

# THE REPUBLIC



# OF PLATO

SECOND EDITION

TRANSLATED WITH NOTES AND  
AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY BY

ALLAN BLOOM

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*To my mother and father*

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

When I teach the *Republic* now, the reactions to it are more urgent and more intense than they were a quarter-century ago when I was working on this translation and this interpretation. The *Republic* is, of course, a permanent book, one of the small number of books that engage the interest and sympathy of thoughtful persons wherever books are esteemed and read in freedom. No other philosophic book so powerfully expresses the human longing for justice while satisfying the intellect's demands for clarity. The problems of justice as presented by Plato arouse more interest, excitement, and disagreement at some points than at others. When non-philosophers begin their acquaintance with philosophers, they frequently say, "This is nonsense." But sometimes they say, "This is outrageous nonsense," and at such moments their passions really become involved with the philosophers, frequently culminating in hatred or in love. Right now Plato is both attractive and repulsive to the young.

This is most obvious when they reach the section of the *Republic* where Socrates legislates about music. Between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s there was a lull in music's power over the soul, between the declining magnetism of high romanticism and the surge of rock, and music was not much of a practical or theoretical problem for students. They took note of the fact that Socrates is for censorship—a no-no, of course—and went on, not taking much account of what in particular is being censored. If forced to think about it, they tended to be surprised that music above all

should be the theme of censorship when what seemed to them to be the likely candidates were science, politics, and sex. But now that musical frenzy has resumed its natural place, Socrates is seen to be both pertinent and dangerous. Discussion is real and intense, for Socrates understands the charms—erotic, military, political, and religious—of music, which he takes to be the most authentic primitive expressions of the soul's hopes and terrors. But, precisely because music is central to the soul and the musicians are such virtuosos at plucking its chords, Socrates argues that it is imperative to think about how the development of the passions affects the whole of life and how musical pleasures may conflict with duties or other, less immediate pleasures. This is intolerable, and many students feel that the whole Socratic understanding is subversive of their establishment. As I said, the *Republic* is perennial; it always returns with the change of human seasons.

Another theme, not unrelated to music, also suddenly became current in the late 1960s and remains central to general and professional discussion about politics: community, or roots. And again the *republic* becomes peculiarly attractive and repulsive because no book describes community so precisely and so completely or undertakes so rigorously to turn cold politics into family warmth. In the period just after World War II, no criticism of what Karl Popper called "the open society" was brooked. The open society was understood to be simply unproblematic, having solved the difficulties presented by older thinkers. The progress of science was understood to be strictly paralleled by that of society; individualism seemed no threat to human ties, and *mass* society no threat to meaningful participation. The softening in this narrow liberal position can be seen in the substitution in common discourse of the less positively charged term *technology* for *science*, the pervasive doubt about whether the mastery of nature is a very good idea, and a commonly expressed sentiment of lostness and powerlessness on the part of individual citizens.

In the days of thoughtless optimism, Plato was considered irrelevant and his criticism was not available to warn us of possible dangers. Now it is recognized that he had all the doubts we have today and that the founding myth of his city treats men and women as literally rooted in its soil. Everybody is sure that Plato knew something about community, but he makes today's comfortable communitarians uncomfortable by insisting that so much individuality must be sacrificed to community. Moreover, they rightly sense that Plato partly parodies the claims and the pretensions of community. The uninvolved Socrates, distrustful of neat solutions, does not appear to be a very reliable ally of movements. Plato, criticized in the recent past for not being a good liberal, is now shunned for not being a wholehearted communitarian. He is, however, back in the game.

But, above all, the Platonic text is now gripping because of its very

radical, more than up-to-date treatment of the “gender question.” In a stunning demonstration of the power of the philosophic imagination, Plato treats the question as it was never again treated up to our own day—proving thereby that reason can penetrate to the essentials at any time or place. Perfect justice, Socrates argues in the dialogue, can be achieved only by suppression of the distinction between the sexes in all important matters and the admission of women on an equal footing to all activities of the city, particularly the most important, fighting and thinking. Corollary to this is the virtual suppression of the bodily differences between the sexes and all the psychic affects habitually accompanying those differences, especially shame, which effectively separates women from men.)

