguments on behalf of democracy. This lecture, therefore, addresses what is perhaps the most politically charged issue found in this course. We live in a democracy and, thus, we tend to affirm it unconditionally. Socrates’s challenge may be uncomfortable, but responding to it should sharpen students’ understanding of the regime that they likely think best.

We conclude with a discussion of this passage: “It is probably necessary for the man who wishes to organize a city, as we were just doing, to go to a city under a democracy” (557d). This is most surprising (and typically Platonic): After apparently condemning democracy in the most hostile of terms, Socrates seems to suggest that the very activity taking place in the *Republic* itself would “probably” occur only in a democracy.

### Outline

- I. The democratic individual comes into being in the following way.
  - A. The oligarch is unwilling to invest in his son’s education (559d). Thus, the son is undisciplined and vulnerable to the lures of the “unnecessary desires” (558d). He becomes a democrat.
  - B. The democratic individual is whimsical. He has no stable character, because he has not been properly educated (561c–d).
  - C. He is hostile to all forms of authority (563d).
    1. A democracy becomes a “youth culture” (562e–563a).
    2. A democracy is “formless” (563c).
- II. There are similarities between the democracy Socrates condemns and the democratic America in which we live.
  - A. Do we live in a youth culture?
  - B. Are we excessively egalitarian?
  - C. Are we formless?
  - D. Is there too much freedom?
- III. Socrates is finally ambivalent toward democracy.
  - A. He says, “it is probably the fairest of all regimes” (557c).

- B. Most surprisingly, he also says, “It is probably necessary for the man who wishes to organize a city, as we were just doing, to go to a city under a democracy” (557d).
    - 1. This seems to imply that only in a democracy is the sort of philosophizing found in the *Republic* possible.
    - 2. Perhaps the freedom of speech and the protection of privacy available in a democracy are conditions that allow philosophy to flourish.
    - 3. Recall the ship of state parable discussed in Lecture XI. Perhaps a philosopher in a real city leads a private, not a political, life.
- IV. The culminating criticism of a democracy is that it leads to tyranny.
- A. The democracy is “drunk” (502d) with the concept of freedom.
  - B. Therefore, the rulers must flatter, rather than educate, the citizens.
  - C. A demagogue, the supreme flatterer, emerges (565c). He eventually gets control of the entire city.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book VIII.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Monson, S. *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements*, pp. 5–29.

Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, pp. 45–68.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s Republic*, pp. 78–93.

Samons, L. *What’s Wrong with Democracy?*

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. Is Plato, as Karl Popper thought, an enemy of the “open society”?
- 2. Socrates seems to characterize the democracy as a “youth culture,” in which all authority, including that of parents and teachers, is despised. Does this seem true of American democracy?

## Lecture Nineteen

### Books VIII and IX—The Critique of Tyranny

**Scope:** Socrates offers a lengthy discussion, and thorough condemnation, of tyranny, the worst of all possible regimes. We will discuss how the tyrant emerges from the democracy, how he gets power, and what, finally, makes his rule so morally and politically bankrupt. Despite his feelings of omnipotence, the tyrant is actually the unhappiest and most slavish of men. This section of the dialogue contains a penetrating analysis of the effect power has on people. We will test Socrates's analysis by comparing what he says to what is known about the most notorious tyrant of our generation: Saddam Hussein.

#### Outline

- I. The demagogue becomes the tyrant.
  - A. The demagogue poses as the champion of the people, especially the poor (565a–c).
    1. He demands his own bodyguards (566b).
    2. He gets a taste of blood by executing those of the rich who hate the poor (566c).
    3. Intoxicated by his own power, he expands his power base. He promises the poor “freedom from debts” and to “distribute land to the people” (566e).
  - B. The tyrant instigates war against other cities so that his people will need a strong leader—so that they will need him.
  - C. He begins to execute those among his former allies who have “free thoughts” (567a). They represent potential threats to his rule.
    1. The tyrant has no friends. Only sycophants surround him.
    2. Both he and his regime are impoverished by his desire to stay in power. The tyrant spends lavishly (568d).
    3. The tyrant is willing to kill his own father to retain power (569b).
  - D. The tyrant is a slave to his passions. He is willing to act on those savage impulses (572b)—desires that lie in the hearts of all men.
  - E. The tyrant is always at risk of assassination, unable to travel freely.
- II. The accuracy of Socrates's depiction of the tyrant can be seen in reflecting on the career of Saddam Hussein.
  - A. Plato was personally familiar with tyranny; recall the Tyranny of the Thirty of 404.
  - B. Saddam Hussein is a gripping example of a contemporary tyrant.

