

II MA ENGLISH
HISTORY OF IDEAS – MEN35A
(Prepared by Ponnivalavan P, Assistant Professor, Thiruvalluvar University College of Arts and Science, Tirupattur)

UNIT I – ANCIENT

1. Republic (Book 2) by Plato

About the Author

The Athenian philosopher Plato (c.428-347 B.C.) is one of the most important figures of the Ancient Greek world and the entire history of Western thought. In his written dialogues he conveyed and expanded on the ideas and techniques of his teacher Socrates. The Academy he founded was by some accounts the world's first university and in it he trained his greatest student, the equally influential philosopher Aristotle. Plato's recurring fascination was the distinction between ideal forms and everyday experience, and how it played out both for individuals and for societies. In the "Republic," his most famous work, he envisioned a civilization governed not by lowly appetites but by the pure wisdom of a philosopher-king.

Plato was born around 428 B.C., during the final years of the Golden Age of Pericles' Athens. He was of noble Athenian lineage on both sides. His father Ariston died when he was a child. His mother Perictione remarried the politician Pyrilampes. Plato grew up during the Peloponnesian War (431-404) and came of age around the time of Athens' final defeat by Sparta and the political chaos that followed. He was educated in philosophy, poetry and gymnastics by distinguished Athenian teachers including the philosopher Cratylus.

The young Plato became a devoted follower of Socrates—indeed, he was one of the youths Socrates was condemned for allegedly corrupting. Plato's recollections of Socrates' lived-out philosophy and style of relentless questioning, the Socratic method, became the basis for his early dialogues. Plato's dialogues, along with "Apologia," his written account of the trial of Socrates, are viewed by historians as the most accurate available picture of the elder philosopher, who left no written works of his own.

Around 387, the 40-year-old Plato returned to Athens and founded his philosophical school in the grove of the Greek hero Academus, just outside the city walls. In his open-air Academy he delivered lectures to students gathered from throughout the Greek world (nine-tenths of them from outside Athens). Many of Plato's writings, especially the so-called later dialogues, seem to have originated in his teaching there. In establishing the Academy Plato moved beyond the precepts of Socrates, who never founded a school and questioned the very idea of a teacher's ability to impart knowledge.

Detailed Overview

Socrates believes he has adequately responded to Thrasymachus and is through with the discussion of justice, but the others are not satisfied with the conclusion they have reached. Glaucon, one of Socrates's young companions, explains what they would like him to do. Glaucon states that all goods can be divided into three classes: things that we desire only for their consequences, such as physical training and medical treatment; things that we desire only for their own sake, such as joy; and, the highest class, things we desire both for their own

sake and for what we get from them, such as knowledge, sight, and health. What Glaucon and the rest would like Socrates to prove is that justice is not only desirable, but that it belongs to the highest class of desirable things: those desired both for their own sake and their consequences.

Glaucon points out that most people class justice among the first group. They view justice as a necessary evil, which we allow ourselves to suffer in order to avoid the greater evil that would befall us if we did away with it. Justice stems from human weakness and vulnerability. Since we can all suffer from each other's injustices, we make a social contract agreeing to be just to one another. We only suffer under the burden of justice because we know we would suffer worse without it. Justice is not something practiced for its own sake but something one engages in out of fear and weakness.

To emphasize his point, Glaucon appeals to a thought experiment. Invoking the legend of the ring of Gyges, he asks us to imagine that a just man is given a ring which makes him invisible. Once in possession of this ring, the man can act unjustly with no fear of reprisal. No one can deny, Glaucon claims, that even the most just man would behave unjustly if he had this ring. He would indulge all of his materialistic, power-hungry, and erotically lustful urges. This tale proves that people are only just because they are afraid of punishment for injustice. No one is just because justice is desirable in itself.

Glaucon ends his speech with an attempt to demonstrate that not only do people prefer to be unjust rather than just, but that it is rational for them to do so. The perfectly unjust life, he argues, is more pleasant than the perfectly just life. In making this claim, he draws two detailed portraits of the just and unjust man. The completely unjust man, who indulges all his urges, is honored and rewarded with wealth. The completely just man, on the other hand, is scorned and wretched.

