

Plato's Political Philosophy

Plato is generally viewed as one of the greatest and most influential philosophers in the Western tradition. His political philosophy is held in similarly high regard, and is the earliest comprehensive political view we possess. As with other great figures, Plato's political theory was not only part of his overall philosophical system but profoundly shaped by his social and political circumstances. Plato's political experience was one of general decay and decline. In his view, the traditional *polis*, the main function of which was inculcating its moral values, was under assault from forces of democracy, individualism, and imperialism. Throughout his works Plato defended the traditional *polis* and argued for the need to pursue values of justice and the intellectual virtues rather than worldly goods such as wealth and reputation.

Plato was born in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, between Athens and Sparta (431-403 BC). He was profoundly affected by political turmoil in Athens after the war ended, which caused him to distrust existing political forms. In his autobiographical *Seventh Epistle*--the authenticity of which is disputed, though it is accepted by a majority of scholars (see Morrow 1962; Guthrie 1962-81: V, 401)--he describes his loss of faith in politics and his conclusion that a just regime will come about only when "those who are sincerely and truly lovers of wisdom come into political power, or the rulers of our cities, by the grace of God, learn true philosophy." (Ep. 7, 326a-b) The implications of the union of philosophy and political power are pursued in his most celebrated work, the *Republic*.

There is great controversy about the interpretation of Plato's political philosophy and numerous unresolved issues. In large part this is because he wrote dialogues rather than treatises, and it is not clear how closely we may identify the views of the main speakers--generally Socrates--

as Plato's own. This problem is compounded by disagreements about the dating of different dialogues, the authenticity of others, and the reliability of certain historical evidence, including the *Seventh Epistle*. An additional factor is the radicalism of Plato's proposals and disagreements about his motives in proposing them. While different interpretations cannot be explored in this essay, the reader should be aware that they abound in the voluminous literature. (For discussion of central problems of interpretation, with references, see Klosko 2006a, Chap. 2.)

Socratic Dialogues

The series of dialogues generally believed to be Plato's earliest vividly depict the character and teaching of Socrates. There are irresolvable problems in establishing the relationship between the Socrates of these works and the historical Socrates--as Plato understood him--and Plato's own philosophical views. While it is possible that, like a number of other ancient authors, Plato was deeply concerned with depicting the Socrates he knew, it is also possible that he used Socrates as a mouthpiece for his own ideas (at the times he wrote different works). The solution to this "Socratic problem" may well lie somewhere between these poles (see Ross 1933; Guthrie 1962-81: Vol. III; Vlastos 1991: Chap. 2). In Plato's later works, the influence of Socrates clearly decreases. In the dialogues that are generally viewed as Plato's last, Socrates assumes only a background role, while he is absent entirely from the *Laws*, generally viewed as Plato's last work, left unfinished at his death.

Wherever one comes down on the Socratic problem, the early dialogues explore a range of topics that remained central to Plato's political theory. To begin with, Socrates is deeply concerned with the importance of justice. In a series of dialogues, he argues that justice is not only necessary but sufficient for happiness. As he says in the *Apology*, no harm can come to a good man (*Ap.* 41d).

Although he could be killed, that is not true harm, as only injustice, which damages the soul, can harm one. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates develops this view, arguing that it is worse to commit injustice (*adikein*) than to have injustice committed against one (*adikeisthai*). But nowhere in this series of dialogues is there a clear account of exactly what justice is and how it contributes to happiness. A series of dialogues feature inquiries into the nature of other moral virtues, several of which end in general *aporia*, or puzzlement. It is not until the *Republic* that questions raised in many of the early dialogues receive comprehensive answers (see Shorey 1903; 1933: 62-73).

Along with justice, Socrates evinces deep concern with a value akin to moral autonomy. As classically recounted in the *Apology*, although Socrates is ignorant about fundamental moral issues, he is still wiser than other people, because he recognizes his own ignorance. Knowing he is ignorant, Socrates searches for moral knowledge, and, through relentless questioning, attempts to awaken his complacent fellow citizens. Socrates compares himself to a gadfly, attempting to rouse a lazy horse by stinging it (*Ap.* 30e-31a). He claims that to talk about virtue is "the highest good for man" and that "the unexamined life is not worth living." (38a) But it is difficult to reconcile Socrates' professed ignorance with his strongly held convictions concerning the importance of justice (Vlastos 1994: Chap. 2; Brickhouse and Smith 1996: Chap. 2).

