

# Happiness in Plato's Theory of Philosopher- King

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**Abstract:** Plato in Theory of Philosopher-King believes that all of the members of ideal city-state, whether ruler or citizens, will attain happiness if the philosopher is the ruler. But there are paradoxes in the theory and the bases of the happiness are unstable too. In other words, Plato in his theory presents hierarchical dualities (Intelligible/Visible world, Episteme/ Doxa, True/ Untrue Or Shadow, ...) but is not bound to their necessities and tries to justify the (philosophical)theory by myth and allegory. Hence, happiness as an important and basic part of the theory has some problems and basically is not attainable.

**Keywords:** Plato, Happiness, Philosopher-King, Citizen

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## Introduction

Happiness has been a central concept in political thought from the classic ages. This concept that was propounded as a philosophical question from the beginning, followed arguments. Plato's answer as one of the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece is indispensable. But an important related point is the relation that he made between happiness and politics. Of course it is not strange that for Plato, like other ancient Greek philosophers, ethics, philosophy and politics are surely related; but the important point about Plato is the insertion of happiness in the theory of Philosopher- King.

In this essay, the researcher tries to describe relation between the ruler (philosopher- king) and the citizens along with describing the insertion. In other words, in the meantime it will be explained that Plato puts the happiness on the peak of mountain where philosopher has ascended and then he descended as a ruler to the citizens, then an attempt will be made to answer these following basic questions: How does the philosopher attain the happiness? And how can philosopher-king make the citizens happy?

Certainly, Plato has marked these relations but these relations along with questioning about ascent and descent will be attended more critically and pathologically. Finally, it will be clear that none of the philosopher and the citizens could attain happiness.

Since the theory of philosopher-king is on the bases of Plato's anthropology, ontology and epistemology, the questions and the essay's structure will be with reference to them. It is necessary to state that the arguments are just involved in Republic, especially Books 5, 6, 7.

## Bi-basical Anthropology

In the theory of philosopher-king, the happiness as a concept with a human aspect draws our attention to Plato's anthropology. Plato (1974) in Republic before describing his theory, when he speaks about forbidden to say stories with frightening gods, weak heroes, and panic death (387a-391a), actually says that he does not intend to characterize human completely as good or bad, but human is a being under influence of outer factors. Later, before he presents the outer factor, which will be looked at under the name of "education", he presents an important and stable section of his anthropological insight that is very different from the hidden possibility in former section- something that implies Plato's essentialist insight about human nature. Actually when Plato introduces human nature based on a myth ( ruler's nature is of gold, nature of guardians is of silver, nature of farmers and other workers is of iron and bronze) and thinks about loyalty of the citizens towards an especial class (415a-c), he divides humans in three

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hierarchical classes with especial natures. Here the criticism is that:

1) Plato's essentialism is based on a Phoenician tale; then it is non-philosophical argument;

2) How is it possible to bear a silver child of golden parents or a golden child of bronze parents.(415c)

But Plato's essentialism is more stable. In fact, when Plato goes after soul (psyche) and its parts, he completely hardens the foundation of his hierarchical essentialism.

Basically, Plato defines human by its soul. There he introduces a compound soul that is related to body and life. In book 4, we can see triple soul with different ends and separation of rational interest from mere desire.(439e) Plato defends theory of philosopher-king through division of soul. Practically the city has three classes (ruler, guardians, farmers and other workers) because the soul has three parts (reason, anger, appetite). (441a) these parts have been distinguished with their own particular pleasures: pleasure of the first part is knowledge, of the second is honor and power, and of the third is money and profit. (580d-581c)

Hence, the significant point is that although Plato distinguishes parts of soul or types of character( philosopher, ambitious, acquisitive),he connects them together because of their possessing of intelligent, and in an epistemological way, he rubs off keen edges of hierarchical essentialism – the keen edges which represent rough features of inferior slavery\_ superior mastery. In other words, Plato rejects the conception of education that was professed by sophists, those who said that they could put knowledge that was not there before into the mind. In return he believes "this is a capacity which is innate in each man's mind." (518b-c) Thus, he in a metaphysical manner considers common faculty in everybody and as Reeve (1988) thinks "Plato does not deny intelligence proportioned to each parts of soul and character"(p.288). Of course as it is referred to, these common characteristics in parts of soul does not deny unequal human nature and hierarchical essentialism in Plato's theory.

