

A Short Argumentative Essay on Plato's *The Republic of Plato*

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Undressing the Puppets of Philosophy:

Revealing Identities of Deceptive Wise Men

The characters crafted in *The Republic of Plato* are arranged in a manner that works to reveal the very essence of a true philosopher, enlightening the reader on the parallels and distinctions that coexist among dynamic groups in society. By way of dialogue, Plato employs Glaucon and Thrasymachus to represent what he believes to be apparent philosophers, simultaneously allowing his teacher, Socrates, to encompass the constitution of a “real” philosopher or “philosopher king” as he describes. The selection of personalities used to educate the reader on this topic highlights Socrates’ ambition to enrich the minds of the most influential individuals within his grasp, suggesting both a free-handed spirit and a propensity for goodness that synchronously prevail in the wise man “fit to rule”. The following quote works to validate Socrates’ notorious claim that philosophers must rule the city, in at first, a general manner.

Unless philosophers’ rule as kings or those now called kings genuinely philosophize, and political power coincide in the same place...there is no rest from ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for humankind  
(Plato 473 d).

For the reader who takes on the challenge of deciphering cryptic messages within Plato’s text

more discreet value can be discovered. Socrates reveals his belief that all citizens are equally worthy of becoming true philosophers when he states that “There is in every one of us, even the most moderate, a type of desire that is terrible, wild, and lawless” (360c). This quote skillfully suggests that all souls can potentially be enlightened in a manner by which moral decision making is achieved through careful learning and collected reason. Evidently, Socrates was a very figurative thinker whose messages were conveyed in a way that sometimes unintentionally, invited misinterpretation. He makes these bold statements with the hope that his audience will seek to find common political ground among their fellow Athenians but for his direct audience, who is thinking in much more literal terms, it only works to intensify the existing frustrations, they already feel toward the many.

In Book I, Plato introduces his main character and real-life mentor, Socrates, allowing him to lay the foundation for what is “just”, finding it to be a fundamental characteristic within the true philosopher or in his eyes, the only person “fit” to rule. His comrades press him further to persuade them on whether “it is in every way better to be just than unjust” (357a) to which Socrates replies “In my opinion, at least, there is a good of this kind” (357c). This small exchange displays a purposeful intent for Plato’s character, Socrates, as being one meant to encompass the qualities of someone who is morally fit to lead, plainly displaying his ethical morality in a way that clearly separates him apart from the others in Plato’s cast. Glaucon happily, engages with Socrates on this topic, agreeing that true philosophers are “those who delight in each thing that is itself” (340a). Meaning, that it is in their nature to love and seek the truth in a manner that is void of greed. Socrates argues that “Each of the private wage earners whom these men call sophists and believes to be their rivals in art, educates in nothing other than these convictions of the many, which they opine when they are gathered together and calls this

wisdom” (493a). He believes “these men”, sophists, who seek money in exchange for their knowledge of reality, are not to be trusted as rulers and does not look fondly upon those who abuse their knowledge and power in such a way. Socrates’ modest birthright is not a hidden element in *The Republic of Plato* which also speaks to the intention of this dialogue and arguably, the importance of this character’s most redeeming attributes. Because of Socrates’ unique teaching methods, Plato’s narrative is successful in its attempt at provoking a longing for fairness within political dimensions and works to inspire hope within the reader that if respectful discourse is achieved, civic agreements are possible, even between the most unlikely parties. Only a philosopher king, however, could guide their city toward this kind of peaceful reality which is tragically one that remains subject to all the wills of the “unjust” according to Plato.

Glaucon’s eminent presence in the opening chapter demonstrates the class of company to which Socrates directs his efforts. Undoubtedly, he sees Glaucon as a dominant figure in Greek society and is privy to his political and social influence in Athens. In Book II he recounts the tale of The Ring of Gyges in attempt to complement his certainties about justice when he states that “no one is willingly just but only when compelled to do so” (360 c). It can be questioned however, whether Glaucon’s account of justice is honest to his true beliefs after he succumbs to Socrates’ reasoning somewhat systematically. As the definition of justice unravels, it sparks a curiosity as to whether the rebuttal is anticipated, in an effort to capture the mind of his younger brother, Ademeintus, deliberately exposing him to the hopeful attitudes held by his highly regarded friend. Glaucon’s audience in this dialogue is crucial in grasping the ambition of the debate, discreetly revealing the high opinion, he holds for Socrates, who he secretly hopes will inspire his nearest kin. Ademeintus is a keen observer in this dialogue, evidently provoked by the conversation which his older brother eventually allows him to dominate. This conversation not

only sheds light on the stark attitudes about justice held by apparent philosophers in the fifth century but also the great love and loyalty between siblings, continuing to stand the test of time and ceaselessly tugging and twisting the realities of political landscapes some 2500 years later.