More directly political themes are also featured in these works. A prominent theme is Socrates' belief in government by expertise, as opposed to the Athenian system of appointing magistrates by lot. According to both Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1395b5-8) and Xenophon (*Mem.* I, ii,9, III, ix, 10-12), the historical Socrates was critical of the Athenian lottery system, which placed crucial matters of governing the state in the hands of people chosen by chance. To this practice, Socrates opposed the ideal of government as a matter of expertise. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates notes the Athenian policy of turning to experts for advice on technical matters, such as naval fortifications, but

allowing anyone at all to speak on political questions. If government is a matter of expertise, then possession of the "political art" should be a basis for political authority.

In addition to its lack of qualified leadership, Socrates criticizes the Athenian democracy for being morally corrupt. In his defense speech in the *Apology*, one thing for which he actually apologizes (*apologia* is the Greek word for "defense") is his avoidance of Athenian politics. Socrates pursued his lifelong mission of attempting to turn his fellow citizens towards virtue outside the political system. In his role as gadfly, he takes his fellow citizens aside individually, "like a father or an elder brother" (*Ap.* 31b). His reason for withdrawing from politics is that, because of the volatility of Athenian politics, someone who attempted to pursue justice within the system could not long survive (32e-3a). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates presents a searing indictment of existing politicians as panderers to the Athenian people. They tell the people what they want to hear rather than what is good for them. They are successful, as pastry cooks would be successful arguing against physicians before a jury of children. As a result, the citizens' appetites have been inflamed, resulting in a city that is swollen and festering with walls and harbors and similar trash (518e-19a). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates begins to describe a different kind of political leader, one who would restrain the citizens' harmful appetites instead of indulging them.

In spite of his criticisms of Athenian democracy, in the *Crito*, Socrates argues for strict compliance with the laws. Having been sentenced to death on charges of impiety and corrupting the young, Socrates refuses to escape from prison, because it would be unjust to do so. The arguments on which he bases this decision constitute the only comprehensive discussion of the question of political obligation in ancient Greek philosophy. Socrates' conclusion is extremely strong, a requirement to obey the law "whatever it commands" (*ha en keleuê*) (51b). However, not only does this conclusion appear to be objectionably authoritarian, but it is difficult to reconcile with Socrates'

views expressed in other dialogues, especially the *Apology*, in which he declares that he will obey the command of the gods and continue his mission, more or less regardless of what the Athenian court demands (*Ap.* 29d-30a; see esp. Kraut 1984).

The Republic: Defense of Justice

The *Republic* centers upon an inquiry into the nature of justice. (*Dikaiosunê*, the Greek term, has broader connotations than "justice"; it is closer to "righteousness" or virtue in general.) In Book I, Socrates asks a series of interlocutors to define justice. He refutes all their efforts, the most notable of which is a famous definition of justice as "the interest of the stronger," put forth by the Sophist, Thrasymachus (see Kerferd 1947; Maguire 1971). Socrates resorts to a series of argumentative tricks to dismiss Thrasymachus. But at the beginning of Book II, Glaucon and Adeimantus (Plato's actual brothers) claim that Thrasymachus gave up too easily and wish to hear more.

In the role of devil's advocate, Glaucon challenges Socrates to identify the nature of justice and explain how it pays. Glaucon develops the first "social contract" argument in the Western tradition. He argues that justice is born of weakness; people set up rules to protect themselves from other people, but would violate the rules if they could. Doing so would allow them to take advantage of others--to steal from them, kill them, etc.--but, unable to violate the rules with impunity, people unwillingly adhere to them. Adeimantus supports Glaucon's claims with appeal to popular opinion, according to which the only reason to be just is fear of getting caught.

Accordingly, Socrates' challenge is not only to define justice but to demonstrate the value of justice itself, without regard to reputation, regardless, in other words, of whether one's justice is known by men or gods. To construct his response, Socrates says that, since the justice of an

individual soul is small and so hard to make out, he will observe justice in a larger entity, a hypothetical just city. Having identified justice in the latter, Socrates will demonstrate the superiority of justice to injustice by demonstrating the superiority of the just city to four hypothetical unjust cities. Because justice is analogous in city and soul, this procedure will allow him to identify justice in the soul and to demonstrate the superiority of justice, on the basis of a comparison between the just soul and four unjust souls that correspond to the four unjust cities.

