



# PLS1501 Assignment 2 - An analysis of Plato's theory of the utopia

Western Philosophy (University of South Africa)



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# WESTERN PHILOSOPHY ASSIGNMENT

**STUDENT NUMBER: 17064147**

**MODULE CODE: PLS1501**

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## **DISCUSS PLATO'S THEORY OF THE IDEAL STATE WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON HIS PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE AND THE 'HIGHEST GOOD'.**

Life is what you make out of it, this is a saying almost everyone has heard and this could be a theory best used to describe philosophers.

Philosophers create theories that make sense to them and a large number of people also follow these theories that have been set. We can conclude that philosophers make the best of life using their knowledge and wisdom, we are going to discuss one philosopher who has created multiple theories of which many are still followed even till present and this philosopher was a student of one of the greatest philosophers.

Plato was a student of Socrates; Socrates was one of the greatest philosophers who unfortunately never had any of his work written down as he had presented his philosophies orally. Through Plato however, we get to read Socrates' philosophies, although this is still debatable as some people argue that perhaps Plato is using Socrates' name to push his philosophies.

In his book, "The Republic", we see that Plato has styled a dialogue between Socrates and other characters, in these conversations held we

get to understand Socrates' philosophies as he is presenting them to the other characters. In Book 2, Plato introduces the "*kallipolis*" which is a beautiful city, 'Kalli' means beautiful and 'polis' means city in Greek. According to Socrates, the Kallipolis is the perfect society whereby justice will be executed knowledgeably and correctly. The Kallipolis is referred to as a utopia, one might then ask wonder, what is a utopia? If we take a look at the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it has three definitions;

1. "a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government and social conditions"
2. "An impractical scheme for social improvement"
3. "An imaginary and indefinitely remote place"

All these definitions are relevant to describe the Kallipolis as they are all used to describe something that doesn't exist and is merely just an idea.

An Ideal state consists of three classes which are namely; Producers, auxiliaries and guardians. These classes had different responsibilities to carry out and rules to live according to. I will get into the responsibilities of each class in the next paragraph.

The first class, the producers, is the general society of the state. Everyone in this class is part of the working class. The second class the

auxiliaries(soldiers) are the class that protects the state, they are selected from a very young age and trained into being the 'perfect' soldiers for the state. And the last class, The Guardians, are the rulers, they are also chosen from a very young age and everything they do is monitored, they are then put into school and undergo several tests to ensure that they are well prepared for what will be asked of them.

According to the article on Profolus, "Membership in either one of these social classes would be voluntary. This means that a citizen has the freedom to choose, granted that he or she would meet the criteria or fulfil the requirements set for his or her desired class. <sup>1</sup>", there is a 'requirement' that would be set by the people choosing the guardians, "Socrates says that all citizens should be told a useful lie so as to promote allegiance to the State and enforce its three-tiered social order. <sup>2</sup>", the 'useful lie' being told to the people is the '**myth of the metals**' which states that "...every citizen is born out of the earth of the state and every other citizen is his brother or sister. Yet God has framed them differently, mixing different metals into their souls: gold for the rulers, silver for the auxiliaries, and brass or iron for the husbandmen or craftsmen. <sup>3</sup>", this brings me to the point of whether it is really voluntary which class you want to be in because of this useful lie or are people blinded into thinking

1. Hauron Alfarsi, "Plato: The Philosopher Kings of Kallipolis". 5 January 2021. Profolus

2. Neel Burton, "Platonic myths: The myth of the metals". 22 October 2010. Neel Burton

they are not suitable for specific classes due to certain characteristics they hold? And how exactly are these metals identified because the soul is "the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings, or the universe. <sup>4</sup>", therefore it is not tangible so how do we then identify between each metal group?

The utopia of the ideal state came about when the Greek philosophers had been trying to define justice. Socrates identified justice as a relationship and for a relationship to work, all parties involved need to work with each other. However, how do they sift around the state and decide which of the people is best suited to be the rulers of the state? There are three characteristics used to define each of the social groups: appetite, spirit, and intellect.

- Appetite is for the producer group because they are defined as eager to work
- Spirit, the auxiliaries, are considered to be driven by emotion
- Intellect for the guardians, as one cannot rule over a state without the knowledge and wisdom of how to actually go about it.

Plato suggests that the state will need all these characteristics in place for the proper function of the state, without these the state will collapse. Plato further gives us the virtues which every class should have, producers have temperance, auxiliaries have courage and Guardians have wisdom. The final virtue is one that every state should have and is not confined to a specific class, Justice. Justice brings about harmony to the state. These are the **Four Cardinal Virtues of Plato's Theory of Justice**. If a social group lack any of the three characteristics or any of the virtues that Plato has mentioned, that state will not be perfect.

The Highest Good is one of Plato's most important theories, which surpasses all theories however it is the reason why other theories were established. The Highest Good is known as the 'Form of The Good', there are other forms that exist however the Form of the Good is the highest and all these forms are placed in a hierarchy. "The Highest Form is the Form of the Good, which is the ultimate principle. Like the Sun in the Allegory of the cave, the Good illuminates the other Forms. <sup>5</sup>" so the highest form could be linked to ethics because a state without ethics is rather absurd, how would it even function because for the virtues and characteristics to even exist, is because of the existence of the Highest good.

Plato states that The Form of The Highest Good is the origin of knowledge however, it is not knowledge itself. As I had stated previously that The Form of the Highest Good illuminates the other forms, so this is why it is the origin of knowledge.

To conclude, life is really what you make out of it. Plato created a utopia of the perfect state but he was well aware that it was merely just an idea and it was not realistic enough to be of substance in the real world. He believed that Justice is the way to a perfect state and although it is not fully effective but part of his theory has an effect on today's democracy's and other nations.



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# STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY DECLARATION

## Declaration

Name: Letuxolo Nonophela Bacela

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Module code: PLS1501

Assignment number: 2

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