

Plato's Book Eight.

Plato's Republic, Sections 543-549b of Book Eight

- 1) Plato thinks that there are five basic types of government, these are...
 - a) Aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny.
 - b) Aristocracy, timocracy, communism, market-societies and socialism.
 - c) Aristocracy, timocracy, theocracy, democracy and oligarchy.
 - d) Monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, theocracy and a democratic theocracy.

- 2) For Plato the five basic types of governments are very similar to...
 - a) The five groups of food.
 - b) The five type of human personalities.
 - c) The five types of religion.
 - d) The five types of senses.

- 3) In this part of the reading Plato thinks you can compare...
 - a) Reason and revelation.
 - b) Reason and evidence.
 - c) Evidence and revelation.
 - d) The behavior of people and the behavior of governments.

Commentary on questions 1-3. Sections 543-549b

Book eight deals primarily with what has been termed by some 'the decline of the ideal state', it is a discussion of five basic types of government, how one type can arise or fall out of others and of the five basic type of persons. Plato thinks that states are reflections of the people who make them up, governments are human personalities writ large. Plato terms his society, the one has been discussing, aristocracy which means the rule of the best. Timocracy is the rule of honor or the warrior class, oligarch is the rule of the few or the rich, democracy is the rule of the tribes or the masses and tyranny is the rule of a single powerful individual. Plato will eventually compare the life of the aristocratic person and the aristocratic state with what he considers to be the worst form of government, tyranny to finally answer the question of which life is better, one of justice or injustice.

According to Plato a decline from an aristocratic form of government can begin if children are born out of season. Plato provides a rather odd formula for the proper begetting children at 546-547 but the basic idea is that the supply of gold persons (or those fit to be philosopher-kings) runs short. With the loss of the unity of the state factions begin to develop and the constitution or structure of the state begins to change, golds and silvers, philosophers and warriors are allowed to own property. The decline of the ideal state has begun.

Plato's Republic, Sections 549c-554e of Book Eight

- 4) For Plato the most conspicuous aspect of the timocratic man and timocratic society is...
 - a) Many armed men in the street, each man having been trained to fight and to fight fiercely.
 - b) Generals in the highest political posts.
 - c) A love of honor and victory.
 - d) A love of military history and military training.

- 5) According to Plato the best guardian and sole guarantor of virtue is...
 - a) Chastity.
 - b) A rational and cultivated mind.
 - c) Wise, elder statesman leading the government.
 - d) Both A and B.

- 6) According to Plato the ruin of the timocratic is when...
 - a) More battles are lost than won by the city or the man.
 - b) Religious history becomes predominate over military history.
 - c) Private persons begin accumulating gold.
 - d) Commerce commences by sea.

- 7) For Plato oligarchic societies begin when...
 - a) There is a significant property requirement to hold political office.
 - b) Honor is valued more than gold.
 - c) Wisdom is valued more than honor.

- d) Commerce commences by sea and a market economy replaces the rural/agricultural economy.
- 8) The presence of beggars, in Plato's eyes, is evidence that...
- a) The market society is functioning correctly, there must be some unemployment to prevent the massive inflation that is inevitable once a society reaches full employment and the workers develop unions.
 - b) Higher taxes are needed on the wealthiest members to re-distribute the resources.
 - c) Other unsavory characters like thieves, cutpurses and other criminals are also present.
 - d) All of the above.
- 9) The oligarchic man and the oligarchic society are similar in that...
- a) They value wealth above all else and exhibit thrift and hard work.
 - b) Property is seen as a means to political office and a life of honor.
 - c) It takes the massive profits of sea-borne commerce to support their estates.
 - d) Both A and C.
- 10) Plato compares oligarchy, in either form, to...
- a) A Lion, ready to devour but still noble in bearing.
 - b) A Hydra, the many heads representing the many appetites gold can feed.
 - c) A thing divided into two opposing or contending factions.
 - d) Life eternal as gold can pave the way to paradise as priests desire money and have a path to the ear of the gods.

Commentary on questions 4-10. Sections 545d-554e

It is useful to keep in mind at this point Plato's definition of justice as a combination of three other virtues, temperance, courage and wisdom. With the loss of the philosopher-kings, or the loss of wisdom, justice is also lost and while courage and temperance remain the loss of wisdom is the loss of two virtues (wisdom and justice). In one move the half the virtues of ideal state disappear, the decline in virtues is quick. Most societies are at a significant distance from the best one.