In consequence, Socrates further recognizes that there must be a revolution in the family in which its functions are transferred to the community, so that women will not have to bear the double burden of career mothers. Day-care centers, abortion, and the desacralization of marriage are only a few of the easily recognizable elements of this revolution in favor of synthesizing the opposites man/woman into the unity, human being. Some activists even find Socrates’ analysis too radical, sacrificing all the charms of family ties to rational considerations of justice. Reason, it seems, is corrosive of the mysteries of human connectedness. Others rightly suspect that Socrates is not sufficiently convinced of the factual equality of women. Socrates is again the questionable ally, but he marks the starting point of something that would be unimaginable if he had not thought it through. One can search in other historical epochs and cultures, but the foundations of this perspective will not be found elsewhere. They are inextricably linked to the founder of political philosophy.

For students the story of man bound in the cave and breaking the bonds, moving out and up into the light of the sun, is the most memorable from their encounter with the *Republic*. This is the image of every serious student’s profoundest longing, the longing for liberation from convention in order to live according to nature, and one of the book’s evidently permanent aspects. The story still exercises some of its old magic, but it now encounters a fresh obstacle, for the meaning of the story is that truth is substituted for myth. Today students are taught that no such substitution is possible and that there is nothing beyond myth or “narrative.” The myths of the most primitive cultures are not, it is said, qualitatively different from the narratives of the most rigorous science. Men and women must bend to the power of myth rather than try to shuck it off as philosophy wrongly used to believe. Socrates, who gaily abandons the founding myth or noble lie he himself made up for the sake of the city, looks quixotic in this light. This can be disheartening to the young person who cares, but it can be a beginning of philosophy, for he is perplexed by a real difficulty in his own breast. This is another case where Platonic radicalism is particularly timely for us.

Finally, in terms of my own experience of these last twenty-five years, after the *Republic* I translated Rousseau's *Emile*, the greatest modern book on education. Rousseau was one of the great readers of Plato, and from my time on that work I gained an even greater respect for the *Republic*. *Emile* is its natural companion, and Rousseau proved his greatness by entering the lists in worthy combat with it. He shows that Plato articulated first and best all the problems, and he himself differs only with respect to some of the solutions. If one takes the two books together, one has the basic training necessary for the educational wars. And wars they are, now that doctrine tells us that these two books are cornerstones of an outlived canon. So, I conclude, the *Republic* is always useful to students who read it, but now more than ever.

I have corrected many minor mistranslations or misleading formulations for this second edition. I must also add that there are certainly many more I did not catch. This is regrettable but inherent in the nature of the task and the nature of this translator.

*Paris, 1991*

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## PREFACE

This is intended to be a literal translation. My goal—unattained—was the accuracy of William of Moerbeke's Latin translations of Aristotle. These versions are so faithful to Aristotle's text that they are authorities for the correction of the Greek manuscripts, and they enabled Thomas Aquinas to become a supreme interpreter of Aristotle without knowing Greek.

Such a translation is intended to be useful to the serious student, the one who wishes and is able to arrive at his own understanding of the work. He must be emancipated from the tyranny of the translator, given the means of transcending the limitations of the translator's interpretation, enabled to discover the subtleties of the elusive original. The only way to provide the reader with this independence is by a slavish, even if sometimes cumbersome, literalness—insofar as possible always using the same English equivalent for the same Greek word. Thus the little difficulties which add up to major discoveries become evident to, or at least are not hidden from, the careful student. The translator should conceive of himself as a medium between a master whose depths he has not plumbed and an audience of potential students of that master who may be much better endowed than is the translator. His greatest vice is to believe he has adequately grasped the teaching of his author. It is least of all his function to render the work palatable to those who do not wish, or are unable, to expend the effort requisite to



the study of difficult texts. Nor should he try to make an ancient mode of thought sound "contemporary." Such translations become less useful as more attention is paid to the text. At the very least, one can say that a literal translation is a necessary supplement to more felicitous renditions which deviate widely from their original.

The difference from age to age in the notions of the translator's responsibility is in itself a chapter of intellectual history. Certainly the popularization of the classics is one part of that chapter. But there seem to be two major causes for the current distaste for literal translations—one rooted in the historical science of our time, the other rooted in a specific, and I believe erroneous, view of the character of Platonic books.

