

Notes on Plato's *Republic*

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Republic Book 1

[I wrote these lectures in the mid-1990s. I really don't know if they resonate with how I think today. But I offer them to the Internet Commons. They rely on John Sallis, *Being and Logos*.]

The *Republic* is a fantastic work of art. As a dialogue, not just a treatise, it has **three interlocking levels**, of *mythos* [image], *ergon* [action], and *logos* [rational discussion]. On the level of *mythos*, or image, Plato both invokes traditional myths like Hades and his own images, like that of the cave. On the level of *ergon*, or action, Socrates will perform just the sort of taming of a spirited nature (Glaucón) as the education of the guardians requires. Finally, on the level of *logos*, or rational discussion, Plato will lay out several very complicated conceptual schemes. What's fascinating is that sometimes all three levels come together, as in the tour de force of the Cave, which echoes the myths of descent and ascent from Hades, performs a pedagogical action on Glaucón, and articulates the conceptual scheme of the relation of forms and things.

Starting with Book I, then, Socrates is telling the story, after the fact, of his night in the **Piraeus**, the port of Athens. To upper-crusties like Plato, going down to the Piraeus was **slumming**. Not only do adventurers, explorers, pirates, sailors, foreigners, decadents, democrats all hang out on the docks, it was the demands of the lower citizen class, essential to naval power as rowers that drove Athens to empire, democracy, and then defeat. Cultural mix, flowing waters, muck and mire, rampant democracy: just the sort of thing that needs to be cleaned up, and Socrates is just the guy to do it! So in one sense, Socrates is the philosophical gunslinger, armed with "irony and eyebrows," and he says implicitly to Thrasymachus, his most fierce opponent in Bk 1, "this town's not big enough for the both of us!" These are levels of image and action. On the level of *logos*, Socrates makes a tour of contemporary definitions of justice, and shows the problems with each.

1) Cephalus ("Mr. Head"), the old rich man, was historically a "metic," a resident alien w/ economic dealings but no political rights. He thinks justice is meeting obligations: telling the truth and paying your debts, in short, obeying the law and keeping your nose clean, so that your economic activities are not hindered. This is a cramped and private view of justice correlated with his metic position: economics, not politics. Glad to be rid of his bodily impulses, interested only in performing the rituals needed to assure his after-life reward, "Mr. Head" forgets passion and madness, so he's easily trapped by Socrates' counter-example of giving a sword back to a friend temporarily mad with anger.

2) Polemarchus ("Mr. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces" or more simply, "Mr. War Ruler"), the aggressive young man, was historically a leader of resistance against the Thirty, and ended up being killed by them. He follows the poet Simonides in thinking justice is doing good to friends and harm to enemies. Here we see a mini-Socratic dialogue, as Socrates gets Polemarchus to see the conflict hidden in his poetically-inspired opinions. (Conflict of phil and poetry.) Socrates gets him to admit that this sort of active justice seems only good in guarding things, not using them. This seems innocent enough, but now comes the reversal: the just man would have to be a good thief too then, for guarding something lets you know how to steal it too! In the classic Socratic way, Polemarchus must now admit "I don't any longer know what I mean, but I still believe what I believe" (334b)! After

admitting that errors of judgment can occur, Polemarchus amends his theory so that harming bad people is okay. But this just makes them worse, Socrates shows, so the practice of justice is now in the uncomfortable position of making some people more unjust. (Here the modern problems of criminal justice: rehab v. revenge v. deterrence.) Having tied Polemarchus in knots Socrates is about to move on to lead him to a better conception of justice when ...

3) Thrasymachus ("Mr. Rash Fighter" or "Mr. Tough Guy"), the brutal sophist, suddenly breaks in. Although the exchange takes several twists and turns the basic conflict is as follows: Thrasymachus argues from the perspective of **non-shareable goods** or society as a zero-sum game (the more one person has, the less everyone else has), while Socrates argues from the perspective of a **common good** for the city, so that the better the city is (the better the ruler), the better everyone will be, not just the ruler. We must also note a difference in the object of analysis: Thrasymachus examines the **actual behavior** of rulers w/ regard to physical necessities and luxuries, while Socrates examines how rulers **should** behave in order to produce justice. In other words, Thrasymachus describes **real** governments, while Socrates prescribes **ideal** governments. The real difference is that Socrates shows how physical necessities should be treated as mere **pre-requisites** for a communal good life, while Thrasymachus shows that most rulers squeeze the production and distribution of necessities to produce **luxuries** for themselves. The question is the **direction of desire**: across material goods to a common good or directly solely to material goods and (private) luxurious sensations.

