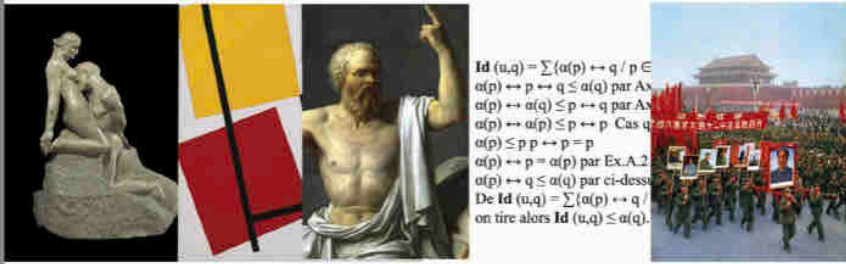


# Plato's *Republic*



$\text{Id}(u,q) = \sum (a(p) \leftrightarrow q) / p \in$   
 $a(p) \leftrightarrow p \leftrightarrow q \leq a(q) \text{ par } A$   
 $a(p) \leftrightarrow a(q) \leq p \leftrightarrow q \text{ par } A$   
 $a(p) \leftrightarrow a(p) \leq p \leftrightarrow p \text{ Cas } q$   
 $a(p) \leq p \leftrightarrow p = p$   
 $a(p) \leftrightarrow p = a(p) \text{ par Ex.A.2}$   
 $a(p) \leftrightarrow q \leq a(q) \text{ par ci-dessus}$   
 De  $\text{Id}(u,q) = \sum (a(p) \leftrightarrow q)$   
 on tire alors  $\text{Id}(u,q) \leq a(q)$ .

The Republic proceeds logically through sets of dialogue to uncover answers about what Justice is and how we as individuals relate to it.

Plato also argues for some stratification of society, though with a strong unification of citizenship. Only the most adept have the chance to rule, but everyone's goal is the betterment of society as a whole.

Plato meticulously and logically walks through each point. There is also a huge range of other concepts and lines of logic worth reading through, such as why other forms of government like Democracy, are less preferable. You may not agree with every concept, but Plato's Republic will likely challenge your thinking.

A timocracy is a system where property replaces wisdom as the highest value. In this regime, the soldier/guardian class are no longer warriors in pursuit of honor, but seek the things important to people of the middle class – moderate wealth, medicine, basic schooling, leisure, influence, etc. In this system, leaders are more "high-spirited" and simple-minded than in an aristocratic regime (Crete and Sparta are Plato's examples of a timocracy). A timocratic man's nature is primarily good, but reason's preeminence has been eclipsed by appetite and spirit, which are the new highest values in a timocracy.

An oligarchy is the first regime in which an actual desire for wealth rules. It is not property (or real-ty) in this system that is valued, but money. Money is desired for its own sake whereas in previous regimes money was a means to acquire the materials necessary for the good life. In this way, money is prized over virtue or honor. The rulers in an oligarchy are warriors whose "spiritedness" dominates their soul. Oligarchs tend to be thrifty, hard working, and possess a superficial honesty derived from self-interest. They may seem superior to the majority, but their souls are extremely fragile. Oligarchs are scions who have forsaken their father's values because the fragility of a decaying regime could not maintain its previous orientation towards the good life. Oligarchs retreat from a life of high ambition and virtuous living. These men only appear to be good, while their desires are almost entirely self-referential and materialistic.

After democracy crumbles, tyranny emerges from combining a desire for freedom and a lack of discipline. In this regime there are no remnants of civic virtue and power is seized for the purpose of maintaining order. A tyrant is the worst type of man and he is completely unjust. Naturally, he is also the man who leads the worst type of regime. The tyrant is eros incarnate. For a real life example, it's quite possible that this character type has some Trump-like qualities.

## [What are main ideas from The Republic \(Plato\)?](#)

In a nutshell:

1. In the best of all possible states, the wisest would rule.
2. How do we know who the wisest are? Answer: We put all young boys and girls, regardless of parentage, in a universal school system (supported by the state) in which every student is given exactly the same educational

opportunities. Those who rise to the top of the top in this academic system become the next generation of rulers.

3. This system, according to Plato, is preferable to democracy if you can implement it, because in democracy, the masses do not always listen to the wise.
4. That, in turn, causes bad government because it would be like the Captain of a ship (the "Ship of State") turning decisions over to the enlisted seamen rather than to the Navigator (the Navigator being a wise man or a philosopher). The ship is likely to run unground.
5. In an ideal state, regulating literature and music is a good idea, because those things influence the mental states of the citizens.

Plato's ideal state, the one that he argues would be the best of all systems, is — I would argue — a better democracy than democracy itself. Why? Because there is total equality of opportunity within the state itself. Even a real democracy or a real republic does not have this degree of equality of opportunity — even though it is not equal after the philosopher kings are separated from the second-raters. :)

How does it work? Well, here is Plato's ideal state in a nutshell... all humans (men and women both, as Plato was the first proto-feminist) are thought to fall into one of three categories... sorted, by the way, by their degree of academic excellence or failure:

Men of Gold — the rulers, the philosopher kings. Interestingly enough, they are not to enrich themselves or live in luxury. However, they are selected because they love wisdom; so luxury is not thought to be a loss by this class of people. (So Plato argues.)

Men of Silver — these are people not wise enough to be the philosopher kings, but nonetheless they value honor over consumption. They therefore are good enough to be soldiers and policemen, reporting to the philosopher kings.

Men of Bronze — These are the rest, the unwashed masses. Ironically (to us) they can live in luxury if they work hard enough. These people do most of the other jobs (except for the really unpleasant work, which is given to slaves), and they are assumed to be motivated by sensuous pleasure.

Plato's Republic is of course extremely valuable, as well as Thomas More's Utopia. They are both insights into what both men considered to be a perfect form of government. Both seem to rely on certain assumptions that uniformity is necessary. Uniformity would of course be necessary for a small body of men and/or women to rule over the masses. Both also recognize that for the Utopian ideal there is required a small city or country or island for this ideal to exist.