Out of aristocracy comes timocracy, the rule of courage or the warriors, the love of honor and victory. With the loss of wisdom however the provision of restricting wealth to the working classes will disappear and eventually virtue and wealth will be at odds with one another. Lovers of honor and virtue will soon become lovers of wealth and political office will be restricted to those who hold a significant amount of property, the birth of the oligarchy. Oligarchies will be the first to permit 'the greatest of all evils' allowing people to sell all they have and become paupers, money and not virtue is the name of the game. The presence of beggars in a society, for Plato, is a sign that other evils created by poverty are also present, the weak and poor may beg but the poor and strong will steal and engage in villainy. The oligarch will still maintain the virtue of temperance even though honor and wisdom have been lost and will thus still exhibit hard work and thrift. The reason for the remaining virtue of temperance is not a rational understanding of humanity or that the oligarch thinks intemperance to be wrong, the oligarch fears the loss of their property and this provides the motivation for the sole remaining virtue. The oligarch and the oligarchic society have become divided into opposing factions, the oligarch divided between temperance and desires, the oligarchy between rich and poor.

In Plato's eyes the virtues create a harmonious society, as they disappear the social and political conflicts will erupt and you will get, as he mentioned earlier, a form of civil war. The divisions of the oligarchy set the stage or are the opening skirmishes in what will soon be greater conflicts if the slide of virtue cannot be stopped or reversed.

Plato's Republic, Sections 555-562 of Book Eight

11) For Plato the love of wealth is incompatible with...

- a) Being sober-minded.
- b) A rural or agricultural economy.
- c) Being temperate.
- d) Both A and C.

12) Plato proposes that the lender of money...

- a) Should have recourse to courts that meet regularly to enforce his claims peacefully.
- b) Should do so at his/her own risk.
- c) Should never expect to be paid back.

d) Should hold the children of the borrowers as guarantees for large loans.

13) According to Plato an oligarchy is likely to end and give birth to a democracy when...

- a) The rich are banned from society.
- b) The poor win their on-going conflict with the oligarchs.
- c) Foreign powers attempt a conquest of a Greek city.
- d) Religion is forsaken for the pursuit of money.

14) For Plato, the most defining characteristic of a democracy is...

- a) Religious fervor.
- b) Money.
- c) Commerce.
- d) None of the above.

15) Plato thinks that democracy tends to produce...

- a) Just constitutions.
- b) The best kind of people.
- c) Very good philosophers.
- d) Equality for equals and unequal alike.

16) In this reading Plato divides pleasures into the following categories...

- a) Necessary and unnecessary.
- b) Good, bad and neutral.
- c) Plato does not make a distinction between pleasures.
- d) Wanted and unwanted.

17) According to Plato the typical democratic person lacks...

- a) Money and power.
- b) Access to the best information.
- c) Order and discipline in their day to day life.
- d) None of the above.

Commentary on questions 11-17. Sections 555-562

An oligarchy will turn into a democracy when the last remaining virtue, that of temperance is lost. The oligarch maintains his wealth by not giving into their appetites. But when the drive for wealth, the greed, becomes too strong they will encourage irresponsible spending in the population through loans. Much like banks giving out easy credit at high interest. These loans will be secured against properties and by encouraging destructive spending they will acquire greater properties from the individuals who will begin to default on their loans. Plato proposes his policy of loaning at your own risk and without any securities or physical guarantees, if the person you loan money defaults you simply lose your money, no recourse on the matter. It is useful to keep in mind that while Athens is also a commercial power it was also an agricultural society as well where the ownership of land was an important social consideration. To lose your land was to lose social respectability and it is lose an independent class of landowners, individuals who need not go along with the latest political fad to feed their families.

As the oligarchs gather up more and more properties and wealth the number of poor will increase and in the on-going political conflict between the rich and the poor the have-nots will eventually begin to win and establish a democracy. As one can easily tell from the reading Plato is no fan of direct democracy, the giving of equality to equals and unequals alike as he terms it. Democracy, for Plato, is almost a form of social chaos, a little short of madness. A direct democracy gives each citizen a vote on matters; it is different from a representative democracy where citizens elect officials who then determine the laws. The Athenians would periodically meet in an assembly and determine their laws and the direction of the city. There were some officials that made day to day decisions but the assembly had great power.

Here Plato is discussing direct democracy when he uses the term democracy. There is reason to think he would be a little more sympathetic to a representative democracy, as he might think it could be more like an oligarchy, timocracy or aristocracy depending on the quality of the character of the representatives. For Plato not all people are alike when it comes to political judgements, some are better at it than others and thus it makes little sense to give everyone the same voice just as it makes little sense to put everyone into a choir, whether they can sing or not.

Plato draws a fairly strict line between necessary and unnecessary pleasures, pleasure we can do without and still have a healthy life are pleasures that lead down the wrong path. Simple and moderate pleasures is the path of virtue and the good life, the democratic citizen mirrors the

democratic state in lacking structure in their life and being given to unnecessary and unwise pleasures.

Plato's Republic, Sections 562-569c of Book Eight

18) In a democracy, for Plato, ...

- a) His ideal state is finally realized.
- b) The rulers behave like the subject and the subjects behave like the rulers.
- c) Religious insight and power can finally be brought together.
- d) Both B and C.