His brother, Adeimantus, breaks in and bolsters Glaucon's arguments by claiming that no one praises justice for its own sake, but only for the rewards it allows you to reap in both this life and the afterlife. He reiterates Glaucon's request that Socrates show justice to be desirable in the absence of any external rewards: that justice is desirable for its own sake, like joy, health, and knowledge.

The first reason is methodological: it is always best to make sure that the position you are attacking is the strongest one available to your opponent. Plato does not want the immoralist to be able to come back and say, "but justice is only a social contract" after he has carefully taken apart the claim that it is the advantage of the stronger. He wants to make sure that in defending justice, he dismantles all the best arguments of the immoralists.

The accumulation of further ideas about justice might be intended to demonstrate his new approach to philosophy. In the early dialogues, Socrates often argues with Sophists, but Thrasymachus is the last Sophist we ever see Socrates arguing with. From now on, we never see Socrates arguing with people who have profoundly wrong values. There is a departure from the techniques of *elenchus* and *aporia*, toward more constructive efforts at building up theory.

Socrates is reluctant to respond to the challenge that justice is desirable in and of itself, but the others compel him. He lays out his plan of attack. There are two kinds of political justice—the justice belonging to a city or state—and individual—the justice of a particular man. Since a city is bigger than a man, he will proceed upon the assumption that it is easier to first look for justice at the political level and later inquire as to whether there is any analogous virtue to be found in the individual. To locate political justice, he will build up a perfectly just city from scratch, and see where and when justice enters it. This project will occupy *The Republic* until Book IV.

Socrates introduces the foundational principle of human society: the principle of specialization. The principle of specialization states that each person must perform the role for which he is naturally best suited and that he must not meddle in any other business. The carpenter must only build things, the farmer must only farm. Behind this principle is the notion that human beings have natural inclinations that should be fulfilled. Specialization demands not only the division of labor, but the most appropriate such division. Only in this way, Socrates is convinced, can everything be done at the highest level possible.

Having isolated the foundational principle of the city, Socrates is ready to begin building it. The first roles to fill are those that will provide for the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, health, and shelter. The just city is populated by craftsmen, farmers, and doctors who each do their own job and refrain from engaging in any other role. They are all members of what Socrates deems the “producing class,” because their role is to produce objects for use.

Socrates calls this city the “healthy city” because it is governed only by necessary desires. In the healthy city, there are only producers, and these producers only produce what is absolutely necessary for life. Glaucon looks less kindly on this city, calling it a “city of pigs.” He points out that such a city is impossible: people have unnecessary desires as well as these necessary ones. They yearn for rich food, luxurious surroundings, and art.

The next stage is to transform this city into the luxurious city, or the “city with a fever.” Once luxuries are in demand, positions like merchant, actor, poet, tutor, and beautician are created. All of this wealth will necessarily lead to wars, and so a class of warriors is needed to keep the peace within the city and to protect it from outside forces. The producers cannot act as our warriors because that would violate our principle of specialization.

Socrates spends the rest of this book, and most of the next, talking about the nature and education of these warriors, whom he calls “guardians.” It is crucial that guardians develop the right balance between gentleness and toughness. They must not be thugs, nor can they be wimpy and ineffective. Members of this class must be carefully selected—people with the correct nature or innate psychology. In particular, guardians should be spirited, or honor-loving, philosophical, or knowledge-loving, and physically strong and fast.

Nature is not sufficient to produce guardians. Nature must be protected and augmented with education. The education of guardians will involve physical training for the body, and music and poetry for the soul. Education of guardians is the most important aspect of the city. It is the process of purification through which the unhealthy, luxurious city can be purged and purified. Because the education of the guardians is so important, Socrates walks us through it in painstaking detail.

