

Plato on Dialectic and Virtue in the *Republic*

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In the *Republic*, Plato envisions the method of philosophical dialectic, assigned to the future rulers of *Callipolis*, as being aimed at Forms, whatever its substance. But why does Plato believe that acquiring knowledge of the Forms *means* they become truly virtuous? Plato's lack of explicit discussion of this point has resulted in various interpretations being proposed. This paper aims to answer the above question by examining the relationship between dialectic, mathematics, and the acquisition of virtue in the *Republic*.

In section one, I review Rowett's recent interpretation regarding this issue, which claims that Plato in the *Republic* deviates from the "Socratic" method envisaged in early dialogues that seeks the definition of virtue, and then contest her interpretation. In sections two and three, I introduce and examine Burnyeat's interpretation, which highlights "unity ($\epsilon\nu$)" as a crucial concept to explain why Plato finds so much study of mathematics necessary for the future rulers before heading for the dialectic that culminates in grasping the Form of the Good. Although Burnyeat's interpretation is in the right direction, it is at risk of attributing to Plato an unnecessarily implausible philosophical view that one can adequately deal with practical matters such as legislation and administration by the direct application of some *mathematical* ratios or formulas to the relevant circumstances; in short, Burnyeat mathematizes Plato too much. Nonetheless, Burnyeat hits the mark to the extent that he deems mathematics and dialectic as constituting a series of studies that enhance one's understanding of unity.

In section four, based upon the discussion of the previous sections, I argue that Plato expects dialectic to render the learner good or virtuous because this study enables them to become assimilated to the object of study, i.e., the totality or system of the Forms, which is arguably the most unified (or good) entity (cf. VI 500c3–d3). In section five, I conclude by fleshing out what it is like to become assimilated to the totality of the Forms or become "godlike"; I submit that the simile of irrigation at VI 485d6–e5 and the tripartite psychology help us elucidate this state of the soul.