Although formally subordinate to an inquiry into the nature of justice, Plato's account of the just city is clearly intended as much more, as a vehicle through which Plato can present his political philosophy (cf. Annas 1999; Klosko 2006b). The just city is composed of three classes: rulers, and auxiliaries or soldiers, who, together, are the city's "guardians," and an unnamed class of craftsmen and farmers. The city's virtues turn on relationships between the classes, with justice defined as an overall principle that each class should stay in its proper place and do its own job.

The soul is analogous to the city in being composed of three parts or aspects: reason, which corresponds to the rulers; the spirited part (*thumos* or *thumoeidês*) corresponding to the auxiliaries, and appetite, which corresponds to the workers. In arguing for parts of the soul, Plato may appear to be relying somewhat arbitrarily on the analogy with the city, but he has strong arguments for his position, based on the phenomenon of psychological conflict. The fact that one can feel urges both to do something and not to do it--e.g., to eat a sweet, and not to eat it, because one is on a diet--indicates separate faculties. Appetite centers on physiologically rooted drives, e.g., for food, drink, and sex. Reason, in contrast, is concerned with the soul's overall good. One reason the analogy between city and soul is particularly apt is that Plato believes that struggle between conflicting urges is settled politically. Thus if reason is able to control the urges of desire, it "rules" in the soul (Kraut 1973). Spirit is a kind of anger that is primarily directed back at oneself. As interpreted by

scholars, it centers on anger at oneself for not living up to one's desired conception of oneself (Gosling 1973: Chap. 3). In the virtuous soul, spirit is allied with reason, lending reason emotional force to help it keep the appetites in check. The virtues of the soul are analogous to those of the city. As in the just city, justice in the soul is the overall principle that each element stays in its place and does its own job.

The analogy between city and soul is used to demonstrate the superiority of justice to injustice. Only if reason rules in a soul will all elements receive satisfaction. Unlike the other parts, reason recognizes the legitimate needs of the other elements and pursues a balanced plan of life that works to the benefit of the soul as a whole. This is analogous to how the rulers function in the just city, ruling in the interests of all classes, not their own. Looking at the city as a whole, we can see the superiority of the balanced, harmonious just city to the four unjust cities--timarchy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny--in each of which the rulers rule by force. The fruits of injustice are most clear in the tyrannic city, in which the ruler oppresses and impoverishes his fellow citizens solely for his own interest. A similar comparison holds in regard to the just soul and four corresponding unjust souls. Like the just city, the just soul is balanced and harmonious; its health contrasts with the anguish of disharmony and conflict between elements that characterize the unjust souls. Once again, the contrast is most apparent in regard to the tyrannic soul. Possessed by an overriding lust, this soul sacrifices all other concerns in a vain attempt to satisfy this base desire.

However, even if we accept Plato's argument for the superiority of justice, it is not clear that this is an adequate response to Glaucon and Adeimantus. In making their case for injustice, Plato's brothers clearly describe injustice as concerned with people's conduct. As indicated above, injustice is epitomized by the tyrant, who kills whomever he pleases, steals from whomever he pleases, and commits other actions that are generally forbidden. In responding, Plato transforms justice into a

quality of the soul. It does not concern a person's conduct, but internal psychic conditions.

Accordingly, a notorious difficulty in the *Republic* concerns the need to connect up these internal and external aspects of justice, to establish, in other words, that the performance of unjust actions will disturb the balance and harmony of the soul that are necessary for happiness (Sachs 1971).

However, although Plato does not address this problem directly, it is likely that a suitable response can be constructed from the materials he provides. Especially important is his basic assumption that conduct strongly affects psychic qualities. As we will see directly, the fact that, especially in early childhood, one's soul is shaped by how one behaves is central to his political theory.

The Republic: The Just City

The essence of Plato's political theory is straightforward. The purpose of the just city is to make its inhabitants as virtuous as possible, and so everything possible is done to achieve this. The result is a completely controlled environment in which all resources are devoted to the inculcation of virtue. The city's primary institution is the education system. Its other institutions, including Plato's famous system of communism, are intended to provide an environment in which the task of education can be successfully carried on.

