

# Stalin the Philosopher-King: The Soviet Totalitarianism as Realization of Plato's Republic

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It is not an extraordinary visage; it could belong to any factory worker struggling through life. But the expression of fierce determination gives one pause; the stars of destiny shine behind the squinted eyes, the chin juts forward defiantly, pointing towards historical immortality. No, this is not the face of a simple worker; it is their champion, the man whose life is the personification of the proletarian struggle. Their force is in him. Joseph Stalin, whose very name is an accolade ("Man of Steel"); Stalin, in whose mighty hands an entire nation was forged according to his iron will.

Joseph Stalin endures as perhaps the most perplexing figure in the annals of history. He accumulated personal power that would awe Caesar, his crash programs in modernization propelled the Soviet Union from a backwards agrarian country to the fore of world powers, and he was the source of hope for not only the peoples of his realm, but also for those who still tasted the bitter wormwood of colonization. And yet his legacy is stained with blood, his nation's earth is filled with the bodies of his victims, and the benign smiling face of Comrade Stalin appears menacing and evil—the face of a tyrant. During his lifetime he was lauded with a myriad of titles, almost embarrassing in their adulation: "the Greatest Genius of Geniuses," "the Most Brilliant Strategist of All Times and Peoples," "the Best Friend of Counterintelligence Operatives," and "the Leader of All Progressive Humanity."<sup>1</sup> A few short years after his death he had fallen from the Empyrean, cast into the Pit, as castigated as the Enemy of Humanity who reigns over that land.

Back across the epic span of time, long before the Man of Steel stood atop the world stage, an erudite student of Socrates was penning his *summum opus*. It attempted to answer a profound question, "What is justice?," easily postulated but onerous in its complexity. Plato, who is the acknowledged master of Western philosophy, attacked this question with alacrity in his *Republic*. In attempting to bring the mystery of justice to resolution, Plato sketched the blueprint for the perfect state that would be established entirely on this most lofty of principles. This state was condemned to the pages of the book, imprisoned in the world of the intellect, until the brilliant, albeit sinister, mind of Stalin constructed Plato's state, bringing it out of the inert world of academia and into the dynamic realm of politics.

*Republic* was the instructions for the most oppressive and powerful state ever realized in the age of humanity: Stalin's totalitarianism. The Worker-Tsar saw himself as a Platonic guardian<sup>2</sup>, the leader-type found in the tract, and numerous parallels (far too many to be a simple coincidence) between *Republic* and the USSR can be seen by the observant eye. In the Red regime, Joseph Stalin and Plato, two of history's giants, come together from across millennia to at last establish the reign of the Philosopher-King.

## I. Historiography

### A.) PLATO

Plato's immortal tract has been the subject of scrutiny for some of the world's best minds, as is appropriate for a work of its scope and originality. This investigation has yielded much that is both intriguing and controversial. The historiography breaks down into a bipolar world, each side analyzing the political proposals found in the work and each reaching a bold conclusion. One school contends that the political system devised by Plato is the precursor to totalitarianism, while the rival camp advocates that *Republic* is that system's antithesis, the forerunner of democracy. Certainly, the implications of this matter are profound; Plato is esteemed as the foundation of Western thought. The burgeoning student of philosophy is often reminded by his instructor: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."<sup>3</sup> Was, then, this coryphaeus a believer in totalitarianism or democracy? If it is the former, then serious doubts are raised as regard either the inherent values of Western civilization or the placement of Plato as its principal philosopher. In the case that the latter emerges triumphant, our society will be strengthened in the knowledge that it is the product of an ancient ideal.

#### 1.) *Republic as Totalitarianism*

Those who oppose Plato as an enemy of democracy form an imposing company of guerrilla warriors, seeking to undermine the established viewpoint of Plato as an enlightened thinker. The charge is led by R. H. S. Crossman with the audacious declaration, dripping with raw vitriol: "Plato's philosophy is the most savage and the most profound attack upon liberal ideas which history can show."<sup>4</sup> Crossman does not let this claim stand naked; he goes on to clothe it in robes of proof.

The civilians, by far the largest contingent in the society, must content themselves with toiling in the fields and laboring in their artisan shops, because their sole function is to produce society's goods and produce.<sup>5</sup> There is no political participation; there is no self-determination. There is only the hammer and the sickle. But the civilian's lot does not merely deny them the right to choose their fate. They must also endure a total lack of personal security: "For the good of the state the ruler must punish and banish and kill the citizen who objects to the political operation the State must undergo."<sup>6</sup> These powers of the ruler have chilling implications—the life of any opponent is forfeit. Even worse, perhaps, is the necessity of suffering needlessly in the present for some future happiness that may be nothing but a chimera. This "end justifies the means" policy is a hallmark of the brutal totalitarian regimes of the Twentieth Century.

A key feature in *Republic* is the "noble lie"—a concept that Plato never explicitly defines. Crossman sees the noble lie as propaganda, a means for instilling certain viewpoints into the masses. This indoctrination with simplified socio-political principles, Crossman argues, is the only education the bulk of society will ever receive.<sup>7</sup> All media—including literature, music, and theater—will be censored and regulated so as to inculcate a slavish devotion to the regime of the philosopher-kings among the populace at large.<sup>8</sup>

Crossman concludes that Plato's perfect state "gives to the many not self-government but security, not freedom but prosperity, not knowledge but the 'noble lie...'. [It] is not a democracy of rational equals, but an aristocracy in which a hereditary caste of cultured gentlemen care with paternal solicitude for the toiling masses."<sup>9</sup> The biting rancor with which Crossman passes his sentence convinces even the incredulous reader of his deep conviction that Plato is an opponent of democracy.

Crossman is not alone in the ranks of the guerrillas. He was but the first wave. Lesley Brown joins the struggle, penning her own article in an endeavor to prove Plato a totalitarian. Brown begins by examining a totalitarian state, finding that its essential feature is its intolerance of any rival loyalties. She then focuses her gaze on *Republic*, learning that the State will countenance no opposition to its constitution.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, then, *Republic* is a totalitarian entity.

A further necessary characteristic, continues Brown, is the presence of "repressive measures to ensure conformity and to stifle dissent, including lies, state propaganda, and censorship of free speech, art, music, and literature."<sup>11</sup> Once again, Plato (through his mouthpiece in *Republic*, Socrates) openly proclaims these features as integral to his system.<sup>12</sup>

Plato's ultimate ambition, it must be credited, was to make the people of his *polis* happy. And further to his credit, he did not want a single stratum of society to have a monopoly on bliss, but rather the whole city drinking from the fount of mirth.<sup>13</sup> But even these noble sentiments were tools in Plato's hands. Brown finds in *Republic* the idea that a city can only be happy when the philosopher-kings rule with the aid of the auxiliaries (the police force), while the "mass of workers must simply mind their own business and do what they are told."<sup>14</sup> They are not individuals, but rather "good cogs in the great machine."<sup>15</sup> It is clear that Plato, while wishing for the happiness of the citizenry, believes this can only be achieved through the stamping out of liberty and individuality.

