

## Winter History & Heritage -- #3 (Jan. 6)

### **The Republic --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 73-85)**

**This magisterial dialogue**, Plato's most controversial, seems to be less a practical political program than a mythical exploration of order in the soul and in society? In the discourse, Plato draws an analogy between three chief classes in society (thinkers--soldiers--farmers) and three faculties of the soul (mind--will--appetite). An enlightened harmony of rule and submission in the inner man (the soul's faculties), the philosopher taught, was prerequisite to the same in the outer dimension (society's classes).

### **Plato's Ideas (or god) --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 73-85)**

**This transcendent order of being** seems to be Plato's supreme reality upon which all things are based, including man's moral awareness and aspirations? Sometimes, with reference to higher matters, the philosopher employs almost a biblical style as when he declares, "It is God who is, for you and me, the measure of all things." However, his transcendence seems reducible to a heavenly realm of Ideas which constitutes Truth, the substantive origin of earthly things (mere shadows by comparison).

### **Aristotle's Era --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 86-96)**

**This Greek philosopher's era** in the 4th-century (300s) before Christ was, in Russell Kirk's words, "a time of troubles and innovations on a colossal scale"? Sparta dominated a wounded Greek mainland until the barbarous Macedonians subdued not only the Greek cities but Egypt and much of Asia, all the way to India. The philosopher's most celebrated pupil, Macedonia's great prince, did most of the conquering, though his early death led to a fourfold division of his Hellenistic empire.

### **"Man is a Social Animal" --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 86-96)**

**This truth about human nature** is what Aristotle had in mind when he wrote, "A man in solitude must be either a beast or a god"? The philosopher held that only in community, as a civilized member of a city-state (polis), does man realize his full moral and vocational potential. Thus, politics from this perspective may be seen as the art of safeguarding society and its standards by law both for man (his proper place and reward) and from man (his bent toward reckless disregard of his best interest).

### **Golden Mean --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 86-96)**

**This title** is shorthand for Aristotle's approach to virtue, a 4th-century BC version of the old Homeric "nothing to excess" standard? The basic idea is to avoid extremes of character, conduct, and condition in private and public life for the sake of a middle way of balance and moderation. A good man, for example, steers clear of gluttony and asceticism in favor of temperance, or chooses self-respect over arrogance and self-loathing, or finds a way to temper contemplation with action or vice versa.

**(as always, sources are as indicated; any errors of judgment belong to Mr. Zaffini, Veritas history teacher and writer of this post for his students & their families)**