

Guide to Lecture 27: Platonic Politics and Society

A) Introduction

- a) Plato's politics based on two ideas: individuals are not self-sufficient, and we are defined primarily according to our needs and skills. The purpose of government is to enable happiness by forcing people to function well together according to a specific vision of happiness and the good life. The ideal society does not value personal choices, self-expression, personal autobiography, or individuality generally, since these lead to discord and disagreement and less devotion to the society as a whole. Performance of one's functions will lead to personal fulfillment and the goodness of society. Ultimately this demands widespread government control of education and information, propaganda, forced family planning. Government will be run by specially –trained “philosopher-kings.”

B) Social Classes, Family, Gender Equality and the Myth of Metals

- a) The Myth of Metals: to explain why people have certain skills and need to be in certain social positions. Citizens not truly aware of why their society is organized the way it is.
- b) Need widespread, communal family planning and reproduction plans.

C) Philosopher-Kings, Education, and the Allegory of the Cave

- a) Allegory of the Cave, portrays three levels of knowledge and freedom: being a slave to the senses, being an artist whose portrayals are misleading, and being exposed to light and truth after a conversion experience. The duty of those who have knowledge to go back and help those who still lack it.
- b) The education process extends for many years for those who will be philosopher-kings; many others do not even learn critical thinking skills.

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Philosopher kings both philosophize and have practical experience ruling, though they don't enjoy it; they are kept very aloof from any error or the activities/experiences of lesser people.

D) Art, Censorship and Justice

- a) Plato very concerned about pleasure: we follow what is portrayed as pleasurable. Exposure to the wrong things and enjoying them is disastrous; need to censor all arts and literature.
- b) Art is also metaphysically and epistemologically deficient.
- c) Criticisms of Plato's views (by Dykes): children, curiosity, jokes, extremism

E) Comments on Astrology, Magic, and Sacred Geometry

- a) The city of Magnesia from Plato's *Laws*: built according to sacred geometry and astrological notions. A square version of the city resembles an ancient astrological chart.
- b) The city of Atlantis, from Plato's *Timaeus*. Also built according to sacred geometry, but based on 10, which leads to moral and physical difficulties.
- c) Basic ideas behind a Platonic Astrology.
- d) Magic. The Allegory of the Cave as a description of conversion and initiation. The importance of looking to the higher while not denigrating the material world.