Lecture Six: The Rule of Reason

logistikon - the rational part of the soul, naturally oriented to truth, knowledge, and the good of the whole
technê - craft, art, skill, expertise
politikê technê: the art of politics; the skill of the rational ruler
reluctant ruler principle (weak): since ruling is exercised for the benefit of the ruled rather than the ruler, only those who are reluctant to rule, and need to be incentivized in some way (by 'wages' extrinsic to the activity of ruling itself) should rule
reluctant ruler principle (strong): since the desire to rule inevitably leads to conflict and faction, only those who are reluctant to rule should rule
something-better criterion: since the only morally acceptable ruler is the reluctant ruler, they must be someone with something better to do -- someone who has access to greater goods in some way of life other than ruling

I. Victorian Prelude:

"It was reserved for Sokrates, and for Plato, who, whether as the interpreter or continuator of Sokrates, can never be severed from him, to exalt this negative arm of philosophy to a perfection never since surpassed, and to provide it with its greatest, most interesting, and most indispensable field of exercise, the generalities relating to life and conduct. These great men originated the thought, that, like every other part of the practice of life, morals and politics are an affair of science, to be understood only after severe study and special training; an indispensable part of which consists in acquiring the habit of considering, not merely what can be said in favour of a doctrine, but what can be said against it; of sifting opinions, and never accepting any until it has emerged victorious over every logical, still more than over every practical objection. These two principles -- the necessity of a scientific basis and method for ethics and politics, and of rigorous negative dialectics as a part of that method, are the greatest of the many lessons to be learnt from Plato; and it is because the modern mind has in a great measure laid both these lessons, especially the latter of them, aside, that we regard the Platonic writings as among the most precious of the intellectual treasures bequeathed to us by antiquity."
-- J.S. Mill, 'Grote's Plato' [1866], pp. 382-3

"In the political theory thus conceived by Plato--confining ourselves to his scheme of the ideally best, and neglecting his compromise with existing obstacles in the comparatively tame production of his decline--there are two things specially deserving of remark. First, the vigorous assertion of a truth, of transcendent importance and universal application—that the work of government is a Skilled Employment; that governing is not a thing which can be done at odd times, or by the way, in conjunction with a hundred other pursuits, nor to which a person can be competent without a large and liberal general education, followed by special and professional study, laborious and of long duration, directed to acquiring, not mere practical dexterity, but a scientific mastery of the subject." -- J.S. Mill, 'Grote's Plato' [1866], pp. 435-6

"The demand for a Scientific Governor, not responsible for any part of his conduct to his

unscientific fellow-citizens, is part of this general conception of Division of Labour, and errs only by a too exclusive clinging to that one principle." -- J.S. Mill, 'Grote's Plato' [1866], pp. 439

"Plato's conception of forms corresponds to what we have in mind when we speak of 'principles' in morality and of 'laws' in science. What he says applies alike to moral, aesthetic, and physical conceptions; the form in every case is that which is constant under variation, and it is what the man of science is always trying to get at. To the ordinary mind it seems at first unreal, less real than the ordinary view of things as they appear, the sensible world; but the world as it is for science, the world of what Plato calls forms, is not a secondary, shadowy, unreal world, it is the same world better understood."
-- R. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London: Macmillan, 1968: first published 1897), p. 195

"It is only the small number who ultimately rule the state who go through the complete course. No one can doubt that, if it were possible to do something in his spirit for the training of the most influential people in the state, modern government would be considerably better than it is, for, if the function of government is the hardest and highest of all, it clearly requires the best training and the best instruments". - ibid., p. 293

" He is the father of idealism in philosophy, in politics, in literature.> And many of the latest conceptions of modern thinkers and statesmen, such as the unity of knowledge, the reign of law, and the equality of the sexes, have been anticipated in a dream by him. "
- B. Jowett 1875 vol. III, 1-2; angled brackets mark words added in 2nd ed., as cited in Burnyeat, 1998

I. What Does A Guardian Know?

The City Of All the Sciences:

"You are right," he said.

