

Makale Geliş Tarihi | Received: 20.06.2023  
Makale Kabul Tarihi | Accepted: 24.08.2023

E-ISSN: 2148-9327  
http://dergipark.org.tr/kilikya  
Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

## THE LAST CONDITION OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC: THE PHILOSOPHER-KING

Özlem ÜNLÜ\*

**Abstract:** In Plato's dialogue of the *Republic*, politics is a concept questioned in the context of one of the most ancient problems of philosophy, that is, the relationship between theory and practice, and formulated as a paradox. Plato finds a solution to the paradox by establishing the city-state proximate to his theory and to put forward three conditions. The last of those conditions, as Plato calls it the greatest wave of paradox in his own terms, that the rulers must be philosopher-kings, contains many clues about Plato's conception of politics. The aim of this study is to examine the implications of the philosopher-king condition in Plato's political philosophy. To this end, first, it is demonstrated that the political meaning of the philosopher's exit from the cave on the way to becoming ruler is apolitical. Secondly, it will be shown how the political activity of the philosopher, contrary to the nature of politics and in a way that excludes others, is reduced to both ascetic and cognitive activity.

**Keywords:** Plato, Republic, Philosopher-King, Paradox, Justice

## PLATON'UN DEVLETİNİN SON KOŞULU: FİLOZOF-KRAL

**Öz:** Platon'un *Devlet* diyalogunda politika, felsefenin en kadim sorunlarından biri olan teori-pratik arasındaki uyum bağlamında sorgulandığı ve paradoks olarak formüle edildiği bir kavramdır. Platon bu paradoksun çözümünü kuramına en yakın şehir devletini kurmakta bulmuş ve bunun için üç koşul ortaya koymuştur. Bu koşullardan sonuncusu, Platon'un kendi deyişiyle paradoksun en büyük dalgası dediği, yöneticilerin filozof kral olması, Platon'un politika anlayışına dair pek çok ipucu barındırır. Bu çalışmanın amacı filozof-kral koşulunun Platon'un politik felsefesindeki imalarını incelemektir. Bu amaçla ilk olarak filozofun yönetici olma yolunda mağaradan çıkışının politik anlamının apolitik sonuçlandığı üzerinde durulacak ve politikanın doğasına aykırı, diğerlerini dışlayacak şekilde filozofun politik faaliyetinin nasıl hem münzevi hem de bilişsel bir faaliyete indirgendiği gösterilecektir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Platon, Devlet, Filozof-Kral, Paradoks, Adalet

---

\* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi | Asst. Prof.

Selçuk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Felsefe Bölümü, Türkiye | Selçuk University, Faculty of Letters, Philosophy Department, Türkiye.

[ozlmunlu@gmail.com](mailto:ozlmunlu@gmail.com)

Orcid Id: ORCID: 0000-0001-5260-5499

Ünlü, Ö. (2023). The Last Condition of Plato's Republic: The Philosopher-King. *Kilikya Felsefe Dergisi*, (2), 106-118.

## 1. Introduction

In the *Republic*, one can see how Plato, especially after Socrates's moral definition of justice in Book I and Book II, seek justice for all by epistemologically organizing *polis* as a political unity. Plato's attempt to turn a moral question with Socratic legacy into a political one by treating it metaphysically gives rise to the ideal facet of the city-state. Among the wide range of topics, the utopian character of the *Republic* is revealed in three political proposals for a just city by Plato as three 'waves'. Firstly, like men, women become involved in the guardianship (Plato, 1937, 5.449)<sup>1</sup>. Secondly there is a community of women and children among the guardians, which means the abolishment of family (Plato, 1937, 5.469). Lastly "philosophers become kings", a proposal which Plato himself calls "the greatest wave of paradox" (Plato, 1937, 5.506-7). Apart from the first two waves whose possibilities are explored by appealing to their correspondence to nature, the possibility of realization of the third is manifested firstly by prescribing the philosophical way of life to political leadership and secondly by securing the voluntary consent of people for the philosopher king.<sup>2</sup>

