

A Coin of Kallipolis,  
Plato's Beautiful City

by

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It is often believed that Plato's Republic lays out a blueprint for the ideal city, referred to as kallipolis (527a), or "beautiful city", under the rule of a philosopher-king. Historically, the closest example of a philosopher-king was found in the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. For centuries scholars and politicians have debated the feasibility of such a city, or government, being established in reality. Much controversy has centered on many of the extreme measures that Socrates appears to recommend in order for the establishing of such a government, including the abolishment of the nuclear family.

What is often missed is that the Republic is dialectical in nature; the ideas are not laid out as a complete plan in a linear fashion, but rather go through several iterations as an evolving philosophic argument toward increasing coherence, aimed at finding the truth about how a society can be established in which all can live a good life.

Socrates concludes in Book IX that the perfect government is not possible on earth, but that he believes there is a pattern of it "laid up in heaven," an ideal which every person can utilize to establish a stable government within his very soul (psyche or mind). Thus the benefits of the ideal city are available to us all as an the Internal Republic, the Kallipolis of the mind, if we are willing to follow the Delphic advice to "know thyself" and put our internal house in order through the philosophical lifestyle (the pursuit of wisdom, truth, and the Good).

Socrates (469-399 B.C.) is the most famous of the Greek philosophers of the ancient Greece, as evidenced by the fact that all who came before him are referred to as "pre-Socratics," and

modern European philosophy being famously described as "a series of footnotes to Plato" by Lord Alfred North Whitehead. Yet is difficult to completely separate the views of Socrates from those of his most famous student as the vast majority of what we know of Socrates comes from the writings of Plato (427-347 B.C.).

His theory of the soul, as discussed in both the Republic and Phaedrus, was probably copied by Freud to become the foundation of psychoanalytic theory, the beginnings of a science of psychology.

Furthermore, research in neuroscience over the past few decades continues to support the Platonic model:

"There was nothing the ancient Greeks did not poke their nose into, no experience they shunned, no problem they did not attempt to solve. When the world was still young, they set off at the first light, and returned early, from the agora...Whatever we experience in our day, whatever we hope to learn, whatever we most desire, whatever we set out to find, we see that the Greeks have been there before us, and we meet them on their way back." (Thomas Cahill, *Sailing the Wine Dark Sea, Why the Greeks Matter*, 2003)

When Socrates spoke about the psyche he was speaking of what we would call the mind, but believed that the mind remained intact and lived on after the death of our bodies. Where modern man often separates the concepts of mind and soul, they were one in the same to Socrates.

As a professional psychologist, amateur philosopher and historian, and collector of ancient Greek coins, the idea of holding a coin from Plato's Kallipolis is very appealing. Yet this Kallipolis never existed in the physical realm, but only in the world of ideas, so no visit to the bourse floor, the Vcoins website, or any archaeological dig could help me here. Thus was born the very rare coinage of Kallipolis: its story begins with the ideas found in the dialogues of Plato and ends with the pounding of a modern-day celator's hammer.

I began my quest by surfing the web to find someone who could produce a coin that would be worthy of Plato and the Greeks, something along the lines of a classical Sicilian tetradrachm. After several dead ends, I found the Antiquanova website ([www.antiquanova.com](http://www.antiquanova.com)) and liked what I saw.

After perusing their site, sampling their reproductions in both tin and silver, and exchanging emails, I was impressed by the quality and integrity of their work. Not only did their coins appear true to the originals, allowing collectors with small budgets a chance to enjoy the beauty of the work of the ancient celator before centuries of wear took its toll, but they openly publish their work and mark each coin in order to help protect the collector from being deceived by a dishonest dealer.

Thus began a dialogue via email in which I tried to describe what I wanted while Antiquanova rendered it into a visual form. I started with a basic idea and very crude "drawing" of my own, and kept adding more details as I returned to Plato's dialogues and received feedback and their renderings.





A few final changes and the dies were carved (note reverse image):



A final general concept was decided upon for obverse and reverse:



### THE OBTVERSE

The obverse of the coin of Kallipolis is modeled after the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC tetradrachms designed by the masters Cimon, Eucleides, and Euainetos.



Psyche

Once the dies were hardened, the coins are hammered by hand (see the Antiquanova website for a streaming video of Petr Soušek making an Athenian tetradrachm.

In Plato's Republic (Book IV) the soul (psyche) is described as divided into three parts: nous ("intellect" or "reason"), thumos ("spirit" or "passion" or "will"), and epithumia ("appetite" or "desire").

The appetitive part includes the bodily desires and gut instincts that operate primarily at an automatic or unconscious level. This part of our psyche operates by the Pleasure Principle; "if it feels good keep doing it, if it feels bad stop it by getting away or killing it." This is the portion of each of us that wants and feels many things, most of which must be deferred in the face of rational goals.

