

THE REPUBLIC

The word "republic" is from Latin: *Res publica*, from *res* 'concern' + *publicus* 'of the people, the public' thus meaning "public matters" or "the state."

In Greek, the title was the *Politeia* (πολιτεία), from *polis* 'the city', organization of, thus *Government* or *Constitution*.

Plato's central concern in the *Republic* is justice—*dikaiosyne* (δικαιοσύνη).

Book I

Socrates recounts his trip the day before to the Piraeus (??)

Socrates was on his way back to town and encounters Polymarchus

Socrates was with Glaucon

Polymarchus comes up with Adeimantus, brother of Glaucon

Niceratus and a few unnamed others

interesting brief exchange at the outset that may be important

Socrates was on his way out of town

Polymarchus (perhaps somewhat jesting) challenges Socrates to stay
his main reason is simply force:

Well, do you see how many we are?

Certainly I do.

Then either prove yourself the stronger party, or else stay where you are. (327c)

Socrates responds that there is perhaps an alternative (reason): "suppose we persuade you that you ought to let us go"

Polymarchus then (jesting?) responds by saying that would be impossible
because they would refuse to listen

is this not the essence of the fundamental political problem?

How do we deal with the difficult issues that divide us?

How do we come to an agreement about justice?

what chance has rational dialogue have if people simply refuse to listen
refuse to take part in the Socratic conversation?

wouldn't the consequence be that *might makes right*?

but the end of the exchange has Socrates and Glaucon agreeing to stay
not because of this threat of force

but after Polymarchus says that after dinner, and a night-festival

that there will be time for conversation

"Therefore stay, and do not refuse us"

So Socrates and Glaucon are persuaded to stay not by the force of might but of reason
and in particular, the invitation to conversation

so they go to Polymarchus' home

there they meet Polymarchus' brothers, Lysias and Euthydemus

Thrasymachus of Chalcedon (who will be one of the main characters)
Charmantides, and finally Polymarchus' father, Cephalus

Cephalus begins with a remark that he finds the decay of bodily pleasures (old age)
to be accompanied by an increase in his appetite for philosophy
here, of course, we find Plato's opposition between body and soul, the senses and reason

Cephalus goes on to tell an interesting anecdote about Sophocles, the great poet
in his advanced age he was asked what he thought of love (what word is used here? *Eros*?)
was he still capable?

He responds that he is delighted to have finally escaped this "savage monster"

Cephalus welcomes old age because it brings freedom from the passions

Cephalus' philosophy seems very close to Plato's indeed:

If they possess well-regulated souls and easy tempers, old age itself is no intolerable burden: if they are differently constituted, why in that case, Socrates, they find even youth as irksome to them as old age" (329d)

Socrates, naturally, agrees heartily with this
but then responds by saying that other people think that it is not Cephalus' character
that enable him to embrace old age
but his wealth
this brings up the subject of property
Cephalus, a man of wealth, obviously contrasts with Socrates
someone who seems "not very fond of money"

Socrates asks Cephalus what the greatest advantage wealth has brought him
Cephalus follows with a discussion about death
when a man sees death approaching he begins to calculate his life
to see whether he had done any injustice

Hereupon, if he finds his life full of unjust deeds, he is apt to awaken from sleep in terror, as children do, and he lives haunted by gloomy anticipations. But *for the man who is conscious of no unjust deeds* sweet hope is always present, that 'kind nurse of old age,' as Pindar calls it. (331a, emphasis added)

is this a recommendation to do no unjust deeds, or simply to remain unconscious of them??

Cephalus then says this is the greatest benefit of wealth
that it helps one avoid injustice
like, for example, dying without having paid one's debts

Socrates then begins to inquire about what justice is
is it simply "to speak the truth and to give back what one had taken from another?" (331c)
so here is the first definition of justice
and Socrates typically questions it
he gives the example of a man, while in possession of his senses,
gives a dangerous weapon to a friend
and later comes back in a fit of madness and wants the weapon back
what is the friend to do?

if justice is simply giving back what one had taken from another
it would seem the just thing to do would be to give the weapon back
but this is clearly madness itself
thus the definition of justice is inadequate

Polymarchus then interrupts and claims that it is an adequate definition
Cephalus retires from the scene leaving Socrates to continue the discussion with the others

Socrates then asks Polymarchus for a definition of justice
Polymarchus thinks what Simonides says is right
“to restore to each man what is his due” (331e)

Socrates tries to find out just what it is that Simonides meant
that it can't be simply returning debts
Polymarchus then amends the definition by elaborating on what is meant by repaying debts
“the debt of friend to friend is to do good to one another, and not harm” (332a)

and further adds that the debt to an enemy, restoring what is due to the enemy, must be harm
thus Socrates adds this up for a definition of justice:
“justice consisted in rendering to each man that which is appropriate to him, which he called his
due” (332c)

Socrates begins to question this by asking about a number of other instances
in which something due and appropriate is rendered
what due and appropriate thing is rendered? and what are the recipients?
Medicine: drugs, meats and drinks for the body
Cooking: seasoning to food

Justice?
What is rendered? Who are the recipients?
Polymarchus answers that the things rendered are
assistance and harm, to friends and enemies

Socrates questioning leads this definition of justice to some absurd conclusions
justice is useless when a thing is in use, but useful when it is out of use? (333d)
thus justice cannot be very valuable if it is only useful when applied to useless things
also that the just man is a kind of thief (334b)

then an examination of the concept of the “friend”
Socrates wonders whether a friend is one who *seems* to be honest
after Polymarchus agrees Socrates points out that people can make mistakes
and that one who *seems* to be the friend is really an enemy
thus if justice is repaying good to our friends (those who seem to be our friends)
and injustice repaying harm to enemies (those who seem to be our enemies)
that we could end up with a situation in which it is just to do harm
to those who we think are our enemies (though in fact they have done no injustice)
Polymarchus admits this is “wicked speech”
and that it is just to injure the unjust and to assist the just

but still there is the problem that mistaken people can do justice
by injuring friends and assisting enemies

this leads then to a further inquiry into the definition of friend and enemy
a true friend is a good man
the one who only seems to be honest is no friend
this leads to a new definition of justice:

It is just to do good to our friend if he is a good man, and to hurt our enemy if he is a bad man”
(335b)

this leads to a new inquiry
can a just man do harm at all?