Both Crossman and Brown's arguments are persuasive and scathing, but Karl R. Popper emerges to deliver the most damning attack of them all. He finds two basic elements in Plato's *Republic*:

- a) The strict division of the classes; i.e., the ruling class consisting of herdsman and watch-dogs must be strictly separated from the human cattle.
- b) The identification of the fate of the state with that of the ruling class; the exclusive interest in this class, and in its unity; and subservient to this unity, the rigid rules for breeding and educating this class, and the strict supervision and collectivization of the interests of its members.<sup>16</sup>

Popper does not mask the force of his words with academic prose; he cuts to the very foundation of *Republic*, a foundation that *a priori* totalitarian; it places the burden of proof on the gainsayers.

Popper does not allow Plato to recover from his first stinging blow; he connects with another, even more damaging charge: that Plato cynically pretended that *Republic* was a treatise on justice, when it was in fact a means of disseminating totalitarian literature—the masquerade of the totalitarian state as one founded on justice would further win over followers.<sup>17</sup> This is a damning indictment, but unfortunately it cannot be corroborated by any of Plato's extant notes (a man of his

intelligence would surely have destroyed any evidence of such an act). Popper must instead prove his contention by analyzing the work in question.

Popper argues that the goal of education in the ideal State is not "the awakening of self-criticism and of critical thought in general"<sup>18</sup>—it is, on the contrary, indoctrination, the suppression of any critical thought and the acceptance of decrees of the government as axiomatic.

He goes on: Plato's primary interest is in the collective body, the state as a whole; justice is nothing more than the health and well-being of this polity.<sup>19</sup> An action that would benefit the state is a just one, whereas an action that blights the institution is wicked and unjust. "*The criterion of morality is the interest of the state* [emphasis is Popper's]."<sup>20</sup>

Popper contends that Plato wished not only for the workers to live in a fog of lies, but that it was his solemn hope that the rulers themselves, after a few generations, would subscribe to the propaganda. Thus, without any access to the truth by any stratum of society, the lie will become, in effect if not in form, truth. The goal of this is nothing less than the strengthening of the ruling caste (in Popper's evocative words, a "master race") and the total halting of all societal progress.<sup>21</sup> Plato knew as well as Orwell that the halting of progress froze the material conditions in a certain state, bringing unshakable stability to the status quo.

In sum, the guerrillas of the Totalitarian camp rely on the social structure of the *polis* to corroborate their charges; specifically, the extensive use of propaganda, the sanctioned use of terror against the populace, and the granting of political power to an elite body of sages, who control all aspects of their subjects' lives.

## 2.) *Republic as Democracy*

The forces battling Plato and his classic work are puissant indeed, but they are not unopposed in their advance. No, like the Red Army that halts the *Wehrmacht* juggernaut at the gates of Moscow, a group of warrior-poets comes to defend Plato and his ideal state. It is a far more difficult road to flesh out elements of democracy in this work, and even if they should fail in their mission, their names are emblazoned on the historiography of Plato's *Republic*.

The counterattack is led by John H. Hallowell. He begins by declaring that Plato "meant by philosophers lovers of wisdom, seekers after the good."<sup>22</sup> Plato believed that only a handful of individuals in a generation could reach this level, while today we hold that all human beings are capable of reaching beyond the stars.<sup>23</sup> It is but a small step to progress from Plato's concept to our own; in a democracy, all the people are philosopher-kings (at least in the ideal).

Hallowell then turns his attention to debunking the totalitarian charge. The totalitarian dictators believe that there is no standard by which they can be judged; their will is in the right simply because it is their will.<sup>24</sup> Plato rejects such tautological arguments; philosopher-kings must serve the truth and wisdom—those are the standards by which they are to be judged.<sup>25</sup>

Hallowell is relieved by John Wild, who crafts an eloquent argument in support of Plato and his democratic leanings. But Wild first makes a statement brimming with daring:

[Plato] identified [Athenian] democracy with irresponsible anarchy and condemned it both in itself and in being the mother of tyranny. Indeed, in Book VIII of the *Republic*, he places the pure form of democracy under oligarchy and holds that it is exceeded in degeneracy only by tyranny.<sup>26</sup>

Wild is able to reconcile this historical fact with his stance by defining Athenian democracy as mob-rule, simple majoritarian democracy. But democracy is more than simply statistical majorities having political power—in fact, it is not even a necessary characteristic.<sup>27</sup>

Democracy, Wild continues, can be viewed as a system seeking the avoidance of tyranny coupled with a profound “sense of the dignity and worth of human life, the fundamental equality of all under God, and the universal brotherhood of men.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Greek philosophy has contributed its love of reason, faith in human nature, and hope for the future.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, Plato can be seen to have a deep respect for human beings, and the final category (Greek philosophy) might have a little to do with him as well.

Wild then succors the philosopher-kings, claiming that they are not arbitrary rulers, but rather “guardians of the law, who try first to understand it, then to apply it for the benefit of the whole community...”<sup>30</sup>

Wild addresses the issue of the “noble lie,” attributing its negative definition to a basic misunderstanding of its principles. It is not propaganda; instead, it is the simplified truth—only the philosopher-kings can comprehend the world as it really is, and they must dilute it for consumption by the masses.<sup>31</sup> It is comparable to adults explaining complex events to children.

Furthermore, Plato’s society does not have slaves—in the economic or the political sense. The natural rights of all citizens are protected, especially education.<sup>32</sup> Plato was an ardent supporter of education, recognizing its value as a guard against the advent of tyranny.<sup>33</sup> As Thomas Jefferson wisely said, “Information is the currency of democracy.”<sup>34</sup>

The Democratic school differs markedly from the Totalitarians in its methodology; whereas the latter are more concerned with the practical proposals, the Democrats focus on the theoretical aspects of the work. Their words are eloquent and their remarks valid, but the arguments lack the force found in the charges of Crossman, Brown, and Popper. It is a truism that words and ideals count for little when trumpeted over a grim reality. While the values espoused by Hallowell and Wild may flow logically from Platonic thought, the application of *Republic’s* political schema is incontrovertibly totalitarian. The volcanic eruption that razes a village today will, once the lava cools, form the ground on which a megalopolis may one day flourish.

It has been illustrated that Plato’s *Republic* inspires vastly different readings. The totalitarian camp curses him even as he is extolled by the democrats. Through the historiography, it becomes clear that Plato’s ideas can be used to forge entirely different systems—imagine the potential of *Republic* when interpreted by the extraordinary mind of Joseph Stalin.

## B.) STALIN

The reign of Joseph Stalin was a drama on the world stage, and he succeeded in his ambition of carving his name into the Story of Humanity. For as long as civilization covers the globe, imposing the vision of humankind onto the body of nature, his deeds will be seared into the collective consciousness. The Twentieth Century, that most wondrous and bloody of epochs, is largely the tale of his movement and its clash with its antithesis, fascism; of his personal battle with an adventurer-conqueror who betrayed him and the world: Adolf Hitler.

