

Plato

The *Republic*

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Learning objectives

1. To gain a sense of how the disparate parts of the *Republic* constitute an argument.
2. To grasp how the overall argument answers the threat of immorality or nihilism.
3. To appreciate the *Republic* as a portrayal of philosophy, as philosophy seeks to inform governance, and as it differs from general rationality.
4. To understand the parallel approaches to justice in the *Republic*, as a characteristic of constitutions and as a virtue grounded in a person's psychic balance.
5. To attain an overview of Platonic metaphysics and the dualism of 'Plato's two worlds.'

Commentary

Introduction

Philosophy, famously impractical, brought to the cynical practicalities of politics: [Plato's Republic](#) assigns itself this task in a bid to reimagine philosophy so that it engages with politics, and also to reimagine politics in a way that opens it to such engagement.

The dialogue's ambition, together with its capacious inclusivity of topics, have made it always one of Plato's central works. (Books on the *Republic* include Annas 1981, Blackburn 2006, Brown 2017, Cross and Woosley 1964, Ferrari 2007, McPherran 2010a, Reeve 1988, Santas 2006, 2010.)

As most Platonic works do the *Republic* takes the form of a conversation (Hyland 1968, Patterson 1982). [Socrates](#) dominates. But readers should distinguish this character from the historical figure who lived in ancient Athens (Kahn 1981). There was such a person, from all the evidence a provocative thinker and personally an eccentric, who cross-examined expertly, focusing on what words meant (Benson 1992, Vlastos 1991). Did he teach, though? – and what, and to whom? The consensus is that he offered no lessons, although he set an example that inspired others to philosophize (Blank 1985, Nehamas 1992). He showed little interest in theories about nature, but as the sophists did he addressed matters of politics and value.

Unlike Socrates, the [sophists](#) offered formal instruction. They taught many subjects, but came to be identified with persuasive speaking. Sometimes mistaken for a sophist, Socrates investigated questions of value as if they had answers. He asked about courage, friendship, and justice, trusting that inquiry could lead to precise accounts. The sophists hid in thickets of ambiguous language; Socrates cleared thickets away.

A jury sentenced Socrates to death in 399 BCE, partly because he had made enemies by interrogating prominent Athenians, but mainly because he was suspected of having undermined democracy. Some of his associates aided Sparta, enemy of Athens, during the war between the cities. Others overthrew the democracy and ruled in a Spartan puppet regime. It did not help that Socrates sympathized with Sparta and challenged the wisdom of collective decision-making.

Plato was young when he met Socrates, probably through relatives who had conspired against democracy. Plato kept himself aloof from politics, in this respect emulating Socrates, who despite his sympathies remained uninvolved with public life. Probably after Socrates' death, Plato joined the numerous associates who had written dialogues portraying Socratic conversations (Boys-Stones and Rowe 2013). Some scholars believe that the short, inconclusive pieces he wrote –

Euthyphro, *Laches*, and others – depict a Socrates like the one who really lived, whereas longer works ascribe theories to him unknown to the historical figure; but such hypotheses are risky.

Regarding politics, the *Republic's* 'Socrates' voices suspicions about democracy that harmonize with what we think the real Socrates said. Moreover the historical Socrates' proposal that one follow an expert, where experts are available, appears in the *Republic's* plan for a knowledgeable ruling class. Yet even here a difference appears between Plato's character and Plato's friend. Faced with the divide between philosophy and politics, Socrates declined political involvement in favour of free private thinking. The *Republic* pictures him questioning that divide. Must one live either politically or ethically, or might there be an ethical polity?

Outline of the Republic

The *Republic* is accessible even for those new to philosophy. It does cover many topics, but it possesses a clear structure (Barney 2010). First, Books 1 and 10 (following an ancient division, though not Plato's own) should be set aside as ancillary to the main argument. The remainder is guided by an analogy: *The virtue called justice in a human soul resembles the desirable constitutional trait known as justice in a state, and is to be preferred over injustice in either city or state* (Blössner 2007, Cooper 1977, Ferrari 2005, Neu 1971). Books 2-9 devote themselves to explicating and justifying this claim, digressing from the main argument to support claims about psychology, education, poetry and the arts, feminism, and ontology. The overall argument goes:

- Justice in soul and city. Books 2-3-4.
 - Digression to the distinctly political appearance of justice. Books 5-6-7.
 - Digression from the digression. Forms and the Form of the Good.
- Injustice in soul and city, always worse than justice. Books 8-9.