1. He joined the Baath Socialist Party in 1956. As Socrates says, he began as a champion of the poor.
  2. By 1979, he was the president of Iraq.
  3. He initiated and prolonged an eight-year war against Iran from 1979–1988. As Socrates says, it is in the interest of the tyrant to keep his city at war.
  4. It has been said that “Saddam is a dictator who is ready to sacrifice his country, just so long as he can remain on his throne in Baghdad” (BBC News, Middle East Web site).
  5. He brutalized his own population. He used chemical weapons against the Kurds.
  6. He executed many of his own generals, and as a result, his army was less proficient than it could have been.
  7. As Socrates says, he was unable to travel freely. He had many palaces and constantly feared assassination (579d–e).
  8. He allowed no criticism and, hence, was surrounded by sycophants.
  9. He led his country to disaster. As Socrates says, “there is no city more wretched than one under a tyranny” (576e).
- III. There is a surprising and uncomfortable similarity between the philosopher and the tyrant.
- A. Both are erotic. The tyrant has a passionate love of power, and the philosopher has a passionate love of wisdom. In fact, “love has from old been called a tyrant” (573b).
  - B. The theme of *eros* runs through the *Republic* from the very first scene. Plato witnessed tyranny firsthand; it is not surprising that this theme is so prevalent in the *Republic*.
  - C. Both the tyrant and the philosopher have a disregard for convention.
  - D. Both are bullies in their own way.
  - E. There are two kinds of tyrant: private and public (578c). Who would be the private tyrant? The answer is, someone who is dominated by his interests, such as a philosopher who is dominated by his love of wisdom.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic*, Books VIII and IX.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, pp. 86–93.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Have there been any American demagogues who threatened to become tyrants? You might want to consider the case of Huey Long.
2. Do you agree with Socrates when he says that love is a tyrant? What does this mean?



## Lecture Twenty

### Book IX—The Superiority of Justice

**Scope:** Socrates argues that the life of the just philosopher is happier and more pleasant than that of the unjust tyrant. With this argument, he returns, finally, to the challenge posed by Thrasymachus in Book I; namely, to show that one ought to prefer a life of justice to a life of injustice. In completing this argument, Socrates offers yet another image. This time, he sketches a strange picture of both a lion, a many-headed beast, and a human being living within each human being. We will discuss this image in detail and see how it complements the psychology Socrates offered in Book IV.

We will conclude this lecture by examining one passage: “Perhaps a pattern is laid up for the man who wants to see and found a city within himself on the basis of what he sees. It doesn’t make any difference whether it is or will be somewhere” (592b).

### Outline

- I. Socrates addresses the challenge issued by Glaucon and Adeimantus: to demonstrate that Thrasymachus was wrong and that a life of justice is superior to a life of injustice.
  - A. The main reason is that, as discussed in the previous lecture, the real tyrant is a slave to his passions (579e).
  - B. Socrates explains this by returning to the tripartite psychology he developed in Book IV.
  - C. There are three parts of the soul: wisdom-loving, victory-loving, gain-loving (581c). In Book IV, these were called reason, spirit, and desire.
  - D. The entire soul is now characterized by “love.”
  - E. The life of the just man, ruled by the love of wisdom, is more pleasant than that of the unjust man.
    1. The lover of wisdom has tasted all the pleasures. The lover of gain and the lover of honor, by contrast, have never tasted the pleasure of philosophy (582a).
    2. Therefore, the lover of wisdom has the most pleasure.
    3. Further, the pleasure experienced by the lover of wisdom is the most pure. It does not entail its opposite: pain (584b).
    4. The object of philosophy is “being,” that is, what is stable and “really real.” Therefore, the pleasure associated with it is stable (584c).

- 5. Socrates tells a joke: The philosopher-king “lives 729 times more pleasantly” (587e) than the tyrant. (There are 729 days and nights in one year.)
  - 6. The answer to why philosophy is superior to life’s other pursuits is found in the *Republic* as a whole. It teaches us what it is to be a human being, what it is to have a soul.
- F. At the end of the *Republic*, it is unclear whether Socrates is talking about justice as it is conventionally understood or the sort of harmony that was discussed in Book IV—reason ruling desire with the assistance of the spirit..
- II. Socrates proposes a new image of the human soul.
- A. A many-headed beast represents desire, a lion represents spirit, and a human being represents reason. All three are contained within the human soul (588c–e).
  - B. The image suggests the basic reason why justice should be pursued: It is most human (589a–b).