THRASYMACHUS	SOCRATES
descriptive	prescriptive
real	ideal
private goods	common good
"zero sum game"	"win win"
production for luxury	production for necessity
instrumental reason (means/end)	prudential reason (evaluation of ends)
what is useful to obtain luxuries?	what is the Good of the whole?
how?	why?

The stages in the Socrates/Thrasymachus encounter.

- 1) Th: justice = advantage of stronger; S: possibility of errors by rulers.
- 2) Th answers that insofar as they are rulers, they don't make mistakes: when they screw up, they're not being rulers, but blunderers; Soc answers by showing that the true craftsman works to the advantage of the object of his craft, while it is only as a money-maker that he looks to himself. (conflict at heart of "professional ethics.")
- 3) Th answers that certainly the shepherd works for his own advantage, not that of the sheep! Soc insists on separating craft from the money-making that accompanies it.
- 4) Finally, Th listens as Soc elaborates a provisional statement of justice as wisdom and virtue, that is, orientation to the Good. As unity, the proper fit of part/whole enabling systematic functioning, orientation to the Good, or justice, is the possibility of communal action, even with a band of thieves.

Book 1 previews the rest of the *Republic*. In terms of *mythos*, Socrates has descended into Hades to do battle for justice. In terms of *logos*, he has argued the proper conception of justice. In terms of *ergon*, Socrates has rescued Glaucon from Thrasymachus.

Mythos: Socrates has weathered the storm and defeated Cerebus (Thrasymachus). He can now begin his ascent with Glaucon in tow.

Logos: Cephalus and Polemarchus present behaviors appropriate to their class: meeting obligations for the artisans; helping friends and harming enemies for the warriors. Their problem comes when they present these partial views as justice itself. Justice must not be class-specific, but directed to the common good of the city. Thrasymachus sees that the ruler's craft (politics, not economics or warfare) must be the focus, but doesn't distinguish money-making from the other crafts, and so puts the city at war with itself, rich against poor, in pursuit of non-shareable goods.. Only the philosopher, the one who knows the Good, can direct a hierarchy of crafts in city to avoid conflict between money-making, war, and common good, in other words, can separate and put private economics or dangerous war in the service of common good.

Ergon: Socrates has seen Cephalus drop out (private business not interested in politics), Polemarchus be converted (his honor/war-eroticized position taken by Glaucon and Adeimantus), and Thrasymachus (luxury-eros driven politics) sullenly co-operate. Can he maintain his hold on the warriors (Glaucon) and convert the politicians (Thrasymachus)?

Republic Books 2-4

- I. The Challenge: Define Justice
- II. Key to the *Republic*: Harmony of Unitary Body/Soul/Community/Cosmos
- III. Necessity: The Healthy City (artisans/production)
- IV. Desire: The Luxurious City (merchants/trade)
- V. Discipline: The Purged City (soldiers/war)
- VI. Harmonious Unity: The Just City (philosophers/politics)

I. THE CHALLENGE: DEFINE JUSTICE

After Socrates has tamed Thrasymachus, Book 2 begins with Glaucon and Adeimantus taking up Thrasymachus' point of view and sharpening his challenge. Glaucon claims that justice is simply a mean between the best (doing injustice) and the worst (suffering it), a **social contract of the weak** entered into only because most men calculate they are unable to get away with injustice, and so go against their naturally selfish and greedy natures and submit to conventional compulsion, trusting in the sheer weight of their numbers to protect them from the few strong ones who would prey upon their individual mediocrity. In this scenario, the life of perfect injustice (i.e. w/ reputation for goodness) is preferable to that of the tortured and despised just man w/ a reputation for evil. (With mention of torture the question of the **body** comes up, the relation of which with "soul," will be a key point.) Adeimantus' addition focuses on reputation as well, and asks that Socrates describe not the social effects of a reputation for good or evil, but the effects of justice/injustice on the soul of individual men.