"Listen then," I said, "to my dream, to see whether it comes through horn or through ivory.[9] If temperance really ruled over us and were as
b we now define it, surely everything would be done according to science: neither would anyone who says he is a pilot (but is not) deceive us, nor would any doctor or general or anyone else pretending to know what he does not know escape our notice. This being the situation, wouldn't we have greater bodily health than we do now, and safety when we are in danger at sea or in battle, and wouldn't we have dishes and all our clothes
c and shoes and things skillfully made for us, and many other things as well, because we would be employing true craftsmen? And, if you will, let us even agree that the mantic art is knowledge of what is to be and that temperance, directing her, keeps away deceivers and sets up the true
d seers as prophets of the future. I grant that the human race, if thus equipped, would act and live in a scientific way—because temperance, watching over it, would not allow the absence of science to creep in and become our accomplice. But whether acting scientifically would make us fare well and be happy, this we have yet to learn, my dear Critias."

"But on the other hand," he said, "you will not readily gain the prize of faring well by any other means if you eliminate scientific action."

"Instruct me on just one more small point," I said. "When you say that
e something is scientifically done, are you talking about the science of cutting out shoes?"

"Good heavens no!"

"You wretch," said I, "all this time you've been leading me right round in a circle and concealing from me that it was not living scientifically that was making us fare well and be happy, even if we possessed all the sciences put together, but that we have to have this one science of good and evil. Because, Critias, if you consent to take away this science from the other sciences, will medicine any the less produce health, or cobbling produce shoes, or the art of weaving produce clothes, or will the pilot's art any the less prevent us from dying at sea or the general's art in war?"

"They will do it just the same," he said.

"But my dear Critias, our chance of getting any of these things well and beneficially done will have vanished if this is lacking."

"You are right."

"Then this science, at any rate, is not temperance, as it seems, but that one of which the function is to benefit us. For it is not a science of science and absence of science but of good and evil. So that, if this latter one is beneficial, temperance would be something else for us."

-- Plato, *Charmides* 173a-d, 4b-c (trans. Sprague)

II. Why Do Guardians Rule?

The Reluctant Ruler Principle:

"Therefore, Thrasymachus, it is plain by now that no art or kind of rule provides for its own benefit, but, as we have been saying all along, it provides for and commands the one who is ruled, considering his advantage-that of the weaker-and not that of the stronger. It is for just this reason, my dear Thrasymachus, that I said a moment ago that no one willingly chooses to rule and get mixed up in straightening out other people's troubles; but he asks for wages, because the man who is to do anything fine by art never does what is best for himself nor does he command it, insofar as he is commanding by art, but rather what is best for the man who is ruled. It is for just this reason, as it seems, that there must be wages for those who are going to be willing to rule--either money, or honor, or a penalty if he should not rule."

"What do you mean by that, Socrates?" said Glaucon. "The first two kinds of wages I know, but I don't understand what penalty you mean and how you can say it is a kind of wage." -- *Rep.* 346e-7a, Bloom trans. rev.

The Return to the Cave:

"And what about this? Isn't it likely," I said, "and necessary, as a consequence of what was said before, that those who are without education and experience of truth would never be adequate stewards of a city, nor would those who have been allowed to spend their time in education continuously to the end-the former because they don't have any single goal in life at which they must aim in doing everything they do in private or in public, the latter because they won't be willing to act, believing they have emigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive?"

"True," he said.