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book IX.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Sachs, D. “A Fallacy in Plato’s *Republic*,” in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato’s Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 1–17.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. Review Socrates’s argument about pleasure. He seems to imply that some pleasures are superior to others. Is this true, or are all pleasures equal?
- 2. Socrates seems to state that it doesn’t matter whether his ideal city comes into existence or not. If this is the case, then why do you think he bothered to construct an ideal city?

## Lecture Twenty-One

### Book X—Philosophy versus Poetry

**Scope:** Despite the fact that he discussed poetry at length in Books II and III, Socrates returns to this topic in Book X. This time, his critique is even more severe. While a certain kind of poetry was allowed in Book III—what Socrates calls the “unmixed imitation of the decent” (397d)—in Book X, all poetic imitation is condemned. Socrates offers two arguments to bolster his extreme position. The first is metaphysical; the second is psychological. We will discuss both in detail. We will conclude with some general reflections on what Socrates calls the “old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (607b). We will try to understand why he thinks that these two most basic forms of human intellectual activity are at odds with each other.

### Outline

- I. In Book IX, Socrates reiterates that his just city is not a blueprint for political action.
  - A. He says the job of the philosopher is to look within himself (591e).
  - B. There, he will find a pattern of a just city. It doesn't matter whether this city actually comes into being (592b).
  - C. The *Republic* is about the human soul; it is intended to teach us something about ourselves.
- II. In Books II and III, Socrates recommended censoring poetry. In Book X, he offers an even more forceful denunciation of it.
  - A. Socrates applies the term *poetry* to all forms of storytelling.
  - B. His first argument is a “metaphysical critique” of poetry.
    - 1. There is “one particular ‘form’ for each of the particular ‘manys’ to which we apply the same name” (596a).
    - 2. This is a version of the theory of Ideas.
    - 3. For example, there is one “idea of the couch” and many particular couches.
    - 4. God produced the idea of the couch (597b).
    - 5. A carpenter builds a couch.
    - 6. A painter imitates the carpenter's couch in his painting.
    - 7. Therefore, imitation takes us far from the truth. It is two steps removed from reality. (See 599a.)
  - C. The second argument is a psychological critique of poetry.

1. Because poetry depends on images and tells emotionally charged stories, it nourishes the irrational part of the human soul. (See 603b.)
  2. Poetry, particularly tragedy, imitates men who are conflicted (604a). This is what makes a play “dramatic.”
  3. But the good man, whose soul is harmonious, experiences no such conflict.
  4. Therefore, poetry encourages psychological discord.
  5. The characters in a play experience a wild array of emotions. The good man is self-controlled and “quiet.”
  6. The comic poet makes us laugh at things (such as sexual activities) that we would otherwise be too ashamed to laugh at (606c).
- D. “There is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (607b), which Socrates resolves, essentially, by banning the poets.
- III. The critique of poetry in Book X is even more severe than the censorship program of Books II and III. Why?
- A. Poetry is a fundamental alternative to philosophy.
  - B. Yet Socrates says that if a poet could make an argument to defend his poetry, then “we should be delighted to receive it” (607c).
    1. A philosophical form of poetry seems acceptable.
    2. Perhaps the Platonic dialogues themselves are such a form of poetry.
    3. The *Republic* itself violates the rules against poetry!
  - C. Socrates draws a comparison between Sophistry, which uses persuasive rhetoric, and poetry. Both make their own truths. Even Socrates himself borrows the rhetorical techniques of the Sophists and the storytelling art of poets to make his points. He respects the power of poetry and Sophistry.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book X.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s Republic*, pp. 93–125.

Urmson, James. “Plato and the Poets,” in R. Kraut, ed., *Plato’s Republic: Critical Essays*, pp. 223–234.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you think there are ideas, or “truths,” that a poem (or a story) can express that an argument cannot? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Plato wrote dialogues instead of abstract arguments?

## Lecture Twenty-Two

### Book X—The Myth of Er

**Scope:** In a move that only Plato is capable of making, he has Socrates, almost immediately after criticizing poetry, telling a poem of his own. Before doing so, he argues that the soul is immortal. Then he tells his own poem about the afterlife. This is the Myth of Er. Er was a warrior who was killed but then returned to life to report on the other world. Socrates's myth gives a detailed description of this cosmic vision and its implications for how human beings should live their lives.

