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# The Nature of Power and Corruption in Plato and J.R.R. Tolkien

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THE NATURE OF POWER AND CORRUPTION IN PLATO AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN

by

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## DEDICATION

To Dr Trevor H. Howard-Hill

*And so it goes.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Lily Howard-Hill

## ABSTRACT

In the collected dialogues of Plato, Plato sets out his arguments on democracy, power, and free-will through Socrates' interactions with his interlocutors. His understandings of morality and justice suggest that a good and moral person is the foundation for successful societies. In *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and other tales, Tolkien offers a different lens through which to observe philosophical and ethical concepts. Plato's morality is centered around the organization and the structure of the soul. The soul is ruled by virtues which include justice and knowledge. Here, I present an analysis of key Platonic concepts by offering examples and illustrations from the fictional work of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, and asking the fundamental question: if one was given an object that granted them insurmountable power, would one still choose to live a moral life?

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FOTR .....	The Fellowship of the Ring
LET.....	The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien
ROTK .....	The Return of the King
TS.....	The Silmarillion
TT.....	The Two Towers



## INTRODUCTION

My goal is to bring together an examination of Plato's discussion of morality and how the same concept is addressed in the fictional work of J.R.R. Tolkien to show that classical moral theory offers a rhetorical lens through which to read a literary text. I believe it is possible to use Tolkien's work as a reimagining of an exploration of Plato's understandings of morality and justice. This hermeneutical expression of texts allows, in this paper, for the analysis of Plato and Tolkien, and to offer a new truth. I plan to establish bridges between the texts to create a conversation and find intersections that can be investigated to overlay Platonic philosophy onto the realized concepts in Tolkien's literary work. A self-proclaimed literary critic who dabbled in philosophical discussion, Tolkien was familiar with the Platonic dialogues during the years prior to writing *The Hobbit*. As recent scholarship has indicated, Tolkien was an incredibly learned scholar who did not hesitate to grapple with profound questions on big issues.<sup>1</sup> A key question that guides how we think about Tolkien in relation to Plato and *vice versa* is how Tolkien's novels and Plato's dialogues intersect with each other. It is possible to say with some certainty that they inform each other in some way, particularly when we consider

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien was an Oxford professor of Medieval English, not a philosopher, but for a closer look at Tolkien's philosophical leanings, see Peter Kreeft's *The Philosophy of Tolkien* and Patrick Curry's *Defending Middle-Earth*.

that both Plato and Tolkien examine whether that given the possession of an insurmountable power, does that outweigh the need to be a just and virtuous person?

Plato does not use the word morality in his dialogues, talking only about moral theory and not morality in the way that it is now used. He addresses morality through discussions of the interconnected concepts of virtue, justice, and happiness. Plato maintains a virtue-based eudaemonistic conception of ethics. Well-being, or eudaimonia, is the highest aim of moral thought and conduct, and the virtues (aretê) are those skills needed to attain it. In the Republic, Socrates explains his take on the formation of ethics until Glaucon, Plato's brother, offers an alternate myth that could stand as the source of moral theory (Republic II 359c-360b). The myth came to be known as The Ring of Gyges and tells of a nameless shepherd who comes across a simple gold ring. Diverting from historical fact, Glaucon presents the shepherd as an ancestor of King Gyges of Lydia, who in Herodotus' earlier account is the one who finds the ring (Smith 363). When an earthquake reveals a cave in a mountainside, the shepherd enters the cave and finds a tomb full of treasures. In addition, the tomb held a corpse who wore a golden ring. Glaucon explains that the shepherd kept the ring, assuming it was nothing more than a trinket, and carried on with his duties. During a meeting of other shepherds, the anonymous shepherd twisted the ring on his finger and became invisible. The ring revealed its power when his friends, assuming he left, talked about him as if he was not there. Under the guise of the invisibility provided by the ring, the unnamed shepherd murders the King, steals the throne, and seduces the Queen.

The way Glaucon simplifies the rest of the myth is alarming, particularly since it is those later acts that prompt his questions (Shell 35). When pushed to an explanation by Plato, Glaucon argues that the myth illustrates that no being, no matter who it might be, “would have such iron strength of mind as to stand fast in doing right” (Republic 360b).<sup>2</sup> Plato’s dialogue presents the shepherd as a model of one who appears to be, but is not, good (Shell 29). His tyrannic power of invisibility is a hypothetical device that enunciates one of the positions in the debate about virtue and justice. It is the threat or fear of punishment that establishes moral guidelines to which all should hold themselves. It would not be out of the question to act immorally or without morals if that act would go unpunished. In the case of the anonymous shepherd, of course he would choose to act as he did, because he was invisible and would never be able to be held to account for his deeds.

Like Socrates, Tolkien purports that virtue leads to flourishing and vice to degradation. Tolkien’s One Ring is able to corrupt, although Tolkien never really offers a definition of morality other than the personal choices through which one lives a good life. In the mythology of Middle Earth, the One Ring was one of the most powerful artifacts ever created. Crafted by the Dark Lord Sauron in the fires of Mount Doom, Sauron’s goal was to solidify and enhance his own power. He intended to exercise control over the other Rings of Power that had been made, with his assistance, by the elves of Eregion (The Silmarillion 344-346). Without the elves’ knowledge, Sauron intended to create an object

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<sup>2</sup> In Hamilton and Cairns’ collection of dialogues, the passage is translated as follows: “...no one could be found, it could seem, of such adamantine temper as to persevere in justice and endure to refrain his hands from the possessions of others and not touch them.” Other translations retain the same meaning but simplifies the language to place the emphasis on the act of doing right.

so powerful that it would grant him free reign over the people of Middle Earth. To have ultimate dominion over the other rings, the One Ring needed to contain an extraordinary amount of power, so Sauron confined within it a part of his soul. In this way, Sauron's fate became bound to that of the One Ring. If it were damaged or destroyed, so too would be Sauron's strength and power. Sauron retained control of the One Ring for thousands of years. In the Second Age, Isildur, son of Elendil and leader of the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, ended Sauron's seven year siege at Barad-dûr. During the battle, Isildur cut the One Ring from Sauron's finger, but instead of destroying it in the fires of Mount Doom, Isildur kept it, immediately drawn in by the power contained within (Tolkien, TS).<sup>3</sup> Isildur owned the Ring until it became lost in the River Anduin upon his death.