I think the Republic is a good thought exercise when considering government today, but remember that today's world can only change positively if society changes with it. You can't legislate morality. Like with your own psychological state, change must come from within before it will be effective.

In the book, a group decides to create an imaginary city to define what justice looks like. The city is divided into classes: the Rulers who have an understanding of right and wrong, the Guardians who protect the city and care for its people, and the Producers who provide goods and services for the people.

The conclusion is the same: "We are, at all events, aware that such poetry mustn't be taken seriously as a serious thing laying hold of truth, but that the man who hears it must be careful, fearing for the regime in himself, and must hold what we have said about poetry" (608a6–b2).

Nowhere in the Republic does Socrates mention the poet's claim to inspiration. Indeed, that claim is pointedly omitted in the passage in which Socrates talks about the beginnings of the Iliad (392e2–393a5; see Bloom's note ad loc). Socrates implicitly denies the soundness of that claim here. Given his conception of the divine as Idea, such a claim could not be true, since the Ideas do not speak, let alone speak the things which Homer, Hesiod, and their followers recount. The result is that the poets are fabricators even of the appearance of knowing what they are talking about; this is not inconsistent with the Ion's characterization of poetry as inspired ignorance.

Does the critique of poetry in the Republic extend beyond the project of founding the just city in speech? I have already suggested an affirmative answer when discussing book II. The concerns about poetry expressed in books III and X would also extend beyond the immediate project of the dialogue, if they carry any water at all, even though the targets Plato names are of course taken from his own times. It has been argued that the authority to speak truth that poets claim is shared by many widely esteemed poets since then.

On the esoteric reading, Plato fully understands all the flaws of the perfectly just city to the construction of which the first half of the *Republic* is devoted. Thus the inside teaching is that extremism, the attempt to institute ideal justice on earth, will end in disastrous injustice, for this city is extremely coercive.

**Plato's republic risked to be authoritarian and maybe totalitarian.** He talks about censorship of arts, dividing

people in useful and useless and he also seems to like some debateable spartan customs. **However, these are things that need to be contextualized.**

**Because Plato also teaches us about wonderful things, such as the importance of education and music, the equality of men and women (which was a very progressive idea at that time), and last but not least, he demonstrated that the unjust are doomed to regret their behaviour, 'cause it only pays to be good in the world.** These are fine thoughts, that really deserved to become the foundations on which our culture is built.

**The Republic contains his whole system of ideas and it's – unexpectedly – an easy reading, that everyone should know.**

It is also from Plato that Badiou derives his organization of truth into four fields, or sets, of "procedures:" science, politics, art, and love. Some readers may be scandalized by Badiou's liberties in this translation: his systematic modifications of Greek terms, occasional elimination of entire passages, pervasive anachronistic references (such as AIDS, iPods, and Euros), and other conspicuous transformations. His language (and Susan Spitzer's translation) is dramatically vivid, colloquial, colorful, and at times raw and gritty. Socrates and his interlocutors speak like Europeans or Americans of today or the recent past, and their cultural references are both classical and contemporary. Nevertheless, Badiou's remains faithful to the spirit of Plato's text -- and, above all, to Plato's ideas.

Socrates advocates complete state control of everything, land, schools, businesses, homes, and even children to be taken away from their parents and raised by the state. In other words, an early form of communism. Plato agreed but Aristotle didn't, he knew only parents would love their children, which kids need. Most of the book is dialogues between various men as how to establish a perfect state. Socrates / Plato wanted Greece ruled by philosopher kings.

The ideas of Socrates have had an afterlife that is as long and varied as the thousand year journey envisioned for souls in the famous *Story of Er*. It is impossible to catalogue the full list of impacts but Whitehead's quote (introductory to this review) gives adequate flavor. The practical influence of Republic is more difficult to gauge than its impact on the theorizing of later thinkers - over the centuries, individuals have discovered in Plato's works the inspiration for undertaking political or social or educational reform and have used it as the springboard for much revolutionary thought, and deeds.

Republic has inspired in addition to all the expository analysis, also countless creative interpretations, which have shaped our vision of future possibilities, limits and of extremities. Many depictions of both utopian societies and their dystopian counterparts, ranging from Thomas More's [Utopia](#) to Jonathan Swift's [Gulliver's Travels](#) to Aldous Huxley's [Brave New World](#) to George Orwell's [1984](#), have their roots in the ideal city brought to life by Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus. Contemporary films such as [Gattaca](#) and [The Matrix](#) may not owe direct inspiration to Republic, but they participate in a long tradition of artistic works that ultimately trace their concerns back to the political, social, and metaphysical issues raised in Republic.

To identify this basic concern, we need only look at the complex structure of the dialogue itself. Republic's "narrative" is structured in an almost circular pattern. This circular pattern is complex, evoking the narrative patterns of epic poems such as *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Most basically, the dialogue's two main concerns (defining justice and ascertaining its relationship to happiness) are treated in two corresponding sections (books 2-4 and books 8-9) that are interrupted by what is nominally a series of digressions in books 5-7, and 10. These nominal digressions, of course, create the dialogue's most memorable metaphors, but they are meant to be digressions that add to the core. Not the other way around.

At its most basic level, Republic is an effort to forge a consistent and meaningful redefinition of "Justice". The *areté* that is explored lies in nothing outward, but rests solely in the mature reason and regard for what is beneficial to the soul. Not all the details in these allegories stand up to logical analysis, but they are not meant to.

This is made clear by the fact that The Republic's interlocutors repeatedly draw attention to the incomplete, provisional, and at times unsatisfactory nature of their treatment of justice, happiness, the ideal political community, the theory of the ideas, the cognitive faculties of human beings, etc. The inadequacy of "the method we are employing" is acknowledged at 4.435c-d, at 6.504b-d and in many other places.