Recall that in Book I, old Cephalus claimed that he would neither cheat nor lie so that when he went to the next life, he would not be punished. The Myth of Er, which concludes the *Republic*, thus comes full circle by returning to the opening theme. Whatever one thinks of Plato's philosophical arguments, there is no denying that he was a masterful writer.

### Outline

- I. Socrates argues that the soul is immortal (608d–611a).
  - A. For every object, there are good and bad things. Good things benefit the object; bad things harm it.
  - B. For example, sickness is bad for the body. It will destroy it.
  - C. If there were an object that could not be destroyed by its bad thing, it would be indestructible.
  - D. What is bad for a soul is injustice.
  - E. But injustice, although it makes a soul worse, does not destroy it.
  - F. Therefore, the soul is indestructible. It is immortal.
- II. The argument is not convincing, but it sets up Socrates's next move: his myth of the afterworld.
- III. The Myth of Er can be outlined as follows (614b–621d):
  - A. Er was a warrior who returned to life and told what he saw.
  - B. When someone dies, he goes to the “demonic place” (614c), where he is judged. The “demonic place” is like a waiting room in a train station. Newcomers are there, as well as those who have returned from their 1,000-year journeys.
    1. Those who have been just go upward and to the right and are treated to 1,000 years of “inconceivable beauty” (615a).

2. Those who have been unjust go downward and to the left and receive 1,000 years of punishment.
  3. Those who are so terribly bad that they are “incurable” receive the punishment of eternal damnation. Tyrants are in this category.
- C. After their 1,000-year journeys, the souls are taken on a tour of the cosmos.
1. They see the eight circular orbits of the heavenly bodies.
  2. They hear the “harmony of the spheres.”
  3. They see the geometric beauty of the cosmos.
- D. The souls pick their next lives.
1. There is a lottery to determine the order of their selection.
  2. “Here is the whole risk for a human being” (618c). This is when a human being chooses what kind of life to live.
  3. A man who had lived a decent but non-philosophical life picks first: He chooses the life of a tyrant.
  4. In general, there is an “exchange of evils and goods for most of the souls” (619d). Those who had lived good lives pick bad ones and vice versa.
  5. Odysseus picks last. He chooses “the life of a private man who minds his own business” (620c).
  6. Perhaps Odysseus, who is the most intellectual of Greek heroes, represents the philosopher.
  7. Perhaps Plato’s point is that in real life, philosophers must remain private and not get involved in politics. This seems to be the message of Book VI and of Plato’s dialogue *The Apology of Socrates*.
- E. The myth expresses a view that affirms both freedom and determinism. We choose our own lives but then are “forced” to live with our choices.
- IV. The Myth of Er teaches important lessons.
- A. There are two basic possibilities for human beings: philosophy and tyranny.
  - B. The *Republic* teaches that philosophy is the best life.
  - C. The last words of the *Republic* are: “we shall fare well.”
  - D. At the heart of the *Republic* is the Platonic conception of the good life, that of the philosopher, one who asks questions without necessarily receiving immediate answers.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato’s Republic*, Book X.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Howland, J. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 150–160.

Plato. *The Apology of Socrates*.

Roochnik, D. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*, pp. 121–128.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do human beings need afterlife myths in order to promote virtue? Or can we try to lead the best possible life even if we think nothing awaits us after we die?
2. Do you think Socrates's treatment of the soul who chose first—the man who had lived a decent but non-philosophical life—is fair? Isn't it possible for a non-philosopher to lead a good life?
3. Can philosophers be political? Or must they always remain private?



## Lecture Twenty-Three

### Summary and Overview

**Scope:** In this lecture, we will review the journey we have taken through the 10 books of Plato's *Republic*. We will produce something of a "highlight film" that includes Socrates's refutation of Thrasymachus, Glaucon's rejection of the city of pigs, the censorship of poetry, the ship of state, the Idea of the Good, the divided line, the parable of the cave, the breakdown of the perfectly just city, the story of the mistaken regimes, the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry, and the Myth of Er. We will try to summarize the great achievements of this extraordinary book.