The modern historical consciousness has engendered a general scepticism about the truth of all "world views," except for that one of which it is itself a product. There seems to be an opinion that the thought of the past is immediately accessible to us, that, although we may not accept it, we at least understand it. We apply the tools of our science to the past without reflecting that those tools are also historically limited. We do not sufficiently realize that the only true historical objectivity is to understand the ancient authors as they understood themselves; and we are loath to assume that perhaps *they* may be able to criticize *our* framework and our methods. We should, rather, try to see our historical science in the perspective of their teachings rather than the other way around. Most of all, we must accept, at least tentatively, the claim of the older thinkers that the truth is potentially attainable by the efforts of unaided human reason at all times and in all places. If we begin by denying the fundamental contention of men like Plato and Aristotle, they are refuted for us from the outset, not by any immanent criticism but by our unreflecting acceptance of the self-contradictory principle that all thought is related to a specific age and has no grasp of reality beyond that age. On this basis, it is impossible to take them seriously. One often suspects that this is what is lacking in many translations: they are not animated by the passion for the truth; they are really the results of elegant trifling. William of Moerbeke was motivated by the concern that he might miss the most important counsels about the most important things, counsels emanating from a man wiser than he. His knowledge of the world and his way of life, nay, his very happiness, depended on the success of his quest to get at Aristotle's real meaning.

Today men do not generally believe so much is at stake in their studies of classic thinkers, and there is an inclination to smile at naive scholastic reverence for antiquity. But that smile should fade when it is

realized that this sense of superiority is merely the perseveration of the confidence, so widespread in the nineteenth century, that science had reached a plateau overlooking broader and more comprehensible horizons than those previously known, a confidence that our intellectual progress could suffer no reverse. This confidence has almost vanished; few scholars believe that our perspective is *the* authoritative one any longer; but much scholarship still clings to the habits which grew up in the shadow of that conviction. However, if that is not a justified conviction, if we are really at sea so far as the truth of things goes, then our most evident categories are questionable, and we do not even know whether we understand the simplest questions Plato poses. It then behooves us to rediscover the perspective of the ancient authors, for the sake both of accurate scholarship and of trying to find alternatives to the current mode of understanding things.

It is not usually understood how difficult it is to see the phenomena as they were seen by the older writers. It is one of the most awesome undertakings of the mind, for we have divided the world up differently, and willy-nilly we apply our terms, and hence the thoughts behind them, to the things discussed. It is always the most popular and questionable terms of our own age that seem most natural; it is virtually impossible to speak without using them. For example, H. D. P. Lee, in describing his view of a translator's responsibility, says, "The translator must go behind what Plato said and discover what he means, and if, for example, he says 'examining the beautiful and the good' must not hesitate to render this as 'discussing moral values' if that is in fact the way in which the same thought would be expressed today." (*The Republic* [London: Penguin, 1956], p. 48.) But if one hurries too quickly "behind" Plato's speech, one loses the sense of the surface. Lee shares with Cornford and many other translators the assurance that they have a sufficient understanding of Plato's meaning, and that that meaning is pretty much the kind of thing Englishmen or Americans already think. However, it might be more prudent to let the reader decide whether "the beautiful and the good" are simply equivalent to "moral values." If they are the same, he will soon enough find out. And if they are not, as may be the case, he will not be prevented from finding that out and thereby putting his own opinions to the test.

In fact "values," in this sense, is a usage of German origin popularized by sociologists in the last seventy-five years. Implicit in this usage is the distinction between "facts and values" and the consequence that ends or goals are not based on facts but are mere individual subjective preferences or, at most, ideal creations of the human spirit.

Whether the translator intends it or not, the word "values" conjures up a series of thoughts which are alien to Plato. Every school child knows that values are relative, and thus that the Plato who seems to derive them from facts, or treat them as facts themselves, is unsophisticated. When the case is prejudged for him in this way, how could the student ever find out that there was once another way of looking at these things that had some plausibility? The text becomes a mirror in which he sees only himself. Or, as Nietzsche put it, the scholars dig up what they themselves buried.

Even if Plato is wrong, the pre-history of our current wisdom is still of some importance so that the inadequacies of the traditional teaching, which necessitated its replacement, may become clear.

