

Plato - The Republic Hilliker

Books I and II (25-81): As far as I know, there is no magic formula for teaching this text - it is complex, scathingly brilliant (both intellectually and rhetorically) and problematic - it is one of the principal sources of Western philosophy, and is as topical in the early 21st century as when it was written! For my purposes, it is important to, at least in some small measure, comprehend Plato's arguments; to do so the text must be followed closely, in some cases line by line. For historical context, I refer you to Gary's outline in the course guide; for a structural guide to the Platonic system, see Bruce Foltz's notes in same. Note that subjects in Plato justice, virtue, education, the nature of knowledge, the gods, the polis, literature, the soul- repeat in a spiral-like and interconnected fashion throughout the text.

For day one I'll have 10 questions or so for the first 2 books, 1 pair of students per, but the following will have to be pared down:

- Book I: 1. Describe the situation in which Socrates and the others find themselves - (dialogic, conversational nature of the text and a basic understanding of dialectic, thesis-antithesis-synthesis; you might also refer to the notions of hospitality and the wisdom of elders as seen in Homer); -why does S. engage Cephalus? (26d-e) -what does he ask C. about money? (27c-b) - what is the value of wealth for C? (28b) and what essential question does this provide a segue for?
2. Why, for S., are telling the truth and repaying one's debts not an adequate definition of justice (what is his anecdote)? (28-29); - what definition does Polemarchus end up with? (31b-c, bottom); what is the response of S? (32e); How does S. refute the general definition? (33e)
3. Who now enters the debate? (34e-b) - what is his attitude toward S?--what is his definition of justice? (35c) -how does S. characterize T.'s argument? (37e)
4. Explain S.'s analogy with professions (39-40) - to what conclusion does it lead him? (40e-b); - T. rants against S. (40-42) -what is his concluding argument? (42-c) (42c through 42e resumes and summarizes the preceding)
5. Plato digresses, or seems to, on government - what type of people should serve? (44b); back to T's argument - how is it refined? (46-349); S goes back to the professions - can you reconstruct the argument? - to what conclusion does S. lead T. against the latter's will? (48c-d)
6. S. segues into a discussion of power and justice in the city - what does S. argue about injustice in groups? (50-352); how does S. use function in his argument? - to what, seemingly inevitable conclusion does S. lead T? (52-354) - what does S. conclude from all this argumentation?

Book II (more straightforward): 7. What kind of good is justice? (53-358); what 3 points of T.'s argument does Glaucon take up? - Summarize G.'s argument while referring to his notion of lawmaking (54-55); what point does G. make with the 'Ring of Gyges' story? (55-56); in his portrait of the unjust man, what condition does G. insist on? (57b-c)

8. Adeimantus steps in and ups the ante (58d) - what is the benefit of having a reputation for justice? (this continues the theme of 'seeming to be' that P. began in I; also will later connect with Machiavelli) - what is A.'s attitude toward the poets, toward the gods? (59-61); what is the essence of A.'s question? (62e-b; A.'s plea here is the heart of liberal arts education -what is the point of this if it doesn't bring reputation or fortune? - how do I justice and injustice do their work within the human soul, out of the sight of both gods and men'?)

9. What is S's reaction to A.'s plea? (63-368); why does S. move the discussion to the city? (64e-b); what are the elements that begin the city? -how does S. divide labor? (65b); once the city is complete (67e) what question does S. ask? - in what sort of city (v. 'a city of pigs) is one more likely to discover the roots of justice and injustice? -what other elements are added?

10. What is the nature of the guardians? (70e; what sort of stories does S. wish to have? (73b), what solution does he suggest? (73c), why? -why should the gods not be depicted as evil? (75) - what is the nature of god/the gods?(77- 79) - what is a 'true lie? (79b)

Questions students should be able to answer post Platonic-encounter:

1. What is the form or genre of the text? Define 'dialectic'
2. What is the central subject of Book I? What are the two main definitions brought forth? Can you summarize the arguments and counter-arguments for each?
3. What is the essence of the plea made by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II? How does S. broaden the discussion?
4. Why does S. choose a city to continue his quest for the nature of justice? - what are the elements of the city? -who are the guardians and what is their nature?
5. What is S's argument for censorship? (good debate topic here; right up to date)