In addition to nature, the second factor involved in Plato's anthropology is education that contrary to the first is outer and inconstant. Plato in preparation of his theory in book 2 emphasizes on one point: knowing. He not only believes "the guardians are men with suitable natural aptitudes for

the defence of city"(374e), but also says, they should distinguish familiar and stranger, thus their soul must be educated. (374e-377e) Also, he believes that one who will be a ruler, must be educated, for instance by good literature and good music.(400d) When Plato speaks about education of guardians, holds "nor will be the guardians whom we are training, until they can recognize the qualities(eidos) of courage, generosity,...and others akin to them, as well as their opposites."(402c)

The important thing about education is the kinds of it. Plato in Republic implies two kinds: education with the meaning of training of techne (skill) or the physical education; and education with the meaning of knowing (the mental education).About the first meaning when Plato speaks about good judges, he finds them as those who have been trained by the skill of judgment.(408c-e) But for the second, different from the pertaining skill, he implies knowing and knowledge; The kind that is the essay's emphasis. Concerning good judges, Plato distinguishes them as those who have knowledge of justice and wickedness through discern in other people's soul. (409b) In this way, "brave is the one who holds fast the part of anger in his soul to the orders of reason about what he ought or ought not to fear, in spite of pleasure and pain".(442c) Therefore, the silver nature, when accompanied by knowing of courage, distinguishes the brave man; the man who belongs to the guardians. (429a-430a) And the iron or bronze nature when through the education, controls desires and appetites, is called self-discipline or as people use it "being master of oneself". (430e) Thus, Rowe's view is not true that "rational desire for good and knowledge of the good is in direct competition with irrational desires." (2001; p.122) Moreover, although education is a kind of knowledge and has role of knowing, we can say at the first place that it does not mean total knowledge, as for example knowledge of medical science is not knowledge of all sciences, but of particular subject. At the second place, when the education is accompanied with particular nature, with attention to knowledge, specifies a kind of human who is placed in an unequal relation to the two other kinds.

The point, here is that Plato's anthropology, to accompany education with nature, does not confirm human's happiness. If we want to follow this anthropological matter with looking at the nature or the happiness of each part of the soul, we can understand that happiness is not for an especial

part of soul or a particular nature. Plato in book 4 emphasizes that it is not true to divide one part from the other and make only it happy. Each one enjoys happiness on the condition that it does its own especial task.(435a) Thus, it is perceived that reason, related to domination of different desires on different parts of soul, helps it too, and concentrates on different things such as knowledge, honor and money; for example, the desires which dominate profit-seeking man[or iron nature] concentrate his reason on achievement to ends that are based on appetite.(553d) While desires that dominate the philosopher, concentrate on knowing the true.(581b) In this way, if in the soul that governs reason, dialectical thought and achievement of the Forms happens -it will be discussed later-but not in the other souls or natures, undoubtedly, a portion of reason is devoted to different natures or parts of soul proportional to their capacities. Of course, the kind and quality of happiness can be different but the happiness itself cannot be absent. Therefore, this accentration is understandable: "purpose is not to promote the particular happiness of a single class, but, of the whole community if possible."(420b)

Here, the problem of human's happiness does not come to an end but properly where Plato speaks about ruling of philosopher for the first time, the human's happiness enjoys epistemological and ontological features. He says:"ideal city can never grow into a reality till philosophers become kings ,or till those we call them kings and the rulers, really and truly, become philosophers, and thus political power and philosophy come into congregation."(473c-d) In other words, Plato, after putting forward this question that who should rule, directs his argument from the education to subject of knowledge(episteme) and through his own bi-basical ontology/epistemology, he tries to explain human's happiness; The subject will be approached critically and pathologically in this article.