As noted above, the just city is composed of the three classes: the rulers, auxiliaries, and farmers. Underlying the structure of the city and its educational function are two basic psychological assumptions. First, Plato believes that people are largely malleable. A person is strongly affected by the environment in which he or she grows up, and so can be made virtuous if brought up in a properly governed city. The second assumption limits malleability. Plato believes there are fundamental, innate differences between people. The three different kinds of people--those with gold, silver, or bronze in their souls (*Rep.* 415a-d)--have vastly different capacities to achieve

virtue. Although the just city is designed to raise people to the highest levels of virtue they are capable of, the result must be different classes with different levels of virtue.

Plato is unusual in the history of political philosophy in the amount of emphasis he gives to the psychological effects of art, which is a central theme in the *Republic*. In ancient Greece, poetry was the primary artistic medium, and so poetry, especially Homer, receives detailed criticism, in regard to proper rhythms and meter, as well as content. Similar concerns with rhythm and harmony apply to music and the visual arts, though Plato does not discuss the last subject in detail. He believes the arts are most effective with the very young, instilling balance and harmony, readying children for true moral principles when they are old enough to understand them. As a result of lifelong, intensive education, all inhabitants are raised to the highest level of virtue possible for them. But because of the inherent incapacities of most people, this requires that members of the lower classes be completely subordinate--Plato describes them as "slaves" (590d)--to the rulers.

The just city's major institutions are intended to facilitate education. As Plato famously argues, the city should be ruled by philosophers. A just city is not possible until political power and philosophic wisdom are joined in the same hands. The philosophers' claim to rule rests on their apprehension of the Forms--perfect moral standards that exist outside the phenomenal world and are the only things that are truly real. This divine knowledge orients the philosophers' desires away from worldly things, so they can be trusted to rule completely unchecked, although Plato does not provide a detailed account of how their knowledge actually helps in the business of ruling. The nature of the philosophers' knowledge and of the Forms themselves are illustrated in three famous images: the Form of the Good as the sun; the "divided line," which elaborates on different cognitive states and corresponding entities at different levels of existence; and the Cave. The details of these images, and of the theory of Forms more generally, cannot be discussed in this essay, although, as is

especially clear in the image of the Cave, Plato's metaphysical and epistemological views are the essential underpinning of his political philosophy (see below).

The other distinctive institutions in the just city are the treatment of women and communism. In regard to the former, Plato argues that gender differences are not relevant to ruling. He is a pioneer in the history of women's equality in arguing that women who are qualified to rule should be allowed to do so. Accordingly, the common term "philosopher kings" is actually misleading in not taking account of philosopher-queens. However, equal treatment is only for exceptional women. Outside the class of guardians, conventional family structures are apparently maintained.

Even more radical is the system of living arrangements for guardians, men and women. For them, the nuclear family is abolished. Children are raised communally, and with reproduction controlled by the state, the stock of guardians can be improved by selective breeding. Abolition of the family also makes the guardians in effect one big family, thereby eliminating causes of faction and promoting stability in the state.

Community of family receives much more detailed discussion than community of property. The Guardians live a permanent barracks existence, as soldiers in camp, with common mess. They are allowed to possess only their weapons, are forbidden to own gold and silver, and are forbidden houses or storerooms which anyone who wishes is not free to enter. The city's land is owned by members of the lowest class, while the Guardians are maintained by an annual tax upon this class, which they receive as a salary for protecting them.

Although it is often said that Plato's just city is communistic, this description is inaccurate. Communism (or socialism) is generally described as public ownership of the means of production. In Plato's city, the primary means of production, land, is owned by the lowest class. There is an element of communism in the city, as the guardians live communally without individual possessions.

But this is community of poverty rather than community of property.

Through these arrangements, the just city is cleverly constructed in order to give each class what it wants. This is essential for the virtue of temperance, that each class willingly stays in its place, thereby allowing the city to remain just. The farmers, who are oriented towards the satisfaction of their appetites, control the state's wealth. Since moving up to the ruling class would require them to renounce property, they should prefer to remain where they are. Something similar is true of the auxiliaries, who are honored for their military service, thereby receiving what they desire. The philosophers, on the other hand, are to some extent forced to set aside their own desires. Although they would prefer to focus on their studies, they must serve as rulers, not for their own benefit but for the sake of their fellow citizens. Plato holds that a city will be able to prosper only if its rulers rule unwillingly, because there is no way they can profit from ruling. But in the final analysis, Plato argues that, living in a secure environment, freed from the cares of ordinary life, and honored by their fellow citizens, the rulers are as happy as Olympic victors (465b-e).

