

AN ENGAGEMENT WITH PLATO'S REPUBLIC

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A Companion to the *Republic*

by

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to

A.D. Woozley and R.M. Hare

Our tutors in philosophy,
who are in no way responsible for our opinions,
but whose standards of thinking we have endeavoured to uphold

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	viii
<i>A Note on Translation</i>	x
1 Questions Asked	1
Shadow Boxing	1
Cleitophon's Suggestion	4
Who was Thrasymachus?	5
Thrasymachus' Position	6
Difficulties	9
Three Further Arguments against Thrasymachus	11
2 Can Morality be Justified?	15
Dissatisfaction	15
Structure of the <i>Republic</i>	15
The Case Against Morality	18
Identification with Society	22
The Analogy between Individuals and Societies	24
Mental Metaphors	29
Facets of Personality	30
Threefold Classification	32
3 Return of the Self	37
Alternatives	36
Decline of the Constitution	37
Power and Glory	39
The Sovereignty of Wealth	40
Free For All	41
The Depths of Degradation	43
4 Knowledge and Opinion	45
Who are the <i>φιλόσοφοι</i> ?	45
Knowledge and Necessity	45
Knowledge as Understanding	47
The Ontology of Knowledge	49
Between Knowledge and Ignorance	50
The Corruption of the Intelligentsia	52
In Defence of Opinion	54
Knowledge and Opinion: Reason and Faith	55

5	The Theory of Forms	58
	A Theory of Adjectives	58
	A Theory of Nouns	61
	The Third Man	63
	The Logic of Nouns	66
	Objects of Knowledge	67
	Necessity	68
	Conclusion	70
6	The Theory of Argument	73
	The Search for Absolute Cogency	73
	Deduction	75
	Plato's Philosophies of Mathematics	77
	The Axiomatic Method	82
	The Price of Postulating	83
	The Search for First Principles	85
7	The Search for the Good	88
	Sun, Line and Cave	88
	Difficulties with Traditional Interpretation	89
	The Traditional View Reconsidered	92
	Plato's Use of Allegory	97
	The Cave Interpreted	98
	The Nature of Dialectic	101
	An Architectural Analogy	104
	The Rational Grounding of Morality	106
8	Morality and Happiness	109
	The Challenge Met?	109
	A Kantian Plato?	110
	Is Plato's Argument Broken-backed?	114
9	Plato and Pluralism	117
	The Different Faces of Democracy	117
	Plato Against Athenian Democracy	117
	Plato Against Egalitarianism	119
	Pluralism	120
	Diversity and Toleration	122
	Rational Decision between Forms of Life	126
	Autonomy and Objectivity	128

Contents

vii

10	Sex, Self and Power	131
	Plato's Feminism	131
	Emotional Involvement	133
	Homosexuality	133
	The Abolition of the Self	134
	Dynasties and Power	136
	The Real Origin of Sin	138
	Modern Feminists and Plato	141
11	Education	144
	Jowett's Ideal	144
	Indoctrination and Censorship	145
	Higher Education	149
	The Transmission of <i>Mores</i>	152
12	The Quarrel with the Poets	154
	Education and Drama	154
	Copy of a Copy	156
	The Appeal of Art	158
	The Rationality of Literature	163
	<i>Envoi</i>	167
	<i>Schematic Analysis of Text</i>	168
	<i>Index</i>	172

Introduction

Introductions should introduce, but sometimes lead to engagements. That is our aim. We want to make Plato's *Republic* more easily read by modern readers, but do not want to do only that. For philosophy is like poetry, and cannot be learned second-hand. I can learn all sorts of facts about a poem, but unless I have entered into the poet's experience, if only in my imagination, it remains dead. Similarly, I shall not see the point of text-book analyses of philosophical doctrines unless I have felt the force of the arguments that led the philosopher to propose them, and have some sense of the objections he encountered and the way he sought to surmount them. That is why we still need to read Plato and Aristotle, as we do Homer and Sophocles, in a way that we do not, save as a historical exercise, read ancient textbooks of medicine or mechanical construction.

We need not only to be guided—Plato had no chapter headings or footnotes—but to be involved. Many readers are infuriated by Plato: others are overwhelmed with admiration. Both responses are appropriate, but need to be explored further. Outrageous, unfashionable, politically incorrect though many of the things Plato says undoubtedly are, we should not just dismiss them as thoughts nowadays unthinkable, but think through them, recognising the force of the arguments that led Plato to enunciate them, and considering the counter-arguments he might have marshalled to meet contemporary objections. And equally, deep and inspiring though some of his sentiments are, we need to remember that Aristotle, revering Plato greatly, revered truth even more, and came to reject many of Plato's platonic doctrines. Neither view is right; neither wholly wrong. But it is better to take either view than none at all. Plato believed that philosophy could only be properly carried out in the form of a dialogue, when there was a meeting of minds, and we are being truer to his precepts if we react to him than if we preserve a scholarly detachment. Indeed, there are not just two views of Plato, but as many as there are interested readers of the *Republic*, and each of us must make his own interpretation.

