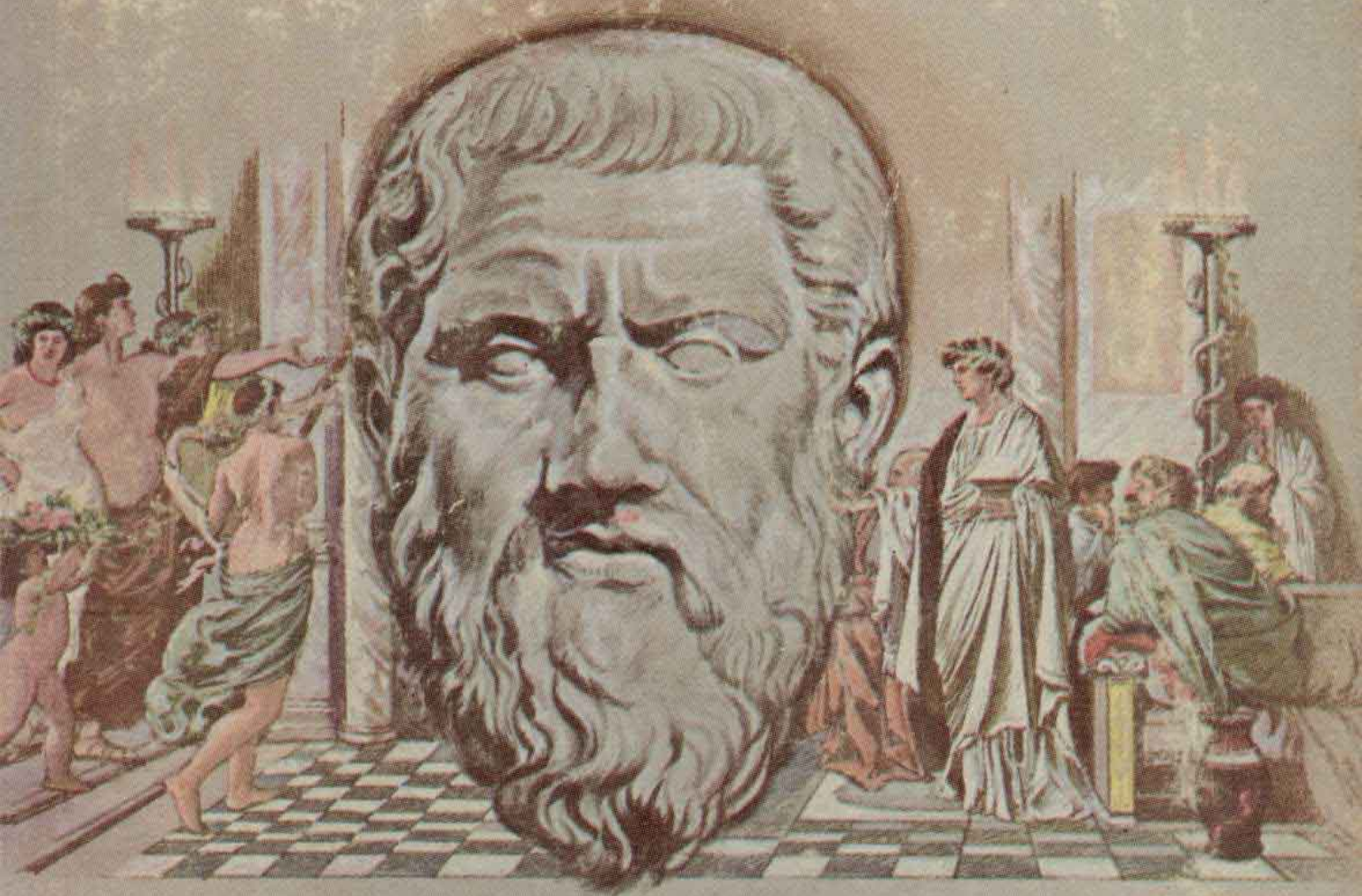


# PLATO'S REPUBLIC



The Complete And Unabridged  
**OWETT TRANSLATION**

*Introduction by Francis R. Gemme*



PLATO  
THE REPUBLIC



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# PLATO

## THE REPUBLIC

*Translated by*  
BENJAMIN JOWETT

NOTES BY DAVID MASSON



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# PLATO

## *The Republic*

Translated by  
BENJAMIN  
JOWETT



### Introduction

The literature of utopias has been a central part of the history of ideas in Western civilization since the Golden Age of Pericles. Philosophers and writers continue to imagine and to conceive plans for the ideal state. Like Plato, they may use their models of an ideal government to express ideas on contemporary issues and political conditions.

Mankind has never tired of comparing the real and the ideal, the actual with the dream, the stark facts of the human condition and hypothetical versions of the optimum life and government. We are familiar with many titles that attempt to visualize man as he could be. Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* and H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* are only a few of the better-known of this genre. A more modern example would be Skinner's *Walden II* in which principles of behavioristic psychology are used to produce the "ideal" society. Some writers have chosen to delineate the ideal by implication by presenting a pessimistic view of the modern state. Such ventures may be termed "dystopias" and the twentieth-century reader has two excellent examples in George Orwell's *Brave New World* and Aldous Huxley's *1984*.