It is difficult to know how seriously Plato takes his sketch of an ideal city. Challenged by his interlocutors, Socrates devotes considerable effort to describing how the city could be realized. Though this would be difficult, it is not impossible (*Rep.* 501a-502c; Klosko 1981; Burnyeat 1992). But the city is later described as existing only "in theory," and Plato suggests that it does not matter whether it is ever realized (592a-b). Prominent scholars argue that the city is so extreme that it is an ingenious satire, intended to demonstrate the impossibility of political reform (Strauss 1964; Bloom 1968; criticized in Burnyeat 1985; Klosko 1986).

Whether or not the just city is intended to be realized, the *Republic* develops Plato's critique of Athenian democracy (cf. Monoson 2000). In the famous parable of the ship of state (488a-89d), the populace show no respect for those who truly understand navigation, whom they view as odd,

turning over control of the ship to charlatans who only pretend to knowledge. Plato also argues that the mob is emotional and easily misled. Sophists are likened to animal trainers, who have mastered the art of managing the unruly beast of the mob (493a-c). To these somewhat familiar themes, Plato adds a wonderful satirical sketch of democracy in Book VIII, which criticizes democracy for treating unequals alike. This holds for the old and the young, men and women, masters and slaves, even animals and human beings.

Central to Plato's critique of democracy is belief in objective values, which only a few have the capacity to know. To follow other values, is simply to be wrong, and so the expertise of the few must take precedence over the wishes of the many. Accordingly, in addition to educative institutions that make the many as virtuous as possible, a system of higher education is intended to create a class of political experts. As there are relatively well established means to train experts in the different crafts that Socrates frequently discusses in the early dialogues--shoemaking, carpentry, etc.--Plato describes a similar system to train future philosophers. Their curriculum centers on mathematics, which raises their minds from the material world to the abstract intellectual world, and finally to the Forms, which they study for five years. Then the philosophers spend fifteen years helping to govern the city, and so gain practical experience, before they are raised to knowledge of the Form of the Good.

The central orientation of Plato's political philosophy is illustrated by the Cave image (514a-17a). Prisoners in the cave are bound so they can see only shadows that pass on a wall in front of them and contend for preeminence in this shadow world. If they could escape and see the world outside the cave, they would despise their former situation. However, when a prisoner who had been freed from the cave, goes back down to free his former fellows, he is disoriented by returning to darkness. He appears foolish to his former fellows, who resist his efforts and would kill him, if they

could.

Because the prisoners inhabit a world that is not fully real, to attain knowledge and true values, they must move beyond appearances and out of the cave. Notable in this image is complete denial of the legitimacy of ordinary people's desires--and of the appetitive life, which Plato views with disdain. To be freed from the chains of appetite people must be educated in a properly run state. Once again, this requires complete subordination of the lower classes to the philosophers

In the aftermath of twentieth century fascist and totalitarian regimes, Plato received harsh criticism, because of resemblances between the just city and these systems. The most celebrated attack is by Karl Popper, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Popper 1966). Although many of Popper's specific charges are wide of the mark and his work as a whole is wildly polemical, there is a clear element of truth to the general charge (cf. Levinson 1953; Klosko 1996). Because of his overall lack of faith in most people's ability to achieve virtue on their own, Plato believes they must live in permanent subjection to the philosophers. At one point, Plato says that after people have been properly educated, they will become free (591a). But it is not clear what this freedom consists of in the totally controlled, totally censored just city. Popper's critique, along with similar criticisms from other scholars (Crossman 1939; Winspear 1940), raised additional related issues, including whether Plato is a racist (Klosko 1991), and possibly statist implications of the principles of distributive justice advocated in the *Republic* (Vlastos 1977).

Plato's Later Political Theory

In his later dialogues, Plato's political theory moves in directions of increased realism and pessimism. This may be connected to his incursions into Syracuse and his unsuccessful attempt to win over Dionysius II, the city's tyrant, to philosophy. Though Plato was not optimistic, he decided

to go to Syracuse, lest he be "a pure theorist, unwilling to touch any practical task" (*Ep.* 7 328c). Dionysius' commitment to philosophy proved to be weak, while Plato and his followers were implicated in the subsequent disastrous invasion of Sicily undertaken by Dion, Plato's close associate (see Morrow 1962).