We must be careful here with the word "**soul**": the Greek is *psuche*, something like "life principle" or "living spirit." The various discussions of the deathlessness and reincarnation of the life principle in Plato's dialogues should be seen as Plato's confrontation with Pythagoreanism, and to my mind have little to do with later Christian concerns with a substantial unity, independent of the body, that is gifted

with a personal immortality that will receive eternal rewards or punishments based on moral worth. Two important difference with a Christian notion: one, the Platonic "soul" has parts, so it is not quite a substantial unity, and two, in the discussions of human life in the *Republic*, prior to the concluding myth, *psuche* entertains intriguingly close connections with *soma*, or body, so we should **not** see it as entirely distinct from the body, at least not during life. (As we'll see, Aristotle explicitly addresses *psuche* as embodied life principle, and Lucretius will provide a consistently materialist reading of "soul.")

II. KEY TO THE *REPUBLIC*: HARMONY OF UNITARY BODY/SOUL/COMMUNITY/COSMOS

Socrates replies that we should study justice in the polis/city first, then in the soul. This principle of an **isomorphism** or **analogy** of **city/soul** will have a long history in the West. To ensure that most people in a community act predictably, according to customs, is the goal of traditional politics, which above all was a **cultural/corporeal politics**: shaping the character of the citizens (and dependents: women, slaves, children: future citizens or future wives) by **philosophical direction** of the **customary** arts and physical activities of the people: determining what games the children play, what stories they are told, what people can wear and eat and how they should worship, who has access to the bodies of whom, to either derive pleasure or inflict pain, and so on. NB: laws should agree w/ custom, but custom is somewhat plastic, as it must be reproduced each generation in training.

How a **conformity** and predictability of behavior works in **contemporary liberal democracies**, where the codes are less legal, and more social (taste, gossip, fashion, exclusion), is a fascinating study. (NB: some codes are still legal, especially sexual; on the whole, other codes have dropped out of law.) We know there is such conformity via public opinion polls, marketing surveys, etc: knowing the gender, race, class, income, zip code, education level, religion, etc., will let one predict lots of behaviors: cultural tastes, political choices, consumption patterns. To take up the first days lecture: **decisions** in the sense of **channels of predictable and acceptable behavior** [you will probably go to a large southern state university] are different from **choices** [LSU or Georgia].)

The cultural/corporeal politics of the city/soul analogy should be compared with Socrates' wider strategy of a **macrocosm/microcosm** analogy. On a higher level, Socrates wants to model the politics of the city on the principles of nature (that's why the rulers must be philosophers.) The key is **unity**: the famous trio of the Greeks: the identity of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful derives from unity: the **True** is what is true to itself, what is one with its form or singular look, the **Beautiful** is the singular shining forth of the True, the **Good** is the proper part/whole relation allowing for a system to function as one, as a whole, as a healthy organism.

That's a brief sketch of the entire *Republic*: defining justice in terms of the cosmic principle of unity (or the Good) and designing a community that will establish and protect its unity via cultural/corporeal politics. Now let's see some of the details.

Socrates' **method** is important to notice: Each **community** proposed in thought will explore one **principle** of justice, exemplified by one **class** of people. Each community, following the principle of justice of its class, will perform an important **task**, but will nevertheless be **lacking** something. Upon discovering this lack, Socrates will move on to **supplement** the previous community and its principle/class with a new one. The previous principles/classes are **retained** however in the new community, but they are now **subsumed** in a larger whole.

COMMUNITY	PRINCIPLE	TASK	CLASS	CHARACTER
healthy city	necessity	production for need	farmers/artisans	simple, healthy
luxurious city	desire	production of luxury	merchants	soft, feverish
purged city	discipline	taming of warriors	soldiers (= "auxillaries")	harsh yet gentle
just city	justice	harmonizing unification	philosopher-kings	harmonious

Note the way the three previous communities are all retained and placed in proper position in the fourth, complete community:

III. NECESSITY: THE HEALTHY CITY

Socrates begins with a community that provides only **basic biological needs**. Since no one person is biologically self-sufficient, a city of farmers and artisans with simple, healthy bodies is founded on the **principle** of meeting biological needs. Principle (= *arche*) needs emphasis. Socrates is **not** saying that one fine day in the past, individual, separately existing people simultaneously arrived at the good idea of communal living and then up and decided to join together. Rather, he's trying to explain **the reason why** humans never appear alone, but always in groups. Thus this city, and all the others, is a **thought experiment to discover principles of just communal living, not a historical description**. We'll see how the declining cities break history (tyranny after democracy).