The linked ethical and political inquiries are introduced by a gripping but inconclusive opening discussion that seeks to define justice in traditional fashion. Book 10 then returns first to the topic of poetry and art and subsequently to the life after death that souls experience.

Along the way, the *Republic* discusses education twice, and speaks twice of poetry and art. These repetitions obscure the argumentative structure but are not gratuitous. Education comes up twice because Socrates twice defines the city's governing class, describing first the military and then a cadre within that military, and both definitions imply contradictions. To prevent possible contradictions from undermining the political theory, Socrates details what the 'guardians' will learn and how. The tensions reveal something essential about philosophers, thus both illuminating and threatening the *Republic's* 'philosophicalization' of politics.

Poetry and art meanwhile come up initially in the context of the first passage on pedagogy, which examines poetry from a ruler's perspective – politically – then again when the *Republic* grounds those earlier criticisms in a theory of the soul's inner order: psychologically.

What is justice? Book 1

Of Book 1, as of many sections of the *Republic*, you may say that it contributes to the whole but also exceeds the demands of its contributory function.

Book 1 stands apart stylistically from what follows (Kahn 1993, Lycos 1987, Sesonske 1961). Many Platonic dialogues establish scene and character in detail. In others the characters are mere names, the setting rudimentary. The *Republic* takes both approaches. Whereas Books 2-10 mainly contain the first-person voice of Socrates detailing arguments with complaisant replies from Glaucon and Adeimantus, Book 1 spells out where the conversation is taking place, and when, and in what company. It resembles those short dialogues that end in confusion.

Polemarchus, his father Cephalus, and the rhetorician Thrasymachus seek to explain *dikaïosunê* 'justice,' the virtue pertaining to interactions among people. After some exploratory definitions (Joseph 1966), Thrasymachus declares that justice, 'the advantage of the stronger,' never benefits the just (338c). At worst, moral language is hijacked by those in power to extol the

behaviour that benefits them (338d-339a). Or else 'justice' describes something real, but the behaviour it prescribes is unprofitable (343c-344c).

Socrates silences Thrasymachus by seizing on inconsistencies in his overstated claims. Then he introduces 'soul' in a defence of justice as soul's well-being (352d-354a). But Thrasymachus's attack lingers. Why obey moral precepts when they bring no benefit (Barney 2006, Boter 1986, Gotoff 1980, Reeve 1985, Sparshott 1966)?

Justice in city and soul: Books 2-4

The *Republic* follows Book 1 with a systematic introduction to the questions it will address and the terms in which it will answer them (Ferrari 2010, Weiss 2007).

This reiteration exemplifies a presentational strategy of this dialogue. A point is made, then argued for or illustrated a second time. Often Glaucon hears the abstruse idea and Adeimantus has it spelled out to him; but the reiteration takes other forms too.

As Book 2 begins, Glaucon and Adeimantus urge Socrates to produce a better defence for justice. He silenced an immoralist without refuting immoralism (358b). But people resent the demands of justice. Human beings worked out rules of society in order to live together, so those rules have force only insofar as people enforce them (358e-359b). Anyone freed from social sanctions by magical invisibility would commit atrocities (359c-360c). An unjust person with a reputation for justice would be as happy as a just person believed to be unjust is miserable (360c-362c). Therefore, even when they praise justice, people do so cynically, with an eye to social consequences distinct from the virtue itself (362e-363a). Virtue needs a defence that shows justice in the soul (see [Psychê](#)) conferring benefits on the just (366e; Lycos 1987).

Socrates announces his analogy. Because both cities and souls can possess justice, the city's may be thought of as a soul-justice more easily analysed. They should look at elements of a city's constitution and ascertain how those elements reveal the justice or injustice in that city. If the soul contains comparable elements, we can define its justice (368c-369a). Not incidentally, the analogy lets philosophy address questions considered unphilosophical. The city, ostensibly mere picture of the soul, becomes the dialogue's main subject. The manifestly philosophical task of understanding soul permits philosophizing about politics.

Socrates sketches a simple community, based on axioms that will guide later steps in the argument. A1. In every society, a plurality joins together (369b). A2. Social organization entails the coordination of specialized activities (370a). No need for social contracts where natural forces organize society.

