

Plato, aristotle, and moses

[Profession](#), [Philosophers](#)



" Households, cities, countries, and nations have enjoyed great happiness when a single individual has taken heed of the Good and Beautiful. Such people not only liberate themselves; they fill those they meet with a free mind. " Philo of Alexandria Athens, via Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and Jerusalem through the Hebrew Scriptures, refer to two general and fundamental ways of life: the life of free inquiry on the one hand, the life of obedience to God's law on the other.

As discussed in class, the fact that most do not read the Hebrew Scriptures as a politically philosophical text, they are overlooking some fundamental political principles that are similar and complimentary to the Greeks. The book of Genesis to the end of the book of Kings is not only revelation in the form of a narrative, but can be seen as a work of reason, and political philosophy. Plato and Aristotle are certainly accepted as political philosophers, while the Patriarchs are not (widely) regarded as such. Because of this, I shall use the Pentateuch as my basis to discuss my assertion.

Given the constraints of this paper, a short reflection on our assigned readings for class, and my limited knowledge of both the Hebrew Scriptures and Greek philosophy, I do not pretend for this to be sophisticated, beyond a thoughtful meditation. With a few exceptions, I shall utilize Moses' life as the pathway through this illustration. Genesis seems a fitting place to begin. The expulsion from the Garden of Eden was the first " exodus. " In Genesis, humanity as a whole, and in Exodus, the Hebrews through their transformation into the Israelites, began a trek.

They each see a perilous journey ahead as they begin fumbling toward a dimly seen goal. God, Moses, and Socrates all want what is best for His/his people. The people would rather not have it, “ And they said to each other, ‘ We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt. ’ ” A seemingly universal and consistent source of political strife, what the people want vs. what the ruler thinks is good for them. Plato’s presentation of Socrates is generally in the form of the “ dialectic”. The dialectic between God and his creation is expressed frequently throughout the Scriptures.

It seems much more often towards the beginning, waning through the prophets (later, waxing until the final culmination of the “ dialectic” with the condemnation and crucifixion of God the Son). Adam and Eve’s questioning by the Father: “ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “ Where are you? ” He answered, “ I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid. And he said, “ Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? ” The man said, “ The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it. ” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “ What is this you have done? ” The woman said, “ The serpent deceived me, and I ate. ” Cain’s interrogation for the murder of his brother (Am I my brother’s keeper?), Abraham’s bargaining with God over the destruction of Sodom “ Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were 50 innocent people in the city? , and Moses’ unenthusiastic response to God’s command to be the standard bearer to “ let His people go! ” At this

point in Moses' life, he has developed a tripartite identity: a Hebrew origin, an Egyptian upbringing, and after his "exile" in Midian, he has a married and fairly sedentary lifestyle. Moses does not want to be the leader of the Hebrews out of Egypt. Like the "philosophers" in the Republic, they do not wish to rule the multitude, they must be compelled to rule. God compels Moses, through the burning bush, to "carry his cross". When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses! "... But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name? Then what shall I tell them?' " God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" The transformation that Moses undergoes, having seen "the face of God" at the burning bush is similar to Plato's "Analogy of the Cave". He emerges with a mission, a calling that is to consume his life; leading the people to truth and justice. Bringing them forth from the darkness of Egypt into the light of Canaan. Like the man who returns to the cave having seen the light, Moses' trustability is doubted many times.

Moses was rejected by "his people" many times. First, by the Hebrews as he attempted to help them by killing the overseer, sending him into exile. Secondly, by the Egyptians for siding with the slaves. Thirdly, by the Israelites during his attempt to lead them safely to the Promised Land. Like

the Israelites, the Athenians did not understand, or refused to accept, the teachings of Socrates, which were intended to renew private and public morality; leading to his eventual condemnation and a nightcap of hemlock. Following the death of Socrates, many of his students fled.

Plato returned in an attempt to continue transformation of society and to redeem his "time", he also failed. Moses hesitantly heads back to Egypt, to engage in his fruitless negotiation with the Pharaoh; fruitless in part due to the Lord's "hardening of his heart". The ultimate plague set upon the Egyptians is the Angel of Death's reaping of the first born of each household who does not possess the mark above their doorway. This was not a simple sweeping away of children, intent on causing anguish amongst the citizens, in an attempt to incite them against the Pharaoh (that seems to have been just a bonus).

