

Plato Guide: *Republic*

PHIL301

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Reading Schedule:

Week of	Reading Assigned	Topics
Feb. 24	<i>Republic I-II</i> (all) III.412a (“Then the person who achieves ...”)- 417b (end) RAGP pp. 369-423, 450-455	Moral Order: (What is Justice?) Epistemology: how do we access truth?
Mar. 3	<i>Republic IV.427d</i> (“Well, son of Ariston ...”)- 445b (“... is ruined and in turmoil.”) V.472a (“The more you speak ...”)- 480a (end) VI.504d (“Aren’t these virtues, then ...”)- 511e (end)	Moral Order: Justice Epistemology: rationalism (little-r) Metaphysics: Plato’s Theory of Forms (Idealism), Dualism The Apex of Rationalism
Mar. 10	<i>Republic VII</i> (beginning of book)- 521c (“Indeed.”) RAGP pp. 463-482, 506-514, 534-541, 542-548 VIII (beginning of book)- 547c (“... this transformation begins.”) IX (beginning of book)- 576c (“... certain, at any rate.”) RAGP pp. 567-571, 594-599 <i>Symposium</i> 201d-205a (pp. 347-351) Burkert , “Philosophical Religion,” 325-332 (Dacus Electronic Reserve)	Metaphysics and Epistemology: Imperfection, Decay Spirits and Demons

Brief Introductory Notes:

- The *Republic* is one of Plato’s greatest works and one of the Western world’s great intellectual and artistic achievements.
- The title is a translation of πολιτεία (*politeia*), which means (literally) “political nature” or (more loosely) how to live as persons. The regrettable translation to ‘Republic’ is owing to Cicero.
- The topics discussed in *Republic* include political theory, ethical theory, metaphysics, epistemology, semantics, and aesthetics.
- The principal topic is *justice*: what is justice, and how might it be possible for humans to be just? Plato’s general answer is twofold: justice involves a certain organization of the “soul”, but complete justice requires living also in a just society, where the just society has a similar organization.
- Plato’s concept of justice (*dikaiosyne*) is a broad one. It is a kind of super-virtue, subsuming the other moral virtues, and may be construed as interchangeable with our

- concept of moral goodness or rightness (cf. “righteousness”; cf. Socrates’ notion of wisdom).
- Some context: as we have seen, Plato lived in a turbulent time. Athens had endured 30 years of war with its neighbors; Plato’s family was involved in a coup, resulting in rule by “the 30 tyrants,” whose government was violent and short-lived. Plato’s own forays into politics were themselves short-lived and unfortunate. Treachery and political disorder were all too familiar to him. His interest in the possibility of personal justice and a politically just society was thus personal and acute.

An Overview of Plato’s *Republic*

and of some Key Sections:

Book I.327a-354c

Socrates initiates a discussion of *justice*, the central moral virtue (rightness, righteousness), with Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. Cephalus and Polemarchus offer weak definitions of justice and thus prove vulnerable to Thrasymachus’ cynical definition. While Socrates defeats Thrasymachus in debate, the questions of what is justice and why one should be just remain unanswered.

Book II.357a-368c

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 III.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.

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.

476a: introduces the notion of a single form for many instances. Cf. 507b.

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.

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.

Study Questions

In General:

1. How does the thought of Plato compare with that of Socrates?
2. How does Plato’s thought compare with that of the Pre-Socratics? To which Pre-Socratic philosophers is Plato especially indebted?
3. What general principles (*archia*) appear in Plato’s thought?
4. How does Plato view the prospect and project of human knowledge?
5. To what extent is Plato a rationalist?

Book I

Some general questions:

1. Why, exactly, does Socrates think that it is good to be just?

2. How does Socrates' method of discovery here compare with that exemplified in the *Euthyphro*? Are Socrates' results satisfactory to him? to his interlocutors?
3. What is Plato's attitude towards Socrates' method and results?

More specifically:

4. What is Cephalus' attitude towards the question of what is justice?
5. What is Polemarchus' attitude? Why does he fail poorly under Socrates' examination?
6. What is Thrasymachus' attitude towards Socrates' investigation?
7. What is Thrasymachus' definition of justice? What, if anything, is wrong with Thrasymachus' definition of justice?
8. How does Socrates go about refuting Thrasymachus' account?

Book II

1. Method: How does Socrates propose answering the question, what is justice?
2. The *Polis*: What is the origin of the city (*polis*, basic political entity)? What two factors contribute to specialization (i.e., of work), in the *polis*? What prompts Socrates to introduce luxuries into his city? How is the luxurious city different from "the healthy one"? For what purpose is the class of *guardians* introduced to the *kallipolis*?
3. The Guardians: What are the essential qualities of guardians? Why does Socrates think that they must be philosophical? Bonus Fun Question: In what way are guardians like dogs?
4. Education of the Guardians: How does Plato propose to educate the guardians? Why does Plato ban Homer and Hesiod from the *kallipolis*?

Book III

5. Education of the Guardians: Under what circumstances is it appropriate for a ruler to lie to his/her subjects? What is Plato's view of the popular culture of his time? What sort of theater will Plato allow in the *kallipolis*? What sort of music? What sort of homosexual love?
6. Further social care and selection: What treatment will Plato afford invalids? Sociopaths?
7. The Rulers: Which sort of individual should rule in the *kallipolis*? How are these individuals to be trained?
8. The Noble Lie: How does Plato propose convincing guardians of the *kallipolis* to accept their station? How will the guardians be imbued with love of their city?
9. Lives of the Guardians: Why does Plato propose communal life and property for the guardians?