All of these works owe a debt to Plato's *Republic*. The philosophical basis of the *Republic* is the Socratic dictum: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Plato extended that examination beyond the individual to the state. His definition of justice and his use of that definition as the foundation of an entire system of government and society may not coincide with current philosophies of the just state, but his ideas continue to impel us and continue to provoke thought on the most essential questions of life.

Benjamin Jowett, the Oxford scholar and translator of this edition, felt that multiplicity of ideas in the *Republic* is what makes it the greatest of Plato's works: ". . . no other dialogue of Plato has the same largeness of view and the same perfection of style; no other shows an equal knowledge of the world, or contains more of those thoughts which are new as well as old, and not of one age but of all. Nowhere in Plato is there a deeper irony or a greater wealth of humor or imagery, or more dramatic power. Nor in any other of his writings is the attempt made to interweave life and speculation, or to connect politics with philosophy . . . here philosophy reaches the highest point to which ancient thinkers ever attained."

The *Republic* begins with a traditional Platonic dialogue concerning the meaning of justice. When a final definition is never stated, the prevailing views regarding justice are put forth by Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. Their arguments are quickly demolished by Socrates, who is presented as the wisest and humblest of philosophers. Socrates moves from the difficulty of defining such terms as justice to a wider consideration of justice in the state and the individual. Since the basis of the ideal state is justice and reason, citizens must be educated in a certain way in order to achieve those goals. Thus the *Republic* gives Plato's view of the ideal state and offers a complete educational program which, if adopted, he believed would lead to the realization of his vision. We might rebel against Plato's division of the citizens into sharply demarcated classes.

It differs from a modern concept of egalitarianism. Yet Plato's basis for this aristocratic system is that each citizen should be developed according to his own capacity and that, because of natural ability or intelligence, some would be higher on the ladder than others. A third major section of the work deals with the Philosopher-King, the ideal ruler and the epitome of an intellectual and philosophical aristocracy. The concluding sections of the *Republic* take up types of government—aristocracy, democracy, and dictatorship—the merits of philosophy and poetry, and concludes with a discussion of immorality and the rewards of justice.

While it is improbable that such a republic could ever exist, the variety of philosophical development in the work is clearly designed to stretch the mind of the reader and offer comparative alternatives to real conditions. The controversial nature of many of Plato's ideas will force the reader to rethink his own position on many of these matters. As a result, the realm of ideas, the true habitat of all philosophy, prevails.

Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.) was descended from an aristocratic family prominent in the Periclean Age. Although Pericles died of the plague when Plato was only an infant, the boy was reared with a keen sense of public service and was able to benefit from the lingering cultural atmosphere of the Golden Age. His relationship with Socrates permeated his thinking and made him a man of thought. The combination of philosophical training and dedication to public service made Plato turn to visions of the ideal state rather than involve himself directly in the transitory and unstable political and economic conditions of the times. The times, however, influenced the visions.

Plato spent the bulk of his early and late years in Athens. He traveled widely, visiting Egypt, Cyrene, Magna Graecia, and Sicily, with lengthy sojourns in Megara and Syracuse. Following the death of Socrates in 399, Plato withdrew from Athens with a group of the master's other students and settled at Megara. There, the youthful philosopher set about record-



ing for posterity the teachings of his former mentor; Socrates had never written anything himself.

The form in which Plato decided to express the ideas of Socrates as well as his own ideas was that of the dialogue. The view of Socrates as "the justest man of that time" emerges from Plato's sympathetic portrayal of the man who gave the world the "Socratic method" of philosophical inquiry. Platonic dialogues of this early period of writing include several pieces on ethical topics, works about Socrates' life, and the *Republic*, the first utopia in Western literature.

Besides the *Republic*, the most influential of Plato's thirty-six works, the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, two dialogues on love, and the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, the three dialogues dealing with Socrates' trial, his refusal to escape from prison and death, are Plato's most famous works. Socrates is the central figure in each of these. In the later dialogues, written after Plato had established his famous Academy in Athens, the role of Socrates is not so important as the development of a Platonic philosophical system.

As Plato was Socrates' most important student, the outstanding student of Plato's Academy was Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). The appearance of a great philosopher at any time in the world's history is a rare event, but the concentration of the Socratic, Platonic, and Aristotelean legacies within three generations is unparalleled. In contrast the history of America has seen few original philosophers of major stature. Two who come immediately to mind are Jonathan Edwards (1703-1754) and William James (1842-1912). Yet America as well as the world has had no small number of philosophical popularizers, men of lesser philosophical stature who are successful in transmitting pure philosophy into the popular culture.

One such popular philosophical spokesman was Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), essayist, poet, transcendentalist, and mentor of Henry David Thoreau. In his essay entitled, "Spiritual Laws," Emerson summarized a thousand generations of

the Platonic heritage: "There are not in the world at any one time more than a dozen persons who read and understand Plato:—never enough to pay for an edition of his works; yet to every generation these come duly down, for the sake of those few persons, as if God brought them written in his hand."

FRANCIS R. GEMME

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## CONTENTS

BOOK I	19
BOOK II	60
BOOK III	98
BOOK IV	144
BOOK V	182
BOOK VI	230
BOOK VII	269
BOOK VIII	307
BOOK IX	345
BOOK X	376



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