This group dependency extends beyond even the obvious case of parents, the beginning of life, and child rearing, to day by day adult survival. This is an extremely important point: it takes an elaborate network of social support to allow people to have the fantasy that they are real individuals! -- besides the obvious case of an urban support system (supermarkets, plumbing, housing for rent, tax support that keeps tuition and student loan interest low, etc) which enable people today to "live alone," even mountain men or hermits benefit from their years of training in living off the land: someone taught them what to look for to eat and drink: a huge social investment spanning many generations. (NB: this real dependency doesn't mean a social system cannot or should not safeguard "individual rights" in a political/legal sense).

An important principle of justice is apparent in this simple thought experiment-community though: that **each person's task should be suited to his nature** (370c). As we will see, one of the most interesting things about the *Republic* is the claim that natural affinity for communal tasks **cannot be predicted on the basis of gender or class**! More on this later.

Now despite the desire for self-sufficient economy, geographical limits make **trade** (and hence an excess to be traded) inevitable. But trade will bring **cultural mix**: the bodies of the members of the necessary city will be subjected to new and different foods, and come to desire these **new sensations**. Thus we must move to consider a new principle, that of **desire**, even though this means leaving behind the "true, healthy" city of necessity.

IV. DESIRE: THE LUXURIOUS CITY

The next principle, desire, brings us to consider the luxurious city, the city of class differences. Merchants are added to the primary producers. Plato is very clear on the **economic origin of war**: it arises when a city has **"surrendered itself to the limitless acquisition of wealth and overstepped the boundaries of the necessary"** (373e). This is a very important point. For the Greeks, the limitless needs limit (the sea needs a harbor). A simple body is limited by simple tastes, enforced by cultural/corporeal

politics that keeps together a homogeneous cultural unit and self-sufficient economy. But this unity is possible only in thought experiment. Principles need to be added to adjust to reality. Geographical limits to self-sufficiency mean trade and trade means new tastes. Once the link is made between new tastes and the medium for acquiring them, wealth, a shift occurs, and people come to desire the medium, wealth, rather than the goal, new tastes. But since wealth, especially in the form of money, is limitless, there is no limit now to desire. This **limitless desire** is a sort of *fever* that leads to political conflict and war.

According to the principle of natural affinity, **an army devoted only to the craft of war** is needed. The "guardians" as they are now called, are to be "kind to friends and fierce to enemies" (recall Polemarchus' definition of justice). This combination of gentleness and fierceness seems impossible, but Socrates claims an animal example: the pedigree watchdog. The question now turns to the **education of the guardians**, one of the most interesting passages of the entire *Republic*. This training amounts to a new principle, one of **a discipline that produces harmony**. In other words, this training **turns warriors into soldiers**.

V. DISCIPLINE: THE PURGED CITY

Two main training techniques can instill disciplined harmony in the body and souls of the guardians, blending gentleness and harshness, and thus turning them from warriors to soldiers: arts and physical training. Socrates first establishes the importance of what we have called cultural/corporeal politics, then launches into a long discussion of poetry. At the close of his discussion, Socrates explains why arts/culture is so important (401a ff).

The basic idea was already explained by Dr. Jensen, using Aristotle's formulation: the soul is imitative. The arts (and here Plato relies upon Greek beauty as measure and proportion) will open and attune the soul to beauty. A **beauty-attuned** soul for Plato is an **erotic** soul. Now since beauty was **measure, proportion, symmetry**, a soul attuned to it is open to receiving **logos**, which is also measure, proportion, both in our **thought** processes and in the **cosmos**. (Remember the microcosm/macrocosm analogy we talked about earlier.) With such a soul that loves measure and proportion in the form of artistic beauty, one can receive scientific studies that deal directly with logos. Details in Bk 7 (521 ff).

Now this "Platonic love" is a little too neat for some Greeks and some Greek scholars. It's a tamed *eros*, perhaps on the way to its sad fate as Cupid, that prepares a harmonious body/soul receptive to *logos*. While we won't read Euripides' *The Bacchae* in the class, it's a famous example of the demonic side of *eros*, the disruptive, **Dionysian** side that tears apart the calm, **Apollinian**, side that prepares one for *logos*.