Thumos is the emotional element includes conscious anger, fear, love, guilt, shame, etc. This part of our psyche operates by the Reality Principle. The spirited part (will or volition) of our psyche is the active portion; its function is to carry out the dictates of reason in practical life, courageously doing whatever the intellect has determined to be best. It is the interface between our animalistic drives and the restrictions of what we perceive as "civilization", between irrational impulses and realistic self-control. It creates an interface between our



These were then turned into more precise proofs before the making of the dies:





selfish desire for immediate gratification and the limitations placed on us by the reality of the world. This is where our self-awareness and will power reside.

Nous is (or should be) the controlling part which subjugates the appetites through reason and the pursuit of ideals with the aid of thumos. The rational part of the psyche is the thinking portion within each of us, which discerns what is real and not merely apparent, judges what is true and what is false, and wisely makes the rational decisions in accordance with which human life is most properly lived. This part of our psyche operates under the "Morality Principle", which is where our conscience (or sense of right and wrong) and "Ego Ideal" reside. The "Ego Ideal" refers to our idea about who we want to be, or our picture of what it means to "be all you can be."

The true philosopher is one in whom the rule of reason is established, and in this situation all parts of the soul conspire together for a united good. The rational part of the soul is a lover of wisdom, and distinguished from the appetitive part not by the absence of all desire but by having a different object of desire: the absolute, intelligible good.

### The Biga

Plato's theory of the psyche is presented mythically in the Phaedrus (246a), where the human soul is pictured as a Biga (two horsed chariot), with the charioteer (reason)



driving a pair of horses (passion and appetite). The passionate horse is a clean and noble



creature which follows the guide of reason, while it's fellow horse is a shaggy and unruly beast



which tries to drag the chariot away from its proper course.

Plato's division of the soul persists in later works such as the Timaeus, in which the rational part of the soul is stated to be divine and immortal, and is contrasted with two mortal, irrational parts: passion and appetite (69d). The rational part is located in the head, while the irrational parts are located in the chest (passion) and the belly (appetite).

### The Cave



The allegory of the cave pictures an underground cave with its mouth open toward the light of a blazing fire. Within the cave are people chained so that they cannot move. They can see only the cave wall directly in front of them. This is illuminated by the light of the fire, which throws shadows of people and objects onto the wall. The cave dwellers equate the shadows with reality.

If one of the inhabitants were allowed to leave the cave, he would realize that the shadows are but dark reflections of a more complex reality, and that the knowledge of his fellow cave dwellers is dim and flawed. Yet if he returned to the cave in order to share his new knowledge with the other occupants, he would most likely be ridiculed for his views.

For the cave prisoners, the familiar images of the cave would be much more meaningful than any story about a world they had never seen.

The cave stands for the world of appearances and the journey outside stands for the ascent to knowledge. People in everyday life are trapped by illusions, hence the way they understand reality is limited and flawed.

By appreciating this and by making determined efforts to see beyond the superficial, people have an ability to free themselves from imperfect ways of seeing. However, as the allegory suggests, many of us often resist or ridicule efforts at enlightenment, preferring to remain in the dark rather than to risk exposure to a new world and its threat to the old ways.

### The Good

The Idea of the Good is the highest and most comprehensive of the Socratic Ideas or Forms. In relationship to the soul or intellect, it plays a role that is analogous to the role that the sun plays in relationship to the eye.

An Idea or Form refers to the standard that we apply to particulars (people, places, things, or events) when we make value judgments about them. True knowledge is not of what things are, but rather of what they should be. To know a thing is not to know how it in fact exists (the particular, or the case at hand), but what it should be according to its form (or ideal).

The word "good" (agathos) means "the desirable." Since we cannot pursue all goods with equal effort and at the same time, we must assign priorities. We must arrive at some kind of rank order of these goods so that we can determine degrees of desirability.

The Idea of the Good, or the Good Itself (to agathon), is the term that Plato (through the mouth of Socrates) uses to refer to the principle or standard we use to determine our priorities.

Socrates draws an analogy between the Idea of the Good and

the sun: as the sun is related to the eye, the Idea of the Good is related to intellect or reason. Where the sun provides the light that makes it possible for the eye to perceive visible things, the Idea of the Good provides the rays of "light" that enables the intellect to



"see" the relative value of particular good things.

### Divided Line and Stages of Cognition



In the Divided Line analogy, Plato describes a line which is divided into four parts, each representing a different level of knowledge:

**EI** = Eikasia, the lowest level of knowledge, an unenlightened state of mind involving the acceptance of appearances without further investigation (indiscriminate belief) or the reliance on conjecture. Few people, other than very young children, spend much of the mental activity at this level alone.

**P** = Pistis, discriminate belief or opinion without a logical explanation or account (aitias logismos, explanatory/causal account); having discriminate (and often correct) belief or faith in something, but without having delineated ones reasons for such beliefs. ("I can't tell you why, but I know it when I see it.") This is the level where the "average man" spends most of his mental activity.

**D** = Dianoia, logical or hypothetical reasoning. Knowledge of x is correct belief about x with the ability to give an account (aitias logismos) properly relating x to other suitably interrelated objects

in the same field. Reaching the third level one passes from the realm of opinion into the realm of knowledge, being able to reason logically from a premise to a conclusion. Here, all is abstract and unchanging; below, all is concrete and constantly in flux.