Book IV

10. Life in the *kallipolis*: How does Plato respond to the question whether individuals in the *kallipolis* will be happy? What sort of happiness is afforded to workers? to guardians? What family structure does Plato propose for the guardians?
11. Civic Virtues: What is it for a city to be wise? What is it for it to be courageous? What is civic moderation? What is it for a city to be just?
12. Justice in the polis: What is the greatest harm that can befall a city? To what extent are the citizens of the polis permitted to change their jobs?
13. The Tri-Partite Soul: On what basis does Plato argue that the *appetites* are distinct from *reason*? How does he argue that *spirit* is distinguished from reason?
14. Human Virtue: What is it for a person to be courageous? wise? moderate? just? What sort of behavior does Plato expect from the just? from the unjust? By what argument, then, does Plato seek to establish the *prudence* of justice?

Book V

15. More Life in the *kallipolis*: What is Plato's attitude towards women? What work will women do in the *kallipolis*? What treatment does Plato propose for "defective" children?
16. The Feasibility Question: Does Plato think that the *kallipolis* is a possible city? How does Plato view the relationship between theory and practice? Would the infeasibility of the *kallipolis* entail that Plato's theory of justice is false?
17. Philosopher-Kings: What one change to political organization would most help our approaching the *kallipolis*? Why does Plato think that only philosophers are entitled to rule? What theory of knowledge and reality supports Plato's contention?
18. The Forms: Is Beauty, per se, visible or otherwise open to sensation? What do beautiful things have in common, that make them beautiful? Why does Plato think that the Forms are the proper objects of knowledge?
19. Knowledge: How does knowledge differ from ignorance? How do knowledge and ignorance differ from opinion? What does it mean to say that opinion is of that which both is and is not? What sort of things both are and are not? How does Plato propose convincing the "lovers of sight and sound" that they have only opinion, and not knowledge?

Book VI

20. Philosopher-Kings: Why does Plato think that only philosophers are equipped to rule? Why does he think that a proper philosopher will be virtuous? Why are philosophers generally not well esteemed? Under what conditions can a philosopher properly flourish?
21. The Good: What is the ultimate object of knowledge, according to Plato? Why is knowledge of the Good essential for proper rule?
22. The Forms: What does it mean to say that there is "a single form of each," where beauty and goodness are concerned? Why does Plato think these "forms" invisible? Which faculty of mind grasps the forms?
23. The Sun Analogy: In what way is the Good like the Sun? What is the relationship between the Good and truth, on Plato's account? How is Good related to being?
24. The Line: What is the significance of Plato's Line metaphor? How are knowledge and opinion related to reality? How are belief and imaging related to reality?

Book VII

25. The Cave Allegory: Why does Plato compare ordinary sense experience to the experience of prisoners in the cave? How are the objects of sense experience related to reality? What do the different elements of the Cave (images on wall, puppets, firelight, outer world, actual objects, sun) represent? How are those returning to the cave received?
26. Education of Philosophers: What is the overall goal in the education of philosophers? How do the various subjects contribute to this goal? What are "summoners" and what educational work do they perform? What is "dialectics", and why is it important to the pursuit of truth?
27. Metaphysics: What is the difference between being and becoming, as Plato uses these terms? Which things are beings and which are in the state of becoming?

Book VIII

28. Why does Plato think that there will be a correspondence between forms of human character and those of political constitutions?
29. Which are the five forms of soul and constitution?
30. Why does Plato believe that the *Kallipolis* must inevitably decay? What is the significance of the number 12,960,000, for Plato?

31. For what reason will the Timocracy devolve into an Oligarchy? What faults characterize the timocratic ruler?
32. What faults characterize the oligarchic ruler? By what means will Oligarchy develop into Democracy?
33. What is the distinction between necessary and unnecessary appetites? What are examples of both?
34. How does Plato characterize Democracy? What is his opinion of Democracy? How does Plato characterize the democratic man?
35. How, finally, does Tyranny evolve from Democracy? What does full freedom mean, for Plato? Why is it replaced by slavery?
36. What are examples of each of the above four states?

Book IX

37. How does Plato characterize those with tyrannical souls? What fates await the tyrannical?
38. Why, exactly, will the tyrannical be unjust?
39. Why are the tyrannical prone to errors concerning what will please them?
40. Why does Plato think that the pleasures of the tyrannical are less than those with philosophical souls?
41. Is it possible for the tyrannical to be happy, in *your* judgment?

***Symposium*, Plato, 201d-205a (RAGP, pp. 347-351)**

- Plato's *Symposium* is his great work on love, comprising a series of speeches on love delivered by guests at a dinner-party. In it, Socrates recounts the words of his teacher, Diotima, one of the few female philosophers known to us from antiquity. On her account, love is neither god nor mortal, but something "in between" – a "spirit" or *daimon*.
- Consider, then, the status of such "messengers" who intercede between gods and men.
- The *Symposium* is a "middle period" platonic work.
- 42. Given Plato's postulation of the divine to the realm of the forms, what is the significance of spirit messengers relating the divine to the mortal?
- 43. What is Diotima's view of the philosopher – i.e., s/he who loves wisdom – with respect to wisdom and ignorance?

Burkert, W. "Philosophical Religion," 321-332

- Our Burkert passage provides an overview of Plato's theology, returning us to some of the themes that we first encountered in Hesiod. Note the degree to which reality, rationality, and goodness are unified, for Plato. This culminates a progressing begun in Pre-Socratic thought. Think about the extent to which we can understand our world as one in which order, reality, and goodness are *identical*.
- Note too, Burkert's discussion of the re-emergence of *daimones* in Greek religious thought.
- 44. On Burkert's account, what for Plato is the relationship between goodness, being, and rationality?
- 45. To what extent is the ultimate reality logical and knowable, for Plato, on Burkert's account?
- 46. What role is played by *daimones* in the later thought of Plato, according to Burkert?