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PREFACE

I SHOULD say a few words about the strategy of the book. The translation is intended to be readable—as readable as I can make it and still remain true to Plato's Greek. We can only speculate on what kind of audience Plato wrote the book for: was it aimed at an intelligent lay readership or 'professional' philosophers? At any rate, his Greek is invariably readable and fluent, so I have tried to write the same kind of English.

Plato did not furnish his works with notes. Of course, his original audience would have detected more of his implicit references than most people will today; so it is incumbent on a translator to provide notes to explain as many of those obscurities as he can. But it is a virtue of end-of-book notes (as used in the World's Classics series) that one can read the translation without constantly feeling the need to interrupt one's reading to refer to what is printed at the foot of the page. In this sense one can simulate Plato's original audience, and that is for the best: like any great work, *Republic* has many facets, and a reader should enjoy it in the first instance for what he or she happens to get out of it.

Apart from the kind of explanatory notes mentioned in the previous paragraph, I have also occasionally indulged in critical and philosophical commentary. The chief purpose of this kind of note is to stimulate the reader to think more deeply about what he or she is reading; paradoxically, however, such notes in a volume like this are bound, for reasons of compass, to be rather dogmatic. A highly selective bibliography has been provided in case a reader is prompted to read further. These notes, then, should be understood to skim the surface of current scholarship on *Republic*. One thing I have avoided in the notes is cross-reference to other Platonic dialogues: *Republic* is so central within Plato's corpus that there would have been no end to it.

The Introduction is intended to provide some kind of overview of *Republic* and to develop one or two lines of thought at greater length than the notes would allow.

The two books I most frequently consulted were Sir Desmond Lee's translation, which always urged me to try to do better, and Julia Annas's modestly entitled 'Introduction', which constantly

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prompted me to think more deeply about what I was reading.

In addition, there are a number of personal debts which should be acknowledged. The overriding one is to my wife Brijji. This translation has been completed on schedule, and the time spent over it has been as wonderful as it should be, when things could have been so different: in the face of life-threatening disease, her courage and lack of self-indulgence have been astounding.

Talking of schedules, Catherine Clarke of Oxford University Press has been an excellent editor—patient and firm in the right proportions. The assiduous work of the Press's anonymous reader and my father Peter Waterfield's fine tuning resulted in many changes to earlier drafts of the translation. Trevor Saunders was gracious and benevolent at a crucial stage, and Peter Kingsley was always at the end of the phone when I needed his advice.

R. A. H. W.

INTRODUCTION

REPUBLIC is a sprawling work. It is written as if it were the record of an actual conversation, and to a certain extent it meanders like a true conversation. The topic of morality unifies it, but it also takes in a number of other major philosophical areas, and throws out a huge number of lesser ideas. Reading Plato should be easy; understanding Plato can be difficult. He wrote philosophical literature, not philosophical textbooks. Sometimes he stresses things which are fairly unimportant; sometimes he underplays vital philosophical issues. Not everything is sewn up tight; issues emerge and then go underground, sometimes never to reappear. This procedure raises half-questions in the reader's mind. There often seems to be slightly more going on than one can immediately grasp.

The best possible benefits of this Introduction would be to provide a unified picture of the overall scope of the book, and to help the reader deepen his or her thinking about the major topics. This is what I hope to do, but with the following qualification. There are so many diverse topics to cover that it is impossible to treat them all, without considerable awkwardness, under a single heading. If *Republic* is a huge estate, we have to explore the areas within it one by one and on foot, rather than looking at the whole estate at once from the air. The very nature of the book makes this approach necessary, and some topics have also been covered in the notes. In any case, it is to be hoped that the end result will still be an overall picture. If before reading this Introduction a reader wants a summary of the whole book, I recommend the following procedure. Every chapter and section has been introduced with an italicized summary. These are easy to pick out by flicking through the pages of the book; read consecutively, they add up to a detailed summary of the work.

The title *Republic* is a bad translation of the Greek *politeia*. The Greek word does occur a number of times in the book, as well as forming the title, and in this translation it has invariably been rendered as 'political system'. *Politeia* is the public and political life of a community; in Latin this is *res publica*, 'public business'; Greek works used to be referred to by their Latin or Latinized

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titles: hence *Republic*. The book, however, is not by any stretch of the imagination a treatise on republicanism or Republicanism. Nevertheless, the title is immovable.