Plato demonstrates the possibility of the first wave by dialectic that there is no difference between the nature of man and woman in quality, but only in quantity regarding their *technē*. The possibility of the second wave is partly allowed by appealing to the necessity of love. As for the third wave, the last condition of the ideal *polis*, Plato's inquiry regarding the nature of justice and its relation to philosophy comes into focus through especially the Book V, VI and VII. This study in this context attempts to grasp the significance of the last wave, namely, the philosopher's necessary ascent to governance as Plato formulates in *Republic*. Such an insight will shed some light to the possible deficiencies of his comprehensive political philosophy pertaining to the attainment of the ideal city. I deal with Plato's two attempts, as specified above, to show the possibility of the third wave.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I have modelled the reference to the *Republic* as book and page number such as 5.509 due to the fact that The Loeb Classical Library translation has margin only original Greek part of the dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> Before beginning I must clarify that I really appreciate Plato's description of the certain lifestyle, the philosophical way of life which impose on us certain norm and lead us to transform our being. However, I must delay the assertion of this bold claim to another paper. Here is the only philosopher's role in politics with which I have dealt.

<sup>3</sup> While writing this paper I have consulted Plato's *Republic* only among other dialogues that cover the relation of justice to philosophy, taking into consideration Nussbaum's suggestion that In Plato's texts, "two major problems confront us: development and dialogue. Plato is a courageously self-critical philosopher; he not only revises previous positions, he even subjects them to criticism within his dialogues themselves. This means that it can be dangerous to make a synthesis of positions from different works; and yet often, clearly, it can also be fruitful, even necessary" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 87). In this respect, misinterpretations due to the overlooking of the development or possible stages of Plato's philosophy, not due to my own misreading or inadequate evaluation of his very text at hand, which infinitely remains a possibility despite all my effort to be coherent.

## 2. Happiness, the Soul, and the City

W. K. C. Guthrie claims that the Greek title of Plato's work has been misleadingly translated from Latin *Res publica* into English as *Republic*. "The State or On Justice" would be correct translation. "On the Just Man", argues Guthrie, would be modern transposition of Plato's masterpiece (Guthrie, 1975, p. 434). Plato's designation of being just is important to understand Plato's attitude toward where one should begin to investigate true nature of justice. The first clue to the notion of justice is given in the Book I, when Socrates asked Polemarcus for "the art that renders what to whom would be denominated justice" (Plato, 1937, 1.25). As seen, justice (*dikaiosynē*) is first thought together with the term *technē* among which Plato speaks of a list of profession, such as physician and pilot.<sup>4</sup> Then, Plato puts 'being just' (*dikaios*) as the adjective form in a broader and abstract context that covers all profession which should be thoroughly performed. Therefore, in connection with *technē*, and accordingly *ergon*, the notion of justice turns out to be being just in one's *personal* dealings with others as a specific virtue of man. (Plato, 1937, 1.35). In other words, one's genuine concern about both how to live and how to live with others. This is Plato's twofold conception of justice in which one's happiness is secured by the same one's character excellences.

For which purpose does Plato propose his fancy of the philosopher-king? Plato's respond is clear: "there is no other way of happiness either for private or public life" (Plato, 1937, 5.509) if philosophers eventually do not become rulers over the city. Then, what is happiness in Plato's political philosophy? Happiness is to the soul in private life, what it to the city in public life; a kind of perfect harmony between three parts in the soul and three classes of people in the city regarding their works proper to each person. Plato again approaches happiness by appealing to twofold synthesis. So, one is to be both happy and just as they never exclude each other. That is the art of living which Plato investigates into what way of life we should choose to make life worth of living.<sup>5</sup>

At this point, it is important to know what Plato refers to by the term soul whose *arête* is justice and whose defect injustice (Plato, 1937, 1.105). The Greek concept *phusis* refers to "the beginning, the development and the result of the process by which a thing constitutes itself" (Hadot, 2002, p.10). Platonic conception of *phusis* has been transformed into 'nature-process', a process the cause of which is itself and moved by itself, that is, the soul. Thus, Plato searches any kind of excellence of the soul with respect to nature. His inquiry of justice evolves into the nature of the soul. That is why Plato tries to define justice as the essential activity of the soul and why we, humankind, naturally seek justice. However, some souls naturally seek more justice than some others who are governed by unnecessary appetites rather than reason. Unnecessary desires mean the excess of necessary desires. The varieties of food do harm to both body and soul and in this respect, they pose "an obstacle to the soul's attainment of intelligence and sobriety"

---

<sup>4</sup> Platonic use of the concept *dikaiosynē* is not uncontroversial. For a quite detailed examination of the concept, see Murteza, 2013: 181-195.