He begins by describing what sort of stories will be permitted in the city. The stories told to the young guardians-in-training, he warns, must be closely supervised, because it is chiefly stories that shape a child's soul, just as the way parents handle an infant shapes his body. The remainder of Book II, therefore, is a discussion of permissible tales to tell about the gods. Socrates comes up with two laws to govern the telling of such stories. First, the gods must always be represented as wholly good and as responsible only for what is good in the world. If the gods are presented otherwise (as the warring, conniving, murderous characters that the traditional poetry depicts them to be), children will inevitably grow up believing that such behavior is permissible, even admirable. Second, the gods cannot be represented as sorcerers who change themselves into different forms or as liars. Otherwise, children will grow up without a proper reverence for truth and honesty.

Visual Summary

Republic (Book 2) by Plato

Glaucon

Three classes of goods

1. Things that we desire only for their consequences, such as physical training and medical treatment
2. Things that we desire only for their own sake, such as joy; and, the highest class
3. Things we desire both for their own sake and for what we get from them, such as knowledge, sight, and health

Glaucon and the rest would like Socrates to prove is that justice is not only desirable, but that it belongs to the highest class of desirable things: those desired both for their own sake and their consequences.

Points out that most people class justice among the first group. They view justice as a necessary evil, which we allow ourselves to suffer in order to avoid the greater evil that would befall us if we did away with it. Justice stems from human weakness and vulnerability. Since we can all suffer from each other's injustices, we make a social contract agreeing to be just to one another. We only suffer under the burden of justice because we know we would suffer worse without it. Justice is not something practiced for its own sake but something one engages in out of fear and weakness. To emphasize his point he cites the thought experiment

Thought Experiment: Invoking the legend of the ring of Gyges, he asks us to imagine that a just man is given a ring which makes him invisible. Once in possession of this ring, the man can act unjustly with no fear of reprisal. No one can deny, Glaucon claims, that even the most just man would behave unjustly if he had this ring. He would indulge all of his materialistic, power-hungry, and erotically lustful urges. This tale proves that people are only just because they are afraid of punishment for injustice. No one is just because justice is desirable in itself.

Adeimantus

Bolsters Glaucon's arguments by claiming that no one praises justice for its own sake, but only for the rewards it allows you to reap in both this life and the afterlife. He reiterates Glaucon's request that Socrates show justice to be desirable in the absence of any external rewards: that justice is desirable for its own sake, like joy, health, and knowledge.

Socrates

Two Kinds of Political Justice

- Justice belonging to a city or state
- Justice belonging to an individual

Socrates introduces the foundational principle of human society: the principle of specialization. The principle of specialization states that each person must perform the role for which he is naturally best suited and that he must not meddle in any other business. The carpenter must only build things, the farmer must only farm. Behind this principle is the notion that human beings have natural inclinations that should be fulfilled. Specialization demands not only the division of labor, but the most appropriate such division. Only in this way, Socrates is convinced, can everything be done at the highest level possible.

Foundational Principle of Human Society: The Principal of Specialisation

The producers cannot act as our warriors because that would violate our principle of specialization. Socrates spends the rest of this book, and most of the next, talking about the nature and education of these warriors, whom he calls "guardians." It is crucial that guardians develop the right balance between gentleness and toughness. They must not be thugs, nor can they be wimpy and ineffective. Members of this class must be carefully selected—people with the correct nature or innate psychology. In particular, guardians should be spirited, or honor-loving, philosophical, or knowledge-loving, and physically strong and fast.

Guardians

Stories to be told to the young guardians in training

Socrates comes up with two laws to govern the telling of such stories. First, the gods must always be represented as wholly good and as responsible only for what is good in the world. If the gods are presented otherwise (as the warring, conniving, murderous characters that the traditional poetry depicts them to be), children will inevitably grow up believing that such behavior is permissible, even admirable. Second, the gods cannot be represented as sorcerers who change themselves into different forms or as liars. Otherwise, children will grow up without a proper reverence for truth and honesty.