**E** = Episteme, or Nous, abstract reasoning using the Dialectic, or philosophical conversation by question and answer. Through dialectic reasoning, one can analyze all ideas and see their relation to one another. At this level all of the Forms/Ideas developed in the Dianoia level are brought together into a unity with the Ideal of the Good.

Plato's account of knowledge is based on two fundamental principles: Knowledge Based on Knowledge (KBK), and Knowledge requires a propositional account or Logos (LK). One never knows a single thing, separate from its ties to other things; all knowledge involves logical interrelations.

The Divided Line and the Cave both represent the stages of the psyche's educational progress toward the attainment of enlightenment. Each segment of the Divided Line corresponds to a position occupied by the prisoner described in the Cave. Both the Divided Line and the Cave are intended to function as maps to guide us through the "stages on life's journey" -- the stages we go through as we move from youth to full maturity as human beings.

### Pythagorean Tetraktys



Just as it is difficult to separate Plato's philosophy from that of Socrates (and vice versa), it is also difficult to abstract from Plato's philosophy what originated with the Pythagoreans. W.K.C. Guthrie observed, "In general the separation of early Pythagoreanism from the teaching

of Plato is one of the historian's most difficult tasks, to which he can scarcely avoid bringing a subjective bias of his own. If later Pythagoreanism was coloured by Platonic influences, it is equally undeniable that Plato himself was deeply affected by earlier Pythagorean belief."

For Pythagoras, arithmetic was seen as the study of the abstract essence of things. Thus each number had both a cosmological and mathematical significance. The monad, the number one, signifies the elemental unity at the basis of creation. The tetrad, number four, represents completion, as  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ , or the Decad. The Decad was also known to the Pythagoreans as the Tetraktys which sums up, in a compressed symbolism, the whole range of Pythagoreanism.



THE REVERSE

The reverse of the coin of Kallipolis was modeled after the 5<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC coinage of Calabria, depicting Heracles wrestling the Nemean lion on the reverse, and the head of Athena with Skylla on her helmet on the obverse.

In Book IX of The Republic we find Socrates describing a symbolic image of the soul that is amazingly similar to Freud's structural model of the mind, and to the modern neuroscience tripartite model of the brain.

What Socrates called the appetitive part of the soul, what Freud called the id part of the mind, and neuroscientists the reptilian brain or brain stem, Socrates described as "one of those natures that the ancient fables tells of...a manifold and many headed beast..." called

Skylla or Hydra, a many-headed sea monster.



For what Socrates called the spirited part of the soul, Freud the ego part of the mind, and neuroscientists the mammalian brain or limbic system, he described as a lion.



For what Socrates called the reasoning part of the soul, Freud called the superego part of the mind, and neuroscientists the human brain or neo-cortex, he described as an image of a man.



Thus we have the three-fold nature of the soul inside each of us: "Join the three in one...Then mold about them outside the likeness of one, that of man, so that to anyone who is unable to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man."

Socrates goes on to state that the just or psychologically healthy man should "...should ever so speak and act as to give the man within him in some way or other the most complete mastery over the entire human creature. He should watch over the many-headed monster like a good husbandman, fostering and cultivating the gentle qualities, and preventing the wild ones from growing; he should be making the lion-heart his ally, and in common care of them all should be uniting the several parts with one another and with himself." (Plato, Republic 588-589b)



On the coin of Kallipolis this mastery is represented mythically by the club of Herakles.

#### Ladder of Love



"For this is the right approach to the affairs of love, or the right way to be guided by another; to begin from particular objects of beauty and, for the sake of that absolute beauty, to climb on and on, as if on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, from two to all beautiful bodies; from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs; from customs to beautiful branches of knowledge; so that, from beautiful branches of knowledge, one may end up at that branch of knowledge which is the knowledge of nothing other than this absolute beauty, and may understand in the end what absolute beauty is. Such is the life, my dear Socrates, said Diotima, which above all others a man should live, in contemplation of beauty itself." (Symposium, 211c)

The final symbol on the coin is the celator's mark, the Greek initials for Petr Soušek:



This has been the story of the coin of Kallipolis, its journey from an idea to its embodiment in silver. Much more important is the expedition which we can all make to Plato's Beautiful City of the Soul, which is an internal (and perhaps, eternal) journey:

"But in reality justice was such as we were describing, being concerned however, not with the outward man, but with the inward, which is the true self and concernment of man: for the just man does not permit the several

elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others,—he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself; and when he has bound together the three principles within him, which may be compared to the higher, lower, and middle notes of the scale, and the intermediate intervals—when he has bound all these together, and is no longer many, but has become one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature, then he proceeds to act, if he has to act, whether in a matter of property, or in the treatment of the body, or in some affair of politics or private business; always thinking and calling that which preserves and co-operates with this harmonious condition, just and good action, and the knowledge which presides over it, wisdom, and that which at any time impairs this condition, he will call unjust action, and the opinion which presides over it ignorance. (Plato, Republic 443c – 444a)