

Plato's republic – philosopher queens assignment



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| FIRST PERM PAPER| TOPIC # 6| | RONEN LEVSHTAIN| 206-325-492OCTOBER

6, 2010| | Even though the definition “ Philosopher Queens” itself is not mentioned in the text, Plato refers to them as ‘ these’ women who are capable of performing the same tasks and follow the same obligations as men. The questions as to why he thinks this way lies in his understanding of human nature and his theory of virtue. For this argument Plato used Socrates view of women’s nature and place in the city to elaborate on his own views.

It is important to say that Socrates was dragged to talk about this issue, as he himself thought he finished investigating the city. He also feared the subject as he himself did not know much about it. He feared that his theory or virtue could not support his theory of philosopher queens, without making it sound completely ridiculous at the time. His fear was not from laughter upon his words, but from the thought behind it, which may not even be possible, and if possible if it is for the best.

He also feared talking about a subject which he knows little about, and his companions not only lack the same knowledge, but also friends who he does not wish to drag down with him in case he slips from the truth, “ it’s better to run this risk among enemies than among friends” (Plato, Republic, p. 124, Line 451). After several attempts to convince him to start, Socrates agrees to comply and begins his argument by using the example of guard dogs, where he asks whether it is true to keep the women guard dogs at home, as “ incapable” (Plato, Republic, p. 25, Line 451d), since they must tend to their puppies, while the men go to hunt and guard, or should they take equal part in the hunting and guarding as men do? When Glaucon agrees with this statement, Socrates then states that it should only be right to educate and

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train our women the same way we educate and train our men as they are also used for the same thing as men. After this argument, Socrates moves to discuss the ridicule of the thought. He asks: “ what is the most ridiculous thing that you see in it? ” (Plato, Republic, p. 126, Line 452).

He then relates it to a gymnasium scenario whereas women, not only young but old, love to partake in physical training with men, although it was not too long ago, that even the Greeks considered it shameful for even men to be seen naked. From here he argued that the people of Athens should remember those days, and take this matter seriously. He finished this example by talking about things that once were considered ridiculous, “ when Cretans and then the Lacedaemonians began the gymnasiums” (Plato, Republic, p. 126, Line 452c), were found to be better, and as such customs changed to accommodate the better rather than the ridiculous “... hat’s stupid or bad or it’s foolish to take seriously any standard of what is fine and beautiful other than the good” (Plato, Republic, p. 126, Line 452e). Before going any further, Socrates wanted to be prepared in case anyone asks him to justify why he thinks that women should have the same opportunities as men, whereas it might not even be possible according to women’s nature. His strategy was to question himself, and as a monologue try to convince his rightfulness, “ shall we give the argument against ourselves, then, on behalf of those who share these reservations... ” (Plato, Republic, p. 27, Line 453) His first argument was that of a previous statement whereas he spoke about the foundation of his city, whereas “... each must do his own work in accordance with his nature” (Plato, Republic, p. 127, Line 453b). As a result of this statement he is now facing a dilemma, whereas on the one hand he

agrees that women are very different from men by nature, yet on the other hand he states that each has a distinctive work in accordance with his own nature. Hence, how is it possible for women to do the same tasks as men when they are so different and distinct in nature?

After some thought he realized that they were concentrating on the contradiction of that was said, rather than dividing it into forms, and analyzing it case by case. He portrayed them as falling into a sea of argument, and they must do anything and everything to swim their way out or be rescued by some other hopeless means. The reason for the dilemma was that they were falling into a dispute among themselves, rather than having a conversation, whereas they examine all point and forms of view. When this was realized he then moved to discuss the subject by focusing on the difference of the natural forms they were trying to distinguish. He uses the example of Bald versus Long-Haired men for if their natures are different or similar. For if we do think they are different, we should agree that one of them cannot be a cobbler while the other is, and this is ridiculous. He furthers it by using another example, whereas he says that a woman doctor and a man doctor have the same nature, while a doctor and a carpenter have different one. He then concludes that if women are different from men with regards to a specific task, or way of life, it should be agreed that a specific and different task should be assigned to each.

Yet if the difference between men and women is only in the bearing of children than it can be argued that women are no different than men in any of the other forms, hence we should count on women, the same way we count on men, to be our guardians and philosophers, and if anyone thinks

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the opposite, we should demand from them an explanation as to what task or why of life according to the constitution of the city whereas the nature of women and men are different. He takes it further by discussing the way the city should measure who is fit for something and who is not.

It is the ability of the person to learn and practice that makes him fit for a certain work, " that the one learned it easily, the other with difficulty; ... that the body of the one adequately served his thought, while the body of the other opposed his" (Plato, Republic, p. 129, Line 455b). In this regard, there is no task pertaining to the management of the city that " belongs to a woman because she's a woman or to a man because he's a man" (Plato, Republic, p. 129, Line 455d), and different natures are allocated equally among the sexes, so should the tasks.

With this in mind, it must also be concluded that the natures of some women are different than those of others, resulting in the fact that that some women can be guardians, living with men, while others cannot. He gives many examples whereas women are different from one another, just like men are, such as one woman can be athletic and love war, while the other is not and does not accept war; whereas one is philosophical and cherish wisdom while the other is ignorant and not philosophical. Then he rhetorically asks whether or not these qualities are what we were looking for in men when we selected our leaders and guardians.

Hence, it is true to say that women and men are the same by nature with the only exception that one is weaker than the other in all ways of life, yet it does not justify giving all the tasks to men and not to women, just for being

weaker. Therefore it can be established that women should also receive the exact same education and training as men. If we consider the men guardians we have selected, and we think of them as the best citizens, we should also agree that the women guardians we can select will be the best of all women.

For this reason it will be possible as well as optimal to have the best of both sexes as our guardians, which in turn are also the best of citizens. Thus women should “ strip for physical training, since they'll wear virtue or excellence instead of clothes” (Plato, Republic, p. 131, Line 457b), yet due to the weakness of their sex should be assigned the lighter work, and those who laugh at naked women are ignorant “... for it is and will always be the finest saying that the beneficial is beautiful, while the harmful is ugly” (Plato, Republic, p. 131, Line 457b).

As a conclusion it is safe to say the Socrates believes that these women guardians are the wisest, excellent, and best suited for such a position. According to his understanding of virtue, philosopher queens and kings should possess all of the above mentioned qualities, and since he concluded that such women carry these qualities, he acknowledged the legitimacy of the law to recognize it as not only possible, but also beneficial, which in turn expresses his understanding of virtue in terms of one versus the many, “ he should therefore fear the blame and welcome the praise of that one man, and not those of the many” (Crito, p. 7, Line 47b), and also in terms of the life that is worth living, which are pure of corruption and filled with truth.

Bibliography: 1 - Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates, Third Edition, Trans. G. M. A Grube (Hackett) 2 ??? Plato, The Republic, Trans. G. M. A Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett)

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