A1 and A2 identify the unity and division of labour found in all societies. Socrates will justify aspects of his political proposals that we call communistic by saying they foster unity (462a-b). He defends the segmentation of the population as division of labour (434a-b). The *Republic's* definition of city-justice combines the axioms when it describes a city unified in its acceptance of its class differences (433a-b).

First, anyway, Socrates conceives a town that provides sustainable happiness (370c-371e). Glaucon prefers something resembling the Athens he knows (372c-d), so Socrates steers away from utopia to ask how one might begin with a complex city and create the conditions for justice there (372e-373c). Philosophy remains among practicalities. Interpreters who take Plato to demean the inquiry into the unhealthy city miss this point. The great accomplishment for philosophy is to change the existing world, not to dream up a different one (Bobonich 2002, Klosko 1981, Lane 1999).

Thus, for one thing, complex societies will experience wars. Appealing to A2, Socrates proposes a standing army, the city's *phulakes* 'guards' or 'guardians' (374b-e). (One translation emphasizes that this class watches the population, the other that it watches *over* them.) The *phulakes* function as combined military and police, being therefore ferocious in battle but gentle at home (375b-c) – a contradiction, unless they are trained right (376c-e). Hence the first account of education.

The army's schooling draws on tradition in that it incorporates poetry, music (Fitzpatrick 2021, Schofield 2010), and physical exercise, but each of these will need to be transformed, poetry especially (Belfiore 1985, Havelock 1966, Partee 1970). Homer and the tragedians slander gods and heroes (377d). The city will banish all stories from mythology that represent divinities as deceitful, lustful, or otherwise lacking virtue (377e-383c), and stories about unvirtuous heroes (386a-391e).

The very form of much poetry is dangerous, when it is performed with any enactment of characters (393b-d). Playing someone temperate would be all right; more often performers emulate cowardice or uncontrolled desire (395c-396e). The city ought to shield its fighters from the corrupting effect of such playacting.

The *Republic's* insistence on special training seeks to reconcile natural differences in strength and aggressivity with the demands of civilized society. It may ameliorate the impression of a caste structure (Annas 1981). Plato does assume that the gifted will largely be found among children of the gifted (415b). But the pains taken to redesign the culture one grows up in ought to indicate how much more than innate traits go into making a ruler. To the same point the *Republic* compares its guardians to dogs (e.g. 495a-b), conjuring up the effect of domestication.

City and soul as articulated wholes

Socrates complicates the class organization he proposed and uses it to define the constitution's justice. He discerns motives that work within an individual as the city's classes work in the society.

On the political side of the argument, one detail stands out: Socrates divides the guardians into the army and its commanders, who govern the entire city (413c-414b). These rulers form a separate group. The argument's focus shifts so decisively to this cadre that Socrates designates them the true guardians, the army now 'auxiliaries.'

A proposal about enacting the new city also stands out: the 'noble lie' (414d-e). Citizens will be taught that the founding generation gestated underground and contained metals of different values – gold, silver, bronze, iron – which the founders of the new order used in sorting this generation into classes (Lear 2006). Whatever crisis in fact goes into transforming an existing city into the new one is veiled behind this lie, because of which all history before the revolution disappears, together with any suspicion that government is an artifice (Pappas 2021).

The class structure lets the *Republic* define a state's virtues in terms of citizens' virtues. The city enacts its courage in battle, hence by possessing a brave army. Wise rulers make it a wise city (see [Wisdom](#)). Less specifically, moderation (*sôphrosunê*) too is defined with reference to class membership (428a-432a).

These subsidiary virtues have justice as their common feature. Each class performs its function, and justice means 'doing one's own thing,' inasmuch as your civic business is what your class determines it to be (433a-b). Justice combines the axioms describing human society, for this separate performance of the class function (A2) serves the purpose of the larger entity's unity (A1).

Psychology

Socrates finds analogues of ruler, army, and productive labourer in the soul, mainly through examples of inner conflict. The examples reveal two impulses distinguishable from reason: desire (Lorenz 2006), which includes hunger and sexual appetite (437b-e); and 'spiritedness,' the *thumos* (Brennan 2012), source of non-rational emotions associated with shame and anger (439e-440a). Advancing beyond dualistic psychodynamics – reason *contra* unreason – this account distinguishes an impulsive non-rational element from one susceptible to guidance. Now the drives of appetite can be contained by the non-rational power of shame and indignation. Justice consists in this internal harmony, rather than in any particular actions.