### Outline

- I. The *Republic* is structured around several key "interruptions."
  - A. Polemarchus "forces" Socrates to stay in the Piraeus (Book I).
  - B. Glaucon pressures Socrates to stay in the Piraeus (Book I).
  - C. Glaucon and Adeimantus pressure Socrates to do a better job of refuting Thrasymachus (Book II).
  - D. Polemarchus and the others force Socrates to return to the issue of sexual relationships (Book V).
  - E. The perfectly just city collapses because the rulers cannot calculate the "marriage number" (Book VIII). They fail to regulate sexual relationships with a mathematically based eugenical science.
- II. These interruptions tell us much about what kind of book the *Republic* is. It is *dialectical*.
  - A. The *Republic* is a giant conversation. It is a dialogue.
  - B. It is not an abstract or systematic argument. It is a human attempt to understand the meaning of life.
- III. The following is a review of the highlights of the *Republic*.
  - A. The refutation of Thrasymachus (Book I) deals with the question of justice and leaves us with an issue of relativism.
  - B. The city-soul analogy (Book II) implies that humans are naturally political, but the analogy is not fully explained; we are meant to think for ourselves.
  - C. Justice is seen as "minding one's own business" (Book IV). Bernard Williams offered a telling critique of Plato's concept of the human soul as having a tripartite structure.

- D. The three waves (Book V) are the successive conditions upon which the perfectly just city comes into being.
- E. The ship of state (Book VI) presents one of the most pessimistic views of politics in history. The person who gains control of the ship is, tragically, not the one who knows how to sail the ship. Perhaps it is not realistic to expect to have a true pilot.
- F. The Idea of the Good (Book VI) is not defined by Socrates, who merely makes an analogy with the sun.
- G. The divided line (Book VI) is a graphic representation of the struggle of human intellectual progress.
- H. The parable of the cave (Book VII) is about education. It requires energy and passion to “fly upwards” toward intellectual progress.
- I. Mathematics (Book VII) points mankind in the right direction but is not the ultimate answer in and of itself.
- J. The perfectly just city collapses (Book VIII).
- K. Socrates is ambivalent in his critique of democracy (Book VIII).
- L. The worst criticism of democracy is that it can become a tyranny (Book VIII–IX).
- M. The Myth of Er (Book X) implies a surprising affinity between the philosopher and the tyrant.

**Essential Reading:**

*Plato's Republic.*

**Supplementary Reading:**

Roochnik, David. *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic.*

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you think any “highlights” were left off the list presented above?
2. Do you agree with the characterization of the *Republic* as a blend of mathematics and poetry?

## Lecture Twenty-Four

### The Legacy of Plato's *Republic*

**Scope:** Alfred North Whitehead once said, “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” The last lecture in this course will be a brief look at some of these “footnotes.” We will begin with Aristotle’s critique of the *Republic* found in his book *The Politics*. We will then turn to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, and John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* to see a thoroughly modern, thoroughly anti-Platonic view of politics. We will discuss the views of Immanuel Kant in order, once again, to see conceptions of the moral and political life that are radically at odds with what Socrates proposes in the *Republic*. Finally, we will mention Karl Marx’s work in order to see a view that is not entirely opposed to what Socrates proposes.

It is a wild exaggeration to call all these great thinkers mere “footnotes to Plato,” but it is nonetheless true that their works can all enter into a dialogue with the *Republic*. It is for this reason that the claim was made, in Lecture One of this course, that the *Republic* is the most influential work in the history of Western political philosophy.

#### Outline

- I. Alfred North Whitehead once said, “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.”
  - A. This means that subsequent philosophers took up the questions Plato first raised.
  - B. The history of philosophy continues a dialogue that commenced with Plato.
- II. Consider the following examples:
  - A. Aristotle’s *Politics* became one of the most influential books in the Middle Ages.
    1. Aristotle studied with Plato for 20 years (367–347).
    2. In Book II of the *Politics*, he criticizes the *Republic*.
    3. Socrates’s perfectly just city is too rigidly organized. It is too much of a unity and, thus, not a real city.
    4. The abolition of private property would have counterproductive results. Citizens would become apathetic.
    5. Aristotle warns that political ideology can lead to huge problems.
    6. He proposes a blend of democracy and oligarchy.

- B.** Machiavelli's *The Prince* was tremendously influential during the Renaissance.
1. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) is often counted as the first modern political theorist.
  2. He was a “realist” who believed that idealism is disastrous.
  3. A successful ruler must be willing to be flexible, rather than rigidly moralistic. A successful ruler must be willing to be evil if necessary.
  4. His position is not unlike that of Thrasymachus: The end justifies the means.
- C.** Hobbes's *Leviathan* was the first work of political philosophy that tried to take account of the “new science” of mathematical physics.
1. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is usually counted as the founder of English moral and political philosophy.
  2. He was a materialist.
  3. In the state of nature, life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” There is a war of all against all.
  4. It is rational, therefore, for human beings to give up some of their rights in order to create a state that will offer them security.
  5. His position is not unlike that offered by Glaucon at the beginning of Book II, when he suggests that justice is a good, not desirable for itself but only for its consequences.
- D.** Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is one of the most famous books in the history of moral philosophy.
1. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was arguably the most influential philosopher of the modern age.
  2. He developed the concept of the *categorical imperative*, an absolute demand for moral action.
  3. He argued that it was never morally justifiable to lie. He would have strongly opposed Socrates's noble lie.
  4. He argued that human autonomy and dignity must be respected. He was an egalitarian.
  5. Kantian ethics is fundamentally opposed to the basic principles of Socrates's just city.
- E.** Mill's *On Liberty* is a crucial text for modern “liberalism.”
1. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) is often thought to be the greatest British philosopher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  2. In *On Liberty*, he argues that the only justification for the state to restrict the freedom of an individual is to prevent harm to others.

