

Chapter 7: The link between Plato's Philosopher-king and the Worshipful Master of a Lodge

One of the most compelling reasons that *Republic* has been a foundation stone of western philosophy is that the book appeals and speaks to us at many levels. It can be read and applied as a political manifesto, as a sociological commentary, as a psychological exposition or as an educational treatise. In addition, (after more than 2000 years), at whatever level we read it, its message is still vibrant and still speaks to us about the concerns that we have as men and women living in the 21st century.

The one level that hasn't been explored to any large degree is the level we are exploring at the moment – *Republic* as the foundation of modern Freemasonic ritual. So at this point, we will take a close look at the most important parallels between its philosophy and our Ritual.

Republic is a large work and complex at times (despite its seeming straightforward everyday discussion). So, now may be as good a point in time as any to briefly familiarise ourselves with the parallels that exist between this book and our Ritual. This will simplify the process of reading *Republic*, because we can strip away all the superfluous elements and focus solely on those elements that were chosen by the composers of Emulation Ritual in the years between 1813 and 1823. These were the elements that they believed were important for each of us to develop competency in as *thinking leaders* or modern –day “philosopher-kings”.

In commerce, we often refer to concepts known as “business models”. In simple terms, business models are platforms to develop very specific results. By way of example, these results may have *financial targets*, or they may be designed to *capture a particular market share* or they may even be based about *developing or enhancing desired relationships*. What the business model addresses are *the means by which* this goal is to be achieved.

If we approach *Republic* from this easy to understand angle, the one thing that will become evident is that the “business model” that Plato projects is similarly - a simple one. His goal is to develop a *thinking leader* (or to use his own terminology) – a philosopher-king. *How* does he propose to do this? His method is *simplicity at its very best*. He argues that *education* is the key. It is nothing more, or anything less.

Drilling down further, he says that the man or woman chosen to receive this *specialised* education is to be trained, disciplined, counselled, and encouraged over many years – *grounded* – in two distinct but complementary avenues of study.

The first is the development of the candidate's *intellectual capacity*. The second is the development of the candidate's *character*.

At its most basic (but sharply-accurate) level, *Republic's* formula can be expressed as:

Intellect + Character = Philosopher-king

At this exact point it is inevitable that we will be wondering how this formula applies to Freemasonry. The answer is also *simple*. It is so simple that it shares so many similarities with a process that you and I are probably very familiar with but which on all accounts the composers of Emulation Ritual may not have been troubled by in 1816.

Let me explain it by this very east-to-follow example: In 1816 - the year that Emulation Ritual was approved, I am unsure that socks were any colour other than black. The upshot of this is that these men were probably disconnected from the daily phenomenon that we face in the 21st century – the problem of finding a specific pair of socks in the rush to go to work each morning. I call out to my wife in the morning: “Jenny – where are my black socks with the white stripes”? She is in the kitchen preparing sandwiches for our youngest son. While Jenny does not have the ability to see through walls (that I'm aware of), she is always able to know

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where they are. She'll call out: "Have you tried looking in the very front of your sock drawer"? I do and am always amazed to find the *exact* pair of socks that matches my suit that day.

What I am looking for is always staring me in the face.

The exact principle applies here.

Firstly - Plato put together a curriculum that comprised the subjects that make up the "intellect" portion of the equation. We have discussed the collective term for this group of subjects. We know them as the *liberal arts and sciences*.

He then went one step further. He devised a curriculum that comprised the subjects that made up the "character" portion of the equation. Singly, these subjects are – prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. Collectively, we refer to them as the Four Cardinal Virtues and will explore them in greater detail a little later.

So let's revisit the equation. We can now express it as:

The Liberal Arts and Sciences + The Four Cardinal Virtues = Philosopher-king.

There is still one major issue that we have not overcome and it relates to the *Philosopher-king* term in the above equation.

Putting philosophy aside for the moment let us go back to the simpler task of finding our socks in the morning that I referred to earlier. Remember – the answer is right in front of our eyes.

We need to keep in mind that the men who put together the Emulation Ritual were highly educated in *the classics*. Back in 1816 when Emulation Ritual was finally completed and approved, "the classics" covered a range of literature from the Bible to Greek and Roman writings to Jonathon Swift. What we're saying is that the compass of classic literature was and thankfully remains...broad.

So...let's go looking for our socks once again...

Our Ritual is based on what? The simple Ritual response is:

It is based on the circumstances connected with the building of King Solomon's Temple.

It is based on the construction of a Temple belonging to King Solomon!

This scriptural character is famous on two accounts. The first is that he was a *king*. The second is that he was famous for being a *lover of wisdom*. In this respect it is far from accidental that the Greek term for "lover of wisdom" is *philosopher*.

So...King Solomon (from a Freemasonic viewpoint) is *the* philosopher-king!

Now, we will advance one step further...

In a Masonic lodge, it is the Worshipful Master who sits in the Chair of King Solomon. It is the *Worshipful Master* who represents King Solomon. It is the Worshipful Master who represents that characteristic of *Wisdom*.

So let's reduce the terms of the Platonic formula into a meaningfully freemasonic one:

The Liberal Arts and Sciences + The Four Cardinal Virtues = Philosopher-king = Worshipful Master

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While we may have solved one small Masonic mystery, it still has not adequately explained the mystery of how it is that your wife (and mine) knows the *exact* location of our black socks (*with the white stripes*) - *each* morning.

...Even from the kitchen!