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Thrasymachus' government – an analogy with Machiavelli's Prince

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In Book I of Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus introduces a significant point of discussion in political philosophy. Through his arguments, he links the concept of justice to the policies of existing governments. He asserts that, regardless of the political system in place, power always resides with the government, which is responsible for creating the laws that it is fair for the governed to obey. This work aims first to analyze Thrasymachus' proposal within the broader context of political philosophy, and second, to connect this proposal to Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Introduction

In Book I of Plato's *Republic*[1], a significant debate occurs between Thrasymachus and Socrates regarding the meaning of justice for both individuals and the city (*pólis*). Thrasymachus argues that there is a connection between justice (*tò díkaion*) and strength (*krátos*) that is evident within the realm of government. He suggests that the determinations made by a ruler can be considered just because the ruler is the strongest in the city (Rep., 338c-339a).

Thrasymachus's proposition opens an important avenue for analysis in political philosophy. His discourse associates justice with the prevailing government policies in cities, implying that, regardless of the political system, power always rests with the government, which creates the laws that the governed are expected to obey.

This work aims to analyze Thrasymachus's proposal within the broader context of political philosophy and to connect it with Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Thrasymachus' government

Thrasymachus recognizes that maintaining a government requires a distinct art (*téchne*) that allows a ruler to effectively manage the city and gather all the rewards (*misthoí*) for himself. The concept of *téchne* is crucial for our understanding. Each *téchne* pertains to a specific area of expertise, such as medicine, agriculture, or carpentry. A craftsman is an expert

[1] For the original Greek throughout the work, we will use the text established by S. R. Slings, *Platonis Rempvblicam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Other references to 'Republic' will be abbreviated by *Rep*. followed by the Stephanus page. All translations are mine.

in their particular art and possesses comprehensive knowledge about it. For instance, we can consider the doctor, the farmer, or the carpenter.

Thrasymachus defines a craftsman as someone who is free from error, indicating that a skilled practitioner has mastery over their craft (Rep., 340d-e). This does not imply that individuals never make mistakes; rather, it highlights that we cannot define art or craftsmanship negatively - meaning we should define something by its qualities, not by its errors.

With this in mind, Thrasymachus asserts that the ruler, referred to as the "strongest," is akin to other artisans. Consequently, there exists an art of governance that also demands specific knowledge to be effectively executed by its creator.

> Consequently, no craftsman, sage or ruler is mistaken [...]. To specify the facts as much as possible: the ruler, insofar as he is in government, is not mistaken; if he is not mistaken, he enacts the law that is best for him, and it is this that must be fulfilled by the governed. So, as I stated at the beginning, I say that justice consists in doing what is convenient for the stronger. (*Rep.*, 340e4-341a4)

Thrasymachus introduces an argument that allows us to consider the exercise of government as a *téchne*, which Socrates will not dispute. This *téchne* provides a framework for understanding government and allows us to explore the type of knowledge (*epistéme*) one must possess to govern the *pólis* effectively. Each *téchne* is associated with a specific type of knowledge that empowers the craftsman to evaluate and perform his duties accurately and skillfully.

Thus, Thrasymachus cannot be labeled a legalist. By asserting that a ruler does not err, he suggests that government is not merely based on a formal legal foundation that can be wielded by anyone in power. As Everson notes: "Even if one thinks that legislating is an essential activity of being a ruler, one can concede that legislating requires skill without making the possession of that skill essential to being a ruler" (EVERSON, 2020, p. 89). This perspective does not diminish the legal dimension's importance within governance. On the contrary, laws are crucial for supporting a ruler's power and determining the obligations of the governed.

For Thrasymachus, the law is connected to *krátos*, or political power. The 'strongest' ruler is the one who exercises his function without error, possessing the *epistéme* of governance. Therefore, laws derive from the ruler's authority, who wields power in the *pólis* largely because of his knowledge of the art of government. Nawar argues that the claim of the artificer's infallibility is a significant point rather than an irrelevant one.