Polymarchus holds that it is just to harm those who are wicked, those who are enemies
Socrates uses several examples to question whether ever doing harm makes things worse or better
are horses and dogs made better or worse by being harmed?
men, too, Socrates concludes are “lowered in the scale of virtue” by being harmed
Socrates concludes:

Then, Polymarchus, it is the work, not of the just man, but of his opposite, the unjust man, to hurt
either friend or any other creature. . . because we have discovered that, in no instance, is it just to
injure anybody.” (335d)

here we have the entrance of Thrasymachus to the scene
he had remained quiet up to this point
but now sprang up “like a wild beast”
terrifying both Socrates and Polymarchus
he chastises Socrates for beating around the bush asking questions
without giving any answers
he demands an answer to the question of what justice is
Socrates responds with an analogy about searching for gold
the implication being that we wouldn’t want to too easily reach conclusions
taking fools gold for gold

Thrasymachus bursts out:

O Hercules! here is an instance of that irony which Socrates affects. (337a)

eventually a sort of contest is agreed to
Socrates and Thrasymachus will contest the meaning of justice
the victor will be rewarded with a payment from the vanquished
Socrates says Thrasymachus should be the one to start speaking
since he is the one who claims to know the subject
Thrasymachus scolds Socrates for being one who will not give out instruction himself
one who goes about learning from others but not showing gratitude for the lessons learned
but Socrates objects that he does show gratitude
as he has no money he can only show gratitude by giving his praise

The discussion begins with Thrasymachus’ first definition of justice:

I say that justice is simply the interest of the stronger. (338c)

Socrates inquires as to exactly what this means
Thrasymachus brings up the fact that some societies are ruled by a tyrant

others by a democracy, and others by an aristocracy
he argues that in every city superior strength lies with the ruling body
everywhere the rulers determine
what is in the interests of not only themselves but also their subjects
therefore, justice is what is decided by the established regime
the conclusion then is that “the interest of the stronger, is everywhere just”
this is simply the view that *might makes right*

Socrates begins to interrogate this claim
he agrees with Thrasymachus that justice is in harmony with interest
but is not ready to agree that it is the interest of the stronger

Socrates questions:

Thrasymachus maintains that it is just to obey the rulers
but Socrates points out that rulers can sometimes make mistakes
if the rulers can be mistaken about what is in their interest
then according to this definition it is just to do what is not in the best interest of the rulers
“as long as you maintain that it is just for the subject to obey, in every instance, the injunctions of the rulers” (339e)

this leads to a need for further clarification

Tell me then, Thrasymachus, was this the definition you meant to give of justice, that it is what seems to be the stronger, whether it be really for his interest or not? (340c)

Thrasymachus responds that

it is only through a failure of knowledge that a man errs, and to that extent he is no craftsman (??)
(340e)

[a position Plato would agree with]

Thrasymachus further claims that “a ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, never errs” (341a)
thus he is able to return to his definition that justice is doing what is in the interest of the stronger

now Socrates examines what is meant by the terms “ruler” and “stronger”
he examines several other examples of “arts” (techne)
that of the physician and of the pilot of a ship
in the case of the physician, it is clear he serves the interest not of himself but of the patient
and the case of the pilot will not seek only the pilot’s interest but that of his sailors

And thus, Thrasymachus, all who are in any place of ruling, in so far as they are rulers, neither consider nor order their own interest, but that of the subjects for whom they exercise their craft; and in all that they do or say, they act with an exclusive view to *them*, and to what is good and proper for *them*. (342e)

Thrasymachus replies with insolence, implying that Socrates must still need a wet-nurse
as he cannot even tell the difference between sheep and shepherd
does the shepherd really care for the interest of the sheep or does he have the sheep for his own interest?
Thrasymachus suggest the relationship of ruler to subject is like shepherd to sheep
justice is serving the interests of the stronger
injustice would then be the reverse
the stronger making the weaker serve his interest

this leads to the conclusion

. . . that a just man everywhere has the worst of it, compared with an unjust man. (343d)

in order to push this argument that the unjust man has it better

Thrasymachus challenges Socrates by bringing up the case of the tyrant”

To him you must direct your attention, if you wish to judge how much more profitable it is to a man’s own self to be unjust than to be just. And you will learn this truth with the greatest ease, if you turn your attention to the most consummate form of injustice, which, while it makes the wrong-doer most happy, makes those who are wronged, and will not retaliate, most miserable. This form is tyranny, which proceeds not by small degrees, but by wholesale. . . . (344a)

justice is serving the interests of the stronger

injustice is serving one’s own interest

thus it is better to be unjust than just

Thrasymachus was ready at this point to depart the victor in the contest

having, to his way of thinking, satisfactorily answered the question about justice

Socrates presses him however:

. . . do you have it in mind to take your leave, before you have satisfactorily taught us, or learnt yourself, whether your argument is right or wrong” (344d)

Socrates is not yet convinced that injustice is better than justice

. . . let there be an unjust man, and let him have full power to practice injustice, either by evading detection or by overpowering opposition, still I am not convinced that such a course is more profitable than justice. (345a)

Socrates returns to the previous examples of ruling

in every regime, the ruler looks to what is best for the subjects

thus against Thrasymachus’ contention that rulers rule willingly

Socrates argues that the good ruler rules out of a sense of obligation, not personal interest

in a society of all good men there would be a competition to avoid the possession of power (347d)