Some commentators debate whether Plato can produce a workable theory of soul without reifying the three motive-types into independent subjects (Bobonich 2002, Price 2009, Shields 2010). But on any interpretation, the soul contains a governance and hierarchy. In a just soul every motive stays within its bounds, reason governing (Cooper 1984, Vasiliou 2012).

Digression. Political specifics

The *Republic* will clinch its case by surveying all constitutional forms that differ from the best city, and all souls other than the just, and showing that each one is worse than the just. Plato defers that comparison to Book 8, staging an interruption by interlocutors who want to hear more about the new city – *not* how the city parallels the soul, but the opposite. What can Socrates say about the city considered as a city (449c-d)?

Having lost control of the argument (Ferrari 2010), Socrates spells out life under the new constitution. Women will be equal to men (451d-456a; Bluestone 1987, Santas 2010). The rulers will arrange ‘marriages,’ now understood as temporary procreative couplings, to breed the best guardians. Guardian children grow up not knowing whom they are related to (460b-d). The guardians will live communistically and not even touching money (463c-464d; see 416d-417a). Sometimes these details are read as generating a new politics different from what preceded; but on most interpretations they amend and explain the constitution already established.

Pressed to explain how such changes might come about, Socrates reveals his most radical proposal. *Philosophers will govern* (473c-d). That specific impossibility lets the hugely impossible city exist.

Philosopher-kings and –queens embody the *Republic’s* enterprise of bringing philosophizing into politics. Immoralists (Thrasymachus) detect only manipulative power in justice. The ‘social contract’ with which Glaucon explains society comes from jaded sophists, grounding morality in shrewdness. But where others found self-interest and truthless persuasion, philosophy sees principle rooted in natural order. If A1 and A2 describe necessary conditions for all societies, all cities should divide up civic functions and coordinate the classes performing them. And now, with these philosopher-royals, philosophy can inform day-to-day governance.

For exemplars of reason to rule, reason must be expanded. Thus far in the dialogue it has been the faculty controlling other motives. Analogously the city’s ruling class oversees what the other classes do and believe. Now, being philosophers, rulers will additionally want to contemplate abstract truths. Human reason goes from only guiding other impulses to also following its desire for knowledge.

In a city premised on the division of labour, the innovation that makes the plan possible threatens A2. Philosophers live two vocations. This logical pressure on the argument inspires a second educational theory (489a, 504c-d), seeking to describe philosophical knowledge that is both the study of being and a moral inquiry guiding the rulers’ judgment (Sedley 2007).

By knowing the Forms, objects of greater reality than those seen, philosophers compare with non-philosophical people as those awake with dreamers, for they have knowledge not mere opinion (476c-d, 477a-b; Fine 1993, Silverman 2014). In Plato’s dialogues Socrates typically speaks of Forms as ideal versions of what is perceived (see [Forms, Platonic](#)). They are sometimes versions of objects (the Form of tree) more often of relational properties (largeness, doubleness), and paradigmatically evaluative properties (justice and beauty).

Objects of experience hold their properties equivocally, Socrates says now. Beautiful things contain ugly components, look ugly in other contexts or to other observers, are uglified over time (479a-c). Thus F things both are and are not F (Malcolm 1991, Nehamas 1979, Rickless 2007). The Form of F however *is* F (always, everywhere, throughout) and so *is* absolutely where perceptible things *somewhat are* (Kahn 2009). In a word: A Form bears its property yet is not identical to any ordinary bearer of that same property.

If Forms do not exist, no properties can be known. The perceived world lacks intelligibility. It follows that if some intelligible world did exist, one would know more insofar as one inquired into that world’s elements. One would know things better by knowing better things (Ferejohn 2006).

The educational theory that creates these philosophers comes in Book 7 (521c-541b). It also includes a sketch of philosophy’s highest goal (505a-520e).

Forms and the Good

The simile of the sun, the divided line, and the allegory of the cave illustrate Platonic metaphysics. The sun (505a-509d) gives a point to the parallel between what can be seen and what can be thought. The sun causes the existence of visible living things, which we see thanks to light from the sun. Objects of thought owe their existence to the Good (Form of the Good), but the Good also gives forth the truth thanks to which as thinking beings we can know those things (Denyer 2007, Santas 1983).

How the Good generates Forms or enables knowledge is unclear. It can't be a Form of Forms, because objects are said to 'share' in a Form's property, and although Forms are characterized as all possessing being, the Good is 'beyond being' (509b). Forms can't get their being from it.