Putting this objection to the side, we see that Socrates now discusses physical training, which is to introduce harmony in the body, and hence in the soul. This link of body and soul is very interesting, and will become pronounced in Aristotle and Lucretius, to say nothing of contemporary science. A harmonious energy flow, properly channeled, is a **regime** of the body, a **body politic**. Plato enunciates here the idea that training techniques modify the body in predictable ways. Nurture can impact nature, in modern terms. Body processes are hence at least amenable to change via discipline. The body may not "have" a *logos* of its own, but it can "listen" to *logos*. (This is hard to think in the West, but yoga is a clear example: changes in all sorts of energy flows we can hardly believe.) This plasticity of the body politic, and its link to the soul, will be extremely important in discussing the education of women in Book 5.

After discussing medicine and law as ways of redressing a disordered body politic (individual and social: soul and community) Socrates will move to split off a ruling class from the soldier class. He indicates this

with a name change: soldiers are now "auxillaries," helpers to the "rulers." With this, we move to the fourth community and principle, that of **justice**.

VI HARMONIOUS UNITY: THE JUST COMMUNITY

For simplicity, Socrates now ignores the merchant class of the feverish city and posits three classes: farmer/artisan, soldier, ruler, each according to natural affinity. A "noble lie" is to preserve the class system, but this is a **meritocracy, not a hereditary** system. Socrates makes the important point that merit (=affinity for a position) cannot be necessarily predicted on the basis of parentage (415b). Thus the "first and most important command" is to carefully evaluate the souls (= potentials) of the next generation. In other words, Socrates puts all forms of inheritance and nepotism outside the just city and insists on **rigorous meritocracy as a principle of justice**. Nothing could be more threatening and controversial than this threat to the hereditary class system then (and now) operating--except Socrates' claim in Book 5 that merit cannot be predicted either on the basis of sex!

Before we get there, though, a glance at Book 4. Adeimantus objects that the rulers will not be happy w/o property. (To prevent a military dictatorship, Socrates has outlawed personal property for the auxillaries and rulers.) Socrates reminds him that the happiness (= flourishing) of the whole is his goal, not of any one part of the community.

At 423b ff Socrates enunciates the **principle of unity**: the community must be one. The basis of the unity of the community is natural affinity for the task performed by each class. The unity of the community is safeguarded, we are reminded, by a cultural/corporeal politics, with attention even to children's games, which are to instill "obedience to the law" (425a). Such obedience in early training will make explicit legal social coding--table manners, clothing, hair styles, etc--irrelevant, as predictable behavior stems from early (bottom up) training, not from explicit legal coding (top down) (425c). Here's a clue to the problem conformity in modern liberal (relatively decoded) democracies.

Socrates then move to explain the justice community in terms of the Greek theory of the **virtues**: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. See the chart. The key is that justice is harmonious unity or health, while injustice is disharmonious dissension or disease. Notice also how Plato is at the base of the fascinating metaphor of the **body politic** which underlies much of Western political philosophy of the State orientation. While the **community is discussed in biological terms** (the just community is a healthy organism), **the individual body/soul complex is described in political terms** (reason is to rule over [or master or persuade, depending on philosopher] the spirited part and the appetites).

	CITY	CITY/SOUL ANALOGY	INDIVIDUAL SOUL
WISDOM	guardians know best for each part re: common good	rulers/learning part	[prudential] reason knows best for each re: common good
COURAGE	auxillaries preserve correct beliefs taught by guardians about the fearful	soldiers/spirited part	spiritedness preserves correct beliefs taught by reason about the fearful
MODERATION	whole city agreement as to who should rule	workers/appetites	whole soul agreement as to who should rule
JUSTICE	harmony of whole city (each does natural task without meddling)	city/soul	harmony of whole soul (each does natural task without meddling)

Republic 5

- 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 **opinionable**, 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.

Republic, Book 6

I. The Philosopher's Body

II. The Good

III. The Analogy of the Sun and the Good

IV. The Divided Line

Book 6 has two main parts: a long discussion of the philosopher and the city; then two short "images of the Good": the analogy of the sun and the Good, and the divided line.

The first long part (484a-507b) interweaves contemporary accounts of the danger of philosophic natures being perverted by their insertion in unjust cities (usually assumed to be Alcibiades) with discussions of philosophical virtues. We'll just mention one interesting thing here, then concentrate on the two "images of the Good."

