

Why does plato argue that rulers must be philosophers?

[Philosophy](#)



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Within this essay I intend to examine Plato's reasoning and justification for his belief in philosopher rulers and question whether they are, in fact, the best people to govern society. The current democratic method of organization of the "polis" was not suitable for Plato as he considered ruling far too vital a role in society to be left to the untrained. Instead, it should be left to those who have the knowledge and more crucially, the wisdom required to comprehend such a task.

It is, however, at this point, we should consider that a significant factor in Plato's opposition to democracy was that the Athenian democracy had condemned Socrates to death. It is important to remember that the liberal democracy which we currently experience is very recent and not at all the concept of democracy that Plato speaks. In fact, the idea of all adults over the age of 18 being able to vote would indeed be absurd to someone such as Plato.

The democracy, of which he speaks, would be of greater equivalence to a modern day referendum, in which all those eligible to vote gather to debate and eventually vote. Plato thus set out to craft a new structural form for the polis, in simple, an ideal society. This constituted three general social classes and indirectly three separate polities within the whole Solipsism. At the lowest end of this, was the "producers", although Plato pays little attention to this class, it comprises people who were engaged in economic activities, such as, farmers and manufacturers.

Although of no political importance, they served the crucial function of providing the economic and material requirements of the community.

Primarily, Plato places them as obedient workers under the control of the auxiliaries. This constitutes the first polis, "one in which money-lovers, and only money-lovers are made as happy as possible" (Reeve C. D. C. 1984), and thus becomes a "luxurious polis" (Plato *The Republic* 1984 e). The second level on Plato's ideal society was that of the auxiliaries.

It was the auxiliaries who, in current times, would complete the actions of the military, civil service and public offices i.e. Police. Consequently, it was their occupation to enact the decisions made by the ruling class. It would be from the elite of the auxiliaries that a philosopher-guardian would emerge, as they had worked their way through the education and training. Therefore, this emerges as the second polis in which "unnecessary appetites" (Reeve C. D. C. 1984) are removed; this is the part of the polis in which honor-lovers are made as happy as possible. (Reeve C. D. C. 1984) However, it must be pointed out that the auxiliaries also shared this second polis with the guardians who were not chosen as "pensioners." In the *Hymn to Athena*, it was ten Guardians who were let at the top of the society, as the rulers. This was the elite group above the rest of society, only those who completed all the statutes laid out during their training would be able to become a recognized philosopher-guardian at the age of 50. These would be the people who had a true understanding of the forms and ultimately, of what is good and just.

With this Plato has set out his "dodona" for the ideal society and his belief that those most suited to govern this society were his "Philosopher-Kings" who were chosen from this Guardian class. It is at this point, that I believe we must further engage with what in fact it means to be a philosopher, and how

you reach such a position. Plato sets an initial screening process, " the one who is willing to taste every kind of learning with gusto, and who turns to learning with enthusiasm, and cannot get enough of it, he is the one we shall rightly call a philosopher. (Plato The Republic 474 c) " Those who have reached that goal are philosopher kings at last. The polis over which they rule, and which contains the elaborate educational apparatus necessary to reliably produce them, is the third polis. " (Reeve C. D. C. P 195, 1984). During Plat's explanation of his philosopher-king, he uses three analogies, the sun, the line and finally the cave, in order to depict the reason for the philosopher's irreplaceable role in politics.

The central element in each of these is the concept of the forms. In my opinion, Plato most aptly explains the transition to a philosopher with his simile of the cave. Plato classes this as " the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition" (Plato The Republic IPPP a). The allegory of the cave is to illustrate that the philosopher is the one who sees things as they really are. The philosopher is able to see the truth, whereas, the masses see, merely, shadows.

The arduous process of education which draws the philosopher from the state of ignorance and belief to the enlightened state of knowledge and wisdom is comparable with the difficult Journey from a dark cave up a long path to the open light of the sun. Whilst explaining the Journey of the philosopher's education he also attempts to show why it is that the masses reject the philosopher once their knowledge has been gained. Primarily, Plato says that the philosopher is misunderstood by the ignorant masses and that

the knowledge which they attempt to impart threatens the beliefs of their UN-enlightened minds.