> Thrasymachus' claims about the infallibility of τέχνη are not a purely ad hoc or ungrounded response to Socrates' criticisms, but instead articulate a serious existing view (which Plato's Socrates does *not* rapidly dismiss)

according to which a τέχνη is a complete and perfected area of rational expertise whose success cannot be credited to luck and which *guarantees* that a skilled practitioner will act successfully when they attempt to. (NAWAR, 2018, p. 373)

Only through knowledge of his art can a ruler be a *true ruler*. [ὡς αληθῶς ἄρχουσιν] (Cf. Rep., 343b5) and take for himself all the benefits that lead to happiness. Let us examine how Thrasymachus will interpret this ruler:

But the easiest way to learn is if you reach the most complete injustice, the one that brings the most happiness to the unjust, and the greatest misfortune to those who have been victims of injustice and do not want to commit such acts. It is a matter of tyranny, which seizes alien property by stealth and violence, whether sacred or profane, private, or public, and not gradually, but all at once. If anyone commits any of these parts of injustice while not being hidden, he is punished and receives the greatest injuries. [...] But if the latter, in addition to appropriating the goods of the citizens, makes them slaves and makes them his servants, instead of these injurious epithets, he is called happy and blessed, not only by his fellow citizens, but by everyone else who knows that he has committed this complete injustice. It is just that those who criticize injustice don't criticize it because they fear doing it, but because they fear suffering it. (*Rep.*, 344a4-c4)

Thrasymachus views the tyrant as the true ruler because such a leader primarily focuses on their own interests and can act freely and unjustly. By using the tyrant as an example of an unjust ruler, we can better understand Thrasymachus' perspective on the role of justice in governance. He argues that just as a shepherd cares for sheep to gain personal benefits, a ruler functions similarly by seeking advantages from the governed (Rep., 345c-d). Socrates, however, approaches this analogy from a different angle and challenges Thrasymachus' oversimplified view. He contends that a true shepherd must prioritize the well-being of the sheep, suggesting that the benefits derived from their care are linked to what he refers to as the art of profits.

To refute Thrasymachus's argument, Socrates asserts that each art is characterized by a specific capacity (*dýnamis*) that creates a utility. This utility (*ophelía*) benefits the recipient of the art rather than the practitioner. For the practitioner to gain benefits, a secondary art must be assigned to each art: the art of profit, which generates a salary (*misthós*) as a reward for their service. While wages are beneficial to those practicing their art, it is undeniable that the practice of their craft remains beneficial to others, even if the craftsman does not receive compensation for it (Rep., 346a1-e2). Socrates' argument suggests a redefinition of the *téchne* beyond its socio-economic function (CAMPESE, 2010, p. 259). Thus, he acknowledges a *misthós* for the craftsman earned through *misthotiké* in the execution of their own *téchne*. Therefore, we can distinguish between wages and utility: one pertains to the individual practicing the art and receiving compensation, while the other refers to the recipient of the art's utility. For Thrasymachus to uphold his claim that justice serves the interests of the strongest, he must

demonstrate the existence of a *téchne* that seeks its own advantage. Only then could he justify the notion of a ruler acting in their own self-interest.

The views of Thrasymachus and Socrates diverge significantly in how they approach the means and ends of their respective arts. For Thrasymachus, the benefits produced by an art must primarily benefit the craftsman, whereas for Socrates, the benefits should be directed towards those for whom the art is intended. In the context of government, Socrates believes that the advantages of governance should be aimed at the governed, while Thrasymachus asserts that the ruler should be the only one to benefit from the art of government.

This disagreement raises a problem of political ontology, as their differing views on governance lead to fundamentally different conceptions of political practice within the city. According to Thrasymachus, the ruler governs based on what seems good for themselves (Rep., 345e) and is driven by *pleonexía*, which embodies greed, arrogance, and abundance; in our analysis, we will interpret *pleonexía* as the "desire to have more than others". In contrast, Socrates posits that the ruler does not govern out of personal will or a desire for reward, since

> the good ones do not want to govern either because of riches or honors, because they do not want to be called mercenaries, openly demanding the salary of their position, nor thieves, taking advantage of their position. Neither do they want to govern for the sake of honors, since they do not value them. (*Rep.*, 347b6-10)

Socrates argues that good individuals are compelled into positions of governance by coercion (*ánánke*) rather than choosing to rule, as they prefer not to be governed by someone of lesser character. He believes that this is where the true ruler can be found [τῷ ὄντι ἀληθινὸς ἄρχων] (Rep., 347d4-5). In such a government, the ruler prioritizes the welfare of the city and its citizens above any personal gains they might receive from their position.