In this translation, *Republic* is about morality—what it is and how it fulfils one's life as a human being. Some readers, however, may have encountered translations which make it a treatise on 'justice'. But Aristotle says (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1129^b–1130^a) that *dikaiosunē*—the Greek word involved—refers to something which encompasses all the various virtues and is almost synonymous with 'virtue' in general; my own experience of the relevant Greek words confirms that Aristotle is not indulging in special pleading to make some philosophical point. To most people, 'justice' means (roughly) 'acting fairly and impartially towards others': this is a part, but not the whole, of *dikaiosunē*. There were times when the translation 'justice' would have sat better in the text, but I found it preferable to use a single equivalent throughout, so as not to mislead a Greekless reader.

Plato's Life in its Contemporary Political Setting

Plato was born in Athens in 427 BC and died there in 347. Although the sources for details of his life are unreliable, the story that he considered a political career is not implausible, since many high-born young men like him did just that. His formative political experiences, however, soon put him off. He grew up during the Peloponnesian War (431–404), in which Athens took on her long-standing rival Sparta and lost. This was a 'world war' in the sense that—what with Athens' and Sparta's allies and subjects—it involved almost all the known civilized world; and it was a war in which Plato's native city excelled in the kinds of stupidities and atrocities that are usual in war.

For most of the conflict, Athens was a democracy. If a modern liberal were to accuse Plato of betraying signs of contempt for the masses and for their power-hungry leaders, Plato would respond that he knew what they were capable of. Reading Thucydides' account of the war, one is occasionally reminded of the worst excesses of the French Revolution or of Pol Pot's regime.

Of course, Plato also saw democracies enact sensible laws, but he knew that the system was capable of terrible abuse, and he

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knew the instability of a system where decrees could be repealed almost as soon as they were made. There is a joke about a distressed would-be philanthropist who found that although he loved humanity, he loathed people. In Plato's case, the tale might be inverted: although it is clear that he disliked the masses as a mass, there is little evidence that he felt the same about individuals just because of their class. In a famous episode in *Meno*, he demonstrates that in terms of intellectual capacity Meno's slave is the equal of Meno.

In Britain in the 1930s political opinions became highly polarized between fairly extreme versions of right-wing and left-wing thought. A great many people—including Philby, Burgess, Maclean, and Blunt—felt that they had to side with one extreme or the other. In the Athens of Plato's time it was equally difficult to be neutral: the choice lay between democracy and Athens on the one hand, oligarchy and Sparta on the other. By birth and upbringing, Plato would have been inclined towards oligarchy.

Oligarchy twice had an opportunity to show its colours in Athens during Plato's youth. In 411 a moderate oligarchy was established, but was overthrown just as it was drifting towards extremism, and before too many allies seized the chance to secede. More importantly, in 404, immediately following Athens' downfall in the war, a government of thirty leaders took control, who counted among their number several relatives and many friends of Plato's family. The Thirty embarked upon a reign of terror, however, until they were overthrown the following year in a democratic counter-revolution.

Some time in the dying years of the fifth century Plato joined the circle of followers of Socrates, and Socrates became the decisive philosophical influence on Plato's life and thinking. The details and extent of that influence cannot be gone into here; there are, in any case, a number of good and available accounts of Socratic thought and Plato's intellectual development. Suffice it to say, in the present context, that Plato loved and admired Socrates above all others—and that in 399 the restored democracy of Athens put Socrates to death on charges of irreligion and corrupting the minds of the city's youth.

Plato's disillusionment with politics was now complete, and he devoted the rest of his life to philosophy. He began—along with others from Socrates' circle—to write dialogues with Socrates as

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the protagonist. To what extent the historical Socrates is accurately reflected in these works is a matter of endless and fascinating debate. It is certain, however, that by the time he wrote *Republic* Plato had already gone beyond history and was using 'Socrates' to voice views which were increasingly taking on a distinctive Platonic hue.

This carries us ahead of our story, however. During the 390s Plato's reputation as a writer and thinker was spreading through the Greek world. In those days powerful 'tyrants' (the word did not necessarily mean that they ruled unpopularity and by force) liked to embellish their own and their state's prestige by inviting famous artists to live in their territory under their patronage. In 388 Plato accepted such an invitation from Dionysius I of Syracuse in Sicily. We do not know details of the sojourn, which was short and bitter. Did he hope to use philosophy to influence politics? His friend the Pythagorean philosopher Archytas was a powerful political figure in Tarentum in southern Italy, and may have been a model.

Some time after returning from Sicily, Plato established a philosophical community in Athens, which came to be called the Academy since it occupied a grove sacred to the local hero Academus. Philosophers and budding philosophers from all over the Greek world came and lived here, sometimes for much of their life. In modern terms, it was part research university, part religious community.

