

## Selections from Plato's *Republic*

(VI.473a-474c; 487b-494a; VII.514a-521c;

VIII.544a-45c; 555b—564a)

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473 Is it possible for anything to be realized in deed as it is spoken in word, or is it the nature of things that action should partake of exact truth less than speech, even if some deny it? Do you admit it or not?

I do, he said.

Then don't insist, said I, that I must exhibit as realized in action precisely what we expounded in words. But if we can discover how a state might be constituted most nearly answering to our description, you must say that we have discovered that possibility of  
b realization which you demanded. Will you not be content if you get this? I for my part would.

And I too, he said.

Next, it seems, we must try to discover and point out what it is that is now badly managed in our cities, and that prevents them from being so governed, and what is the smallest change that would bring a state to this manner of government, preferably a change in one thing, if not, then in two, and, failing that, the fewest possible in number and the slightest in potency.

c By all means, he said.

There is one change, then, said I, which I think that we can show would bring about the desired transformation. It is not a slight or an easy thing but it is possible.

What is that? said he.

I am on the very verge, said I, of what we likened to the greatest wave of paradox. But say it I will, even if, to keep the figure, it is likely to wash us away on billows of laughter and scorn. Listen.

I am all attention, he said.

Unless, said I, either philosophers become kings in our states or  
d those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophical intelligence. while

the motley horde of the natures who at present pursue either apart from the other are compulsorily excluded, there can be no cessation of troubles, dear Glaucon, for our states, nor, I fancy, for the human race e either. Nor, until this happens, will this constitution which we have been expounding in theory ever be put into practice within the limits of possibility and see the light of the sun. But this is the thing that has made me so long shrink from speaking out, because I saw that it would be a very paradoxical saying. For it is not easy to see that there is no other way of happiness either for private or public life.

Whereupon he said, Socrates, after hurling at us such an utterance and statement as that, you must expect to be attacked by a great multitude of our men of light and leading, who forthwith will, so to speak, cast off their garments and strip and, snatching the first 474 weapon that comes to hand, rush at you with might and main, prepared to do dreadful deeds. And if you don't find words to defend yourself against them, and escape their assault, then to be scorned and flouted will in very truth be the penalty you will have to pay.

And isn't it you, said I, that have brought this upon me and are to blame?

And a good thing, too, said he, but I won't let you down, and will defend you with what I can. I can do so with my good will and my encouragement, and perhaps I might answer your questions more suitably than another. So, with such an aid to back you, try to make it b plain to the doubters that the truth is as you say.

I must try, I replied, since you proffer so strong an alliance. I think it requisite, then, if we are to escape the assailants you speak of, that we should define for them whom we mean by the philosophers, who we dare to say ought to be our rulers. When these are clearly discriminated it will be possible to defend ourselves by showing that to c them by their very nature belong the study of philosophy and political leadership, while it befits the other sort to let philosophy alone and to follow their leader.

It is high time, he said, to produce your definition.

And Adimantus said, No one, Socrates, would be able to contro- b vert these statements of yours. But, all the same, those who

But regarding the other constitutions, my recollection 544  
is that you said there were four species worth speaking of and ob-  
serving their defects and the corresponding types of men, in order  
that when we had seen them all and come to an agreement about the  
best and the worst man, we might determine whether the best is the  
happiest and the worst most wretched or whether it is otherwise. And  
when I was asking what were the four constitutions you had in mind, b  
Polemarchus and Adimantus thereupon broke in, and that was how  
you took up the discussion again and brought it to this point.

Your memory is most exact, I said.

A second time then, as in a wrestling match, offer me the same  
hold, and when I repeat my question try to tell me what you were  
then about to say.

I will if I can, said I.

And indeed, said he, I am eager myself to hear what four forms c  
of government you meant.