Thrasymachus affirms that the life of the unjust man is better than that of the just

Glaucon agrees with Socrates that the life of the just man is better

Socrates returns to the beginning and asks Thrasymachus:

Do you assert that a perfect injustice is more profitable than a perfect injustice? (348b)

Thrasymachus thinks that the masters of injustice are the prudent ones:

Yes, those who are able to practice injustice on the complete scale, having the power to reduce whole cities and nations of men to subjection. You, perhaps, imagine that I am speaking of petty criminals, and I certainly allow that even deeds like theirs are profitable if they escape detection; but they are not worthy to be considered in comparison with those I have just mentioned. (348d)

Thrasymachus thus ranks injustice with virtue and wisdom, and justice under the opposite

eventually Socrates dialectic leads Thrasymachus to consent

that the just man resembles the wise and good, not the other way around (350c)

he ends up getting Thrasymachus to blush

he is trapped by the force of argument

and responds that he will simply do “as we do with old women when they tell us stories”

simply nod in agreement without really listening

Socrates then returns to the original question:
what sort of thing is justice compared with injustice?

If justice is wisdom and virtue and injustice ignorance
Socrates contends that it would be easy to see that justice is stronger than injustice

Socrates gives an example of a city (state) that is unjust
that it may unjustly attempt to enslave other cities (states)

Socrates then raises the question of whether any body of men could succeed at any enterprise
if they were to deal unjustly with one another
since injustice breeds division and animosity
and justice breeds friendship and unanimity
then it is better for the rulers to act justly
for any collective task to be accomplished the members of a group must have some justice
even a band of thieves must act justly with one another or they will get nowhere
those who are complete villains, thoroughly unjust, will be unable to act

but this still leaves the question of whether the just also live a better life
and are happier than the unjust

turns to the relationship between a thing and its function
the eyes are for seeing, ears are for hearing
a pruning knife for pruning
the function of a thing is that work for which it is either the sole or best instrument
everything that has an appointed function has a *proper* virtue
Socrates then comes to the point by bringing up the case of the soul
has the soul an appointed function and a proper virtue?

Socrates gets Thrasymachus to admit that life is a function of the soul
and that for the soul to perform its function well it must not be destitute of its own peculiar virtue
and since it was earlier granted that justice was a virtue of the soul
and injustice a vice
then the just soul will best be able to fulfill its function
thus a just man will live well and the unjust man will not
and he who lives well will be blessed and happy, and he who lives others will not
thus the just man is happy, and the unjust man miserable
and since it is happiness that is advantageous and not misery
then justice is more advantageous than injustice

this seems to be a tidy conclusion
the exchange ends, however, with Socrates unhappy
though they have apparently reached the conclusion that justice is more advantageous than injustice
they still have not come to any answer concerning the real nature of justice

Thrasymachus exits the scene at this point

Book II

Glaucou takes over for Thrasymachus
imploring Socrates to make a stronger case
that on every account it is better to be just than unjust

Glaucou begins making a distinction between three classes of things:
1) things that are intrinsically good, not because of their consequences
2) things which are valued both for their own sake and their consequences
3) things which are valued for their consequences only

in which class does justice belong? Socrates, of course, thinks justice belongs in the highest class
like true happiness it is sought for its own sake not for its consequences

Glaucou points out that the many would rank justice in the third class
something which is disagreeable, irksome and repulsive on its own
but is valued because of the consequences
Glaucou thus takes up Thrasymachus' argument
that the life of the unjust man is better than the just
that people practice justice not because of its intrinsic rewards
but basically, it is implied, because of social pressures
if people could get away with injustice they would

the argument runs something like this:
to commit injustice and get away with it is best
to suffer injustice is worst
the practice of justice stands midway between these extremes
justice is simply a matter of law that forbids injustice
even those who practice justice do so unwillingly

then Glaucou proposes an experiment

Let us give full liberty to the just man and to the unjust alike, to do whatever they please, and then
let us follow them, and see whither the inclination of each will lead him. (359c)

this leads, of course, to the ring of Gyges thought experiment (359d)
a shepherd, Gyges, finds a golden ring
when turned makes him invisible
upon discovering this he contrives to be appointed messenger to the king
upon arrival he seduces the queen, and conspiring with her, slew the king
and took possession of the kingdom

the experiment is to suppose there were two such rings
one given to a just man and the other to an unjust one
if it were guaranteed that one could get away with injustice
would there be any reason to be just?

to push the experiment we have to imagine
that the unjust man thoroughly unjust, and the just thoroughly just
the unjust man makes no mistake in his pursuit of injustice
while committing the grossest injustice

he fools everyone and has the highest reputation for justice
ends up with power, wealth, women of his choice
everything one could desire

the case of the just man is the exact reverse
while practicing perfect justice he has the worst reputation for justice
the just man ends up imprisoned, tortured, and crucified
is it not best then, not to be just, but to seem just?