In the end, the state is not fleshed out enough to really form a complete constitution for any state that can exist in reality (and not just as an idea). But the psychological part (it is curious how this part has generated so much less criticism, in comparison) is - we return in the end (and all the way in between) to the original question of how an individual should order his life - what his virtues should be. It is a political critique piggy-backing on a personal enquiry and hence any commentary of it cannot treat them differently. Censorship, slaves, aristocracy are all wonderful aspects in an individual but not palatable in a state (to modern eyes). Hence, we can only criticize that the greater to smaller equality is not well realized (i.e. from state => individual). But then Socrates, as above, is always eager to make the point about the provisional nature of his metaphor which is only meant to incite thinking and not as an answer - that is just not the way to deal with true lovers of truth, with true philosophers.

We need to understand that the Platonic Dialogues, in principle, are not meant to represent a simple doctrine that can be followed, they instead are meant to prepare the way for philosophizing. They are not easy guide books to follow. They require work from the reader, above and beyond the ideas presented. That is one of the reasons for the dialogue nature in which they are structured. Plato's overarching purpose in writing the Republic was to effect a change in his readers similar to the change that Glaucon and Adeimantus undergo at Socrates' hands in the fictional world of the dialogue. This purpose can be summed up in the word *protreptic*, from the Greek *protrepein*, which means "turn (someone) forward," hence "propel," "urge on," "exhort." Plato uses literary art, which in his case includes but is not limited to philosophical argument, to move his reader toward a greater readiness to adopt a just way of life.

All academic disciplines are organized around a few basic questions—"what is the nature of human cognition?" "what are the fundamental laws of the universe?"—and in *The Republic*, Plato touches on almost every one of them. That's why shelving the book in the philosophy section doesn't quite do it justice. An exhaustive list of the disciplines touched upon in this dialogue would be massive—epistemology, metaphysics, psychology, eschatology, political science, economics, art, literature, music. In fact, it would be easier naming disciplines that *aren't* touched upon.

That's how Plato lit up the intellectual landscape for me. By posing these questions in their most basic forms, and attempting answers, he makes it clear which questions are the important ones in life, and how difficult they are to answer. And that's why Plato's *Republic* is the quintessential classic. It has everything a classic should have—a unique perspective, brilliant ideas, engagement with perennial issues, and a charming writing style. It is the greatest book of perhaps the Western tradition's greatest thinker. I don't care who you are—you should read it.

Plato didn't write didactic works. He puts his ideas—sometimes conflicting ideas—into the mouths of the people of his day. The result is a kind of double confusion. To what extent are the ideas expressed by Socrates actually Socrates's? To what extent are they Plato's? To what extent are they anyone's? Perhaps Plato was just fond of playing intellectual games and creating philosophical pocket dramas.

Added to this is a kind of subtle irony that creeps up in several of his dialogues. In *Phaedrus*, Plato has Socrates complain about the evils of writing; yet Plato obviously loved to write. One of Plato's most influential ideas is his theory of forms; yet one of the most influential arguments *against* the theory was put forward by Plato himself. In *The Republic*, as well as elsewhere, Plato repeatedly equates knowledge with goodness, and falsity with evil; yet he proposes to found his entire utopia on a massive lie.

There are many complaints commonly lodged at Plato (and his pupil Aristotle). Liberals criticize his hatred of democracy and freedom. Moralists complain that he embraced slavery. (A friend of mine once told me that his philosophy professor called Aristotle the "father of racism.") Scientists—such as Carl Sagan—disparage Plato's anti-empirical and mystical tendencies. Nietzsche and his followers condemn Plato for dividing up the world into self-evident good and bad. The list of complaints can be extended almost endlessly. And, it should be said, there is some justice in all of these criticisms. (But just you try and found an entire intellectual tradition spanning thousands of years, and see if you do any better!)

*The Republic* is where Plato lays down his ideas of an ideal state and its rulers. Plato's Utopian state is one which is just and his ideal rulers are philosophers. Presented as a series of dialogue between Socrates and Plato's brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon, in eleven parts Plato step by step forms his ideal state (Part I and II), its rulers (Part IV and Part VII), their education, women's position (Part VI) and the position of art and poetry (Part X) in the new

state. Although some of his views are far fetched and absurd, many of them are thought-provoking. And if you examine carefully, you will see some truth in many of his viewpoints, especially those relating to imperfect societies (discussed in Part IX).

Basically, people are born with various levels of merit and a just society would identify those who are favoured with whatever merit they have, and it would set them to the tasks that best suit whatever merit they have. Plato talks of the merit of people as a bit like being assigned to different metals (not unlike in the Olympics) and those people metals differentiate them into different classifications – gold, silver, bronze and iron – and each will have their proper tasks in society. Once you have been assigned to one of these classifications you are pretty much stuck there. There are tasks that are appropriate to your abilities and the just society is one where people are assigned tasks that best meet their abilities. For this reason, it is important that parents don't know their own children and that children are brought up in common by the whole of society. That way you won't end up with a bronze child from two gold parents being given a gold education that they will not be able to make any use of, or their bronze child wreaking havoc trying to be a philosopher king, when they would have been a better baker or blacksmith or something.

Plato brings out the idea of art. A painting of a table is a mere reflection of the table that is painted, and every painting of that table will be different and no painter is able to paint that table as it truly is – the painter is basically restrained by the medium of which the painter creates the table.

The same goes with poetry, because the poet is only able to create a pale reflection of the event that the poet is writing the poem about, and no poet, through the medium of poetry, is able to create a perfect reflection of that event.

However, let us consider what this government is. First of all, it is not a democracy, and has no democratic institutions. The government is a oligarchic state which is ruled by philosophers, with the philosopher king at the top of the chain. It is also a very stratified form of government, with three castes, namely the ruling caste, the warrior caste (known as the Guardians), and the working caste. We must remember also that there is no room for anybody who cannot fit into any of these castes, thus the sick, injured, or disabled, have no part in this society because they are not able to fulfil any meaningful role within the state. However your caste his not determined by your birth, which means that just because you are born to working class parents does not mean you are automatically a part of the working class, and as such, just because you are born among the ruling class does not mean you are automatically members of the ruling class.