As near as we can estimate, *Republic* was written in the 370s, when Plato had already completed getting on for twenty shorter works. *Republic* was to be far more ambitious, in scope and in length. Subsequent visits to Syracuse in 367 and 361, to tutor the new young king Dionysius II, may have briefly kindled some hopes that the other-worldly political ideas of the book might be partially realizable; but if so, such hopes were soon dashed. Plato's interest in real politics resurfaced in later works such as *Statesman* and *Laws*, but it is arguable that at the time of writing *Republic* he was thoroughly disillusioned with real politics.

Reading Republic

Plato was a genius as a thinker and as a writer. Few would dispute this, even if they disagree with all or any of his views. All great

works of literature contain more than one layer: they gain depth as the more hidden layers resonate with parts of the reader's mind that are not directly being used while focusing on the immediate words of the text: this is where reading even a work of philosophy becomes a subjective exercise. I call the 'immediate words of the text' the 'hard' aspects of a book, and the other layers the 'soft' aspects.

Like any great work of literature, then, *Republic* is a difficult book to discuss. A commentator may go on at length about certain aspects of the book, and be left with the uneasy feeling that he or she has neglected other rich veins. Let us put these considerations in the context of the claim that at the time of writing *Republic* Plato was disillusioned with politics. The one thing that everyone knows, even before picking the book up, is that in it Plato envisages a community ruled by philosophers; and as soon as one gets into the meat of the dialogue, it is clear that it is thoroughly infused with politics. How can this paradox be explained? Did Plato somehow not mean us to take these proposals seriously? These questions are answerable with some plausibility, if one follows up one of the half-submerged threads mentioned earlier.

The Greek world of Plato's time was divided essentially into more or less independent city-states (*poleis*, singular *polis*), each with influence over the immediately surrounding territory, and with friendships and enmities abroad. Accurate population figures are a matter of unreliable conjecture, but the largest of these states was a mere town by modern standards. Politics, therefore, was not some remote game played by your chosen representatives in a distant place. Politics permeated your life and was acted out on your doorstep. In Athenian-style democracies every male citizen had the right and the duty to participate directly in the decision-making processes.

One result of this was that the Greeks had, in certain respects, a far less fully formed concept of the individual than we do today. Mystics and philosophers were suspected of peddling private salvation, when religion was a state matter. It was your duty as a citizen to keep the gods smiling on your community—and that was the end of religion. The notion of an individual's 'rights' was more or less unknown; an individual's happiness was scarcely relevant compared with that of the state. The good life was the political life, or at least it was guaranteed for you by the state

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rather than by your own efforts. In the relatively early dialogue *Euthydemus*, for instance, at 288b–292e, Plato portrays Socrates searching for the branch of knowledge which will bring individual happiness. The closest he can get is to argue that it is the best kind of political system which can do this.

Yet Socrates was a great individualist, and was killed for promoting individualism and therefore subverting the traditional state-centred values. And it is clear that Plato inherited this tendency from his master. *Republic* is Plato's main attempt to define in non-abstract terms how an individual can fulfil himself, can attain happiness or 'live the good life', as a Greek would have said. A Greek would have expected such a discussion to be couched in political terms—and that is what we get, though not entirely in the way a Greek would have expected.

Overt discussion of political and other external issues would be a 'hard' aspect of the book; in *Republic* there are also 'soft' aspects to this discussion. It is possible to read the book as a predominantly individualist approach to the issues, with the traditional political terminology of the debate suborned and largely turned over to metaphorical purposes, to describe the inner state of the individual. Metaphor is a familiar method for turning hard aspects into soft aspects; and it is typical of Plato's sense of humour that he would turn the usual terms of debate on their head in this way.

This is not to say, of course, that the soft aspects of the book (those concerned with the inner state of an individual) are all the book consists of. As Plato projects the inner life of an individual out on to the larger screen of a mythical world where political factors play a part, he does also make some proposals which are more concerned with outer politics than the inner politics of the individual—which are hard rather than soft. In fact, because he is such a skilful writer, he often writes for both layers simultaneously. But the hard aspects of the book are less than one might expect: the outside world takes on a half-life, but the inner life of the individual is the primary concern of the book. As a metaphor, the politics of *Republic* is stimulating and coherent; as a manifesto, it is naïve and fragmentary. Anyone reading the book with a view to finding a political philosophy to follow or to criticize is going to be disappointed and will be forced to supply a lot of the evidence.