Before Socrates can respond, Glaucon's brother, Adeimantus adds a further point
bringing up the issue of what happens after death in Hades
on the one hand there is the view that justice is rewarded and injustice punished by the gods
but then there are the mystic rites
through proper sacrificial offering the gods can be appeased

Considering all that has been said, by what device, Socrates, can a man who has any advantages,
either of high talent, or wealth, or personal appearance, or birth, bring himself to honor justice,
instead of smiling when he hears it praised? (367c)

at the end of Adeimantus' discourse he implores Socrates

Therefore do not content yourself with proving to us that justice is better than injustice; but show
us what is that influence exerted by each on its possessor, by which, whether gods and men see it
or not, the one is in itself a good, and the other a detriment. (367e)

it is at this point that Socrates takes up an inquiry into the justice of the state
he uses an analogy about trying to read small writing from a distance
and then finding the same text in large letters
thus it might be easier to first find justice in the state
before finding it in the individual

Perhaps, then, justice may exist in larger proportions in the greater subject, and thus be easier to
discover; so, if you please, let us first investigate its character in cities; afterwards let us apply the
same inquiry to the individual, looking for the counterpart of the greater as it exists in the form of
the less. (369a)

thus they begin to outline the ideal city
it is because individuals are not independent that cities arise in the first place
cities arise to satisfy needs of individuals
the individual can share the fruits of his labor
and benefit from the labor of his neighbor

each person has a different nature
each is suited for a different occupation

an individual is more likely to succeed when devoted to a single task
rather than dividing his exertions into many tasks

Again, it is also clear, I imagine, that if a person lets the right moment for any work go by, it never
returns. . . . For the thing to be done does not choose, I imagine, to await the leisure of the doer,
but the doer must be at the call of the thing to be done, and not treat it as a secondary affair. (370b)

it follows that all things will be produced in superior quality and quantity when each man works at a single occupation, in accordance with his nature
so a city must have producers—farmers and craftsmen of all sorts
but also merchants and traders
and this gives rise to a market, and a currency
this leads to a class of tradesmen
and a class of laborers

Socrates then asks where justice is in the city

Adeimantus replies

I have no notion, Socrates, unless perhaps it be discoverable somewhere in the mutual relations of these same persons. (372a)

[the remainder of Book II is omitted]

Book III

the topic now turns to who should rule the ideal city

There can be no doubt that the rulers must be the elderly men. . . (412c)

the rulers must be selected from the guardian class
they will be those whose interests are identified with the city

Then we must select from the whole body of guardians those individuals who appear to us, after due observation, to be remarkable above others for the zeal with which, through their whole life, they have done what they have thought advantageous for the city. . . . (412d-e)

here the “noble lie” is introduced

but first it is admitted that it is a bad thing to be the “victim of a lie, and a good thing to possess the truth” (413a)

and further it is admitted that “a man is in possession of the truth when his opinions represent things as they are?” (413a)

[here, clearly, an indication of Plato’s representational theory of truth]

then there is a discussion about being deprived of a true opinion against one’s will
as in theft, witchcraft or violence

as when one is led to change one’s opinion through the seductions of pleasure
or the pressure of fear

those who would be rulers must then be tested to see whether they can resist such pressures

now the noble lie:

This being the case, I continued, can we contrive any ingenious mode of bringing into play one of those noble lies of which we lately spoke, so that, propounding a single noble lie, we may bring even the rulers themselves, if possible, to believe it, or if not them, the rest of the city? (414b)

it is suggested that the guardians must be brought to believe a fiction
that the composition of men’s souls are made of different metals
gold, silver, iron and bronze

those who are made of silver and gold will be brought into the guardian class

those who are made of iron and bronze will be cast into the class of artisans and farmers

“because there is an oracle which declares that the city shall then perish when it is guarded by iron or bronze” (415c)

it is admitted that it would be hard to persuade those who begin the city of this noble lie but that over time, their sons and the next generation will be taught to believe it

an analogy is proposed comparing the ideal city to a flock of well-cared for sheep
the guardians or auxiliary class must be like the sheep dogs
since the guardians (sheep dogs) will be stronger than the artisans and farmers (sheep)
care must be taken that these guardians do not become like wolves

for this the guardians must obviously have the right education
but they must also be forbidden from possessing private property, except as necessary
they must live then in communal dwellings
“no one should have a dwelling or storehouse into which all who please may not enter” (416d)

the guardians must be told a noble lie:
“we must tell them that they are in perpetual possession of a divine species of the precious metals placed in their souls by the gods themselves, and therefore have no need of the earthly ore” (416e)

Book IV

the subject now turns back toward the question of justice
where is justice to be found in this ideal city?

a perfectly good city is one which has four virtues:
wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice

wisdom consists in the possession of knowledge of guardianship (428d)
the guardians will be the smallest class since this will be the class of those who possess this knowledge

courage involves the “safe keeping of the opinion created by law through education” (429c)
This power, therefore, to hold fast continually the right and lawful opinion concerning things to be feared and things not to be feared, I define to be courage, and call it by that name. . . .” (430b)

temperance is a kind of order and mastery over certain pleasures and desires (430e)
those who are temperate have simple and modest desires under the guidance and control of reason
Do you not see that the parallel to this exists in your city—in other words, that the desires of the vulgar many are there controlled by the desires and wisdom of the cultivated few? (431d)

what then is *justice*?

Here we get Plato’s answer

justice is when each person does what is proper to him

it is assumed that every individual has a certain natural capacity that determines his proper occupation

Then it would seem, my friend, that to do one’s own business, in some shape or other, is justice.
(433b)

the virtue of the city is then

. . . traced to the presence of that fourth principle [justice] in every child and woman, in every slave and freeman, and artisan, in the ruler and the ruled, requiring each to do his own work, and not meddle with many things. (433d)

the rulers then will be guided by this conception of justice

Will not their judgments be guided, above everything, by the desire that no one may appropriate what belongs to others, nor be deprived of what is his own? (433e)

justice then involves keeping a proper order

Thus, according to this view also, it will be granted that to have and do what belongs to us and is our own, is justice. (434a)

the order, and thus justice, of the ideal city depends upon the proper arrangement of

the three major classes of citizens

- 1) rulers
- 2) guardians
- 3) producers

injustice is then “any intermeddling in the three parts” (434c)

as when an artisan is so elated by wealth that he intrudes himself into the warrior class or when a warrior intrudes into the class of counselors or guardians

. . . adherence to their own business on the part of the merchants, the military, and the guardians, each of these doing its own work in the city, is justice, and will render the city just. (434c)