Plato advocates censorship, particularly in education. He indicates that there are some things that should not be taught to our young for fear that our young may not understand what is being taught. This is very much the case today because there is a form of censorship that is basically accepted, and that is the rating systems for our movies, and now for our computer games.

The book is comprised of 14 dialogues\*, all of which are fairly similar to other dialogues I've read by Plato, particularly the first few. Though some I disagree with, there are many parts of the dialogues that I respect and some that, if nothing else, I find interesting to consider. In Chapter IV, Socrates says, *'The point is that a young person can't tell when something is allegorical and when it isn't, and any idea admitted by a person of that age tends to become almost ineradicable and permanent. All things considered, then, that is why a very great deal of importance should be placed upon ensuring that the first stories they hear are best adapted for their moral improvement.'*

The final Chapter was perhaps the best, a Dante like experience and explanation of where the souls go after death including my favourite Greek figure, Odysseus himself, as an example. I would recommend *Republic* for this final part alone. The rest of the book isn't always sound in its debate, but it is almost always readable and enjoyable, considering the reputation the book has as being one of the cornerstones of Western philosophy and literature. As far as reading Plato for the first time goes, *Symposium* is far, far, shorter and in some ways better, surrounded around the idea of love and what love is, something everyone can relate to faster than the idea of morality, politics and state as seen in these pages.

*The Republic*, for example, which would be better translated in our modern language to *Society*, is one of the more important of the dozens of Plato's books to still exist; it is one of the first books in Western culture, in fact, to tackle the very question of what a society is, of how to best organize one, and how to lay the long-term plans to make such

a "republic" stable and violence-free. For example, the whole first part of the book tackles nothing else but what Socrates saw as the fundamental question behind all societies, that of "justice;" of how we as an organized group of people determine what exactly is "fair," what exactly is "right" and "wrong," and how we go about not only formally defining that but also enforcing it on a society-wide basis.

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(Plato and his peers, in fact, believed that the enlightened citizen should be all of these things at once; it's only in our modern times that we split them into four different professions.) This then gets us into part 3 of *The Republic*, a detailed examination of four popular types of society that were around at the time; this is what gets us our modern definitions of timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny, and of course the dozens of other government types that have since been invented by later philosophers.

And then finally, the way Socrates and his students actually discuss and arrive at these conclusions is through what is now known as the "Socratic Method," a fancy term for something most people will immediately understand; it's simply the process of teaching through talking and asking questions, guiding a student through a series of answers into discovering the wisdom of that topic on their own. Anytime a public school teacher discusses a subject out loud in a classroom, for example, then calls on a student to answer a question about the subject, that technically is the Socratic Method.

There's nothing like reading the actual source material, fans of Classical literature will tell you, if you want a deep understanding of the principles guiding all of Western culture; this one single book, for example, laid the groundwork for how over half the world's governments now operate, making it the very definition of a book you should read before you die.

#### *The argument against:*

Of course, let's not forget the price of reading a 2,200-year-old book of philosophy, which is that much of it is out-of-date by now; in fact, there's an entire litany of terms in *The Republic* that a reader must put air quotes around each time they come across, with "democracy" for example not meaning nearly the same thing to Plato that it means to us, nor "republic," nor "equality," nor "freedom." Two thousand years is a long time to be able to tweak and build on a certain set of specific ideas, let's not forget; in fact, most of the incremental improvements we make to government anymore are based on principles from merely a half-century or so ago, which themselves were the product of the 75th or 80th generation of small improvements that have now been made over the centuries to Plato and Socrates' original ideas.

Plato does not offer the reader answers in the manner that Aristotle will, but invites the reader to discover truth for himself as he listens to the conversation, follows the arguments, and works them out for himself; there is no other true learning. (2) I was reading it this time as part of an intensive course, and the pace was much faster than I should have liked, because some of the passages are so illuminating and beautiful that one really must put the book down and bask in the splendour of its glow. In this sense, I found that the book has an ennobling quality. It focussed me on noble things; it made me want to be a better man, pursuing justice, temperance, courage, wisdom (the four cardinal virtues).

The core argument that Plato makes, through using Socrates as the voice of reason, seems to link up to the idea of the creation of a better Republic - hence the title - or a kind of Utopia. He argues that in the end the things that most people pursue in life - wealth, fame, power etc. - are not as important as philosophy - or in other words the knowledge of what to do with wealth, fame and power. He, therefore, upholds justice and rationality over such things.

Part I starts with Socrates leading a debate with several other men on what the definitions of justice and injustice are. Everybody has slightly different ideas, but Socrates is able to persuade everyone but Thrasymachus, who believes that justice is the interest of the stronger. Part II continues their debate about justice, with Thrasymachus arguing that individuals benefit from unjust acts, and Socrates claiming that society as a whole benefits from justice.

This is the closest thing that I've seen to a heated debate in Socratic dialogues.

Part III is concerned with education. The Republic was written in 380 B.C., before the time of Christ, and much of their theology was derived from ancient Greek poets like Homer. Their discussion was about what types of poetry young people should be exposed to. They agreed that it should express courage and strength, rather than the "woe is me" type poetry that might encourage weakness. I believe this is also the section where they discussed music theory and which modes were proper. I learned all the modes on guitar when I was younger, and I still use them. Each mode has its own personality, as Plato describes. They also agreed that males and females should receive the same education, which is fascinating considering how many societies throughout history have been patriarchal.

In Parts IV and V, they discuss how the members of society will be happy in filling their appropriate roles, whether it be leader or auxiliary. They should have specialized jobs so that they can become experts in their fields and more efficient. There will be no "jack-of-all-trades" in this society. It may be hard to live up to this ideal, but Plato's goal seems to be justice and equality. Part VI discusses the family. Women can have the same jobs as men, as long as it is fitting. But the family must be abolished, so that everyone will treat each other the same, without preferential treatment. Also, this will help the State to breed ideal citizens.