### **Bi-basical ontology/epistemology**

The subject of happiness in Theory of philosopher-king is related to Plato's ontology/ epistemology when he introduces the ways in which somebody will be a ruler. Formerly, it was mentioned that Plato believes in different natures and necessity of enjoying nature of gold for the ruler. But he does not consider it enough and while he empha-

sizes on mental education of the philosopher, he thinks "to love the truth is the end of mental education." In fact, "the true philosophers are those who love to see the truth."(475e) Then, in an elitist manne, he believes that only a few men can do it, because just those whose soul is good can know virtue (arête).(409d,474a)

Plato shows the process of the elitist education through dividing the world in to the visible and the intelligible. Since the education of philosopher is directed towards the citizens and the city, it means towards the steps of education in the city, thus it belongs to visible world and the city. Philosophers pass through the steps of their own education, whether physical or mental, in the city. They, after training in music and literature as a preliminary education, learn mathematical disciplines- arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmonics. (521e-527e) these steps are clearly outlined in three allegories by Plato:

- 1) Allegory of the Cave: In prison of the cave, that is the same visible world, men, like us, who have been prisoners there, can only look straight ahead and see the shadows on the wall of the cave, since they have sat behind the entrance and their legs and necks are fastened. But when one of the prisoners [the same as Plato's philosopher in the future], is released from his bonds and turn round from the shadows, in fact he begins to educate in preliminary disciplines. In this way, he moves but steps ahead of the entrance, because he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of whose shadows he used to see. (514a-515e, 532b)
- 2) Allegory of the Sun: In this allegory, Plato shows that the man who possesses gold's nature, should not be satisfied with seeing the shadows like the others, but he should continuously try [by education] to succeed to see the true forms of things.(504c) Indeed, the result of that education for the man who possesses golden nature is the same as " seeing reflections of the sun' light in water and shadows of things (real things, and not mere images throwing shadows in the light of a fire derived from it compared with the sun)." (532c)
- 3) Allegory of the divided Line: In this allegory, visible world, in one of the sides of a allegorical line, is inclusive of images and shadows, and originals of these images. The soul's state in the former is "illusion" and in the later is

"belief" and generally is mentioned "opinion"(doxa). There is an important point here and it is "opinion being concerned with the world of becoming".(533e) The philosopher should go away from the unstable world to be ready for ruling. This step as the end of the education will follow accenting to intelligible world, that is, to the course of philosopher's happiness that will state in the second part of allegories.

In the second part of the allegory of the Cave, leaving the cave is the same as the ascent of the soul to intelligible world or world of "Form" and seeing Idea of "the good". The philosopher after attaining and seeing the form of "the good", will be assured that in both of the worlds, this is the origin of every beauty and good, producing in the visible world light, and being in the intelligible world itself controlling source of truth and intelligence.(517b-c)

In the second part of the allegory of the Sun, the philosopher attains the highest form of knowledge, that is, knowledge of the form of the good, from which things that are just derive their value. Here he achieves every knowledge and happiness, because he is not satisfied to have something that only appear to be good but requires something that really is. He, instead of many particular things that are good, reaches to goodness in-itself that is unique. Therefore, if in the first part of the allegory, the Sun was the image of the good, here knowledge is the form of the good, and if in the former, sun was identical with eyes in the visible world, in the later, it is identical with the good. (505a-d, 507b, 508c)

Also, the allegory of the divided Line shows that on the other side of the line, intelligible world is inclusive of visible world's originals of images and Ideas. The soul's state in the former is "reason"(knowing through understanding) and in the later is "pure thought"(episteme) and totally is mentioned "knowledge". There is an important point here and it is "the knowledge being concerned with the world of being and stability". (533e)

### **Happiness of Philosopher-King and Citizens:**

For Plato it is necessary that educational steps in the visible world (city) be passed and the intelligible world be perceived by the golden nature as

a condition of happiness; but it must be added that he mentions something above it, that is, returning to the cave or in one sense, the city.