<sup>5</sup> This is the argument of Book 1 that I express succinctly.

since it spoils the reasoning or intellectual function. One so needs to orchestrate her soul in such a way that one could free oneself from them by discipline and in this way save oneself from “inner faction and lack of self-agreement” (Plato, 1937, 1.99). As one of the four descriptions of the soul, corresponding to government types, democracy works under directions of unlimited freedom, namely, unnecessary desires.

Plato divides appetites into three classes: necessary, unnecessary, and lawless desires. The first one is the “desires that we cannot divert or suppress” and “whose satisfaction is beneficial to us” such as eating and drinking (Plato, 1942, 8.293);<sup>6</sup> profitable appetites since they have a tendency for production. The last two appetitive parts must be tempered, but not absolutely denied—this would be dangerous oligarchic attitude toward unnecessary desires (Plato, 1942, 9.341)—by means of the reasoning part of the soul (*logistikon*) whenever they arise. So, one’s capability of keeping appetites within the boundary of reason refers to a way of life in which the soul is subject itself to transformation. Hence it moderately rejects absolute bodily life and welcomes rather spiritual life where there remains no internal conflict within the soul (Plato, 1942, 8.297). Plato constantly seeks a unity in character which is a lack of oligarchic soul. One who has oligarchic soul “would not be really one, but in some sort a double man” (Plato, 1942, 8.277).

It is important to notice that Plato frequently makes use of the similarity between the individual and the city just as private and public as mentioned above. For Plato, both democratic and oligarchic soul are deficient just as democratic and oligarchic city. Like individual self-deficiency, cities could also be self-deficient. At this point, it might be fruitful to examine Martha Nussbaum’s point that the lack of self-sufficiency both in state and individual points at the unsafe conditions in which ethical principles of the state or individual can be damaged. This is the very point we see Cephalus’ thought about value when he speaks of his salvation from carnal drives at the beginning of the Book I. Cephalus finds himself safe with his attitude towards sexual desires. In this regard, he represents a self-sufficient character in considerable degree.<sup>7</sup>

Self-deficiency for both individual and city is dangerous for Plato. For this reason, he detects the chronic shortage which the present city has suffered from and prescribes the philosopher-kings for the remedy. So, what kind of people are philosophers? To ask in a more Platonic way, what is “the nature that they [philosophers] must have from birth” (Plato, 1942, 6.7)? Here the key concept that we must take into consideration is

---

<sup>6</sup> In the detailed chapter on the meaning of goodness and happiness in Plato’s moral philosophy, especially with reference to the *Republic*, Nussbaum points at what could be termed as one of the blind spots of Plato’s formulations regarding appetitive element of soul as excessiveness of basic needs. His denial of the worldly pleasures can possibly lead, says Nussbaum, to a kind of asceticism for philosopher and Plato “seriously underestimates the complexity of our appetitive nature” (Nussbaum, 2001, p.153).

<sup>7</sup> We can see three important figures - by no means arbitrarily chosen by Plato - at the beginning scene of the *Republic*; firstly, it takes place in Peiraeus, an Athenian city of trade centre, secondly “the inheritor of argument” and money, Polemarchus killed by oligarchs due to Cephalus, his father fortune, and lastly Socrates who was put to death by Athenian democracy (Nusbaum, 2001, p.136-37).

philosophical nature apart from education which makes philosopher involve in politics *par excellence*. Before anything else, it is one's nature which makes her participate in politics. It is just like as everyone gets one's own share of happiness in proportion to one's nature; "each class is to be left to share of happiness that its nature comports" in a well-ordered city (Plato, 1937, 4.321). The philosophers, then, become the happiest class of the city in accordance with their way of living. Plato levels the philosophers' way of life against those who keep constantly themselves busy with carnal drives. Their true vision regarding things brings about true pleasures, namely, necessary pleasures. It must be necessary pleasures since Plato remains silent as to whether there are some other types of pleasure apart from three kinds. This means that philosopher lives at minimum in terms of bodily pleasures. This leads Plato to claim that philosopher is the one who is capable of canalizing herself into truth which is beyond what is happening between birth and death and "the many particulars" (Plato, 1942, 6.29).