For another two thousand years, the One Ring remained lost, until it was found by Déagol. Immediately captivated by its power, Sméagol murdered his cousin Déagol and stole the One Ring. Sméagol was changed by the Ring's influence over several centuries, turning into the creature known as Gollum. His vice, which in many ways was the Ring itself, led to a physical degradation. Tolkien makes it evident that the line crossed by Sméagol when he killed Déagol accelerated the effects of the Ring on his soul. Jane Chance suggests that the two names of Gollum and Sméagol illustrate the fragmenting of his soul and the consequences of his fall into vice. The "Gollum" sound is an expression of his greed.

After taking the Ring, Gollum sought shelter far beneath the Misty Mountains and remained there for nearly five hundred years. When the Ring abandoned Gollum, as is

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the history of Elendil and Isildur, see Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, 'Of The Rings of Power and The Third Age'.

Misty Mountains. Discovering that wearing the One Ring rendered one invisible, Bilbo escaped Gollum and the Orcs that inhabited the Misty Mountains. After the events of *The Hobbit*, the wizard Gandalf quickly came to believe that the Ring had a concerning effect on its owner that set to work almost immediately. He saw no real danger, however, in letting Bilbo keep the Ring despite his strangely possessive attitude towards it. The power of Bilbo's ring is quick to make itself known, yet in *The Hobbit*, he still only uses it to the advantage of others. Often to the detriment of his own wellbeing, Bilbo fights spiders, enters the dragon's den, and uses his morality to bear witness to the greed of Thorin Oakenshield (Tolkien, TH). Bilbo is quick to use the Ring to do what is morally right, in contrast to Frodo who rarely uses the Ring except for his own self-preservation. In the first chapters of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the town of Hobbiton is seen celebrating Bilbo Baggins' 111th birthday. When, in the midst of the celebration, Bilbo stands up to give a speech, he slips the One Ring onto his finger and is invisible (FOTR 31). As the shepherds in Glaucon's myth began to talk about the anonymous shepherd, so, too, do the alarmed Hobbits when it appears that Bilbo has left.

Throughout the entirety of Tolkien's fictional universe, various characters use the powers of the One Ring to their own advantages. The One Ring convinces the characters that wielding its power will satisfy all of their desires, encouraging a disregard of any other being. Tolkien's Ring is a statement of the belief that unlimited power is incompatible with any understanding of morality; absolute power cannot resolve the needs of others, however everyone has the capability to reject the use of a Ring of Power. It is not difficult to see the similarities between the two stories, to the extent that we can

say with confidence that Tolkien must have been familiar with myth of the Ring of Gyges at some point before writing *The Hobbit*. Mary E. Zimmer has argued that Tolkien's depiction of magic in a fictional universe correlates with the "Neo-Platonic belief that language first created reality" (Zimmer 71). The Ring in both Glaucon's myth and Tolkien's Middle Earth is a source of immorality, inducing men of weak character to act unreasonably, when the moral man of strong character would resist. This intersection gives us the exigence to ask how the promise of absolute power operates in relation to morality and justice. I plan to show that corruption by immense power is a theme present in both Plato's dialogues and the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, also indicating how they present temptation as a foil to true moral goodness.

## CHAPTER ONE: JUSTICE, VIRTUE, AND POWER IN PLATO'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Following the myth of the Ring of Gyges, Plato poses the following question: If one has an insurmountable power, does that outweigh the need to be a moral person? Or, to put it more specifically, if one was guaranteed an object that could grant such a power, would one choose to make moral choices? In Socrates' arguments, the corruption of the soul by a single object is central to the nature of its power. To resist is to be satisfied with and true to an existing moral character. By looking at some of the key dialogues, we are reminded of the exigence that allows us to explore the intersections of Platonic moral theory and Tolkien's fictitious Middle Earth.

While admittedly the most studied and most well-known of the dialogues, *The Republic* is not the only location of Plato's moral and ethical theory. *The Protagoras* examines the question of virtue as unity, with the most famous teacher of 'civic virtues' among the Sophists, yet Plato's dialogue seems adamant in reducing all virtues to knowledge and the teachability of virtue. Protagoras lays out a scenario in which a city state is resting its survival on the skill of flute playing. Being the most important thing for that society, hypothetically, parents would be eager to teach the skill to their sons. Some would pick up the skill more quickly than others, as some would have a greater natural inclination to playing the flute. For example, the son of a flute player may have an

inherent advantage. Regardless, any flute player, even a bad one, would be better than an average citizen who made no attempt to learn how to play. The same logic applies to virtue, Protagoras says. Virtue is considered fundamentally important that everyone in a society is taught it to a particular degree - this is why virtue often appears as part of human nature even though it is not (*Protagoras* 323d-327e).

The *Gorgias* discusses rhetoric and its relation to virtue and justice. It is Socrates' claim that it is far worse to inflict evil and injustice than to be the victim of it. The analogy he gives is that disease is to the body as injustice is to the soul (*Gorgias* 475e-477c). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates represents Right, the man with virtue and knowledge who operates in absolute truths and seeks heavenly rewards. Callicles represents Might - the man of physical strength who commands the uneducated masses through the strength of his personality, deception, and ruthlessness. As we will see later, this gives us a platform from which to examine presentations of power in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In the *Meno*, the question of how virtue is obtained is asked by a student of Gorgias, Meno, who himself is an ambitious seeker of power and wealth. Meno proposes that virtue is the desire for good things and having the power to obtain them. Socrates critiques that by saying that Meno's claim does not address what is good and what is evil, as many people do not recognize evil, or mistake one for the other (77d-78e).

In the collection of dialogues, Plato has no single moral philosophy. An examination of the dialogues offer no answers to the big philosophical questions Plato and Socrates ask. At no stage in Plato's philosophy is there a systematic treatment of, and



commitment to, basic principles of ethics that would justify the derivation of rules and norms of how humans are supposed to behave in modern discussions. Plato's ethic is *eudaemonistic*, in the sense that it is directed towards the attainment of man's highest good, in the possession of which true happiness consists. Plato divides the soul into three parts and gives to each a different kind of desire (rational, appetitive, or spirited).<sup>4</sup>

Appetitive and spirited desires can conflict with our rational desires about what contributes to our overall good, and they will sometimes move us to act in ways we recognize to be against our greater good. Socrates builds on the tripartite psychology established in the fourth book of the *Republic* when Glaucon declares that unjust souls exist in eternal turmoil and are unsalvageable, and Socrates demands a more satisfactory answer. The highest good of a man may be said to be the true development of man's personality as a rational and moral being, the right cultivation of his soul, and the general harmonious well-being of life. When a man's soul is in the state it ought to be in, then that man is happy (Coplestone 216).

