

Plato- The Republic

Plato was born in 427 B.C. After execution of his friend and teacher Socrates in 399 B.C, who drank hemlock and died Plato doesn't join politics. Strongly inspired by Socrates in 375 B.C Plato writes some conclusions about nature of ethics, knowledge, virtue, society, justice etc. in the Republic. The philosopher ruler is the Central theme of the Republic; it is the aim of its whole educational syllabus to produce him, and much that has already been said has dealt with him directly or by implication. So no state would be happy and successful unless philosophers became rulers, or rulers became philosophers. Plato leads us through the book with the dialogs between sophists and Socrates. Plato doesn't express his own view personally but he puts Socrates for the main narrator, and Socrates is the one who is developing his ideas of ideal state throughout different tales and theories. The main purpose of those stories is to prove that the ideal state can exist only under philosopher's rule and in division of the state into three main classes.

Here we come to a narrative which relates an old Phoenician lie or noble lie called the myth of metals. When gods created a world and people they mixed metals in the earth and in the people. Since we come from the earth, earth is people's mother and they want to protect it. They are all brothers and sisters because they all come from the same mother. But when gods created people they put different metals in their compositions. The ones who received gold are proposed to be rulers. Auxiliaries have silver in their body and the farmers, the craftsmen and all others have iron's and bronze's clauses. Because all people are consisting of the mixture of same basis there could be born a child with golden metal from the two parents with iron and bronze metals. Equally could be born a child with iron or bronze to the parents with gold. In both cases their parents will have to let their child to follow the direction proposed by the metal.

Socrates tells this simple lie to prevent people's jealousy. Socrates thinks that this story should be first told to the guardians and that to the third class. Probably it would take some generations to completely convince people about their nature. But there is an important point in this story. Socrates proposes that citizens should go through certain stages to become guardians. In the Ideal state the rulers are not decided by heredity but by the certain tests through which they have to go. So it means that on the end of the whole education procedure there is left only the best minority, which has managed to pass all the exams. But Socrates says that it has been already decided (noble lie) who will be a ruler, who auxiliary and all the rest. Gods have already decided man's destiny (by metal) but man by himself must prove which metal he carries. So people would reconcile to oneself to the fact that they carry better or worse metal. Because of understanding which metal they carry and their position, they wouldn't complain about their life style and wouldn't be jealous with each other. With knowing their positions they would live together without internal quarrels and there would be no danger of citizens' resistance against the state.

Plato doesn't tell us much about the iron and bronze class. He says that they should provide food and other needs for the guardians. They also don't have any right of governing and of course since rulers are chosen by certain tests, they don't vote. But instead of putting attention to the bronze class Socrates centralizes his ideas to the golden and silver class. Through the whole book he introduces main ideas about guardians their education, physical condition, living standards...

Furthermore the guardians should be told that they already carry the gold or silver metal, which is given by gods, and they shouldn't mix it with earth's gold and iron, because that could make them impure and weakened them. Socrates says: quote 417a "They alone, therefore, of all the citizens are forbidden to touch or handle silver or gold; they must not

come under same roof as them, nor wear them as ornaments, nor drink from vessels made of them. Upon this their safety and that of the state depends.” From that passage we can see what kind of life Socrates proposes for guardians. Guardians should have no own properties or stores. They should live pure life with discipline, living together. They should have no desires of any material goods. They should get everything that they need from the third class and their only purpose is care for the state. Socrates suggests that with this discipline the state would be prevented by being exploited by the guardians. He says as well that if the guardians possess own land they become farmers and workers and they don’t perform their duties as guardians and the state could be in danger of internal revolts.

Those who have golden or silver metal and who are mentioned to be rulers, they should go through certain stages of education to become the perfect rulers. Socrates says: quote 376e “To become a good guardian, a man must be by nature fast, strong, and a spirited philosopher.” So he is the first one who establishes the curriculum for the best rulers or auxiliaries. He suggests that everyone should be taught reading and writing, physical education, history of his land, poetry and literary. And furthermore studies of music, poetry, dialectic, arithmetic, astronomy, and military training. The perfect ruler has to have all of these qualities. Socrates also says that females have the same opportunities as males even though he thinks that females cannot reach such perfection as males can, as well from the biological aspect of view for e.g. in the war females can not fight as men can. When a student passes certain exams he could be promoted in a higher social class or demoted to lower social class.

For sure the myth of metal or noble lie has raised questions about Plato’s morality. He builds up his three classes’ theory under the cover of the myth of metal. Noble lie tries to convince people of their nature actually just on the base of one story which was made by some poets. But we can clearly see that Plato so Socrates wants with this story just to help ordinary people (citizen) to understand division of ideal society. I hardly believe that his idea about our human nature could convince people to understand better their position. I think that the positive side of Plato’s division is that everyone can demote or promote from one class to another. The theory from the myth of metals that a golden child could be born from the bronze’s parents shows that Plato doesn’t want the rulers who are offspring of the previous ones. So it means that Plato wants that rulers are chosen because of their knowledge and their physical abilities, not because of their parents. Even though his Ideal state is not democratic compare to our democracy, it at least chooses the best offspring to make sure that state will be successful. So Plato tries to establish powerful, successful country which is also just. So in his opinion his division of society is therefore good for the state and also consequently for its citizens. Plato shows a great tolerance of women especially at that time. With the myth of metal he says that we are all sisters and brothers coming from the same mother, from earth of the same mixture of metal. So he gives equal rights also to women and if women have gold in self they could be rulers as well. I think that even though the myth of metals is some kind of feint it’s in my opinion quite fair. The fact that everyone is equal at the beginning and then through the certain examination he/she becomes a perfect philosopher ruler is for me, fairer and better for the state, as the ruler who becomes the ruler because of his blood or family. From this aspect I find Plato’s society division positive.