3. For Mill, if the law doesn't prohibit it, then an individual can do whatever he wants. For Plato, the individual can do only what the law tells him to do.
  4. Mill justifies his "liberalism" by arguing that the liberation of individual talents will bring great progress.
  5. His position could not be further from that embraced by Socrates's perfectly just city.
  6. In *On Utilitarianism*, Mill argues that it is wrong to lie. Although lies achieve short-term goals, they create long-term instability.
  7. Mill would object to Socrates's noble lie.
- F. Marx's *Capital* was notorious in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
1. Karl Marx (1818–1883) is the major source of inspiration for all forms of modern social radicalism.
  2. He argued for the elimination of private property. Here, he would be in agreement with Socrates's treatment of the guardians.
  3. He argued for the abolition of classes. Here, he would strongly disagree with Socrates's division of all the citizens into three separate classes.
  4. The failure of Marxist experiments in the Soviet Union and elsewhere is perhaps predicted by Socrates's descriptions of the breakdown of the perfectly just city in Book VIII of the *Republic*.

**III.** It is absurd to label these great thinkers "footnotes to Plato."

- A. They do, however, all take up themes that Plato first explored.
- B. Even if one disagrees with much in the *Republic*, it is impossible to deny how rich it is.

**Essential Readings:**

Honderich, Ted, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*.

**Supplementary Readings:**

Crosey, Joseph, and Leo Strauss, eds. *History of Political Philosophy*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Marxism seems to have been totally discredited by the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Do you think the comparison between Socrates's ideal city and Marx's conception of communism is apt? If so, does the 20<sup>th</sup> century discredit the *Republic*?
2. Machiavelli is famous for being a "realist" who thinks idealism gets political leaders into trouble. Is Plato an idealist or a realist?

## Timeline

### B.C.E.

|         |       |   |
|---------|-------|---|
| 750–700 | ..... | The approximate dates of Homer and Hesiod.  |
| 585     | ..... | Thales predicts a solar eclipse. The beginning of Western philosophy.   |
| 508     | ..... | Cleisthenes enacts basic reforms, which start to move Athens toward democracy.  |
| 490     | ..... | Greeks defeat Persians at the Battle of Marathon.   |
| 480     | ..... | Greeks defeat Persians at Salamis.  |
| 478     | ..... | Formation of the Delian League, an alliance of Greek city-states dominated by Athens.   |
| 469     | ..... | Birth of Socrates.  |
| 469     | ..... | Pericles ascends to power in Athens.  |
| 456     | ..... | Death of Aeschylus, the tragedian.  |
| 432     | ..... | Parthenon completed.  |
| 431     | ..... | Beginning of the Peloponnesian War.   |
| 429     | ..... | Death of Pericles.  |
| 429     | ..... | Birth of Plato.   |
| 406     | ..... | Death of Sophocles, the tragedian.  |
| 406     | ..... | Death of Euripides, the tragedian.  |
| 405–404 | ..... | Athenians lose a decisive battle to the Spartans at Aegospotami. End of the Peloponnesian War. Restoration of Athenian democracy. |
| 404–403 | ..... | Tyranny of the Thirty in Athens.  |
| 399     | ..... | Socrates executed.  |
| 388     | ..... | Plato makes his first visit to Sicily, where he befriends Dion, a relative of Dionysius I, the ruler of Syracuse.                 |
| 386     | ..... | Plato founds his school in Athens, known as the Academy.  |

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 385 ..... | Death of Aristophanes, the comic poet.   |
| 368 ..... | Aristotle enters the Academy.  |
| 367 ..... | Dionysius I dies and is succeeded by<br>Dionysius II. Plato visits and tries to educate<br>Dionysius II. He fails. |
| 348 ..... | Death of Plato.  |
| 322 ..... | Death of Aristotle.  |

## Glossary

**Aristokratia:** “aristocracy.” Literally, the “rule of the best.” The perfectly just city, ruled by philosophers, is meant to be such a regime.