As mentioned, Plato has no single moral philosophy. Instead, he has Socrates present a number of problems that locate the conversation around something that we could now identify as morality. Not just a single morality, however, but a number of them that explore different aspects of virtue and its relation to justice and happiness. These themes are explored in many of Plato's dialogues, examining the nature of virtue and the character of a virtuous person. Socrates' account of justice depends on his account of the

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<sup>4</sup> The three constituent parts only apply to the embodied soul. Socrates argues in Book Ten of the *Republic* that the soul is immortal and disembodied (608c-611a), and a disembodied soul might be much simpler to explain. While Socrates goes no further in insisting on this point in the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* offer different understandings.

human soul at any particular time, centering around the idea that one can only be a just man as long as all of the parts of the soul are functioning in the correct way. Being moral comes from the soul, therefore a soul in the correct order is less likely to commit unjust acts (Annas 438). A moral person understands that living a life with questionable morals and power obtained through the use of a magical object irrevocably corrupts the soul. Such power, without virtue, leads to a fundamental unhappiness.

Understanding that ill-obtained power contains the potential for a corrupted soul and a fundamental unhappiness prompts the following question: if one had the power and ability to satisfy completely one's own desires without consequence, would a person in the most ordinary of circumstances choose virtue and justice over self- fulfillment and power? In addressing the health of the soul at the prospect of absolute power, Socrates offers a better explanation of why it is better to be unlucky and of good moral character than the luckiest immoral being. Socrates calls the iterations of these characters the philosopher and the tyrant (Beals 608).

The tyrant is ruled by an appetite that can never be fully satisfied, because it is always in want of more. This allows the tyrant to be caught in a circle of appetitive desire whenever something catches his eye, even if that desire is too difficult for him to satisfy, or satisfying that particular desire would prevent the satisfaction of other desires. The unsatisfied desires of the tyrant create feelings of inadequacy and make him wish he could, in fact, satisfy said desires. Because his unsatisfied appetitive desires only grow more pressing, the awareness of the inability to express his free-will makes him fearful that such an awareness will remind him of his likely future inability to do what he wants

(Ferrari 192). This leads to a fairly desolate life with misery still cemented in ever-increasing appetites that can never be satisfied. Ultimately, the tyrant is ruined, because he can never do what he wants to do.

The philosopher, in opposition to the tyrant, is able to enact her desires because it is in her nature to always do what is best as long as one is able. If there were a set of circumstances that made an apparent course of action undoable, then it would no longer be the best action, and the philosopher would not make it. As Mary Mackenzie states, “What we really desire is happiness; anything that we appear to desire that has the potential to turn out badly for us is not the object of our real desire.” (Mackenzie 89). All of this is not to say that the philosopher is always guaranteed to do what she wants -- Socrates is adamant that it is a necessary part of having a just soul to embrace the appetite and that there are circumstances in which we can imagine that the appetitive attitudes are unable to be satisfied. Even if the philosopher could satisfy her appetites, it is not guaranteed that a philosophical soul would be able to retain that ability in every situation.

The comparison of the tyrannical soul and the philosophical soul assumes that human happiness and contentment are the primary goals. Socrates reminds us that any person who does not consider themselves a philosopher has a more divided soul or is ruled by their appetitive desires. A person with a divided soul cannot hope to do what they truly want because, as previously discussed, those desires can never be fully satisfied. To be able to make the best decisions, he needs to be educated (Dahl 811-815). Socrates believes that virtue is knowledge because it is the aim of all living things to achieve their perceived good; if anyone lacks clarity on what is good, he is unable to do it

until he has the relevant knowledge and can aim for the right target. In the *Republic*, Glaucon asks whether he and Socrates would act any differently to the shepherd in his myth, claiming that being invisible is the soul's attempt to reveal hidden desires (*Republic* 360). A just and moral man "would act no differently from the unjust, but both would go the same way" (*Republic* II, 360c). The reason Glaucon feels conflicted about the arguments that praise tyranny is because he recognizes those elements in his own nature (O'Connor 67).

Thrasymachus and Callicles are the two great examples in Platonic philosophy of a disdainful critique of conventional morality. In the *Gorgias* and Book I of the *Republic*, they denounce the virtue of justice, *dikaiosunê*, as a constraint upon the exercise of free will and self-interest (Barney 51). The strong man in Thrasymachus' argument is not worried about the appearance of propriety because he has enough power to impose justice on others without needing to deceive them. He is already at an advantage. Glaucon's strong man is concerned with appearances because he already knows the true nature of things and manipulates them to his advantage. Glaucon's tyrant must cultivate the appearance of a good reputation in order to maintain his power and because he is more likely, at any time, to be betrayed by his own intentions (Weiss 96). Glaucon's tyrant is not afraid to resort to brute force to secure his own self-interests, and even Plato does not completely turn away from the proposed use of force by rulers who would impose actions upon the people against their moral will:

What then shall we say of citizens of a state who have been forced to do things which are contrary to written laws and ancestral customs but are nevertheless

juster, more effective and more noble than the directions of these traditional authorities? How shall we regard censure by these citizens of the force which has applied in these circumstances? Unless they wish to appear ridiculous in the extreme there is one thing they must refrain from saying. They must not assert in any such instance that in being subjected to compulsion they have suffered disgrace, injustice or evil at the hands of those who compelled them (Statesman 296c).

The fact is that justice can be a result of a public taking matters of justice into their own hands, and when it is, even the strong men and the tyrants are left with no choice but to submit to the will of the masses. Anyone that appears unjust will fail, regardless of whether they are just or unjust. Morris contrasts justice against other virtues, showing that while there are obviously clear differences between them, justice is still a necessary virtue to have. In the same way that bravery and rationality build virtue, justice is needed to live a good life (Morris 17).

