

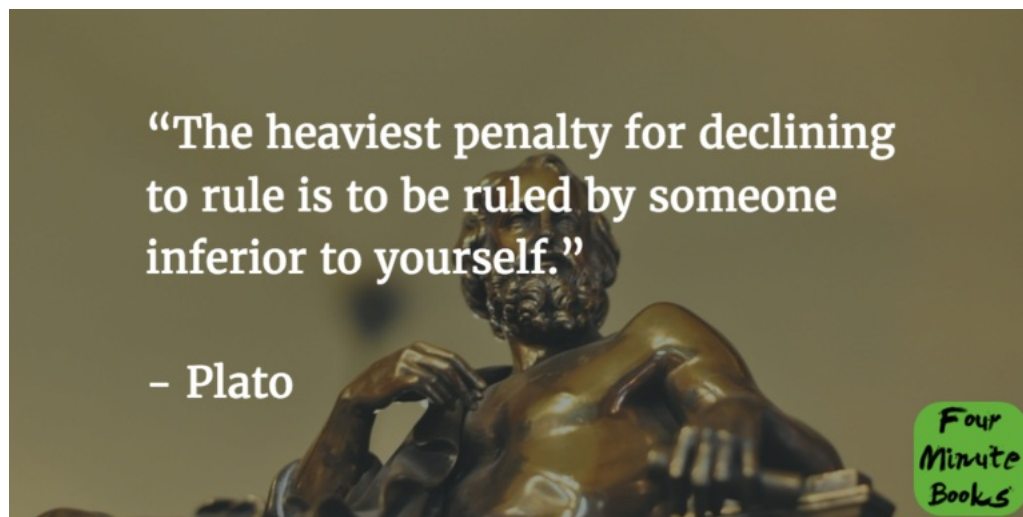
The Republic Summary

 fourminutebooks.com/the-republic-summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *The Republic* is one of the most important works about philosophy and politics in history, written by Plato, one of Socrates students in ancient Greece, as a dialogue about justice and political systems.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



When approaching new people on Twitter, I like to ask them fun and thoughtful questions. One of them is: "You get to have dinner with anyone from history, who would it be?" It's fun to think about and actually not that easy to answer. While I'd love to be able to name someone like Plato or Socrates to have dinner with, I don't think I would be able to understand even a word they'd say (even if they talked to me in plain English), because they're thinking is on a much higher level than mine.

Luckily, these guys wrote it all down and many people have translated their words in ways even the average Joe like me can understand. You can think of Plato's most notable work, *The Republic* as a documentation of a dialogue between Socrates, Plato's mentor, and his students.

However, since it's one of Plato's "middle" dialogues from later in his life, chances are Socrates serves more as a mouthpiece for Plato's own views here, rather than being the true original source of the ideas in this book about justice.

Here are the 3 lessons I think are most important:

1. Justice must be looked at on an individual, as well as a city level.
2. Both cities and souls can be divided into three distinct parts.
3. Philosophers trying to rule others justly will face lots of difficulty.

Do you want to understand the most important ideas of one of philosophy's all-time greatest texts? Let's learn what The Republic is about!

Lesson 1: You can't say what's just only for an individual or a city. You have to look at both.

The dialogue starts with Socrates asking his students to propose definitions of justice, all of which he dismantles quite quickly. As it turns out, defining justice without huge loopholes isn't that easy. The reason is that it's impossible to say what's just if you only look at an individual or a city alone. You have to consider both.

Given this, Socrates comes up with his own idea of justice: **minding one's own business**.

This has both an individual and a communal aspect to it. It means that **everyone should take responsibility for their own role within society**, and do as best a job as they can, thus benefitting themselves and the city as a whole.

For example, if a city has doctors, merchants, politicians, soldiers, artists, etc., then everyone can focus on their own role and no one will have to do everything, because each role serves the greater good of the society at large.

However, not everyone is suited for every role – we must consider our individual skills, as well as what the society needs, to determine it.

So in a just city, individual and societal needs are intertwined and they work in a symbiosis to make life better for everyone.

Lesson 2: Cities, as well as human souls, can be divided into the same three, distinct parts.

After defining justice, Socrates goes on to use something called the “noble lie” to give people something to believe in, which will keep social harmony intact. A noble lie can be a myth or a story, often of religious nature, presented by a leader as true to guide their followers, even though it's not, but with good intent.

Plato's tripartite theory of soul is one of those noble lies, which suggests both cities and people's souls have three distinct parts:

1. **Reason.** The golden part of the soul, predominant in city rulers, who create just laws and rule their city with reason and logic, overseeing everything and maintaining order.
2. **Spirit.** The mediator between emotions and reason, the silver part of the soul, represents the army, which keeps order during times of peace and tries to restore it in times of war.

3. **Desire.** The bronze part of our soul, concerned with natural wants and needs, like food, sleep and sex. This represents the farmers, craft workers, and other more basic roles in society.

While the three parts dominate certain individuals in their respective roles, **every single individual has the same three parts in their own soul**. We all have a rational side, a spiritual side and an emotional one and they balance each other.

Considering how old this idea is, it makes a scary lot of sense when you compare it to what science has come up with in recent years.

Lesson 3: Being a philosopher and teaching others justice is like trying to pull people out of a cave.

If reason is the golden part of the soul and it's what gets cities to be governed in a just way, then it naturally follows that kings should be philosophers and philosophers should be kings. However, rational rarely means popular, which means philosophers will face a lot of headwind when educating others.

Here, Socrates (or rather Plato), uses a metaphor known as Plato's Allegory of the Cave. I remember discussing this in religion class by relating it to the movie "The Matrix."

Imagine a cave where people are chained to the wall and have been so all of their lives, facing another wall they stare at all day. Behind them, people pass items in front of a fire, casting shadows on the wall the prisoners see, thus creating their reality for them. If one of the prisoners were to break free and leave the cave, he'd first be terrified by the sunlight and the outside world, but then conclude life's better outside and try to drag out the other prisoners – which they will likely refuse and maybe even attempt to kill their savior, for they don't think going outside is worth the risk of getting blinded by the sun.

In a way, we're all born into this cave, but some of us manage to get out, see the sunlight and thus the world as it really is. Those people are philosophers, and though it's not an easy job, it's their task to liberate the rest of us and lead us to the truth.

The Republic Review

With books like The Republic, I'm super glad to have Blinkist as a mediator and make the ideas more understandable. Sure, Wikipedia helps, but it's often a slew of long articles, and you have to filter them a ton to get down to the core. Blinkist makes this really easy. I hope I managed to present the ideas in a way you can understand too!

[Read full summary on Blinkist >>](#)

[Free Preview >>](#)

[Learn more about the author >>](#)

What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Three definitions of justice that don't hold up
- Why being fake just is actually the worst kind of injustice
- What role education plays for justice
- How the just soul relates to the just city
- What a philosopher-king's job is
- Which of the five types of government is the best one

Who would I recommend The Republic summary to?

The 14 year old, who just started learning about ancient Greece in her history class, the 33 year old young lawyer, who's slowly adjusting his moral compass in navigating the world of law, and anyone who takes an interest in politics.