Similarly, the word "moral" is inappropriate. It is questionable whether Plato had a "moral philosophy." There is a teaching about the virtues, some of which find their roots in the city, some in philosophy. But in Plato there are no moral virtues, as we find them first described in Aristotle's *Ethics*. This is a subtle question, one that requires long study, but one that leads to the heart of the difference between Plato and Aristotle, and beyond to the whole dispute about the status of morality. Thus the translator hides another issue. And even if "the beautiful and the good" do add up to what we mean by morality, it is well that the student should know that for Plato morality is composed of two elements, one of which lends a certain splendor to it which is lacking in, say, Kantian morality. And it may also be the case that these two elements are not always wholly in harmony. The good or the just need not always be beautiful or noble, for example, punishment; and the beautiful or noble need not always be good or just, for example, Achilles' wrath. There is further matter for reflection here: one might learn a great deal if one could follow such problems throughout Plato's works. It is only in this way that a student might reconstruct a plausible and profound Platonic view of the world rather than find the dialogues a compendium of unconvincing platitudes.

F. M. Cornford, whose translation is now the one most widely used, ridicules literal translation and insists that it is often "... misleading, or tedious, or grotesque and silly, or pompous and verbose" (*The Republic* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1956], p. v.). I doubt that it is often misleading, although I admit that it may often lack the beauty of the original. The issue is whether a certain spurious charm—for it is not Plato's charm—is worth the loss of awareness of Plato's problems necessitated by Cornford's notions about translation. It is only because he did not see the extent of the loss that he could be so cavalier with the original. He made a rather heavy joke at the expense of an earlier translator:

One who opened Jowett's version at random and lighted on the statement (at 549B) that the best guardian for a man's "virtue" is "philosophy tempered with music," might run away with the idea that in order to avoid irregular relations with women, he had better play the violin in the intervals of studying metaphysics. There may be some truth in this; but only after reading widely in other parts of the book would he discover that it was not quite what Plato meant by describing *logos*, combined with *musikē*, as the only sure safeguard of *aretē* (*ibid.*, p. vi.).

But no matter how widely one reads in Cornford's translation, one cannot clarify this sentence or connect it with the general problems developed throughout the *Republic*; for the only possible sources of clarification or connection, the original terms, have disappeared and have been replaced by a sentence meaningless in itself and unilluminated by the carefully prepared antecedents which were intended to give the thought special significance. Cornford's version reads as follows, ". . . his character is not thoroughly sound, for lack of the only safeguard that can preserve it throughout life, a thoughtful and cultivated mind." A literal rendering would be ". . . [he is] not pure in his attachment to virtue, having been abandoned by the best guardian . . ." 'What's that?' Adeimantus said. 'Argument [or speech or reason] mixed with music. . . .' There is no doubt that one can read the sentence as it appears in Cornford without being drawn up short, without being puzzled. But this is only because it says nothing. It uses commonplace terms which have no precise significance; it is the kind of sentence one finds in newspaper editorials. From having been shocking or incomprehensible, Plato becomes boring. There is no food for reflection here. Virtue has become character. But virtue has been a theme from the beginning of the *Republic*, and it has received a most subtle treatment. As a matter of fact, the whole issue of the book is whether one of the virtues, justice, is choiceworthy in itself or only for its accessory advantages. Socrates in this passage teaches that a man of the Spartan type—the kind of man most reputed for virtue—really does not love virtue for its own sake, but for other advantages following upon it. Secretly he believes money is truly good. This is the same critique Aristotle makes of Sparta. The question raised here is whether all vulgar virtue, all nonphilosophic practice of the virtues, is based upon expectation of some kind of further reward or not. None of this would appear from Cornford's version, no matter how hard the student of the text might think about it. He even suppresses Adeimantus' question so that the entire atmosphere of perplexity disappears. Now, Adeimantus is an admirer of Sparta, and Socrates has been trying to

correct and purify that admiration. Adeimantus' question indicates his difficulty in understanding Socrates' criticism of what he admires; it shows how little he has learned. The dramatic aspect of the dialogue is not without significance.