Stalin, like Plato, is a complex figure whose life inspires several different interpretations. One school of thought holds him to be a great leader—although even this school must concede that he was marred by several severe flaws. The second camp contends that Stalin was a brutal tyrant, his “vermin fangs imbued in human gore.”<sup>35</sup> The last group contemns him as an incompetent ruler, his record of criminal acts unbalanced by any redeeming features. Which was the true Stalin? This question must be answered if his specter is to be exorcised from the earthly realm.

### 1.) *Stalin: Great Leader*

During his lifetime, official Soviet biographies heaped praise upon the “Leader of All Progressive Humanity,” painting his picture as a benign champion of the common man, friend to the worker, and titan of history. He was the Soviet Union’s *vozhd*<sup>36</sup>—a term difficult to translate into English, meaning something like unquestionable and all-powerful leader, similar to the German *Fuehrer*.<sup>36</sup> This view as an infallible ruler clearly could not survive Stalin, and his image was tarnished when reports of the terrible costs of his leadership became known. Still, he is not without defenders, scholars who seek to return some of the lost glory to Stalin’s name.

Robert H. McNeal is, if not an all-out Stalinist, a man who respects his vast contributions to Soviet Society and the world. Stalin’s ultimate loyalty, McNeal argues, was the Soviet Union itself, which he regarded as the socialist motherland and the keystone of any future proletarian revolution. Throughout his career, Stalin served his country devotedly, and reaped much success for it and the Communist movement.<sup>37</sup> This last claim, certainly, is undeniable; Stalin found the USSR an industrially weak agrarian nation and left it a world superpower with an empire spreading from the Elbe River to the Pacific Ocean.

To explain the monstrous purges of the party and society, McNeal proclaims that “it [was] not necessary for a victim to be literally in the pay of the class enemy. If he was thwarting or threatening Stalin, he was objectively serving the imperialists.”<sup>38</sup> So, McNeal says, what is commonly regarded as tyrannical repression is in fact a necessary move to provide strong leadership and, ergo, protection against a menace.

The workers were rarely the victims of these purges, and were ardent believers in class warfare, backing Stalin in his efforts to crush kulak and bourgeois counterrevolutionary activity.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, McNeal stresses that the violence employed against the party elite is often greatly exaggerated. The purging of the party’s upper echelon lasted only two years of Stalin’s long reign. Many of the cases were not at Stalin’s behest at all, but were rather conducted under the impetus of opportunistic, unscrupulous underlings seeking to blaze a trail for career advancement.<sup>40</sup>

McNeal hints that perhaps it is not Stalin who should bear the full burden of responsibility. It is instead the chief of the secret police, Yezhov, who is to blame for its excesses. He writes that any contention that

Yezhov and not Stalin was supreme is unjustified, but the most widespread arrests, deportations to the Gulag, and executions among the Soviet elite did occur during Yezhov's tenure as head of the police, September 1936-December 1938, and it is highly probable that the violence and scope of these repressions owed something to his personal management or mismanagement of Stalin's terror.<sup>41</sup>

In the area of collectivization, one of Stalin's most-lamented policies, McNeal contends that Stalin made bona fide efforts to limit the brutality of the implementation. He issued secret decrees that placed ceilings on the arrests of kulaks, and made a clandestine speech to party functionaries that called for an end to "administrative measures," a common euphemism for coercion, confiscation of land, and exile to labor camps.<sup>42</sup>

Another point McNeal hastens to convey is that Stalin did not approve of his cult of personality, for which he is so reviled by his opponents. Rather than the instrument of vainglory, it was "necessary as a beacon for the masses—who were too easily influenced by false movements and leaders—and was the guarantee that a reliable Marxist-Leninist would retain supremacy."<sup>43</sup> The cult, then, was a political tool to promote stability, not the hero-worship of a semi-divine ruler.

McNeal concedes that Stalin was guilty of oppression, deceit, and murder on an epic scale, but that he did all this in the service of a just war<sup>44</sup>—the attempt to build a new kind of society and a new citizen to inhabit it.

Nathan Leites makes a single—albeit salient—contribution to the great leader school of thought. He finds evidence that Stalin engaged in philosophical debate with mid-level bureaucrats, who often differed with Stalin on several key points. None of these technocrats suffered torture or any other punishment for their stance.<sup>45</sup> This proves that Stalin could countenance criticism in an area as sensitive as philosophy (of vital importance to a Soviet ruler, because the CCCP leader was expected to be a master theoretician).<sup>46</sup> This evidence undermines the oft-repeated claim that Stalin was an ego-maniac, and even instills a degree of magnanimity into his personality.

Jules Archer declares that Stalin was truly a Man of Steel, that human misery and suffering were trifling matters in the quest to build a mighty nation.<sup>47</sup> It was not the individual, but the mass of humanity that he cared about. This may make him seem a monster, but he served this ideal with conviction.

Archer admits that Stalin showed no degree of clemency to his enemies. He ordered grain seized from all collective farms that failed to realize their quota, accusing the peasants of deliberately sabotaging the harvest. The crop confiscation resulted in a terrible famine, but the will of the peasants to resist was forever broken.<sup>48</sup> Soviet power at last established dominion in the countryside.

Seeking to end Russia's industrial weakness, Stalin ordered the advent of a Five Year Plan to hurl the country from out of the darkness. The Plan was designed to industrialize the Union at the fastest possible speed, regardless of difficulty or resistance.<sup>49</sup> Archer finds that "despite Stalin's blunders and inhuman cruelty, he drove Russians to accomplish in one generation the work of ten."<sup>50</sup> Only a man like Stalin could have attained such a result.

Archer concludes that Stalin, while brutal in his methods, achieved his historical mission—he brought the Soviet Union to the fore of world powers, and changed its people from peasant-folk to an educated modern citizenry with a love of culture.<sup>51</sup>

These historians support Stalin and work to wash some of the blood off his hands. It is undeniable that Stalin was responsible for countless deaths; his defenders provide evidence to illustrate Stalin either working to assuage the victims or as a man fighting for the Great Cause, which necessitated the loss of life. They succeed in their mission; while not absolving the Man of Steel of his crimes, they illustrate that his regime accomplished momentous deeds.

## 2.) *Stalin: Tyrant*

Stalin was not able to silence all of his enemies with a pistol. They cannot be silenced, because no sooner does one fall than another appears, armed with moral indignation that even Stalin's staunchest supporters cannot match.

Helene Carrere d'Encausse is such an enemy. She curses his reign as "years of unadulterated tyranny."<sup>52</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, a former Red Army officer and propagandist, has broken with his Communist past to corroborate Carrere d'Encausse's contention; "Stalin's political 'principle' was monistic—everyone was to be ruled by the single method of coercion."<sup>53</sup> This is the method not of a great leader—for leaders do not require the use of repressive force—but of a tyrant, able to keep control only through fear and death.