2. On Poetics – Description of Tragedy

About the Author

Aristotle, Greek Aristoteles, (born 384 BCE, Stagira, Chalcidice, Greece—died 322, Chalcis, Euboea), ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the greatest intellectual figures of Western history. He was the author of a philosophical and scientific system that became the framework and vehicle for both Christian Scholasticism and medieval Islamic philosophy. Even after the intellectual revolutions of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, Aristotelian concepts remained embedded in Western thinking.

Aristotle's intellectual range was vast, covering most of the sciences and many of the arts, including biology, botany, chemistry, ethics, history, logic, metaphysics, rhetoric, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, physics, poetics, political theory, psychology, and zoology. He was the founder of formal logic, devising for it a finished system that for centuries was regarded as the sum of the discipline; and he pioneered the study of zoology, both observational and theoretical, in which some of his work remained unsurpassed until the 19th century. But he is, of course, most outstanding as a philosopher. His writings in ethics and political theory as well as in metaphysics and the philosophy of science continue to be studied, and his work remains a powerful current in contemporary philosophical debate.

Aristotle's writings fall into two groups: those that were published by him but are now almost entirely lost, and those that were not intended for publication but were collected and preserved by others. The first group consists mainly of popular works; the second group comprises treatises that Aristotle used in his teaching.

The lost works include poetry, letters, and essays as well as dialogues in the Platonic manner. To judge by surviving fragments, their content often differed widely from the doctrines of the surviving treatises. The commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias (born c. 200) suggested that Aristotle's works may express two truths: an "exoteric" truth for public consumption and an "esoteric" truth reserved for students in the Lyceum. Most contemporary scholars, however, believe that the popular writings reflect not Aristotle's public views but rather an early stage of his intellectual development.

The works that have been preserved derive from manuscripts left by Aristotle on his death. According to ancient tradition—passed on by Plutarch (46–c. 119 CE) and Strabo (c. 64 BCE–23? CE)—the writings of Aristotle and Theophrastus were bequeathed to Neleus of Scepsis, whose heirs hid them in a cellar to prevent their being confiscated for the library of the kings of Pergamum (in present-day Turkey). Later, according to this tradition, the books were purchased by a collector and taken to Athens, where they were commandeered by the Roman commander Sulla when he conquered the city in 86 BCE. Taken to Rome, they were edited and published there about 60 BCE by Andronicus of Rhodes, the last head of the Lyceum. Although many elements of this story are implausible, it is still widely accepted that Andronicus edited Aristotle's texts and published them with the titles and in the form and order that are familiar today.

Detailed Overview

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle's famous study of Greek dramatic art, Aristotle compares tragedy to such other metrical forms as comedy and epic. He determines that tragedy, like all poetry, is a kind of imitation (*mimesis*), but adds that it has a serious purpose and uses direct action rather than narrative to achieve its ends. He says that poetic *mimesis* is imitation of things as they could be, not as they are — for example, of universals and ideals — thus poetry is a more philosophical and exalted medium than history, which merely records what has actually happened.

The aim of tragedy, Aristotle writes, is to bring about a "catharsis" of the spectators — to arouse in them sensations of pity and fear, and to purge them of these emotions so that they leave the theatre feeling cleansed and uplifted, with a heightened understanding of the ways of gods and men. This catharsis is brought about by witnessing some disastrous and moving change in the fortunes of the drama's protagonist (Aristotle recognized that the change might not be disastrous, but felt this was the kind shown in the best tragedies — *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, was considered a tragedy by the Greeks but does not have an unhappy ending).

According to Aristotle, tragedy has six main elements: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle (scenic effect), and song (music), of which the first two are primary. Most of the *Poetics* is devoted to analysis of the scope and proper use of these elements, with illustrative examples selected from many tragic dramas, especially those of Sophocles, although Aeschylus, Euripides, and some playwrights whose works no longer survive are also cited.