> We can see different rulers in both cases, that is, (a) Thrasymachus ruler – rules by will, rules for one's own advantage, takes rewards for oneself, seeks *pleonexía*; (b) ruler of Socrates – governs by *ánánke*, governs for the benefit of others, has as a reward not to be ruling by someone worse, curbs pleonexy. (MENEZES, 2019, p. 43)

The differences in the models of rulers discussed lead to contrasting outcomes for city governments. The Socratic view aligns with the definition of *téchne* presented in the *Republic*, suggesting that the art of governance should prioritize the benefit of the governed rather than the ruler. According to this perspective, a ruler governs only out of necessity; if they did not, a less capable individual might take their place.

In contrast, Thrasymachus' view reflects how politics is often actually practiced by rulers. His perspective contradicts the definition of *téchne*, implying a purely empirical and contingent approach to politics, lacking any foundational principles. We should focus more on this aspect and critically assess Thrasymachus' proposal.

Thrasymachus argues that injustice, through its own tyrannical power, can seize all the goods it desires and thereby make its possessor happy. He presents an alternative perspective that Socrates does not fully explore. This sets the stage for Socrates to continue his argument as follows:

- Does it seem to you that a city or an army, pirates, thieves, or any other class, could carry out the illegal plan they undertook in common, if they did not observe justice towards each other?
"Certainly not," he replied.
- What if they watched her? Wouldn't that be better?
- Absolutely.
- Undoubtedly, Thrasymachus, it is because injustice produces revolts, hatred, strife in some and others; whereas justice breeds concord and friendship. Is it not like this?
- Be it - he replied -, just so I don't argue with you. (*Rep.*, 351c7-d6)

Socrates demonstrates that if injustice causes hatred wherever it arises, making those who possess it incapable of cooperating with others, then injustice cannot truly be beneficial for the unjust person. If we only consider injustice among individuals, it would lead to constant conflict and disagreement, preventing any possibility of reaching consensus. Such a situation would obstruct the establishment of a functioning polis.

Socrates argues that collective actions cannot be unjust unless justice is present; this is where the strength of justice lies. His view does not contradict Thrasymachus's earlier points, as we can understand that Thrasymachus posits that an unjust ruler must still govern with justice. The governed must continue to practice justice to maintain the order established in the polis and benefit the leadership represented by the ruler. In this scenario, justice emerges from the injustice of the ruler, who creates the laws and defines what is considered just, as Thrasymachus implies with his shepherd-ruler argument.

What is true of the helpers of rulers is true of the rulers themselves and all other human beings (including tyrants and gangsters) who need the help of other men in their enterprises however unjust: no association can last if it does not practice justice among its members (351c7-d3). This however amounts to an admission that *justice may be a mere means*, if an indispensable means, for injustice: for the shearing and eating of sheep". (STRAUSS, 1964, p. 82. Our emphasis)[2]

[2] Cf. Weiss, 2021, p. 84: "The very best internal harmony will certainly dispose one to justice and make the committing of injustice unlikely, but, as Book I shows, the justice of the whole is not a matter of the relations of its parts but of the character of its (external) projects. It is the members or parts that are in those relations that may be said to be just or unjust–because their relations are external".

Thrasymachus suggests a way of arguing that reconciles law and power.[3] This relationship aligns with his vision of governance, where both elements may be employed as needed. If an unjust ruler possesses these attributes, he can wield both law and power to define what is considered just for others.[4] This idea closely resembles the themes found in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, as we will explore further below.