**Aristos:** “best.”

**Arithmos:** “number.” Root of our word *arithmetic*. The crucial first subject studied by the philosopher-kings.

**Dêmokratia:** “democracy.” Literally, the “rule of the people.” Plato is famously critical of democracy.

**Dêmos:** “the people.”

**Dialetikê:** “dialectic.” This is the ultimate subject studied by Plato’s philosopher-kings. It is a study of the formal structure of all reality.

**Dianoia:** “thought.” The cognitive activity found at the second highest stage of the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of mathematical objects.

**Eidos:** “form.” Derived from the Greek verb *idein*, which means “to see,” *eidos* literally means the “look” of a thing. It is a technical term for Plato and refers to the intelligible objects that give reality its structure.

**Eikasia:** “imagination.” This is the cognitive activity found at the bottom of the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of images.

**Eikones:** “images.” The root of our word *icon*.

**Elenchus:** “refutation.” Socrates was famous for refuting people by showing how their positions contained contradictions.

**Epistêmê:** “knowledge” or “science.” Root of our word *epistemology*, which means “the study of knowledge.”

**Eros:** “love, desire.” A crucial concept for Plato. The philosopher is an erotic person because he or she loves wisdom.

**Idea:** “idea” or “form.” Synonymous with *eidos*, it is also derived from the verb *to see*.

**Kalon:** “beautiful” or “fine.” The Greek word has both aesthetic and moral connotations.

**Kratê:** “power, rule.” The root of the suffix of such words as *democracy* and *aristocracy*.

**Noêsis:** “intellection.” The highest cognitive activity, found at the top segment of the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of Forms.

**Oligarchia:** “rule by the wealthy few.” One of the “mistaken” regimes Socrates describes.



**Oligos:** “few.” Root of the word *oligarchy*, rule by the wealthy few.

**Philosophia:** “love of wisdom.”

**Pistis:** “trust.” The second-to-lowest cognitive activity found on the divided line. It is responsible for the apprehension of sensible objects.

**Polis:** “city.” Root of our word *political*. The Greek *polis* was a “city-state,” an independent and self-sufficient political entity.

**Politeia:** “republic, regime.” The organizing principle of a *polis*.

**Psuchê:** “soul.” Root of our word *psychology*, the study of the soul.

**Sophia:** “wisdom.” Root of our word *philosophy*, the love of wisdom.

**Technê:** “art, craft.” Root of our words *technical* and *technology*.

**Timê:** “honor.” What a spirited man such as Glaucon desires.

**Timokratia:** “rule by those who love honor.” One of the “mistaken regimes” Socrates discusses.

**To Agathon:** “the Good.” The supreme principle of Platonic philosophy. Also called “the Idea of the Good.”

**To On:** “being.” Root of our word *ontology*, the study of being.

## Biographical Notes

**Adeimantus:** Brother of Plato, major character in the *Republic*. His dates are unknown, but he is presumed to be older than both Plato and Glaucon.

**Aeschylus (525–456):** The first great tragic poet and a loyal Athenian patriot.

**Aristophanes (455–386):** The greatest Athenian comic poet. In his play “The Assembly of Women,” proposals are made concerning the role of women that are similar to ones made in the *Republic*.

**Aristotle (384–322):** One of the greatest philosophers in Western history. He came from his home in Stagira, near Macedon, to study with Plato for 20 years, then founded his own school in Athens.

**Cephalus:** A wealthy arms manufacturer who migrated to the Piraeus from Syracuse. The conversation of the *Republic* takes place in his home.

**Cleitophon:** Appears briefly in Book I of the *Republic*. Plutarch reports that he was initially an associate of Socrates who eventually rejected the philosopher’s influence. Plato wrote a short dialogue titled *The Cleitophon*.

**Dion (408–354):** Brother-in-law of Dionysius I, the ruler of Syracuse. He was impressed by Plato when the philosopher visited in 389 and tried to make Dionysius II a philosopher-king.

**Dionysius I (430–367):** Ruler of Syracuse.

**Dionysius II (397–336):** Eldest son of Dionysius I. Plato’s attempt to educate him and mold him into a philosopher-king failed.

**Euripides (480–406):** Athenian tragic playwright of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

**Glaucon:** Plato’s brother and, after Socrates, the major character of the *Republic*.

**Gorgias (483–376):** From Leontini, one of the earliest and greatest Greek Sophists. He taught rhetoric. Thrasymachus seems to embrace some of his views in Book I of the *Republic*.