Plato defends justice in the Republic, showing that individual justice is indeed a virtue:

It is left for us to enquire, it seems, if it is more profitable to act justly, to engage in fine pursuits and be just, whether one is known to be so or not, or to do wrong and be unjust, provided one does not pay the penalty and is not improved by punishment.

But Socrates, Glaucon said, this enquiry strikes me as becoming ridiculous now that justice and injustice have been shown to be such as we described. It is

generally thought that life is not worth living when the body's nature is ruined, even if every kind of food and drink, every kind of wealth and power are available; yet we are to enquire whether life will be worth living when our soul, the very thing by which we live, is confused and ruined, if only one can do whatever one wishes, except that one cannot do what will free one from vice and injustice and make one acquire justice and virtue (Republic IV, 444e-445b)

Plato's argument on social justice and power relations within Ancient Greece is that people, while compelled to do good things by the notion of individual justice, are also required to do good things by social justice.

Plato's theory of justice states that to an individual, justice is a virtue that makes a person good and choose to consistently act that way. Socially, justice acts as a social consciousness that creates a good and harmonious society (Wright). Plato is dissatisfied with the correlation between the two, claiming that it seems likely that the needs of individual and social justice may not be mutually beneficial (Morris 18). The source of Plato's dissatisfaction is the idea that the rulers of Ancient Greece will use to their advantage the idea of social justice. Aristotle explicitly states the nature of justice as being directed towards the other: "Justice is the only virtue that seems to be another person's good, because it is related to another; for it does what benefits another, either the rule or the fellow member of the community" (Aristotle, 1130a 3-5). Unlike Plato and Socrates, Aristotle does not offer an explanation as to why the virtue of justice is

something we should aspire to. He does, however, suggest that justice is a supreme virtue because it is “the complete exercise of complete virtue” (Aristotle, 1129b1–1130a6).

Because Plato and Socrates do not address morality as it is contemporaneously understood, going as far as to not even use the word *morality* at all, they deal only in terms of virtue, happiness, and justice. Whatever happiness is, it must take account of the fact that a happy life is one lived by rational agents who act and who are not simply victims of their circumstances. It may be easy to recognize the foolishness in risking one’s life and the lives of others to secure a seemingly simply benefit. It is also easy to say that it is unjust to harm others to secure power and wealth for our own comfort. For Plato, and consequently Socrates, thinks it takes someone of a good moral character to decide, in normal circumstances, the kind of actions that are warranted or appropriate and reasonable.

What are the consequences of making immoral decisions? We have already seen that if one thought they could get away with a bad action, then they would still commit it. The missing component to the dilemma of free-will and morality is the integration of an external agent. The question of whether, when in possession of an item that granted them an insurmountable power, a person would still make moral decisions can be answered when we consider the item itself as the active agent. It is not always bad to be bad; that is to say it is not always harmful to one’s self to be immoral. In Glaucon’s presentation of the Ring of Gyges, the unnamed shepherd has a ring that allows him to commit immoral acts only because he knows he can get away with them under the guise of invisibility. Given his tale, Glaucon concludes that if identical rings were given to a just man and an

unjust man, then both men would act unjustly. This proves that people act justly only under compulsion, influenced by the power of something else, for example faith or social consciousness. For Glaucon, all living things by nature aspire to indulge their desires. Despite this, he does consider the possibility that someone might decline to use the ring to perform misdeeds. While such a person would be praised to her face, she would be regarded as a great fool for not using the power in her possession.

The Platonic dialogues at times present morality as a necessary casualty of power dynamics in Ancient Greece. The nature of power in Plato's dialogues is a key concept. For many of Socrates' interlocutors, power is embodied as the ability to exercise rule over others and to satisfy one's own desires. Most think that strength and power are synonymous and that if a person had more power than anyone else, they could not be harmed or punished. Because they could not be harmed or punished, such a person would have no need to make moral decisions (Wardy 61). Like Glaucon's explication of his myth, this illuminates the idea that the only valid reason for being morally good is to avoid the punishment that is normally attached to being morally bad. If that punishment did not exist, then the impetus behind making good moral choices is removed. This position is best expressed in the *Gorgias* by Polus and Callicles. According to its traditional subtitle, *On Rhetoric*, the *Gorgias* is about rhetoric and its implementations. E. R. Dodds, however, sees its central theme as "the moral basis of politics" and holds that the uses of rhetoric, particularly as a persuasive device, are entwined with questions of *eudaimonia* (Haden 313).



In parsing out his disagreement, Plato is careful. Socrates argues first that those in positions of political power -- those who rule others -- must often undertake actions that may disadvantage themselves, but benefit the state. In this sense then, even the most powerful tyrants act against their will. True and absolute power, then, is more than just ruling over others. Socrates adds that those who are able to satisfy their desires do not possess real power because real power extinguishes appetitive desires, not just satisfies them. A person capable of always satisfying their desires is in constant need of further satisfaction and therefore are compelled to seek out such satisfaction, and this compulsion robs them of real power. In the *Republic*, Socrates considers a desire to drink being opposed by a realization that drinking would not be good (439a-d), an act that draws a contrast between appetite and reason. Leontius becomes angry with himself for having inappropriate desires towards corpses (439e-440b). Most of the arguments made by Socrates are perfectly positioned to address *akrasia*, or weakness of will. He denies in the *Protagoras* that there is anybody who would willingly commit an act other than that which is believed to be best. Reason, as one of the parts of the soul, forces a person to act only in the best interests of themselves and for the good will of others (Protagoras 358d). A good person, in other words, never chooses to act against better judgement; such an act can only be the result of a lack of reason. Socrates argues against Glaucon that morality is not a social construct because it removes the element of free will from the argument. For Socrates, the shepherd living immorally can never be happy. A man, therefore, would never intentionally choose to commit an immoral act because they would lose out on the

feelings of contentment that come from doing an act deemed “right” or “good” (Klosko 618).

