

War as Metaphor in the *Republic*

In this paper, I wish to investigate the use of war in the *Republic* as a metaphor. If Plato's primary goal was to examine justice in the individual rather than justice in the state, as some have argued,¹ then one might conclude that the discussion in the dialogue centering on the behavior of the state, including its recourse to war, is merely a metaphor used to illuminate Plato's psychological theories. It seems, however, that the language of war is used in at least one other way: as a normative guide to the conduct of philosophy itself. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates uses metaphors of battle and war to encourage and exhort his interlocutors to find solutions to the problems under discussion. For example, in book 1, Socrates asserts that both he and Polemarchus "shall do battle in common" (*machoumetha koinēi*) against those who would claim that justice is simply helping friends and harming enemies (335e). These metaphors are further applied to the training and character of the rulers, who are described in language befitting the stalwart soldier: only "the steadiest (*bebaiotatous*) and most courageous (*andreiotatous*)" are wanted by the framers of the community's constitution for the position of philosopher-king; these individuals must be keen at studying and learn without difficulty, "for souls are much more likely to be cowardly (*apodeilōsi*) in severe studies (*en ischurois mathēmasin*) than in gymnastic (7.535a-b)." In fact, the rulers of the ideal state ought to exhibit the same dedicated and unwavering approach (they are to be *monomoi*, "those who remain in their place," i.e., steadfast) to their philosophical studies as they do in their roles as the state's preeminent warriors (537d). This use of the language of war connecting the soldier to the philosopher is familiar to the reader of the *Apology*, where Socrates likens philosophy to a military obligation bestowed upon him by the god (28d-e).²

Several questions arise from these observations. Does Socrates, by continually using military vocabulary in contexts that concern the lofty pursuit of *philosophia*, thereby valorize the life of arms? How do we reconcile this sort of language with his denunciations in books 8 and 9 of the tyrant, who lives almost exclusively in a state of war? Does the text distinguish for us the positive qualities of war from the negative? The substance of my paper will be a response to these questions.

¹ E.g., N. White *A Companion to Plato's Republic* 1979.

² Cf. A. Hobbs *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good* 2000, and "Plato on War," *Maieusis* 20 (2007), in which text she helpfully collects several other passages from the *Republic* where the philosopher and the act of philosophy are contextualized as actors and actions demanding soldierly courage.