There will be no difficulty about that, said I. For those I mean are  
precisely those that have names in common usage—that which the  
many praise, your Cretan and Spartan constitution, and the second  
in place and in honor, that which is called oligarchy, a constitution  
teeming with many ills, and its sequent counterpart and opponent,  
democracy, and then the noble tyranny surpassing them all, the fourth  
and final malady of a state. Can you mention any other type of gov- d  
ernment, I mean any other that constitutes a distinct species? For, no  
doubt, there are hereditary principalities and purchased kingships,  
and similar intermediate constitutions which one could find in even  
greater numbers among the barbarians than among the Greeks.

Certainly many strange ones are reported, he said.

Are you aware, then, said I, that there must be as many types of  
character among men as there are forms of government? Or do you  
suppose that constitutions spring from the proverbial oak or rock and  
not from the characters of the citizens, which, as it were, by their  
e momentum and weight in the scales draw other things after them?

They could not possibly come from any other source, he said.

Then if the forms of government are five, the patterns of individ-  
ual souls must be five also.

Surely.

Now we have already described the man corresponding to aris-  
tocracy or the government of the best, whom we aver to be the truly  
545 good and just man.

We have.

Must we not, then, next after this, survey the inferior types,  
the man who is contentious and covetous of honor, corresponding to  
the Laconian constitution, and the oligarchic man in turn, and the

democratic and the tyrannical, in order that, after observing the most  
unjust of all, we may oppose him to the most just, and complete our  
inquiry as to the relation of pure justice and pure injustice in respect  
of the happiness and unhappiness of the possessor, so that we may  
b either follow the counsel of Thrasymachus and pursue injustice or  
the present argument and pursue justice?

Assuredly, he said, that is what we have to do.

Shall we, then, as we began by examining moral qualities in states  
before individuals, as being more manifest there, so now consider  
first the constitution based on the love of honor? I do not know of  
any special name for it in use. We must call it either timocracy or  
timarchy. And then in connection with this we will consider the man  
c of that type, and thereafter oligarchy and the oligarch, and again,  
fixing our eyes on democracy, we will contemplate the democratic  
man, and fourthly, after coming to the city ruled by a tyrant and ob-  
serving it, we will in turn take a look into the tyrannical soul, and so  
try to make ourselves competent judges of the question before us.

That would be at least a systematic and consistent way of con-  
ducting the observation and the decision, he said.

Have we any further doubt, then, I said, as to the correspond- 555  
ence and resemblance between the thrifty and money-making man b  
and the oligarchic state?

None, he said.

We have next to consider, it seems, the origin and nature of  
democracy, that we may next learn the character of that type of man  
and range him beside the others for our judgment.

That would at least be a consistent procedure.

Then, said I, is not the transition from oligarchy to democracy effected in some such way as this—by the insatiate greed for that which it set before itself as the good, the attainment of the greatest possible wealth?

In what way?

c Why, since its rulers owe their offices to their wealth, they are not willing to prohibit by law the prodigals who arise among the youth from spending and wasting their substance. Their object is, by lending money on the property of such men, and buying it in, to become still richer and more esteemed.

By all means.

And is it not at once apparent in a state that this honoring of wealth is incompatible with a sober and temperate citizenship, but that one or the other of these two ideals is inevitably neglected.

d That is pretty clear, he said.

And such negligence and encouragement of licentiousness in oligarchies not infrequently has reduced to poverty men of no ignoble quality.

It surely has.

And there they sit, I fancy, within the city, furnished with stings, that is, arms, some burdened with debt, others disfranchised, others both, hating and conspiring against the acquirers of their estates and the rest of the citizens, and eager for revolution.

'Tis so.

e But these money-makers with down-bent heads, pretending not even to see them, but inserting the sting of their money into any of the remainder who do not resist, and harvesting from them in interest  
556 as it were a manifold progeny of the parent sum, foster the drone and pauper element in the state.

They do indeed multiply it, he said.

And they are not willing to quench the evil as it bursts into flame either by way of a law prohibiting a man from doing as he likes with his own, or in this way, by a second law that does away with such abuses.

