10 posters on Plato’s dialogue
The Republic (Politeia)

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Introducing The Republic by Plato

reasons to become familiar with The Republic by Plato

1. It is the master piece of the great philosopher Plato, which contains his famous cave analogy.
2. It shows how leaders can use words and images to lead, instead of brute force.
3. It is in the West the first systematic treatment of politics, with much influence on later thinkers in Europe and America.
4. It is a classical example of a learning process.

The author

Plato’s name was actually Aristocles. He came from an aristocratic and influential family. He lived in the Greek city Athens. Plato has over 30 dialogues to his name. The Republic is the second longest of them all.

Hoe long ago Plato was born?

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<th>Shakespeare</th>
<th>Jesus</th>
<th>Plato</th>
<th>Homer</th>
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Plato was born over 2400 years ago

The story

Socrates walks out of Athens, together with his student Glaucon. They descend to the Piraeus, the harbour. Here they get into a conversation about justice, together with four others. During the conversation Socrates initiates Glaucon into philosophy.

The style

Plato’s texts read more like a novel than a philosophy textbook. Plato describes vivid characters. They talk a lot, but they also do stuff, like walking. Each dialogue takes place in a concrete spatial and social environment.

The title

The Republic is a Latin title of later date. The Greek title was Politeia. That is: the organisation or ordering of a state.

English translations commonly use the title The Republic.

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Is Socrates a good educator?

What is the central problem of The Republic? Socrates wanted to train young people as philosophers. Plato compares that education with a journey to a higher point.

Socrates must show that he (1) can locate that higher point and (2) can lead someone there. Further, he has to (3) win over everyone who stands in the way of the ascent.

According to some experts Plato compares the Piraeus with the underworld, that is, the realm of the dead. Three clues support this reading of the Republic:

**Clue 1:** When Plato writes that Socrates and Glaucon “descend” to the Piraeus he uses the exact same word as Homer used for Odysseus’ descent into the realm of the dead.

**Clue 2:** The goddess Bendis belonged with the realm of the dead. In some Greek myths she accompanied souls to the underworld.

**Clue 3:** Heroes who descended to the realm of the dead were detained on their way back by the watch dog Cerberus. Socrates is also detained.

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**REALM OF THE GODS**

**REALM OF THE LIVING**

In a famous poem by the Greek poet Homer the hero Odysseus descended into the realm of the dead.

**REALM OF THE DEAD**

In the real om the dead Odysseus received information he needed to finally return home after 10 years of wandering.

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The closing scene: the myth of Er

The Republic ends with the myth of Er. In this myth, a soldier named Er dies on the battle field. His soul leaves his body and makes a journey towards a spectacle that resembles a festival.

Several parallels can be drawn between the opening scene and the closing scene. But there are also differences. The myth of Er introduces two novel elements that are not in the openings scene.

4 parallels between the openings scene and the closing scene:

1. In the closing scene Er dies on the battle field. The openings scene also takes place in the context of war. The harbour was the seat of the military power of Athens.

2. Er dies and his soul leaves his body. Just as Socrates in the Pireaus Er’s soul is stopped. It is now allowed to travel to on, but must stay put, on a meadow.

3. Like the harbour the meadow is a place of coming and going. The soul of Er watches how other souls come and go through openings into the heavens and the earth.

4. At the meadow Er watches a spectacle that resembles a public festival. Similarly, Socrates ascended to the Pireaus to watch a festival.

1 difference between the openings scene and the closing scene:

New is that in the myth of Er the coming and going of souls is governed by laws. The coming and going of souls follows a set cycle.

The movement of souls follows the law of justice: just souls go upward, and unjust souls go downward.
At the house of Kephalos

In the Pireaus, Socrates visits Kephalos and his son Polermarchos. Father and son talk in cliches: they merely repeat what they have learned, and do not think for themselves. That makes them followers instead of leaders.

Kephalos imitates traditional poets. When Socrates tries to provoke him to think for himself, Kephalos clings to the habits of his ancestors. In the end he even walks away. Kephalos imitates passively, without thinking for himself.

Polemarchos is Kephalos’ heir, both of his possessions and his ideas. But contrary to his father he is interested in philosophy. In response to Socrates, he rejects his father’s ideas. Polemarchos actively engages in the discussion that unfolds.

Plato also relied on images, but he used them to explain himself. He did so for didactic purposes. Plato did not object to the didactic use of images. By using images someone who has knowledge of the original can help those who lack this knowledge. It is not a problem to imitate ideas, as long as you have actively made them your own.

Plato does warn against stopping and remaining on the level of images, without going further up.

To gain insight in what a chair really is, you need to see the one Form, on which various physical chairs are based. This form is not made by humans.

Physical chairs are embodiments of the single Form. These embodiments are perceived with the senses. An artefact is created by imitating the original.

