

Plato's Practical Theory of Ideal State

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The purpose of this paper is to prove that while the ideal state Plato conceived in the *Republic* was an unrealizable one, he propounded a vision of a practical ideal state in the *Laws*.

In the *Republic*, Plato says that the ruler of the ideal state must have the *episteme* (knowledge in the strictest sense) of the Form (*idea*) of the Good. On the other hand, it is evident that he never thought any human being could have *episteme* (i.e. *sophia*) at all (cf. *Apol.*23a, *Phdr.*278d, *Tht.*145d-e). It follows then, that Plato thought in the *Republic* the ideal state he conceived was not to be realized.

The description of the ideal state in the *Republic* is part of the proof that the just are to lead a happy life and the unjust an unhappy one. The proof is interrupted by the digressive argument in the books V-VII. In this digression Plato introduces the Form of the Good and claims that it is the necessary condition of the perfect ruler of the ideal state to have the *episteme* of that Form. As is well known, Plato made a distinction of *episteme* and *doxa*, and thought that Forms were objects of *episteme*. From this fact and the fact that Forms are not introduced in the 'main argument' (Books II-IV and VIII-IX), we should understand that the 'main argument' belongs to the region of the *doxa*. If so, it follows that the ideal state in the 'main argument' also belongs to the same region, with the result that the ruler of that state doesn't have the *episteme* of the Form of the Good, which means that the state is not really an 'ideal' one.

In *Politicus* Plato propounded the idea that the judgment of the perfect ruler was superior to any of the written laws. This suggests that he thought, not only in the *Politicus* but also in the earlier written *Republic*, that if an ideal state could be realized, it was to be realized not by laws but by the perfect ruler. In the *Laws* on the other hand Plato thinks, admitting that human beings cannot establish perfect laws, that what realizes an ideal state is laws and not a perfect ruler.

To prove that Plato had a vision of a practical ideal state in the *Laws*, I offered a part of the vision, especially concerning education. For reasons of space, however, I could not support this with more testimonies of the vision.