Several of Aristotle's main points are of great value for an understanding of Greek tragic drama. Particularly significant is his statement that the plot is the most important element of tragedy:

Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of action and life, of happiness and misery. And life consists of action, and its end is a mode of activity, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is their action that makes them happy or wretched. The purpose of action in the tragedy, therefore, is not the representation of character: character comes in as contributing to the action. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of the tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be one without character. . . . The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: character holds the second place.

Aristotle goes on to discuss the structure of the ideal tragic plot and spends several chapters on its requirements. He says that the plot must be a complete whole — with a definite beginning, middle, and end — and its length should be such that the spectators can comprehend without difficulty both its separate parts and its overall unity. Moreover, the plot requires a single central theme in which all the elements are logically related to demonstrate the change in the protagonist's fortunes, with emphasis on the dramatic causation and probability of the events.

Aristotle has relatively less to say about the tragic hero because the incidents of tragedy are often beyond the hero's control or not closely related to his personality. The plot is intended

to illustrate matters of cosmic rather than individual significance, and the protagonist is viewed primarily as the character who experiences the changes that take place. This stress placed by the Greek tragedians on the development of plot and action at the expense of character, and their general lack of interest in exploring psychological motivation, is one of the major differences between ancient and modern drama.

Since the aim of a tragedy is to arouse pity and fear through an alteration in the status of the central character, he must be a figure with whom the audience can identify and whose fate can trigger these emotions. Aristotle says that "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." He surveys various possible types of characters on the basis of these premises, then defines the ideal protagonist as a man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty; a personage like Oedipus.

In addition, the hero should not offend the moral sensibilities of the spectators, and as a character he must be true to type, true to life, and consistent.

The hero's error or frailty (hamartia) is often misleadingly explained as his "tragic flaw," in the sense of that personal quality which inevitably causes his downfall or subjects him to retribution. However, overemphasis on a search for the decisive flaw in the protagonist as the key factor for understanding the tragedy can lead to superficial or false interpretations. It gives more attention to personality than the dramatists intended and ignores the broader philosophical implications of the typical plot's denouement. It is true that the hero frequently takes a step that initiates the events of the tragedy and, owing to his own ignorance or poor judgment, acts in such a way as to bring about his own downfall. In a more sophisticated philosophical sense though, the hero's fate, despite its immediate cause in his finite act, comes about because of the nature of the cosmic moral order and the role played by chance or destiny in human affairs. Unless the conclusions of most tragedies are interpreted on this level, the reader is forced to credit the Greeks with the most primitive of moral systems.

It is worth noting that some scholars believe the "flaw" was intended by Aristotle as a necessary corollary of his requirement that the hero should not be a completely admirable man. Hamartia would thus be the factor that delimits the protagonist's imperfection and keeps him on a human plane, making it possible for the audience to sympathize with him. This view tends to give the "flaw" an ethical definition but relates it only to the spectators' reactions to the hero and does not increase its importance for interpreting the tragedies.

The remainder of the Poetics is given over to examination of the other elements of tragedy and to discussion of various techniques, devices, and stylistic principles. Aristotle mentions two features of the plot, both of which are related to the concept of hamartia, as crucial components of any well-made tragedy. These are "reversal" (peripeteia), where the opposite of what was planned or hoped for by the protagonist takes place, as when Oedipus' investigation of the murder of Laius leads to a catastrophic and unexpected conclusion; and "recognition" (anagnorisis), the point when the protagonist recognizes the truth of a situation, discovers another character's identity, or comes to a realization about himself. This sudden acquisition of knowledge or insight by the hero arouses the desired intense emotional

