

Plato's argument goes as follows: society ought to operate justly; both men and society are just in the same way. Justice being when each part of a whole fulfills the role best suited to it. From justice, the moral and the productive result—for the just is both good and efficient. In man, reason, the part of ourselves with the highest capacity to lead, should guide the remaining parts of the psyche, with each fulfilling their proper roles. In society, likewise, having a small class of exceptional “guardians” rule, and all other parts fulfilling their proper role. In this way, those best suited to rule are those who rule, and those best suited to cobble shoes, or treat patients, or defend borders will fulfill their just part too. Further, the other two constituent parts of society, the producers and the auxiliaries (found in the psyche as appetitive and willful) should fulfill their respective roles of producing and maintaining stability. This construction of society, in Plato's view, brings about the maximal good for its inhabitants.

Plato argues not that the collective consensus should direct the executive action of the government, as in a democracy, but that the judgment of a few wise individuals ought to direct society. Imagine a ship where the sailors aim to be the captain, this is how Plato views democracy. The collective consensus is incompetent at ruling, as the sailors would be at captaining the ship. The minds composing the collective consensus are susceptible to ignorance, foolishness, and rash judgements. Power hungry individuals could manipulate the public into making foolish decisions, whereas the wise would perceive those malign attempts. Plato's solution is to leave those lacking the ruling proficiency out of ruling, and to establish “guardians” with temperaments and faculties appropriate for ruling in their just position. He argues these guardians would be wise, fair and moral—leading society towards the greatest good for all its members, regardless of what any one group may desire.

An issue for Plato's argument is how a group of individuals can be selected such that all of them hold the moral fortitude necessary to resist power's temptations. Nothing guarantees the good intentions and loyalty of the guardians; nothing guarantees they won't trample their subjects. There is no way to ensure those placed into power won't be changed by it. And if the guardians lead the producers and the auxiliaries astray, is it just for the subordinates to rebel against their rulers? Or does this violate his principle of justice being harmonious? Plato's view may be utopian in arguing individuals won't be corrupted into putting their interests above the total good of the society. Whereas, in a democracy, the collective consensus would be more likely to place what is best for the society above any one person's interests. A single nefarious guardian may alter a majority of the other guardians' opinions away from the just, where a majority of society would be more resilient to the nefarious guardian's attempts. The collective consensus would, in reality, be far more difficult to rouse to action than a small group of powerful individuals would be.

A possible rejoinder may be: Is it better that the rulers are a small and known group, or a faceless, blameless mob? When the mob is placed in a position of power it loses all accountability, meaning injustice can easily go unpunished. But when a very select class of rulers shows injustice, it becomes much easier to rally against them. A moral and wise class of rulers would be far less likely to be swayed into letting any one person gain too much power, whereas the uninformed mass may be swayed by powerful demagogues.

This rejoinder may fail in the assumption that choosing a moral and wise class to lead is a practical feat. It may be a near impossibility to ensure the wisest members of society are placed at its head, and further that those leaders won't be corrupted by the power they are given. The only sure way to know if power will corrupt one is to put them into that position. Historical insight would suggest much more often than not, they will be corrupted. A great Roman said:

Oh wolf, what a distinguished shepherd of sheep. (Cicero, *Philippics*)

From this discussion we see: Plato's argument in *The Republic* is a beautiful ideal, but ultimately unattainable in our world; it fails in the assumption that selecting individuals with the fortitude to resist the corrupting influence of power is possible. Failing first, that a selection process could be devised to accomplish this end, and second, that those selected would remain the same people once placed in power. In Plato's favor, we may duly note, his diagnosis of democracy's downfalls, in the untrustworthiness of the masses, is very just.