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The ambitious project of the book is to demonstrate that morality is beneficial to its possessor—that, in fact, an individual gains in happiness by being moral whether or not any external advantages accrue to him. At the beginning of Chapter 3 Plato says that this is a tough task, since it is difficult to look inside a person's mind and see what is good or bad there. He therefore proposes to work with a political analogy: perhaps morality will be easier to see if we construct a community, describe its political system, and look for morality in this imaginary community. If the analogy with an individual is exact, we shall then be able to discover the features of the 'political' state of affairs in an individual.

There is nothing ambiguous about this. In *Republic* Plato is not primarily interested in politics in the real world: he is constructing an *imaginary* community, to serve as a paradigm. The primary purpose for any political exploration that will occur in the book is a 'soft' purpose—to help us understand an individual. And Plato constantly reminds us that this is the point of the 'politics': time and again he mentions the individual who is supposed to correspond to the imaginary state. These reminders can be found at 351e, 369a, 432b, 434d, 441c, 445c, 472c–d, 541b, 543d–544a and throughout Chapters 11 and 12, 605b, and 608a–b.

Despite so much unequivocal evidence, this way of reading *Republic* is not the one which is usually found in scholarly books on the subject. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is that psychology is a softer science than political theory, and therefore less susceptible to the traditional tools of scholarly exegesis. The possible extent of the analogy has, of course, been noticed, but it has never been fully followed through. For instance, Guthrie says (p. 561), 'Essentially, however, the *Republic* is not a piece of political theory, but an allegory of the individual human spirit.' And Murphy says (p. 76), responding to those who accuse Plato of political totalitarianism: 'It seems fair to remember that the study of the *polis* is subsidiary . . . To some extent this consideration may be taken to explain the many noticeable gaps in the account of the city; much of its actual institutions and working (not being necessary to the analogy) is simply left to the reader's imagination—an imagination very differently exercised by different readers!'

It is in my view not just a case of 'gaps', as Murphy puts it, though those are startling enough (he could have added the lack of

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mention of foreign policy). It is also that a great deal of the book is simply absurd if read as serious political philosophy. An often-quoted remark by Trevor Saunders sums it up: 'To suppose that Plato ever thought that the *Republic* was attainable would be to suppose him capable not merely of optimism or idealism, but of sheer political *naïveté*' (*Plato: The Laws* (Penguin Books, 1970), 27–8). A number of the most blatant oddities and absurdities which point in the same direction, and support the notion that in *Republic* Plato is considerably less interested in external politics than in individual psychology, have been mentioned in the notes (on 370b, 407a, 428d, 432a, 460c, 472e, 537a, 575d).

In short, then, attention to the soft aspects of the book, as well as the hard, explains how Plato could have written a 'political' work while not being interested in real politics; and it can also explain or mitigate some of the peculiar features of the book. I shall give one more example of this latter point, because it does not occur in the notes mentioned above. It has been claimed that the whole analogy is radically mistaken, because people are unlike parts of the mind in important ways. Plato uses the analogy to claim that just as there are three different kinds of people in his community, so there are three equivalent parts of the mind. But while it makes sense to say that an appetitive part of the mind is hardly rational, it does not make sense to say that a worker is hardly rational, just because he is a worker. This whole issue begins to evaporate if it is borne in mind that the main reason for dividing the paradigmatic community into three parts is to provide a parallel with the mind. No one supposes for one minute that Plato thought up the tripartite state and the tripartite mind independently and then noticed, to his surprise, that they were equivalent. Of course the political proposals will appear unrealistic or even unsavoury at times: they may not be destined for the real world, but their primary function is to illustrate the workings of the human mind.

The Soft Republic

It is perfectly possible, then, to read a great deal of the book as an extended metaphor; not only is it possible, but there is good textual authorization for that reading. However, I will not develop

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an extensive interpretation of *Republic* along those lines. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, this soft layer of the book is, as I have said, somewhat subjective, and therefore it is up to every reader to pursue it as he or she sees fit; in the second place, it would ultimately be only a partial interpretation—it would deal with one main layer of the book to the exclusion of the other. However, it is important to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the book has more than one layer.

Here, then, briefly and dogmatically, is one possible reading of some passages of the book, in accordance with the soft interpretative approach Plato invites us to take: he invites us, as we read, to use features of the community he constructs as a map or key for understanding our own psyches. If any of what follows strikes a modern reader as banal, it should be remembered that we live in an age which has far more theoretical psychological knowledge than was available in Plato's time; if any of it strikes a reader as odd, then it should be said that it is no more odd in its way than many of Plato's political proposals are in their way.