Plato says: "much greater achievement might happen in a suitable society, where the philosopher could develop more fully, to his own happiness and that of the community."(497a) In other words, Plato believes that the philosopher ought to return to the city, because if he does not promote the citizens towards the happiness, his own happiness will not be perfect. Although, here, there is a question that if Plato believed to return to ruling as a condition for the happiness of philosopher, why would he present to see the Idea of the good as the highest things; but above all, there is another basic question: How can philosopher, the man who belongs to the visible and becoming realm, perceive the intelligible world as a condition of happiness?

Surely, Plato's answer is not beyond the theory of philosopher-king. In this theory, "dialectic" does as "steps in the ascent", that is to say, philosopher, after preliminary training, must learn dialectic method to know the truth. In this method, "the soul moves from hypothesis (assumption) to a first principle which involves no hypothesis, without the images used in the other sub-section, but pursuing its inquiry solely by and through forms, themselves."(510b) Considering this theory, abstract conceptions, like mathematics that enjoys them, help philosophy, but the theory never tell us how the philosopher that belongs to becoming realm, can perfectly perceive the first principle. In relation to this, even if we agree with Hanna Arendt that "the philosopher images the Idea or true substance through deliberation"(2006;147), again, there is a problem that "The good is absolute and pure and when descends to visible realm, must relate to somebody or something."(Sedley, 2007;276) Thus, it is clear that manhood of philosopher is involved in and the intelligible dips into the visible. This is why Plato never defines nature of the good and gets satisfied with allegories; for instance, in the allegory of the divided line," the line is only an image"(Smith,1998;p.307), that if we want to go on arguing on Plato's logic, because of belonging images to visible realm, it will not support "degree of intelligible world's reality". (Vlastos, 1996; p.219) In other words, images are imitations of truth and "merely produce a superficial likeness of any subject they treat."(600e) Consequently, we can say that not only Plato speaks to allegorical language which relates to illusion's sub-section,

and lays happiness on weak foundation, but also, philosopher as a human principally cannot attain happiness, and then ruling.

Of course, even if we accept that Plato's philosopher can see the good and attain the happiness, there is another question: why does he have to return? In relation to it, Brickhouse challenges the idea of philosopher's return to the city (polis) for ruling. In his view, "a paradox arises in the Republic where Plato lays down the requirement that philosophers must rule in the ideal city.

This is the reason that Plato promises supreme benefits to the just man. Yet he also apparently requires that the Philosophers, paradigmatically just men, at least partially sacrifice their own welfare in order to enhance the welfare of the polis. It would appear that the two positions, both of which are asserted with equal emphasis and both of which are of central importance to the Republic, are inconsistent."(1998;141)

Of course Brickhouse attempts to resolve the paradox. He believes "when Plato says that philosophers ought to return to the polis," ought to" means not "coercion" but "requirement" for happiness. Further, for Plato, in setting forth the principles which shape the ideal city, the primary concern must be with the maximized happiness of the city as a whole. Finally, because philosophers enjoy the greatest of the goods, psychic harmony, we must conclude that the philosophers are maximally happy even as they descend into the cave."(Op cit:150-151) In this way, Brickhouse attempts to resolve the paradox through making conditional philosopher's happiness upon ruling. He tries to show that philosophers are maximally happy while principally the paradox is formed in another way, that is, basically, why the philosopher ought to return to the world of shadows if he attains the happiness in the intelligible realm. If our answer like that of Brickhouse is that ruling is "requirement" of happiness, consequently, we are made happiness of the intelligible realm conditional and imperfect, that is, it depends upon shadow world's happiness. Also, if it is true that ruling is equivalent to the happiness that the philosopher attains through achieving the intelligible world, the foundation of the theory, that is, achieving in the highest happiness because of knowing the highest knowledge(the form of the good), will collapse.