The most important late political dialogues are the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. In both works, dramatic action is severely reduced. Though the dialogue form is retained, it is largely a shell for authoritative disquisitions by the works' main characters, who in neither work is Socrates (cf. Gill and McCabe 1996). In the *Statesman*, Socrates remains in the background while an unnamed Eleatic Stranger discusses the nature of the statesman--as he does in regard to the nature of the sophist, in a sister dialogue. In the *Laws*, from which Socrates is absent, the main character is an unnamed Athenian Stranger. These two works maintain Plato's concerns with government by expertise and inculcation of virtue. But in both works, Plato turns from the intense idealism of the *Republic* toward greater appreciation of laws and existing institutions.

The *Statesman's* concern with laws shows up in the Eleatic Stranger's argument that the statesman's art should not be constrained by law. If a physician had to be away from his patients, he would leave instructions for them. But when he returns, his expertise takes precedence over his previous instructions, which may be set aside. Something similar holds in regard to laws. Because subjects of laws are numerous and differ in many respects, proper instructions for them must be general, not tailored to specific characteristics of individuals. As with the physician, the true statesman may disregard the generality of laws in order directly to apply his expertise to each case. However, if a true statesman is not available, laws should be adhered to. Although the text is compressed and at times obscure, it also appears that laws should remain unchanged. Laws are necessary to restrain the populace, while Plato suggests that attempts to change them will invariably

be corrupted. Although law is no substitute for political expertise, it is a "second best" (297d, 297e, 300c), and Plato presents a classification of constitutions with good states distinguished from bad on the basis of whether or not the rulers adhere to the laws.

Plato's interest in laws is developed in the *Laws*. The participants in this dialogue are three old men, an unnamed Athenian Stranger, a Spartan, Megillus, and Clinias, a Cretan. As the three walk to a shrine on the island of Crete, they discuss the construction of a city, Magnesia, which is going to be founded as a colony of Crete. The *Laws* displays deep knowledge of the laws and institutions of many Greek cities, which is obviously the fruits of years of research conducted by Plato and his school (Morrow 1960). Unlike the just city in the *Republic*, which is designed more or less freely from the ground up, the "second best" city in the *Laws* (739a-e, 875c-d) proceeds from existing political and social institutions, which Plato improves (see the invaluable discussion in Morrow 1960). Plato's basic plan combines a system of political institutions similar to those of democratic Athens and a social and economic system like that of Sparta. Overall control is vested in the laws, which are described in enormous detail. They are drawn up by a philosophical lawgiver, and, after an initial try out period, will be virtually impossible to change. As the Athenian says in regard to laws concerning education, his aim is to emulate Egypt, in which laws concerning music had not changed in thousands of years (656d-57a).

A decisive element in the movement from the *Republic* to the *Laws* is Plato's loss of faith in the possibility of philosopher kings. Even if someone could understand what is necessary to do, "human nature" would impel him towards self-aggrandizement, thereby bringing ruin to the city (*Laws* 875a-d). Because no human being can be trusted with unaccountable power, only the rule of law allows human beings to rise above the level of savage beasts (874e-75a). Along with his abandonment of the philosopher king, Plato appears to place more reliance in the abilities of more

ordinary people (Bobonich 2002). All citizens are enfranchised politically, and all live in traditional families. In Magnesia, there are no guardians living apart from and over society as a whole.

However, although Plato's attitude towards democracy in the *Laws* is undoubtedly more favorable than in the *Republic*, this still falls short of modern views. Citizens' virtually only prerogative is to help choose their magistrates, while magistrates too do not determine the state's course. This is prescribed for all time by the laws.

The political system of the *Laws* is purged of the excesses of Athenian democracy. As in Athens, important institutions are an Assembly and popular courts. But the former is assigned fewer functions than in Athens, while the power of popular courts is curbed by a system for appeals. Magnesia departs notably from Athens in its large array of magistrates with important functions. While the Athenians generally appointed magistrates through the lottery, in Magnesia, most are appointed through a combination of election and the lot. Significant officials include "guardians of the laws," who are assigned a host of duties, a board of examiners, and a "nocturnal council."