19) In a democracy, according to Plato, even the beasts...

- a) Demonstrate that liberty is appearing everywhere.
- b) Are treated like slaves.
- c) Can be elected to political office.
- d) None of the above.

20) The rise of tyranny, for Plato, is the result of...

- a) A desire to be free of making political decisions by the populace.
- b) Too much liberty in a democracy, any extreme in politics tends to provoke its' opposite.
- c) Too little liberty.
- d) Too little religious freedom.

21) Plato divides the democratic society into three classes these are...

- a) The rich, the middle-class and the poor.
- b) The rich, the poor and the warriors.
- c) Idle people who live extravagant lives, moneymakers and the general populace.
- d) Idle people who live extravagant lives, moneymakers and the warriors.

22) According to Plato the tyrant begins as a protector of the people but soon gets a body-guard and becomes...

- a) A wolf to citizens of the city, even his own kin.
- b) A true leader as all true leaders need force to back up their decrees.

- c) A learned man as he now has many to help with any study he wants to under-take.
 - d) A religious figure, as he will likely promote himself to god-hood.
- 23) To maintain his power and drain the city of his opponents the tyrant must...
- a) Take the children of the city as hostages for the good conduct of the citizens.
 - b) Declare himself as a god as this will cement his hold on power.
 - c) Continually provoke wars.
 - d) None of the above.
- 24) In exchange for excessive liberty the people now have...
- a) Slavery.
 - b) A real democracy as excessive liberty gives way to ethics.
 - c) A true king, kings wield power and to do this they need to curtail dissent.
 - d) Both A and C.

Commentary on questions 18-24. Sections 562-569c (the end of book eight).

In Plato's eyes democracy opens the door to unrestrained liberty. Justice is not doing what you want whenever you want. A just society does not live moment to moment without pause or reflection; it is a well-designed and structured whole that promotes human social life by encouraging temperance, courage and wisdom. Not every idea is a good idea and not every thought should give rise to action, the natural laws or forms condition human what is right and proper, what will work as an ethical and desirable social system.

In attempting to win the votes of the crowd Plato thinks that in a democracy you see an inversion of the ruler-subject relationship typical in most forms of human organization. A king commands and people obey, 'top down management' to use a common phrase from our times. In a democracy the candidates in the bids for office must promise to work for the interests and special interests of the people, must attempt to behave and act like the ordinary person, in essence become the ruled not the ruler. A philosopher-king will act for the good of the state but in terms of the forms or natural laws, not the good of the state as defined by the multitude. Ruling

a society from the bottom up is dangerous for Plato as very few possess the education necessary to understand matters of just government and the result it thus quite a mess.

It is useful to keep in mind that it is not long after Plato's death that the democracy of Athens falls (as does the rest of Greece) to the king-ship of Philip of Macedonia and the father of Alexander the Great. Plato's proposals may sometimes sound radical but changes needed to be made if Athens was to remain independent of foreign rule. It is possible that the Greek-Persian conflict is what ends the independence of all the Ancient Greek cities (and not so much the vices of the Athenians) as the only way to effectively deal with Persia is by a Greek unification of one sort or another. A well-lead Athens, however, might have been more influential in the coming unification of Greece instead of falling to Macedonia.

Democracies in Plato's eyes can be divided into three general groups, those who live expensive lives but do no real work the moneymakers and the general population. These idlers, for Plato, are the source of the trouble, denied political office in all other governments they use the public courts and their offices to confiscate what they need to live and live large. This in turn stirs up trouble between the people and oligarchs or moneymakers and soon plots beget plots and the people call for a protector. The tyrant, or the rule of a single powerful individual.

The tyrant is granted sweeping powers to right the wrongs of democracy but the tyrant is usually not a philosopher-king and thus things get worse instead of better. Conflicts grow more heated, the tyrant is granted a bodyguard or a small private army and then things really get out of hand. In politics each extreme calls out for the opposite and thus extreme liberty results in slavery, as the tyrant will soon enslave the city to his will.

Essay Questions, Please Answer one of the three following questions.

- 1) Compare and contrast timocracy with oligarchy as Plato's describes them. Be sure to include a description of the virtues common to each and how a timocracy devolves into an oligarchy.
- 2) Compare and contrast oligarchy with democracy as Plato's describes them. Be sure to include a description of the virtues (or lack of virtues) common to each and how an oligarchy devolves into a democracy.

3) Compare and contrast democracy with tyranny as Plato's describes them.
Be sure to include a description of the virtues (or lack of virtues)
common to each and how a democracy devolves into a tyranny.

1 A

2 B

3 D

4 C

5 B

6 C

7 A

8 C

9 A

10 C

11 C

12 B

13 B

14 D

15 D

16 A

17 C

18 B

19 A

20 B

21 C

22 A

23 C

24 A