Volkogonov further charges that Stalin did not even properly understand economics, a damning critique indeed for the leader of an essentially economic movement. His comprehension only went so far as recognizing the need for rapid and profound improvement in industrial capacity, and exhorted for this general improvement.<sup>54</sup> The Five-Year Plan did result in massive increases in industrial potential, as well as the creation of several new markets (automobiles, chemicals, aircraft),<sup>55</sup> but many of the achievements rested on the backs of political prisoners, who were extensively used as slave labor.<sup>56</sup>

Alan Bullock is widely respected as one of the premiere Hitler-historians, but he aggrandizes his expertise to include the other great Twentieth-century dictator in his massive dual biography of Hitler and Stalin. In this tome, he scrutinizes collectivization of agriculture as one of the principal actions of the Stalinist government. Carrere d'Encausse presents the fact that the collectivization campaign resulted in monstrous losses, hardly conceivable by the human mind. There were "millions of dead, with unimaginable sufferings, with a rural society decimated physically and doomed morally."<sup>57</sup> What makes it even more bitter is that it was an economic debacle, entirely ruining the once fertile Soviet agriculture.<sup>58</sup> This was, of course, never admitted. The official party line is that sabotage and wrecking caused the poor harvests of collectivized agriculture.<sup>59</sup>

Carrere d'Encausse condemns Stalin's use of secret police, the ultimate key of his power over society. These secret police, whose name changed several times and whose powers continued to expand, created a state of perpetual fear in order to smash the bonds of human society—such as friendship and family (after all, friends and family members could be police informants)—to break the will of those who would resist until nothing is left but malleable, frightened husks, into which anything can be

inculcated.<sup>60</sup> Daniel Myerson evokes the terror of the police headquarters, the Lubyanka; "Men and women are strapped to tables. Their teeth are kicked out;... they are forced to stare at two-thousand-watt light bulbs,...needles are stabbed through the back of the neck until the spinal cord is injured and convulsions begin."<sup>61</sup>

The adherents of the Tyrant school have a far easier task than did the Great Leader contingent. They need only expose the ghastly wounds that the Red Tsar gouged into the Socialist Motherland. The death toll during his reign is so astronomical as to cease to be comprehensible to the human mind. His projects for social development, they argue in unison, resulted in a bloodbath and the enslavement of the people of the USSR to the will of a vainglorious megalomaniac. His achievements were incidental. The Tyrant camp poses a serious threat to the Great Leader squadron; the former claims with righteous indignation that the results of Stalin's programs did not justify their brutality; the latter stoically contends that the Cause is greater than morality. The loyalty of students of history is contingent upon that individual's own value system, whether that person is dedicated to the human being or to humanity as a whole.

### **3.) Stalin: Incompetent Ruler**

There exist even more vehement opponents of Stalin than the tyrant camp. These scholars disdain Stalin and do not even afford him the dignity of being an effective tyrant, let alone a leader. The sole accomplishment of his reign is that he was able to have a reign. Striking after the death of Stalin, during the "Thaw" of Khrushchev, Roy A. Medvedev burst forth like a thunderbolt to topple the statues of the "Greatest Genius of Geniuses." Stalin, Medvedev begins, was a man consumed with raw ambition, the desire to become one with power. Unfortunately, he was not especially endowed with any talents or qualities that might justify his placing the signet ring on his covetous finger. This "limitless ambition" coupled with his "limited abilities" necessitated that Stalin remove any potential rivals...that is, he must destroy those who are superior to him until he stands as a titan.<sup>62</sup>

Stalin's purges were the largest in scale in human history. The death toll is truly nauseating. Medvedev rages, "these were not streams, these were rivers of blood, the blood of honest Soviet people."<sup>63</sup> So many innocents were killed because Stalin was incapable of distinguishing between actual enemies and loyal citizens.

Stalin continually attempted to shirk responsibility for his failures. After the debacle of collectivization, he penned the article "Dizzy With Success" in an endeavor to place the blame for the excesses on local officials.<sup>64</sup> When the paucity of qualified individuals became manifest following the purge, Stalin charged Yezhov with committing the excesses.<sup>65</sup> And finally, he declared that the Five-Year Plan, optimum version, was fully realized

in order...to get the people to see some justification for the sacrifices forced on them by collectivization and industrialization, which were not so much due to the actual needs of the economy as to the poor leadership of Stalin and his aides.<sup>66</sup>

The horror of this time could perhaps be palatable if it served some great cause, but Medvedev argues that there was no point, that it was all engendered by Stalin's bungling.

Gary Kern joins this camp by analyzing Stalin as portrayed by the great Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn's epic novel *The First Circle* uses the labor camps to symbolize the drudgery of life under Joseph Stalin.<sup>67</sup> The Red Tsar is not even entirely human—he is a “moral monster...who cannot be redeemed by a single fact or rationalization.”<sup>68</sup> This is a devastating portrait, denying Stalin even a single positive attribute.

*The First Circle* takes us into the mind of the Man of Steel, allows us to follow his thought-process:

Distrust was Iosif Džusashvili's [Stalin] determining trait. Distrust was his world view...He did not trust his mother...He did not trust his party members...He did not trust the workers...He did not trust those close to him...And he always turned out to be right! And then he trusted just one man...That man was Adolf Hitler.<sup>69</sup>

This quotation is damning on its face. Hitler was the least trust-worthy of any statesman in human memory; Stalin had watched him betray countless allies. He placed his complete faith in this man, who all along had professed to the world his will to forge a German Empire on the steppes of Russia.

Kern labels Stalin as the center of power, his will as the fuel that operates the machinery of state. He is “a man of unlimited power, a man whose squint can mean death and whose every word must be hailed as genius.”<sup>70</sup> To give some examples of the depths of madness to which the cult of personality sank, there were proposals to rename the Volga River and even the Moon after Stalin.<sup>71</sup> A man who is so adulated has supreme difficulty remaining attached to reality; “such a mind inevitably has no foundation, dwells in megalomaniac fantasies, and begins to eat away at itself.”<sup>72</sup> The great irony is, however, that “the hideous, senile tyrant, despite massive proof of his ineptitude, nevertheless keeps the country firmly in his grip.”<sup>73</sup> Kern would argue that Stalin is imbued with the one ability that allows him to remain in power, and even this is not so much a quality as a lack of one: ruthlessness.

Robert C. Tucker is an established historian and psychobiographer. He adds his voice to the chorus in a profoundly original way. Tucker believes that Stalin's inner world was one of epic battles between him, the leader of genius, and those who would destroy him. He constructed complex fantasies, “hero-scripts,” to borrow Tucker's term, and enacted them once he had attained power.<sup>74</sup> He identified with revolutionary figures from Russia's long and dark past, and was inspired by their deeds. The principal figures in his pantheon were Ivan Grozny (the Terrible) and Peter I (the Great).<sup>75</sup> Stalin resolved to cover himself with glory by achieving even grander accomplishments than these celebrated monarchs.