This last body is composed of high office holders throughout the state. Its ominous sounding name comes from its meeting in the hours before dawn, a convenient time for busy officials. It is described as a kind of ongoing seminar to study the laws of different cities, with an eye to preserving those of Magnesia. Having described this council, the Athenian concludes the *Laws* by saying that the state must be "turned over to it" (969b). Although this may sound like a return to philosopher-kings--which is apparently Aristotle's interpretation (*Pol.* 1265a3-4)--this would contradict many elements of the *Laws*. Glenn Morrow, the most important scholar of the *Laws*, argues that the council exercise only informal authority, providing advice when it is necessary to change laws. However, on this construal, the apparent importance of the council does not rest well with the rigidity of the laws and the extreme difficulty of changing them. In regard to the nocturnal council,

as other aspects of the *Laws*, it is possible that Plato had not fully worked out the details at the time of his death (see Morrow 1960: Chap. 9; Klosko 2008).

In regard to economic arrangements, the Athenian argues that while community of property is best, it is possible only for gods or children of gods, and so the second best state has private property (739a-e). But as in Sparta, land held by each family is inalienable, and citizens dine communally. As in Sparta, ownership of gold and silver is forbidden, while excessive wealth is confiscated by the state. While the traditional family structure is retained, women are to be educated along with men, to provide military service, and to be eligible for public office--although Plato provides few details.

Because their farms are worked by slaves, most citizens have the leisure necessary for pursuit of virtue. This is their central occupation, and the day is not long enough for all the activities this requires (806d-08c). As in the *Republic*, the need to inculcate virtue is the state's main business. Poetry and other arts are strictly censored. Magnesia has an intensive system of education, the main emphasis of which is on conditioning, education of pleasures and pains. An indication of how extreme Plato's views have become is that the process of conditioning must begin before birth, as pregnant women are to do rhythmic exercises, to make the young balanced and harmonious (789a-e).

Religious elements of Magnesia receive considerable emphasis, arguably taking over the role of philosophy in the just city of the *Republic*. In Book X, the Athenian develops elaborate--though philosophically weak--arguments against common heresies. He proves the existence of the gods, that the gods involve themselves in human affairs, and cannot be bought off with bribes. Although--or perhaps, because--the arguments are so weak, adherence to them is to be enforced through a kind of inquisition. People who do not believe in them are sentenced to death, even if their conduct is otherwise exemplary. Thus Plato has the dubious honor of being one of the first thinkers in the

Western tradition to advocate death for thought-crime.

The distance Plato's political philosophy has traveled from its Socratic roots is apparent in the *Laws* (esp. Gould 1972). Changes that appear in the *Republic* are more pronounced in the *Laws*. In general, the movement of Plato's thought is from the Socratic ideal of moral autonomy to society-wide, intensive conditioning, beginning before birth. Amidst this overall development throughout Plato's career, there are also elements of continuity, especially continued emphasis on virtue and government by expertise. To realize this ideal, the *Republic* argues that philosophy and political power must be combined in the hands of the philosopher-king. At the end of his life, having lost faith in the possibility of philosophic rulers, in the *Laws*, Plato focuses on a second best form of philosophic politics: adherence to unchanging laws constructed by a philosophic lawgiver.

References

Quotations of Plato are from J. M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997); translations occasionally modified slightly. A full list of the standard definitions used in this essay can be found in various reference works, including Liddell-Scott-Jones' *Greek Lexicon*.

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Further Reading

J. Adam (ed.), *The Republic of Plato*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902) is a classic Greek edition, with valuable commentary. Volumes IV and V of W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*. 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962-81), is a judicious

commentary, dialogue by dialogue. Vols. 2 and 3 of P. Friedlander, *Plato*, 3 vols., H. Meyerhoff (trans.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958-69), provide a dialogue by dialogue commentary, with more of a literary focus, while Vol. I is an introductory volume on central themes. T. Irwin *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), is a valuable account of Plato's moral philosophy. M. Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), is a recent thematic discussion, by an eminent classicist. As its title indicates, G. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*. 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), examines the movement of Plato's political theory throughout his career. M. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), is the best recent book on the *Statesman*. G. Morrow's *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), is an indispensable historical analysis of the *Laws*. C. Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), is a brilliant, though iconoclastic analysis of central philosophical themes in the *Laws*.