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## Ancient Political Advice for Today's Rulers

BY  BERT OLIVIER MAY 2, 2024 GOVERNMENT, PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY 11 MINUTE READ

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It is probably the case that politicians who are encouraged to read the works of the ancient Greek thinker, [Plato](#) – particularly [The Republic](#) – to learn something there about the prerequisites for being able to govern appropriately and wisely, would scoff at this suggestion, with perhaps a few rare exceptions. More specifically, among these prerequisites Plato counted an understanding of the ‘nature’ of human beings – their ‘soul’ or *psuche* (where our word, psyche, comes from). To the question of why Plato would consider it essential for rulers to understand the people whom they govern, the answer should be obvious: unless you have a grasp of how these creatures think, what they desire, and so on, your governance may just flounder against the rock of misunderstanding.

At least this is something on which our current ‘rulers’ (such as they are) would agree: you have to ‘understand’ the people over whom you rule, but with an important – in fact, crucial – qualification. For Plato, knowledge of human nature was essential because, as a philosopher, he wanted rulers to rule wisely, for the *benefit* of the people and for the *polis* or city-state; for those fascists who would lord it over us today, such knowledge is similarly essential, although it comes with a massive difference. Instead of utilising an understanding of humans for the benefit of all, their intent, to use and abuse such knowledge with the aim of exercising totalitarian control over the supposed ‘useless eaters,’ has been demonstrated in no uncertain terms since at least 2020, although the aftermath of 9/11 was already a warning of what was to come.

So, how should one govern, given specific abilities, inclinations, and dispositions on the part of the governed and the governing – considering that rulers also have to understand *themselves* to be able to govern well and justly? If you recognise the name of Plato, you will probably know that he was an ancient Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century BCE. You may also know that Socrates was his teacher and that he (Plato), in turn, was Aristotle's teacher, who later turned out to be the teacher of the Macedonian prince who became Alexander the Great. This is the historical context in broad brushstrokes. What few people know is that Plato could teach politicians a thing or two about *good* governance.

Politicians would probably scoff at this — a fellow who lived more than 2,000 years ago teach us 'modern' politicians how to do our job? Come on! Actually, this is precisely what I mean. Consider this. Plato's *Republic* did not fall from thin air. When his teacher, Socrates, was found guilty of misleading the youth of the city (that is, for teaching them how to think for themselves) by an Athenian court, he was condemned to death. For Plato this was a clear sign that justice did not prevail in Athens.

Who knew better than Plato that Socrates was a just man, whose only 'crime' was that he taught people to question things, especially 'the gods of the city' — in other words, all those things that cities (today, societies) accept conventionally and uncritically. For individuals who have political and economic power in a city or society, such a person as Socrates was a direct threat to their power, and therefore he 'had to go.'

In his *Apology* Plato provides an account of Socrates' trial, which gives us some insight into his reasons for believing that Socrates was a just man, and hence, that his conviction and execution comprised an unjust act. But in his *Republic* — which is undoubtedly one of the most important and influential works ever written — Plato has furnished us with a thoroughly reasoned account of the conditions that a city-state (or *polis*, in Greek), must satisfy to be a 'just' city.

If Plato's notion of justice comes across as strange today, it is probably because one does not often judge laws in light of the question, whether they are just; that is, serve justice. And yet, it has always been the case that laws are not necessarily just. (Think of South Africa's erstwhile apartheid laws: they were not just.) However, the comparative novelty of Plato's notion of a 'just' city, from a contemporary perspective, only comes into focus when one discovers that you first have to understand his conception of the human psyche or soul. In a nutshell, the structure of a just city is congruent to that of what may be called a 'just' soul.

According to Plato the human psyche is composite, with three components, namely reason, spirit, and appetite (or desire). By means of striking images, functioning as metaphors, he enabled his readers to visualise their relation to one another. The best known of these images is probably the one in the *Phaedrus*, where he compares the psyche to a chariot, driven by a charioteer and pulled by two horses. The first of the latter was a grey-eyed, black horse, stockily built and not really beautiful, but extraordinarily strong, and disobedient to boot. The other horse was black-eyed, white, beautiful, graceful, and obedient.

What do these metaphorical components of the soul – the chariot, two horses and charioteer – represent? The charioteer instantiates *reason*, the white horse *spirit*, and the black horse *desire* (appetite). Reason guides, spirit animates, and desire motivates. The strength of desire, in Plato's estimation, is apparent from his argument that, unless the charioteer (reason) enlists the assistance of the white, obedient horse (spirit), the powerful black horse (desire) cannot be controlled, and pulls the chariot wherever it wants to go.

In other words, the partnership between the charioteer and the obedient, but spirited horse is essential to prevent the headstrong horse from taking them from pillar to post in the quest, to satisfy its needs. However, if the charioteer (reason), assisted by the white horse, gains mastery over this powerful creature, he or she can guide the two steeds, which means that reason is not self-sufficient, but depends on the two other faculties (spirit and desire) to live a life in equilibrium. Putting it differently: only *wisdom* (reason's 'excellence' or virtue) together with *courage* (spirit's 'excellence') can rein in the excesses of appetite or desire (whose 'excellence' is to *motivate*).

What should be prevented at all costs, according to Plato, is that desire be allowed to rule the former two faculties, as disharmony or chaos would be the result in a person's life. Significantly, such an appetite- or need-ruled person's soul is said to lack 'justice.' The 'just' soul is therefore also a happy one; where there is balance among reason, spirit, and desire, all three of these faculties being necessary for a fulfilled life.