### 3. Platonic Formula for the Greatest Possible Happiness: Politics as a Necessary Evil

After Plato's account of philosopher's nature, there arises a series of questions: what makes philosophers so political that they become rulers? Why then should the city be under the governance of the philosopher-kings? What is exactly philosophical beyond the domain of experience, which is the very concern of the existing politics, indeed? Hannah Arendt criticizes Plato for attributing "enormous superiority of contemplation over activity of any kind". Not that this assigned superiority finds its origin in Christianity but in Plato's political philosophy "where the whole utopian reorganization of *polis* life is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher but has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher's way of life" (Arendt, 1998, p. 14). In the hierarchical ranking of human activities, claims Arendt, what in fact Plato's proposal was, was a substitution of action for a model of politics which pursues the philo-contemplative way of life.

In the light of the conception of self-deficiency, a further examination necessitates to clarify "the philosophic *apolitia*", an *apolitia* which, says Arendt, remains indifferent to the affairs of the omnipresent society due to Plato's very account of distinctive nature of philosopher and preserves him from falling into ongoing human affairs (Arendt, 1998, p. 15). With the contribution of Thrasymachus who asserts that "the just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" (Plato, 1937, 1.47)—the stronger later turns out to be the ruling class who are responsible for dispensing justice—Socrates finally starts arguing what justice means "externally", namely, in public terms (Plato, 1937, 4.413). Before that, Socrates has already offered Glaucon to investigate into the nature of justice in the city and to delay temporarily it in the individual soul on the ground that it would be easy to see justice in the greater volume (Plato, 1937, 2.149).

Socrates asserts that we must know the *raison d'être* of *polis* if we want to know from where justice and injustice arise; the origin of *polis* lies "in the fact that we do not severally suffice for our own needs, but each of us lack many things" (Plato, 1937, 2.149). So, human beings, lack of self-sufficiency, need to one another; in other words, one

requires other's use value which implies the division of labour. This leads Plato to claim that in a just city one performs only a single task "according to his nature" (Plato, 1937, 2.153). Justice as the most necessary virtue out of which all other three virtues, wisdom, courage, and soberness grow is "the principle of everyone"; doing one's own task (Plato, 1937, 4.369-71). This account converts division of labour - let's say division of work of *technē*—into natural division of labour which will turn out to be "a universal requirement" of justice in the Book IV (Plato, 1937, 4.367). It is impossible to establish "the greatest possible happiness of the city as a whole" without this requirement (Plato, 1937, 4.317). Plato, on this very account, grants his rejection of the present political way of life and defines a new one as philosophical by nature which has nothing to do with politics except the natural division of labour.

As for the art of ruling, it is in the need of the virtue by means of which the rulers as the performers of the ruling art, must consider the advantage of the ruled just like physician who considers the well-being of the body. This is the very reason why the genuine rulers who are supposed to guard the interest of the ruled would not compete to rule; on the contrary, they would compete not to rule, indeed. Candidates for ruling should agree to rule by force or by compulsion, and if they refuse, "the chief penalty is to be governed by someone worse" (Plato, 1937, 1.81). It is interesting that for Plato the motivation for entering politics cannot be care for others; a humanly concern that a candidate can feel for her fellow citizen whose troubles or interest is to be considered as the common. In opposition with this, Plato proceeds even further that "every man of understanding would rather choose to be benefitted by another than to be bothered with benefitting him" (Plato, 1937, 1.83). What Plato makes is to reduce the motivation of political performance—the mere motivation indeed—to perceiving it as an evil threat. In fact, he equates politics, or, as he puts it, 'holding office and ruling' with "a necessary evil" (Plato, 1937, 1.81).

It seems that transformation of the uneducated soul into philosophical one entails the attainment of a point where the soul categorically refuses to be ruler unless the leadership regards it as "an unavoidable necessity" (Plato, 1942, 7.145). On the one hand, there is a life devoted to political matters and on the other, the life of the philosopher, devoted to contemplating, which is eternal, everlasting, unchanging and unchangeable. This explains why Plato asserts that "if you can discover better way of life than office holding for your future rulers, a well governed city becomes a possibility" (Plato, 1942, 7.145). If politics for philosopher means only an additional work, how can an apolitical politics possibly manage different types of human affairs in the city? Can only natural division of labour enable it? At this point, we may look at what will happen when the philosopher is being so discouraged by "the multitude";

he would be as a man who has fallen among wild beast, unwilling to share against the savagery of all, and that he would thus, before he could in any way benefit his friends or the state come to an ultimately end without doing any good to himself or others.—for all these reasons I say the philosopher remains quiet, minds his own affair...(Plato, 1942, 6.53-5)