But he was not able to supersede them. Tucker mocks Stalin as a “colossal bungler of high policy.”<sup>76</sup> He failed in his historical mission. For instance, the first Five-Year Plan, while achieving some genuine results (such as the Dnieper River Dam, which incidentally utilized slave labor), had many blunders. There was poor oversight, and many projects “begun were not always completed. Expensive imported machinery was often mishandled or left to rust in unsheltered places.”<sup>77</sup> Industrialization and collectivization were attained, but “it did so at a cost that was incalculably great in lives, health, morale, and the well-being of a generation, and unnecessary for the bulk of the results achieved.”<sup>78</sup>

The Incompetent Ruler division is the least compelling of the Stalin camps. These scholars write as if personally enraged with the Soviet Leader (two of them, in fact, were Soviet citizens and chafed under his yoke). Their arguments are logically consistent, to be sure, and Tucker's evaluation of Stalin's mental state is nothing short of brilliant, but the historians deny Stalin even the political acumen that the Tyrant and Great Leader companies concede him. This is at odds with reality, and leaves their work incomplete, like a painting left unfinished because the artist is inept at forming faces.

Joseph Stalin is a man who continues to be discussed and evaluated. His life and times have provided the pabulum for many a distinguished career in history. While the attempt to provide the definitive analysis degenerates into a gray blur of contradictory conclusions, one thing is presented in crystal clarity; Joseph Stalin, long dead, continues to dominate the world.

## II. Argument

Many of the world-historic figures have had an ardent faith in their own destinies, a confidence bordering on arrogance that they would attain the lofty heights which beckoned, out of reach, to so many worthy individuals. And these figures, these titans of history, often develop their social designs long before they attain their ambitions; Napoleon no doubt coveted the crown long before that chilly December day; Hitler penned *Mein Kampf* while in prison, declaring his intention to stretch the German frontier to the Urals; and Joseph Stalin, one of those rare Communists who was actually from the working class, was the disciple of two sages: Karl Marx and Plato.

*Republic* is a blueprint for a state that existed only in the mind of a great thinker, and it was treated as a tool for the discussion of justice, not as an actual constitution. Plato himself probably doubted the likelihood of his plan's fruition, but he was no doubt sincere when he made a claim no less daring in our time than it was in ancient Greece:

Until philosophers rule as kings in cities or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, cities will have no rest from evils...nor will the human race.<sup>79</sup>

Stalin was indubitably intrigued by this passage, as it is the foundation upon which Plato constructs his mighty *polis*, but it is unfortunately impossible to determine if Stalin's character naturally mirrored the Platonic guardian, or if he was influenced by the work to the extent that it formed his personality. The importance of this question is marginal. The fact of the matter is that nearly all of Stalin's actions, and those of his society, can be understood in terms of Plato's *Republic*.

Plato was munificent in describing his ideal ruler, and these attributes can be examined vis-à-vis Stalin's nature, confirming the somewhat bold labeling of him as a philosopher-king. The lifestyle of the guardian (this term and philosopher-king will be used interchangeably here as in *Republic*) is humble, free of any ostentation or luxury.<sup>80</sup> He is "moderate and not at all a money-lover."<sup>81</sup> Stalin conforms to this image perfectly; the virtue of a modest home cannot be denied him. He was often

praised by visitors for his domicile, which was a "single story, two-room house in the former servants' quarters of the Kremlin, shabbily furnished."<sup>82</sup> Stalin, like Plato's hero, cared little for the material world. He was more concerned with pure power and its exercise.<sup>83</sup> In this matter, ostensibly of minor importance but in sooth telling about the lifestyle, and henceforth attitude towards life of a leader, Stalin fits into the robes of the philosopher-king.

Plato takes great care in elucidating that his guardian does not exult in the diadem resting upon his head. In fact, the true philosopher, he exclaims, "despises political rule."<sup>84</sup> They instead look upon their ascendancy as a necessity, as something to be avoided if at all possible.<sup>85</sup> Stalin noted this characteristic of the philosopher-king no less than he did the previous point. Therefore, he made a maneuver to illustrate his aversion to political power; he declared to the Central Committee that he wished to abdicate as the Party's General Secretary.<sup>86</sup> The Party, naturally, refused to accept his resignation, and it would be absurd to contend that Stalin was sincere in his offer. However, this example does establish that Stalin recognized the expediency in feigning an antipathy to the exercise of power. It is an axiom that people are more likely to trust a person with great power if he is reluctant to possess it. Once again, Stalin looked to *Republic* for guidance, and emulated, albeit without sincerity, the guardian's approach to a situation.

Stalin reigned during one of the most cataclysmic epochs in human history: the ideological clash of fascism with all rival thought-systems. Especially bitter was fascism's battle with its polar opposite, communism. The triumph of the Soviet Union, with great assistance from the industrial democracies, over the monstrous German war machine is one of the most salient events in Stalin's story. The Red Tsar fancied himself a military genius, depicted in numerous books and films as the Force whose strategic formulations crushed the *Wehrmacht* when lesser plans would have yielded only perdition.<sup>87</sup> This was more than simple political prudence, more than crafting himself into the Architect of Victory. Stalin was an ardent admirer of the army, wearing his marshal's uniform with a healthy dose of pride.<sup>88</sup> He involved himself personally in inspecting the military equipment and outfits.<sup>89</sup> This sphere of Stalin's nature finds a partner in the guardian, who combines the professions of "both warrior and philosopher" in his person.<sup>90</sup>

Plato, like the cold and calculating warrior that he praises, has naught but disdain for those who shirk their military responsibilities and embrace the coward's path of surrender. He icily declares, "anyone who is captured alive [should] be left to his captors as a gift to do with as they wish."<sup>91</sup> Stalin had the opportunity to prove his loyalty to Plato in this regard. During the massive Operation Barbarossa (the German invasion of the USSR), Stalin's own son, Yakov, was captured by the Nazis. The Germans extended feelers to Stalin with the purpose of exchanging Yakov for an important *Wehrmacht* officer. Stalin refused, leaving Yakov to the Nazis. He did not survive his confinement.<sup>92</sup>

Stalin's way of life and personal beliefs have been compared to the philosopher-king, and it has been demonstrated that in many instances that their natures are identical. However, there remains the most essential characteristic of the Platonic guardian—the ability to philosophize. This is the integral component, without which the philosopher-king would cease to be such. If Stalin were discovered to lack this

feature, any earlier victories would be lost; our liberated cities would be re-conquered by the enemy, ignorance.