. . . we resolved that a city was just, when the three natural kinds present in it were severally occupied in doing their proper work. . . . (435b)

the remainder of the book now turns to the analogy between the polis and the individual

just as the just city was one in which the three parts were properly ordered

the just soul would be also properly ordered between

the three parts of the soul:

- 1) rational
- 2) spirited
- 3) appetitive

. . . can we refuse to admit that there exist in each of us the same forms and characters as are found in the city? (435e)

returning to the analogy with the flock of sheep

. . . in our city we made the auxiliaries, like sheep-dogs, subject to the rulers, who are as it were the shepherds of the city. (440d)

a man is just then in the same way that a city is just

when each of the three parts are doing their proper work

a man is brave when the spirited part of the soul is guided by reason

so that he knows what is to be feared and what is not to be feared

he is wise when guided by the rational part of the soul

thus justice in the individual soul:

The truth being that justice is indeed, to all appearance, something of this kind, only that, instead of dealing with a man's outward performance of his own work, it has to do with that inward performance of it which truly concerns the man himself, and his own interests: so that the just man will not permit the several principles in him to do any work but their own, nor allow the distinct classes in his soul to interfere with each other, but will really set his house in order, and having gained the mastery over himself, will so regulate his own character as to be on good terms with himself, and to set those three principles in tune together, as if they were verily three chords of a harmony, a higher and a lower and a middle, and whatever may lie between these; and after he has bound all these together, and reduced the many elements of his nature to a real unity, as a temperate and duly harmonized man, he will then at length proceed to do whatever he may have to do. . . . (443d-e)

injustice is again described as a state of strife between the three principles
the insurrection of a part of the soul against the whole

the book ends returning to the issue brought up by Thrasymachus
whether it is really profitable to act justly
whether the just person is really better off
and whether justice has an intrinsic value

Book V

this book concerns mostly issues concerning the guardian class
Socrates presents three notions which he expects to be met with considerable resistance
even scorn and derision
he likens the three to successive waves
each successive wave more challenging than the previous one

1) the first deals with the relationship between men and women
specifically whether women can be admitted into the guardian class at all
and to what extent women can take on the responsibilities of the guardians
and to what extent women should be treated the same way as men

the expected derision comes from the proposal of allowing women
to participate equally in the gymnastic exercises of the guardians
for it seems a particular feature unique to the Greeks
was that gymnastic exercises were done in the buff
and thus the "most ridiculous" proposal
"of women exercising naked in the schools with the men" (452b)

underlying this bit of levity is a serious philosophical issue
that continues to be relevant today, especially in feminist philosophy
and that is the issue of the nature of woman
do women have a different nature than men
at least a difference that makes a difference
in terms of whether women should be treated equally as men?

at first the argument seems to lead to a quite strongly anti-feminist position

starting with Socrates position regarding justice

that every individual therein ought, in accordance with nature, do the one work which belongs to him (453b)

and then the acknowledgment that obviously

there is a very marked difference between the nature of woman and that of man (453c)

seems to lead very clearly to the conclusion that it is

fitting to assign to each sex a different work, appropriate to its peculiar nature (453c)

but then there follows a simple lesson in linguistic philosophy

the conclusion turns out to have been too hastily reached

for the basic terms were not adequately defined

they were caught in “eristical debate” and not “dialectical discussion”

because they cannot distinguish the meanings of a term (454a)

the problem is that it was not clearly specified in what sense that

the nature of woman is different from that of man

it turns out that the difference is one that does not make a difference

and thus they arrive at a fairly feminist position:

we shall assert that it has not yet been by any means demonstrated that the difference between man and woman touches our purpose; on the contrary, we shall still think it proper for our guardians and their wives to engage in the same pursuits. (454e)

it turns out that even though the female sex is weaker in some respects

at least in terms of the duties of guardianship there is no significant difference

I conclude then, my friend, that none of the occupations concerned with ordering a city belong to woman as woman, nor yet to man as man; but natural gifts are to be found here and there, in both sexes alike; and, so far as her nature is concerned, the woman is admissible to all pursuits as well as the man; though in all of them the woman is weaker than the man. (455d-e)

Then as far as the guardianship of a city is concerned, there is not difference between the natures of the man and the woman, but only various degrees of weakness and strength. (456b)

this leads to the conclusion

Then the women of our guardians must strip for their exercises, inasmuch as they will put on virtue instead of robes, and must bear their part in war and the other duties comprised in the guardianship of the city. . . . (457a)

2) the second wave is expected to be met with even stronger resistance and derision

and that is that the guardians shall have their wives and their children in common

as the guardians are to have no private property

the women and men will live together in communal housing

and have no private families

this, of course, leads to the practical problem of how to avoid incest

this is solved by considering all children born between seven and ten months after coupling

as sons and daughters

obviously sexual contact among the guardians is to be strictly regulated

also the issue of the propagation of the guardian class is considered

and here a system of lots is proposed

so that the best breed with the best
imperfect children and those born from inferior parents are to be abandoned (460c)

the philosophical issue here is that there is obviously no notion of individual rights
Plato's Republic is a totalitarian system in which only the good of the whole is to be considered

3) finally, the third breaker, the "most mountainous and formidable"
here is the famous passage about the philosopher-kings:

Unless it happen either that philosophers acquire the kingly power in cities, or that those who are now called kings and the powers-that-be, be imbued with a sufficient measure of genuine philosophy, that is to say, unless political power and philosophy be united in the same person, most of those minds which at present pursue one to the exclusion of the other being necessarily excluded from either, there will be no deliverance, my dear Glaucon, for cities, nor yet, I believe, for the human race. . . . (473d)

unless philosophers become kings or kings philosophers there will be no peace. . . .

