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What Makes Kallipolis a Utopian Society?

Socrates’ theoretical city of Kallipolis is framed as a sort of perfect society due to its organization, ruling, and citizens’ contribution toward the society’s advancement. Socrates depicts this contribution as “harmonizing the citizens together through both persuasion and compulsion” and having them share with one other “the benefit they can confer on the community” (Plato 519e-520a). The vision here is consistent with what Socrates has been explaining all along: every citizen must perform one and only one job and share his products with the rest of the city in order to form a just, sustainable society. Without this cooperation of the inhabitants, the city cannot remain self-sustained and just for the benefit of all, and evils will befall the dwelling. Socrates goes on to say that such behavior by the citizens “produces such men … to bind the city together,” which further reinforces Socrates’ point that the unified and shared efforts of the citizens of this city are the only chance it has to be a “just” and perfect society (Plato 520a-b).

Another facet of this Utopian model named Kallipolis, and probably the most essential, is the ruling by a philosopher king; this enlightened ruler is the only one that Socrates deems capable of truly ruling our just society. Socrates is so bold as to say “Until philosophers rule as kings in their cities … cities will have no rest from evils … nor, I think, will the human race,” a hefty claim that even causes Glaucon to express his shock (Plato 473c-e). Although, as Socrates goes on to explain, he shows that he does not mean just any philosopher may serve as our ruler, but rather a rare breed of philosopher that is “fitted by nature to engage in philosophy and to take the lead in a city” (Plato 474c). What makes these true philosopher kings different from the other rulers? Their lack of desire to rule and absence of a lust for power and material acquisitions. Socrates describes this “true” philosopher as “concerned … with the pleasures that the soul experiences just by itself, and … indifferent to those that come through the body,” which is quite sensible, because any real lover of truth and wisdom would not fall into infatuation with power and money (Plato 485d-e). He also says that the philosopher kings would be least eager to rule, further pointing to the likelihood that they would not allow themselves to be swayed by the material distractions of the position, but rather they will properly carry out the duties required of them by the just city. These philosopher kings are best suited for their roles as leader because “a city in which those who are going to rule are least eager to rule is necessarily best and freest from faction” and will therefore yield a more unified city (Plato 520d-e).

Ultimately, Kallipolis is made a Utopian society by the unified workings of its civilians and their specializations, the upbringing and just nature of the guardians, and the uneager ruling of the philosopher kings. Socrates reaches these conclusions by looking at “what is badly done in cities nowadays that prevents them from being managed [their] way” and reasoning how each job is best done and what type of man is best suited for each job (Plato 473b-c). This theoretical society does in fact present a freedom from factions and the grounds to form a unified society whose goals aim toward the path of betterment for the good of everyone. Socrates gradually demonstrates all of these truths and, although his ideas are a touch radical, they prove to be self-evident and essential to the result of a perfect, just, and therefore utopian, society.

I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work. Peter George Plotas

Excellent response paper. 4.5/5

Works Cited

Plato. *Republic.* Trans. C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2003. Print.