The affairs of the multitude lead philosopher to live rather ascetic way of life unless she finds a city where her nature corresponds her way of life.<sup>8</sup> Plato further asserts that this claim of being apolitical is also valid not only for the multitude but also for "a city of good men" (Plato, 1937, 1.81):

the true lawgiver does not work at all except when it comes to religious matters since they work for either an ill-governed or a well-governed city. In the first case there could not be any solution to order the bad city well and as for the second case such a city does not need any lawgiver. (Plato, 1937, 4.343)

Another problematic could be formulated in the following way: how could it be possible, then, that a grudging ruler performs her virtue rightfully just as the virtues of all other professions that Plato constantly exemplifies with his anecdotes to justify his ideal ruler? Could a physician be both good and reluctant? So, according to Plato if a good ruler is a reluctant one, would she consider the advantage of the ruled willingly or unwilling?

#### 4. Caught In-Between or Popular Juggernaut

Although the education of philosopher is impossible unless she has certain character excellences (Plato, 1942, 6.81), Plato opens the Book VII by saying that "compare out nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this" (Plato, 1942, 7.119). Here he refers to dialectics as education since at the end of the Book VI he speaks of dialectics as lifelong process which enables one to contemplate what is intelligible. In relation with what Plato terms as the intelligible, the *Republic* will become far more elaborate on the conception of justice by introducing the idea of good. In every dialogue of Plato, the ideas "are first and foremost moral values" (Hadot, 2002, p.75).<sup>9</sup> Plato's postulation of the good directly concerns moral qualities both in the states and individuals. Unsurprisingly, true philosophers only are able to gain this long true epistemological experience of the ideas; "except in the case of transcendent natural gifts no one could become a good man unless from childhood his play and all his pursuits were concerned with things fair and good" (Plato, 1942, 8.290-1).

Plato's emphasis on true philosophical manner addresses a farewell to the Doppelgänger. Throughout the *Republic*, Plato is obsessed with "pretenders to that way of life" and "imitators", that is, untrue philosophers instead of which I use the term Doppelgänger, a ghostly double of a living person, especially one that haunts such a person (Plato, 1942, 6.27). They experience somehow a bad education and learn how to manipulate their art of speech. Dialectician's sagacity accesses to true essence of being that rhetorician's chatter cannot. In parallel with this, Arendt asserts that "every

---

<sup>8</sup> There is a general agreement among scholars that it was Socrates' death which makes Plato bring up philosophers as rulers and resent so-called Athenian Democracy, its court and assembly. Guthrie is inclined to even oppose that Plato wrote any dialogue before Socrates' death (Guthrie, 1975, p.56). Hadot also states that "Plato's initial intentions were political" (Hadot, 2002, p. 58); he wanted to live a life devoted to politics until the death of Socrates.

politician was called a 'rhetor' and that rhetoric, the art of public speaking, as distinguished from dialectic, the art of philosophic speech" (Arendt, 1998, p.26). This explains why Plato seems so irritated at their political manner.

Plato speaks of "the vision of the little soul" not the little vision of the soul (Plato, 1942, 7.137). Not every soul is capable of seeing the truth; "blind souls" are those who are "entering upon a way of life which is too high for them and exceed their powers" (Plato, 1942, 6.31). Therefore, the present guardians do not follow the laws "since they have not been educated by persuasion but by force because of their neglect of true Muse, the companion of discussion and philosophy" (Plato, 1942, 8.253). Plato explains the sophistic behaviour of Diomedes as a necessity of which one acts under compulsion, a compulsion which loudly demands what the multitude pleases from the present guardians. Sophists need to keep their finger on the pulse of their voters, namely, the multitude (Plato, 1942, 6.39). Such a political manner that the present guardians hold is responsible for the corruption of philosophy in the eyes of people and thus for losing their trust to it. Plato suggests Adeimantus blaming those who pretend to be philosophers but in fact never be so because of their manipulation of dialectics, for the corruption of philosophy in the eyes of the multitude:

do not thus absolutely condemn the multitude. They will surely be of another mind if in no spirit of contention but soothingly and endeavoring to do away with the dispraise of learning you point out to then whom you mean by philosophers, and define as we recently did their nature and their pursuit so that the people may not suppose you to mean those of whom they are thinking. Or even if they do look at them in that way, are you still going to deny that they will change their opinion and answer differently? (Plato, 1942, 6.67)