The divided line (509d-511e) amplifies the comparison between visible and intelligible. Divide a line unequally. Divide each resultant segment in the same ratio. The first division sets the intelligible realm apart from the visible. The subdivision within the visible realm distinguishes objects from shadows and reflections; within the intelligible realm we get Forms and mathematical objects. The intelligible domain is more real than the visible, as a tree is than its reflection (Benson 2010, Denyer 2007, Smith 1996).

The less that eyesight is involved in an experience, the better the knowledge. Reflections and shadows are nothing but appearance; regular objects *have* an appearance but are more than that; appearance triggers thoughts of unseen mathematical objects, as when a drawn circle invites geometers to demonstrate properties of circles (510c-e). Only regarding Forms does one think from start to finish free from sight. Thus Forms are known with complete understanding, while about shadows there is nothing to know. Highest of all is again the Good, the progress towards which can be read as aiming either at axiomatic certainty (what is most true) or definitional clarity (what is best understood).

The line leaves unsettled the question whether each kind of object determines a distinct type of cognition. Does what you inquire into establish how well you inquire; or does how one thinks determine what one thinks about (Silverman 2014)?

The line's layout of beings maps onto the next image (514a-515c). Picture the sun as Good, shining on plants and animals (Forms), which are also visible as reflections in still water (mathematical objects). People live as prisoners chained down inside a cave, seeing only shadows (empty talk) cast on the cave wall by cutout shapes (physical objects) carried past a fire (sun).

Now picture one prisoner liberated, turned around to see how the cave works, and dragged to the world outside. One gets accustomed to things' reflections, then can look at things themselves, sometimes glimpsing the sun. Upon returning to the cave unimpressed by its shadow plays, the liberated prisoner describes the world outside the cave, only to be met with jeers and threats (515b-517a).

Such is life. But whereas those in existing cities who escape cave living refuse to re-engage with it, the newly constituted city will send its philosophers back underground to rule (519d-520d).

The allegorical escapee's reluctance to return indicates the conflict within philosophical rulers (Brown 2000, Mahoney 1992, Smith 2010). One trusts them because they have something better to do than govern (521a). But how can the philosopher's training reveal the unity of higher thought with governance if it produces people who find governing insufficiently philosophical? It is in such places that 'philosophy' appears ambiguous, meaning sometimes sound executive thinking and sometimes thought about distinct objects. And if the demand that philosophers govern is just (520e), how can people as splendid as philosophers resent it? Justice, which was to mean happiness in the soul, evidently feels burdensome even to the just.

Another problem: The prisoners' jeers imply that the public even under a new regime will mistrust enlightened rule. This is not the concord promised elsewhere (Kamtekar 2004).

Socrates has steered back to governance. He now details what the new city's philosophers will learn (Burnyeat 2000), before returning to the main argument. Mathematics and other

theoretical subjects join music and gymnastics, for rather than putting content into the soul education is now seen as turning the soul's eye around (518c; Reeve 2010). The stimulation of thought must not go too far, though. Bright young students exposed early to dialectical argumentation risk being corrupted by it (537c-539d). Making good rulers takes more delicacy than training a militia.

Unjust cities and souls

Existing cities prove the desirability of the new order. The constitutions under which people live contain undesirable qualities, and instabilities that send those constitutions degenerating into worse ones (Hitz 2010).

Book 8 arranges constitutions in a depressing chronology. Despite its best efforts the philosophical city will become a Spartan-style military society (547b-c). That degrades into oligarchy (550d-551b), oligarchy into relativistic democracy (555b-557a). The pursuit of wealth and the liquidation of real property create economic conditions for these transformations. Then democracy ends when one figure appeals to the poor for support and establishes tyranny (565d-566d).

Why does the *Republic* present these transformations as a history (Frede 1996)? The comparative argument does not require these constitutions to arise consecutively. It does not even require this ranking. As long as every other constitution can be seen as inferior to the best, they may be as good as one another and arise in any sequence. The chronological arrangement does however underscore the need for a well-run city, because every other constitution gets caught up in the laws of worsening history, and because only the *Republic's* city separates power from the wealth that corrupts every other order.

(As it happens Athenian history had moved oppositely, from tyranny into democracy, which in Plato's adolescence became an oligarchy, in his adulthood a junta declaring Spartan ideals. Plato is not observing history but inverting it.)