First, Plato's concept of the true philosopher must be established if we are to find an exemplar in Stalin. This question is one of the most complex in the entire *Republic*, but Plato is able to solve it with much aplomb. He laconically identifies the philosopher as an individual who possesses "the share of the knowledge that alone among knowledge is to be called wisdom."<sup>93</sup> He continues: the philosopher is he "who love[s] the sight of truth."<sup>94</sup>

Now, armed with Plato's definition of the philosopher, we must probe into Stalin's psyche to find this quality. At this juncture, the debate reaches a crossroads; is it imperative that Stalin *actually* possess the rare ability to see Platonic truth, or is it sufficient that he *believe* himself to be endowed with it? This is an especially difficult conundrum because it is highly dubious that Stalin could fairly be called a philosopher. The previous examples of guardian behavior were all matters of will; one cannot will oneself a philosopher. It is a gift that cannot be seized. For the purposes of this inquiry, Stalin's belief in his philosophic acumen will be deemed adequate. After all, in order to emulate something it is not necessary to be such.

Stalin understood truth, perhaps predictably, in Marxist terms. In one of his letters to his principal lackey (and friend, or so the tone of the letters connote) Molotov, Stalin complains that the Chinese Communist Party is bereft of competent leadership: "There is not a *single* Marxist mind in the [Chinese] Central Committee capable of understanding the underpinning (the social underpinning) of the events now occurring [that is, the brewing civil war in China between the Reds and the forces of Kuomintang]."<sup>95</sup> Without a leader who is able to analyze the situation in Marxist terms, that is, truth, Stalin clearly believes any revolutionary activity to be fruitless. Philosophy, then, is a prerequisite for true leadership.

Naturally, Stalin himself was generously endowed with this crucial faculty, at least according to works produced by his propaganda machine (which disseminated the view Stalin had of himself, ergo being germane to the discussion). His genius for philosophy was manifest; his

whole career is an example of profound theoretical powers combined with an unusual breadth and versatility of practical experience in the revolutionary struggle...His advice is taken as a guide to action in all fields of Socialist construction...Everybody is familiar with the cogent and invincible force of Stalin's logic, the crystal clarity of his mind, his iron will...Stalin is wise and deliberate in solving complex political questions where a thorough weighing of pros and cons is required. At the same time, he is a supreme master of bold revolutionary decisions and sharp turns of policy.<sup>96</sup>

Through this indulgent and over-adulatory language, Stalin's intellectual puissance is confirmed. His mind is a powerful instrument capable of fertilizing the barren fields of ignorance. He can see the dawn of glory where others see only the blankets of night, because he is the "farsighted statesman and wise strategist who is cognizant of the laws of historical development and who molds [the Communist] Party's policy, strategy and tactics strictly on the basis of the objective laws of history and of a sober estimation of the actual forces."<sup>97</sup> Or so Stalin believed, and hoped others would as well.

Clearly, Stalin viewed himself as a leader of the Platonic type, who was able to view the truth, which were the immutable laws of historical materialism. These laws were the key to action; only policies formulated according to the truth were satisfactory. In this most important respect of all, Stalin is a Doppelgänger of Plato's ideal ruler.

In official Soviet history, the General Secretary is lauded as the solitary "Architect of Communist Society."<sup>98</sup> Under his auspices, the USSR blossomed into a flower of mirth, a marvel of science and order.<sup>99</sup> This accolade could have been taken verbatim from Plato's immortal work: "Surely one individual would be sufficient to bring to completion all the things that now seem so incredible, provided that his city obeys him."<sup>100</sup> And so, all of Stalin's ambitions find a corollary in *Republic*. His destiny to be the Builder of Socialism is found in the pages of this blueprint, and the only condition of his victory was the acquiescence of the people and his fellow politicians.

Let us travel backwards through time, to before Stalin's supremacy of Party and Country was established. Stalin was confident of his abilities to triumph in his endeavor to construct a socialist state; in fact, he felt that he alone possessed the vision and will-power to bring the revolution to its Fructador. However, he was burdened by the lead cloak of his brethren party members, who lacked Stalin's philosophic gift for beholding the truth (recall, this is his personal belief, not necessarily objectively factual). It was therefore imperative to remove this onus and rule alone.<sup>101</sup>

The means of accomplishing this *coup* was the secret police, which was known by many different acronyms: GPU, OGPU, and finally the NKVD. The transitory status of the names did not mirror the perpetual state of fear the organization inspired. The institution had its claws in all Party organs, and there were sections that watched over this first level, and still another stratum spying on these watchers. Furthermore, and perhaps even more effective, every important Party official (and therefore opponent of the philosopher-king) was protected by a troupe of NKVD agents, whose true purpose was to act as Stalin's spies.<sup>102</sup> Their duty, of course, was to promote Stalin's viewpoint through intimidation or outright terror. In Plato's terms, the secret police are the "auxiliaries[, who are the] supporters of the guardians' convictions."<sup>103</sup> Stalin personally cultivated this organization, which provided the keystone of his power. He bloated its authority to mammoth proportions, which ultimately included placing criminals in jail or concentration camps, jurisdiction over these camps, and the ability to commit capital punishment without any formal judicial procedure.<sup>104</sup>

The auxiliaries have no will of their own; they must defer in all instances to the volition of the philosopher-king. This is precisely the relationship Stalin shared with this organization. As its powers grew, he decided that it had become expedient to replace its head, Yagoda, because he had

become too intimate with Stalin's purge methods, and too close to the reins of power...The man chosen as Yagoda's successor was Nikolai Yezhov, whom Stalin had 'planted' several years before as Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and head of the bureau of appointments, chief dispenser of patronage. In these positions Yezhov had been silently building a parallel OGPU, responsible only to Stalin personally.<sup>105</sup>

The secret police, then, became an extension of Stalin's own self, a dagger in his inclement hand. The GPU/OGPU/NKVD were "like dogs obedient to the rulers, who are themselves like shepherds of the city."<sup>106</sup> Stalin expected that his pets enforce his enlightened will with "unrelenting firmness and ruthlessness,"<sup>107</sup> as one of his letters to his crony Molotov puts it. The successful creation of the auxiliaries mark one of Stalin's greatest triumphs; it represents his imposition of the ideals of *Republic* not on himself, but on entities independent of his personal perspective.