Thrasymachus is another defining character in *The Republic of Plato* who holds a very specific purpose for Plato. He maintains a very static view that justice is “the advantage of the stronger” (338c) to represent a class of citizens who use intimidation to challenge the morals and virtue of their’ counterparts. Thrasymachus’ singular thinking is repeatedly conveyed through his careless comments that seek to challenge and tempt his competition, leading one to question his true motives in the discussion. His arrogance is repeatedly portrayed in Book I, during a debate in which he attacks Socrates’ methods of conditioning.

Why do you act like fools making way for one another? If you truly want to know what the just is, do not ask and gratify your love of honour by refuting whatever someone answers-you know that it is easier to ask than to answer-but answer yourself and say what you assert the just to be (336c).

His resentment towards Socrates’ ability to enrapture his friends is exposed in this line, revealing the somewhat possessive attitude he holds toward his fellow elites who claim to support him. Presumably, this character is someone who held power within their circle by means of coercion for a long period of time, explaining his unwillingness to hand such authority over to Socrates without a fight. If one dissects the meaning of the name “Thrasymachus” the Greek word “Fierce Fighter” can be found, which is not only fitting for someone with his strength of character but also works to explain the symbolism taking place within his “character flaws”. Plato uses this character in attempt to represent a divisive group of citizens who he believes to be very influential in shaping general political opinion within the city of Athens. Seemingly, Plato took a

keen interest in depicting this character in a way that familiarizes the reader with a personality that may exist within his or her own family, connecting them with a perspective that could perhaps be experienced on a personal level while simultaneously bringing to life another example of an apparent philosopher. Thrasymachus was likely a citizen who was very privileged in asserting his beliefs without refutation for much of his life, denying him of the humbleness that grows naturally from being open to learning from others. Socrates' poses a revealing question when he asks "Will a soul ever accomplish its work well if deprived of its virtue, or is that impossible" (353 e)? to which Thrasymachus replies "Impossible.", revealing an attitude that is surprisingly wanting yet willing to invest in Socrates ideas while his audience of peers listen on. Thrasymachus was likely a person whose hereditary ranking and coercive manner wedged him into a very limiting position of authority, forcing him to experience his power in the only way he knew how. There is likely an underlying lesson to be learned from his character that aims to disclose the twisted political dynamics that exists within communities in which certain citizens are heavily driven to sacrifice their own goodness to procure any amount of power in their otherwise powerless world.

Some scholars have implied a belief that Plato intentionally "hid" knowledge within his work to make it harder for the less deserving to attain. Sadly, this opinion may hold some truth; however, it is not until one grasps the understanding that Socrates himself, likely held very contrasting beliefs, that this notion becomes upsetting. Socrates willingness to share knowledge so readily and freely with everybody, may have been one of top motivators in Plato's decision to later open his learning academy, in hopes of gaining back some control over who may benefit from the philosophy shared by his mentor. Contrarily, Socrates understood that everyone is deserving of the best advice and philosophy possible which is also in the best interest

of the “just” city he builds, unearthing a very flagrant reality pertaining to the historical development of private educational institutions in my opinion. Socrates character seems to have a very solid awareness that some of the biggest problems in politics lie in the very issue of selective sharing and the reality that many citizens and leaders do not give their best advice and true opinions consistently, creating various points of contention in all environments and groups where political debate is present. Socrates was evidently a man of many words and likely found it difficult to relay his thoughts in a limited amount of time and space, just as Thrasymachus may not have been able to experience his perspective of the world in any other manner than how he did. It cannot be disputed however, that Plato’s cunning revival of these characters in *The Republic of Plato* bring all the necessary elements together, inspiring a greater understanding of the qualities within a “just” person and a “true philosopher” by his standards.

Plato is successful at using and maneuvering these individuals to reveal character flaws that occur within the nature of apparent philosophers, taking the reader on an odyssey of clever exchange in which the true illustration of a real philosopher can be discovered. Socrates deliberate attempts to verbally undermine his counterparts pay heed to the success of his unconventional methods of the time while exposing the quintessence of wisdom and justice and other admirable traits woven into the true nature of a “philosopher king”. By magnifying the moral and ethical flaws of Thrasymachus and Glaucon it challenges the reader to want to recognize the qualities within Socrates as compelling characteristics despite his common disposition and figurative expression. Plato is successful at invoking the reader to sympathize with Socrates’ character and by experiencing the nature of a real philosopher, it lays bare the reality of present-day politicians or apparent philosophers, who frequently fall victim to the greed and temptation that continues to shape current political systems around the world. By

allowing these individuals, the right to rule, it encourages the generation and regeneration of more apparent philosophers, causing patterns of oppression and sometimes conflict within political society. Plato's belief that a true philosopher is the only one fit to rule in a city, is born from the high moral and intellectual standards set by his teacher, Socrates, whom he evidently holds in high regard. He uses this character to illuminate his audience about why individuals, such as Socrates can be valued in such a way that a whole community may benefit from their virtues.

Works Cited

Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 2016