

## **Republic 8-10**

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- I. Origin of discord.
- II. Genesis and Structure of the Unjust Cities
- III. Conclusion of Main Argument
- IV. Criticism of the Poets
- V. Rewards of Virtue

**I. Origin of discord.** The overblown poetic language and obscure mathematics here are notorious. Plato is stuck with an insurmountable problem: having left history to discuss various insufficient principles of justice in a quasi-historical "progression" of cities in Bks 2-4, he must now critique principles of justice in existing cities as if they declined from justice. But how can he "enter" history in order to construct his quasi-historical "decline" narrative? He can't: there is *no entry into history from an investigation of principles*. It would have been better if he drew a map of principles rather than construct a progress or decline narrative, because principles are not historical: principles of cities can be near or far from justice on the map of principles, but only cities decline, not principles. All his mumbo-jumbo in Book 8 only masks a move on the level of principles, explaining the "departure" from the principle of the just city to the principles of existing cities. In other words, *he hides his map of principles behind a quasi-historical narrative*. He has already explained the gap of his principle of justice and existing cities, i.e., why no existing city has adopted his principle of justice--lack of philosopher-kings--and now he will examine principles of existing cities as to their distance from his principle of justice.

**II. Genesis and Structure of the Unjust Cities.** Plato's problems come because he insists on including a "genesis" part in discussing each city and character. Here he can only concoct stories, like blaming the jealous wife! The clue to the phantastical nature of the decline narrative is that, as we have seen, tyranny was the prelude to democracy for the Greeks, as it broke the monopoly on power of hereditary aristocracies. But as the study of real history shows, we never see linear narratives! Rather we see *jumps on the map of principles, as events move cities into "sensitive" revolutionary states and from there onto a neighboring regime*.

**Complexity theory** can explain these jumps on the map, if we see regimes are "attractors" and revolutions are "bifurcators." Democracy would then be turbulence, anarchy would be chaos, and perfect justice would be point attractor, a self-replicating "steady state." Once again, most Western political philosophy is based on a forced choice of anarchy or top-down control, missing the self-organization of turbulent democracy. Of course, many questions arise here: a) whether we today in USA have democracy, and if so, what kind; b) whether the market as classically conceived is self-organizing; c) how historical capitalism, which has always sought government intervention, relates to the classic theory of the market--all these are enormous problems outside our view here. The important issue is to see the difference between history as movement on a map and history as a linear narrative. Plato sees something of the map, but he misleadingly puts his insights into a unidirectional linear narrative of progress (Bks 2-4) or decline (Bks 8-9).

The interesting description from this perspective is that of **democracy** (555b-562a). For Plato, democracy is rule of the many, *hoi polloi*, the *demos*, the mob. The genesis of its regime comes from the excessive desire of people under an oligarchy to be rich. Since however it is impossible to honor wealth and moderation at same time, some nobles are reduced to poverty and come to desire revolution. Here we see the insight that the production of wealth creates poor people; *poverty is not a problem to be overcome* for class production systems, *but the very source of wealth* for the few. Now not only is poverty the positive source of wealth, but it is also, in most cases, a stabilizing influence, as a "moderate" level of poverty of the many keeps them working at jobs that produce wealth for the owners; after all, stable subsistence-or-better poverty is better than death from starvation or the risk of death in revolution. However, sometimes this stabilizing effect of moderate poverty is overcome: since desire for money wealth is unlimitable, the most immoderate of the rich will even impoverish

their fellow rich, thus destabilizing the system. But having caught the fever of wealth-acquisition, the rich do not discipline themselves or their sons, and the poor, hardened by their labor, come to despise the physical weakness and cowardice of the rich.

Here we have to remember that *ancient cultures privileged land and agricultural output over money as noble sources of wealth*. Having land, but living in the city, allows one time for arts and PT, time to train to be a warrior/soldier. Being a businessman chasing money, however, was "illiberal": it took up too much time; one wasn't free to pursue the "liberal arts" and one's mind narrowed as one's belly widened.

At this point in Plato's description the city is super-sensitive, so that a slight shock from outside (each side recruits help) will bring about civil war/revolution. The city is so destabilized that revolution can even occur w/o outside intervention. In the supersensitive state, the democracy moves toward a region of "self-organization": its structure is *election by lot to offices*. Accompanying this is a *free arrangement of lives*, in other words, no hierarchical cultural politics. Plato disparages this as an "emporium of constitutions" and as "tolerance" (again, no official cultural politics re: children).