Cornford is undoubtedly right that virtue no longer means what it used to mean and that it has lost its currency. (However, if one were to assert that courage, for example, is a virtue, most contemporaries would have some divination of what one is talking about.) But is this senility of the word only an accident? It has been said that it is one of the great mysteries of Western thought "how a word which used to mean the manliness of man has come to mean the chastity of woman." This change in significance is the product of a new understanding of the nature of man which began with Machiavelli. (If there were a translation of the *Prince* which always translated *virtù* by *virtue*, the student who compared it with the *Republic* would be in a position to make the most exciting of discoveries.) "Freedom" took the place of "virtue" as the most important term of political discourse, and virtue came to mean social virtue—that is, the disposition which would lead men to be obedient to civil authority and live in peace together rather than the natural perfection of the soul. The man who begins his studies should not be expected to know these things, but the only tolerable result of learning is that he become aware of them and be able to reflect on which of the alternatives most adequately describes the human condition. As it now stands, he may well be robbed of the greatest opportunity for enlightenment afforded by the classic literature. A study of the use of the word "virtue" in the *Republic* is by itself most revealing; and when, in addition, its sense is compared in Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, and Rousseau, the true history of political thought comes to light, and a series of alternatives is presented to the mind. These authors all self-consciously used the same term and in their disagreement were referring to the same issues. The reader must be sensitized by the use of the term to a whole *ethos* in which "virtue" was still a political issue.

Cornford uses *safeguard* instead of *guardian*. This is unobjectionable in itself, but *guardian* is a word that has been laden with significance by what has preceded in the book. The rulers, in particular those who fight and thus hold the power in the city, have been called guardians since their introduction in Book II. In a sense the problem of the *Republic* was to educate a ruling class which is such as to possess the characteristics of both the citizen, who cares for his country and has the spirit to fight for it, and the philosopher, who is gentle and cosmopolitan. This is a quasi-impossibility, and it is

the leading theme of the onerous and complex training prescribed in the succeeding five books. If the education does not succeed, justice must be fundamentally compromised with the nature of those who hold power. In the context under discussion here Socrates is discussing the regimes which have to be founded on the fundamental compromise because of the flawed character of the guardians' virtues. Regimes depend on men's virtues, not on institutions; if the highest virtues are not present in the rulers, an inferior regime must be instituted. There are no guardians above the guardians; the only guardian of the guardians is a proper education. It is this theme to which the reader's attention must be brought.

X And Socrates tells us something important about that education: it consists of reason but not reason alone. It must be mixed with a non-rational element which tempers the wildness and harshness of both the pre-philosophic and philosophic natures. Reason does not suffice in the formation of the good ruler. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the full bearing of this lesson, but it is of utmost significance. The term *music* is indeed a difficult one for the modern reader, but there has been a full discussion of it in several passages of the *Republic*, and any other word would surely be most misleading. And, in fact, the sense we give to music is not totally alien to the understanding Glaucon and Adeimantus had at the start. It is Socrates who transformed their view by concentrating on the speech and its truth while subordinating rhythm and harmony. It is Socrates who rationalized *music*.

Is it not conceivable that the *Republic* is a book meant for people who are going to read widely in it, and that it would be unfair to cheat them for the sake of the subjective satisfaction of those who pick out sentences aimlessly? Is the man who comes away from the text with the interpretation feared by Cornford a reader about whom Plato would care? And does the gain in immediate intelligibility or beauty offset the loss in substance? Only unawareness of the problems can account for such a perverse skewing of the emphases. And this was a sentence chosen by Cornford to demonstrate the evident superiority of his procedure!

There are a whole series of fundamental terms like *virtue*. *Nature* and *city* are but two of the most important which are most often mistranslated. I have tried to indicate a number of them in the notes when they first occur. They are translated as they have been by the great authors in the philosophic tradition. Above all, I have avoided using terms of recent origin for which it is difficult to find an exact Greek equivalent, inasmuch as they are likely to be the ones which most reflect specifically modern thought. It is, of course, impossible always

to translate every Greek word in the same way. But the only standard for change was the absolute unintelligibility of the rendition and not any desire to make Plato sound better or to add variety where he might seem monotonous. And the most crucial words, like those just mentioned and *form* and *regime*, etc., are always the same in spite of the difficulties this procedure sometimes causes. Ordinarily in contemporary translations the occurrence of, for example, *nature* in the English is no indication that there is anything related to *physis* in the Greek, and the occurrence of *physis* in the Greek does not regularly call forth any word related to *nature* from the translator. But, since *nature* is the standard for Plato, this confusion causes the reader either to be ignorant of the fact that nature is indeed Plato's standard or to mistake which phenomena he considers natural. Literal translation makes the *Republic* a difficult book to read; but it is in itself a difficult book, and our historical situation makes it doubly difficult for us. This must not be hidden. Plato intended his works essentially for the intelligent and industrious few, a natural aristocracy determined neither by birth nor wealth, and this translation attempts to do nothing which would contradict that intention.