The Prince analogy

The victory that Socrates achieves in Plato's Book I seems to have concluded the discussion on political philosophy represented by Thrasymachus. This dialogue would only be revisited during the Renaissance with Machiavelli. Thrasymachus presents a more empirical approach to politics, arguing that real political activity arises from worldly events. This idea closely parallels Machiavelli's perspective in *The Prince*. To illustrate this, let us quote a relevant passage from his work:

> But since my intention was to write something that will be useful to those who listen to it, it seemed more convenient to go after the *effective truth of the thing* than its imagination. Many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to really exist. Because there is so much distance between how one lives and how one should live, that *he who leaves what he does for what he should do more quickly learns ruin than his preservation:* because a man who in every respect wants to do profession of good has to be ruined among so many that are not good. Hence it is necessary, wanting a prince to maintain, to learn to be able to be not good and to use it and not to use it according to need. (2017, p. 183. Our Emphasis)

Machiavelli, in this passage, reveals the true purpose behind writing *The Prince*: "the effective truth of the thing". This does not imply that he is focused on ontological questions. Rather, when he refers to the effective truth, he is concerned with factual matters—namely, how politics functions in reality, as it exists, rather than how it ought to be. His focus is on Realpolitik, examining how significant political actions unfold in the real world, without being influenced by idealistic notions or speculations about the perfect form of government.

This is why Machiavellian *virtù* aligns with the necessary qualities for a ruler to seize and retain power. It goes beyond simply acting virtuously; it may also involve acting immorally when the situation demands it. Ultimately, this reflects the nature of how politics operates in practice.

[3] According to Reeve (2008, p. 98): "Thrasymachus' account is a coherent and resourceful blend, then of ethical realism and semantic conventionalism, which identifies justice in each city with what is advantageous to its stronger ruler, and the semantic content of 'justice' with what its particular laws prescribe".

[4] Cf. *Rep.*, 344a7-b1; in which Thrasymachus says that tyranny "seizes alien property by stealth and violence, whether sacred or profane, private, or public, and not gradually, but all at once".

Machiavelli distinguishes between two ways of thinking about political philosophy: (a) how one lives and (b) how one should live. This division highlights a clear opposition in perspectives. Some thinkers prioritize values that impose themselves on the empirical world, aspiring to create "principalities the likes of which have never been seen". In contrast, others focus on the actual state of affairs in the temporal world. The way one should live reflects an idealized vision of reality, while the way one lives represents the actual truth of the world as it is.

In Thrasymachus, we can observe a division similar to the one made by Machiavelli regarding politics. Thrasymachus draws an analogy between a ruler and the ruled using the example of a shepherd and his sheep. He argues that the way rulers care for their subjects resembles how a shepherd tends to his sheep, primarily for his own benefit. This representation captures the essence of politics in its raw form, and Thrasymachus's example illustrates this more effectively than Socrates's reformulation. In contrast, Socrates idealizes the shepherd as one who cares for the sheep out of a sense of responsibility and expertise. He places importance on the shepherd's role, suggesting that such care is rooted in the art of shepherding, with profit being a secondary concern. However, the existence of a profession focused on self-gain—like that of profit-making—raises questions about the general definition of *téchne* (art or skill). This definition should ideally involve the benefit of the subject being cared for, which is a fundamental characteristic of true artistry.

Even if we consider that the art of making profits is carried out by the beneficiary of the primary skill, as in the case of a patient who pays a doctor, this still doesn't resolve the underlying issue of this art. It would remain a skill lacking specific knowledge, one that anyone could potentially exploit. This leads us to a different interpretation of the shepherd: his primary goal is not merely to care for the sheep, but rather, caring for them serves as a means to achieving a greater objective that is rewarding in itself. This perspective aligns with Thrasymachus's defense of the shepherd-governor: like the shepherd, he cares for and governs those under his authority, ultimately seeking to benefit from the rewards of his role. Thus, the ruler described by Thrasymachus utilizes whatever serves his own benefit as the ultimate aim, with the rewards not being separate from the art of governing itself.[5]

This interpretation of Thrasymachus effectively illustrates the workings of politics. For him, “justice and the just are an alien good, which in reality consists of the advantage of the

[5] Cf. KERFERD (1976), p. 552; “in the case of the art of ruling the immediate object is the ruled, but the ultimate object is the interest of the ruler”.

strongest and those in power. This concept is characteristic of those who obey and serve, who ultimately suffer harm; whereas injustice is its opposite and is preferred by the truly naive and righteous" (Rep., 343c3-7).