Part VII deals with the famous "Allegory of the Cave" which compares ignorance to seeing shadows on the wall of a cave, rather than seeing the actual objects. The "philosopher king" must be brought up to be able to see the actual objects and not just the shadows. Part VIII, my favorite section, discusses the four unjust constitutions. They are timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. He believes that the philosopher king is superior to any of these forms of government. I enjoyed this section because of how it relates to today's governments.

Part IX is where everything starts to come full circle as we approach our conclusion. He points out how because the tyrannical man has so much inner conflict, his selfishness cannot make him happier than the philosopher king. It is virtue in itself that makes the philosopher happy. In this, he is taking one more jab at Thrasymachus's argument. Part X is a bizarre detour into how poetry doesn't help society. I disagree with this section, but I guess it's just a product of its time. Part XI is a beautiful conclusion discussing reincarnation and how people get to choose their next life after they die. The Republic was an amazing book and an inspiration.

In "The Republic," Plato, through the voice of Socrates, provided the keenest metaphor to describe his understanding of the problem cod defining "reality." His allegory of the cave serves as the takeoff point. Socrates describes the situation to Glaucon thus:

[Socrates:]: Imagine the condition of men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground, with an entrance open to the light and a long passage all down the cave. Here they have been from childhood, chained by the leg and also by the neck, so that they cannot move and can see only what is in front of them, because the chains will not let them turn their heads. At some distance higher up is the light of a fire burning behind them; and between the prisoners and the fire is a track with a parapet built along it, like a screen at a puppet-show, which hides the performers while they show their puppets over the top. . .

Now behind this parapet imagine persons carrying along various artificial objects, including figures of men and animals in wood or stone or other materials, which project above the parapet. Naturally, some of the persons will be talking, others silent.

Next, Plato has Socrates examine what happens if someone is taken from the cave out into the light of day. This person then comes to understand that all is illusion and shadows in the cave--whereas earlier that person had defined the images as reality. In this sense, through education, one could come to see reality and escape the confines of the cave. And when that person would re-enter the cave, he would realize the nature of illusions and be able to try to illuminate with his (or her) wisdom the lives of the people in the cave. This, of course, would be difficult since the denizens of that dark region would not themselves have directly experienced the light of knowledge.

Apparently, Plato was not unaware of the near impossibility of even a society as nearly perfect as Atlantis was, to be above eventual corruption and divine judgment. The myth of Atlantis bears some marked similarities to the biblical story of Nimrod and Babylon in Genesis and it's reappearance in Revelation. The similarities, in fact, are rather striking. Taking into account all of the above, Plato seemed to understand the unlikelihood of a perfect society ever existing; and even if one could, the dangers inherent in it. Plato seems to intimate even here that the closer a society (or a person) gets to perfection, the greater the risk of corruption becomes and for it to become the polar opposite of perfect. All the potential for good becomes means for evil. Plato was very astute in understanding political models and was also aware of the risks involved with those models. The Hellenistic states had been subject to various

models of government and all were shown to be lacking. Plato saw in democracy a freedom leading to sloth and moral laxity. Indeed, eventually democracies become dictatorships.

Plato asks so well and considers so well, and so comprehensively, that his ideal system (regardless of whether he was even very serious about it) isn't the issue. The significance, I think, is that he gets us to consider all the important questions he considers, many of which we otherwise probably wouldn't have considered, and among other things to then uncover our unexamined assumptions and prejudices and reassess them.

Plato's sockpuppet reboot of his martyred life-coach is a much more worrisome figure, and *The Republic* is an exasperating intellectual maze of madcap sophistry lobbying for some insanely bad ideas. A classical Odditorium of notions that would have been considered nutso even by most Greeks in their day. (Plato even admits as much in Book VI, portraying his elite corps of misunderstood philosopher-errants as slinging pearls before Athenian swine, but with a moral imperative to convert the unwashed masses for their own darn good.)

On the one hand, the gears milling in Socrates' head tend to grind semantics down to a squishy mass of equivocation and fast-talk. He is a prince of legerdemain under cover of false modesty, of leading questions and of badgering the witness.

Plato's skepticism, in *The Republic*, does not extend to questioning the divinity of the gods (or, collectively, "God"), whom he asserts to be the foundation of all Being, and is as eager to browbeat or banish heretics and freethinkers as any dark-age Inquisitor. (In Book X, it takes Plato about four pages to "prove" the immortality of the soul, while skeptics are punted to the curb as amoral rabblers.) His reboot of Greek religion would redact any story which slanders the gods as susceptible to human-like folly or appetite.

Happiness is about allowing oneself (and the State) to become a perfect receptive mirror of Apollonian purity and righteousness. The archangel ecstasy of the Platonic alpha caste will then (presumably) trickle down to the grateful, mewling, sunstruck plebes, happily entranced by the Noble Lie (in its myriad forms) erected by the philosopher monarchs keep us drones gaga-eyed as altruistic cogs of the state.

Slavery, propaganda, autocracy, one-dimensional art, the abolition of irony, a militarist ideal, top-to-bottom social-engineering, are crucial support-struts of Plato's master plan in summoning the ambrosial Up There to cleanse the fetid, cancerous Down Here, to achieve racial and philosophic purity in a utopian climax to History.

**Book I** An engaging start, with Socrates and his mate essentially pressured into hanging out with some dudes, and Socrates begins by chatting to an old guy about getting old, something that is pretty timelessly relatable. When Socrates starts in with "so what is 'justice'?" the old dude knows well enough to find something else to do.