In addition to unawareness of the need for precision, unwillingness to accept certain unpalatable or shocking statements or teachings is another cause of deviation from literalness. This unwillingness is due either to a refusal to believe Plato says what he means or to a desire to make him respectable. Cornford provides again a spectacular example of a not too uncommon tendency. At Book III 414 Socrates tells of the need for a "noble lie" to be believed in the city he and his companions are founding (in speech). Cornford calls it a "bold flight of invention" and adds the following note: "This phrase is commonly rendered 'noble lie,' a self-contradictory expression no more applicable to Plato's harmless allegory than to a New Testament parable or the Pilgrim's Progress, and liable to suggest that he would countenance the lies, for the most part ignoble, now called propaganda . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 106). But Socrates calls it a lie. The difference between a parable and this tale is that the man who hears a parable is conscious that it is an invention the truth of which is not in its literal expression, whereas the inhabitants of Socrates' city are to believe the untrue story to be true. His interlocutors are shocked by the notion, but—according to Cornford—we are to believe it is harmless because it might conjure up unpleasant associations.

This whole question of lying has been carefully prepared by Plato from the very outset, starting with the discussion with old Cephalus (331 b-c). It recurs again with respect to the lies of the poets (377 d),

and in the assertions that gods cannot lie (381 e–382 e) and that rulers may lie (380 b–c). Now, finally, it is baldly stated that the only truly just civil society must be founded on a lie. Socrates prefers to face up to the issue with clarity. A good regime cannot be based on enlightenment; if there is no lie, a number of compromises—among them private property—must be made and hence merely conventional inequalities must be accepted. This is a radical statement about the relationship between truth and justice, one which leads to the paradox that wisdom can rule only in an element dominated by falsehood. It is hardly worth obscuring this issue for the sake of avoiding the crudest of misunderstandings. And perhaps the peculiarly modern phenomenon of propaganda might become clearer to the man who sees that it is somehow related to a certain myth of enlightenment which is itself brought into question by the Platonic analysis.

Beyond the general problems affecting the translation of all Greek and Latin texts, the Platonic dialogues present a particular difficulty. It is not too hard to find acceptable versions of Aristotle's treatises. This is because they are not entirely unlike modern books. There is, on the other hand, frequently a lack of clarity about the purposes of the dialogue form. Plato is commonly understood to have had a teaching like that of Aristotle and to have enclosed it in a sweet coating designed to perform certain didactic or artistic functions but which must be stripped away to get to the philosophic core. We then have Plato the poet and Plato the philosopher, two beings rolled into one and coexisting in an uneasy harmony. This is the fatal error which leads to the distinction between form and substance. The student of philosophy then takes one part of the dialogue as his special domain and the student of literature another as his; the translator follows suit, using great license in the bulk of the book and reverting to a care appropriate to Aristotle when philosophy appears to enter.

Cornford, as in all other things, expresses the current tendency in a radical form. He cuts out many of the exchanges of the interlocutors and suppresses entire arguments which do not seem to him to contribute to the movement of the dialogue. Although he claims his wish is to fulfill Plato's intentions in a modern context, he finally confesses that "the convention of question and answer becomes formal and frequently tedious. Plato himself came near to abandoning it in his latest work, the *Laws* . . ." (*ibid.*, p. vii). Cornford thus improves on Plato, correcting him in what he believes to be the proper direction. He thinks the dialogue form is only a convention, and, when it fatigues him, *he* abandons it. It is at precisely this point that one should begin to ask whether we understand what a dialogue really is. It is neither poetry nor