The *Protagoras* also offers an exposition of the central claim that virtue is knowledge, and that evil is merely another name for ignorance. Socrates argues against the idea that pleasure can dissuade one from doing what is right, because what is right is always what is most pleasurable. Knowledge or virtue is then the ability to perceive what will bring most pleasure. If knowledge is virtue, and ignorance is evil, then having a power so great that it makes it possible to know everything - it can be argued that anything that grants invisibility also grants access to a previously inaccessible wealth of knowledge - should be considered virtuous. Weiss writes that justice is socially constructed by the weak as a defense against the tyrannical, and that justice inherently affects all people, just or unjust (Weiss 101). Thrasymachus appears as a character in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Phaedrus, 266c), yet has nothing significant attributed to him until the *Republic* when he strongly disagrees with Socrates' discussion with Polemarchus on justice. In *Republic I*, Thrasymachus claims that “justice is the advantage of the stronger” (338c), adding that “injustice, if on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, more masterly than justice” (344c). Socrates returns by pressuring Thrasymachus to acknowledge the importance of wisdom in ruling power structures, since that is something he claims to teach. Thrasymachus' ideas have often been seen as a critique of moral values. His insistence that justice only works to the benefit of the strong supports the view that moral values are social constructions and hold no real power in themselves. The argument then

turns to Socrates' point that the standard of justice exists outside of simple power relations and stretches beyond the advantage of the stronger (Weiss 105).

The focus of Plato's *Republic*, his most famous dialogue and that which deals most directly with the conundrums of morality and power, operates primarily as a contribution to ethics. It is an elaborate discussion of what justice is as a human virtue and why a person should seek to embody it. By showing that the virtuous person will resist temptation even at personal cost, Thrasymachus, Callicles, and Leontius offer one example of an answer to Plato's question of morality, power, and autonomy. As we see in Plato's arguments, the corruption of the soul by the Ring is central to the nature of its power. To resist is to be satisfied with and true to an existing moral character. Plato no longer expects any human being to be immune to the temptations of power because in their efforts to obtain a *eudaimoniastic* existence, they are always in search of further satisfaction. They can never be truly powerful because that need to satisfy desires operates against Socrates' understanding of true power.

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato, and subsequently Socrates, use their exchanges with other characters to explore the Platonic understandings of power, morality, and justice. Power was tied to justice because they were both given to the people by the *polis*. Justice itself operated as the most supreme of the Platonic virtues because as Plato elucidates in the *Republic*, almost every issue that should be regarded as ethical can also be explained through the notion of justice (Keyt 347). It is justice that exercises its control over the soul. While Plato used his experiences in Ancient Athens to critique the social structures and the combative and aggressive rule of the the Athenian tyrants, J.R.R.

Tolkien was able to create his own world. Tolkien remained free from the constraints of any real society, and was able to shape his own version of justice as it applied to his characters. Tolkien's imagined universe dealt with real world issues, such as justice and morality, that in many ways mirrored the post-World War I tensions in Europe.

Plato never gives up his conviction that the nature of all things requires knowledge, and that condition applies most of all to the Good (Republic VI 509). To be virtuous and just is have knowledge and wisdom. It is possible to ask the same question of Tolkien as Socrates asks in the Platonic dialogues: whether or not a being in possession of an object that granted them unlimited power would choose to live a moral life. Furthermore, would such an object like a Ring of Power give the same kind of power to each person that possessed it, or would it depend on the existing underlying character traits in that character? Plato's *Republic* outlines his intentions for democracy but asks questions about how and why people should choose to live a moral existence. The question of what kind of person one should aspire to be is at the center of ethics and moral philosophy. Tolkien, in his tales of the One Ring, offers an answer to Plato's challenge of morality.

## CHAPTER TWO: POWER AND CORRUPTION IN TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE EARTH

When asked in a letter from a fan about the philosophical themes in his work, J.R.R. Tolkien replied that, “Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth or error, but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world” (LET 216). Despite the popularity of Middle Earth and its inhabitants, it is only recently interest has turned to a broader investigation of Tolkien's moral exposition. Of those existing studies addressing the philosophical heritage of Tolkien's work - and there are many, a number of whom speak in variations on a theme - scholarly and critical interest has understandably shifted towards the foundational philosophies of Platonism and Socratic theory. Many of Tolkien's characters in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* embody elements of the Platonic theories of power and justice and react to the power of the Ring in different ways. With the question raised by Plato – whether any man in possession of an object that granted them unlimited power would still choose to lead a moral life – as background, Tolkien illustrates these concepts through the thoughts and actions of his characters, showing why we should be moral beings.

We can consider the myth of the Ring of Gyges in Plato's *Republic* as an influence on Tolkien's mythology and the story of the One Ring. Both physical objects appear to offer their wearers an insurmountable power, but that power comes at some cost

either to the wearer himself or to those in close proximity to the wearer. In the *Republic*, the anonymous shepherd who finds the ring goes on to depose the king and rule as a tyrant because the invisibility granted by the ring means that he can never be punished for any unjust acts. Tolkien's interpretation of an all-powerful object actually improves and augments the argument of Plato, because Tolkien's One Ring in Middle Earth explicitly corrupts those that wear it. Plato has Socrates argue that this corruption would occur, but Tolkien offers a number of examples of how this corruption might look. Tolkien also puts forward an alternate view of a moral life, highlighting, through the thoughts and actions of his characters, the difficulties, sacrifices, and burdens that comprise the fulfillment of morality.

The mythology of Middle Earth, clearly displays elements of Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas. It would not be difficult to draw more defined parallels between Plato's moral theory and the nature of characters in Tolkien's fiction when presented with an object of insurmountable power. Plato has a ring in the myth of the Ring of Gyges. Tolkien also has a ring in his adventures in Middle Earth, but goes a step further than Plato by demonstrating the dilemma in an additional way through the introduction of the Palantíri as other objects that grant insurmountable power. Power, particularly as presented in these two worlds, is an amplification of underlying character traits. The amplification of these traits can make something good, such as beauty or being loved by a community, appear as a bad thing. This is particularly true in the case of power in both Plato and Tolkien. For Plato, power is always good or bad itself, existing externally to any agent. Tolkien presents power as a magnification of personality traits - for example,

power in the hands of someone good will never be absolutely good because at some point, the well-intentioned acts will become forceful and dominating, becoming morally bad. Further, Tolkien engages in an examination of different personality types, exploring how people with different traits and attributes react differently to the Ring, an object that grants the illusion of absolute power. What follows here is a presentation of a taxonomy of the differential types, as well as a return to the idea of the necessity of an external agent - such as a ring - to induce a reaction to absolute power

