

Republic 5

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- I Equality of opportunity for women
- II Communal child-rearing
- III The philosopher (king)

Republic 5 has provoked amazing resistance to its demonstration that the just community must include a) equality of education and responsibility for women and b) communal child rearing.

The need for equality of women and men rests on the claim that reproductive differences are irrelevant to guarding/ruling (454de). Since sex of the child cannot preselect the guarding/ruling class, male and female children must be raised identically, so that one can determine ease of learning, the only criterion for natural affinity for a task (455b). The advantage to the society of equal education/responsibility is that it now has a doubled selection pool from which to draw its best guardians/rulers.

The need for communal child rearing rests on the related claim that parentage cannot predict affinity for guarding/ruling, as discussed in the "noble lie" section at end of Book 3 (415b). To prevent the nepotistic retention of inferior children of superior guardians/rulers and the omission from training of superior children of inferior guardians/rulers [and perhaps farmer/artisans--Plato is not as clear on this in Book 5 as he was in Book 3], children of guardians/rulers must be raised communally.

To the objection that this arrangement necessitates incest, Plato replies that incest will be forbidden, as no one can mate with those born in the same year or those of the parental generation [461de]. Plato here recognizes that incest is social, not biological. If by chance one mates with an older or younger biological sibling, this is not incest, since the terms "brother" and "sister" are only socially recognizable. Obviously, sex with an adopted but not blood sibling is incest, but not sex with an unrecognized ["separated at birth"] sibling.

To the objection that it is "natural" to want to know one's biological children, we can point out that similar to sibling relations, parentage is a social relation, not biological. For instance, it is common practice in polyandrous societies for men to think it an advantage to be able to claim all children of the common woman as their children. Less exotically to us, adoptive parents prove the social character of parentage.

1) RIDICULE.
Socrates begins by warning against the use of ridicule as a political weapon to dismiss any social reform that deviates from custom (i.e., any social reform!) before proper experimentation and evaluation. Read 452a - e ("Perhaps, I said, many of the things ... it is foolish to be in earnest about any other standard of beauty than that of the good.") We can all come up with contemporary examples of such "conservative" ridicule (e.g., the ugly, man-hating feminist). Don't forget the difference between satire of the powerful and conservative ridicule of the struggling, and that pointing out use of ridicule as a weapon is branded as "no sense of humor PC."

2) DISTRIBUTION vs MEAN & HIGHEST RANK.
After claiming that reproductive differences are irrelevant to guarding/ruling and that the only criterion for natural affinity is ease of learning (454d-55c), Socrates now distinguishes distribution from mean and highest rank in order to allow the possibility of women guardian/rulers, even when the male group has a higher mean and males have the highest individual rank. Read 455c-e ("Do you know of any occupation physically weaker creature than man.")

3) NATURE vs NURTURE.
Some people might object that these arbitrary numbers would never appear in real life. But contemporary

distributions are irrelevant, since Socrates assumes equal upbringing, then testing. For us, after Marie Curie et al., virtually no one argues contemporary mental sex distributions anymore and that even physical sex distributions seem to support Socrates, as in the case of female Olympic athletes, who are stronger and faster than all but a few men, and are now stronger and faster than past male champions (e.g., Johnny Weissmuller; pre Jessie Owens sprinters).

Any experiment to test the claim that natural differences account for contemporary social distributions (political office, business leaders, etc.) must control for all relevant nurture differences in strictly identical upbringing. Any claims to natural differences as explanatory of social differences prior to such strictly controlled experiments are unscientific. Plato lists what he considers to be the plausible difference-producing practices that would have to be changed for the Athenians (arts and physical training: weaving vs athletics; seclusion vs free movement), after which one would be in a position to evaluate his claim as to the probability of meritorious women guardians.

After the discussions of the equal treatment of women and men and communal child-rearing, Socrates must now face what he calls the "greatest wave" of ridicule from the uninformed: the **philosopher-king**.

Taking the etymological sense of *philosophos* (= the lover of wisdom, or he who gives allegiance to wisdom), Socrates searches for those who have a natural aptitude for philosophy. Using the criterion of ease of learning, the **philosopher is defined** at 475c: "the man who is easily willing to learn every kind of knowledge, gladly turns to learning things, and is insatiable in this respect."

Glaucon objects that this definition might include lovers of sensuous spectacle: parades, plays, torch races on horseback, etc. Socrates replies that they resemble philosophers, but that these love "the spectacle of truth." Here Socrates introduces a key Platonic distinction: between "forms" and "actions and bodies." There have been thousands of years of commentary on this **doctrine of forms**. The Greek word here is *eidos*, or "look."

The doctrine of forms says something like this: in itself, the look of justice is singular, one with itself, but in association with actions and bodies, it appears as many, as multiple. For example, all the just trials conducted today contain a perspective on justice, so that justice appears in association with these trials, offers many looks through all these trials which participate in justice, but justice is itself singular, has only one look. Let's call the form the **singular look** and its multiple appearance in association with actions and bodies, the **mixed looks**.

In other words, the mixed looks are the result of the everyday way of looking at things, our looking about on the basis of uncriticized cultural pre-suppositions (e.g., reading the newspaper accounts of trials), while the singular look is the result of philosophical critique, a purification of the everyday (criticizing what we presuppose about justice when we read about trials).

Now I have to warn you about something. While we will only ask you to explain this interpretation, if you take another philosophy course, you may find another interpretation, the traditional, standard one, which puts the forms in "another world," which is timeless, unchanging, separated from our world, etc. We won't get into all the philosophical issues here--not the least of which is that Plato himself seems in later to develop a biting critique of the "two world" or "separated forms" theory--but let's just say that the more the "other world" of forms is made different from our world of time and change, the more problems you have in showing how we are to know this other world.

In my interpretation, there is **only one world**, one set of actions and bodies, but there are **different ways of looking at forms**, different ways in which we let them appear to us: the everyday mixed look in which forms appear in multiple perspectives in their association with actions and bodies, and the philosophical (we would add "scientific") in which we isolate and purify a singular look. In philosophical terms, I push an **epistemological** theory of the forms (concerned with knowledge) while the "two world" theory is an **ontological** theory (concerned with levels of being or "reality").

Thus the distinction between knowledge and opinion (476d-80a) points out three ways of knowing and three corresponding objects. 1) The **knowable**, the singular look: "what is"; the limit; the stable; pure borders. 2) The **unknowable**, no look: "what is not"; the unlimited; the chaotic; pure flow. 3) The **opinable**, the mixed looks: "neither what is nor what is not"; the limited; the turbulent; flow within borders.

Thus Platonic philosophy is the attempt to **isolate stable singular looks from the turbulent mixed looks**, (giving up on the chaotic: "chaos theory" needs computers.) The process of isolating the singular looks is the process of Socratic philosophy, the **radical self-questioning of cultural pre-suppositions**.

Returning then to 476c, we can understand the difference between the indiscriminate lover of sensuous spectacle and the philosopher as the difference between those capable only of accessing mixed looks of forms and those capable of accessing the singular look of a particular form. The indiscriminate lover sees only beautiful "things," i.e., actions and bodies (form of beauty mixed w/ actions and bodies) and not the beautiful itself (the singular look of the form of beauty), nor is he able to be educated, to follow someone else in learning how to see the form of beauty. The philosopher, on the other hand, sees the beautiful (singular look) and what shares in it (the mixed looks) and can distinguish the two. He must presumably have been educated how to make this distinction, and can in turn educate others. We'll examine the Platonic notion of education in the cave story of Book 7.