Cities will have no respite from evil, unless philosophers rule as kings in the cities, or those who we call kings or rulers genuinely and adequately study philosophy, until, that is, political power and philosophy coalesce, and the various natures of those who now pursue the one to the exclusion of the other, are forcibly debarred from doing so. Otherwise, the city we have been describing will never grow into a possibility or see the light of day. [Plato, *The Republic*, translation by Grube, Book V.473e]

Athens, idealized often and by many as the ultimate representation of harmony and balance in a society, suffers a period of political and social upheaval that are the products of its slow decay. Political and social discords, even though present in earlier forms of Athenian government, are emphasized in Plato’s lifetime during the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the fourth century. Athens faces a very controversial time in its development. Its many victories in battle with other city states, its prosperous commerce, and its government under Pericles’ impulsive tendency towards greatness introduces the city into a process of extension, which raises imperialism and brings wealth and luxury to the city. Affluence, sharply linked with political power, raises corruption as it becomes an obsession in Athenian people. Athenian leaders struggle to acquire political positions under any circumstance, using persuasion and demagogic techniques to bribe the population. Sophistry and its mastery of rhetoric become popular as methods to justify opinions and proposals of crucial importance to Athenian life.

Social and political dimensions produce constant changes in the arrangement of the Athenian government as a number of revolutions take place in the city during the course of the Peloponnesian War. The constant shift in the government from democracy to oligarchy, creates an unclear arrangement of
the society, and an undefined idea of the social group that is supposed to rule. The precarious and unstable systems of administration of the state in Athens, affect the economy and the living conditions of the citizens, as the city-state enters a process of political stagnation.

Plato is a product of the ebbing Athenian culture and is educated with the tools to criticize its denigration. He is revolted by the political situation, as he considers both the democrats and the oligarchs to be corrupt and guided by self-interest. Both parties were concerned with the acquisition of power, while the real social dilemmas were not solved, as the real interests of the whole community were neglected in the administration policies.

In *The Republic*, Plato makes a meticulous analysis of the political and social conflict of the state, and plots his idea of a perfect state by creating a social structure in which the real interests of the people will be perceived and taken into consideration by unifying philosophy and politics. His perfect state is divided into three social groups, which, through the practice Plato’s four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice), will reach a perfect equality. Plato illustrates the three social divisions with the Myth of the Metals, assigning a specific metal for each social partition: gold (the rulers educated through Plato’s complex program of education); silver (the guardians who are to swell for the security of the state); and bronze (the craftsmen who will proportion the material needs of the society and will be the only individuals allowed to trade with money). The three social classes are perfectly balanced as each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Plato considers philosophy as the only instrument that should be used when trying to build a true society. However, with a more profound analysis of Athens and other Greek poleis like Sparta, which Plato includes in his dialogue, the ideal state can be refuted, as a similar social arrangement to that presented in *The Republic*, is distinctive yet could never be transformed into Plato’s utopia.

In *The Republic*, Plato considers the classes in his perfect state to be equal, as communal happiness is reached through the interaction and cooperation of the three divisions, in which individuals are presumed to labor in only one job. Happiness is produced by the involvement of the truth, discovered through
philosophy, in society. Even though communal happiness and social concord are present in Plato’s state as there is equilibrium, the truth is not exposed to the lower social class—the craftsmen—because education is a convenience of the ruling class. What is the use of reaching communal happiness if the whole community is not able to understand the truth? Plato is then removing every possibility of fulfillment as an individual possibility. He describes individuals as constituents of an organization that should only struggle for the convenience of the whole. Individuals become machines that, according to Plato, will not be alienated, as they are to obey their situation in the community. Hence, in Plato’s society there are no social differences in welfare, but there are intended differences in knowledge, which are predetermined by the manipulation of society through noble lies.

The difference in knowledge among the different social classes is one of the similar elements that are evident both in Plato’s ideal state as well as in the Greek polis. Plato follows the standards of the social structure of the Greek city states to outline his supposed perfect state. Thus, the mistakes that lead to social antagonism are existent in Plato’s reasoning.

In the early poleis, the arrangement of the society was thoroughly aristocratic. The superior class was established by warriors of noble blood, among which the king was to be chosen. The aristocrats had a superior possibility of being educated, especially in Athens where, in order for an individual to acquire the instruments of rhetoric, a necessary skill for political exploitation, the sophists would have expected remuneration. Akin, in Plato’s Republic, the philosopher king is to be chosen among the class of rulers (gold): warriors through an exhaustive educational program based on philosophy.

All the individuals who were considered citizens in the poleis were strictly demanded to participate in war, which would involve sacrificing their time, wealth and life for the benefit of the state. The class of the guardians (silver) in Plato’s utopia is supposed to exercise a similar activity to assure the security of the state.

A polis was an exclusive organization. Not all the members of the population had a right to citizenship. Slaves, landless and foreign men, worked in the fields. Artisans, craftsmen, and merchants were slaves native to other cities,
who supply the other classes with corporeal necessities. Plato’s distribution of society assigns a similar role to the class of the craftsmen (bronze), who, though supposed to enjoy the benefits of monetary marketing, are constrained to labor in the fabrication of physical needs.

The social arrangement of Plato’s ideal state thus follows the social structure of the developing polis. The principal idea of the Greek city-state, the passionate connection between the individual and the city for the food of the community, is also present in *The Republic*.

In the polis, the aristocracy was not supposed to work for a living. This ideal inferred the existence of slavery and political disadvantage and inferiority. The aristocracy dwelled for the organization and benefit of the government. It was supposed to be ready to fight in battle, and to deliberate in the assembly. An equivalent position is occupied by the ruling classes in Plato’s ideal state. Conversely, the lower classes of the polis, as well as the class of the craftsmen in Plato’s theoretical state, were supposed to strive for the accumulation of profits.