The ranking and sequence let the *Republic* indict democracy. Athens hated tyranny; so does the *Republic*; but whereas in Athenian discourse tyranny was cast as opposite to democracy, the *Republic's* history resituates democracy at tyranny's threshold (Arruzza 2019). At the same time however democracy contains the makings of the philosophers' city (557d). It is the crisis-constitution poised to change to either better or worse.

Souls decline as cities do. A man with an oligarchical soul has a democratically-souled son (559d-e). His son has a constitution resembling tyranny (572d-573b). Books 8-9 supplement the psychological theory developed earlier, so that the three parts of the soul generate five types. The additional complexity derives from the variety in desire. At its most organized, being the desire for money, it dominates in the oligarch's thrifty personality. In a democratic soul all desires flower. Then importunate lust emerges (571c-573a). Sexually deviant, fed by simulacra (586b-c, 587c-d), the soul putatively driven by pleasure is the unhappiest (Parry 2007), as seen through contrasts between it and the just soul (580a-587e). Note that the just soul is now understood as the philosopher's (581b; Brown 2017, Russell 2007). Again the philosopher's reason comprises both ordinary reasonableness and the special pursuit of metaphysics (Nussbaum 1986).

Book 10. Book 10 enlarges and reinforces earlier points, beginning with poetry and painting (595a-608a; Burnyeat 1999, Halliwell 2002). Continuing the theme of souls that take in likenesses, Socrates argues that mimetic poetry consists in such likenesses (see [Mimêsis](#)).

Poetry that represents human beings resembles painting in presenting appearance without reality (596e, 600e). Born from ignorance (598d-600c), it is show alone. It evidently appeals to the worst part of the soul (602c-603b; Moss 2007, Nehamas 1982).

Socrates does not explain why tragedy's apparitions have a pernicious effect not found in shadows. Poetry must contain some entrancement (598d, 607c, 608a) that makes its audience prefer artistic ignorance over philosophical insight. Book 10 explores that charm, diagnosing the emotional experience of tragedy. Spectators sympathize with the sight of a hero overcome by

misery; their capacity for lamentation increases (603d-606c). As Book 3 said, one must ban mimetic poetry (Pappas 2020).

The *Republic* has argued that justice is better for the soul throughout life than injustice. It concludes by extending that assertion beyond life. The soul is immortal (608d-610d) (see [Immortality in ancient philosophy](#)). The myth of Er reveals the rewards and punishments awaiting after death (Annas 1982), first for a millennium of afterlife, then as souls select the lives they'll be reincarnated into (614b-621d).

The myth revisits the ambiguity that reason acquired when rulers became philosophers, and rationality expanded from executive ordering to contemplation. In the process virtue came to mean more too. Thus the myth awards a heavenly millennium to any orderly soul that obeys just principles. When souls select their next lives, those narcotized by heavenly reward will choose carelessly; they'll be born fated to vice then punishment (619d-e). In the very long run, just behaviour does not suffice (McPherran 2010b). Philosophers, being obedient *and* congenitally thoughtful, pick good lives every time (618b-c, 619d-e). Philosophical justice prevails.

Questions for review

1. The allegory of the cave tells of hostility exhibited toward the released prisoner who returns to the cave. Does this imply that human beings will always reject philosophy, even in a well-run city? What contrary evidence does the *Republic* provide that the populace might accept and value governance by philosophers, and how compelling is that evidence?
2. Do the "parts of the soul" that appear in the *Republic's* analysis of motivation need to be distinct entities for Plato's psychological theory to work? Will they be like little selves inside the big self? What naturalistic sense can we make of the distinctions that Socrates draws among human motives, without feeling as though the distinctions generate a mythology of the human interior?
3. In what respects does Plato undervalue poetry and the arts? In what respects does he *over*-value them? How does the *Republic's* assessment of literary writing and drama compare with modern assessments, from the point of view of how much truth a work might contain, how much knowledge goes into it, how much can be learned by studying it, how strongly it affects the mind, and how slyly it subverts a culture's values?
4. According to the *Republic*, does the level of reality or being of the objects one studies determine the cognitive level of the thinking one does about such objects? If so, does it follow that one can never be wrong about the Forms? Does that make it impossible for two people who think in different ways (one philosophically, one empirically) to look at one object and understand it differently? But if the objects studied do *not* determine the level of thought about those objects, what becomes of the advantage to a city to have its rulers study philosophy? The subject seems not guaranteed to improve their minds.

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