In this passage Plato speaks as if there were the people who were ready for accepting what true philosophers say as laws if they are truly explained what the essence of things is. Then, what does Plato consider as the people? The clearest determination of it, I hold, is this since it reflects the bold contrast between the rulers and the ruled; "the multitude believes pleasure to be good, and the finer spirits intelligence or knowledge" (Plato, 1942, 6.89). The people need to be informed by the philosophers. Their task is "to practice stamping on the plastic matter of human nature in public and private the patterns that he visions there and not merely to mould and fashion himself"<sup>10</sup> so that ordinary people would be equipped with "all forms of ordinary civic virtue" (Plato, 1942, 6.71).

Philosophers are not "ordinary reformers", who take individual and state as they are, but revolutionists who take them as *tabula rasa* in which they mould their personality with reference to "justice, beauty, sobriety and the like as they are in the nature of themselves" (Plato, 1942, 6.73). They work on the *tabula rasa* until it turns into a "fairest painting" that suddenly strikes the people (Plato, 1942, 6.73). Plato is sure that they will

---

<sup>10</sup> Grube's translation of this important passage seems to be clearer; "to put what he sees there into people's character, whether into a single person or into a populace, instead of shaping only his own" (Plato, 1992, 500d-e).



be convinced and reluctantly comply with what they see in the painting. For the realization of the ideal city, the only way is to secure peoples' persuasion and consent (Plato, 1942, 6.77). Here Plato supposes a common sense according to which laws and institutions of the city is to be founded. Here the problem is: how can Plato plausibly expect the present illiterate people to agree on what philosopher solitarily gains from the idea of the good from which all political principle inferred unilaterally? Even Plato himself asks the same question: "Can the multitude possibly tolerate or believe in the reality of the beautiful in itself as opposed to the multiplicity of beautiful things?" (Plato, 1942, 6.43).

## 5. The Philosopher-King as A Cure for Platonic Anxiety About Governmental Change

Plato claims that philosophers by their very nature belong to the political leadership whose function is to find higher and purer principles than those who rule present city, by appealing to the ideas (Plato, 1937, 5.511). The parable of the Cave, as told in the *Republic*, is the very centre of Plato's political philosophy. The ideas of beautiful, good and justice as political guidance are philosopher's intellectual sustenance when involved in legislation. While legislating, the true ruler must completely turn to the world of being from that of becoming (Plato, 1942, 7.135). "The leader of the choir" for philosopher is "truth", "true being", not "many particulars" (Plato, 1942, 6.27). This is a trip<sup>11</sup> ascending and descending through which the philosopher ruler is to apprehend especially the idea of good ranked as the highest, even higher than justice.<sup>12</sup> "This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known" (Plato, 1942, 7.103-5).

Timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, tyranny, all types of governments are subject to transformation by nature "since for everything that has come into being destruction is appointed" (Plato, 1942, 8.245). Everything by nature transforms into something and this is why Plato seeks unchangeable ideas by means of the trip. The difference between the beginning and the end of this trip concerns being or 'is'. Plato expects the previous mode of soul as the sojourner to come to the realization of this 'is'ness after the trip. On the part of the returning soul, the object of cognition becomes clear (Plato, 1942, 7.141-2). This is the philosopher's authority and capability which solves any political conflicts as if the conflict is the problem of cognition. Knowing as a power or a faculty is the legitimacy of the philosopher-king. The illiterate flock for this very reason is supposed

---

<sup>11</sup> *Phaidea* transforms a lover of wisdom into a dialectician day by day in such a way that he "is more capable of sharing *both* ways of life" (Plato, 1942, 7.143).

<sup>12</sup> What is the idea of good to politics, the beautiful to art. For a detailed examination the relationship between the concepts, see (Avci, 2018, pp. 239-47). In the same vein, Kraut relates justice to the idea of good and many other significant Platonic concepts by arguing that contrary to being just, there is "no common feature of all good things". That's why Plato never define what "the Form of the Good" is but is contented with calling it "some kind of harmony" (Kraut, 1992, pp. 322-23).

to owe its welfare to philosopher. Through the philosopher's mediation, the people finally meet with ideas at the legislative degree which appoints them to appropriate work according to their nature.