The madness of the secret police's terror is well known and could fairly be said to form the general population's perception of the Stalinist regime. The violence is random, the victims unrelated. The arm of the law becomes the lightning of electrical storms, awesome and capricious. The secret police would arrest someone, as innocent and clean as freshly-fallen snow, and force them to put their signatures to wild confessions, admitting to involvement in vast and elaborate, almost Goldbergian conspiracies.<sup>108</sup> A representative example is the case of the "Toiling Peasant Party." A huge portion of the bureaucracy was exposed to be members of this cabal, whose program was to destroy the farm implements of the kolkhoz (the collective farms), which would result in a poor harvest and ergo a famine. This famine would undermine the popularity of Stalin and the Soviet government, leading to a counter-revolutionary mood among the populace. The "Toiling Peasant Party" would then use its position in the bureaucracy to overthrow the Soviets and abolish all vestiges of communism from society, thus ordaining a bourgeois democracy.<sup>109</sup> If the accused were to refuse signing the confession, he would be subjected to physical and psychological torture until he agreed to admit guilt to a crime that never transpired.<sup>110</sup>

The facts of the case invariably consisted entirely of self-incriminations, with the contrite conspirator expounding upon his twisted deeds, which often did include a kernel of truth (for instance, when Yagoda was arrested, he was charged with attempting to poison the Politburo members, and he was in fact responsible for observing their food's preparation).<sup>111</sup> One of Stalin's secret policeman, a certain Krivitsky, went so far as to call it a "gigantic madhouse...[where] the very concept of guilt was lost sight of."<sup>112</sup>

Such practices seem to weaken, indeed, to destroy the view of Stalin as a philosopher-king. The practice of arresting a sea of officials and executing them on trumped-up charges is *a priori* contrary to the nature of a Platonic guardian, who loves truth above all else. However, even in this instance, where our daring comparison ostensibly is toppled like the statue of a deposed tyrant, Stalin proves himself more forcefully than ever to be a philosopher. Plato reminds us that such a being "must be without falsehood—[he] must refuse to accept what is false, hate it, and have a love for the truth."<sup>113</sup> This can be observed in his behavior, if the husk of appearance is shed.

Stalin was compelled by his belief in his unique wisdom to destroy those who would interdict him from ruling unfettered (see above). He had them removed from the power structure by the secret police, who accomplished this end by arresting them for conspiratorial activity that never happened. This falsehood was anathema to Stalin, who could not countenance this glaring challenge to his philosophic nature. The secret police were ergo instructed to force the prisoners *themselves* to sign their confessions, and then later incriminate themselves in open court.<sup>114</sup> Such behavior

served to hide the falsehood with a cloak of truth that made these underhanded methods palatable to Stalin the philosopher-king.

Stalin was able to extend his will not only to his auxiliaries, but also to society itself. Not content with being a philosopher-king, he resolved to construct Plato's *polis* as he found it in the pages of his beloved book. Of course, the populace in *Republic* lacks that most lofty of attributes, the ability to see truth and beauty, and is therefore incapable of philosophy.<sup>115</sup> Stalin shared Plato's negative assessment of the masses. He felt nothing but scorn for popular opinion (he mocked certain officials who "love[d] to swim along 'with the tide' of the sentiment of the 'masses.'").<sup>116</sup> The lot of the populace is to abstain from philosophy and to devote themselves to executing the will of the *vozhda*.<sup>117</sup>

Plato was remarkable in many respects, but he has earned special distinction as one of history's first feminists (or at least as a soldier for women's liberation). He argues that philosophic nature has prejudice for neither sex.<sup>118</sup> Since the guardian is the greatest of all people (combining the qualities of the thinker and the warrior), it can be inferred that men and women are both qualified for all kinds of lesser work. Stalin embraced this lesson, and labored to engrave it into his society. At his report to the Seventeenth Party Congress, the GenSec gives several figures showing the presence of women in the highest echelon of party and society.<sup>119</sup> He goes on to applaud this phenomenon, declaring

This fact, comrades, is of tremendous significance. It is of tremendous significance because women form half the population of our country; they constitute a huge army of workers; and they are called upon to bring up our children, our future generation, that is to say, our future. That is why we must not permit this huge army of working people to remain in darkness and ignorance! That is why we must welcome the growing social activity of the working women and their promotion to leading posts as an indubitable sign of the growth of our culture.<sup>120</sup>

The respective natures of Stalin and of Plato's philosopher-king continues to be indistinguishable, and the Red regime and the *polis* are proving to be of like constitution as well.

Plato's hierarchy of society is justified by the different make-ups of the citizenry, who rise so far as their merit allows. This has been coined the "Myth of the Metals," and is expounded by the sage in an oft-repeated passage:

All of you in the city are brothers...but the god who made you mixed some gold into those who are adequately equipped to rule, because they are the most valuable. He put silver in those who are auxiliaries and iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen. For the most part you will produce children like yourselves, but, because you are all related, a silver child will occasionally be born from a golden parent, and vice versa, and all the others from each other...If an offspring of theirs is found to have a mixture of iron or bronze, they must not pity him in any way, but give him the rank appropriate to his nature and drive him out to join the craftsmen and farmers. But if an offspring of these people is found to have a mixture of gold or silver, they will honor him and take him up to join the guardians or the auxiliaries...<sup>121</sup>

The purges of the party that Stalin undertook with increasing regularity were the means of implementing the Myth of the Metals, of ascertaining that party members were those with gold or silver in their souls. These purges, according to a decree, had manifold objectives but were primarily executed to "rais[e] the ideological level of the

members of the party...[and] to [rid] the party of persons not worthy of the lofty title of party member.<sup>#122</sup>

It is manifest that the removal of unworthy elements finds a parallel in the demotion of iron and bronze guardians/auxiliaries. But Stalinist society also rewarded those who it regarded as golden. During the heroic period of the First Five-Year Plan, there were massive opportunities for those who were imbued with industry and ambition. Especially favored were people from underprivileged backgrounds, such as manual workers and peasants. These individuals benefited from affirmative action programs that allowed them to ascend to dizzying heights, unimaginable in the days before the Revolution.<sup>123</sup> It is not require a Herculean exertion to see that the designation of workers and peasants as golden citizens is a result of Stalin's Marxist coloring of *Republic*.

Plato contends that the guardians of his city must have the power to "receive a clean slate or are allowed to clean it themselves."<sup>#124</sup> He goes further: "They'll send everyone in the city who is over ten years old into the country."<sup>#125</sup> This ambiguous language could easily be interpreted as a call for the decimation of the population, especially by a man consumed with a desire for historical immortality as Stalin. The Man of Steel did not shrink from the actions Plato advocated. His slogan for the Great Purge was "A whole generation must be sacrificed."<sup>#126</sup> Those who opposed the philosopher-king were forfeit; those who had lived prior to his ascendancy were dangerous reactionaries. As one victim of the purge, Sloutski, lamented to his compatriot: "They will take me. They will take you, as they took the others. We belong to the generation which must perish. Stalin has said that the entire pre-revolutionary and war generation must be destroyed as a millstone around the neck of the Revolution."<sup>#127</sup> Of those who were fortunate enough to survive the Purge, many experienced earth-shattering events that changed them fundamentally. Those technocrats and peasants who opposed Stalin often found themselves in a labor camp under the grim rule of the GPU/OGPU/NKVD, bombarded with propaganda extolling the Stalinist system and broken physically and mentally by onerous work. One day they were released from the prison, but their minds remained shackled in chains.<sup>128</sup> They had been arrested as independent spirits and had been reduced to clean slates, to be marked as the Best Friend of Counterintelligence Operatives desired.

Plato also conceded that the philosopher-king, when serving the Great Cause, is above any considerations of morality. In a dialogue with his friend Glaucon, Socrates (Plato's mouthpiece in *Republic*) admonishes those who aspire to superhumanity:

Socrates: And will a thinker high-minded enough to study all time and all being consider human life to be something important?

