

Plato Study Guide
LART602
Prof. Oakes
Winthrop University

Readings:

Plato: *Republic*, Books II-IX
Burkert: "Philosophical Religion" pp. 321-329, 332-337
Classical Greek Sculpture¹

General Notes

- Plato is an *idealist*,² indeed one of our intellectual tradition's foremost exponents of rational idealism. His theory of *forms* is one of the great achievements in the Western intellectual world. This theory asserts that reality is ideal, and thus eternal and unchanging. And since the ideal is capable of intellectual grasp, so too is ultimate reality, on Plato's account. To know, for Plato, is to have intellectual grasp of an ideal form.
- While ultimate reality, for Plato, consists in ideal forms, Plato also recognizes the existence of a material order, though the exact ontological status of that order is not made clear by him. The material order is a world of change, a world of "becoming", as he puts it, where becoming occupies a middle ground between being and non-being. Just what this means, exactly, is difficult to say.
- The overall argument of Plato's *Republic* is an argument about justice – morality, in general, that is. Plato's concept of justice is broad, equivalent perhaps to our present notion of "what's right." Plato seeks to demonstrate that there are moral truths and that the best human life is the moral life. Along the way, he elaborates a theory of knowledge and reality supporting his ethical theory.
- For further information, see my notes on Plato, on the course web-page.
- Our Burkert passage continues his account of the development of theology, culminating in the unification of reality, rational order, and goodness. That is, Plato's conception of the good in relation to the divine gives expression to an idea that will remain influential for centuries.
- Some examples of classical Greek sculpture help to illustrate Plato's rational world view.

Some Questions

1. As you work your way through Plato, you should be asking yourself, in what sense is Plato's world a rationally ordered realm? In what sense, if any, is it not?
2. Given the status of the forms as ultimate reality, what are we to make of the material world? Is it a rational order, or not? Is it real, or not?
3. What do you think of the proposition that true reality is ideal, unchanging, eternal – a system of ideas? (You might compare this proposition with your understanding of the laws of nature.)
4. Plato suggests that there are true moral forms but that these are only ever instantiated imperfectly in the world of material events. Discuss.

Plato's *Republic*

In general, Plato's *Republic* is structured as follows:

Republic I-II: The Task – Define and Defend Justice *RAGP* – pp. 369-407 (327a-367e)

¹ See representative images here, from the temple of Zeus at Olympia, Greece:

http://faculty.winthrop.edu/oakesm/LART602/Classical_Sculpture.html. Other images abound on the internet.

² See Study Guide IIb (Pre-Socratics) for a definition of idealism.

<i>Republic</i> II-V: The <i>Kallipolis</i> and the Tri-Partite Soul; Justice defined	<i>RAGP</i> – pp. 407-507 (367e-473b)
<i>Republic</i> V-VII: Knowledge and Reality	<i>RAGP</i> - pp. 507-566 (473b-541b)
<i>Republic</i> VIII-IX: Completing the Task	<i>RAGP</i> - pp. 567-615 (543a-592b)

Overview of the *Republic*, Books II-IX and of some Key Sections:

Book II.357a-368c³

Glaucon and Adeimantus pose to Socrates the challenge motivating the discussion of the rest of the text: show that justice is good in itself, and not simply good for its consequences (reputation, etc.).

Book II.368c-372d

Introduction of the *kallipolis*. The *kallipolis* is the ideal city (*kalli* means “high” or “best”). Plato proposes to define justice by first considering the nature of the ideal city which, presumably, will be a just city. Cities generally – political bodies – originate in the weakness of individual self-sufficiency. The ideal city is built on the principles of specialization and division of labor. The first main division of labor includes those who produce goods and services (370c-371e).

Book II. 372d-376c

Dissatisfied with Socrates’ “healthy” city, Plato’s brothers demand a luxurious city, which creates the conditions for warfare and thus introduces the need for the second main class of labor in the ideal city, that of the guardians. The guardians are a warrior class charged with protecting the city from harms. The primary attributes of the warrior class are courage and being “philosophical”.

Book II.376c-end of Book VII

The training of the guardian class includes a specification of the ideal city in full, which itself requires development of Plato’s theories of justice, knowledge, and reality.

Book IV.412a-414b

The guardian class will itself be split into two classes, rulers and auxiliaries. The latter will carry out martial duties while the former rule the whole of the *kallipolis*. The rulers will be the best of the guardians, those whose souls are most “harmonious”, blending courage with wisdom. The philosophical training of the guardians takes up much of the rest of the text through Book VII.

Book IV.427e-433c

Plato defines the four cardinal political virtues, including justice. Justice is a structural feature concerning the proper conduct of each of the city’s three parts. If each part “does its own”, then the city will be just: the producers produce, the auxiliaries protect, and the rulers rule.

Book IV.435a-441c

Plato argues for the tri-partite division of the soul: it has the three basic parts that he finds in the *polis*: a producing part, a spirited, defending part, and a thinking, ruling part.

Book IV: 441c-445b

Plato identifies the four cardinal personal virtues, having the same structure as the political virtues. If each part of the soul does its own, then the individual will be just. He presents his preliminary, general argument that it is better to be just than to be unjust.