As regards to the returning soul back to earth, is it possible for one to be just by oneself? Is the sole motivation of philosopher when returning, "care for others" in a mechanical way? Arendt asserts that Plato is well aware that humankind is not able to live apart from her fellows, but Plato did not reckon this very condition among others what makes one human. Adversely, he regards the need of being accompanied by others as mere and natural requirement for human life just like animal life. For Plato, according to Arendt's reading, living together among one of the impositions or limitations by our biological need only which we share with animals, not by social ones. Consequently, what distinguishes human from animal is not our sociality. This is why Plato regards completely the arising difficulty in human affairs as solvable as a problem of cognition (Arendt, 1998, p.24). Or consider Plato's explanation of the unnaturalness of democracy; "it is not the natural course of things that the pilot should beg the sailors to be ruled by him" since pilot *knows* how to navigate the ship (Plato, 1942, 6.25). This is "the Platonic identification of knowledge with command and rulership and of action with obedience and execution" (Arendt, 1998, p.225).

For Plato the ruler class always directs people who are somehow derailed. The transition from oligarchy to democracy is an instance of which "since its rulers owe their offices to their wealth, they are not willing to prohibit by law the prodigals" (Plato, 1942, 8.279). In Platonic *polis*, being philosopher and accordingly being politician are always absolutely forbidden to the multitude (Plato, 1942, 6.43). Therefore, it is impossible that any members of the flock for whom philosopher goes into politics in the hope of changing society, can deliver opinion about their living conditions. What we infer from Plato's introduction of the ideas, albeit being ranked legislation and establishment of lawful city as the highest of body politics is that they have eventually become laws which are ready for execution, not open for discussion among the citizens.<sup>13</sup> According to Arendt, Plato lays theoretical foundation for escaping from plurality of subjects by introducing the idea of the good (Arendt, 1998, p.222).

At this point it may be fruitful to examine Plato's attitude against democracy. Plato treats democracy as a totally collective corruption with regard to both its origin, nature, and corresponding character. Indeed, Plato disdains to define a democratic subject who has nothing special but "diversified with every type of character" (Plato, 1942, 8.287). Plato's decisive judgment as to democracy is that it has such a nature that "everyone would arrange a plan for leading his own life in the way that pleases him" (Plato, 1942, 8.287). In the same manner, the subjects in oligarchical regimes are "busy-bodies and jack-of-all-trades, farmers, financiers and soldiers all in one" (Plato, 1942, 8.267). In such a diversity, one cannot imagine a state that every individual is able to organize her own

---

<sup>13</sup> It is Arendt remark that "Plato elevated lawmaking and city-building to the highest rank in political life" (Arendt, 1998, p.195).

private living space. How could it be possible, asks Plato, that there exists a state in which everyone does "wish to organize a state" if polis would be a unity?<sup>14</sup> (Plato, 1942, 8.287)

We can see Plato's anxiety about governmental change and transition from one regime to another; aristocracy transforms into timocracy, timocracy into oligarchy, oligarchy into democracy and lastly democracy into tyranny. Plato understand a new and different way of life by transformation, having focused on the manner of one's life on which the quality of a constitution is based. Ruler's way of life and the constitution develop simultaneously; "after the change what will be its way of life?" (Plato, 1942, 8.251). Change is a political risk for a unitary framework and it, implies Plato, cannot possibly improve any good manners in ongoing life. Change for the better takes place only through one's unearthly contemplative experience. Plato's ideal rulers are only able to bring about change irreversible in character. However, when it comes to the political constitutions, there is no chance for the betterment at all. Plato's denial of the political change for the betterment seems to be incompatible with the dynamism of actual life.

Plato approaches the notion of the rulership from the prescriptive perspective of his morals, that is, the prescription of philosophical way of life for the rulers. Arendt's claim that in the Cave allegory all rules and measurement of human behaviours are "variations or derivations of the idea of the good in Greek sense of the word, that is, of the 'good for' or of fitness," poses a serious problem to Plato's philosophy on a broad scale (Arendt, 1998, p.225). On heavenly part of the process, something is missing about the nature of politics. Arendt clearly detects that the guiding principles of the self, which will become the principles of human affairs at the same time as Plato shows through the *Republic* overall, are acquired with "a relationship established between me and myself", a relationship which excludes others forever (Arendt, 1998, p. 237-8). Darkness means the presence of others, and the light the absence of others in the Cave allegory.