A drawing, shadow or mirror image is an imitation of a physical chair, which on its turn is an imitation of the Form. This means that a drawing is twice removed from the most real.

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Thinking for yourself

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Plato also relied on images, but he used them to explain himself. He did so for didactic purposes. Plato did not represent his view directly, but use the dialogue form. This form forces the reader to think for himself. Which of the characters do you follow?
What is justice?

During the dialogue at the house of Kephalos Socrates offers his view on justice. He divides the question what justice is in two parts. Justice is an attribute of (1) persons and (2) the city at large. Socrates proposes to investigate first what justice is in the city, and after that what justice is in a person. He draws an analogy between a person and the city: they have three similar parts.

Justice in a person is that each part of his psyche does only that what is appropriate to it.

Justice in the city is that each person does only that task that fits his psyche.

Plato = Socrates?

Is Socrates’ vision on justice also Plato’s vision? Experts disagree. Some say that Socrates is indeed the mouthpiece of Plato.

Others suggest that Plato has a different view of justice himself. For example that a philosopher must distance himself to gain insight, but must return in time to withstand injustice.
In the dialogue, the city develops in five stages. During this development, the traditional culture is transformed. The decay of the city also unfolds in five stages.

**The Beautiful City** is reached by transforming traditional Greek culture.

**In the Healthy City** there are only bare necessities. For this reason there are no poets.

**Growth of the City in 5 Stages**

- **Healthy City**
- **Luxurious City**
- **Military Guardians**
- **Complete Guardians**
- **Beautiful City**

**Decay of the City in 5 Stages**

1. Aristocracy
2. Timocracy
3. Oligarchy
4. Democracy
5. Tyranny

**First Wave:** Men and women hold the same positions.

**Second Wave:** Political control of reproduction.

**Third Wave:** Philosophers (who have eros / are passionate) rule the city.

Plato uses a traditional metaphor: to arrive at the beautiful city, Socrates must swim through three waves.

This image was also used, for example, in Homer’s poem *The Odyssey*.

The image of the three waves is transformed into three proposals to regulate the ‘Eros’ (sex and passion) of citizens. If this is the precondition for a just city, is this city then really ideal?
Decay of the city

At the house of Kephalos Socrates speaks with Glaucon en Adeimantus. They do not merely rely on what they have learned. They investigate for themselves how a city declines. Like the growth of city the decay of the city unfolds in 5 stages. According to Socrates each stage leads to the next. In his mind, democracy leads to tyranny.

- The city is ruled by the best educated citizens
  - Aristocracy

- The city is ruled by the military
  - Timocracy

- The city is ruled by the most wealthy citizens
  - Oligarchy

- The city is ruled by the people
  - A democracy leaves ample room for Eros (sex, desire, passion)
    - Positive is that this leads to a great diversity
      all citizens can follow their passion, including philosophers
    - Negative is that in the end democracy leads to tyranny
      because a demagogue emerges who seduces the people
  - Democracy

- The city is ruled by a tyrant
  - Negative is that the power of a tyrant has no limits
    his Eros is not bounded by laws or customs
  - Tyranny
The allegory of the cave

In the allegory of the cave, Plato plays with three oppositions. First, the opposition between the worlds inside the cave and outside the cave. Second, the opposition between imitations and original things. Third, the opposition between seeing and not-seeing. In order to see you need a light source. But if your eyes are not yet accustomed to the light it blinds you.

Three oppositions:

1. outside the cave
   - metaphysical world
2. inside the cave
   - sensory world
3. imitation → original
4. seeing → truth
5. not-seeing → untruth
6. outside the cave a natural light burns: the sun.
7. in the cave objects are carried along in front of the fire
8. who enters the cave is initially blinded by the darkness
9. who leaves the cave is initially blinded by the bright light of the sun
10. in the cave real objects and beings can be seen
   - they cast shadows on the ground
11. prisoners are bound
   - they can only look forward
   - they cannot see the fire and objects behind them, only the shadows on the wall
Before he offers the allegory of the cave, Socrates compares the good with the sun. Just as in the visible world you cannot see without the sun, the idea of goodness illuminates the intelligible.

**The analogy of the sun**

ideas are ‘seen’ with the ‘eye’ of the soul

just like you see objects with your eyes

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Socrates compares the human psyche with a line that is divided into four parts. Thinking at the top is most clear, thinking at the bottom least clear. Things at the top are most real, things at the bottom are illusions. Can you rediscover these four stages in the allegory of the cave?

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<tr>
<td>noesis</td>
<td>dianonia</td>
<td>pistis</td>
<td>eikasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of the Ideas or Forms</td>
<td>thinking about mathematical objects such as numbers and ratios</td>
<td>perception on the visible world itself</td>
<td>imagination that imitates the visible world</td>
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**The divided line**

- **clear thinking**
- **reality**
- **intelligible world outside the cave**
- **visible world inside the cave**

**DUALISM**