Through the characters of Middle-Earth, Tolkien presents an embodiment of the Platonic values of justice and power, vindicating the importance of leading a moral life. The characters who interact with the Ring are faced with a choice: either to wield the Ring and face the inevitable corruption of their souls by unlimited power or reject the temptation and be satisfied with the fact that they withstood the greatest desire. Plato's assertion that an endless search for power results in eternal unhappiness is fully embodied by the character Sméagol/Gollum. Even though his choices were made long before the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, that single moment of weakness was enough to condemn him to a solitary life of misery and regret (FOTR 51-53). Sméagol's journey and deterioration into Gollum should be considered not only a clear example of the corruption of the soul by the Ring of Power, but also as an incomplete representation of Plato's dilemma. It is not explicitly stated or shown when Gollum made the choice to wear the Ring, but it is this moment of choice that determines the character's fate (Katz 10). Gollum is a mortal being whose every action is dictated by a need to reclaim the Ring for himself to satisfy his desire for the Ring. His actions in the trilogy are not made

through choice, but are made instead because of a compulsion to seek the proffered power and glory.

Because Gollum possessed the Ring longer than anyone else other than its creator Sauron, the Ring continuously plays on Gollum's weak nature, even when the Ring is no longer in his possession. When Gollum is introduced, he is known as Sméagol and belongs to the community of Stoors, a race of riverfolk. Sméagol is fishing with his friend and relative Déagol, and it is Déagol who finds a gold ring. Almost immediately, Sméagol is preternaturally captivated by the shiny, round object. He demands it from Déagol as a birthday gift, but Déagol refuses. Without a thought, Sméagol promptly murders him to gain possession of the Ring (FOTR 52). As Sméagol returns home alone from the ill-fated fishing trip, Tolkien writes the following:

He found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the Ring.

He was very pleased with his discovery and he concealed it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful (FOTR 52).

Sméagol's tyranny leads to his being shunned by his family, exiled from the village, and given the name "Gollum," because of the hacking noise he makes. There are many things interesting about Gollum's story. First, that the pull of the Ring, attractive to Sméagol at the beginning only because of its shiny allure, was so immediately evident. Secondly, because of that attraction, Sméagol commits theft and murder in the same moment. As a



community, the race of Stoors to which Sméagol belonged are very similar to Hobbits: good-natured, family-oriented, and satisfied with the simplicities of life. It is possible that Sméagol's forgoing of these ideologies under the negative influence of the Ring contributed to his exile from the community since it was seen to the Stoors as an abandonment of their societal moral standings.

Another aspect to Gollum's story are the direct parallels to the myth of the Ring of Gyges in Plato's *Republic*. There, the anonymous shepherd conducts his immoral acts because the invisibility offered by the ring also provides the illusion of absolute power. Before his exile, Gollum uses the invisibility given by the One Ring to his own advantage and to the detriment of others by stealing, eavesdropping, and using ill-gained information for his own advancement. Without the corruptive influence of the Ring, it can be argued that Sméagol would never have strayed from the value system of the Stoor community. Experiencing the power of the Ring and exploring the things it allowed him to do created a new desire in Gollum that outweighed any choice he might have made to be good and just. Gollum is ruined by his need for the Ring, both physically and mentally, despite all of the terrible things it has inflicted upon him. He does not have the strength of will to resist its pull. The all-consuming need to regain the Ring from Frodo ultimately leads to Gollum's downfall and death, as he falls into the fires of Mount Doom immediately after reclaiming the Ring from Frodo (ROTK 925).

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Boromir, son of the Steward of Gondor and older brother to Faramir, is representative of the internal conflict between wants and needs. Though primarily embracing his good and just nature, Boromir is far more tempted by

the Ring that any other member of the Fellowship. His reasoning for claiming the Ring for himself is that which fits most closely to Glaucon's moral argument in the *Republic* concerning Gyges. Boromir, for all intents and purposes, is portrayed as a noble and good-hearted man of action. He is confused as to why such a powerful gift is not being used to defeat the forces of evil. At the Council of Elrond (FOTR 233-265), Boromir's suggestion that the Ring be returned to Gondor, delivered to his father Denethor, and then used as a weapon is met with rejection. Elrond rebukes Boromir in language that is reminiscent of Plato's argument: "It...is altogether evil...The very desire of it corrupts the heart...As long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning" (FOTR 261).

In Chapter 10 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Boromir confronts Frodo and demands the Ring (FOTR 390). Boromir claims that the Ring should belong to him who sees its value as a weapon and deems himself strong enough to wield it. Seeing that Boromir's nature has been touched by the corruptive nature of the Ring, Frodo slips it on and escapes under the cloak of its invisibility. Boromir quickly recovers himself, calling for forgiveness and saying, "A madness took me, but it has passed" (FOTR 390). As Katz writes, Boromir's moral nature is redeemed as he sacrifices himself to save Merry and Pippin (Katz 11). The question remains over whether a soul, once betrayed by itself and tempted by the promise of an immoral power, can ever return to its un-corrupted state. Boromir is a just man who comes across a Ring of Power and is unable to resist the temptation to act as if he were above all punishment for his actions. He felt entitled to its power because the realm of Gondor, to which Boromir belonged, had always been

considered the protectors of Middle Earth. Gondor existed in the shadow of Sauron and the land of Mordor, and Boromir's actions can be explained as seeking a solution to the desperation caused by an imminent threat. Tolkien's moral and ethical lesson, then, is evident: even those who are courageous, strong, and live virtuously are not always able to resist the pull of a corrupt thing.

In *Republic V*, goodness and morality are largely the results of living an enlightened and knowledgeable existence. Socrates and Glaucon undertake a comparison of the philosopher and the tyrant, but propose the philosopher-king as a middle way, a ruler who possesses both a love of knowledge, as well as intelligence, reliability, and a willingness to live a simple life. In *The Two Towers*, Tolkien contrasts Boromir - the louder, brasher brother with a fondness for wealth and easy living - with the quieter and harder working Faramir (TT, 635). Like Plato is considered the philosopher in comparison to Glaucon's more action inclined character, Faramir cherishes the wisdom gained through studying books and is content with his nomadic position as a Ranger of Ithilien. In Tolkien's narrative, Boromir stole from Faramir the position in the Fellowship in the first place because he felt his battle prowess and athletic nature would be a greater advantage than his brother's scholarly inclinations. Boromir seeks the glory he feels he deserves as the elder son of Denethor (FOTR 234). The burden placed on Boromir by Denethor to protect Gondor makes Boromir open to using any tool that could allow him to do this. His lust for the Ring, albeit motivated by something good in his need to save Gondor, results in Boromir being prepared to do anything to obtain it, including kill Frodo.