Glaucon: He couldn't possibly.

Socrates: Will he consider death to be a terrible thing?

Glaucon: He least of all.<sup>129</sup>

Stalin did labor for his vision of a perfect society, the utopian paradise of communism. Pondering the truth of historical materialism and class struggle, of a mighty Soviet state capable of surviving capitalist encirclement, he become apathetic to his people's present suffering and hardship.<sup>130</sup> He toiled in the fields of politics, "capable of destroying nine-tenths of the human race to make happy the one tenth."<sup>#131</sup>

Furthermore, Plato explains that the ultimate goal of the *polis* is not to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion.<sup>132</sup>

This passage found a willing vassal in Stalin. It was not his wish to make a particular class in his society content, but to endeavor to make the whole happy and affluent. If this could only be accomplished through the destruction of a particular stratum, so be it. This was the true purpose of the class struggle. This can be illustrated in the liquidation of the kulak class (relatively wealthy peasants). A Central Committee document notes the "number of complaints concerning violence and threats directed by kulak elements at kolkhoz members who do not wish to leave the kolkhozy and who are working honestly and selflessly for the consolidation of these kolkhozy..."<sup>133</sup> The document then proposed:

To apply as a measure of judicial punishment for the plundering (theft) of property belonging to kolkhozy and cooperative societies the highest measure of social protection, namely, execution with confiscation of all property, with commutation of execution under extenuating circumstances to deprivation of freedom for a term of not less than 10 years with confiscation of all property.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the draconian measures employed, it can be gleaned from the directive that Stalin had the happiness of the collective farmers in mind. The kulaks, he believed, were the wreckers who blighted the farms, ruining the felicity of the good people who wanted only to work. By liquidating the kulaks, he made one group miserable, but aimed to make society as a whole prosperous in matters of joy.<sup>135</sup> This is the duty of the philosopher-king.

This bloody regime was defended by those who believed it represented the sole chance for the victory of the proletariat. Out of transient evil would be born the ultimate stage of human development, where freedom and jubilation would be ubiquitous.<sup>136</sup> Plato reminds us that the guardian is concerned with the infinite march of time rather than the infinitesimal period of repression.<sup>137</sup> Stalin found a balm in these words; he may be remembered by posterity as an iron-willed despot, but he would be celebrated as the Builder of Socialism. Only the superhuman volition of a Platonic guardian could construct a lasting human happiness.

The domination of society by the tenets found in *Republic* was not limited to structure. Plato's tract includes provisions for the censorship and control of culture, that expression of a people's soul. He affords culture a prominent role in the life of the *polis*, and judges it "appropriate for the founders to know the patterns on which poets must base their stories and from which they mustn't deviate."<sup>138</sup> As might be expected, the Soviet totalitarianism realized this principle. The standard to which all culture must adhere is "Socialist Realism," which remained an ambiguous term. Essentially, it represented Stalin's tastes, which were conservative. He also had a penchant for the monumental. Any deviation from Socialist Realism was heaped with ridicule and censored.<sup>139</sup>

A further prohibition imposed upon the cultural agents is that their works must demonstrate that "a god isn't the cause of all things but only of good ones."<sup>140</sup> While this applies only to the actions of the gods (something a Marxist would not concern himself with), Stalin doubtlessly was convinced of the wisdom of this policy. What

applies to the gods could be extended to include the guardians. Therefore, the epithet "wreckers" was created in order to absorb the blame for all shortcomings of Stalinist society. During the famine following complete collectivization, for instance, saboteurs and conspirators were labeled as the causes of the poor harvest.<sup>141</sup> Stalin called for the publication of all the wreckers' testimonies, disseminating the true cause of society's ails.<sup>142</sup>

Eventually all the achievements of Stalin's reign were amalgamated into a single tome, *The Short Course*. This work extolled the Man of Steel as a leader of genius whose policies resulted in the might of the USSR and the joy of its people. Stalin was directly involved with the creation of the textbook, although the extent of his role is subject to debate.<sup>143</sup> Called the "Bible of the Stalin Cult,"<sup>144</sup> *The Short Course* became more than a mere textbook; it ascended to a Gospel truth, a "catechism of revolutionary ideology and...a handbook of revolutionary action."<sup>145</sup> This book marked Stalin's victory in his effort to present himself as the bringer of glory, of all happy things. It also successfully castigated those who sought to demolish his work, the double-dealers and wreckers.

Plato further advocates a repression of certain aspects of culture and history. He makes the bold claim that it is desirable to "delete the lamentations and pitiful speeches of famous men."<sup>146</sup> Again, Stalin was capable of aggrandizing this policy into one far more expansive than Plato intended. The Worker-Tsar interpreted it as a signal to alter history, forging it into the shape he wishes. Armed with Plato's suggestion, Stalin manufactured documents, invented interviews, doctored photographs, and even erased personalities from the historical record.<sup>147</sup> Stalin was able to apply Plato's proposal, making himself a titan of history in his own lifetime.

These examples illustrate a general policy that constitutes a significant feature of both Plato's *Republic* and Stalin's USSR, namely, the widespread use of falsehood and propaganda.<sup>148</sup> What is more, the use of this propaganda was quite effective. The conspiracies of the wreckers and class enemies were accepted as truth by ordinary people, who became ever more vigilant and suspicious.<sup>149</sup> The future of the Soviet Union was clouded in darkness, and only the beacon of Comrade Stalin's enlightened mind kept the blankets of night at bay.<sup>150</sup> Or so the incessant barrage of newspaper articles, poetry, songs, and posters proclaimed.

### III. Conclusion

Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, envisioned himself as the hero of Plato's epic philosophical tract, *Republic*. In his actions and in his policy, the nature of the Platonic guardian is manifest. *Republic* was the guiding light of the Stalinist system no less than the voluminous works of Marx and Engels.

But despite the myriad of parallels between Stalin and the philosopher-king, there remains one quality that Stalin was not able to emulate. Despite the philosopher-king's inclement nature, he worked strenuously for a justice that would genuinely permeate society. The rewards for his *polis* would come to pass; the sacrifices would result in a world of plenty and mirth.

Stalin, however, even if he were sincerely working for the happiness of his people, never did attain this goal. His people were broken on the grindstones of tyranny, sacrificed on the altar of Stalin's own vanity. He believed himself to be a philosopher-king, but that did not make it so. His rule did not usher in the next phase of human society; it destroyed an entire generation, a whole nation. The sacrifices his people endured did not bring victory to the Great Cause; it maimed and ruined it.

If Plato were able to journey to our world from the cave of history, he would lament the work his *Republic* has wrought. The achievements of Stalin's regime were not the ones he envisaged. He would return to his cave, his eyes glazed with defeat, his form bent by the force of history's rebuke. Plato had penned his *Republic* intending to show that the rule of the philosopher-king would bring to being the perfect society; Joseph Stalin has proven him wrong.

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### Endnotes

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