Of course, what next has to be determined is just what a genuine philosopher is
and that is the topic of the next book

Book VI

philosophers are those who

. . . love all learning that reveals to them something of that essence which is not made to wander about by generation and decay. (485b)

they never admit to falsehood
lovers of wisdom love the truth
for you cannot find anything more akin to wisdom than truth (485c)
and it is certainly not possible

for the same nature to love wisdom, and at the same time love falsehood. (485d)

the genuine philosopher abandons the pleasures of the body for those of the soul ((485e)
they are not attached to this life

And do you think that reasoning to which belongs magnificence and contemplation of all time and all essence, can possibly attach any great importance to this life? (486a)

genuine philosopher must also have a good memory

Let us never, then, admit a forgetful soul into the ranks of those that are counted worthy of philosophy; but let us look out for a good memory as a requirement for such admission. (486d)

for Socrates it seems natural then to entrust the management of public affairs to philosophers
Adeimantus then interjects and points out that many find that Socrates's reasoning
has somehow tricked them

for even though they are led by the argument to this conclusion
in practice they see those who devote themselves to philosophy
becoming quite eccentric, depraved, and useless to their cities (487d)

how can it be that the miseries of the cities find no relief
when the rulers are those that are completely useless?

Socrates uses an illustration, an image or simile, of a ship taken over by an unruly mob of drunken sailors
they dismiss anyone who claims to know about navigation as useless
this situation is like the situation in cities
where the many (the unruly mob) consider the philosopher useless

another reason philosophers are considered useless
is that often times those who are not worthy are drawn to philosophy
thus giving it a bad reputation

the true philosopher does not stop with “the particulars in the domain of opinion”
but presses on “until he has grasped the nature of each thing as it really is” (490b)

how is it then that the many are like the drunken sailors?
What are the pernicious influence which destroy the character of the many
from which only the few, who are called useless, can escape?

part of the problem is that even the good seeds end up in bad soil
and “the finest natures get more harm, than those of an inferior sort, when exposed to an unsuitable
nourishment” (491d)

thus even bright minds, if improperly trained, turn out particularly wicked
Socrates then refers to the corrupting influence of the sophists (492a)
those who are more concerned to please the crowd

That all those mercenary adventurers who, as we know, are called sophists by the multitude, and regarded as rivals, really teach nothing but the opinions of the majority to which expression is given when large masses are assembled, and dignify them with the title of wisdom. (493a)

it is because the multitude cannot
tolerate or believe that the beautiful itself exists rather than many beautiful things or anything in
itself rather than the many particulars

that
. . . the multitude cannot be philosophical. (494a)

it is this corrupting influence of the multitude
that leads even good minds to seek approval and avoid rebuke
that leads those to “inflict the greatest injury on cities and individuals” (495b)
[perhaps an oblique reference to Alcibiades]

this situation leads some who are worthy of philosophy to turn away
and those who are unworthy to take up philosophy and
who bring her to shame, and attach to her those reproaches, with which you tell me she is loaded,
to the effect that her associates are either worth nothing, or, as in the majority of cases, deserving
of heavy punishment. (495c)

those who are worthy of philosophy are the very few
easy to understand why those few keep to themselves and decline to take part in politics
when they are in a bad city ruled by the mob
they are like a man fallen among wild beasts

Having weighed all this, such a man keeps quiet and confines himself to his own concerns, like one who takes shelter behind a wall on a stormy day, when the wind is driving before it a hurricane of dust and rain; and when from his retreat he sees the infection of lawlessness spreading over the rest

of mankind, he is well content, if he can in any way live his life here untainted in his own person by injustice and unholy deeds, and, when the time for his release arrives, take his departure amid bright hopes with cheerfulness and serenity. (496d)

now the question turns to which sort of constitution is best for a philosophic nature
Socrates conclusion is that there is no present city that is worthy for philosophy (497b)

interesting point: Adeimantus says

it would be necessary to have constantly present in the city something which would understand the constitution in the very light in which you, the legislator, understood it, when you framed the laws. (497d)

this would, of course, require nothing is lost in the transmission of the text

Socrates first thinks it necessary to show how the city can handle philosophy without incurring utter destruction (497d)

the bad reputation of philosophy is again traced to those unworthy ones
who try to be philosophers
who delight in picking quarrels and are always discussing things unsuitable to philosophy (500b)
the true philosopher is again

he who has his thought truly set on the things that really are, cannot even spare time to look down upon the occupations of men, and, by disputing with them, catch the infection of malice and hostility. On the contrary, he devotes all his time to the contemplation of things that are arranged and always in the same condition; and beholding how they neither wrong nor are wronged by each other, but are all obedient to order and in harmony with reason, he studies to imitate and resemble them as closely as he can. (500c)

metaphor of painting applied to philosophy
philosophers are “painters who copy the divine paradigm” (500e)

again it is stated that there will be no peace in the city
until philosophers are given the supreme authority (501c)

then the discussion turns to what sort of education can prepare such philosophers
this leads Socrates eventually to the topic of the greatest of studies
beyond even the subject of justice
“the idea of the good is the highest study” (505a)

Socrates is questioned about this idea of the good, but he cannot reveal this idea directly:

No, I will have to put aside, for the present at any rate, all inquiry into the good itself. For, it seems to me, it is beyond measure of this effort to find the way to what is, after all, only my present opinion on the subject. But I am willing to talk to you about that which appears to be an offshoot of the good, and bears the strongest resemblance to it. . . . (506e)

here he turns to the child of the good itself, i.e., the analogy of the sun
just as the sun is what makes all things in the visible realm visible
the idea of the good makes all things in the intelligible realm intelligible

Well then, I continued, understand that I meant the sun when I spoke of the offspring of the good, begotten by it in a certain resemblance to itself—that is to say, bearing the same relation in the

visible world to sight and to the visible, which the good bears in the intelligible world to the mind and the knowable. (508c)

the condition of the soul depends upon which way it is turned

In the same way understand the condition of the soul as follows. Whenever it has fastened upon those things, over which truth and that which is are shining, it seizes it by an act of mind, and knows it, and thus proves itself to be possessed of reason; but whenever it has fixed upon objects that are blent with darkness, the world of becoming and passing away, it rests in opinion, and its sight grows dim, as its opinions shift backwards and forwards, and it has the appearance of being destitute of mind. (508d)

two powers reigning over two realms—the visible and the intelligible (509d)

