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## **Society And The Cave**

**by Bradley Watts**

Plato's Republic presents an epistemological line grounded in politics. This line can be examined in relation to the social hierarchy that Plato sets up earlier in his book. Plato does appear to have high intentions in his discussion of society and his quest for truth, but Plato's work is filtered and categorized based on his own political motives. I will demonstrate the social hierarchy in the Republic and illustrate its connection to Plato's line of cognition that he uses to explain his epistemology. Also, I will discuss the political attributes of Plato's philosophy.

Before discussing Plato's social hierarchy, something must be said about his concept of justice. Justice directly relates to hierarchy because it is the central concern of the Republic and the reason Plato establishes the state in the manner that he does: without justice, "statecraft is blind and aimless" (56). Part of his establishment of a state is his belief in a shared and embedded concept of justice. This shared concept of justice is applicable to all men, regardless of class, and describes the virtues that make up justice (e.g. fairness, doing good) as being entrenched inside everyone. According to Plato, these embedded virtues imply a "natural order." This "natural order" connects Plato's philosophy to his politics and implies that every person is content in their natural place in society. The natural order of social hierarchy entails that physical laborers belong to the lower class. Also, since philosophers are more extensively trained and educated in truth and justice and the application of these concepts to everyday life, Plato believes they are better off to govern others and should stand as the ruling members of the social hierarchy. Plato says that a moral and ordered state must have justice, and since justice is the power that produces states or individuals, it must be the center of a person's concern (Cornford, 57). "Justice in the State" and the social hierarchy that derives from this concept prescribe to a "natural order" that, according to Plato, could best be led and governed by more educated philosopher kings.

Plato believes that division of labor constitutes "Justice in the State." He states that men are not born alike and that society is natural and advantageous (Cornford, 56). He describes three different social group categories of people that contribute to "Justice in the State": Rulers, Guardians, and Craftsmen.

The first members of the social hierarchy are the Rulers or Philosopher-Kings (as Plato sees it), who should have wisdom and reason. According to Plato, they should not govern on authority alone (e.g. Might is not Right (ch.3)), and not solely seek to meet the will of the dominating class party. Rulers should have knowledge of good and evil and be temperate and just (Cornford, 62). Plato continues by stating that this upper-level social group should be a small class of the wisest people, contributing to his desire for philosopher kings. The most wise people and potential Rulers are members of the upper class who have been trained and educated from birth, also referred to as Guardians.

The next group in Plato's social hierarchy is the Guardians. They should have courage and passion and be trained, schooled, and rid of luxurious or unhealthy elements of society (Cornford, 114). Plato says that the literature of their schooling should be censored (Cornford, 70). He believes that education's end should be knowledge of nature's harmonious order, but part of that harmonious order is the "justice of the state" that helped to establish a social hierarchy and reason for philosopher kings. Plato believes that only the most educated and proven can become rulers: "Whenever we find one [Guardian] who has come unscathed through every test in childhood, youth, and manhood, we shall set him as a ruler to watch over the common wealth" (Cornford, 105). He again implies that Guardians can eventually become rulers but this time links it to his philosophy: "If a soul is pruned from early childhood to rid it of overgrowth the soul will turn towards true reality" (85). "True reality" is Plato's epistemology and is something that Guardians can only reach after years of training and education. Only the wisest people have experienced true reality, which is a higher form of cognition that is both above the world of appearances and only understood by the intelligent mind. The makeup of the world of appearances is only a

form of the makeup of the world of truth. These forms are recognizable to Guardians because of their intense training and education. They become philosophers and now have knowledge of the higher realms of cognition and can more easily recognize their forms in the world of appearances, giving them an advantage in governing the lower worlds.

Plato has little respect for Craftsmen, the final group at the lower end of the social spectrum. He calls this group, as well as women, part of the "inferior multitude" and says, "whereas the simple and moderate desires which, with the aid of reason and right belief, are guided by reflection, you will find only in a few, in those with the best inborn dispositions and the best educated" (Cornford, 125). This means that by definition, only a few of the "inferior multitude" are intelligent and educated. He says Craftsmen are to have temperance and appetite, control and orderliness (124). According to Plato and the rest of his aristocratic society, Craftsmen are lower class, unintelligent, and in their natural place as fieldworkers. Plato also gives special recognition to women as part of the "inferior multitude." He says that they are equal to men and are just as reasonable. They should have the same education and public duties. They are able to do good, only a different kind of good (Cornford, 149). Women have potential to be the same as men and Plato even suggest that if educated they too have the potential to be a philosopher-king. However, there is some ambiguity in Plato's statement. On one hand, he says that women have equal power to men, but on the other, he labels them a part of the "inferior multitude." Either Plato is attempting to arm women with knowledge of their own abilities, notify others of a woman's capabilities, or Plato is completely joking. Since I could not find these statements as funny as perhaps some of his contemporaries did, I do not believe he was joking. Plato says that women have reason, can be educated, and serve in public offices. Since Plato is rejecting established way in the creation of his state it is logical to think that Plato is sincerely rejecting old ways in the treatment and thoughts about women.

