



Plato, *Republic* 1

Study Questions

These study questions are designed to get students to engage with the text of *Republic* 1 in different ways, and generally from quite a different angle than the questions they might encounter in the A Level or AS Level examinations. They might be useful ways to explore the text either if the whole is read in English as a starting point, or as consolidation questions once the text in Greek has been read. They are also useful starting points for engagement beyond the confines of the curriculum and could be used as extension tasks for brighter students. There is no suggested word limit for these essays, and depending on the context, responses could be tightly focused and short, or more discursive and longer: ultimately they are starting points for discussion and further exploration.

Question 1: ‘Drama and character are more important than logic in *Republic* 1’. How defensible is this view?

Question 2: ‘*Republic* 1 up until 331e is mere window-dressing, and reading it is a waste of time.’ How far do you agree with this view?

Question 3: Does Cephalus engage the audience’s sympathy? Why or why not?

Question 4: Cephalus claims that character, not wealth, is the secret to contentment in old age. Is this true?

Question 5: Cephalus is the only character who explicitly connects justice with the divine and the afterlife; how important are these concepts to defending why people ought to be just?

Question 6: Virtue is not a skill: what criticisms can be made of the use of the *techné* analogy in *Republic* 1?



Question 7: ‘Those who have been harmed by necessity become more unjust.’ says Socrates at 335c, arguing with Polemarchus. Do you agree with this statement? What might your interpretation of this statement mean for the justice system?

Question 8: Before his argument proper begins, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of sham ignorance, avoiding answering questions, and taking arguments in the worst way possible – effectively, of arguing in bad faith. How justified is this criticism of Socrates?

Question 9: Thrasymachus’ argument is under-rated: can Socrates’ criticisms of ‘the advantage of the stronger’ be overcome?

Question 10: Thrasymachus argues that it is just to follow what the rulers call law. How far do you agree with him? When is it just to follow a law, even if one disagrees with it, and when ought one break the law?

Question 11: Socrates claims, against Thrasymachus, that ‘no system of knowledge looks to or is organised around its own benefit, but that of the weaker which is governed by it.’ (342c) Is this generally true, or are there exceptions?

Question 12: In his confrontation with Thrasymachus, Socrates claims that the just are happier and have a better life than the unjust. Is this true, and does it matter – would it still be worthwhile pursuing justice if it did not lead to happiness and a good life?