

Straussian Allan Bloom 'Interprets' Plato

These excerpts are taken from The Republic of Plato, an "interpretive essay" by Leo Strauss' student and Paul Wolfowitz' teacher Allan Bloom, published in 1968 and 1991.

"If the distinction between friends and enemies, and the inclination to help the former and harm the latter, were eliminated from the heart and mind of man, political life would be impossible. This is the necessary political definition of justice, and Socrates does not simply reject it as he appears to do." (p. 318)

"Socrates does not suggest that the just man would want to benefit all men, only that he would want to benefit his friends and remain indifferent to the others." (p. 324)

"Socrates' view is perfectly consistent with stealing from or killing an enemy, just so long as he is not made more unjust." (p. 325)

"And no reader can be satisfied that Thrasymachus' definition [that justice is the will of the stronger] has been refuted, or that this discussion has proved that there is sufficient reason to devote oneself to the common good." (p. 334)

". . . the character of men's desires would make it impossible for a rational teaching to be the public teaching." (p. 367)

"The Socratic teaching that a good society requires a fundamental falsehood is the direct opposite of that of the Enlightenment, which argued that civil society could dispense with lies and count on selfish calculation to make men loyal to it." (p. 368)

". . . from the point of view of the healthy city, perhaps men like Socrates should be repressed." (p. 377)

"The soul in which reason is most developed will . . . abound with thoughts usually connected with selfishness, lust, and vice." (p. 377)

". . . if the parallel of city and man is to hold true, then a man, like the city, should be interested only in himself and merely use others for his own advantage." (p. 378)

"Socrates can contemplate going naked where others go clothed; he is not afraid of ridicule. He can also contemplate sexual intercourse where others are stricken with terror; he is not afraid of moral indignation. . . . Shame is the wall built by convention which stands between the mind and the light." (pp. 387-388)

"The philosopher's public speech must be guided by prudence rather than love of the truth; . . . It is obvious that a man can love the truth without telling it." (pp. 392-395)

"The silent lesson would seem to be that it is indeed possible to possess intellectual virtue without what later came to be called moral virtue." (p. 396)

“However, he [Socrates] is silent about the charge of atheism.” (p. 400)

“This was not just any city, but one constructed to meet all the demands of justice. Its impossibility demonstrates the impossibility of the actualization of a just regime. . . . The thinkers of the Enlightenment, culminating in Marx, preserved Socrates’ ultimate goals but forgot his insistence that nature made them impossible for men at large.” (pp. 409-411)

“The *Republic* finally teaches that justice as total dedication to the city cannot be simply good for the philosopher, and that hence it is somewhat questionable for other men as well. . . . But there is one kind of doing good to one’s friends which is also beneficial to the philosopher. There are some young men in whom his soul delights, for they have souls akin to his own and are potential philosophers; . . . He must always carry on a contest with the city for the affections of its sons.” (pp. 411-412)

“Socrates’ political science, paradoxically, is meant to

show the superiority of the private life.” (p. 415)

“The tyrant and the philosopher are united in their sense of their radical incompleteness and their longing for wholeness, in their passion and in their singlemindedness. They are the truly dedicated men.” (p. 424)

“Socrates, by curing Glaucon of his lust for tyrannic pleasures, can indulge his own lust for beautiful souls while at the same time acting the part of the good citizen who defends his city’s regime.” (p. 424)

“ . . . the moral problem consists in a simple alternative: either philosophy or tyranny is the best way of life. . . . If philosophy did not exist, tyranny would be the desideratum which only a lack of vigor would cause one to reject.” (p. 425)

“So Socrates undertakes to convince Glaucon that the soul is immortal. This discussion can hardly rank as a proof, and there is no attempt at all to show that the *individual* soul is immortal, which is the only thing a man anxious about his fate after life would care about.” (p. 435)