The philosopher's experience of the eternal, which to Plato was *arrhēton* ("unspeakable")...can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men, as we know from Cave parable in Plato's *Republic*, where the philosopher, having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect "singularity," as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others. (Arendt, 1998, p. 20)

---

<sup>14</sup> As for the second wave of the *Republic*, which offers the abolishment of traditional family pattern, Arendt claims that "It is a common error to interpret Plato as though he wanted to abolish the family and the household; he wanted, on the contrary, to extend this type of life until one family embraced every citizen. In other words, he wanted to eliminate from the household community its private character, and it is for this purpose that he recommended the abolition of private property and individual marital status" (Arendt, 1998, p.223). In this passage, by the term family Arendt understands one huge family, that is, a communal unity without privacy. In this regard I see no reason why Plato's attempt cannot be interpreted as the abolishment of family since the very notion of family qualitatively loses its meaning just as Arendt points at its "private character".

In this respect Plato's political philosophy, according to Arendt, is the beginning of a tradition which closes the door of discussion among citizens, and even worse, that of action, to speak in Arendtian terms, as decision making mechanism due to wisdom as the capacity of counselling with which only a handful of guardians is endowed (Plato, 1937, 4.350-51). Plato thus dreams of the ruled as the flock that lost its political character and the philosophers as shepherds reluctantly look after what is good for it for the flock. Plato's conception of the people as the flock leads him to be certain of what will happen in political life. All history begins with aristocracy; the shift is always from the best (*aristoi*), aristocracy to the worst, tyranny. In Plato's ideal city, the citizens, namely, the members of the flock are never seen to be active agent.

## 6. Conclusion

The difficulties of Plato's *polis* which he faces while demonstrating its possibility by depending on two conditions persist due to their conflict with the main body of the theory. Through the Book V both Plato and Glaucon seem to be optimistic about the possibility of the ideal city, having accepted that it is difficult but not impossible to realize (Plato, 1937, 5.507).<sup>15</sup> However, Glaucon's statement at the end of the Book IX shows that he completely abnegates his faith to the possibility of Plato's *polis*. Glaucon finally admits its impossibility by saying that there can be a model of this city somewhere at the sky "for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen" (Plato, 1942, 9.417). From this statement, it might be inferred that this intelligible city itself is an idea for the attainment of those who are again endowed with the highest skill to instruct themselves.

Plato makes radical and revolutionary claims for the role of philosophy in human life. Although to design a democratic city in such an *agoraic* culture is easier than to describe the people as passive citizens, it seems that Plato engages in achieving the difficult. There remains a question: Why does Plato convincingly portray people who are ruled via democracy as in Hieronymus bosch-esque picture? Indeed, Arendt has already answered: The trial of Socrates leads to the conflict between the philosopher and the *polis* which has a catastrophic effect on Plato's political philosophy as ending up with neutralizing and even passivating not only citizens, but also philosophers too.

## REFERENCES

- Arendt, H. (1998). *Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Avcı, N. (2018). Beauty and Art in Plato, In *Research and Development on Social Sciences*, (pp. 239-247), Krakow: Jagiellonian University Institute of Public Affairs.

---

<sup>15</sup> Plato's utopianism in *the Republic* is paradigmatic. "A paradigm can be useful without being realized", says Donald R. Morrison (Morrison, 2007, p. 234). Morrison lengthily argues the main utopian characteristics of *the Republic*.

Guthrie, W.K.C. (1975). *A History of Greek Philosophy Volume IV, Plato: The Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

Hadot, P. (2002). *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (M. Chase, Trans.). New York: Harvard University Press.

Kraut, R. (1992). The Defense of Justice in Plato's *Republic*. In R. Kraut (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (pp. 311-338). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morrison, D. R. (2007). The Utopian Character of Plato's Ideal City. In G. R. F. Ferrari (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato Republic* (pp. 232-256). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Murteza, E. Y. (2013). Platon'un Devlet'inde *Dikaiosynē* Kavramının Kullanılışı. In *Felsefi Düşün*, 1, pp. 181-195.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *The Fragility of Goodness Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Shorey, P. (1937). *The Republic, Vol. I: Books 1–5* (Loeb Classical Library No. 237). Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd.

Shorey, P. (1942). *The Republic, Vol. II: Books 6–10* (Loeb Classical Library No. 242). Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd.

Plato. (1992). *Republic*. (G.M.A. Grube, Trans.). New York: Hackett Publishing Company.

White, N. P. (1979). *A Companion to Plato's Republic*. New York: Hackett Publishing Company.