The politics behind the social hierarchy can be examined in connection with Plato's epistemological line of cognition. With this

epistemological line, Plato is attempting to justify why philosophers should be kings. He furthers his political agenda with his hypothesis that education moves people (Guardians) through these lesser worlds of knowledge and then ends with higher forms of reality (unseen truth). In other words, only the educated (Rulers and Guardians) can see the truth and become leaders.

Plato describes four states of mind in his epistemological line. The first is the state of imagining. Plato states that the world of appearances is transcendent and ephemeral, where only shadows of the real can be seen. The second state is belief. People who operate in the world of belief cannot see the unseen truth but only images of it. Often times, they can be deceived by the words of others leaving thought patterns of morality that are unreliable at best. These two realms of knowledge are the lower realms where the uneducated people operate, furthering Plato's political ambition for Philosopher-kings (Cornford, 215). He states that the purpose of higher education is to tear possible philosopher kings and rulers away from these lower worlds of appearances and morality, and turn them to the higher realms of cognition like the third state of mind, thinking. An example can be made of Math, which relies on concepts that make you think to understand and make you sharpen skills of preciseness and clarity. Also, this organization of concepts can be applied to appearances, meaning that those who are educated can better deal with the affairs of those who are not. Therefore, educated philosophers are fully able to govern the common person. Finally, the last state of mind is intelligence. Since the forms and concepts of thinking can never get problems exactly right, there is something higher. Intelligence is a higher sphere of reality where unseen truths are only available to the intelligent state of mind. He says that forms stay the same but appearances can change to validate the superiority in forms. The world of appearances is merely a form of the "true reality" which philosophers have come to know. They can recognize the forms more easily, which gives them insight into the world of appearances and an ability to more efficiently govern it. In other words, since philosophers have experienced the forms of this unseen truth, they are better off to govern the world of appearances (Cornford, 226).

Plato offers an explanation for his line in an allegory about a cave to link his politics and philosophy. He says that, "every feature in this parable my dear Glaucon, is meant to fit our earlier analysis" (Cornford, 231). He relates the prison to the world of imagining: "the ascent to see the things in the upper world you may take as standing for the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible" (231). According to Cornford, Plato is relating the cave, which represents the unlearned, to Hades: "Would he not feel like Homer's Achilles, that he would far sooner 'be on earth as a hired servant in the house of a landless man' or endure anything rather than go back to his old beliefs and live in the old way?" (231). The earlier analysis of Plato's epistemology that the intangible is where truth and reality lie can also be connected to the cave. The result of intelligence, the highest state of mind, is seeing truth and goodness. Knowledge gives birth to light and is the cause of everything good. Since knowledge is "sovereign in the intelligible world and the parent of intelligence and truth," (231) only the educated have access to it, and therefore only the educated can reign in the world. While Plato does search for truth, the truth seems very limited, as the lower worlds have minimal (if any) access to it, while the upper levels like the philosopher kings operate in it, validating their possible ascent to the throne and even causing their status as potential rulers seem like a necessity. They must use their goodness to govern the uneducated and bring knowledge to the world, or as Plato puts it, a Philosopher should "rule in a society as perfect as himself" (Cornford, 207).

Some may argue that the line of cognition is not a political but only an epistemological exercise. It is clearly an epistemological exercise in its study of the realities of truth and knowledge; however, Plato's political desire is too evident to ignore. Plato is an aristocrat and generally aristocrats hold poor opinions of the lower classes. Also, his whole basis for creation of the Republic was to discuss justice and to build the perfect state. Part of that perfect state is where the philosophers are educated for years and then become rulers and the lower class serve as workers. Educated people can operate in higher states of mind, thus linking Plato's politics and philosophy, and validating his social hierarchy and quest for philosopher-kings. Plato

believes that the ignorant have no mark to aim to, and thus it is not possible to solely ignore Plato's political desire. He says that "a state can never be properly governed either by the uneducated who know nothing of truth or by men who are allowed to spend all of their days in the pursuit of culture" (Cornford, 233). To Plato, only the educated philosopher is worthy to be king.

In Plato's republic, the epistemological line is directly connected to education and therefore the social hierarchy. This is made evident by Plato's politics and desire for a philosopher-king. I have reached this conclusion because of Plato's connection between uneducated lower realms of thinking and the mindless yet "natural" work done by the lower class craftsmen. Also, he praises the higher realms of cognition and desires for educated people to rule the state. With these observations I conclude that Plato's line of cognition is an epistemological exercise grounded in his politics.

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