philosophy; it is something of both, but it is itself and not a mere combination of the two. The fact that sometimes it does not meet the standards of the dramatic art reveals the same thing as the fact that sometimes the arguments are not up to the standards of philosophical rigor. Plato's intention is different from that of the poet or the philosopher as we understand them. To call the dialogue a convention is to hide the problem. Perhaps this very tedium of which Cornford complains is the test which Plato gives to the potential philosopher to see whether he is capable of overcoming the charm of external form; for a harsh concentration on often ugly detail is requisite to the philosophic enterprise. It is the concentration on beauty to the detriment of truth which constitutes the core of his critique of poetry, just as the indifference to forms, and hence to man, constitutes the core of his criticism of pre-Socratic philosophy. The dialogue is the synthesis of these two poles and is an organic unity. Every argument must be interpreted dramatically, for every argument is incomplete in itself and only the context can supply the missing links. And every dramatic detail must be interpreted philosophically, because these details contain the images of the problems which complete the arguments. Separately these two aspects are meaningless; together they are an invitation to the philosophic quest.

Cornford cites the *Laws* as proof that Plato gradually mended his ways; thus he has a certain Platonic justification for his changes in the text. But the difference in form between the *Republic* and the *Laws* is not a result of Plato's old age having taught him the defects of his mannered drama, as Cornford would have it, or its having caused him to lose his dramatic flair, as others assert. Rather the difference reflects the differences in the participants in the dialogues and thereby the difference of intention of the two works. This is just one example of what is typical of every part of the Platonic works. By way of the drama one comes to the profoundest issues. In the *Republic* Socrates discusses the best regime, a regime which can never be actualized, with two young men of some theoretical gifts whom he tries to convert from the life of political ambition to one in which philosophy plays a role. He must persuade them; every step of the argument is directed to their particular opinions and characters. Their reasoned assent is crucial to the whole process. The points at which they object to Socrates' reasoning are always most important, and so are the points when they assent when they should not. Each of the exchanges reveals something, even when the responses seem most uninteresting. In the *Laws* the Athenian Stranger engages in the narrower task of prescribing a code of laws for a possible but inferior regime. His interlocutors are old men who have

no theoretical gifts or openness. The Stranger talks to them not for the end of any conversion but only because one of them has the political power the Stranger lacks. The purpose of his rhetoric is to make his two companions receptive to this unusual code. The Stranger must have the consent of the other two to operate his reforms of existing orders. Their particular prejudices must be overcome, but not by true persuasion of the truth; the new teaching must be made to appear to be in accord with their ancestrally hallowed opinions. Important concessions must be made to those opinions, since they are inalterable. The discussions indicate such difficulties and are preliminary to the essential act of lawgiving. Laws by their nature have the character of monologue rather than dialogue, and they are not supposed to discuss or be discussed; thus the presentation of the laws tends to be interrupted less. (The strength and weakness of law lies in the fact that it is the polar opposite of philosophic discussion. The intention of a dialogue is the cause of its form, and that intention comes to light only to those who reflect on its form. )

The Platonic dialogues do not present a doctrine; they prepare the way for philosophizing. They are intended to perform the function of a living teacher who makes his students think, who knows which ones should be led further and which ones should be kept away from the mysteries, and who makes them exercise the same faculties and virtues in studying his words as they would have to use in studying nature independently. One must philosophize to understand them. There is a Platonic teaching, but it is no more to be found in any of the speeches than is the thought of Shakespeare to be found in the utterances of any particular character. That thought is in none of the parts but is somehow in the whole, and the process of arriving at it is more subtle than that involved in reading a treatise. One must look at the microcosm of the drama just as one would look at the macrocosm of the world which it represents. Every detail of that world is an effect of the underlying causes which can be grasped only by the mind but which can be unearthed only by using all the senses as well. Those causes are truly known only when they are come to by way of the fullest consciousness of the world which they cause. Otherwise one does not know what to look for nor can one know the full power of the causes. A teaching which gives only the principles remains abstract and is mere dogma, for the student himself does not know what the principles explain nor does he know enough of the world to be sure that their explanations are anything more than partial. It is this rich consciousness of the phenomena on which the dialogues insist, and they themselves provide a training in it.

The human world is characterized by the distinction between speech and deed, and we all recognize that in order to understand a man or what he says both aspects must be taken into account. Just as no action of a man can be interpreted without hearing what he says about it himself, no speech can be accepted on its face value without comparing it to the actions of its author. The understanding of the man and his speeches is a result of a combination of the two perspectives. Thrasymachus' blush is as important as any of his theoretical arguments. A student who has on his own pieced together the nature of the rhetorician on the basis of his representation in the *Republic* has grasped his nature with a sureness grounded on a perception of the universal seen through the particular. This is his own insight, and he knows it more authentically and surely than someone who has been given a definition. This joins the concreteness of *l'esprit de finesse* to the science of *l'esprit de géométrie*; it avoids the pitfalls of particularistic sensitivity, on the one hand, and abstractness on the other. Poet and scientist become one, for the talents of both are necessary to the attainment of the only end—the truth.

