

"Until philosophers are kings, or until the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and the power of philosophy, cities will never cease to see evils and illnesses, nor shall the entire human race."

PLATO / 427 - 348 BC

THE REPUBLIC

Plato was of noble birth, wrote poetry in youth but turned to philosophy after he met Socrates. Immediately following disastrous execution of Socrates by Athenian democracy 399 BC, Plato left Athens and traveled to Megara, Syracuse, finally returned to Athens and began teaching at Academy ("grove of olive trees") outside city; Athens itself was governed by Oligarchy of The Thirty, later returned to democracy. Plato considered democracy as dangerous and inefficient as Plutocracy as democrats used power of majority to vote offices and money to themselves; masses were too easily swayed; result was usually anarchy.

Plato's major Dialogues: APOLOGY, SYMPOSIUM, PHAEDRUS, TIMAEUS, THEATETUS, ION, MENO, GORGIAS, PARMENIDES, PROTAGORAS, CRATYLUS, REPUBLIC, THE LAWS (last Dialogue). Plato used dialectic method and irony of Socrates to debunk anyone (like the sophist Thrasymachus) who pretends to any real knowledge; Plato blamed sophists for decline of Athenian culture with their mercenary teaching methods.

Plato's influence on later western thinkers was profound: AUGUSTINE; NEOPLATONISTS of early Christian church; THOMAS MORE; BERKELEY's Idealism; COLERIDGE; SHELLEY; and WORDSWORTH:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afair;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home ...

(INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY)

Platonic Doctrine of Knowledge = Recollection.

EMERSON / TRANSCENDENTALISM

THE REPUBLIC / a Dialogue on the nature of Justice

THRASYMACHUS advances definition: "Justice is in the interest of the stronger." SOCRATES destroys this argument, then proceeds to argue that Justice can best be seen in Ideal city-state, Utopia which will be Man Writ Large. Four Classical Virtues -- Justice, Wisdom, Courage, Temperance -- can then be defined in relation to Republic.

3 classes of men/women in Plato's Republic:

1. GUARDIANS or MAGISTRATES, so-called "PHILOSOPHER-KINGS" who own no property, no money, no families, no permanent spouses, are therefore disinterested. No laws, all cases decided by Philosopher-Kings without reference to precedent. GUARDIANS have supreme power in Republic, embody Wisdom. (In THE LAWS, Plato chooses 360 GUARDIANS in groups of 30, for one month each)
2. SOLDIERS or AUXILIARIES have power of sword, live Spartan life style; community of women and children; women take part in naked gymnastics with men; education for 20 years for all; no poets or poetry; censorship of myths and songs; women have equal opportunity with men.
3. PRODUCERS or MAKERS, who manufacture things. 3 types of people: makers, users, imitators - no imitators in Republic. (In THE LAWS, Plato estimates 5040 free citizens in his Republic)

All 3 classes above have TEMPERANCE; JUSTICE will be end result of harmony of various parts.

NATURE OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE - Cave analogy Book VII: knowing vs sense perception. Simile of men chained who see shadows on walls, think these images are only realities. Philosopher escapes from cave, sees things as they really are, but cannot communicate this to prisoners. THEORY OF IDEAS: Forms are outside world of sense, really exist, knowledge of them by pure reason. VIRTUE is KNOWLEDGE, SIN is IGNORANCE.

Myth of Er, returns 12 days after death, describes afterlife, reincarnation of Agamemnon (eagle), Orpheus (swan), Odysseus (peasant).