When Frodo, Sam, and Gollum are captured by the Rangers of Ithilien, Faramir does not succumb to the power of the Ring, mainly because Faramir knows his brother Boromir would have yielded when confronted with the same temptation. In reference to the Ring, Faramir states, “If it were a thing that gave advantage in battle, I can well believe that Boromir, the proud and fearless, often rash, ever anxious for the victory of Minas Tirith and his own glory therein, might desire such a thing and be allured by it.” He goes on to say that he “would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway” (TT 657). Faramir sees the Ring as only an illusion of absolute power and understands that the magical Ring answers to and is controlled only by Sauron, overpowering the good natures of those that are exposed to it.

Plato’s dialogues repeatedly question whether one in possession of the power to satisfy all of their wants and desires would still choose to live a just life. *The Republic* sees Socrates and Glaucon ruminating over the dilemma of the just man versus the unjust man, as the just man never seems to be as celebrated or as worthy of praise. Even in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, we see a realization of the principle that being good and just does not always come with the rewards it deserves. Faramir is perhaps one of the most morally secure characters. He resists the powerful pull of the Ring but is still betrayed by his father’s tyranny and is almost burned alive by his father Denethor. Denethor, who as Steward is the long-time ruler of Gondor, is himself in possession of a Palantír, one of the far-seeing stones. Sauron uses this device to have a view into Gondor and to ultimately drive Denethor to madness and his death. While never explicitly shown in either Tolkien’s books or Jackson’s movie trilogy, Gandalf does assert that Denethor

was shown “the vision of the great might of Mordor” (ROTK 838). Because of the visions in the Palantír, Denethor believed that Sauron had already captured Frodo and had at the same time regained possession of the Ring. So to Denethor the battle was already lost (Shippey 175). In contrast to Denethor, the wizard Saruman fully submits his soul to the power of Sauron’s Ring on the promise of unlimited rule over the fallen lands of Rohan. Saruman also possesses a Palantír through which Sauron persuades Saruman to join his force of evil. Unlike Denethor, Saruman knew from the outset that nothing good could come from using a Palantír, and used it to try and obtain the Ring to ostensibly curry favor with Sauron.

In Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*, Saruman has long been the head of the order of wizards, powerful and respected in his own right. During the War of the Ring, he persuades his armies to act in his favor by positioning himself as the savior of Middle Earth. Tolkien portrays Saruman as a character with more nuanced moral ethics than the simple good or bad, in a way similar to the characters of Boromir and Denethor (LET 154). Saruman is a character who, throughout the collected Tolkien works, displays both good acts and evil acts. Tom Shippey writes that Saruman’s biggest weakness is his devotion to obtaining knowledge, which under other circumstances would be considered a strength, but Saruman’s wisdom is ill-obtained and devious (Shippey 121). Saruman’s Palantír, like the One Ring, is a device capable of corrupting the true nature of a soul by showing false representations of reality, such as Sauron’s pretend willingness to share dominion over Middle Earth. Saruman embodies a murky area of uncertainty in terms of his character at various points through the books. In *The Hobbit*, Saruman becomes

important in the White Council as he drives Sauron from Mirkwood at the end of the book. Saruman did not have the Palantír when he fought against Sauron in *The Hobbit*, demonstrating again Tolkien's presentation of an object that grants untethered power as corruptive. In the following books, Saruman undergoes a transformation into the secondary antagonist, forgoing the nature of the spiritual Valar and ignoring their request to not dominate the peoples of Middle Earth.

Saruman acts as both corrupted and corruptor throughout the latter adventures. Saruman himself is corrupted by Sauron through the Palantír and the compromising of his integrity. Saruman then exercises his ill-gained power over Gríma Wormtongue. Gríma Wormtongue, particularly in Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Two Towers*, is enthralled by Saruman's promise of power and glory to the point that he chooses to set aside what affection he feels for Eowyn, shield maiden of Rohan and the King's niece, to secure his amorally obtained position of authority (TT 501-505; Jackson 2002 scene 8). In the case of Saruman, and subsequently Wormtongue, it is ultimately the reliance upon an external object to obtain what is perceived as ultimate power that leads to their end. This is not to say that no 'good' characters in Tolkien come to happy ends. In fact, with only a few exceptions, they generally do. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the characters in the mythical Middle Earth embody some elements of the philosophical dilemma put forth by Socrates and Glaucon.

A brief look at the temptation of Galadriel in *The Fellowship of the Ring* offers another solution to Glaucon's, and Plato's, dilemma. Galadriel is one of the few non-human characters to be tempted when Frodo offers her the One Ring. Because Frodo sees

Galadriel as able to withstand temptation because of her innate wisdom and reason, he freely offers the Ring to her – if only to relieve himself of its burden (FOTR 410). It is ironic that Frodo offers it freely when we know she could just take it if she wanted to. Taking it by force would be a reaffirmation of the immoral nature of the Ring, an immoral act that would show Galadriel has already been corrupted by her desire for the Ring itself (Katz 12). Obviously, then, it is not wisdom and reason that make a soul infallible as the temptation to take the Ring exists anyway. Tolkien presents to us a visible demonstration of what Galadriel might be if she did submit to the power of the Ring: a being so beautiful but so dangerously powerful that she would be impossible not to love, but also fear (FOTR 356). It is only the desire for power to which one has no claim and the wish to dominate others against their will that is evil and unjust. The Ring does not create power; even in its own creation, it required the existing power of Sauron himself to be instilled in it. Unlike Plato's Ring of Gyges found by the unnamed shepherd, Tolkien's One Ring only magnifies power that already exists within a person. At some level, the corruptive nature of the Ring increases according to that pre-existing power. Without question, the Ring can be a tool of absolute power but only to those who are already powerful. Galadriel presents a manifestation of what would happen if she, a being that already has a supreme, almost god-like power, were given an object that granted her the power to persuade and manipulate under the illusion of being untouchable (Chance 167). The appearance of Galadriel having the Ring to magnify her own existing power is enough to persuade Frodo to keep the Ring for himself.