I. The Philosopher's Body

First, notice the physical, bodily description of the philosopher, as one whose "passions flow toward knowledge" 485d. The commonplace about the philosopher as one who "tries to leave the body behind to concentrate on mental things" is somewhat misleading. Plato knows perfectly well, even though he sounds like he regrets the fact at times, that while living the philosopher will always be embodied: the key is to have a certain kind of body, one whose passions and pleasures come from knowing. We can explain the philosophic attitude to the body through reference to the Greek male aristocratic disdain of the biological realm as one of unfreedom and necessity. The daily bodily needs of the citizen are to be met by the labor of others so that the citizen is free for politics, war, and for Plato highest of all, philosophy. When the system of meeting bodily needs is in place and working well, it **fades into the**

background, hidden behind the important things. Similarly, when the body is fit, trained into harmony, well-fed and rested, then bodily actions and states become **transparent**, fading into a background so one can concentrate on the object. Just as you don't feel your hand while taking notes, in the same way you don't feel your well-fed and rested body while thinking. But that doesn't mean you've literally left your body, only that it's faded into the background, just as the labor of women and slaves fade into the background of the *polis*. Thus the body, and women and slaves, can never be sources of knowledge: all they can do is get in the way. Since you can live with 'em (think or act freely and clearly when they have your attention) or w/o 'em (you do have to eat, sleep, etc., everyday), the next best thing is to have them do their work and then shut up and fade away: out of sight, out of mind. Allowing this fade of the body into the background to allow thinking is the reason for Plato's emphasis on arts and PT and his worries about the poets: they might rile up the body with their saucy stories, and his insistence on political control of the economy: merchants might rile up the body with their sauces!

II. The Good

At 507d, Glaucon asks to hear more about the Good. Socrates demurs and offers him two images instead. Before we get into the details of those images, I'll brave a charge of *hubris*, rushing in where sober philosophers fear to tread, and try to define the Good for you. For Plato, the Good is the **meta-principle of systematic function enabled by proper part/whole relations**. For example, let's take two biological principles: 1) plants turn CO₂ into O₂; 2) animals turn O₂ into CO₂. Each principle explains a certain region of things.

The Good is a meta-principle: it doesn't explain things, but explains how principles explain things. More precisely, the Good explains how principles fit together, how they explain parts of a whole that when properly arranged allows a systematic functioning. In our example, it is the Good, the proper part/whole relation, that explains the fit of the two principles of plant and animal respiration, so that this "co-operation" of plants and animals in trading oxygen and carbon dioxide allows the eco-system to function.

Now at each level of investigation there is a part/whole relation: animals and plants are parts of the whole of the natural system. The Good addresses the whole of all sub-wholes, the ultimate level of systematic function. Each principle is in a sense a partial story, an answer to the question: what good is it? This is called a **teleological** question, asking about the *telos* or final, complete state of perfection of a thing, the state it is in when it is helping its larger whole function. Asking "what good is something?" means "how does it help the system work, what larger whole does this part fit into?" The Good, the proper function of the whole of all wholes, is then the meta-principle that allows all the sub-answers of teleological investigation to explain parts of the world.

III. The Analogy of the Sun and the Good

You can see why Socrates didn't want to lay all that on poor Glaucon! Instead, he gives two images. The first is the analogy of the sun and the Good. As the sun is to light and the eye and the thing seen, so is the Good to truth & being and intelligence and the thing known. This analogy, deep in lots of E. Med. cultures (e.g., Egypt), lies behind our saying "I see what you're talking about," when we could also have said "I understand you." It's also why comic strips represent "insight" (itself a metaphor in this nexus) by a lightbulb. And so on ...

Notice here the way the sun is the largely invisible source of light. We can only catch glimpses of the sun, risking blindness if we look too long. Nevertheless, the sun allows not only our sight, but also the "generation, increase and nurture" of living things, even though it is not the very process of generation

and increase (509b). In other words, the sun is the **condition** of living things. Realizing this is using the sun as a **principle** to explain living things.

Similarly, the Good is the largely invisible source of understanding. It is the meta-principle that is the condition of partial explanatory principles. Since we are ourselves only parts of the whole system, we can only catch glimpses of the Good, but we must assume it is there in order for our sub-explanations, our partial stories explaining parts of the world, to work. In other words, we must **assume** the world makes sense in a systematic unity in order: 1) for us to bother to investigate parts; 2) to provide the systematic horizon that guarantees the convergence of all our stories as stories about one world, about a uni-verse which will ultimately explain and justify our political systems.