What law?

b The law that is next best, and compels the citizens to pay heed to virtue. For if a law commanded that most voluntary contracts should be at the contractor's risk, the pursuit of wealth would be less shameless in the state and fewer of the evils of which we spoke just now would grow up there.

Much fewer, he said.

c But as it is, and for all these reasons, this is the plight to which the rulers in the state reduce their subjects, and as for themselves and their offspring, do they not make the young spoiled wantons averse to toil of body and mind, and too soft to stand up against pleasure and pain, and mere idlers?

Surely.

And do they not fasten upon themselves the habit of neglect of everything except the making of money, and as complete an indifference to virtue as the paupers exhibit?

Little they care.

And when, thus conditioned, the rulers and the ruled are brought together on the march, in wayfaring, or in some other common undertaking, either a religious festival, or a campaign, or as shipmates or fellow soldiers or, for that matter, in actual battle, and observe one another, then the poor are not in the least scorned by the rich, but on the contrary, do you not suppose it often happens that when a lean, sinewy, sunburned pauper is stationed in battle beside a rich man bred in the shade, and burdened with superfluous flesh, and sees him panting and helpless—do you not suppose he will think that such fellows keep their wealth by the cowardice of the poor, and that when the latter are together in private, one will pass the word to another, 'our men are good for nothing'?

Nay, I know very well that they do, said he.

And just as an unhealthy body requires but a slight impulse from outside to fall into sickness, and sometimes, even without that, all the man is one internal war, in like manner does not the corresponding type of state need only a slight occasion, the one party bringing in allies from an oligarchic state, or the other from a democratic, to become diseased and wage war with itself, and sometimes even apart from any external impulse faction arises?

557

Most emphatically.

And a democracy, I suppose, comes into being when the poor, winning the victory, put to death some of the other party, drive out others, and grant the rest of the citizens an equal share in both citizenship and offices—and for the most part these offices are assigned by lot.

Why, yes, he said, that is the constitution of democracy alike whether it is established by force of arms or by terrorism resulting in the withdrawal of one of the parties.

What, then, said I, is the manner of their life and what is the quality of such a constitution? For it is plain that the man of this quality will turn out to be a democratic sort of man.

It is plain, he said.

To begin with, are they not free? And is not the city chock-full of liberty and freedom of speech? And has not every man license to do as he likes?

So it is said, he replied.

And where there is such license, it is obvious that everyone would arrange a plan for leading his own life in the way that pleases him. Obvious.

c All sorts and conditions of men, then, would arise in this polity more than in any other?

Of course.

Possibly, said I, this is the most beautiful of polities; as a garment of many colors, embroidered with all kinds of hues, so this, decked and diversified with every type of character, would appear the most beautiful. And perhaps many would judge it to be the most beautiful, like boys and women when they see bright-colored things.

Yes indeed, he said.

d Yes, said I, and it is the fit place, my good friend, in which to look for a constitution.

Why so?

Because, owing to this license, it includes all kinds, and it seems likely that anyone who wishes to organize a state, as we were just now doing, must find his way to a democratic city and select the model that pleases him, as if in a bazaar of constitutions, and after making his choice, establish his own.

e Perhaps at any rate, he said, he would not be at a loss for patterns.

And the freedom from all compulsion to hold office in such a city, even if you are qualified, or again, to submit to rule, unless you please, or to make war when the rest are at war, or to keep the peace when the others do so, unless you desire peace, and again, the liberty, in defiance of any law that forbids you, to hold office and sit on juries nonetheless, if it occurs to you to do so, is not all that a heavenly and delicious entertainment for the time being?

558 Perhaps, he said, for so long.

And is not the placability of some convicted criminals exquisite? Or have you never seen in such a state men condemned to death or exile who nonetheless stay on, and go to and fro among the people, and as if no one saw or heeded him, the man slips in and out like a revenant?