Interestingly, Plato argues that when spirit, which is characterised by 'spiritedness' or *thumos*, is lacking in a person, it has a particularly deleterious effect on such a person's character, given its indispensable supportive function in relation to reason. Moreover, one knows that spirit is absent from a person's character when someone fails to be angered by injustice. This gives meaning to the expression, 'to be justly angry.'

This is where one can make the transition from a 'just' (and happy) individual soul to the state which is 'just.' In the *Republic*, Plato maps his psychology on to the state or *polis*. There are, or should be, three distinct classes, he argues: the rulers, guardians of the state (or so-called philosopher-kings), the protectors (soldiers and navy, also sometimes called 'guardians'), and the producers (commercial classes).

Furthermore, just as an individual lives happily and in harmony with her- or himself when reason rules over desire with the help of spirit, so, too, a *polis* (or society) is harmonious and 'just' when the *rulers govern wisely*, with the *assistance of the spirited protectors*, in this way restraining the sometimes excessive needs and desires of the commercial classes. Should appetite (the 'excellence' of the commercial producers) gain the upper hand, a city is soon in disharmony, according to Plato, particularly if reason (the rulers) is overwhelmed by the wish to satisfy appetite uncontrollably, and especially if the protectors fail to support the (presumably wise) rulers.

Although one may take issue with Plato on the class structure of his ideal republic, which is thoroughly argued in the book (and I, for one, would do so), one has to acknowledge the genius of his insight into the prerequisites for ruling well; namely a well-grounded comprehension of the way the human soul functions — that of the rulers *and* the ruled. Furthermore, his model of the human psyche is as illuminating today as it was in antiquity, and it is easy to test it on an individual as well as collective level.

Freud understood this so well that at least two of the components of his structural conception of the psyche correspond with Plato's; namely the 'ego' (reason, for Plato) and the 'id' (Platonic desire). The only two that aren't really a match are Freud's 'superego' (the subliminal representative of societal normativity in the psyche) and Plato's 'spirit,' probably because the 'superego' presupposes the Freudian unconscious, of which Plato presumably did not have an idea.

Recall that earlier I alluded to contemporary politicians and other technocrats, who aspire to the assumption of power over the rest of us, employing an understanding of the human psyche, not for the benefit of all — as in Plato's (and later also Aristotle's) case — but instead with the demonstrable intention, to use and abuse such knowledge, with the additional aim of furthering desired totalitarian control. What I have in mind is that, as evidence suggests, the kind of knowledge (pertaining to 'rule') that they aspire to is mainly, if not exclusively, of the psycho-technological sort, which enables them — that is, their agents and servants — to

carry out what is known today as (a variety of) 'psy-ops,' or psychological operations usually attributed to the military.

Psy-ops employ a diversity of psychological strategies and techniques to exercise influence over the feelings, thoughts, and behaviour of a selected group, with the obvious goal of persuading the people comprising the latter, usually via various modes of deception, to act in a desired manner. If this sounds familiar, don't be surprised. It has been carried out on the populations of the world's countries since at least 2020, and arguably for much longer.

Given the advanced state of electronic information and communication technology at that time, the means for the propaganda and cleverly disguised disinformation, essential for convincing people to act in a desired manner, were already there with the advent of Covid, and will be employed again in a similar future situation, such as the possibly pervasive spread of bird flu (among people?), which has already been detected in India and at least 17 US states.

It is not difficult to recall obvious instances of psy-ops during Covid. Who can forget the endless refrain of 'Build back better,' or 'It is time for the Great Reset,' let alone 'No one is safe until we are all safe!' And then there were the psy-ops surrounding lockdowns, masking, and social distancing, where we were all assured that, based on scientific grounds, these strategies for combating 'the virus' were indispensable if we were to defeat it. However, as Robert Kennedy, Jr. reminds us in his *A Letter to Liberals* (p. 32), in an April 2022 interview,

*...Dr. Fauci finally acknowledged his true strategy behind lockdown mandates —a psychological warfare technique to coerce vaccine compliance: 'You use lockdowns to get people vaccinated.'*

Not surprisingly, Fauci has also admitted that social distancing '...was completely fake from the start,' in other words, that it was a psy-op, as indeed were '...draconian rules around vaccines that don't meaningfully stop transmission or infection' (in the same article) – a reference to putatively scientifically founded 'vaccine' mandates. Unfortunately, this rather debonair admission from an unrepentant Covid 'health' czar does not reverse the

immeasurable damage done to so many people by the adoption of these completely unscientific measures, especially to children, in psychological terms.

Not that these psy-ops were restricted to people like Fauci and Bill Gates as far as their indefatigable praise of miraculous 'vaccines' and related matters went. Joe Biden, the president of the United States himself – in the company of dictators like Justin Trudeau of Canada and Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, who did the same thing – endlessly reminded people on television that it was imperative to get the 'vaccine,' lest they die a miserable death, which he confidently predicted on the part of the 'anti-vaxxers.'

And without fail they supported their exhortations with the reassurance to viewers that this was based on 'the science.' Some 'science,' given the accumulating evidence of excess deaths, occurring in the time following the administering of billions of Covid 'vaccines' across the globe – something that is becoming apparent regarding children too. Only a fool would argue that there is no connection between the jabs and the mortality figures.

Is there any indication that knowledge – specifically scientific knowledge, so highly prized in our time – is employed or applied to facilitate good governance or rule today, in a way that is comparable to Plato's use of philosophical knowledge to promote good governance? It seems to me to be abundantly obvious that this is not the case; whether it is techno-psychology, or pharmaceutical science, the exact opposite appears to be so, and while one may argue that this is not explicitly tied to issues concerning rule or governance, in effect it has everything to do with it. Except that it should be called 'misrule,' 'tyranny,' or 'dictatorship.' And as for being 'just,' it is at the furthest possible remove from it.

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