All this is strange enough, but Socrates really gets a rise out of Glaucon when he tells him at 509b that "the Good is not being but superior to and beyond being in dignity and power." This **transcendence** or beyondness of being by the Good corresponds to the sun's being the condition of generation, but not generation itself. The Good then is the condition of being, but it itself is not a thing. What does this mean? Being for the Greeks means being limited, finding its place in the system, so that it shows itself as it truly is, at one with itself, in a singular look. So the Good is the guarantee of individual things having being, that is, being limited and stable. But since it guarantees being by assigning places in the system, it is not a being, it has no place in the system, nor is it even the system itself. Rather, it is the proper functioning of the system. Another way to say this: the Good is neither a part, nor even the whole, but the proper part/whole relation.

Now since we can only see or know stable existing things, things whose stability and knowability are guaranteed by the Good, we can only catch glimpses of the Good itself. We can only know it through its effects, the partial understandings of the system of which we are capable. Thus Socrates could only offer images of the Good to Glaucon. This image-offerings, these supplements, only fire Glaucon up more. So Socrates offers another image, that of the **divided line**.

IV. The Divided Line

The divided line (509d-511e) has four parts, divided into two main sections. It concerns both mental activities and their objects. The two main sections are opinion ("the visible") at the bottom and knowledge at the top. From the bottom, the four parts are imagination and belief (together they make up the realm of opinion), and thought and understanding (together they make up the realm of knowledge).

To each type of mental activity corresponds its object. In the bottom section, that of the visible of which we have opinions, imagination aims at images, while belief aims at bodies. These bodies serve as the originals of those images. In the top section, things become more complicated. After a huge chunk of seeming gobbledy-gook (read out "As follows: through them"), all poor Glaucon can say at 510b is: "I don't yet fully understand what you mean." Can I get a witness? (Here Glaucon is sort of a chorus.)

Let's slow down and follow Socrates' explanation in the next few paragraphs (510c-11b). In the first half of the top section, that of "thought" or *dianoia*, the objects aimed at are mathematical objects. These use bodies as "images": the mathematical circle, the concept of circle, is only imaged by the chalk circle on the blackboard. This investigation of mathematical concepts relies on unprovable assumptions or axioms. These are simply assumed (*hypothesis* = "placed under") and used to arrive at an answer. Strictly speaking, this is science done *more geometrico*, in the geometrical method, with axioms, propositions, and deductions. This model of what a finished science would look like, based on Euclid's geometry, was the standard all sciences aimed at until recently. In a more extended sense, this is how any science operates, in that it has certain assumptions, its "paradigm," its rules of evidence and

procedure, that it doesn't question in the process of generating answers. It's only in "scientific revolutions" that these basic assumptions are questioned and revised.

The last section of the line is the highest. If the third was science, the fourth is philosophy. Here philosophy or "dialectic" uses the hypotheses used as unquestioned assumptions or "first principles" by science as "stepping stones" to reach the "unhypothetical first principle of everything," that is, the Good. Having reached the Good as meta-principle of systematic function based on proper part/whole relations, philosophy can then "reverse itself" and come down the line to reach a conclusion not in terms of visible things (= mixed looks, forms appearing mixed up with actions and bodies) but in terms only of forms, that is, singular looks. In other words, the Good, as ultimate first principle, is unseeable and unprovable, but allows for the systematic fit of sub-principles, the forms that serve as partial principles explaining parts of the whole. The Good allows the forms to take their proper places as parts of the whole, partial stories fit together to tell the story of the whole.

Whew! No wonder Glaucon was mystified or that Aristophanes could caricature Socrates as a double-talking charlatan! Nevertheless, if you take it slowly and work through the text, you could come to the point where you could produce a decent recap like Glaucon provides at 511cd.

Republic 7

Book 7 begins with the third and cumulative image, **the cave**. It will incorporate the ontological and epistemological doctrines of the first two images and include political and educational dimensions. With these last two, it brings into play all three levels of the *Republic*, that is, *logos*, *mythos*, and *ergon*.