Yes, many, he said.

b And the tolerance of democracy, its superiority to all our meticulous requirements, its disdain for our solemn pronouncements made when we were founding our city, that except in the case of transcendent natural gifts no one could ever become a good man unless from childhood his play and all his pursuits were concerned with things fair and good—how superbly it tramples underfoot all such ideals, caring nothing from what practices and way of life a man turns to politics, but honoring him if only he says that he loves the people!

c It is a noble polity, indeed! he said.

These and qualities akin to these democracy would exhibit, and it would, it seems, be a delightful form of government, anarchic and motley, assigning a kind of equality indiscriminately to equals and unequals alike!

Yes, he said, everybody knows that.

Observe, then, the corresponding private character. Or must we first, as in the case of the polity, consider the origin of the type?

Yes, he said.

Is not this, then, the way of it? Our thrifty oligarchic man would d have a son bred in his father's ways.

Why not?

And he, too, would control by force all his appetites for pleasure that are wasters and not winners of wealth, those which are denominated unnecessary.

Obviously.

And in order not to argue in the dark, shall we first define our distinction between necessary and unnecessary appetites?

Let us do so.

Well, then, desires that we cannot divert or suppress may be properly called necessary, and likewise those whose satisfaction is e beneficial to us, may they not? For our nature compels us to seek their satisfaction. Is not that so?

Most assuredly.

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Then we shall rightly use the word 'necessary' of them?

Rightly.

And what of the desires from which a man could free himself by discipline from youth up, and whose presence in the soul does no good and in some cases harm? Should we not fairly call all such unnecessary?

Fairly indeed.

Let us select an example of either kind, so that we may apprehend the type.

Let us do so.

Would not the desire of eating to keep in health and condition and the appetite for mere bread and relishes be necessary?

I think so.

b

The appetite for bread is necessary in both respects, in that it is beneficial and in that if it fails we die.

Yes.

And the desire for relishes, so far as it conduces to fitness?

By all means.

And should we not rightly pronounce unnecessary the appetite c that exceeds these and seeks other varieties of food, and that by correction and training from youth up can be got rid of in most cases and is harmful to the body and a hindrance to the soul's attainment of intelligence and sobriety?

Nay, most rightly.

And may we not call the one group the spendthrift desires and the other the profitable, because they help production?

Surely.

And we shall say the same of sexual and other appetites?

The same.

And were we not saying that the man whom we nicknamed the

drone is the man who teems with such pleasures and appetites, and who is governed by his unnecessary desires, while the one who is ruled  
d by his necessary appetites is the thrifty oligarchic man?

Why, surely.

To return, then, said I, we have to tell how the democratic man develops from the oligarchic type. I think it is usually in this way.

How?

When a youth, bred in the illiberal and niggardly fashion that we were describing, gets a taste of the honey of the drones and associates with fierce and cunning creatures who know how to purvey pleasures of every kind and variety and condition, there you must  
e doubtless conceive is the beginning of the transformation of the oligarchy in his soul into democracy.

Quite inevitably, he said.

May we not say that just as the revolution in the city was brought about by the aid of an alliance from outside, coming to the support of the similar and corresponding party in the state, so the youth is revolutionized when a like and kindred group of appetites from outside comes to the aid of one of the parties in his soul?

By all means, he said.

And if, I take it, a counteralliance comes to the rescue of the oligarchic part of his soul, either it may be from his father or from his  
560 other kin, who admonish and reproach him, then there arise faction and counterfaction and internal strife in the man with himself.

Surely.

And sometimes, I suppose, the democratic element retires before the oligarchic, some of its appetites having been destroyed and others expelled, and a sense of awe and reverence grows up in the young man's soul and order is restored.

That sometimes happens, he said.

And sometimes, again, another brood of desires akin to those expelled are stealthily nurtured to take their place, owing to the father's ignorance of true education, and wax numerous and strong.  
b

Yes, that is wont to be the way of it.