Book VI ends with the divided line

Book VII

begins with the myth of the cave

philosophy is the upward journey of the soul
from the dark prison-house of the cave of the visible world
to the upper world of the intelligible realm
knowledge is only found outside the cave
the sun outside the cave represents the idea of the good

In the world of knowledge, the essential idea of the good is the limit of what can be seen, and can barely be perceived; but when perceived, we cannot help concluding that it is in every case the source of all that is right and beautiful, in the visible world giving birth to light and its master, and in the intelligible world, as master, providing truth and mind—and that whoever would act wisely, either in private or in public, must see it. (517c)

education then consists in turning the faculty of the soul around
away from the visible perishable world to the world of the eternal
philosophy is this art of turning around

the rulers of the city should be trained in this art
these future philosophers will have an obligation to rule
those who rule should be least eager to rule
analogy between waking life and dreaming is introduced
for the philosophers who must go back down into the darkness of the cave
in order to bring the others to the light

For, when accustomed, you will see ten thousand times better than the residents, and you will recognize what each image is, and what is its original, because you have seen the truth of which beautiful and just and good things are copies. And in this way, for you and for us, the city is ruled in a waking state and not in a dream like so many of our present cities. . . . (520c)

what is omitted here in our selection is a long section on the education of the philosopher-kings which includes in the section on astronomy
the famous section on the problem of the planets (529d)

this completes Plato's description of the ideal city
and of the man whose character resembles it—the philosopher-king

Book VIII

here we have Plato's ranking of the types of governments in descending order:

aristocracy: power of the best, from *aristokratia* (αριστοκρατία), *aristos* 'best' + *kratia* 'power'

timocracy: power of honored, from *timokratia* (τιμοκρατία), *timē* 'honor' + *kratia* 'power'

oligarchy: rule by the few, from *oligarchia* (ολιγαρχία), *oligos* 'few' + *archia* 'rule'

democracy: power of the people, from *dēmokratia*, (δημοκρατία), *dēmos* 'people' + *kratia* 'power'

tyranny: rule by a tyrant, from *turannia* (τυραννία), *turannos* 'tyrant'

1) from aristocracy to timocracy

the devolution of ruling regimes turns out to be inevitable

but since everything that has come into being must one day perish, even a construction like ours will not endure for all time, but must suffer dissolution. (546a)

what makes this dissolution inevitable is the fact that the philosopher-kings must rely on sense-perception to put their eugenics program into practice (546b-c)

Thus your young men will grow up worse educated—and, in consequence of this, rulers will take office who will fail in their duty of discriminating Hesiod's races and yours, that is to say the golden and silver and bronze and iron. And this mixture of iron with silver and of bronze with gold will breed dissimilar and disproportionate irregularity; and, wherever these take root their growth always produces enmity and war. (547a)

thus instead of an aristocracy ruled by philosopher-kings whose souls are governed by reason there arises a *timocracy*: a state governed on principles of honor and military glory ruled by those whose souls are governed by the spirited part rather than the rational

But in its fear of installing the wise in office, because the wise men are no longer men who are simple and earnest, but of compound nature, and in its degenerate character, with a greater turn for war than for peace, and in the value of which it set upon the arts and stratagems which war calls out (547e)

a timocracy is the next best form of government but it is clearly a mixture of good and bad

Yes, it is a mixture, I replied, but, owing to the preponderance of the spirited element, there is one thing in particular which it exhibits in the clearest colors, and that is its love of victory and its love of honors. (548c)

2) timocracy to oligarchy

timocracy leads to oligarchy due to the preoccupation with gaining wealth eventually this leads to rule by those few who possess the greatest wealth

And thenceforth they press forward on the path of money-getting, losing their esteem for virtue in proportion as the esteem for wealth grows upon them. . . . Consequently when wealth and the wealthy are honored in a city, virtue and the virtuous sink in estimation. (550e-551a)

instead of being victory- and honor-loving they end up as money-lovers eventually only the wealthy are allowed to rule and thus oligarchy arises

one of the main faults of oligarchy is that the city loses its unity becomes a city divided between the rich and the poor

there also arises a class of paupers
and with that crime

It is quite clear then, that, whenever you see beggars in a city, you may be certain that in the same place lurk thieves, pickpockets, temple-robbers, and the craftsmen of all similar crimes. (552d)

3) oligarchy to democracy

eventually in an oligarchy the wealth concentrates into the hands of the very few
even men of noble birth become poor
and eventually the mass of poor revolt

Democracy, then, I think, arises, whenever the poor win the day, killing some of the opposite party, expelling others, and admitting the remainder to an equal participation in civic rights and offices, and most commonly the offices in such a city are given by lot. (557a)

the character of a democracy is that people are free to do what they want
this mirrors the character of the soul ruled by appetite
in such a regime there is a great diversity of character

this regime may be the prettiest of all, Embroidered as it is with every kind of character, it may be thought as beautiful as a colored dress embroidered with every kind of flower. (557c)

in such a regime there is no obligation to participate in government

Again, consider that, in this city, you are not obliged to rule, though your talents may be equal to the task; and that you need not submit to being ruled, if you dislike it, or go to war when your fellow-citizens are at war, or keep peace when they are doing so, if you do not want peace. . . (557e)

democracy will be very close to anarchy

it will be, in all likelihood, an agreeable, anarchic, many-colored regime, dealing with all alike on a footing of equality, whether they be really equal or not. (558c)