The argument that follows is annoying. Partly that is because it is tempting to read it as a transcription of a real conversation rather than an argument by Plato, and what Plato's Socrates does is not the conversation of real inquiry, where you take someone's definition and examine it fairly, but a sort of rhetorical bullying, with Socrates baffling his conversational partners with sly shifts and misdirection. There's therefore a part of me that wants to interject to point out these failures to engage with the real meaning of another speaker, which somewhat misses the point of the rhetorical device of the conversation itself. I was however pleased to see Socrates dressed down for always criticising and never proposing anything.

The pursuit of the Ideal, the forms that Plato is known to truck in, leads to meaningless decisions. For example, Plato attempts to refute the idea that justice can be defined as doing good to the good (or just) and harm to the evil (or unjust). He does this by analogy, asking if doing harm to a dog improves its excellence in the elements of being a dog, building to an argument that harm is always unjust. The foil conversation partner simply says harm doesn't improve the dog, but this simply isn't true! You might harm a dog to chasten it for bad behaviour, therefore improving its behaviour, an analogy extremely relevant to the discussion of harm in justice. Of course, other sorts of harm are not useful to this aim, but the inability to distinguish between 'a type of harm for one purpose' and other harms as part of a general Harm seems to be key to Plato's tendency to fall into confusion.

**Book II** Glaucon comes off the bench with a staggering presentation of justice in what is recognisably a game-theoretical account. Being unjust is defecting in the dilemma, and suffering multiple defections is the worst outcome for all, so we chose the compact of justice as non-defection, even though each could benefit more by being unjust. I



had no idea that this concept had such a robust pedigree, and it was pretty impressively stated. There's also an illustrative fable involving a ring of invisibility which made me think of an influence on both Tolkien and Wells.

Glaucon's brother also chips in to support another point made by Glaucon, that an unjust person would be capable of *seeming* just, and buying dispensation from the gods for his injustice, so if Socrates is going to prove that justice is good he needs to prove that it has inherent benefits, and not just ones that accrue from seeming just, as those will also, and perhaps mostly, go to the unjust.

Socrates is stumped and admits it. He suggests that they try looking for justice in a city, first, and then seeing how it might apply to a man. He then sets off on a bit of world-building, designing a city. Building on a general view of specialisation as a superior form of organising labour, he makes the case for a professional army, and then in considering what qualities we might want for these men (which he begins by comparing them to dogs, and then makes a dumb leap to requiring them to be philosophers, which incidentally suggests that philosophers are dogs) he starts laying out a programme of indoctrination. This is highly censorious, with Socrates calling for a ban on any negative or even complex representation of the gods, something not just for our dog-philosopher-soldiers, but to be imposed on the entire fictional city. The fact that he's arguing 'philosophers' should be kept from complex moral fiction doesn't seem to alarm Plato.

**Book III** Some pretty horrible stuff, continuing the line of exploration at the end of Book II. Plato sets out to legislate every last element of the guardian-dog-philosophers' lives, including specific types of permitted fiction, the sorts of music they should be able to listen to, and what they should be allowed to eat. At points this seems to cross over into restrictions on the whole fictional city, the distinction is not always clear.

At times this section reads like a *reductio ad absurdum* -- Plato is calling for culturally important texts like those of Homer and Hesiod to be stripped of basically all the best bits, he's arguing that specialisation means that warriors can't be oarsmen, and he's essentially banning actors. This isn't just nuts to modern ears, this would be nuts to Plato's contemporaries. Unfortunately, it goes on too long and diverts through too much else for me to be convinced it really is arguing the opposite of what it says.

Some of the diversions were interesting, including on the nature of temperance and the balance of the athletic and artistic in producing a well-rounded character. It's hard to use Plato as a moral authority given the rest of what he proposes in this book, but there are occasional details and insights that are surprising and worth reflection.

**Book IV** Adeimantus interjects to point out that it sounds like it would suck to be one of these Guardians, and Plato's Socrates agrees, but highlights that we're just looking for a perfect society overall, and components of it can suck if necessary.

Given a few last flourishes of world-building, Socrates moves on to locating justice in his city. He asserts (without challenge) that the four good qualities of a city are wisdom, bravery, temperance and justice, and decides to find justice by nailing down the other elements in a process of elimination. These locations are not particularly well-argued, but Socrates ends up with a definition of justice as a combination of something like the non-aggression principle (nobody meddling in anyone else's business) and a class system that prevents people moving across class boundaries. Around this point in the book I was reminded that Sparta must have been a big influence on Plato in designing his Guardians, with their long tradition of a distinct social class of ascetic warriors that were considered unbeatable in combat for a long time.

Anyway, having decided on what justice looks like in a city, Socrates applies it to a person's own faculties, where it becomes clear that what he has arrived at as a definition of justice is what we might term order -- people putting their reason, spirit and desires all in the proper place. More carefully, it is the natural order of things, so that, at a state level, people fit for carpentry become carpenters, and people fit for rule become rulers. He convinces his conversational aides that they have arrived at a fitting description of justice (the series of commonsense tests he throws at the idea is almost more interesting than the formal definition) and then turns to a discussion of the different forms of government, the first of which is an aristocracy (or kingdom), like the city he described, where the best rulers rule and everyone else is in their proper societal place.

**Book V** Socrates is about to explain why all the other forms of government suck when his audience interject to question him about something he skipped over in the worldbuilding -- women and children. Under protest, he turns

to the topic and explains his vision: women should be treated the same as men, insofar as is practical, and given the same education and most of the same duties, though with some adjustment for their lesser strength. When it comes to children, Plato has an even more radical vision, a sort of state-overseen selective breeding lottery, with the best guardians given freest reign to reproduce, and childrearing mostly offloaded to state nurseries so even mothers don't know their children. When you get past your prime, you get to have as much sex as you want with whoever, so long as you promise to kill any babies.

There are a few other embellishments of the world-building here, too. Plato lays down some sensible restrictions for civilised warfare, and explains a few practical details like how children of the Guardian class might be exposed to battles for edification without putting them in too much danger (I guess he'd love action movies and video games).