**Hesiod (wrote around 700):** After Homer, the second greatest epic poet of ancient Greece. His most important work is the *Theogony*, which is heavily censored by Socrates in Book II of the *Republic*.

**Homer (wrote some time around 700):** The greatest of the ancient Greek epic poets. His *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were fundamental in the development of Western literature. His work is censored by Socrates in Book II of the *Republic*.

**Isocrates (436–338):** Prominent and influential Athenian rhetorician. His school in Athens was the chief rival to Plato’s Academy.

**Pericles** (495-429): The most influential Athenian statesman during the greatest period in Athenian history. Architect of the Peloponnesian War.

**Plato** (429-347): Great Athenian philosopher. Son of rich and powerful parents. Was influenced by Socrates. Created his own school, "The Academy." Wrote approximately 25 dialogues, and 13 letters. Arguably the most influential philosopher in Western history.

**Polemarchus**: Son of Cephalus. Executed by the Tyranny of the Thirty in 404.

**Protagoras** (490-420): From Abdera, the first of the Greek Sophists. Thrasymachus, in Book I of the *Republic*, seems to share his relativistic position.

**Socrates** (469-399): Plato's philosophical inspiration. He was famous for interrogating his fellow Athenians by asking them questions, such as "What is justice?" He was executed by the Athenian democracy in 399, probably because the citizens associated him with the Tyranny of the Thirty.

**Sophocles** (496-406): The great tragic playwright of 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athens.

**Thales** (625?-547?): Widely considered to be the first philosopher in the Western tradition. Legend has it that he correctly predicted an eclipse in 585.

**Thrasymachus** (wrote 430-400): A professional teacher of rhetoric. He is featured in Book I of the *Republic* as Socrates's Sophistic opponent *par excellence*.

## Bibliography

### Essential Reading:

There are many fine translations of Plato's *Republic*. The most literal and the one cited throughout this course is:

*Plato's Republic*. Translation by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Other good translations are:

*Plato: The Republic*. Translation by T. Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. This book has a good introduction and glossary of terms.

*Plato's Republic*. Translation by G. Grube and C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

*Plato: The Republic*. Translation by R. Sterling and W. Scott. New York: Norton, 1985.

### Supplementary Reading:

A mountain of secondary literature has been produced on the *Republic*. What follows below is a very small sample. Most of the books cited below are explicitly designed as introductions, and they should be consulted first.

Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. A difficult but excellent overview of the *Republic*.

Aristotle. *The Politics*. Translation by Carnes Lord. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Book II of this work contains Aristotle's criticism of the *Republic*.

Augustine. *Confessions*. F.J.Sheed, trans. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992. The spiritual autobiography of one of the great Christian philosophers, who was deeply influenced by Plato.

Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1984. A Platonic critique of American society. Bloom's comments about what he takes to be the harmful effects of contemporary music are particularly interesting.

Campbell, Alastair. *Medical Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. A good overview of the field of medical ethics as it is practiced today.

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Dillon, John, ed. *The Greek Sophists*. New York: Penguin, 2003. The most recent collection of the remaining writings of the Greek Sophists. It should be consulted by anyone interested in the relativism of Thrasymachus.

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Howland, Jacob. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2004. An excellent introduction to the dialogue that pays particular attention to its literary form. It also has a good glossary and timeline.

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Kant, Immanuel. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Many translations are available of this work, first published in 1785 and one of the most influential works in the history of moral philosophy. Kant famously argues here that lying can never be morally justified.

Klein, Jacob. *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965. This book contains (on pages 115–125) the best short explanation of the divided line that I have encountered.

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———, ed. *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. A collection of 13 essays about the *Republic*. Several were cited in this course, including David Sachs, “A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*”; Bernard Williams, “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*”;

Jonathan Lear, “Inside and Outside the *Republic*”; Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of the Good”; Arlene Saxonhouse, “The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato”; Gregory Vlastos, “Was Plato a Feminist?”

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Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Written in 1848, this short work spells out some of the basic tenets of modern communism, a position perhaps foreshadowed in Books II–IV of Plato's *Republic*.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Written in 1863, this is Mill's classic explanation of the moral position of utilitarianism.

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Mitchell, B., and J. R. Lucas. *An Engagement with Plato's Republic: A Companion to the Republic*. London: Ashgate, 2003. A lucid introduction to some of the basic philosophical issues found in the dialogue.

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