We could learn from 369b–376c that an individual is complex and consists of a range of needs, not all of which are concerned with the mere maintenance of physical life. Desires are fundamental (perhaps as in Abraham Maslow's psychology). As individuals interact, they threaten one another's integrity. They therefore have innate means for preserving their integrity. These mechanisms are passion and intelligence, distinct from the general run of faculties, which cater to our various needs or desires.

The external educational directives Plato gives in 367c–412a are also easy to internalize: proper psychological development needs to be nourished by the right kind of information and impressions. The 'right' kind means (a) that it corresponds with our natures—we should not try to be other than what we are; and (b) that it increases our psychic harmony. Immorality breeds internal dissension. Rotten parts of the mind—parts which damage its unity—should be eliminated. The net result of correct nourishment is a harmonious fusion of passion and intelligence: our inner guardians function correctly.

There are three parts of the mind (412a–427c). The 'workers' are one's contact with the outside world; they must continue to do their jobs, which is to say that contact with the outside world is

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vital for psychological health. The passionate part defends one's integrity, while the intellectual part supervises it. Both these two higher parts work abstractly (they have no 'possessions').

From 427d–449a Plato spells out the analogy himself, as it applies to morality. Then, with Chapter 7, we enter some fascinating and highly speculative areas. If the guardians are to have no possessions, then they must have no wives or children. Since we are reading lack of possessions as abstraction of thought, then what are wives and children? Children could be formulated concepts, and wives the means or 'matrix' for formulating them. The female function of formulating ideas (children) is just as important as the male function of seeding ideas, and requires just as much attention. But neither faculty should regard the formulations as its own, otherwise they lose the abstract ability to stand back and be creative. Worthless formulations are to be rejected. All the parts of the mind have their work to do, and should be allowed to get on with it, without interference: in that way one becomes a single, unified individual (which is also, interestingly enough, the goal of Jungian psychology).

These suggestions for an interpretation of some of the soft aspects of the book must not be taken to be more than they are—speculative and subjective. A reader can reject or accept or alter them as he or she sees fit. But it would not be doing justice to Plato's genius to discuss only the hard aspects of the book. If *Republic* was monochrome—if it consisted only of hard aspects—it would not (I dare say) have been acclaimed so long and so loud by so many different kinds of reader; the work is many-hued, and it is incumbent upon commentators not to exclude facets with which they feel uncomfortable. But now we can turn from the soft aspects of the book to the more familiar ground of the hard aspects.

The Objective of Republic

Plato gets down to the task of demonstrating that morality is the major cause of happiness in an individual's life by trying to define morality, or its psychological parameters, and then by proving that anyone with this psychological state is better off than anyone

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without it. Towards the end of the book, at 613a–b, we are also told that morality is assimilation to God. By now we know quite a lot about God, especially from 379a–383b. We know that God is single, uniform, stable, unchanging, and eternal. These same attributes are also applied to God in other dialogues. So an ideally moral person would have them too.

Now, this set of attributes is bound to set off echoes in the mind of a reader. It is not only God and an ideally moral person who have them; Plato's metaphysics and epistemology (theory of knowledge) depend crucially on the existence of entities called 'characters' or 'types' which have these attributes; and the community he has spent so much of the book constructing also has these qualities. In other words, all the major elements of *Republic* have the same features.

Plato's purpose in *Republic*, then, is to provide a kind of unified-field theory, in which all the elements which make human life good are tied together in a vision of eternal unity, orderliness, and stability. But why do this? Is it just the obsessive desire to have everything tied neatly together, or to paint a pretty picture? Actually, Plato's objective is to paint a *compelling* picture. He does not care whether an ideally moral person can ever exist in the real world (472b–d); despite some prevarication (see the note on 472e), he does not care ultimately whether or not the model community could ever exist in the real world. The point is that they exist as paradigms to urge us to approximate to them as best we can in our lives—which is to say, to assimilate ourselves to God. As long as we are not assimilated to God, we are in exile (592b; cf. *Theaetetus* 176a–b). It is important to remember that philosophy for Plato was not, or not just, confined to lectures and books: it was a way of life. The modern distinction between the rational activity of philosophy and the emotional engagement of religion and mysticism would have struck Plato as outlandish. His purpose was to get his readers to change their lives, to undertake the pursuit of assimilation to God.

These powerful and heartfelt ideas are central to the book. As we go through the principal issues and ideas that arise in the work, we shall from time to time notice the traces left on Plato's thinking by this nest of notions surrounding unity and assimilation to God.