First, we should note the **structure** of the cave (514a-15a; 516a-c) as a sort of underground "theater." Starting from the bottom, we see 1) the screen; 2) the chained prisoners; 3) the "projection room" with its barrier, puppets, puppet masters, and fire for light source; 4) the path out of the cave; 5) the reflecting pool outside; 6) the objects outside; 7) the sun as outside light source. 1-3 correspond to the lower section of the divided line; 4 to education; 5-7 to the upper section. More on this later.

Second, we see the **political** implications of the cave as an allegory for the "unexamined life" (515a-c). Here we see the mythic or image level of the text. Remember the Piraeus as "going down" into slums or even into Hades. Living chained in the cave looking at shadows on the wall is like living with unexamined cultural presuppositions. The people on puppet master duty are the political leaders, manipulating the people by appealing to cultural myths. If this were the just city, the puppets would be "noble lies" and the puppet masters would be philosopher-kings on **political duty**; if an unjust city, then the puppets would be stereotypes, prejudices, etc. and the puppet masters professional politicians, working for tyrants, etc. Plato includes two returns to the city for the philosophically initiated. The first is motivated by pity and ends in disaster (516c-17a), as the enthusiastic neophyte tries to straightforwardly demystify the world for his fellow prisoners; remember the fate of Socrates. The second is motivated by fear of being governed by those worse (519d-21b); it is said to be done under compulsion and as a duty. What would the philosopher-kings rather be doing? Being just plain philosophers, living up above all the time.

Third, we see the **epistemological/ontological** meaning of the cave (517b-c). Here the philosopher-kings are on **research duty** as it were. They have to make sure their political judgments are attuned with the structure of the universe. Thus up above, the sun represents the form of the Good; being able to understand its role in the intelligible order ensures that they have an understanding of the whole and the polis as part of the whole, each obeying the principle of unity. The upper world is the world seen through teleological explanation, not just the mechanical explanation (=guessing what shadow comes

next available to the cave prisoners). Hence we can maintain a one-world interpretation: the "upper world" is just our world seen philosophically rather than on the basis of everyday unquestioned cultural presuppositions. However, remember that to what extent human philosophers could ever "see the sun in its own place and be able to contemplate it" (516b) is controversial, given all we have said about *nous* and *logos*, insight and explanation, parallel and serial, synchronic and diachronic, etc. Perhaps all Plato means is understand the role of the Good in the construction of philosophical/teleological explanations as necessary assumption of whole allowing convergence of partial explanations.

Fourth, we see the **educational** meaning of the cave. Here we see the *ergon* level: Socrates must educate Glaucon in this way, guide him out of the Piraeus, Hades, the cave. The philosopher-kings must pick out likely candidates and free them from their chains, guiding them up the path to the "outside world" of teleological understanding. Once in the other world they can see their former chains as chains: their former cultural presuppositions are no longer transparent, but have become noticeable. Only living in a "different world," following the path of education, allows this de-mystification. Now what is this type of education? It cannot be information transfer (518b), for that would just allow more accurate prediction of the next shadow, more accurate mechanical explanation. Rather it is turning the soul (518c) in the direction of the Good, allowing people to see the world in terms of teleological explanation. Some of Plato's most "democratic" statements come here, e.g., "the capacity to learn and the organ with which to do so are present in every person's soul" (518c). The learning here is noetic, by *nous*. This is the "divine part" of the soul: insight comes in mysterious flashes, as if from above. Given oppositional logic, the human, mortal transparent body faded into the background seems not to have anything to do with the rare flashes of insight that sometimes come. They must be something other, something divine.

This brings us to the last, **forgotten** part of the cave image, forgotten that is, by Plato's discussion, but present in his description if we just shift our focus. What's all this about transcending the earth and caves, anyway? Some have seen the underground cave that is to be left behind by the upward moving divine element as signifying the feminine element, the body/labor base of male transcendence that is supposed to fade into the background to allow thought after having nurtured the body of the philosopher. In other words, yet another female sacrifice to allow male action. Remember Agamemnon sacrificing Iphigeneia, or the Olympians conquering the Titans, or Apollo and Athena domesticating the Furies? Now of course to the extent that in the just city women and the children of workers are supposed to have equal chance of becoming transcending philosopher-kings this criticism would lose its gender and class implications. It would of course retain them in any city that claims to have philosophy but falls short of Plato's rigorous criteria of justice.

Republic 8-10

- 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 multi-cultural 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