And they tug and pull back to the same associations and in secret intercourse engender a multitude.

Yes indeed.

And in the end, I suppose, they seize the citadel of the young man's soul, finding it empty and unoccupied by studies and honorable pursuits and true discourses, which are the best watchmen and guardians in the minds of men who are dear to the gods.  
c

Much the best, he said.

And then false and braggart words and opinions charge up the height and take their place and occupy that part of such a youth.

They do indeed.

And then he returns, does he not, to those lotus-eaters and with-

out disguise lives openly with them. And if any support comes from his kin to the thrifty element in his soul, those braggart discourses close the gates of the royal fortress within him and refuse admission to the auxiliary force itself, and will not grant audience as to envoys to the words of older friends in private life. And they themselves prevail in the conflict, and naming reverence and awe 'folly' thrust it forth, a dishonored fugitive. And temperance they call 'want of manhood' and banish it with contumely, and they teach that moderation and orderly expenditure are 'rusticity' and 'illiberality,' and they combine with a gang of unprofitable and harmful appetites to drive them over the border.

They do indeed.

And when they have emptied and purged of all these the soul of the youth that they have thus possessed and occupied, and whom they are initiating with these magnificent and costly rites, they proceed to lead home from exile insolence and anarchy and prodigality and shamelessness, resplendent in a great attendant choir and crowned with garlands, and in celebration of their praises they euphemistically denominate insolence 'good breeding,' license 'liberty,' prodigality 'magnificence,' and shamelessness 'manly spirit.' And is it not in some  
561 such way as this that in his youth the transformation takes place from the restriction to necessary desires in his education to the liberation and release of his unnecessary and harmful desires?

Yes, your description is most vivid, said he.

Then, in his subsequent life, I take it, such a one expends money and toil and time no more on his necessary than on his unnecessary pleasures. But if it is his good fortune that the period of storm and stress does not last too long, and as he grows older the fiercest tumult within him passes, and he receives back a part of the banished elements and does not abandon himself altogether to the invasion of the others, then he establishes and maintains all his pleasures on a footing of equality, forsooth, and so lives turning over the guardhouse of his soul to each as it happens along until it is sated, as if it had drawn the lot for that office, and then in turn to another, disdaining none but fostering them all equally.

Quite so.

And he does not accept or admit into the guardhouse the words of truth when anyone tells him that some pleasures arise from honorable and good desires, and others from those that are base, and that we ought to practice and esteem the one and control and subdue the others, but he shakes his head at all such admonitions and avers that they are all alike and to be equally esteemed.

Such is indeed his state of mind and his conduct.

And does he not, said I, also live out his life in this fashion, day by day indulging the appetite of the day, now winebibbing and abandoning himself to the lascivious pleasing of the flute and again  
d

drinking only water and dieting, and at one time exercising his body, and sometimes idling and neglecting all things, and at another time seeming to occupy himself with philosophy. And frequently he goes in for politics and bounces up and says and does whatever enters his head. And if military men excite his emulation, thither he rushes, and if moneyed men, to that he turns, and there is no order or compulsion in his existence, but he calls this life of his the life of pleasure and freedom and happiness and cleaves to it to the end.

e That is a perfect description, he said, of a devotee of equality.

I certainly think, said I, that he is a manifold man stuffed with most excellent differences, and that like that city he is the fair and many-colored one whom many a man and woman would count fortunate in his life, as containing within himself the greatest number of patterns of constitutions and qualities.

Yes, that is so, he said.

562 Shall we definitely assert, then, that such a man is to be ranged with democracy and would properly be designated as democratic?

Let that be his place, he said.

And now, said I, the fairest polity and the fairest man remain for us to describe, the tyranny and the tyrant.

Certainly, he said.

Come then, tell me, dear friend, how tyranny arises. That it is an outgrowth of democracy is fairly plain.

Yes, plain.