Is there a beneficial innovation in Plato’s society? The equality of advantages among the three classes of the ideal state does not proportion a new social arrangement. Plato’s proposal is erratic.

In early expressions of the polis, the aristocracy occupied the uppermost position related to power in the government, as its affluence furnished its members with a comfortable, effortless life that enabled individuals to dedicate their time to the endeavors of the government and war. Riches were a convenience that set the aristocracy in a favorable relationship with the power of the state. The location of the higher classes (silver and gold) in Plato’s conjectural state is correspondent, even though dominance is canceled in this social arrangement. The silver and gold classes are to have the same advantages that affluence bestowed the aristocracy in the polis.

After the year 800 BC, as the poleis started to consolidate, the Greek kings lose power and the oligarchy establishes in the government, measuring participation in public affairs through wealth. Once again, citizenship was an advantage of the few that determined participation in public affairs through wealth. Once again, citizenship was an advantage of the few, that determined participation in the procedures of government and in the decisions of the state.
Individuals who had the advantage of citizenship were expected to go through a training process that is comparable with the educational system for the philosopher rulers of the *Republic*. Once again, it is necessary to emphasize that this was an advantage of a privileged class that had reached its privileged position through the measure of material belongings: the election of magistrates was determined by wealthy citizens, who would also be willing to fight in battle and provide arms for the army.

The Spartan city-state, which Plato considers a timocracy (the second best government system for the good of the whole community), expounds in its constitution the education and organization of society when related to the military and the government: at the age of seven, every boy of a traditional and well-to-do background was expected to leave his family to enter a severe program of physical training. Men could only return to family life after the age of thirty. However, they were expected to receive their food in the barracks until they reached the age sixty. The arduous labor of the slaves provided financial support for the military force. The Spartan council was to be elected and engrossed by citizens over sixty who had finished serving their military duties. Lower groups of the population were not welcome in political life. The craftsmen and merchants furnished equipment for the militia.

The education of the individuals among whom the philosopher king was to be chosen is equivalent in Plato’s ideal state. Plato follows the stages of development of the aristocracy of the polis to plan his social arrangement. However, there is a very significant difference that describes the originality and advantages of Plato’s proposal: the involvement of philosophy in the education of the rulers, which supposedly will lead to the creation of a just society. And even though Plato’s efforts towards an equal society are admirable as communal happiness is the only objective, the manipulation of reality and the capability to utilize power is still an advantage of a minority which has been an object of obsession of ambition intrinsic in human nature. Such a phenomenon has tried to be explained in attempts, similar to Plato’s, of outlining a perfect society in which the installment of power is the non-existent answer to social discord. The works of Machiavelli, Rousseau, Hobbes, and Marx are a few examples of such dissertations.
It is important to recall that Plato belonged to a traditional and aristocratic Athenian family, which could elucidate his desire to place knowledge only in individuals that, in his ideal state, resemble the aristocracy in its social activities. If philosophy was so laudable, why should it only be a possibility of the few, as it was an accession of the wealthy Athenians? Why is the fate of an immense community being determined by several individuals with manipulative power?

Even though overwrought by the political commotion of the time, Plato was undoubtedly conditioned by his own culture, for which he wished to reproduce the situation of power in the hands of a ruling minority. It is also important to acknowledge Socrates’ influence as the source that enabled Plato to critique the reality that he contemplated.

However, Socrates considered each individual to lead his life according to the product of the contemplation and questioning of his surroundings. Plato’s ideal state, in which the population is directed by the system, is then a paradox of Socratic reasoning.

Moreover, Plato’s comprehension of philosophy as the ultimate mechanism towards a just state is unrealistic. Philosophy is a subject that is inexplicable in its essences. A specific truth can be justified through the use of philosophy in a certain reality, but such a conception will not necessarily exist with coherence in other situations. If Plato’s state was to develop and mature it would need to be ostracized from any influence of the external world for its philosophy could be deviated through relationships with convergent societies. If this ostracism was not successful, landless populations could be easily submitted into slavery for the sake of the ideal state, destroying the main objective of Plato’s proposal.

Plato is not conscious of the difficulty of amalgamating philosophy and politics in the practical sense. His effort to constitute an independent city state similar to the one discussed in *The Republic* was a failure in the city of Syracuse.

Nevertheless, Plato is conscious of the decadence of Athens. Great literary and intellectual expressions develop freely in decaying cultures. Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were produced in the disappearing Ionia. As well as *The Republic*, they tried to explain man’s apprehension towards injustice.

Plato’s equal society is not equally educated. It is removing every individualistic trait from the human being. How can justice be attained if the major-
ity of the population lacks social consciousness due to insufficient education? Could philosophy then be developed in a community that does not have the ability to raise controversy?

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**ANALECTS of the CORE of PROFESSOR NELSON**

as compiled by Matthew Spencer, and published in the Core Journal Vol. IX:

1. Professor said of Rousseau’s Confessions, “Boy, it’s so nitty, and it’s so gritty!” Only then did Matthew understand.

2. When Matthew thought he really understood Rousseau, the Professor said, “What’s the point of Rousseau’s life?” and Matthew could not speak for the rest of the day.

3. The Professor said to a student in the class, “You remind me of Satan, but not in a bad way.”

4. When the class thought that they had discussed everything, the Professor surprised them, saying “All we have to do now is figure out, who is Don Giovanni and why, and then we go home!”

5. The Professor redirected discussion one day by uttering the words, “When they were snorting coke!”

6. For a confounded class, the best medicine is more and more confusion. Thus, the Professor said, after a dizzying discussion of Faust, “And otherwise, we only have to figure out the meaning of the universe, and then we’re done, okay?”