4) democracy to tyranny

just as in an oligarchy where an insatiable craving for wealth led to its dissolution

democracy, like oligarchy, is destroyed by its insatiable craving for that which it defines as supremely good (562b)

and it is the insatiable craving for freedom which brings about the end of democracy

Whenever a democratic city which is thirsting for freedom has fallen under the leadership of wicked wine-bearers, and has drunk the unmixed wine of liberty far beyond due measure: it proceeds, I should imagine, to arraign its rulers as accursed oligarchs, and punishes them, unless they become very submissive, and supply it with freedom in copious draughts. (562d)

the excess of freedom is anarchy and this brings democracy to ruin
this excess of freedom leads inevitably to its opposite—slavery
and thus to rule by the tyrant

That very disease, I replied, which broke out in oligarchy and ruined it, appears in democracy, but bigger and stronger, aggravated by the license of the place, and occasions its enslavement. Indeed, to do anything in excess seldom fails to provoke a violent reaction to the opposite extreme, not only in the seasons of the year and in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, but also especially in regimes. . . . Thus, excessive freedom is unlikely to pass into anything but excessive slavery, in the case of cities as well as individuals. . . . Hence, in all likelihood, democracy, and only democracy, lays the foundation of tyranny—that is to say, the most intense freedom lays the foundation for the heaviest and the fiercest slavery. (563e-564a)

a democratic society is divided into three parts

- 1) the class of idle and extravagant men—from these come a powerful few who rule
- 2) the class of the very few wealthy men
- 3) the majority class of laborers “those who work with their own hands”

the leader must constantly strive to appease the swarming masses
and pay off the wealthy few
eventually the leader metamorphoses into a wolf
ruling by fear and bloodshed
and thus democracy gives way to tyranny

the tyrant rules by fear and most constantly be provoking wars

But as soon as he has relieved himself of his exiled enemies, by becoming reconciled to some, and by destroying others, his first measure is, I imagine, to be constantly inciting wars, in order that the people may stand in need of a leader. (566e)

at the end of the book there is a short digression

on how the writers of tragedies draw regimes to democracy and tyranny (568a-c)

Book IX

as Book VIII ends with the description of tyranny

Book IX opens with a long vivid description of the tyrant (not included in our selection)

eventually Socrates returns to Glaucon’s challenge in Book II

how is it that justice is intrinsically good

how is it that the just person is better off than the unjust

even if the unjust gets away with injustice and the just is mercilessly tortured and killed

Socrates response consists of three complex arguments:

1) not in our reader (580a-c)

this argument appeals to the description of the five types of regimes
and corresponding five types of characters
the philosopher-king is the happiest and most just
the tyrant is the most unjust and most wretched

2) not in our reader (580d-583b)

appeals to the tripartite division of the soul
the philosopher’s assessment of the relative pleasantness of his life is more reliable
than that of the money-lovers and honor-lovers

3) not in our reader (583b-588a)

the most complex argument relies on the metaphysical theory developed in Books V-VII
and the psychological theory in Book IV to develop a complex theory of pleasure

it concludes that the philosopher’s pleasures are truer and purer than those of the money-lover or honor-lover

our selection takes us to the end of the Book
and Socrates response to the claim

“that injustice is profitable to the man who is perfectly unjust” (588b)

in other words, what of the unjust person who is able to get away with injustice?

Socrates responds to this with a powerful image of what the soul of the unjust person is like the soul of the unjust person grows more vicious if he escapes detection (591b)

Study Questions

1. What is the ring of Gyges? What purpose does it serve as an example?
2. For what theoretical purpose does Plato construct the ideal city-state?
3. What are the three functional groupings of Plato's ideal community? What are the corresponding virtues?
4. How does Plato define justice in a city-state?
5. How does Plato divide the soul of a person? What is the principle that he uses to make this division?
6. How does Plato define justice in the individual person?
7. How does Plato distinguish between knowledge and belief in the *Republic*?
8. What is intermediate between reality and unreality?
9. According to Plato, why is there a norm of beauty that exists unvarying and permanent?
10. What is a philosopher?
11. What object is the eye like? What sense organ is the soul like?
12. What is the good in the intellectual world in relation to the mind and its objects?
13. How does Plato distinguish between the intelligible and the visible realms? Which is the most real?
14. What is the practice of the dialectic?
15. How does the soul ascend above the hypotheses to the idea of the good?
16. What is the purpose of the allegory of the cave? What do the prisoners look at? What do they see? What do they think they see?
17. What would Plato say about the 2004 U.S. election? What are the fundamental principles involved?
18. Is justice intrinsically good? Is justice instrumentally good? Why does it matter whether it is intrinsically good (rather than merely instrumentally good)?
19. Is it in my rational self-interest not to have self-seeking desires exclusively? Why or why not? Is it in my interest that my community rear people in such a way that people are not exclusively self-seeking?
20. Is it always wrong to harm someone else, as Socrates says? Suppose we distinguish between making someone a worse (more evil) person, which is roughly what Socrates meant by harming another, and making someone suffer, perhaps by taking away some of the person's possessions. Couldn't we call the second of these things harming another, and would harming someone in this second sense necessarily be wrong?
21. Is it just for the state to foster "noble lies" (such as the fable about God mixing metals into people), as Socrates suggests, and to ban harmful truths? Suppose I see through the noble lies fostered by the state and start asking questions. What should happen to me? Perhaps there is a difference between noble lies and ignoble lies, but how can I tell unless I ask questions? *Shouldn't* I ask questions and try to figure out the truth? (Isn't this what Socrates was doing when he was executed?)
22. If the people in Plato's dialogue explicitly advocate telling noble lies, shouldn't we speculate that Plato himself might be telling noble lies to his readership? If so, which claims made in *The Republic* might be lies?
23. What is the point of the parable of the cave? Is there something that rationally self-interested people might discover that would dramatically transform their behavior?