

à la Thrasymachus is, therefore, in the interest of no one, not even of the strong and mighty.

In the same way that Solon had done before him, Plato recognizes differences between classes and seeks to achieve harmony rather than equality. As a result, freedom becomes the freedom to achieve happiness given the characteristics of each class. Specifically, Plato offers two distinct solutions to the problem of how to build a just state. In *Republic*, the task of avoiding strife and maintaining harmony is left to the political leadership, the famous philosopher-kings. The resulting system is clearly aristocratic, in the original sense of “government of the best.” By contrast, in *Laws*, it is the task of good legislation to achieve the same outcome, the resulting system being a mixed constitution, with monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic elements closer to the modern idea of a balance of powers.

The centrality of human nature

Just as in the case of most other schools, Plato’s approach is ultimately grounded in his view of human nature. Despite often being dismissed as naive and idealistic, Plato was actually worried that many people are inevitably irrational and driven by passions and false beliefs. Nevertheless, he also thought that human beings are not inherently bad and that the fact that we are instinctively social beings capable of reason bodes well for the prospect of building a just and fair society.

Several elements of his philosophy are optimistic and even in line with modern progressive views. For instance, he believed in the value of education, as well as in progress and the possibility of a better future for humanity. Specifically, life will be better for everyone when people come to understand the value and necessity of harmony and cooperation.

While Plato is frequently accused of proposing a form of totalitarianism in *Republic*, we have to consider that most of his proposed restrictions apply to the rulers, not the ruled. His emphasis on freedom, friendship, and virtue is hardly what you’d expect from a Stalin or a Pol Pot. When he speaks of “philosophers” being in charge, he doesn’t mean theoretical