To do this, the reader must grapple with Plato's text. The first chapters are intended to help the reader to make sense of the text, either in translation or the original Greek. In later chapters we deal more with themes that Plato raises than with the text itself, even at the cost of some anachronisms. We treat Plato as a contemporary, because his text is not just an ancient text, but one that never ceases to be relevant to contemporary concerns, and demands fresh discussion in every age. This book, therefore, is not intended as a new commentary on the *Republic*, written, as such a commentary must

be, by specialists in ancient philosophy. There are already many commentaries, and many more articles elucidating particular passages in the *Republic*, some excellent ones by colleagues of ours, which we have passed over (and hereby apologize to their authors for not mentioning them), because our aim is different.

Readers will benefit from such commentaries, which will set Plato in the context of his own age, and avoid the anachronisms of this book. But the history of philosophy is different from philosophy itself, and our references to the Periodic Table, the African mole-rat, and modern theories of democracy and education, would be out of place in a scholarly commentary on a text from the fourth century BC, but, we believe, serve to illuminate the issues with which Plato was trying to grapple.

The interpretations we offer are, we believe, defensible, but it is not the purpose of the book to defend them up to the hilt. Many are taken from other scholars, but some we have developed ourselves where we think fresh insights are to be gained. Our views *are* controversial—that is inevitable, granted that our object is to relate Plato to contemporary issues, and to stimulate argument treating him as a contemporary. Readers will often disagree with them: our hope is that they will find them worth disagreeing with.

A note on translation

The most straightforward policy would have been to use English throughout and leave nothing in the original Greek. The trouble with this is that no translation can be entirely faithful. Modern English culture is different from ancient Greek culture, and some words used by Plato have no precise equivalent in English, and others make sense only against a background of assumptions or practices that no longer obtain. No English word adequately represents Plato's use of the words *δικαιοσύνη* (*dikaíosunē*) and Greek *d'ikaíos* (*dikaíos*); *δικαιοσύνη* is commonly translated 'justice', but that is often positively misleading; the question raised by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II is whether morality is worth it, or whether the amoral life is a better bet. Most translators adopt the best English word they can think of, and use it throughout. Words such as *ψυχή* (*psuchē*), *μίμησις* (*mimesis*), *διανοία* (*dianoia*), are given standard translations, which are all right for those familiar with the original Greek, but can mislead others, because in some contexts the standard translation does not carry the sense of the original Greek. We follow the opposite policy. We try to find the English word that makes most sense in the context, but at the same time give the Greek word so that readers who know Greek can make up their own minds. Thus instead of the 'tripartite division of the soul' we shall talk of the threefold classification of facets of personality, *ψυχή* (*psuchē*).

Publishers do not like Greek. They say—and they should know—that it puts off potential purchasers, much as equations do in popular science books. But since we translate the same Greek word differently on different occasions, giving the best rendering we can of its sense in the context, we go against the conventional wisdom, and give the Greek word. We also sometimes give the Greek where the interpretation of a passage is disputed.

We have, on the whole, avoided transliteration. Transliterated Greek is not easy to read and is error-prone. But we have given transliterated versions of key words like Greek *d'ikaíos* (*dikaíos*), *εὐδαιμονία* (*eudaemonia*), *μίμησις* (*mimesis*), where the Greekless reader needs to know that the same Greek word is being used, though rendered by different English words in different contexts.

In his Theory of Forms Plato uses two words, *εἶδος* (*eidos*), *ἰδέα* (*idea*), which are standardly translated as Form, but often would better be rendered as pattern, shape, species, feature, value. We shall use the stock translation, Form, with the capital letter indicating that it is a term of art. We have not used the stock translation, 'justice', for *δικαιοσύνη* or *τὸ δίκαιον*, but have rendered it sometimes as 'righteousness', sometimes as 'morality', sometimes

as ‘integrity’, or whatever best conveys the facet of its meaning that Plato is using in the passage under consideration. For *δόξα* (*doxa*) we use ‘opinion’, and for *ἐπιστήμη* ‘understanding’, and for *νοήσις* (*noesis*) ‘knowledge’, as do most commentators. ‘Knowledge’ seems natural for *γνώσις* too, and ‘confidence’ is usually adequate for *πίστις* (*pistis*) though sometimes ‘settled conviction’ or ‘firm belief’ is better. We found it difficult to translate *εἰκασία* (*eikasía*) in a way that would make Plato’s argument plausible; no English word expresses Plato’s range of meanings. ‘Imagination’ conveys the sense of visual imagery as opposed to reliable reality, but has too strong a sense of not being true. Although unreliable, appearances do not necessarily deceive. ‘Guestimate’ is insufficiently pejorative. ‘Conjecture’ is often the best we can offer. *Διάνοια* (*dianoia*) was also difficult: ‘derivation’ captures the sense of deductive inference from premises, but presupposes our interpretation in terms of modern mathematical logic, an interpretation that many commentators would dispute.