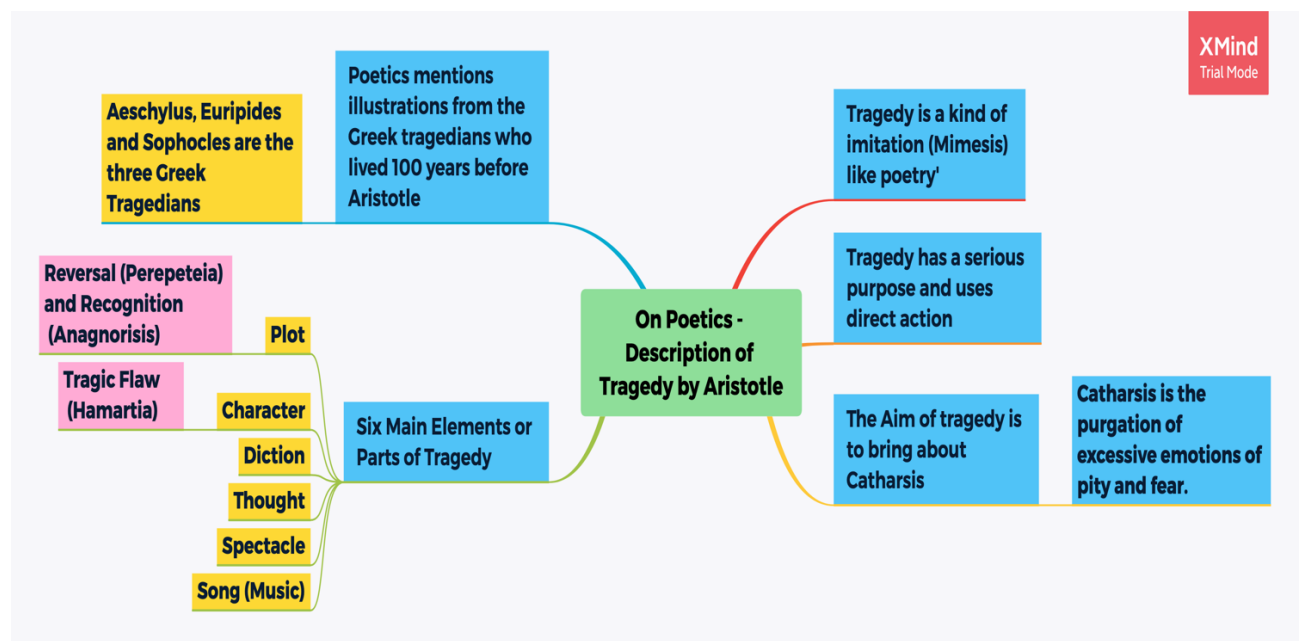
reaction in the spectators, as when Oedipus finds out his true parentage and realizes what crimes he has been responsible for.

Aristotle wrote the Poetics nearly a century after the greatest Greek tragedians (Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles) had already died, in a period when there had been radical transformations in nearly all aspects of Athenian society and culture. The tragic drama of his day was not the same as that of the fifth century, and to a certain extent his work must be construed as a historical study of a genre that no longer existed rather than as a description of a living art form.

In the Poetics, Aristotle used the same analytical methods that he had successfully applied in studies of politics, ethics, and the natural sciences in order to determine tragedy's fundamental principles of composition and content. This approach is not completely suited to a literary study and is sometimes too artificial or formula-prone in its conclusions.

Nonetheless, the Poetics is the only critical study of Greek drama to have been made by a near-contemporary. It contains much valuable information about the origins, methods, and purposes of tragedy, and to a degree shows us how the Greeks themselves reacted to their theater. In addition, Aristotle's work had an overwhelming influence on the development of drama long after it was compiled. The ideas and principles of the Poetics are reflected in the drama of the Roman Empire and dominated the composition of tragedy in western Europe during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

Visual Summary



Infographic created using Trial version of XMIND

Sources and References

- <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html>
- <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/agamemnon-the-choepori-and-the-eumenides/critical-essay/aristotle-on-tragedy>
<https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/republic/section2/>

Note

The study material is prepared to be circulated free of cost exclusively among the students of the Constituent colleges of Thiruvalluvar University under the fair use or fair dealing of material in educational institutions according the Copyright Act of India 1957 amended in 2012. The images used in the document were designed by P.Ponnivalavan, Assistant Professor, Thiruvalluvar University College of Arts and Science, Tirupattur.