Is it, then, in a sense, in the same way in which democracy arises out of oligarchy that tyranny arises from democracy?

b How is that?

The good that they proposed to themselves and that was the cause of the establishment of oligarchy—it was wealth, was it not?

Yes.

Well, then, the insatiate lust for wealth and the neglect of everything else for the sake of money-making were the cause of its undoing.

True, he said.

c And is not the avidity of democracy for that which is its definition and criterion of good the thing which dissolves it too?

What do you say its criterion to be?

Liberty, I replied, for you may hear it said that this is best managed in a democratic city, and for this reason that is the only city in which a man of free spirit will care to live.

Why, yes, he replied, you hear that saying everywhere.

Then, as I was about to observe, is it not the excess and greed of this and the neglect of all other things that revolutionizes this constitution too and prepares the way for the necessity of a dictatorship?

How? he said.

d Why, when a democratic city athirst for liberty gets bad cup-bearers for its leaders and is intoxicated by drinking too deep of that

unmixed wine, and then, if its so-called governors are not extremely mild and gentle with it and do not dispense the liberty unstintedly, it chastises them and accuses them of being accursed oligarchs.

Yes, that is what they do, he replied.

But those who obey the rulers, I said, it reviles as willing slaves and men of nought, but it commends and honors in public and private rulers who resemble subjects and subjects who are like rulers. Is it not inevitable that in such a state the spirit of liberty should go to all lengths?

Of course.

And this anarchic temper, said I, my friend, must penetrate into private homes and finally enter into the very animals.

Just what do we mean by that? he said.

Why, I said, the father habitually tries to resemble the child and is afraid of his sons, and the son likens himself to the father and feels no awe or fear of his parents, so that he may be forsooth a free man. And the resident alien feels himself equal to the citizen and the citizen to him, and the foreigner likewise.

563

Yes, these things do happen, he said.

They do, said I, and such other trifles as these. The teacher in such case fears and fawns upon the pupils, and the pupils pay no heed to the teacher or to their overseers either. And in general the young ape their elders and vie with them in speech and action, while the old, accommodating themselves to the young, are full of pleasantry and graciousness, imitating the young for fear they may be thought disagreeable and authoritative.

By all means, he said.

And the climax of popular liberty, my friend, I said, is attained in such a city when the purchased slaves, male and female, are no less free than the owners who paid for them. And I almost forgot to mention the spirit of freedom and equal rights in the relation of men to women and women to men.

Shall we not, then, said he, in Aeschylean phrase, say 'whatever rises to our lips'?

Certainly, I said, so I will. Without experience of it no one would believe how much freer the very beasts subject to men are in such a city than elsewhere. The dogs literally verify the adage and 'like their mistresses become.' And likewise the horses and asses are wont to hold on their way with the utmost freedom and dignity, bumping into everyone who meets them and who does not step aside. And so all things everywhere are just bursting with the spirit of liberty.

d

It is my own dream you are telling me, he said, for it often happens to me when I go to the country.

And do you note that the sum total of all these items when footed up is that they render the souls of the citizens so sensitive that they chafe at the slightest suggestion of servitude and will not endure it?

For you are aware that they finally pay no heed even to the laws written or unwritten, so that forsooth they may have no master anywhere  
e over them.

I know it very well, said he.

This, then, my friend, said I, is the fine and vigorous root from which tyranny grows, in my opinion.

Vigorous indeed, he said, but what next?

The same malady, I said, that, arising in oligarchy, destroyed it, this more widely diffused and more violent as a result of this license, enslaves democracy. And in truth, any excess is wont to bring about  
564 a corresponding reaction to the opposite in the seasons, in plants, in animal bodies, and most especially in political societies.

Probably, he said.

And so the probable outcome of too much freedom is only too much slavery in the individual and the state.

Yes, that is probable.

Probably, then, tyranny develops out of no other constitution than democracy—from the height of liberty, I take it, the fiercest extreme of servitude.

That is reasonable, he said.