In all of these cases, none of the characters were created without morals, nor did they conduct themselves in a particularly amoral or alarming way until their encounters with the Ring of Power or some other external object. For Sméagol, Boromir, and Galadriel, it was the One Ring. For Saruman and Denethor, it was the Palantíri through which Sauron planted false images and the illusions of power and control. Even Sauron, the primary antagonist, was not evil in origin, as Tolkien explains in Letter #153: “He was a ‘spirit’ corrupted by the Prime Dark Lord Morgoth. He was given an opportunity of repentance, when Morgoth was overcome but...his temporary turn to good and ‘benevolence’ ended in a greater relapse” (LET 196). Tolkien writes also that even after the fall of Morgoth, Sauron at the start of the Second Age was capable of taking on a most beautiful visible shape, therefore he could not be wholly immoral because unjust things held no beauty in them. Due to Sauron having invested so much of his own power into the creation of a ring that would rule above all others, Sauron’s life force was bound to the One Ring. The eventual destruction of the Ring leaves him powerless, because in his arrogance and lust for absolute power, Sauron risked what power he already had. The most complete corruption by the Ring is seen in the Nazgul. In *The Silmarillion*, Christopher Tolkien offers the history behind how, in the Second Age, Sauron gave nine Rings of Power to great men and how they became great kings and warriors with power and unending life:

Those who used the Nine Rings became mighty in their day, kings, sorcerers, and warriors of old. They obtained glory and great wealth, yet it turned to their



undoing... And one by one, sooner or later, according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning, they fell under the thralldom of the ring that they bore and of the domination of the One which was Sauron's (TS 345).

What is interesting is the assertion that each of the nine men had some underlying trait that made them susceptible to the corruptive nature of the Rings: “according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning” (TS 346). Unlike other characters in Tolkien’s mythology, some of whom are not part of the human race and are blessed with immortality, the Nazgul were human. Shippey suggests that in Middle Earth, mortals act more on emotion than wisdom, despite frequently having good intentions. He writes that mortals often become impatient and “start to cut corners, to eliminate opponents, to believe in some ‘cause’ which justifies everything they do” (Shippey 125). Shippey adds that ultimately, the ‘cause’ destroys any moral sense because it becomes an overarching, catch-all excuse for poor choices (Shippey 126). The Ring is created to allow its wielder to enslave others, but in the end, it is the wielder himself who becomes its slave because they answer only to the lust for power instilled upon them by the One Ring. Even the Ring itself answers only to its creator, Sauron, as the one who instilled power upon the object to begin with.

Tolkien’s literary adventures in Middle Earth can be read as a reimagining of Plato’s moral problem. Tolkien demonstrates elements of Plato’s dilemma through the thoughts and actions of his characters, asking the question at the root of this conversation:

is it possible for a being in possession of an object that granted them unlimited power to choose not to use that power for evil deeds and wrongdoings? As we have seen, an object like a Ring of Power gives a different kind of power to different people based on some underlying trait. Tolkien's fictional universe demonstrates that nothing good ever comes from having such an object, as an insurmountable power is overpowering and corruptive. Corruption is a vital aspect of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the story, corruption acts as both a narrative device to develop the story and also is used to show the quality of Tolkien's characters. A plethora of characters who interacted with the One Ring were tempted by its subversive and corruptive nature. A powerful artifact and a powerful predisposition to use it for selfish purposes is almost exclusively necessary for one to be consumed. Without one or the other, the corruption cannot occur.

## CONCLUSION

In the *Republic*, a series of conversations shed light on the Platonic understandings of power, morality, and justice. According to Plato, justice exists as the supreme virtue, commanding the soul. Plato and Socrates operated in the real world, in Ancient Athens where the social structures were cemented by the militaristic rule of the Athenian tyrants. Power and justice were inextricable, and were passed down from the *polis* to the people. J.R.R. Tolkien had the advantage of creating his own world and was therefore unconstrained and able to be the administrator of his own justice on the characters he had created. Tolkien has established a context in which the intentional, intellectual wrestling with real world issues of justice and morality echo his frustration with the societal inability to address these concepts in post-World War I Europe. As has been demonstrated, it is possible to ask the same question of Tolkien as Socrates asks in the Platonic dialogues: whether or not a being in possession of an object that granted them unlimited power would choose to live a moral life. So, could an object like a Ring of Power give a different kind of power to different people, with the outcomes dependent upon the existing moral character in those that wield it?

This project has done the following: firstly, it has explored Plato's moral philosophy to reach an understanding of key concepts such as justice, virtue, and morality. Secondly, it has placed Tolkien in conversation with the ancient dialogues of

Plato by establishing bridges establishing bridges between the ancient and modern texts to create a space in which to find intersections. These intersections have been explored in such a way that it has allowed the overlay of Platonic philosophy onto the realized concepts in Tolkien's literary work. The central question of what one would choose to do if they held possession of an object of insurmountable power is illustrated by the myth of the Ring of Gyges in Plato's *Republic*, and also by the interaction of characters with the One Ring of Power throughout Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Where Plato only demonstrates the pitfalls of unparalleled power with one device, Tolkien takes Plato's dilemma a step further by introducing a second item, the Palantír. The Palantíri operate in much the same way as the Ring of Gyges in the *Republic* and the One Ring in Tolkien's fiction: they all allow their owners to exist under the illusion of insurmountable power and infinite knowledge, ultimately leading to the wielder's corruption and downfall. The addition of the Palantíri in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is perhaps the biggest divergence from the way Plato lays out this dilemma in the *Republic*.

There is much more to be said about the Palantíri and the role of knowledge as an extension of absolute power. To do this one could return to the *Meno*, Plato's dialogue in which Socrates discusses the paradoxical nature of claiming knowledge as virtue.

Further study building on this paper would also include a discussion on Platonic knowledge, a return to justice and virtuous living, and would additionally require a look at the other Rings of Power featured in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* to examine their various effects and correlative powers. As has been indicated in this project, justice as a virtue ensures that success and true power can only be achieved through one of two

ways: either to give the complete appearance of a just soul and to be seen as morally good, or, as in the case of the anonymous shepherd in the Ring of Gyges and Bilbo Baggins in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, to not be seen at all.

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