Challenged on the practicality of achieving this society, Socrates offers the (seemingly quite last-ditch) hope that it might be possible if there were philosopher-kings to enact the vision. Glaucon points out how Socrates is inviting mockery (implicitly, I guess, for the ridiculous nature of the idea that philosophers are any use) and Socrates diverts into an explanation of what he means by philosophers, which was actually one of the more tedious bits of the book so far.

**Book VI** Continuing, Socrates lays out the case for why true philosophers would be ideal kings. As he wraps up, Adeimantus comes back at him with, firstly, a very valid critique of the Socratic style of operation, and secondly an epic diss on philosophers:

For at this moment a person will tell you, that though at each question he cannot oppose you with words, yet in practice he sees that all the students of philosophy, who have devoted themselves to it for any length of time, instead of taking it up for educational purposes and relinquishing it while still young, in most cases become exceedingly eccentric, not to say quite depraved, while even those who appear the most respectable are notwithstanding so far the worse for the pursuit which you commend, that they become useless to their country.

Plato pours oil on this sick burn by having Socrates agree that philosophers indeed quite decidedly suck, comparing them to uneducated sailors competing to be the pilot of a boat, none of them in the least able to even identify when someone else is making sense. He nonetheless argues that a true philosopher might be born, sometime, to a king, without being corrupted by the many issues that plague philosophically-inclined young men, and thenceforth steer things toward the vision being outlined. There's then a discussion of the proper educational context for such a lordling, which Socrates contends should be the contemplation of the ideal Good, which he outlines as having the same relation to reason as the sun has to our eyes.

**Book VII** Plato extends this previous into his famous cave analogy, to explain the difficulty of communicating this sort of 'true' knowledge to others. This is very reminiscent of a lot of Eastern discussions about enlightenment. There is then a long discussion of some of the elements involved in studying this highest discipline, which Plato contends should be primarily mathematical training, looking for abstractions and rules rather than studying reality in and of itself. I'm very much an empiricist rather than a theoretician, and Plato didn't sway me -- I actually found this book the most tiresome, as I couldn't be persuaded that anything important was being discussed.

**Book VIII** Socrates is now finally permitted to return to the subject he left off at the start of Book V -- the forms of government other than perfect rational aristocracy (or monarchy). He describes first of all the form which is most unfamiliar to us, what he calls timocracy -- a state somewhere between aristocracy and oligarchy, where a ruling class jealous of honours and distinctions subjects the other classes rather than ruling modestly in the interest of all. Thence he proceeds to oligarchy, explaining how accumulation of wealth may come to supplant the accumulation of honor, until there are distinct property requirements for participation in government, and society's elite focuses entirely on the extraction of wealth. The resentment this treatment breeds in the underclasses, particularly when rival oligarchs are cast down among them, eventually erupts in revolution, and the creation of a democratic rule. The liberty and equality of democracy may then lead to a loss of shame, balance and public order, and an eternal suspicion of any orderly minds that manage to accrue wealth as being an attempt to return to oligarchy. The poorly-treated rich, being stolen from by the mob, will naturally end up in truth supporting oligarchy, and eventually a people's champion will arise to confront these elites, who himself will soon become despotic, gathering bodyguards

to protect him from elite assassins, and purging all opponents.

This was really fun reading. It is impossible to read Plato's full account of the relationship between oligarchy, democracy and despotism without finding some parallels in modern politics, some of them quite alarming.

And if he is banished, and afterwards restored in despite of his enemies, does he not return a finished tyrant?

**Book IX** Throughout the previous book, Socrates held forth on the character of a man described also by the style of government given (remember, justice in a city paired with justice in a man). Here he gives a far deeper treatment on the final element missing, the character of a man ruling himself as a tyrant. This is a deeply moral and psychological discussion about how the most insane passions are lifted to rule over all other components of the soul.

Following this, Plato turns the conversation to the nature of desires, arguing that in complement to his earlier threefold division of the major elements of man as reason, spirit, and manifold worldly desires, there are pleasures associated with each. He also rather predictably argues that the pleasures of reason should be held uppermost, on the (I think dubious) grounds that only those that plumb the depths of the mind can compare the pleasures.

Finally, Socrates returns to the initial challenges of Thracymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus, demonstrating that he has found that not only is justice best, it is best in and of itself. It is an extremely well-delivered flourish, using the image of a man containing both an ideal man, a lion and a multi-headed beast, and I think communicates well the central intuition of virtue ethics and the forms of self-mastery argued for by traditional conservative morality.

**Book X** Seemingly done with the main investigation, Plato doubles-down on the topic of poetry and the arts, arguing that as art imitates reality, and reality itself only imitates the Ideal, art is necessarily removed from anything important and only good for amusement, and furthermore tends to provoke people to celebrate depictions of behaviour they should avoid. None of this finds any purchase in me, though I appreciate that Plato at least set out that he was open to argument on the value of art and did really quite like Homer, and was mastering this affection through reason in line with his concept of justice rather than out of spite.

Finally, in a section that must have been key to why Plato was so loved by Christians, Plato presents a rather dumb argument as to the immortality of the soul, and caps it off with a religious fable about a man who goes to the afterlife and sees how immortal souls are treated there, something no doubt of great inspiration to Dante. It's not the best ending, philosophically speaking, but it does allow him to do some victory laps about the importance of justice.

Plato's Republic, I submit, crystalizes what has been and will be one of the quintessential aesthetic visions delivered and held by European culture. There is a particular constellation of images of clear knowing and pure being coordinated in an orderly array that forms a singularly beautiful vision of the cosmos that is quite unique to the western idiom and, probably by virtue of its Greek influences, Islam.

