

Plato's *Republic*

WEEK 1 - *Setting the Stage—Introduction and Book I*

The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.

—Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*

I. WHO WAS PLATO?

- A. **Biography:** Athenian philosopher (c. 427 B.C. – 348 B.C), founded the Academy in Athens, student of Socrates, teacher of Aristotle.
- B. **Historical Context:** Plato was born four years after the commencement of the Peloponnesian War; he was 23 years old when Sparta defeated Athens (marking the end of Greece's "Golden Age"); He was 28 when Athens executed Socrates in 399 B.C.

II. THEMES OF *THE REPUBLIC*

- A. **What is Justice?** Multiple answers posed...
- B. **Moral Psychology—You Have a Soul!** What is the Right Ordering of the Soul?
- C. **Poetry and the Arts:** The Power of Culture to Shape Souls and Societies
- D. **Education—Purpose and Methods**
- E. **Controversial Proposals:**
 - 1. Censorship of Poetry and Theology
 - 2. Abolition of Private Property
 - 3. Abolition of the Family
 - 4. The Noble Lie/Propaganda
- F. **Metaphysics/Structure of Being:** We must move from images of things to things as they are.
- G. **The Decline of Political Regimes:** The Descent into Tyranny

III. CENTRAL CONCEIT: THE "CITY/SOUL ANALOGY"

PART OF THE SOUL

Reason

Honor/Thumos (Unstable)

Appetite

GOVERNMENT

Philosophy/Aristocracy

Timocracy

Oligarchy (Wealth)

Democracy (Pleasure)

Tyranny (Power)

CHARACTER

Socrates

Glaucou

Cephalus

Adeimantus

Thrasymachus

IV. CHARACTERS

- A. **Socrates:** The major speaker in the dialogue. Considered a founder of Western philosophy
- B. **Cephalus:** A wealthy and retired old businessman, head of a business family (Appetite—Moneymaking/Convention)
- C. **Polemarchus:** Cephalus' son (*Thumos/Honor-loving*)
- D. **Thrasymachus:** A sophist, a teacher of specious rhetoric (Power/Might Makes Right)
- E. **Adeimantus (Appetite/Hedonism) and Glaucon (Warlike):** Plato's half-brothers

I. BOOK I: Outline

A. INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS:

1. **Book I is a warmup for the rest of the book** – we have a tentative definition of justice until Glaucon and Adeimantus intervene
2. **Theme 1—Inadequacy of Inheritance (Cephalus/Polemarchus):** Parents betray the children, and sons will never get what they need from the fathers
3. **Theme 2—What is Justice? (Socrates v. Thrasymachus):** Socrates contends that justice requires knowledge, not just power.

B. **Ascent and Descent: "I went down to the Piraeus"** – a *descent* from the city to the harbor, the market – from the realm of the intellect to the place of gratification of the appetites

C. **Feast of Bendis:** The moon goddess/fertility (Diana/Artemis) – represents the world of coming into being and passing away

D. **Socrates:** Three arguments in favor of the just life over the unjust life:

1. The **just man is wise and good**, and the unjust man is ignorant and bad (349b);
2. **Injustice produces internal disharmony** which prevents effective actions (351b-c);
3. Virtue is excellence at a thing's function and **the just person lives a happier life than the unjust person**, since he performs the various functions of the human soul well (352d).
4. **Socrates is dissatisfied with the discussion** since an adequate account of justice is necessary before they can address whether the just life is better

Next Time – Searching for Justice—Building the City . . .