"Then our job as founders," I said, "is to compel the best natures to go to the study which we were saying before is the greatest, to see the good and to go up that ascent; and, when they have gone up and seen sufficiently, not to permit them what is now permitted."
"What's that?"
"To remain there," I said, "and not be willing to go down again among those prisoners or share their labors and honors, whether they be slighter or more serious."
[*Glaucon's objection*] "What?" he said. "Are we to do them an injustice, and make them live a worse life when a better is possible for them?"
[*Socrates' response*] "My friend, you have again forgotten," I said, "that it's not the concern of law [*nomôi*] that anyone class in the city fare exceptionally well, but it contrives to bring this about in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, making them share with one another the benefit that each is able to bring to the commonwealth. And it produces such men in the city not in order to let them turn whichever way each wants, but in order that it may use them in binding the city together."
"That's true," he said. "I did forget."
[*The address to the Guardians*] "Well, then, Glaucon," I said, "consider that we won't be doing injustice to the philosophers who come to be among us, but rather that we will say just things to them while compelling them besides to care for and guard the others. We'll say that when such men come to be in the other cities it is fitting for them not to participate in the labors of those cities. For they grow up spontaneously against the will of the regime in each; and a nature that grows by itself and doesn't owe its rearing to anyone has justice on its side when it is not eager to pay off the price of rearing to anyone. 'But you we have begotten for yourselves and for the rest of the city like leaders and kings in hives; you have been better and more perfectly educated and are more able to participate in both lives. [*Life in the Cave*] So you must go down, each in his turn, into the common dwelling of the others and get habituated along with them to seeing the dark things. And, in getting habituated to it, you will see ten thousand times better than the men there, and you'll know what each of the phantoms is, and of what it is a phantom, because you have seen the truth about fine, just, and good things. And thus, the city will be governed by us and by you in a state of waking, not in a dream as the many cities nowadays are governed by men who fight over shadows with one another and form factions for the sake of ruling, as though it were some great good. But the truth is surely this: that city in which those who are going to rule are least eager to rule is necessarily governed in the way that is best and freest from faction, while the one that gets the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way."
"Most certainly," he said.
"Do you suppose our pupils will disobey us when they hear this and be unwilling to join in the labors of the city, each in his turn, while living the greater part of the time with one another in the pure region?"
"Impossible," he said. "For we'll be giving just orders to just people. However, each of them will certainly approach ruling as a necessary thing -- which is the opposite of what is done by those who now rule in every city."
[*The reluctant ruler principle: strong version*] "That's the way it is, my comrade," I said. "If you discover a life better than ruling for those who are going to rule, it is possible that your well-governed city will come into being. For here alone will the really rich rule, rich

not in gold but in those riches required by the happy man, rich in a good and prudent life. But if beggars, men hungering for want of private goods, go to public affairs supposing that in them they must seize the good, it isn't possible. When ruling becomes a thing fought over, such a war-- a domestic war, one within the family-- destroys these men themselves and the rest of the city as well."
"That's very true," he said.
"Have you," I said, "any other life that despises political offices other than that of true philosophy?"
"No, by Zeus," he said. "I don't"
"But men who aren't lovers of ruling must go to it; otherwise rival lovers will fight."
-- *Republic* 519b-21b

Glaucon's objection: Four cases for comparison:

(1) a Guardian who obeys the requirement that she share in the work of government in the just city;
(2) a Guardian who lives in the Isles of the Blessed, ie a just city with no need for a requirement that philosophers share in the work of government (alluded to at 519c);
(3) a Guardian who free-rides, living in the just city but refusing to share in the work of government;
(4) a philosopher (with all the capacities and dispositions of a Guardian) who however lives in an unjust city and doesn't share in the work of government.

The Invention of the Civil Service:

"Do you mean six years," he said, "or four?"
"Don't worry about that," I said. "Set it down at five. Now, after this, they'll have to go down into that cave again for you, and they must be compelled to rule in the affairs of war and all the offices suitable for young men, so that they won't be behind the others in experience. And here, too, they must still be tested whether they will stand firm or give way when pulled in all directions."
"How much time do you assign to this?" he said.
"Fifteen years," I said. "And when they are fifty years old, those who have been preserved throughout and are in every way best at everything, both in deed and in knowledge, must at last be led to the end. And, lifting up the brilliant beams of their souls, they must be compelled to look toward that which provides light for everything. Once they see the good itself, they must be compelled, each in his turn, to use it as a pattern for ordering city, private men, and themselves for the rest of their lives. For the most part, each one spends his time in philosophy, but when his tum comes, he drudges in politics and rules for the city's sake, not as though he were doing a thing that is fine, but one that is necessary. And thus always educating others like themselves and leaving them behind in their place as guardians of the city, they go off to the Isles of the Blessed and dwell." (539e-40b)

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