Here, there may be readers like Vernezze who principally ignores paradox of the theory and relates happiness of the philosopher with participation in political affairs;(1998;p.167) but, consider-

ing the philosopher's "reluctance" to ruling (520e), not only there is a question that if "the turn towards the light is not the mere turning of the mind's eye but an action that encompasses the entire person-in-commonplace terms, both body and mind" (Huard,2007;p.25) , why shall the philosopher be reluctant; but also it is strengthened that the happiness related to knowing the good is higher than ruling and ruling for philosophers is not necessary. Therefore, the society's "demand" the philosopher for ruling (489b), only is a trick which Plato has used to justify ruling of philosophers. Hence, we could agree with Arendt that behind Plato's theory, there is an authority and force, and he tries to convince listeners through knowing and forcing of myth.(op cit.;p.144)

This reading may resolve the problem of the philosopher's "reluctance", but yet, and before it, main problem is "how do citizens understand the philosopher."In other meaning, considering "the society's "demand" the philosopher for ruling", what is criterion for recognizing the philosopher's happiness? Plato says, the criterion is not the philosopher's word because "it is not natural for the master to request the crew to be ruled by him...and you will not be far wrong if you compare the politicians who at present rule us to the sailors in our illustration."(489b-c)On the other hand, the citizens are unable to recognize the true ruler because of sophists being there: "there are some people who pretend to practice philosophy. "(489d) Too," philosophy is impossible among the common people and the common people disapprove philosophers."(494a) So, the crew of the ship cannot say who is the true captain to navigate the ship (488b). Surely, if the criterion was concrete such as "oldness" or to be a "warrior", the citizens would recognize the philosopher, but where it relates to the knowledge, obstacles will appear; Hence Plato cannot explain how the citizens recognize the philosopher who attains happiness.

Furthermore, this problem has already remained that if the happiness of the city is possible only through ruling of the philosopher (499b), how the philosopher-king will make them happy? In one sense, how might the philosopher-king is related to the citizens, the cave men who merely connect to shadows without seeing and understanding intelligible realm? Should he appeal to force and coercion to make them happy? An answer is that Plato's philosopher, after leaving the cave and seeing the Idea of the good, goes back and then, realizes the Idea through imitation and uses it as behavior

norms for their happiness. (Arendt, op cit.; pp.146-7) But if it was true, that is, the philosopher-king is related to the citizens through images, would not he decline to the cave man's place? Would not he also decrease purity of the form and basically, could he decline to that level? Undoubtedly, the truth that philosopher-king attains, could not remain virgin but "when this philosophical truth arrives in the public area, his nature will change to opinion. Here, a fundamental change appears which is changing not only an argument into another argument but also a way of the existence into another way." (Op cit.; 311) It is clear that the problem is not legitimacy of philosopher-king here, but it is an epistemological abstention for a relation between philosopher-king that has reached the forms and those who, because of their nature, will never reach. They not only are unequal to philosopher-king naturally, but also are different from him practically; In fact, they have different kind of living and language which is particularly their own life style. Therefore, they neither perceive philosopher-king's words nor agree with him. In Plato's thought, natural inequality of human presents the citizen's imperfection and need on one side, and philosopher's knowledge on the other side; Then, because of the citizen's imperfection in knowing, those who cannot go out of the cave even by educating, will not attain philosopher's word and so the happiness.

## Conclusion

Despite believing in nature and reason, if Plato was satisfied with relative reason and knowing and finally the happiness for different natures (book 4), he would present more accessible happiness; but because of intertwining the education, the forms, the happiness, knowing the truth of existence, and ignoring human's imperfection, presents paradoxes and neglects issues which are justifiable merely by the allegories and the myth. Plato attempts to govern philosophy in the city; Hence he relates happiness to the knowledge of the good, a point that has made unattainable happiness.

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