Readers who do not know Greek should check our rendering against that in their translation. The best available translations are:

A.D. Lindsay, *The Republic of Plato*, J.M. Dent (Everyman), London, 1907.

H.P.D. Lee, *The Republic of Plato*, Harmondsworth (Penguin), 1955.

F.M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, Oxford, 1941.

G.M.A. Grube, *Plato’s Republic*, Indianapolis, 1974.

R.W. Sterling and W.C. Scott, *Plato: The Republic*, New York, 1985.

Plato’s style is full, and sometimes readers will find a *précis* more helpful than a translation. Plato himself gives one of Books I to V in the *Timaeus* (17a-19b); A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work*, London, 1926, pp.262-298, combines *précis* with commentary.

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References

References to Plato are given to the standard Stephanus pages, first a numeral then, if need be, a letter—a, b, c, d, or e—followed by another numeral; almost every edition and translation of Plato will show these in the margin. References to passages in the *Republic* are given in brackets in the text, preceded, unless it is otiose, by the number of the book in capital Roman numerals. References to other dialogues of Plato and to other works are given in footnotes. In almost all cases we give each reference in full, to save the reader (who may have not read all the previous pages) from having to look back to some earlier footnote. References to Aristotle are to the standard Bekker edition; the books common to the *Nicomachean* and the *Eudemian Ethics* are referred to as *Ethics* V, VI and VII.

Envoi

Everyone must make his own interpretation of the *Republic*. One cannot read it without responding to it, and each reader's response will be different. If some of the things written in this book have helped you make the *Republic* your own, we are happy to have been able to help you: if on other points you interpret Plato and assess his arguments differently, we still are content. It is part of the spell of the *Republic* that it admits of many different defensible interpretations and this is the reason why it is not only a great work of philosophy, but a great work of art.

Schematic analyses of text

Plato had no chapter headings, and the form of a dialogue makes him appear to wander from topic to topic aimlessly, often with digressions and sub-digressions. These analyses, given in increasing detail, are intended to help the reader find his way round the text. Digressions and sub-digressions are indicated by indentations and indentations of indentations. The suggestion that there were many editions of the *Republic* is controversial. Many scholars think that the *Republic* was conceived as a whole, but we find it helpful to view the text as having been written in stages.

Short Schema of the *Republic*

1. Book I Perhaps originally a separate Socratic Dialogue:
Περὶ Δικαίου (*Peri Dikaiou*), *On Honesty*
2. Books II, III and IV Perhaps originally a first edition of
ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ (*POLITEIA*), *Republic* (or *The Constitution of Society*)
Book I Prologue
357-367 Glaucon and Adeimantus restate the challenge of moral scepticism.
368-369 Introduction of *Πόλις* (*Polis*) analogy
369-434 *Πόλις* (*Polis*) analogy. Cardinal virtues of a society identified
434-435 Discussion of *Πόλις* (*Polis*) analogy
435-444b Tripartite psyche: virtues of an individual identified
444c-445b The value of *δικαιοσύνη* (*dikaiousune*)
(first climax of the *Republic*)
3. Books V, VI, and VII (IV 449b-VIII 543c) Digression (added in third edition)
4. Books VIII and IX(i) (445c-449a, 543c-580c)
The four bad types of constitution, social and individual. (added in second edition of *The Constitution of Society*)
445c-449b Introduction: four bad types of constitution
543c-580 The decline of the constitution, social and individual
580a-c The superiority of *δικαιοσύνη* (*dikaiousune*) again vindicated
(second climax of the *Republic*, second edition)
5. IX 580d-592 Appendices I and II (? added in fourth edition ?)
6. X 595-608b Appendix III (? added in fifth edition ?)
7. X 608c-621 Epilogue (? added in fifth edition ?)

Further Analyses

Republic I

Perhaps originally a separate Socratic Dialogue *Περὶ Δικαίου On Honesty*

327-331b Introduction. Scene setting. The Good Life.

331c-336a Inconclusive Socratic Dialogue with Cephalus and Polemarchus on what *δικαιοσύνη* (*dikaïosune*), honesty, is.

336b-339e Thrasymachus' intervention:

δικαιοσύνη, morality, is simply the interest of the stronger;

Socrates probes ambiguities of 'interest' and 'stronger',

and traps Thrasymachus in self-contradiction.