Even if Thrasymachus could acknowledge the Socratic vision as the correct approach to political action, he perceives this vision as fragile and disconnected from political reality. He even calls Socrates the "naivest of men" (ὦ εὐηθέστατε Σώκρατες) (Rep., 343d2) for being more focused on the ideals of the world than on its actual truth.

When we compare passage 344a4-c4 from "Republic" with another excerpt from "The Prince," we can identify a key point presented by Thrasymachus in his speech: the idea that one can conquer and maintain power through criminal acts. We should pay attention to what Machiavelli states in Chapter VIII, titled "Those Who Achieved the Principality Through Crimes."

> Hence it is to be noted that, when conquering a state, the occupier must calculate all the offenses that he needs to do and *do them all at once*, so as not to have to renew them every day and be able, not innovating, to give security to men and gain them with benefits. Whoever does it the other way, either because of shyness or because of being ill-advised, needs to always have a knife in his hand; and neither can he ever be founded upon his subjects, nor can they, by recent and continued injuries, be safe from him. Because insults must be done all together, so that, enjoying less, they offend less; and the benefits must be done little by little, so that they are better savored. And above all, a prince must live with his subjects in such a way that no unforeseen event, whether good or bad, must change him: because, when adverse times come with need, you are no longer in time for evil, and t*he good you do, doesn't benefit you because they think it's forced and there's no graduation in it.* (2017, p. 143-144. Our emphasis)

The passage clearly illustrates that in political action, doing what is good is not always the best course of action. Governing often requires the ability to resort to unethical measures when necessary. Machiavelli acknowledges that criminal behavior can be a key strategy for maintaining government, noting that such actions are common in the political landscape, especially in Italy during his time. He distinguishes the actions of princes from the concepts of virtù and fortune, suggesting that these actions are "sufficient for those who need to imitate them" (2017, p. 139). According to this perspective, a ruler is justified in taking any actions necessary to retain power, as the realm of political action is separate from the realm of morality.

> What constitutes the fundamental core of Machiavellianism is not so much the recognition of the distinction between the good act in itself and the good act for another reason, but the distinction between morality and politics based on this distinction, that is to say that *the sphere of politics is of instrumental* actions which, as such, must be judged not by themselves but according to their greater or lesser aptitude to serve the end one wants to achieve. (BOBBIO, 2005, p. 36-37)

Bobbio's point helps us clarify Thrasymachus' proposal in the *Republic*. Let's revisit the analogy between a pastor and a governor: the ruler, in their actions, aims for something beyond merely caring for those they govern. The realm of politics is distinct from other fields, each having its own unique characteristics that do not overlap with ethics. For Thrasymachus, the art of governance is about enabling the ruler to extract benefits from their subjects, unanchored by the political realities of any specific time. Like Machiavelli centuries later, Thrasymachus focuses on political facts, instrumental actions, and how rulers behave when in power.

To understand this, we must recognize that the actions of the ruler and the government are often conflated, as the concept of the State has not yet developed. In both Machiavelli and Thrasymachus, the ruler's actions define governmental actions because the government is embodied in the ruler. The ruler operates based on empirical politics and adapts to circumstances within the realm of possible actions. Therefore, ethical considerations cannot impede the ruler's activities.

I want to highlight another important factor regarding Machiavellian thought: the inevitability of change. A prince must always be ready to adapt to shifting circumstances. This perspective underlies the proposed political actions. Socrates grappled with this issue, particularly in Books VIII and IX, where he discusses how change can lead to the corruption of the ideal city's constitution, resulting in a decline that progresses through timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and eventually tyranny.

Theories that focus on the empirical nature of politics emphasize the ruler's ability to navigate the challenges posed by changing times. However, in *Republic* 424-426, Socrates argues that with adequate education, guardians can identify what is often overlooked in laws, such as market contracts and marriage. By addressing these neglected aspects, they can preserve and even enhance the well-being of their city.

