

Ideas for Plato's Books IV, V, VII, and X

Book IV

You might want to draw attention to some of Plato's characterizations and have students comment on them. .

"We may say that the mass of diverse appetites, pleasures, and pains is to be found chiefly among children, women, slaves, and the many so-called freemen from the lower classes. But the simple and temperate desires governed by reason, good sense, and true opinion are to be found only in the few, those who are the best born and the best educated" (431).

"The love of learning, which is a particular characteristic of our society, also originates with individuals. So does the love of money in Egypt and Phoenicia" (436).

According to Plato, music and poetry are where "license and lawlessness infiltrate most easily." He further makes the point that "unobtrusively it spreads into all forms of manners and behaviors" (424, p.121). I immediately thought of rock and rap music. What do students think about Plato's assertion?

Plato also bemoans the loss of certain values and traditions in Greek society such as the "young observing a respectful silence in the presence of their elders; rising when older persons enter and making place for them; honoring their parents; comeliness in dress and deportment" (425, p.121). Are these traditions or values important to us? Do or should they matter?

React to the statement below, indicating why you think it should or should not apply to our society.

"My rulers serve for nothing but board and lodging with no additional pay. They can't travel abroad or give presents to pretty girls or spend money on any of those things that other people, who assume they are having a good time, take for granted" (420, p. 116).

How does Plato finally define justice? How does he view the concept of external justice in relation to the individual?

"The reality is that justice is not a matter of external behavior but the way a man privately and truly governs his [or her] inner self. The just man does not permit the various parts of his soul to interfere with one another or usurp each other's function. ... He is his own master and his own law. He has become a friend to himself. He will have brought into turn the three parts of his soul: high, middle, and low, like the three major notes of a musical scale, and all the intervals between" (443, p. 137).

SOUL		CITY		
High (reason)		Ruling class (guardians)		
Middle (spirit, courage, anger)	Artisans	Cobblers	Farmers	
Low (bodily appetite)	Merchants	Army	Carpenters	
INNER ORDER		EXTERNAL ORDER		

Book V

Plato argues that there is a difference between knowledge and opinion and claims that philosophers can gain knowledge where most only have opinions. Are you convinced? Why or why not?

Book VII

The; “Allegory of the Cave” is referred to by Plato as an eikon ‘likeness’, which is in the form of an allegory describing and commenting upon the human condition, its defects and potentialities. Explain what each of the following elements in the story of the prisoners in the cave represent in Platonic philosophy: prison, prisoners, shadows on wall, the escaped prisoner, the outside world and the Sun, ascent from cave to upper world (517, p. 211).

Why is it worthwhile to achieve knowledge of the good (517, pp.211-212)?

Why are those who have gained this knowledge reluctant to become involved in the affairs of men?

What is the basic difference between justice in the real world and justice itself (the essential form of justice) (517)?

In Plato’s view what is education (518)

Why do some men of intelligence not achieve wisdom (519)? What special responsibility do men of wisdom have (520)?

What is the only condition in which ideal government can exist (520)?

To what degree do you believe your college experience has turned your head toward the light and even taken you out of the cave?

Do you concur with Plato that those who have seen the light have an obligation to return back to the cave?

Book X

Why and how are the poets (such as Homer) criticized in the Republic? Is there such a thing as acceptable poetry? Explain.

Explain how, in Plato's view, intellectual and moral growth are inseparable.

Did Plato mean for us to interpret the "Myth of Er" literally, which would assert the fact of reincarnation or did he intend for us to interpret it figuratively?

Who is Er? In what ways are the just and the unjust rewarded and punished (614-615)?

For whom is an afterlife of punishment permanent (615)? Why?

After a period of reward or punishment, what must the souls then do (617-618)? (What must the souls do before entering a new life (621)?

What is the main lesson that the "Myth of Er" teaches us (620)?