³ Note on Plato Citations: Plato’s works are cited by reference to *Stephanus numbers*, owing to the type-setting of a 16th Century French printer, Henri Estienne. These numbers will be found in the margins of our text.

Book V.473-480a

In this section, we find first an important statement of Plato's theory of forms (473c-476d), and then his argument to show that only those knowing the forms (i.e., only philosophers) have knowledge of the truth (476d-480a). Some key passages in the former are these:

473c-d: only philosophers should rule in a perfect state.

475b: the philosopher loves all wisdom.

476b: the so-called lovers of sights and sounds fail to perceive the true nature of what they see/hear.

476c: the lovers of sights and sounds live as in a dream, failing to recognize mere appearance as such, mistaking them for the real.

476c-d: philosophers "see" both the true natures of things and their mere appearances in sense.

476d: Knowledge is of ideal, intellectual forms; the faculty perceiving only sensory appearance is a faculty of mere "opinion".

The argument in 476b-480a involves a three-way distinction among knowledge, opinion, and ignorance and the objects of each of these, or what each is "set over," namely, being, becoming, and nothing, respectively. That is, knowledge is of what is and ignorance is of what is not; what is is being, and what is not is nothing. "Opinion" is that state midway between true knowledge and complete ignorance. Plato reasons that its object, too, must be something midway between what is and what is not. This turns out to be the changing world that we perceive in sense, a world that in some sense is and in some sense is not.

Book VI.504d-VII.535a

In this section of the *Republic*, we find several helpful metaphors for Plato's theory of reality, including the Sun analogy and the Cave allegory which will be our focus. Also helpful is the Line metaphor, though we'll focus less on that. The remainder of the section involves Plato's discussion of the Philosopher-Kings, i.e., the educational requirements enabling them to understand the forms. Some key passages:

505a-506a: Plato introduces the form of the good. Knowledge of this form is essential to knowing how to act properly, how to do the right thing, how to be virtuous. It is our highest object of knowledge.

505b-c, 506b-d: Socrates professes not to know what is the form of the good. In other words, neither does Plato.

507b-509b: The Sun Analogy – Plato's most complete characterization of the nature of the good. The good is fundamental to, the source of all being and of all knowledge as well. The analogy is this: Just as the sun creates the light that makes it possible for us to see that which is visible, so the good creates an intellectual "light" that makes it possible for us to understand that which is intelligible. In other words, we understand what a thing is by reference to the good. And further, just as the sun is the source of all that exists on our planet, in a sense, so too is the good the source of all that exists in the intellectual realm – i.e., it is the source of the forms themselves.

509d-511e: The Line. The line is another analogy by means of which Plato seeks to explain the relationship between the forms and the rest of reality and the human knowledge/belief relationships to these.

514a-519b: The Cave Allegory. Perhaps the most famous image in Western ideas, the Cave represents the relationship between sense perception and truth. It distinguishes several levels of reality and our knowledge of them, culminating in the form of the good.

521c-535a: The Education of the Philosopher-Kings. Note the opposition throughout of being and becoming – the reality of the (ideal) forms on the one hand and the ambiguous reality of the material order. Note the role of dialectics as the pursuit of truth by rational argumentation alone: the forms are not open to sense, only the intellect.

Books VIII-IX

The culmination of the *Republic* consists in Plato's arguments that justice is indeed a virtue in and of itself and that injustice is the worst condition that an individual or city can be in. Plato presents these

arguments by a consideration of individuals and cities dominated by one or another virtue or vice. Notice Plato's impressive psychological insight and descriptive abilities.

Book VIII.545c-547c

In this passage, we find an important remark by Plato concerning the relationship between the sensory world and the ideal realm of forms. Throughout the *Republic*, Plato describes the ideal city or *kallipolis* in order to model his theory of justice. In the ideal city, the wise would rule; they would have perfect knowledge of the form of the good, of justice, etc. Part of the organization of the *kallipolis* would be a program of eugenics, intended to ensure that every segment of society was best suited to its task. Note, then, at 546b-e the crucial source of error leading the inevitable decline of the *kallipolis*: because the philosopher-kings cannot be certain, by sense, of the implementation of their ideal plans, those plans are destined to fail.

Consider, then, the status of *rational order*, for Plato, with respect to the material world. For Plato, while the rational is in some sense the most real and the highest good, the material world only imperfectly models the rational, at best. The material order is not inherently rational, on this view, but only ever approximates the rational. Such rational order as can be achieved in the material order is forever subject to corruption.

Burkert, pp. 321-329, 332-337

Read Burkert for a continuation of his overview of the development of theology under Plato. Plato's unification of reality, truth, and the good helps to provide the intellectual framework inherited by Christianity. Think about the extent to which we can understand our world as one in which order, reality, and goodness are *identical*.

Classical Greek Sculpture

For some images representative of the style, see the link from our course web-page:

http://faculty.winthrop.edu/oakesm/LART602/Classical_Sculpture.html. This form of art was prominent during Plato's youth, gradually giving way to a more realist form of art. Consider the extent to which this art-work constitutes a visual representation of some of Plato's ideas. In particular, consider the faces of the figures and their forms: to what extent are these idealized, if any? What is the relationship between rational order, for Plato, and the specifics of the individual, material body?