Thrasymachus appears to have become subdued in his interaction with Socrates; he is no longer willing to argue as he once did, primarily because Socrates does not allow him to have his way. Nevertheless, Thrasymachus shows visible signs of frustration, suggesting that he does not truly agree with Socrates. Even though he feels constrained in his responses (see Rep., 350e6), there are enough elements in Thrasymachus's speech for us to construct a defense for his position. It is crucial to acknowledge that the dramatic scene highlights Thrasymachus's dissatisfaction with having to engage with Socrates in this manner. When Socrates asks him not to contradict his own beliefs, Thrasymachus replies, "in order to please you, since you do not permit me to speak" (Rep., 350e). This response illustrates that Thrasymachus is still trying

to maintain a common discourse with Socrates, yet he feels uncomfortable continuing this type of question-and-answer exchange and, in protest, refrains from opposing Socrates. To emphasize the contrasting viewpoints, let us quote a passage that clearly outlines their differing perspectives:

- Would you agree that it would be unfair for a *pólis* to try to unjustly subjugate other *póleis* and reduce them to slavery?
- How not? And that is what will do the best and most completely unfair.
- I understand, because this is your argument. But, regarding him, I just want to examine this point: will a *pólis* that takes over another *pólis* exercise its domination without justice, or will it be forced to use it?
- If it is as you said a moment ago – justice is wisdom – with justice. But if it is like I said, with injustice. (*Rep.*, 351b1-c2. Our emphasis.)

Socrates demonstrates a mastery of argumentation that prevents Thrasymachus from fully articulating his understanding of governance in the *pólis*. Thrasymachus illustrates the concept of the unjust ruler through the tyrant, highlighting a realistic possibility for political development within the city. In contrast, the Socratic perspective is more idealistic and utopian, appearing only as a "paradigm in the sky" (Rep., 592b). Thrasymachus contributes significantly to the debate by linking justice with governance, defending the idea of government as a *téchne*, and suggesting the existence of specific knowledge necessary for effective rule.

Thrasymachus defines complete injustice and an unjust government, with tyranny as its extreme example. He argues that there is a technique, or *téchne*, that allows a ruler to govern through injustice and to take all the advantages for himself, which ultimately strengthens the government. Beyond the issue of injustice in governance, Thrasymachus' perspective reflects the instrumental nature of political actions and how rulers effectively govern their cities. In contrast, Socrates envisions a government led by good individuals, implying that those who govern themselves and restrain their greed (*pleonexía*) are best suited to lead other citizens. Let's take a closer look at this passage from Socrates.

Therefore, there needs to be coercion and punishment if you want them to govern, since taking the government willingly, without coercion, risks being branded a shameful thing – and the greatest punishment is being governed by someone worse than you. us, when we ourselves don't want to govern; It is in this fear that good men seem to act when they govern, and then they go to the government, not as to a good thing, in order to enjoy it, but by coercion, which they cannot entrust to better than themselves, nor to others equals. (*Rep.*, 347b10-d2)

The key point in this passage is the issue of coercion (*anánke*) and its significance concerning the philosopher's role in governance. Socrates, when referring to the good that exists in certain individuals, calls them "good men". He notes that these men do not inherently

desire to govern. Therefore, in order for them to take on the responsibility of ruling the city, they must be compelled to do so. This is necessary to prevent the city from falling into the hands of individuals who are less virtuous than they are.

In passages 341c5-342e8, Socrates demonstrates to Thrasymachus that all arts are complete [μάλιστα τελέαν εἶναι] (Rep., 341d12) and lack nothing. He states that "the arts rule and dominate those to whom they belong" [ἄρχουσί γε αἱ τέχναι και κρατοῦσιν ἐκείνου οὗπέρ εἰσιν τέχναι] (Rep., 342c7-8). In this sense, the ruler, when exercising his art, does not prioritize his own convenience but rather the convenience of the ruled.