The democratic character also reflects self-organization. Plato's formula is that all desires are equal. The genesis is fascinating. After a rather long definition of necessary and unnecessary pleasures, we read that the youth gets a **taste** of unnecessary pleasures. These new body sensations, unplanned for by any hierarchical cultural politics, trigger a new regime of bodily intensities. Now since Plato cannot see turbulence as self-organization, he treats the structure of the democratic character as chaotic. This is the old forced choice of imposed form or chaos. But Plato describes self-organization, even if he thematically calls it chaos. The super-sensitive democratic body regime flips easily to new attractors via chance encounters in multicultural society. Here we might have a clue to what freedom might mean in liberal society that nonetheless produces great conformities. **Freedom** might be *the experimental adoption of new combinations of practices/bodies potential within a multicultural society*. Seeing the population as a search mechanism, we can see new regimes being tried out: feminist Buddhist-Christian vegetarian yoga triathletes who meditate via Gregorian chants, for example. Using Plato's own principle of experimentation and avoidance of *a priori* ridicule, we can affirm such experimentation. We have to wait and see its effects before passing judgment.

### III. Conclusion of Main Argument 587b-592b

There are three main points here. **First**, at 587b, after the long discussion of the character of the tyrant, Plato resumes the main argument and compares the just and unjust man. After another *psuedo-mathematical calculation* (the just man is 729 times more happy!), we find an interesting *zoological model* of the inner man: many-headed beast (=appetites), lion (=spiritedness), man (=reason). **Second**, at 590d, Plato shows that *proper rule benefits all, even the ruled*. He first argues the case using *slaves* as his example. He supposes slaves as unable to lead themselves, as fit only to be slaves (as opposed to slaves as only unfortunately captured in war. Next, he argues the appropriateness of his cultural politics of *children's character*: they must not be set free (to govern themselves) until we have established a government within them (for Plato, this is *harmonious body regime that emotionally reacts properly prior to reason* [402a]; this process will become development of guilt-conscience under certain different child-rearing practices [God -- or Santa Claus -- is watching you!]).

**Third**, a summary of the total argument at 591c. He reviews the need for proper studies for the formation of a harmonious soul, stressing that physical training is to produce a harmonious body for the sake of a harmonious soul. Next, he writes that the city of *logos*, the perfectly just city, is only a model for the soul. Here we see a certain withdrawal and resignation from everyday reform politics, as the philosopher should avoid politics in all but the just city--but of course it will never become just if philosophers are not active! Here we see once again that Plato is stuck with his real versus ideal problem. How to move from principles to history? Perhaps we should consider that he has posed the question incorrectly. Maybe it shouldn't be ideal principles **versus** real history, ethics versus social science, Socrates versus Thrasymachus. Maybe the point is not to draw an ideal blueprint that we use to mold recalcitrant matter (people, bodies), but to experimentally push regimes to

thresholds of "revolution" (scare quotes because such change is not necessarily fast or violent) that allow self-organization in sensitive regions. In other words, to *reject the forced choice* of anarchy or control, chaos or imposition of form from above, and *ride the turbulence* of sensitive revolutionary and self-organizing spaces on the map of principles, exploring the spaces between regimes. On this model, then, our last word is that *politics is not an impossible problem of real vs. ideal, but the always real experimentation with actual states and virtual thresholds.*

## BOOK X: CONCLUSIONS 595a-621d

### CRITICISM OF THE POETS: 595a-608b

#### I. Ontological dependence of poetry: 595a-598c

- A. three fold structure
  - 1. forms: singular look
  - 2. things: mixed looks
  - 3. images: look of a look
- B. three producers
  - 1. god: forms
  - 2. artisan: things
  - 3. image-maker: images

#### II. Epistemological fraudulence of poetry: 598d-602c

- A. real knowledge leads to action, not imitative art
  - 1. in politics 599e
  - 2. in ethics (lifestyle) 600a
- B. poetry works by charming the ignorant 601b
- C. true knowledge is knowledge of utility of X (teleology) 601d
  - 1. what X is good for (part/whole relation of system)
  - 2. hierarchy of arts:
    - a. flute-playing
    - b. flute-making
    - c. image-making

#### III. Political-Ethical harm of poetry 602c-607a

- A. poetry appeals to non-rational part of soul 603b
- B. poetry can "corrupt even good men" 605c
  - 1. poetry effeminizes men 605e
  - 2. pity at suffering of others might lead to self-pity 606c
  - 3. ridicule; other desires/pleasures/pains: sex, anger, etc. 606d
  - 4. these non-rational parts come to command the soul

#### IV. Ancient quarrel of poetry and philosophy 607b-608b

## THE REWARDS OF VIRTUE

#### I. Immortality of the soul 608c-612b

#### II. Rewards of virtue during life: 612c-614a

#### III. Rewards of virtue after death: the myth of Er: 614b-621d