The vision is something as follows - the numerical regularities the Pythagoreans detected underlying the principles of musical harmony and consonance are taken as paradigmatic for the deep structure of the cosmos as a whole, in which all things move in an endless dance, guided by an intellectually- and ontologically-pure realm of mathematics and geometry, which plays out in the concordant relationship of parts to the whole, and which may be seen in the structure of the natural world, in the and in the movement of the stars. The soul responds to images of order of this kind because they speak the soul's language, which recognizes in the structure of the cosmos an outer reflection of the inner logic of virtue and goodness, which likewise consists of an orderly comportment of all things.

Much of its focus is upon Plato's concept of the ideal state and how to run it, and his vision will probably strike most readers as profoundly totalitarian, stunningly naive in its psychological and historical consciousness, and extremely odious.

There is entirely too much to say about the repugnance of his political vision, but one aspect that I will focus on is its bizarreness. In his analysis of the ideal state, Plato returns repeatedly and at great length to three themes which, I believe, have no particular right to the centrality he affords them. They are the importance of carefully controlling the education of children, the importance of creating a class of pure and effective guardsmen for the city, and the damage done to the state by what he identifies as the wrong kind of art, such as most types of music and "imitative

poetry,\" the latter of which he dwells on at great length.

The key factor Plato analyzes in the Republic regarding social organization is justice. Now, in Plato's time, as we know from Thucydides, the people of Athens invaded the island of Melos, one of their allies, and, having killed all the men, took all the women and children as slaves. This caused a moral crisis for the Athenians that was carefully analyzed by Euripides, for example, in his \"Trojan Women.\"

Here we have what must have been a ready-to-hand example for Plato of a state at its most unjust. Now I ask his Socrates, are you really saying the thing that we should be most concerned about, the thing that drove the slaughter and enslavement of innocent friends, was poetry?

With respect to all of these issues, both in terms of the strangeness of his conclusions and the grossly disproportionate attention Plato pays to them, I submit we have here chiefly an illustration of a fairly authoritarian psychology, which as an empirical hypothesis we can observe tends to perseverate on these same themes out of all proportion to their actual importance.

Rather, the Republic is about alignment and overall unity. Unity between reality (as Plato believes there is a dividing line between reasoning and vision), morals (justice which is connected to reasoning, injustice to vision), the state (the ideal Republic which exemplifies reason, compared to other states which exemplify vision), and the role of the philosopher (who is controlled by reason rather than vision).

For example, when discussing how the philosopher comes to exist in an imperfect state, Plato resorts to his argument in the Meno that the coming into being of a moral person could be attributed to the Gods (divine intervention, which in ordinary terms could be considered luck or a miracle).

The contemporary Athenian decadence and the prevalence of Injustice ( adike) in the every sphere of society fretted him to the core. He believed it was only Justice that could serve as the instrument for reviving and restoring the faded glory of Athens in a time of political madness. His trust in 'paideia' (education) is so strong that he asserted that :

\"a philosopher must be king or a king must be the philosopher\",

as opposed to the Sophists who emphasised on the individual cause as the basis of state craft, and visualized the dream of disruption. The bifurcated education system that Plato visualized :

- 1) Education of the Body , which can be attained with ease by training in gymnasium.
- 2) Education of the Mind, which is essentially complex and requires prolonged intellectual training under the able guardianship of a preceptor. The ideal form of knowledge may be generated by the perfect form of intellectual training. This knowledge, he further categorized into
  - a) 'alethe' (falsehood), that is the knowledge of semblance, a mere attraction for the appearance.
  - b) 'doxa' (opinion), that is a perception of the finite level of knowledge.
  - c) 'beltion' (knowledge), that is the perfect form of knowledge, the knowledge of ultimate reality, the knowledge of 'being'.

### Book iii

The arguments of Book iii started to take shape in the Book II when Glaucon raised the importance of educating the guardians of the city state. In order to make these guardians courageous and wise they should not be allowed to listen to the stories told by the poets as the poets are inadequate moral guides. This contention of book ii is elaborated and magnified in book iii. It should, therefore, be noted that the discussion of poetry in this book was not prompted by his intention to expatriate the nature of poetry but by the major role that poetry play in the methods of education. Poetry can never be capable of forming the true philosophical spirit of the guardians of the city because poetry can never lead to 'paideia' (perfect form of education), as poetry lacks both psycho-moral education (book iii) and philosophical education (book x). Therefore, poetry is conducive 'apaideia' or educational inadequacy.

The ideal Republic of Plato banished the poets because they are responsible for conducting an excess of emotions

which blurs and destabilises the rational mind. Of all the emotions responsible for this disorder, Plato rejected two particular emotions: the emotion of fear and lamentation. The excess of emotions disrupts the working of reason in a person. Citing the examples of Homer's description of hell and Achilles's lamentation in the 10th book of Iliad or Priam's weeping in the 4th book of Iliad, he averred that if children and young men listen to these sort of stories they will either grow a sense of fear or grow unmanly and start to lament even at a slightest provocation and break into complaints without trying to endure or resist. He also added "Indulgence in violent laughter commonly invites a violent reaction".

**Moral Charges against poetry:** In terms of moral charges, Plato put forward the principle of self-restraint. At socio-political level, self-restraint means "obedience to their rulers", on the other hand, at person level it means "ruling their own desire for the pleasure of eating, drinking and sex." Again citing the examples of Zeus's carnal desire for Hera from Homer's Odyssey (10th) and other great gods who lack the self-restraint, Plato evinced them to be dangerous because listening to such stories and believing in their credibility, people may conclude that they can also perform such immoral acts with impunity, and therefore, destabilize the sociopolitical norms of an ideal city state.

## Book x

Whereas the book x may broadly be divided into two parts. The first part is concentrated in discussing the philosophical theory of 'eidos' (idea or form), whereas the second part tries to correlate it to his discussion of poetry.

**Philosophical charges against poetry:**

Following the charges brought about by Socrates in Plato's Ion, in The Republic, Plato continues the trend by stating that the works of poets or any other artists are imitation, the semblance of truth but not the higher reality which, according to him, only exist in the mind of the God. What form and visible objects that the poets and other artists create are merely imperfect copies of the higher truth or "idea".