In a related passage, 345e5-346e2, Socrates emphasizes the usefulness of all arts, regardless of the rewards they may offer to the craftsman. Thus, Socrates illustrates that every *téchne*, being complete and distinct, provides utility and convenience to its object, rather than to the executor. This means that the very definition of *téchne* implies that the benefits are proportionate only to the object of art.

Consequently, since government is considered a *téchne*, the art of governance must aim at the benefit of the governed.

Thrasymachus, in his speech, highlighted the unrest in existing cities, where the art of governance is not properly practiced. He argued that it is the responsibility of the government to prepare for the world's challenges and do everything necessary to maintain power. Socrates contends that this unrest stems from a misunderstanding of justice. Many cities lack a true understanding of justice, often distorting it empirically. For instance, Thrasymachus aligns himself with tyrants who act unjustly. In a city composed of good and just individuals, those in power do not seek personal gain. A just execution of governance means prioritizing the well-being of the citizens rather than one's own interests. This approach does not contradict the happiness of the ruler, even if it prevents him from achieving maximum happiness.

> Omnipresent in Plato, the political dimension can therefore never be isolated from the other spheres that found and guide it, and this decisive philosophical aspect can contribute by itself to explaining the exegetical uncertainties and the vast range of interpretations that marked the tradition of Plato. "Political Plato". (VEGETTI, 2010, p. 31)

Plato's goal is to reevaluate the politics of his time in order to present a possible, though challenging, path forward. It is crucial to recognize that we are confronted with a dilemma regarding justice in government. Thrasymachus's ruler seeks personal happiness by manipulating justice through an unjust government that serves his self-interest. In contrast, Socrates' ruler aims for the well-being of the city, prioritizing the happiness of its citizens even at the cost of his own happiness in the name of justice within the *pólis*.

Understanding the proposed path requires a grasp of the concept *of the political*[6] in Plato. The political should not be viewed simply as the active agent in the city's affairs, but rather as a comprehensive notion that encompasses everything related to politics and, consequently, to the *pólis*. Our goal is to uncover the unity of the *tà politiká* as presented by Plato in the *Republic*. Discussing unity in Plato inherently involves considerations of ontology and the fundamental nature of reality. According to Plato, unity within the sensible realm can only be achieved through the intelligible. To articulate a concept that encompasses all of politics—removing it from the various perspectives and transience that current political discourse often falls prey to—requires a transition to the realm of *lógos*. This path, which encompasses political, ethical, psychological, and metaphysical dimensions, can be referred to as *political ontology*.

Conclusion

The ruler's art is presented in two ways here. First, we have the Thrasymachean vision, which portrays the execution of this art as relying on the ruler's knowledge. In this view, the ruler must control justice for his own benefit, demonstrating that he needs to understand how to make laws that serve his government. The art of governance must empower the ruler to manage the complexities and uncertainties of politics.

On the other hand, there is the Socratic vision, which emphasizes the use of this knowledge by the ruler to establish a just and happy government for the city and its citizens. In this perspective, justice is no longer simply a tool for the ruler's benefit; instead, it becomes a means to benefit the ruled. Although different aspects of policy may exist, there should still be a criterion for its effective functioning. In Socrates's view, the art of governance involves forming a clear concept of the political, building on the ontological foundations necessary for establishing goodness within the city.

This paper, like Book I of the *Republic,* begins with an introduction that highlights the significance of Thrasymachus' proposal to acknowledge political empiricism as a valuable framework for studying justice in the city and its implications for governance. The comparison

[6] We will use 'the political' to designate everything that intends to encompass the political scope in its unity, all 'city affairs' or *tà politiká*, distinguishing the 'politician' agent of city politics (*politikós*) and the 'politics' as action (*politiké*). This distinction is dear to Meier who distinguishes between 'the political', 'political' and 'politics'. See: MEIER (1990, p. 4): “The great merit of the term the political [das Politische] lies in the fact that it is able, in tune with an essential strand of the modern meaning of the word, to capture something that is not identical with the multiplicity of meaning conveyed by the words *political* and *politics*”.

with Machiavelli's work is intended to elucidate Thrasymachus' perspective on the ruler's policies and actions.

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