340 Cleitophon's amendment—rejected by Thrasymachus

340d-341a Thrasymachus restates his proto-Marxist position.

341-348 Inconclusive Socratic Dialogue with Thrasymachus

on whether honesty really is the best policy.

348c-e Is morality/honesty/humanity merely good-natured stupidity?

349-354 Three concluding arguments:

1. Lyre strings should not be tightened too much.
2. Even among thieves honour is needed.
3. Humane behaviour is the true function of human beings.

354b-c Conclusion: the argument has been inconclusive; more thought needed.

Republic II-IV

369-434 *Πόλις* (*Polis*) analogy

369-374 Origin and nature of society

369-371 mutual help essential

371-374 structure of complex communities

375-376 Guardians needed for government

376e-412b Education of Future Guardians

376e-400c The Curriculum

376e-392c Literature

392c-398b The Dangers of Dramatics

398c-400c Music

400c-403c aims of education

403c-412 physical education

412-427 the Guardians

427-434 excellencies of the *Πόλις* (*Polis*)

434-435 The application of the *Πόλις* (*Polis*) Analogy

435-441c Analysis of the individual personality

441c-445b Integrity is psychological health. QED

Republic V, VI and VII

Digression added in third edition: ostensibly about the collective life of the guardians. In fact, chiefly concerned with metaphysical and epistemological issues:

451c4-471c The Unity of the Community

451c4-457c Community of wives and children

451c4-453b1 Equality of women

453b2-457c2 Inferiority of women

457c-461e Eugenics

462-466d5 Abolition of Self

462a-463e Reform of Language

464a-465b4 All interests shared

465b5-466d5 The bliss of the selfless

466e-471c Usages of War

466e-467e female and child soldiers

468a-469b4 penalties and rewards

469b5-471c Hellas

471c-540 The Intellectual Guardian

471-474 political power and intellectual commitment must be united

474b-480 the realm of the intellect

474b-475e definition of the intellectual

475e-480 nature of knowledge as contrasted with belief

475e-476 Forms

476-480 knowledge and belief

VI 484-502c government by intellectuals

484-487a need for knowledge

487b-489c academics unacceptable as governors

489c-497a the treason of the intellectuals

497a-502c the possibility of good government

502c-511 The Good

502c-506b goals of human life

506c-509c The Sun

509d-511 The Line

VII 514-521b The Cave

521c-540e academic education

521c-535a brochure for the Academy

521c-531c mathematics

524d-526c arithmetic

526c-527c geometry

527d-528e solid geometry

528e-530c particle dynamics

530c-531c theory of vibrations

531c-535a philosophy

535a-540 moral requirements of the intellectual life

540e5-541 replacement of the existing gang by the uncorrupted young

Republic VIII and IX(i)-580c

445c1-547c4 Prefaces:

445c1-449b1 (1) Need to discuss inferior constitutions as a foil to the best

543a-545c7 (2) Recapitulation after long digression

545c8-547c4 (3) Number of the Beast: transition from ἀριστοκρατία
(*aristokratia*) to τιμοκρατία (*timokratia*)

547c5-550c3 Τιμοκρατία (*Timokratia*) (English ‘Aristocracy’)

547c5-548c5 aristocratic society

548e6-550c aristocratic individual

550c4-555b Ὀλιγαρχία (*Oligarchia*) (English ‘Plutocracy’)

550d-551b7 transition from aristocracy to plutocracy.

551b8-553a plutocracy.

553a-553e transition from aristocrat to plutocrat

554a-555b plutocrat

555b-562a Δημοκρατία (*Democratia*) Permissive Society

555b-557a transition from plutocracy (cf. 572) to permissive society

5557a-558c6 permissive society (‘democracy’)

598c8-561a transition from plutocrat to libertine cf. 572c1-d4

561a-562a libertine

562a-576b Τυραννίς (*Tyrannis*) Autistic Autocracy

562a-566b transition from permissiveness to totalitarian dictatorship

566d-569c totalitarian dictatorship

(IX)571a-573b5 transition from libertine to autistic autocrat

573b-576b description of autistic autocracy

576b-580c Evaluation of Autistic Autocracy:

Morality Much Better than Selfishness

Republic IX(ii)

580d-588a Two Appendices on Pleasure and Recapitulation (added in fourth edition)

580d-583b Philosophy is fun.

583c-587b Pleasure not really pleasurable

587b-588a Life of the φιλόσοφος (*philosophos*) 729

times as pleasant as that of the autistic autocrat.

588a-592b Recapitulation of argument of second edition of the *Republic*

Republic X

Perhaps added in fifth edition

X 595-608b Appendix on Art. Refutation of Critics. Expulsion of Poets

X 608c-621 Epilogue. Myth of Er