It was a direct assault on the socio-political fabric of society: primogeniture upended, filial duties confused, and the vanishing of an entire generation. The Athenians feared something somewhat less immediately disruptive, the corruption of a few well-placed "youths". Socrates' actions were, they feared, going to destabilize Athenian society, similar to a malignancy, growing and spreading, infecting the very marrow. Moses, Plato, and Aristotle believed that there was no distinction between morality and politics.

If one cannot restore order to his soul, Plato reasoned, then there can be no order in society. Just as the God of the Pentateuch understood when he gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue presents a mix of the ordering of one's soul (mostly the first 4) and the ordering of society in the last 6. The Greeks knew that the liberation of the soul ought to be the chief

object of individuals on earth. Cleansing the soul frees humanity from the false loves and degrading appetites so that man (and women) may conform to the *nomos*, or the law. The *nomos*, not human beings, is the measure of all things.

Moses was not the liberator, God was. Socrates was not the liberator - truth was. Moses and Socrates were attempting to lead the people towards liberation because they were compelled to because of the Truth. Moses and Socrates were not politicians, generals, or just "leaders". They possessed a vision, they sought righteousness (in different ways), and pursuers of truth and virtue. Thrasymachos' "legal positivistic" view, that objective justice does not exist for rulers, they lay down the laws with the exclusive concern for their own advantage.

Plato's refutation of this view is followed by Aristotle's argument that even "great-souled" men are not immune to the destructive passions associated with the spirited parts of the soul. We see in the account of David, "A man after God's own heart", that even he is not free from temptation or pride. Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land, many surmise it is because out of anger and impatience, struck a rock to produce water, instead he should have followed God's instructions and simply spoke to the rock. While others suggest that it is his, again out of anger, breaking of the Ten Commandments.

Not acting virtuously according to Aristotle's golden mean, Moses freely chooses to act rashly out of anger, and cowardly, by refusing to allow his rebuke of the Israelites to be sufficient. Moses shows himself, in these incidents, to be lacking in virtue. Because of his "situational virtuousness"

<https://assignbuster.com/plato-aristotle-and-moses/>

he is punished by God. In the Book of Samuel, the people of Israel clamor for a king to rule over them. Samuel approaches God with this request. The Lord, far from being a “ democrat”, eventually relents: “ Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.

As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights. ” Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, “ This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots.

Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use.

He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day. ” Socrates, via Plato, describes the decay of the healthy city. Its decay is brought about by

<https://assignbuster.com/plato-aristotle-and-moses/>

the emancipation of the desire for unnecessary things, i. e. , for things that are not necessary for the well being or health of the body. Thus the luxurious or feverish city emerges, the city characterized by the striving for the unlimited acquisition of wealth.

Once can expect that in such a city the individuals will no longer exercise the single art for which each is meant by nature but any art or combination of the arts which is most lucrative, or that there will no longer be a strict correspondence between service and reward: hence there will be dissatisfaction and conflicts and therefore need for government which will restore justice. There will certainly be need for additional territory and hence there will be war, war of aggression. Those who clamored to Samuel for a "king" other than the King who brought them out of slavery should have read the Greeks.

The story of Solomon's rise is one of wisdom, peace, fulfillment and beauty. The descent of Solomon is one of war, oppression overindulgence, idolatry, and misery. Solomon traded away a part of Israel's land, while annexing other's cities (requiring him amass chariots and horsemen), enslaved the Canaanites, accumulated large amounts of gold and silver, had relations with Egypt, married foreign women although Moses forbade it because " they would turn their hearts away from the Lord" and eventually began to worship their idols.

All of this eventually ending in the destruction of Israel, leaving Judah for the " sake of David and Jerusalem". Because of the blessing Solomon began with, and the glory he reached at his pinnacle, his fall was a much more tragic one. The Ten Commandments, and Justice define the problem

associated with living in society. Their statement, however does not solve it. God gives the laws to create an ideal society, Socrates gives the vision of the ideal city.

It has been painfully demonstrated, not just through the accounts of Moses, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, but the entirety of human history, that this ideal is seemingly impossible to attain. The political philosophy expressed in the early Biblical narrative, through Revelation, the Greeks will come to understand (or at least address) through Reason. The establishment of a government (either temporal or divine), the dangers of government, the relationship between the individual to the leader/state (and the leader's responsibilities), forms of government, and the eventual decline of the state.