It is clear upon examination of Plat's society, that it is indubitably a totalitarian regime; however, this point must be critically examined as it is clear that there are distinct and separate ways to critique this point. Naturally, there are those who would say that the restriction of freedom from a dictatorial power is inherently wrong. Conversely, though it must be considered that restriction of freedom for the good of people is no bad thing. In theory a system which imposes " The Good" on all people, would be one which benefits all and enhances the chance of maximum human development and freedom from evil. Until philosophers rule as kings, or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophies, that is, until political power, authority and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will eve no rest from evils,... Nor, I think, will the human race. " (Simon Blackburn IPPP c- D 2006) Obviously the counter argument to that and the very basis of Plat's critics, is that whether human nature being as it is, would ever allow it in reality?

Especially when compared Walt previous totalitarian regimes, experience Allocates Tanat teen have rarely brought good to the majority, and predominantly have indeed brought the opposite. In reality, it could be argued that there has been a historical dominance of state dictatorships in comparison with the relatively recent liberal democracies. Citizens who are raised within the liberal western tradition are taught to be convinced of the

faultlessness of democracy and thus find it challenging to comprehend that any other system could be better, or even to see the weaknesses in democracy.

Due to the inability to acknowledge the failings of democracy, Plato creates two illustrations to depict them; these are the similes of the beast and the ship. Plato utterly rejects two common modes of thought in democratic societies, just because everyone believes it to be true and good does not make it so, and that just because someone is a convincing speaker and persuades the masses to his view - it does not mean he is speaking the truth or that his ideas are good. The foundation of these illustrations is that the Philosophers simply know "The Good".

Plato's debate is clearly rejecting some of the foundational ideas within Democracy. Within the simile of the beast, the large and powerful animal in this story is the general population who make up the democracy. In this tale, Plato is depicting a clear division between, what the majority like and think is good, what pleases them, and unbeknown to them, what actually is "The Good". The Good (I. E. The dodos or form of the good) is good whether people think it is good or not. The Good is the predetermined standard against which the pleasures and desires of the masses must be judged to determine whether they are good or bad.

Plato is saying that the Sophists of his time were merely concerned with remaining in power and thus would bow to the appeasement of the masses that were ill educated. Fiscal and devoid of the knowledge of what is truly important in life and were subsequently unfit to rule the polis. They were no

more than manipulators and responders to popular opinion without any standard to which to work. The Sophists were relativists. For them 'good' meant no more than what the people want, what will keep them happy, and what society thinks are good.

This approach to politics is recognizable within the contemporary use of opinion polls and pressure groups. " All those individuals who make their living by teaching, and whom the public call " Sophists" and new for their skill, in fact teach nothing but the conventional views held and expressed by the mass of the people, when they meet; and this they call science" (Plato The Republic 475a-b) This passage, does not entirely show why Plato is convinced that it is philosophers who should rule.

Socrates proposes the notion that the study of philosophy results in the unearthing of objective truths about what is good, from this grounding this knowledge can be used as a unique; solid platform for policy-making. Plato believes that in contrast with his idea of the world of matter, the world of sense, which he classes as a mere world of shadows, is in fact " world of final, immutable, changeless, objects of contemplation, at the summit of which stands the ultimate object of a higher kind of knowledge independent of sense experience.

This is ultimately a real and ultimately fitting object of love and desire, a constantly radiant eternal source of light, the form of good itself. "

(Blackburn S. Pop, 2006). Subsequently, it has the natural progression that the people most suited to rule, are the people who have the wisdom of this higher realm, so justifiably this would be the philosophers. " If philosophers

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have ten capacity to grasp ten eternal Ana Immutable, Wendell tense won have no such capacity are not philosophers and are lost in multiplicity and change, which of the two should be in charge of a state? (Plato The Republic p 484 b). At no point, has it ever been empirically verified that those who have studied philosophy will all agree on that which is good and right. Even those who do agree that there are moral facts do not agree on exactly what they are - nor do they agree on what is the best way to act in the light of those facts. Even if we do agree with Plato and accept that a true understanding of goodness and Justice is both possible and agreement can be reached between philosophers, it still leaves the question whether this is all that a politician needs.