The Platonic dialogues are a representation of the world; they are a cosmos in themselves. To interpret them, they must be approached as one would approach the world, bringing with one all one's powers. The only difference between the dialogues and the world is that the dialogues are so constructed that each part is integrally connected with every other part; there are no meaningless accidents. Plato reproduced the essential world as he saw it. Every word has its place and its meaning, and when one cannot with assurance explain any detail, he can know that his understanding is incomplete. When something seems boring or has to be explained away as a convention, it means that the interpreter has given up and has taken his place among the ranks of those Plato intended to exclude from the center of his thought. It is always that which strikes us as commonplace or absurd which indicates that we are not open to one of the mysteries, for such sentiments are the protective mechanisms which prevent our framework from being shaken.

The dialogues are constructed with an almost unbelievable care and subtlety. The drama is everywhere, even in what seem to be the most stock responses or the most purely theoretical disquisitions. In the discussion of the divided line, for example, the particular illustrations chosen fit the nature of Socrates' interlocutor; in order to see the whole problem, the reader must ponder not only the distinction of the kinds of knowing and being but its particular effect on Glaucon and what Socrates might have said to another man. One is never allowed to sit and

passively receive the words of wisdom from the mouth of the master. And this means that the translation must, insofar as humanly possible, present all the nuances of the original—the oaths, the repetitions of words, the slight changes in the form of responses, etc.—so that the reader can look at the progress of the drama with all the perceptiveness and sharpness of which his nature permits him, which he would bring to bear on any real situation which concerned him. The translator cannot hope to have understood it all, but he must not begrudge his possible moral and intellectual superiors their possibility of insight. It is in the name of this duty that one risks the ridiculousness of pedantry in preserving the uncomfortable details which force a sacrifice of the easygoing charms of a more contemporary style.

I have used the Oxford text of the *Republic*, edited by John Burnet. I have deviated from it only rarely and in the important instances have made mention of it in the notes. Always at my hand was, of course, James Adam's valuable commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963). Schleiermacher's old German version was the most useful translation I found. Although his text was inferior to ours, he seems to have had the best grasp of the character and meaning of the dialogues. Robin's French is also quite careful. The best English translations are Paul Shorey's (Loeb) and A. D. Lindsay's (Everyman's). The latter is probably the more useful of the two because it is so unpretentious and straightforward.

The notes are not intended to be interpretive but merely to present necessary information the reader could not be expected to know, explain difficulties in translation, present the meaning of certain key terms, and, above all, give the known sources for the citations from other authors and the changes Plato makes in them. The dialogue is so rich in connections with other Platonic works and the rest of classical literature that it would be impossible to begin to supply even the most important. Moreover, it is the reader's job to discover these things himself, not only because it is good for him but also because the editor might very well be wrong in his emphases. The text is as much as possible Plato's, to be confronted directly by the reader. I have saved my own opinions for the interpretive essay. The index is also intended to serve as a glossary; its categories are drawn only from Plato's usage and not from contemporary interests or problems.

Whatever merit this translation may have is due in large measure to the help of Seth Benardete and Werner J. Dannhauser. The former gave me unsparingly of his immense classical learning and insight; the latter was almost unbelievably generous with his time and brought his sensitivity and sound judgment to the entire manuscript. I am also

grateful to Ralph Lerner for his suggestions after a thorough reading of the text. Walter F. Berns, Jr., Richard H. Kennington, and Myron Rush were very helpful with the introduction. I wish to thank my students, who were the first to use the translation in their studies; particularly Carnes Lord, James Nichols, and Marc Plattner for their suggestions and detection of omissions and errors. Mr. Plattner also did the bulk of the work on the index and deserves the credit for this useful addition to my translation. The interpretive essay relies heavily on Leo Strauss' authoritative discussion of the *Republic* in *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964).

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Allan Bloom

*Ithaca, New York*  
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